



# KEEPING ZIMBABWE GREEN THROUGH SUSTAINABLE FORESTATION



THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT IS CENTRAL TO UNIVERSAL'S APPROACH IN AFRICA. TREES ARE RECOGNIZED AS A CRITICAL RESOURCE TO PRESERVE. IN ZIMBABWE, ZLTC HAS TAKEN STEPS TO ADVANCE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES LIKE FORESTATION. AS AN EXAMPLE, ZLTC PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE IN THE SETTING UP OF AN AFFORESTATION ASSOCIATION FOR THE TOBACCO SECTOR IN ZIMBABWE AND COMPLEMENTS ITS ACTIVITY WITH ITS OWN TREE PLANTING PROGRAMME.

## KEEPING ZIMBABWE GREEN THROUGH SUSTAINABLE FORESTATION

The majority of Zimbabwe's small-scale farmers do not own their land, and are thus less inclined to invest to improve it. As the large commercial curing barns used before 2000 by the large tobacco estates are not suitable for small-scale farmers, in many instances they were replaced by smaller but less efficient barns. In addition, the costs of delivering coal, the fuel traditionally used in commercial farms, became complex and burdensome. Recognition of this increase in consumption of wood in tobacco curing has led to focus on fuel utilisation with the aim of promoting sustainability through an afforestation programme.

Concerned by the situation, Zimbabwean tobacco merchants and the tobacco growers' association (ZTA) started discussions in 2010 on how to ensure the sustainability of Zimbabwe's tobacco production. After a consultation period, and with the support of the Tobacco Industry and Marketing Board, the tobacco merchants initiated the Sustainable Afforestation Association (SAA) in 2013 to create a sector that is committed to sound environmental and natural resource management. Member companies currently self-levy at 1.75% of gross purchase value for each season.

The SAA entered into joint-venture partnerships with farmers in tobacco-growing districts to establish eucalyptus plantations. Eucalyptus trees are fast-growing, they provide good-quality firewood, seed is readily available, and their management requirements are well understood. Farmers rent out the required land, SAA provides the capital and management, and the timber is shared at the end of each rotation. After three rotations, ownership of the plantation then reverts to the farmer.



Trees grown for firewood need to be close to where they will be used, to prevent the transport costs from becoming a barrier to use. **SAA has established nearly 11 000 hectares of plantations in the tobacco-growing regions of Zimbabwe's Mashonaland and Manicaland provinces.**

The planting programme starts in October in order to complete planting targets by mid-January. To extend the planting season, and increase the survival rates of newly-planted seedlings prior to the onset of December rains, a special gel is used. The seedlings are planted deep, so that their roots are surrounded by the gel, and covered with dry soil about 10cm above the root collar.



Established in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland and Manicaland provinces.

Understanding the farmers' need for financial return, the SAA promotes intercropping the rows of trees with leguminous crops such as



SOYA



SUGAR BEANS



GROUND NUTS

This ensures that the **land is effectively used** during the first two years before canopy closure and that soil fertility is increased by the nitrogen-fixing properties of these plants.



One of the great enemies of forests in Africa is fire, and planting trees on multiple sites of between 50 and 500 hectares requires the adoption of **every year, the SAA provides fire training and recruits voluntary firefighting teams from within local communities, equipping them to combat any fires that might occur in the locality and providing them with protective clothing and a monthly honorarium. The SAA also facilitated the formation of District Fire Committees to coordinate fire management in each area.**

The Zimbabwe Leaf Tobacco Company (ZLTC) is proud of its role in the foundation of the SAA, and has an additional tree-planting programme on a commercial and smallholder basis that complements the activity of the SAA. In addition, to help farmers reduce their wood consumption, the **ZLTC has a team of builders to assist contracted farmers with the improvement of their curing barns through the implementation of a V-slot furnace and brick flues, increasing the barns' efficiency by 30%. To date, almost 80% of the farmers have improved their barns.** The more modern technique of rocket barns, which significantly reduces fuel consumption, has started to take hold among the small-scale farmers.

These programmes promote a strong environmental conscience even among non-tobacco-growing farmers, who use wood to produce charcoal, the most common fuel in rural areas. Collectively, these efforts help to keep Zimbabwe green.

