

ZIRRCOON's expanding organisation and environmental objectives

Over the past few years ZIRRCOON has developed from the loosely knit movement described in volume 1 (Daneel 1998) to a stable institution with its headquarters and administrative centre in Masvingo town and its grassroots constituency spread widely throughout Masvingo province and some adjacent provinces. Its environmental vision and activities have expanded, partly as a result of developmental projects, youth work and women's clubs, and partly by linking environmental endeavour with income-generating projects. Having focused thus far on the ritualisation of earthkeeping and the concomitant theological developments, I shall now outline ZIRRCOON's institutionalisation and expanding objectives.

6.1 Institutionalisation and specialised activities

6.1.1 Organisation and leadership

ZIRRCOON's basic team of about fifteen officers operates from the administrative headquarters in Masvingo town. They are supported by some 30 nursery keepers stationed at nurseries located in the various districts of Masvingo Province. Thus the movement has a nucleus of more than 40 salaried employees. The main organs through which it operates are AZTREC (the majority of chiefs, headmen and spirit-mediums in Masvingo Province), the AAEC (150 affiliated AICs with an estimated total membership of 2 million people), the Women's Desk (80 women's clubs) and some 30 youth clubs at rural and urban schools.

One of the most important changes in ZIRRCOON's leadership hierarchy in the course of 1994 was the election of Revd Solomon Zvanaka to

succeed me as director. This was necessary, partly because I could not do justice to all the responsibilities of the directorship on top of my academic duties at the University of South Africa, and partly because I believe – on the basis of missiological principles of church planting – that a black African movement of this nature should become self-supporting, self-propagating, self-governing and should generate its own theology while still accommodating a privileged white African participant. The fact that Revd Zvanaka was elected unanimously by the ZIR-RCON executive – which includes AZTREC and AAEC representatives – indicates the status and respect he had already gained among his colleagues at that time.

Revd Zvanaka's leadership qualities, management skills and integrity are beyond doubt. He has set a solid example of financial accountability, which augurs well not only for the internal control of funds at various levels but also for satisfactory and lasting ties with donor agencies. In addition he has proved to be a wise conciliator, capable of defusing conflict and inspiring group solidarity in the face of adversity. This talent is essential in a movement representing such a diversity of aspirations, expectations and religious convictions as is the case in ZIRRCON.

The change in leadership does not mean that I have withdrawn from the movement. On the contrary! Now that I am relieved of administrative duties I am in a position to pay more attention to other aspects of our work. Having established the initial ties with donor agencies as founder of the movement and chief fundraiser, I hope to continue for some time to chair ZIRRCON Trust, the board of trustees. This will enable me to explore new sources of sponsorship for ZIRRCON and to support the director in consolidating the existing system of financial control and accounting. As the movement's senior consultant I hope to continue serving its key figures with the insight and experience I have gained from earthkeeping at the grassroots over the years. In particular I hope to guide the establishment of the envisaged wildlife projects in the form of game sanctuaries at the old holy groves (*marambatemwa*) in the communal lands, the planning and propagation of which I have personally initiated in recent years. For the foreseeable future I shall also continue as head of the research department.

In 1995 we appointed a bookkeeper-secretary, Mr Abraham Mupuwi. His presence in the administrative department has taken a lot of pressure

off Revd Zvanaka, who is now able to devote more attention to public relations, policy, interdepartmental coordination, overseeing field project implementation, publications and so forth.

Over the years ZIRRCON has benefited from the assistance of part-time personnel from abroad.¹ On the whole the participation of these volunteers has been both challenging and enriching. In some instances cultural differences and divergent approaches to organisation, individual schedules and project implementation did give rise to minor conflicts among staff members. The extent of their participation in both office work and field programmes, moreover, varied in accordance with the interests, talents and character of each individual 'migrant worker'. However, the pros in all instances far outweighed the cons. As staff members, our friends from abroad perform the invaluable function of building bridges between our movement and their development or donor agencies abroad. This enhances unity of purpose and action between us and our sponsors.

An area of potential conflict in the movement is the changing relationships between ZIRRCON and its sister organisations, AZTREC and the AAEC. To the extent that institutionalisation and specialisation in the ZIRRCON office have brought salary increases, discrepancies between the remuneration of salaried staff members and grassroots labourers (eg nursery keepers) are becoming more pronounced. Some key figures in AZTREC and the AAEC are inclined to regard this as unfair discrimination which creates divisions between haves and have-nots, despite their recognition of very real differences between fully employed staff members and members of peasant society who participate sporadically in tree planting and woodlot maintenance. Such dissatisfaction has given rise to one or two attempts to subvert a sister organisation, in much the same way as Gonese caused a rift in the ranks of AZTREC (see Daneel 1998). Ironically, these attempts, aimed at the advancement of a few individuals rather than improved performance of the movement as a whole, have run counter to the main trend of consolidating the unity in ideology and action of the bodies integrated in ZIRRCON's green army. One of the most convincing signs of consensus about unity among our sister organisations is the insistence of the majority of chiefs and AIC bishops that, despite religious differences, the immensity of our task requires a united front under one banner and umbrella organisation, ZIRRCON.

It goes without saying that ZIRRCOON's ability to maintain its innovativeness, its appeal to the imagination of the predominantly peasant society it serves, its fulfilment of the people's existential needs and its will to empower rather than direct the green forces in the field will determine its future effectiveness in extending the green front and maintaining the disciplined unity needed for the struggle to continue. Among other things, its constitution will have to be revised to reflect the growing unity of purpose and action throughout the movement. To avoid confusion and dissent the separate constitutions of ZIRRCOON bodies need to be combined without jeopardising the distinct identity and rights of any particular group or association.

6.1.2 Departmental development

ZIRRCOON's original headquarters was my house in Masvingo town, where executive meetings and consultations with key figures in the movement are still held. Recently constructed outbuildings provide office space for research workers and contain a veritable archives of field research data which I have collected over the past 30 years. The combination of my library and ZIRRCOON's research centre should provide a resource base for AIC theologians interested in studying and developing the theologies and general concerns of their churches.

But the administrative demands of our growing movement far exceed the space I can provide. Hence ZIRRCOON has recently purchased a house in the centre of town to provide office space for its expanding departments and desks. Several additional offices will be constructed behind the main house to meet the growing need for space. Ideally, if funds can be raised, a new centre with administrative, library, teaching, conference and accommodation facilities should be erected.

The diagram of ZIRRCOON as an institute (on page 238 above) reflects the changes and expansion which have occurred since the establishment of the original organisational structure depicted in volume 1 (Daneel 1998:114). ZIRRCOON Trust still acts as financial watchdog, while the ZIRRCOON executive – with its comprehensive representation of the entire movement: director, founder and senior consultant, heads of departments and desks, liaison officers of our grassroots associations (AZTREC, AAEC, women's and youth clubs) and senior

Plate 41 Young children (top) and large numbers of students from (mainly rural) schools (bottom) were recruited from the outset of the 'war of the trees' to participate in tree-planting ceremonies



Plate 42 Uniformed school children provide theatrical entertainment during tree-planting ceremonies. Illustrated in this sequence: gender interaction in tree-planting (top), destructive male reaction (middle) and reconciliation in joint ecological endeavour (bottom)



staff members – has become the undisputed governing body. Even though the constitution has not yet been redrafted, it was accepted at the 1995 annual general conferences of both AZTREC and AAEC that these associations will become desks within ZIRRCON. This means that their annually elected executives will be headed by chairpersons instead of by presidents, positions which still afford considerable executive powers but without the former emphasis on group autonomy. This change will in no way undermine the identity, growth, ecological contribution or grassroots status of these associations. Their leadership has agreed that they function primarily as integral parts of the ZIRRCON 'army', represented continuously at headquarters by their respective salaried liaison officers or coordinators.

There are no rigid distinctions between ZIRRCON's departments and desks, and several staff members serve in more than one of these bodies. The working situation, therefore, is fairly fluid without watertight compartmentalisation. However, the general perception of our departments is that they have a greater degree of professionalism because of their qualified members, in the Western sense, than the desks, the latter dealing more directly and regularly with grassroots communities in the field. For instance, the administrative department, via the director and bookkeeper/secretary, takes care of funding, salaries, auditing and reporting; the research department, under my jurisdiction, creates databases and produces reports and publications based on empirical research; and the training department produces literature for workshops, etc. All these functions are performed or overseen by staff members with the necessary expertise. By contrast, the desk coordinators spend much of their time in the field, initiating and facilitating projects in their respective grassroots constituencies. Here they develop another kind of expertise, derived from field training and growing experience of the activities and needs of rural society. Such experience keeps ZIRRCON headquarters, particularly the more office-bound staff, in touch with rural developments. It permits, for instance, realistic fund-raising drives which increasingly become a joint venture between representatives of administration, departments and desks.

It would be misleading, however, to present ZIRRCON's desks as the institution's main or sole links with grassroots society. The departments by their very nature also have direct access to peasant communities. Quite apart from the professional input of agro-foresters in our ecological

department, for instance, the field operations manager, operating from within this department, is, by virtue of his responsibility for ZIRRCON's nurseries and woodlots, in regular touch with environmentalist peasants throughout Masvingo Province. Likewise, the field assistants of the research department, whether monitoring afforestation programmes or acting as participant observers at ritualised ecological ceremonies, also represent a regular link with rural society. Hence at virtually all levels of ZIRRCON's institutional structure, interaction with grassroots society is maintained and emphasised. As such interaction has different objectives (research, dissemination of information, conscientisation, mobilisation, facilitation of projects, etc), the resultant feedback to the various departments and desks at ZIRRCON headquarters is complementary in nature. Insofar as ZIRRCON lays down strategy for the different forces and coordinates their efforts in the environmental liberation struggle, its bonds with grassroots communities, despite some degree of isolation caused by specialisation and bureaucratisation at headquarters, make for an excellent 'intelligence service'.

