

Improve your Goat and beat climate change

By Servaas van den Bosch

The shadows are already getting longer as we head off to tate Reinhard's homestead deep in the mopane woodlands of northern Namibia. Andreas Shilomboleni, coordinator of the Country Pilot Partnership's (CPP) Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) project guns the Landcruiser over sandy roads that meander between the thousands of oshana's - open spaces that get flooded in the rainy season.

Finally we arrive by the traditional kraal, a gathering of clay and straw huts where Reinhard Auala is waiting for us. After retiring from one of the country's largest diamond mines Auala, or tate Reinhard as he is amicably called, returned to his native Omusati Region, not far from the Angolan border, to focus on the family farm. Andreas has come to check up on the Boer goat that tate Reinhard received from the Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) project.

"The goat is dead," starts Auala off. "But not before producing ten offspring. He was a busy man," the manager -



turned- farmer laughs. In 2009, the CCA pilot project under the Country Pilot Partnership (CPP), an alliance of seven Ministries¹ in Namibia supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), started helping farmers to adapt to climate change by distributing improved livestock and seeds.

As we walk to the feeding trough in the fading daylight, tate Reinhard explains how the goats have helped him adapt to ever drier and hotter conditions in sub-Saharan's most arid country. "Boer goats have more meat, they grow faster, produce more offspring and are well suited for hot, arid conditions," he sums up while studying the feeding herd of the goats.

Like most farmers he knows the genealogy of every animal in his kraal by heart and he effortlessly singles out the offspring of the now infamous Boer goat that unfortunately didn't live very long.

"The aim is to cross these Boer goats with our local goats to create a breed that has a higher rate of re-productivity, is more valuable and better resistant to drought," he explains.

'Tate' Reinhard Auala explains the benefits of his improved goats to CCA coordinator Andreas Shilomboleni at his kraal near Outapi. Credit: Servaas van den Bosch

¹ Ministries of Agriculture, Water and Forestry; Environment and Tourism; Mines and Energy; Lands and Resettlement; Regional, Local Government, Housing and Rural Development; Finance; and the National Planning Commission

Auala and many farmers in the region see their livelihoods threatened by rapidly changing climatic conditions. Temperatures are rising while rains, already minimal in the dry nation, are getting more erratic. In the past few years, Namibia's growing seasons were plagued by alternating floods and dry spells, heavily affecting agricultural output.

The higher temperatures - Namibia will see a 1 to 6 degree rise in the next few decades - also greatly reduces reproductivity and milk yield of livestock.

One of the ways to deal with the effects of global warming is to introduce species that are not only more productive but also can cope with the higher temperatures.

"The project gave improved goat rams to 120 households in the area," explains Shilomboleni. "The target is to extent this eventually to 200 households." And it's not just goats, he continues as we drive back over almost darkened roads. "We also distributed drought-resistant fowls to twenty households and six community groups." Fowls? "Yes, we have handed out 80 Guinea fowls to replace chickens and have seen some good results."

The next day we drive to the remote Elondo village in the district around the northern town of Tsandi to see this climate change-defiant poultry. Nine guinea fowls gaze at us suspiciously as we approach with our cameras and, startled, take flight in the opposite direction.

Once again, the better reproductive qualities as well as the toughness of the birds to withstand global warming are praised by the community. "Guinea fowls lay more eggs, are bigger so they have more meat and they reproduce quite fast," says Miina Ipinge, who is a member of the HIV/AIDS support group: Imangulula, which means 'freedom for all'. The CCA project donated fowls to the group to help them overcome their already disadvantaged position, in fighting climate change, as women living with HIV.

"Temperatures have completely changed," says Miina who provides for fourteen people in her household. "On top of that, there has been a shift in rainfall making the growing season much shorter. This demands too much of both humans and animals that have to squeeze all their energy into a very short time. We just don't have enough food to sustain those high energy levels."

Because the rains are late they cannot cool down the soils that becomes too hot to walk on during the summer months making it hard to work the field, adds Imangulula member Lempia Ndiili. The floods that occur with an alarmingly rising frequency on the other hand also make it harder to cultivate the land.

"And the floods bring more birds which eat the little grain that we have managed to grow," she adds.

For them, climate change affects their duties as women which consists primarily of child rearing, cooking, working the field and collecting firewood and water, but can entail everything if there is no man in the household.

"Women have to travel long distances," says Ipinge "But it's when it gets hotter the period, in which you can get your work done, is shortened."

Their status as women living with HIV compounds the challenge they already face because of climate change. "If you are sick it is important to eat so that you are strong, can take your medicine and can work to grow more food," explains Ndiili. "But when there is little food to start with that is a problem."

"Even women that don't have HIV are spending time taking care of those that do have the virus. In that time, they cannot work the land," adds Ipinge. "So, if you are not infected, you are still affected."

Someone who has taken the guinea fowl offer, and ran with it, is Elizabeth Hafyenanye from Okafifi village. A year ago she started with six fowls and now she has 22. “There would have been 23, but we ate one, it brings good luck,” she says good-humouredly.

She likes it that the fowls are not picky as chickens. “You can give them the fermented leftover of traditional brew and they will eat it,” she laughs.

“And people love to view them. School kids on tour will stop to admire the birds it has greatly enhanced my standing in the community.”

Then serious: “I am trying to participate in all these projects in order to beat the effects of climate change. As soon as I hear about an adaptation project, I am on way to the agricultural extension office. I see it as an investment in the future and I am worried about when this project comes to an end.”

One other way, that meme Elizabeth hasn’t explored yet, but has done wonders for Frieda Ndjolomba are the improved seeds that the CCA project handed out among farmers.

“I planted improved Kashana (pearl millet) and red machia (sorghum) seeds,” she says. The result was good. The plants have more grain per stalk and the seeds are bigger. The plants also mature quickly, while the grain dries much faster.”

The better yield helps her combat the negative effects of climate change. “People already had a saying about this area: ‘how on earth does the pot get ready there?’ but nowadays it’s true. We spend more and more time looking for firewood as it gets drier. At least with these seeds we have a better harvest.”



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