A brief survey of the activities of the respective departments and desks should clarify the composite picture.

6.1.2.1 Administration and finance

At present the administration is run by the director, Revd Zvanaka, assisted by the newly appointed bookkeeper/secretary and a secretary/typist. Senior staff members also play a role in this department. For the sake of financial accountability, safeguards have been built into the handling of funds. Along with the director, several signatories are required for the withdrawal of funds from the main bank account; this system keeps key figures informed about expenditure in relation to budgetary constraints. Regular reporting to our local auditors and subsequent discussions with them at executive meetings further enhance transparency and awareness of the financial state of the institution at all levels.

In addition to fund-raising, maintaining contact through correspondence and telephonically with donor agencies and providing annual audited reports, the administrative department is also responsible for setting up schedules for visiting representatives of donor agencies and other interested parties, putting them in touch with both the ZIRRCON

team at headquarters and participant grassroots communities, and familiarising them with our programmes.

Fund-raising and networking with donor agencies are the administrative department's most crucial functions.² Having guided these activities all along, I am greatly encouraged by the consolidation and continuity of overseas support for our institution. The director, moreover, is establishing new donor contacts on his own initiative.

Successful fund-raising does not, however, detract from acute awareness of the need for some measure of self-support. In one particularly successful year we earned Z\$55 000 from the sale of tree seedlings. This is but a drop in the ocean, considering ZIRRCON's annual overheads in excess of Z\$5 million. But it is a move in the right direction, using the local resources at our disposal. Market research and ongoing sales of tree seedlings are receiving attention.

6.1.2.2 *Research and publications*

ZIRRCON's research department has always played a pivotal role in the movement. In fact, the earthkeeping movement grew out of the network of contacts established in the course of my study of the spirituality of *chimurenga*, the liberation struggle. Prominent earthkeepers such as the late Leonard Gono, Bishop Marinda and Revd Zvanaka were all empirical research assistants at one time or another. These close links between researchers and peasant society forged earlier on have facilitated the building of a grassroots organisation.

Through the research department I have been able to further and supervise several academic field studies for degree purposes.³ Although ZIRRCON is not officially affiliated to any university, the kind of inter-university research service it renders is highlighted by my own participation in conferences and seminars at various universities in Southern Africa and abroad.⁴ ZIRRCON's field assistants have enabled me to consistently monitor religio-ecological developments in our movement, as a result of which quite a lot of praxis-related insight was gained and developed into articles for academic journals.⁵ This study of *African earthkeepers* benefits directly from research assistants' regular interviews at both traditional and Christian ecological ceremonies, which are tape-recorded and transcribed.

ZIRRCON's research department also promotes the development of a

local AIC theology. Both Revd Zvanaka and Bishop Marinda are currently engaged in a major research project called 'African Initiatives in Christian Mission', sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts in Philadelphia, USA, and aimed at producing a comprehensive series on the roles of African Christians in the propagation, growth and interpretation of Christianity in Africa. As initiator and coordinator of the project I am supported by Prof Dana Robert, missiologist and church historian at Boston University School of Theology (the host institution of the project), who, among other things, act as fellow senior editor of the envisaged series. Academics from various disciplines – mainly missiologists, scholars of religion and historians – from Boston University, the University of South Africa, ZIRRCO and the Universities of Zimbabwe and Malawi, are participating in the project. As the AIC members of the project team, Zvanaka and Marinda face the challenge of writing the missionary theology of their own Zionist churches, focusing on such themes as missionary strategies, proclamation of the good news, healing, perceptions of salvation and the like. Their work will be based on full-blown empirical surveys within their own churches, for which purpose they have employed temporary field assistants.

Apart from specific academic objectives, the research department also serves ZIRRCO's more immediate environmental needs. Thus it collects data on the interaction between religious beliefs and traditional conservationist customs and laws. This provides raw material for the production of goal-oriented manuals by the training department. A survey of holy groves (*marambatemwa*) in Masvingo Province formed part of a feasibility study conducted by ZIRRCO, with the assistance of members of the Department of Parks and Wildlife and WWF (World-wide Fund), with a view to establishing wildlife sanctuaries in the communal lands. As this is a contentious issue in view of the shortage of land, regular monitoring of community response will be required, particularly during the first phase of project implementation.

A woodlot and seed-collection directory is currently being compiled. Some ten per cent of the more than 2 000 woodlots planted over the past nine years have been surveyed with regard to soil types, tree species, survival rates of trees planted, aftercare, attitudes of committees and communities responsible for woodlots, and so on. This information will be used for policy making, afforestation planning and the publication of articles by a qualified forester.

To sum up: ZIRRCOON's academic goals lead to international exposure at university conferences, lectures and seminars, as well as regular publications on its activities. Its eco-theological goals promote the monitoring of innovations in this field and the development of a written local AIC theology which should eventually enrich more sophisticated, Western-style African theologies. And its praxis-oriented environmental goals facilitate operational planning, training and implementation of its conservationist projects.

6.1.2.3 Training and conscientisation

All ZIRRCOON's afforestation activities, and its tree-planting ceremonies in particular, involve conscientisation and mobilisation to transform the attitudes and behaviour of grassroots communities towards the environment. The training department, formerly the responsibility of Bishop Marinda, promotes ecological awareness building by way of workshops or seminars. This is a form of non-certificated environmental education aimed at imparting the requisite skills to enable communities to identify, analyse and solve their own problems. The starting point is to make communities fully aware of their environmental situation, the extent of the crisis (deforestation, wind and water erosion, gully formation, water pollution, siltation of river beds and dams, dwindling wildlife resources, etc), the causes (unfair land distribution, over-exploitation of natural resources, random bush clearing, poor land husbandry, etc), and then teach skills to resolve the crisis.

The first two training manuals, which Bishop Marinda wrote in the vernacular, target mainly the AICs and reflect ZIRRCOON's religio-ecological interactive emphasis. In his newly published *Theology of the environment* Marinda combines his own interpretation, in Zionist perspective, of biblical injunctions for earth-care with an exposition of AAEC innovations in environmental liturgies and ethics. His second work, *A theology of development*, analyses and assesses environmental exploitation in relation to so-called socioeconomic progress, as well as the implications for grassroots society.

In workshops the teaching blends eco-theological insight with practical instruction, such as the planting of various tree varieties for commercial, fuelwood, carpentry and other purposes, the use of *vetiver* grass

as a substitute for contour ridges and for gully reclamation, and so forth. Workshops tend to integrate ZIRRCON's liberationist ideologies and mobilisation strategies with the environmental practicalities propagated by the departments of Forestry, Natural Resources, Parks and Wildlife and Agritex. Representatives of these bodies participate in workshops, so that ecological experts encounter traditionalist and Christian commitment. Workshops sometimes differentiate between and at other times combine AZTREC and the AAEC. Thus they also help to promote solidarity between chiefs and church leaders in the war of the trees. The two groups participate together enthusiastically and are themselves increasingly emphasising their unity of purpose and earth-keeping commitment at all levels. Once the women's clubs become more active in environmental education, as requested and planned, a broad spectrum of rural African society will receive regular instruction.

6.1.2.4 Ecology

ZIRRCON's ecological department is in charge of the main thrust of the entire movement, namely earthkeeping, so far primarily by way of afforestation programmes. In a sense, therefore, the ecological department encompasses the whole of ZIRRCON, since all its activities – from funding and administration to research, training and religious innovation – basically focus on healing and conserving the earth. Everybody works towards this end: researchers monitoring the survival rate of trees; liaison officers recruiting chiefs for AZTREC or new member churches for the AAEC to extend the green army; the coordinator of the Women's Desk teaching nature conservation to women as part of their income-generating projects; temporary workers from abroad involved in nursery keeping, nursery expansion and the cultivation of new tree species; the executive director and senior consultant planning new fund-raising strategies, drafting budgets and promoting public relations or media exposure.

At present the core of the ecological department consists of the field operations manager – the position held and developed so ably by the late Leonard Gono, currently filled with great enthusiasm by Mr Edwin Machokoto (brother of Bishop Machokoto, first president of the AAEC) – who oversees the work of some 30 regular, salaried nursery keepers.

As we branch out into the field of wildlife through the establishment of

game sanctuaries, the positions and specialisation within the ecological department will naturally become more differentiated. It is conceivable that subdivisions with appropriate staff for afforestation, wildlife and water resources will become necessary.

6.1.3 Desks

6.1.3.1 Women's Desk

Appreciative of the significant role which women were playing as earthkeepers and aware that they constitute the majority of participants at virtually all earthkeeping ceremonies (up to 80% of all adult AIC members are women!), the ZIRRCO executive – in consultation with leading women in African society – decided to promote their cause, not only in earth healing but also with a view to improving their general socio-economic status. In September 1993 ZIRRCO's Women's Desk was officially established. Raviro Mutonga, former research assistant, was appointed as its coordinator. As with AZTREC and the AAEC, a constitution was drafted for the WD, an executive committee was put in charge of its programmes and regular annual general conferences are held.

Under the able leadership of Ms Mutonga and a number of enterprising women leaders some 40 women's clubs were formed in the course of 1994. By the end of 1997 more than 70 clubs had officially registered with the WD and the numbers keep escalating, despite the fact that the facility ZIRRCO offers can barely cope with the needs and drive of its current members. On average a women's club consists of 30 to 40 members. Affiliation is less strictly determined by religious identity than in the case of AZTREC and the AAEC. Nevertheless, a kind of natural ecumenism emerges in some clubs where *Ruwadzano* (Mothers' Union) leaders from one or several churches – either AIC or mainline mission or a combination of both – decide on the religious nature of ecological ceremonies. In clubs where the wives of kraalheads or headmen play a prominent role, traditionalist *mafukidzanyika* (earth-clothing) ceremonies are held, with ritual offerings of beer and ancestral addresses.

As ecological performance is a condition for any club to receive financial aid from the WD, a considerable amount of work has been generated in this field since the inception of the new desk. During the first

two years several full-fledged and satellite nurseries were established; 22 woodlots were developed and, because of the pride the women take in their aftercare, they generally have a far higher survival rate of trees than ZIRRCO has achieved so far. In addition to stepping up the war of the trees by setting an example and taking on challenges themselves, the women's clubs have taken the initiative in approaching schools and activating school communities to engage in new environmental ventures. Having composed their own slogans and songs, the women also emerged as an increasingly well organised component at AZTREC and the AAEC tree-planting ceremonies. Their slogan '*Zvose, zvose, Women's Desk!*' (All! All! Women's Desk) not only suggests that united action will produce abundance but that where there is a will, anything and everything is possible.

Far from signalling wishful thinking, these slogans reflect actual accomplishment in a variety of self-help income-generating projects. To date quite a number of sewing, bakery, soap-making, gardening, poultry-keeping, goat-keeping, bee-keeping and nursery (or satellite nursery) projects have been launched by various clubs. Significantly, these clubs have raised considerable sums of money themselves to initiate or forge ahead with their own projects, independent of outside support. Funds for larger projects will, of course, be raised in the future. In cooperation with the ZIRRCO executive, Ms Mutonga has completed several project funding applications for the consideration of Plan International, the German Development Service, the Japanese Embassy and other donor agencies. But the women are setting a trend of independent endeavour, inspiring ZIRRCO generally to strive for greater self-support than in the past.

In its conscientisation programme the WD collaborates with the training department through joint workshops for both genders. Ms Mutonga also conducts regional workshops, in which clubs in particular districts participate. She has been focusing on subjects like development and women's leadership, institution building, environmental rehabilitation and income-generating activities such as poultry, bee-keeping and clothing manufacture.

Performance statistics give an incomplete picture of the WD's impact. Only when the women start telling their own stories and the feats of outstanding personalities come to light will it be possible to assess the real

significance of what promises to become a dynamic new development in ZIRRCO. A few success stories will illustrate this point.

Ms Gwamure of Chivi district, during a severe drought, formed the *Nzara imhandu* (Hunger is the Enemy) committee to help women contend with the serious problem of dwindling food resources. She insisted that members contribute their own money to establish the *Takabatana* ('We are united') bakery. Simultaneously she encouraged her club friends to start their own nursery, where they cultivated 5 000 seedlings to start with. From the proceeds of both nursery and bakery the club members managed to supply their families with food and to expand their club work. Subsequently Ms Gwamure introduced ZIRRCO's activities to the Zunga school. As a result, pupils and teachers, together with the women's club, embarked on tree planting and related conservationist work. This escalated as surrounding village communities started planting orchards and small woodlots with seedlings purchased from the women's club. Thus Ms Gwamure's inspired leadership, supported by ZIRRCO, has launched a new cycle of environmental rehabilitation in her own locality, as well as providing a mechanism for women to cope with poverty and famine.

Ms Emily Ndahwi, wife of headman Ndahwi in Gutu district, is noted for her originality and progressive spirit, which benefit WD activities both at local district level and at annual general conferences. She formed the *Wasara-Wasara* club ('Those who stay behind stay behind') to promote ZIRRCO's conservationist work. Early in 1994 her club planted 1 600 eucalyptus trees. Through conscientious aftercare the club established a model woodlot in which virtually all seedlings survived. Two more woodlots of eucalyptus and two of indigenous trees were subsequently planted by the same club, all of which are cared for with great commitment. This club has a traditionalist slant because most of its members are wives of traditionalist headmen and kraalheads. Procedure at tree-planting ceremonies follows the AZTREC pattern. Aware of the religious significance of the *muchakata* tree, which symbolises the interdependence of humans and trees as well as the living and the living dead, the women of *Wasara-Wasara* use this tree as their icon: a rallying point for their ancestrally directed conservation work and a traditional metaphor in their own myth about women preserving the fertility and wellbeing of all the earth. They gather under *muchakata* trees when they meet to show their respect for the old customs and commune

effectively with the ancestors, and they refer to the shade of this tree to illustrate the protective nature of their own environmental endeavour. Ms Ndahwi's enthusiasm and dedication have inspired the formation of six additional women's clubs in her district, each with its own project. She herself envisages the planting of numerous orchards to supply fruit for household and commercial purposes.

Ms Mazero is chairperson of the *Tasungana* ('We are bonded') club. She spends much of her time on project work and inspires her followers to run a self-help poultry project, making regular donations from her own savings. The unity expressed by the name of this club is between Roman Catholic and Reformed Church women, who refuse to be divided by the traditional rivalry and doctrinal differences between the two churches. Ms Mazero's leadership has earned her club the respect of the Ministries of Health and Forestry, which have provided them respectively with rabbits and trees for their projects. In response to ZIRRCON's challenge both blue gum and indigenous tree woodlots were established. To combat the attacks of white ants on saplings in these woodlots the club has successfully used natural pesticides, which will no doubt be adopted in other ZIRRCON woodlots which face similar problems.

Despite the freedom and autonomy enjoyed by the WD within the broad framework of ZIRRCON, the leading figures of the clubs have thus far shown remarkable loyalty to the movement. The development of a distinct identity, coupled with pride of achievement, has not led to exclusivist, isolationist or secessionist excesses. The maintenance of unity in the midst of diversity suggests balanced and tactful leadership within the clubs, as well as at committee and executive levels in ZIRRCON. Raviro Mutonga expressed what she considers the real value of the Women's Desk as follows:

African women have not had sufficient opportunities in the field of development since Independence. They still constitute the bulk of marginalised and oppressed people in rural society. In traditional society they were allowed only a humble and subordinate social status. They were deprived of the basic rights of self-determination, co-responsibility and shared authority. But modern development has allowed the quest for self-determination to find practical expression among women in ZIRRCON. Here the women are redefining their

status. Consequently they play a more meaningful role in society. In ZIRRCON they are treated as equals by the men and they have equal opportunities. They organise themselves and share their insight and plans in the movement without interference or domination from the side of men. Economically, too, they are making progress.

Asked to single out a few key objectives of the Women's Desk for the future, Mutonga responded:

- skills training for environmental and other development activities
- conscientising communities to start self-help income-generating projects with their own funds
- developing factories, using local resources such as guava and marula fruit for the production of jams, fruit juices, beverages and so on
- introducing agricultural projects such as sunflower and castor bean crops for processing oil and as stock feeds.

It is not surprising that economic advancement features prominently in a society dependent on subsistence farming and plagued by poverty as a result of the poor crop yields and dwindling numbers of livestock caused by land pressure and frequent droughts. The ZIRRCON women are expressing their conviction that earthkeeping and commercial enterprise are integral to progress in the holistic rural lifestyle they envisage. As ZIRRCON requires environmental input in order to provide infrastructure and financial support for economic advancement, the women seek professional advice and funds for their income-generating projects in return for their contribution to the green struggle.

6.1.3.2 Youth Desk

Over the years ZIRRCON has consistently striven to relate to school communities and activate them to engage in earthkeeping. Schools have been supplied with seedlings to plant their own orchards and/or woodlots; some have been assisted to establish of their own nurseries; interschool competitions have been held in the field of progressive conservationist work; school children collect seeds for ZIRRCON's nurseries; and they usually take an active part in ZIRRCON's traditionalist *mafukidzanyika* and Christian *maporesanyika* ceremonies, providing conscientising entertainment in the form of choir singing, recitals of

poetry, theatrical presentations and the like, all on green themes and produced by the pupils themselves.

Against this background ZIRRCO has decided to seek funding for the establishment of a Youth Desk with a full-time coordinator and one or two assistants, on the same lines as the WD. Thus far ZIRRCO's youth work has been run by staff members such as the field operations manager and AZTREC and AAEC liaison officers. Because of their workload these staff members have been unable to provide the continuity and follow-up work necessary to ensure optimum and enduring results. In view of the long-term importance of environmental awareness and commitment among the youth and the comparatively extensive relations which ZIRRCO has already established with schools, a more structured, institutionalised approach seems indicated.

The following objectives will be paramount once the Youth Desk is in place:

- the formation of environmental youth clubs and/or cooperatives at schools
- regional meetings of the youth clubs of several schools with a view to competitive debates on environmental issues, sharing information, joint planning of projects, nature study outings, etc
- curriculum development in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to make ZIRRCO's wealth of information on the environment in relation to culture, religion and the economy available for regular instruction at schools.
- motivating teachers and pupils to use environmental themes for compositions and poems, theatre productions and art; large-scale projects for clubs to survey tree species or wildlife in the vicinity of schools can also be encouraged
- afforestation: youth clubs will be encouraged to develop their own nurseries, woodlots, orchards, agro-forestry (permaculture) schemes and to enter ZIRRCO's seed-collection competitions to promote the upkeep and expansion of ZIRRCO nurseries. Clubs should become more prominent in the programming, entertainment and work for ZIRRCO's annual tree-planting ceremonies in their districts. Tree identification outings will broaden pupils' practical knowledge of trees and familiarise them with problems created by deforestation

- **wildlife:** youth clubs could form part of the work force deployed in fencing, establishing watering points, constructing living quarters and modest conference centres, etc, for the envisaged game sanctuaries in communal lands. Pupils are likely to develop a lasting interest in wildlife if they take some responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of game sanctuaries located within reach of their schools. Club members with a special interest in wildlife would be involved in planning, stocking procedures, game counts, courses in tracking and bushcraft, anti-poaching measures, culling, conscientisation through media exposure, and so forth. Wilderness trips to the Zambezi valley or the ranching conservancies in the lowveld – especially rural children who have never had such opportunities to see big game out in the open – could form part of ZIRRCO's wildlife programme
- **water resources:** youth clubs at schools situated near large rivers could be encouraged to study the problems of riverbank cultivation, siltation of river beds, pollution, aquatic life, changing weather patterns and their impact on the flow of rivers. They could then develop their own plans of action to deal with these problems.

6.1.3.3 Development Desk

Since the inception of ZIRRCO and its sister organisations, the chiefs and bishops have requested support for income-generating development projects to improve their standard of living. They associate me, the founder of the *Fambidzano* ecumenical movement, with the community development, sewing, clothing manufacture, carpentry, agricultural, water development and other schemes for AICs which I supervised and raised funds for in the past (Daneel 1989). Having seen the detrimental impact of *Fambidzano's* development work on its original focal theological training programme, I was aware of the risk of being distracted from ZIRRCO's basic environmental drive. Consequently I tended to resist this trend, although I understood and sympathised with the economic hardships many of the AZTREC and AAEC members were enduring. For nearly a decade I kept insisting that environmental rehabilitation was, first and foremost, our overriding concern and I confined ZIRRCO fund-raising to this task. In addition, it was always clearly stipulated that a convincing record of solid involvement in ZIRRCO's war

of the trees would be a condition for development aid once we had created the institutional framework to provide it. In other words, ZIRRCO was not prepared to introduce economic development programmes independently of earthkeeping as an end in itself.

The Women's Desk has turned out to be a trend setter in this respect. In the affiliated clubs ecology and commercial enterprise clearly interrelate on the lines indicated above. Now that this example has been set and the ecological identity of the movement has been safely and solidly established over nearly a decade, the creation of a development desk appears appropriate. For some time, Mr Mabhena – formerly employed as senior development officer at *Fambidzano* – was appointed by ZIRRCO for a trial period to establish the envisaged desk. His mandate included the identification of AZTREC and AAEC development projects, conducting feasibility studies on site, writing up project proposals and, together with our managing director, engaging in fundraising. It was agreed that Mabhena's success in this last task would determine the viability of the development desk and the continuity of his own salary. The current three-year EZE (Evangelical Centre for Development Aid, Bonn) budget for ZIRRCO staffing does not cater for this venture. In view of ZIRRCO's track record of clear-cut project goals, successful project implementation and financial accountability I have little doubt, however, that in the course of time the envisaged desk will be established as a permanent part of the institute.

It is to be expected that there will be some overlap between the activities of the new desk and those of the WD. This need not cause conflict or unhealthy competition. Through regular liaison and cooperation the two desks should be able to complement and support each other in a field which offers many more challenges than can actually be met.

6.1.3.4 AZTREC and the AAEC

The reasons for organising ZIRRCO's major sister organisations as integral desks rather than loosely affiliated associations with the emphasis on autonomy from ZIRRCO were explained above.

Change is a gradual process rather than an imposed restructuring. It appeared at the two annual general conferences of 1995 that the newly elected AZTREC and AAEC executives and their chairpersons both had strong majority support. The catharsis following the expulsion of a

couple of secessionist malcontents came as a great relief to the stalwart chiefs and mediums as well as the bishops and prophets. Both groups repeatedly expressed the view that divisive issues should be dealt with jointly by the executives of the two bodies despite religious diversity. This augurs well for ZIRRCO's future, as it reflects commitment to united action and understanding of the reality that environmental ills require a common will and steadfastness transcending any ambition and greed which could lead to group fragmentation or religiously inspired exclusiveness.

Organisational restructuring is unlikely to disturb the ritualised environmental praxis already developed by AZTREC and the AAEC. If anything, it should facilitate expansion and progress in our struggle.

Additional desks may be established in the future to meet growing needs. Public relations, for instance, is a field that has been neglected in the past despite attempts by me, Revd Zvanaka and other ZIRRCO officers to give our movement the necessary exposure in the media. During fund-raising and lecturing tours I have sometimes managed to promote our cause through television appearances, radio discussions and newspaper articles. Both in Zimbabwe and South Africa several TV programmes in recent years have publicised ZIRRCO's activities. This was complemented by popular and academic articles in Southern Africa, the USA and Europe. But the input has been too sporadic and the human resources too limited to follow up and capitalise on such exposure. Through the valiant efforts of Farai Mfanyana of the research department a quarterly newsletter has finally been launched. As our literary efforts become more professional and our circulation expands it may become necessary to develop a separate public relations and publicity desk.

6.1.3.5 Internal capacity building

From the foregoing description it is clear that despite organisational diversification and ongoing institutionalisation some departments and desks are run by little more than a skeleton staff. ZIRRCO, in addition to lacking certain skills, has a much bigger constituency than it can effectively serve. The answer lies not only in funding and the appointment of more staff, but also in technical capacity building. This process is already under way.

Areas which require urgent attention include the following:

- forestry skills (nursery keepers and woodlot committees)
- project implementation management (ecological department and WD)
- project planning and appraisal (ecological department, administration, WD and YD)
- research methodologies and empirical data analysis for feedback on conscientisation (research and training departments)
- personnel management (administration)
- training for all instructors (training and ecology departments, WD and YD)
- typing and electronic word processing (all departments and desks)
- marketing and public relations (administration and ecology departments, WD and Development Desk)

Capacity can be built by sending staff members on courses at training centres, employing temporary consultants, technicians and forestry or wildlife professionals to provide in-service training, and gaining experience through the reinterpretation and application of traditional ecological praxis and worldviews as well as ZIRRCO's Christianised style of earthkeeping. In its dependence on funds from abroad ZIRRCO will have to be wary of being steamrolled into patterns which Western donor agencies may consider efficient and successful, but which may not fit the needs or suit the framework of rural African society. The objective must be local environmental effectiveness which, while inevitably involving Western technology, remains fully in touch with and motivated by the African religio-cultural disposition and mind-set.

6.2 Environmental concerns

6.2.1 Afforestation

The hub of ZIRRCO's war of the trees has all along has been its ten nurseries: Nemanwa, Chivi, Mtirikwe, Nyika, Nyajena, Chinyabako, Muuyu, Muchakata, Nyamakondo and Zimuto (the last two being WD

projects). Despite the black frost which wiped out hundreds of thousands of seedlings in our nurseries in the course of 1994 and 1995, more than three million tree seedlings have been successfully cultivated and distributed for planting over the past nine years. Each nursery, run by two regular nursery keepers and occasional casual labour, aims at cultivating at least 50 000 seedlings annually; some of them achieve a total of up to 70 000 seedlings when seed collection, water supply and other conditions are favourable. New nurseries are being developed in Gutu, Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts so as to cover the whole of Masvingo Province. Within the next few years we hope to run some 20 nurseries. A much-discussed goal in the war of the trees is to cultivate a minimum of one million tree seedlings annually. We will need to produce even larger numbers if we want to actually plant a million trees each year. Experience has taught us that some indigenous species like red mahogany need to stay in the nurseries for two or more years to secure reasonable survival rates in woodlots. In other words, there is a discrepancy between the number of seedlings cultivated and the trees planted in any particular year.

Overseeing nurseries spread over a wide geographical area can be problematic when vehicles break down, water pumps malfunction, water resources dry up or nursery keepers are remiss. We have managed to make some nurseries less dependent on ZIRRCON transport by obtaining scotch carts and donkeys for nursery keepers to fetch humus on their own. In addition, compost is now made at the actual nurseries to cut down on transport, which was a major problem in the past.

Recent planning and budgeting include the rehabilitation of existing nurseries, apart from developing new ones. Leaking water tanks, worn pipes and outdated pumps need to be replaced. Small buildings will be erected to store tools and accommodate nursery keepers. The physical structures at some nurseries require attention, such as extending fences for greater capacity, improving seedbeds, and providing better shading and frost protection for seedlings. Gardening tools and workers' overalls also need replacing. In addition to upgrading facilities, periodic workshops for nursery keepers aim at upgrading nursery procedures: pot-filling, compost mixtures, seed germination and collection, trimming surface growth and roots of fast-growing seedlings, proper record keeping of seedling sales, species cultivated, requests for new woodlots, the condition of woodlots near nurseries, and so forth.



Plate 43 Field operations officers and nursery keepers converse at Muchakata nursery (top). Senior ecologists keep a close check on the nursery routine of pot-filling, planting and tending to seedlings (bottom)



The television programme 'Wild Geese' at Hilversum in the Netherlands has provided funds for ZIRRCO's model nursery just outside Masvingo town on the main road to Beitbridge. A well-wisher and supporter of ZIRRCO's work, Chris Diedericks, leased us enough land for a nursery and an experimental woodlot right next to a trucking centre, filling station and restaurant. This position on the main road offers excellent exposure to remedy our relatively low profile in urban society caused by ZIRRCO's basically rural orientation. Called by my nickname, Muchakata, in honour of my role in the movement, the nursery's sign-board boldly proclaims our holistic aims: to promote the greening of Africa, human relations and interfaith dialogue.

Muchakata nursery has capacity for 100 000 seedlings and can be expanded. Willem van Harderwijk, Roland Teufel and Fieke Vermeulen supervised the layout of both nursery and woodlot. A double rondavel, thatched African-style, was built as an office. A strong borehole, tank and pipe system supply all the nursery's water needs, including limited irrigation for the trees and grass in the adjacent woodlot. Nursery keepers are experimenting with the germination of a wider variety of seeds than in outlying nurseries, different types of grass, and woodlot development which includes innovative permaculture and agro-forestry techniques. Muchakata is probably the largest indigenous tree nursery in Masvingo Province, if not in the whole of Zimbabwe. Because of its location it attracts many visitors. Many of them are not regular callers at ZIRRCO but want advice on tree planting and nurture, or purchase species they require. During the rainy season there is a marked upswing in the sale of seedlings. In the course of a weekend, sales sometimes exceed Z\$500. In terms of environmental awareness-building in all layers of provincial society Muchakata nursery is fast becoming ZIRRCO's most consistent, effective and convincing platform.

ZIRRCO has planted more than five million trees in well over 2 000 woodlots spread throughout Masvingo Province, as well as in the provinces of Manicaland and Matabeleland where there are respectively ten and twenty member churches of the AAEC. There is no accurate count of woodlots at this stage, since nursery keepers have not kept records of orchards and small woodlots comprising only a cluster of blue gum or indigenous trees belonging to individuals or families. Even some of the larger woodlots planted during the late 1980s were not recorded, a situation which will hopefully be remedied by our monitor-

ing team. It is unlikely that we will be able to keep track of all the small orchards and individual woodlots consisting of ten to 100 trees from our nurseries, but eventually all the larger woodlots containing several hundred or a few thousand trees should be accounted for. To my knowledge, the largest ZIRRCOON woodlot, in the Gutu communal lands, contains 8 000 trees. The unavailability of large tracts of land in the communal lands and the problems which are bound to arise over maintenance and ownership have deterred us from seriously considering the establishment of large plantations.

ZIRRCOON woodlots are owned either by individuals together with members of their extended households, or by larger communities such as the inhabitants of one or a cluster of villages (usually under the leadership of a chief, headman, spirit-medium or a prominent traditionalist, if the tree planting was initiated by AZTREC), a congregation or church (AAEC), a school or a women's club. In most cases ownership is collective. Special committees are sometimes appointed by the group concerned to undertake aftercare such as watering trees and pest control, maintaining fences and preventing tree felling when the trees mature. In areas where goats or cattle are a threat, committee members are known to have drawn up a rota to ensure round-the-clock protection of the woodlot. Some traditionalist male elders engaged in night duty claim to rely on the guidance and protective powers of the guardian ancestors of their region. Representatives of collaborating agencies such as the departments of Forestry, Agritex and Natural Resources pay the owners of woodlots field visits to help them with post-planting care and other technical advice.

Collective ownership normally makes for fair play and equal distribution within the community when blue gum woodlots are harvested for building and carpentry materials or for commercial purposes. ZIRRCOON's executive acts mainly in an advisory capacity concerning the use of trees from its nurseries. It will most likely involve itself directly in the use of woodlot trees only in cases of obvious environmental abuse or unfair commercial exploitation by individuals at the expense of the community.

ZIRRCOON's influence has also activated non-affiliated groups to establish their own woodlots or to plant trees for a variety of purposes. For several years running our nurseries have provided the bulk of seedlings

for national tree-planting day proceedings in the province. Of late the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) has been using our services to establish woodlots at various police stations. Many school communities are involved, as mentioned above. The Masvingo golf club has planted numerous trees from our nurseries to beautify its grounds. Local newspapers have written up this event under such captions as 'golfers turned tree planters'. Commercial farmers are increasingly calling on us with orders for blue gum, leucaena, pod mahogany, kiasat and a variety of fruit trees. Recently requests were received for large numbers of salt bush, which some farmers plant to augment the diet of their livestock.

Survival rates of trees have always caused ZIRRCON headaches. On the whole, blue gum trees have a survival rate of 80 to 90 per cent even during droughts. Yet we have deliberately held back on blue gum production to keep it to an estimated 20 per cent of our total nursery yield, since blue gums are known to have a negative impact on underground water resources. Besides, the concern about dwindling forests of indigenous trees, coupled with ZIRRCON's religiously inspired motivation to restore something of the old order in nature, caused a conscious preference for the cultivation of indigenous trees. This choice, however, entails numerous problems because indigenous trees either are slow growers or require special conditions (soil types, altitude, frost or heat, state of seedlings in terms of the size of stems, taproot development, etc) to achieve a reasonable survival rate.

It was possible, for example, to successfully cultivate such species as the *msasa* and *mutondo* acacia, *mudziavashe* ('toilet paper tree', for firewood), *mukamba* (red mahogany), *mukurumbira* (kiasat) and virtually all types of wild fruit trees in our nurseries. Yet the results of planting these trees in woodlots or existing forests proved much less predictable and the survival rate much lower than was the case with blue gum, tipuana tip, leucaena and other exotic species. Part of the problem has always been that we have to proceed by way of trial and error as there are relatively few experts in the growing of indigenous trees in the country, even in the Forestry Commission. It was found, for instance, that *msasa* and *mutondo* stood little chance of survival if planted in the open, however favourable the soil and water conditions. Apparently these seedlings stand a better chance of maturing when planted on the fringes of existing *msasa* and *mutondo* forests. But even this hypothesis has not yet been fully proved by our tree planters. The *mubvumira* (wild seringa)

grows well in woodlots but has hardly any commercial value. In deference to the ancestors, traditionalists nevertheless take pride in caring for these trees. The *mudziwashe* presents its own mystery. Since they are easy to cultivate in nurseries, we initially planted hundreds of these trees in several woodlots in varying conditions and took special care to water them. Yet the survival rate of this tree, highly rated as excellent firewood, was so poor that we stopped cultivating it in our nurseries. We found the *mukamba* (red mahogany) an excellent, if slow, grower. Yet it is so vulnerable to frost that it is preferable to plant this species, like the mopane tree, in the lowveld and not in the higher regions surrounding Masvingo. Both red mahogany and kiaat are slow growers but, being the country's finest hardwood, they have increasing commercial value. It is therefore gratifying to see village elders plant them as an investment for coming generations.

Of the indigenous fruit trees the *mupfura* (marula) and *mushuku* (wild loquat) prove to be good growers. Women's clubs are being encouraged to plant orchards of these trees because of the commercial value of their fruit. Little factories could well be developed if sufficient fruit can be harvested for the production of jams, soft drinks and liqueurs. Other popular fruit trees are the *mutobwe* ('chewing gum'), *munhunguru* (batoka plum), *munhengeni* (sour plum), *mutamba* (monkey orange), *muchechete* (red milkwood), *munyii* (bird plum) and *mukute* (water berry). These trees are planted for household use and in some instances specifically to show respect to senior lineage and/or regional guardian ancestors.

As exotic fruit trees are in great demand, the cultivation of mango, paw-paw, avocado, guava, orange, tangerine, peach, Mexican apple, granadilla and cashew nut has increased considerably in the past few years. In urban areas these fruit trees are in constant demand, thus providing a regular if modest cash income at our two Masvingo town nurseries, Muuyu and Muchakata. We anticipate that we shall start grafting citrus fruit trees in the latter two nurseries in the near future. If successful, such specialisation will further boost sales of fruit trees.

As regards multipurpose exotic trees, the blue gum or *eucalyptus* is the best known, the most popular and most resilient grower in the communal lands. *Leucaena*, which provides excellent fodder for livestock and is a nitrogen-fixing species, is also sought after but one of the most

difficult trees to grow in the communal lands. We have planted several woodlots of *leucaena*, all of which were virtually wiped out by goats and cattle despite good fencing barricaded with thorn branches. In areas with limited grazing for livestock it seems impossible to protect these trees successfully, particularly against goats. We therefore sell *leucaena* seedlings to farmers who can provide the necessary protection on farms where livestock are more effectively controlled. ZIRRCO itself, however, will only attempt establishing new *leucaena* woodlots in the communal lands if these can be fenced with heavy pig wire, which is prohibitively expensive. Through the enthusiasm and support of Mr John Toft we are also experimenting with *nihm* and scarab trees. The seeds of the former can be processed for oil and the pods of the latter are ground into cattle fodder. In addition pigeon pea, *tipuana tip*, flamboyant, jacaranda, cypress and *bougainvillea* are cultivated in small quantities to meet the demand mainly of townspeople. Of late a large number of *jatropha* seedlings have been germinated in the Muchakata nursery. This drought-resistant tree is a fast grower, can be used for hedges and produces sufficient seedpods for harvesting within four to five years. The oil processed from *jatropha* seed is in great demand and has a ready market. Some of the farmers in the Chipinge district are currently replacing their coffee plantations with *jatropha*. ZIRRCO needs to do market research to determine the viability of establishing large-scale commercial woodlots of these trees.

ZIRRCO increasingly applies a dual policy in disposing of its trees. It provides rural communities with large quantities of trees free of charge so as to promote the war of the trees. This is usually the case when AZTREC or the AAEC conducts major tree-planting ceremonies. To remain true to its liberationist and religio-ecological philosophy ZIRRCO is in duty bound to extend this supply of 'arms' to the green forces in the field. On the other hand, the marketing of trees is becoming increasingly important in view of our determination to render all our nurseries self-supporting in terms of salaries, equipment and general running costs (pump fuel and repairs, the cost of water, polythene tubes for pot-filling, humus transport, etc).

At present ZIRRCO's main clientele are in the rural areas, where the buying power is so low that it has little impact on profitability. In our rural nurseries trees are mostly sold at nominal rates, well below cost price. At growth-point settlements seedling sales are more profitable, as

our experience at Nyika Halt in the Bikita district has shown. Consequently some of our new nurseries will be established near growth-points, for example in Gutu and Mwenezi districts. Nevertheless bulk sales to companies or commercial farmers, such as the sale of 20 000 red mahogany seedlings for Z\$40 000 to a Harare company a few years ago, will be necessary if our marketing programme is to succeed. Proper market research and intensive advertising campaigns will have to be conducted in Zimbabwe's urban communities and among commercial farmers if our commercial objectives are to be realised. It may even be necessary to find foreign markets for ZIRRCON's trees in addition to the local one.

It appears that purchased seedlings are better looked after and therefore have a better chance of reaching maturity in the communal lands than those obtained without charge. However, a straight comparison between small family-owned woodlots of primarily fruit trees and larger communal woodlots containing indigenous trees (whose growth patterns are still unclear) is not fair. AZTREC's and the AAEC's communally and religiously inspired aftercare – whether with reference to the protective powers of guardian ancestors or the Holy Spirit – on the whole still appears to secure a higher survival rate than that of some tree-planting campaigns elsewhere in Africa (see Timberlake's estimates, 1985). Nevertheless, price considerations (relatively expensive exotic fruit trees as opposed to cheaper indigenous trees) seem to stimulate the sale of indigenous trees in the communal lands. This places indigenous fruit and other species within the reach of low income subsistence farmers. In urban and growth-point areas people are willing to pay more for fruit trees yielding short-term economic benefits, such as citrus, avocado and guava.

Another new trend is that donor agencies and NGOs of all kinds are increasingly showing an interest in environmental issues. As a result project implementation institutions require seedlings and grass for their programmes – from catchment rehabilitation, water-point protection and gully reclamation to multipurpose woodlot development as part of community dam-building schemes. Thus another potential market is opening up for ZIRRCON. Among other things this development has caused our nursery keepers to pay greater attention to the growing of grass, especially *vetiver*, which is well known for its use against soil erosion, and *bana*. We are currently collecting and cultivating much

more grass than before, so that we can demonstrate its soil conservation qualities in our experimental woodlot next to Muchakata, and have enough in stock to cater for the needs of ZIRRCO's constituency.

6.2.2 Wildlife

Elsewhere I have discussed the prospect of ZIRRCO converting some of the existing holy groves (*marambatemwa*) in the communal lands into game sanctuaries (Daneel 1998:xx). I argued that, in view of the traditional religious sanction underlying all customary conservation laws and the continuing significance of holy groves as geographical symbols of abundant wildlife which these laws were designed to preserve, the *marambatemwa* provide ideal launching pads for the reintroduction of game in the communal lands. The scheme has great appeal for tribal elders, as discussions out in the communal lands during feasibility studies and at annual general conferences have disclosed. These game sanctuaries will differ from commercial game farms in that less land is available, implying smaller game populations. Yet through the empowerment of traditional elders and rural council members via the initiating agency, ZIRRCO, such a game restocking exercise will be an essentially African community enterprise, based on reconsideration, adaptation and implementation of traditional conservationist codes. It is conceivable, for instance, that anti-poaching and anti-snaring measures could be effectively applied in sacred game sanctuaries because of the persistent belief in the mystical protection of the ancestors. The chiefs and mediums of AZTREC are bound to declare imported game the 'property' of the *midzimu*. If initial experiments with small game such as rabbits, steenbok, duiker, reedbuck and impala prove successful, one could consider the reintroduction of threatened species such as pangolin and klipspringer. The latter is a small buck which should thrive in the mountainous terrain of holy groves, especially Mount Rasa (see Daneel 1998:224). One could also consider introducing bird species like guineafowl, pheasant, duck and geese, which in some areas are becoming increasingly rare. Controlled bird hunting by tribespeople in the immediate vicinity of game sanctuaries will enable them to benefit directly from ZIRRCO's wildlife projects and give new flocks of birds a chance to establish themselves and breed regularly in protected zones.

It was also argued (Daneel 1998:221) that ZIRRCO game sanctuaries would complement the wildlife management programme of CAMPFIRE. This organisation has successfully introduced the principle of making rural district councils and the grassroots communities they represent responsible for game conservation. Once the advantages of wildlife management in terms of improved living conditions became apparent to rural communities, peasant attitudes shifted markedly towards public opposition to poaching and the protection of game as a marketable resource. Much of CAMPFIRE's success, however, has been achieved in areas where the survival of sufficient numbers of big game has permitted the application of their policy. Restocking game, as ZIRRCO envisages, in game-fenced sanctuaries where human overpopulation has crowded out most game species – in other words, creating from scratch the conditions for game conservation, management and eventually also marketing – would be a totally different ball-game, one which is bound to be more complex and costly to initiate and maintain.

I have advanced several arguments in favour of establishing game sanctuaries in communal lands (Daneel 1998:220). Here I need merely point out that communal responsibility for game and bird life could change attitudes in rural society from the poaching-snaring mentality caused by deprivation to positive conservationism and controlled commercial enterprise. Conscious reinterpretation of traditional ecology and hunting laws and building on those foundations will, moreover, give such a wildlife enterprise recognisable cultural roots. This will have the advantage of promoting authentic popular concern about wildlife and in the process enhance the status of the chiefs, mediums, councillors and others responsible for project implementation. Probably the single biggest advantage of the proposed game sanctuaries is that they could become conscientisation centres for the youth at surrounding schools.

The link between youth work and wildlife management has already been mentioned in passing (Daneel 1998:225–227; *supra*:256–257). Modest African-style conference centres at ZIRRCO's game sanctuaries could accommodate youth clubs from rural schools, where weekend programmes could include environmental training: bushcraft instruction, anti-poaching exercises, tree and wildlife identification hikes and visits to places of cultural and historical significance in the sanctuaries (bushman paintings, ancestral shrines, caves used as hide-outs during Ndebele/Shona clashes and during the more recent freedom

struggle). In this way the earthkeepers and wildlife custodians of tomorrow, who are currently deprived of such opportunities in the denuded communal lands, can face the challenge of preserving and rebuilding their environmental heritage within the religio-cultural context of their forefathers.

The fact that I have discussed wildlife conservation mainly in terms of traditional customs and religion does not detract from the interest which AAEC leaders have shown in this subject. Although the chances are that AZTREC and the AAEC will be jointly involved in the realisation of our wildlife schemes, we have already discussed the possibility of running at least two sanctuaries along distinct religious lines, one traditionalist and the other Christian. This will enable adherents of the two religious traditions to develop and experiment with the ritualisation of their wildlife concerns and to establish new wildlife identities without external interference, in the same way that they developed religiously distinct tree-planting rituals and liturgies (ancestral *mafukidzanyika* and eucharistic *maporesanyika* ceremonies). Thus I can imagine that, because of historical ancestral requirements, AZTREC elders may prefer to stock the Rasa sanctuary with different species of game from those selected by AAEC bishops in another area, where their '*marambatemwa*' may in fact be a holy mountain on which a famous prophet experienced a call to the ministry, or a mountain with a tradition of Christian fasts, prayer and confessions in preparation for rains and the planting season. I can also imagine that the AZTREC elders will want to develop variations of beer libations, ancestral addresses, songs and dances for the launch of a new game camp, establish water-points, 'show' the game to the ancestors during stocking exercises or game counts, sanction a culling operation and remember the ancestors when distributing the meat, as well as consult the ancestral war council (*dare rechimurenga*) in the fight against poaching and snaring. For similar occasions the AAEC bishops may want to develop wildlife dedication liturgies, wildlife protection dances and songs, confessions and fasting services at holy places within a sanctuary, even a wildlife-related eucharist to symbolically illustrate in yet another way that in Christ all things hold together (Col 1:17).

At this stage ZIRRCO's wildlife programme is still in the planning phase. I have personally broached the subject of reintroducing game into the communal lands via the *marambatemwa* at various levels in

ZIRRCON: in one-to-one discussions with the director and other staff members, in executive meetings of ZIRRCON, AZTREC and the AAEC, and at general conferences. The consensus in the movement is that we should press ahead with the establishment of game sanctuaries as soon as funds are available. A positive response has also been forthcoming from the Department of Parks and Wildlife (discussions with Norman Monks, a well-known visionary game conservationist and expert on rhinos in the Kyle National Park, and his senior colleagues in Masvingo Province), the Worldwide Fund (whose representatives are currently assisting ZIRRCON to draft proposals for fundraising) and CAMPFIRE (Prof Marshall Murphree and others).

ZIRRCON's current staffing situation certainly does not allow for much more than its afforestation and related income-generating projects. It is hoped, however, that support for our wildlife proposals will enable us to make a few permanent appointments in the ecological department and to procure additional vehicles to undertake the new venture. Meanwhile, with the means at our disposal and the assistance of wildlife experts (John Toft, a freelancer; Norman Monks and Tizai of Parks and Wildlife; Messrs Cummings and Chafota of WWF), feasibility studies have been conducted at Mount Rasa and a few other holy groves to determine game fencing needs, water-points, game species to be stocked, community response and so on.

6.2.3 Water resources

ZIRRCON has not yet launched into concerted action in the field of water resources to the same extent that it has done in afforestation. Nevertheless the importance of water as the substance of life, and hence of good rains as a prerequisite for successful tree planting, has made rural people at both *mafukidzanyika* and *maporesanyika* ceremonies more aware of the actual state of the water resources they depend on in their immediate vicinity and the vital need to protect these resources. AZTREC's annual pilgrimage to the oracular shrine at Matonjeni has also served to motivate chiefs and mediums to take greater responsibility in this regard back in their home districts. Consequently these tribal elders are increasingly introducing control systems to combat riverbank cultivation, while the mediums police the remaining fountains, pools and rivulets, still considered to be inhabited

by the environment-friendly *njuzu* spirits, to stop pollution. These activities reflect an emerging ethic which stigmatises water pollution, like wanton tree felling, as a form of wizardry (*uroyi*), punishable by fines or withdrawal of land holding rights. Such accusations – similar to those directed against collaborators with the Rhodesian administration during *chimurenga* – are a sure sign that the traditional custodians of the land are existentially committed to the green struggle.

ZIRRCON's other awareness-building activities relating to water include teaching (by both the training department and Women's Desk) on subjects such as the causes of river and dam siltation, water pollution, water conservation, use of underground water resources and possible causes of changing weather patterns, as well as the provision of seedlings and grass for gully reclamation and new water schemes. I have, moreover, made several proposals, both orally and in writing, for future water projects.

ZIRRCON could render a similar service to its constituency as *Fambidzano*, which was and still is involved in water development work (digging and reinforcement of water-holes, installation and repair of hand-driven pumps, providing boreholes and diesel pumps at schools or church centres). Specialised work of this nature can, however, only be attempted if there is a well-informed policy on the use of underground water and fluctuating water tables to prevent overexploitation of a limited resource.

Another new activity is the protection of wetlands. Nursery development and tree planting will be ZIRRCON's contribution to the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) recently launched Zimuto-Msagashe Wetlands Rehabilitation project north of Masvingo town. Participation in agro-forestry schemes designed to suit and preserve wetland conditions will provide ZIRRCON with the know-how and experience to assist other communities farming under similar conditions.

Because of its primary concern with afforestation ZIRRCON's involvement in the protection of water resources in the foreseeable future is bound to focus on the organic link between vegetation and water. When it comes to strategy the question is: how can ZIRRCON use the environmental tools at its disposal – trees and grass – to help create a situation conducive to sound water usage, water conservation and the stability of unpolluted water resources? As ZIRRCON's commitment in this

field grows the ecological department may have to be expanded to provide the required expertise.

6.3 Assessment of ZIRRCO's religio-environmental contribution

Compared to the immensity of environmental problems facing humankind all over the world, ZIRRCO's contribution is but a drop in the ocean. Even if it achieves its current goals of planting one million trees annually, reclaiming numerous gullies, establishing a few wildlife sanctuaries in the communal lands and successfully protecting some water resources, it will still have done relatively little about the situation in Africa. One should, therefore, be careful not to overrate ZIRRCO's achievements.

However, in the local perspective of rural Masvingo Province, where there was hardly any earthkeeping endeavour prior to the formation of ZIRRCO, its impact has been dramatic. Through institutionalisation ZIRRCO has become a relatively stable organisation which has actually managed to activate and empower grassroots participation in environmental reform. The scale of this participation, its persistence and the wide range of opportunities created under the umbrella of earthkeeping are unprecedented in our part of the world. It is no mean achievement for an institution to fire the imagination of scores of chiefs, headmen and mediums and, having empowered them, to take part in their earthkeeping activities over more than a decade. There is also the accomplishment of ecumenically uniting a large number of African Independent Churches and participating in that union, constructed around a new ecological ethic and theology in the face of many humanly understandable pitfalls of ambition, opposition and possible defections. All that has been achieved despite shoestring budgets, desperate financial straits and uncertainty which hit ZIRRCO staff from time to time. To some extent these were teething problems, for ZIRRCO's sponsorship has stabilised and improved over the years. The point is that it needed the courage and commitment of all ZIRRCO's members to persevere during periods of adversity. Its survival and tenacious sense of purpose under adverse conditions are the measure of ZIRRCO's significance.

ZIRRCON did manage to place environmental concerns fairly and squarely in the liberationist tradition of peasant society. In declaring a war of trees the sentiments and unifying forces of *chimurenga* were resuscitated to give special historical meaning to the struggle of further liberating the agriculturally overtaxed, tired soil. Propagating earth healing by paying tribute to the old heroes who fought white rule and simultaneously creating opportunities for new heroic exploits in the post-Independence struggle largely explains the fascination and staying power of ZIRRCON's cadres of green fighters. There are, no doubt, some pragmatic and exploitive motives in the ranks of ZIRRCON earthkeepers. After all, who in peasant society would not like to capitalise on the availability of firewood or building and carpentry materials in accessible woodlots? But it takes much more than mere pragmatism for the same people to persist with afforestation year after year, despite black frost wiping out their seedlings, entire woodlots being ravaged by livestock desperate for grazing, and any number of obstacles. Our movement has indeed applied cool-headed agro-economic reasoning in waging its war of afforestation. But its long-term durability and success lie in harnessing the people's love of the land and their willingness to sacrifice and suffer so as to restore what essentially spells home to them.

Psychologically, I consider ZIRRCON's major breakthrough so far to be the switch of rural peasants' attitudes from fatalism and lethargy to new hope and conviction that something can be done to stem the destructive tide of environmental deterioration. By motivating and empowering people to implement their own conservationist projects, ZIRRCON has enabled large numbers of peasant families in the communal lands to get a new grip on their destiny and to build a movement of which they can be proud. Through large-scale mobilisation and the creation of regular rallying points where earthkeepers can meet and plan together it is instilling a sense of unity, dignity, strength and competition in the struggle against the common enemy of earth destruction. Constant reminders at meetings and earthkeeping events that the struggle has just begun are effective deterrents against complacency.

Despite the limited scale of ZIRRCON's earthkeeping contribution and its relative lack of Western ecological expertise, it has managed to strike a healthy balance between instructive conscientisation and earth-healing action. Far from satisfying itself with rousing meetings, conferences and workshops – valuable and indispensable as these may be –

the movement went into concerted action from its inception. Thus it has created its own very real myth, embodied in nurseries and woodlots, on which to build and which in itself provides the example and motivation for continued earth-healing action. ZIRRCO's durability and future growth hinge to a large extent on this combination of convincing action and inspired teaching.

To try and separate ZIRRCO's environmental work from the religio-cultural mould in which all its activities are cast would be to misunderstand the entire movement. The one cannot be assessed without the other. AZTREC and the AAEC have been vehicles of contextualisation, shaping the idiom in which earthkeeping concern is couched. Have these two arms of ZIRRCO really succeeded in setting rural environmental endeavour on a new course, or have they merely devised ephemeral gimmicks to attract the masses, the *povo*?

6.3.1 The traditional dimension

AZTREC's revitalisation of traditional religion in its quest for responsible earth-care was assessed in volume 1 (Daneel 1998, chapter 5). But in view of the close ecumenical cooperation between this movement and the AAEC in the war of the trees, the parallel ritual and conceptual developments in both and the broad overview attempted in this chapter, AZTREC's achievements are outlined here as well.

Significantly, neither of ZIRRCO's religiously inspired green armies has adopted a conquest mentality in regard to the other. Despite minor frictions over project implementation, retention of religious identity and mutual respect have always been the rule. Shared ecological commitment and willingness to seek new ways of jointly combating a common enemy have led to meaningful interfaith exchange and parallel internal innovation in each group, notably the traditionalist earth-clothing (*mafukidzanyika*) and the Christian earth-healing (*maporesanyika*) ceremonies. In both instances communion with the spirit world and/or divinity strengthens spiritual, communal and ecological resolve.

The most outstanding feature of AZTREC's work is the ability of the traditional custodians of the land to appropriate and revitalise Africa's age-old religio-ecological values in a modern programme of environmental reform. AZTREC has demonstrated convincingly that where the authority

of the traditional leaders, the chiefs and the mediums, is still relatively intact they are capable, once motivated and empowered, of mobilising rural society in large-scale environmental programmes. Appropriation and revitalisation of traditional values amount to much more than mere reversion to or revival of an old religious and cultural order. As a result of AZTREC's ecological engagement the spirit guardians of the land are now conceived of as insisting not only on customary ecological laws to preserve the holy groves, but also on a much more aggressive and geographically extensive process of healing and clothing the barren land through reafforestation and related programmes.

How does this traditionalist appropriation of the old religious order, the building on old foundations, introduce innovative change? I mention a few of the most significant examples. First, the *mafukidzanyika* tree-planting ceremonies resemble traditional *mukwerere* rain rituals in their invocation of the guardian ancestors of the land. Yet ancestral demands have changed considerably in that the right-mindedness required for their mediation of abundant rains and good crops involves more than just respect and veneration symbolised by libations and ritual addresses. In the new ritual context the senior ancestors in fact require the living earthkeepers to create the conditions for good rainy seasons, namely ample vegetation, through reafforestation. This is entirely different from the traditional requirement of merely conserving the abundance which nature itself could keep regenerating before overpopulation, land pressure and deforestation got out of hand. The viability and environmental success of AZTREC lies in 'modernising' this ancestral sanction in an earthkeeping praxis which in some respects transcends traditional conservationist customs without alienating people from their roots.

Second, even the spirit world appears to be regrouping in AZTREC's rendition of the war of the trees. As in the war years, the senior guardian ancestors of chiefdoms and districts are collaborating in the spirit war council (*dare rechimurenga*) presided over by Mwari. This is evident in the geographically more comprehensive representation of spirit hierarchies at tree-planting ceremonies. The involvement of Mwari, the oracular deity, in particular underscores this trend. AZTREC visits to Matonjeni strengthen our traditionalist constituency's awareness that their struggle has national, even universal implications.

Here too, as in the AICs, the creator God draws close as an insider.

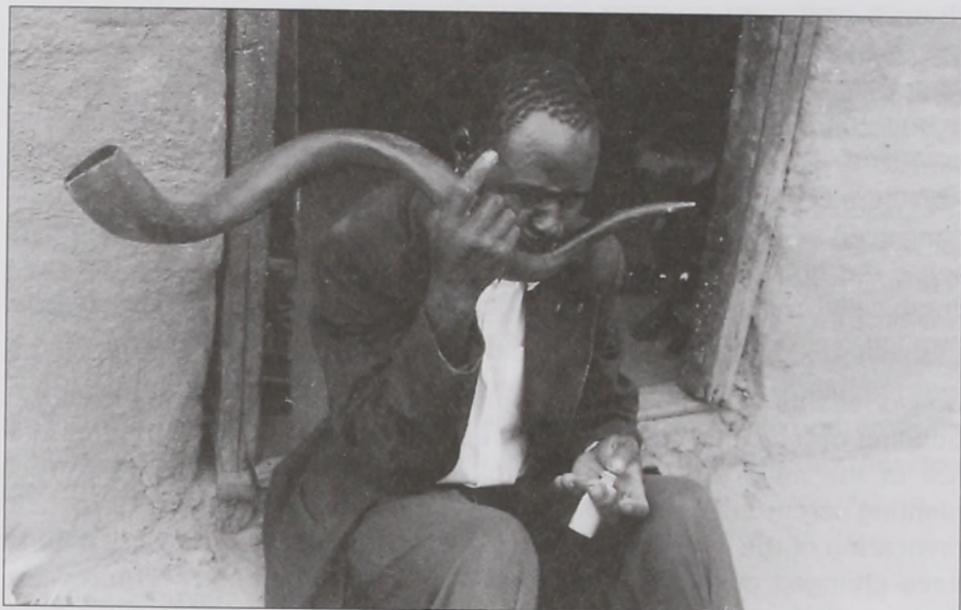


Plate 44 The husband of high-priestess Intombiyamazulu signals the start of oracular proceedings at the Vembe shrine (top). Cult officials drum and dance in honour of Mwari at the Vembe shrine, Matonjeni, in preparation for the late-night oracular session requested by an AZTREC delegation (bottom)



His/her immanent presence in nature is emphasised. The dimension of an elite of cult officials mediating on behalf of the entire population and the perception of the traditional Mwari as *Wokumusoro*, the remote one in the skies, are transcended through regular visitations by tree planters – commoners rather than privileged cult messengers (*vanyai*) – who draw Mwari into the fray of afforestation.

In the third place, traditional perceptions of evil are imaginatively applied to environmental destruction in an indigenous ethos aimed at ecological repair. The will of traditional authorities in AZTREC to take drastic measures against environmental trespassers – as also happens in the AAEC – surfaces in the stigmatising of such offenders as *varoyi venyika* ('wizards of the land'). Customary law has always allowed for punishment of *varoyi* because of the threat they pose to the wellbeing of people and thus of society. Branding wanton tree fellers and cultivators of riverbanks *varoyi* is creating a situation in which transgressors of the emerging green ethos can be effectively disciplined.

AZTREC's traditionalist model of earthkeeping is certainly worth considering for the development of inculturated environmental strategies elsewhere in Africa. It enables traditional authorities to harness African cosmologies and worldviews for lasting ecological action. In terms of mobilising grassroots communities in afforestation programmes, AZTREC has achieved what the Forestry Commission of Zimbabwe, by its own admission, has not been able to do, despite its greater financial stability, salaried staff and other resources. In my view AZTREC convincingly illustrates that the institution of chieftainship, including spirit-mediumship, is capable of orchestrating comprehensive environmental reform in Africa. For the chiefs and mediums to contribute their own ecological creativity, they need a platform, organisationally and financially independent of government and environmental institutions.

6.3.2 The Christian dimension

In the formation and expansion of the AAEC the AICs have amply demonstrated their commitment to ecumenical interaction, their willingness to form a united front so as to give clout to their earthkeeping mission. The ecclesiastic union existing today reflects a communal understanding that unity in Christ is not an end in itself but acquires meaning and purpose when it manifests in specific witness to the world

(Jn 17:21, 23) – in this instance that Christ's salvific work includes the liberation and wellbeing of *all* creation. Christian unity becomes meaningful in the AAEC where service is rendered to fellow human beings and to the environment, where members of many churches sense that when they act together as co-workers of God the creator, Christ the saviour and earthkeeper, and the Holy Spirit, the source of life and architect of all earth-healing activity, the boundaries of church-ism are transcended. Ecumenism is evident in joint confessions of ecological abuse, in prophets of different churches prophesying in the Spirit on behalf of one creation, in healing hands of all denominations placing new life and hope in the soil of the one creator, in dancing feet below billowing garments in the colours of diverse church orders obeying one rhythm of celebration in the Lord. That is when denominationalism, that 'scandal to the world and a sin before God' (Messer 1992:23), is overcome.

In the planning stage AAEC ecumenism may have been intended as ecclesiastic unity for the sake of earthkeeping. In practice, however, the process is two-way. AIC unity indeed facilitates wide-reaching and effective afforestation, but earthkeeping programmes in the field in their turn feed and reinforce AIC ecumenism and spirituality. To the extent that earthkeeping in nurseries and woodlots requires sustained commitment – often across boundaries of religious differentiation – there is a constant challenge to unity of purpose and action, one which goes way beyond the more fashionable, and probably more easily achieved, religious unity at occasional ceremonies. In the earthkeeping process of communal living – *in* the nurseries, *in* the woodlots, *in* the ZIRRCO offices, *in* conference halls, etc – new and exacting patterns of day-to-day interaction emerge. In such interaction the role players, representing both religious pluriformity and unity, become icons of a twofold ecumenism within the green struggle: that between Christian churches and, more broadly, between all participant religions, Christian and non-Christian.

As an ecumenical body the AAEC is distinguished by three remarkable achievements. First, it empowers its member churches to develop an earthkeeping ministry, with practical implications both for environmental reform and for theological growth. Second, the AAEC as an institution which stimulates regular and intensive interaction breaks through the kind of isolation which some of these churches experience as a result of their geographic remoteness from the country's highways and their

limited financial resources. In this respect the AAEC follows and augments the AIC ecumenical tradition already established by *Fambidzano*. Third, the existence of the AAEC as the Christian counterpart of AZTREC provides a valuable platform for interfaith dialogue. Despite a degree of understandable conflict between AIC prophets and traditionalist spirit-mediums, the bishops through their earthkeeping institution have formed close ties with many of the AZTREC chiefs. They have found that the latter, many of whom are Christians as well as active ex officio traditionalists, contribute to the removal of religious bias and the promotion of tolerance whenever the green struggle requires interreligious planning and/or action. At tree-planting ceremonies in particular, where contingents of AIC and traditional leaders interact, friendships, acceptance and respect for each other's dignity and convictions are established. Hence it is *in* the green struggle, in striving and working for a common cause, that spontaneous dialogue about God, the ancestors, church life and the earth takes place. This is the more remarkable because of the fairly rigid and doctrinaire orientation of Zionists and Apostles – the vast majority in AAEC circles – towards traditional beliefs and rituals. In a prophetic tradition which brands ancestors 'demons' and forbids any form of participation in traditional rituals, religious interaction is invariably characterised by radical confrontation and deliberate transformation of the old in the context of the church, rather than by reconciliatory and constructive dialogue. This tradition obviously prevails to a large extent, but in the AAEC's earthkeeping context it acquires a humane face, becomes more tolerant and sheds much of the judgmentalism which so often bedevils interfaith relations and attitudes.

Not only are the ecumenically interconnected AICs a green force to be reckoned with; individually, too, as grassroots organisations with considerable influence in African society, they are proving to be effective vehicles of earthkeeping. One of the main reasons for this is their composition. On the whole their membership comprises rural peasant families whose very existence hinges on subsistence farming and, therefore, on an agriculturally healthy environment. So when the church itself actively empowers afforestation and related conservationist projects, its constituency, by virtue of its nature and existential need, is bound to respond positively. In addition, the holistic, seamless theology of the AICs – less fettered by ages of doctrinal history than their counterparts in the West – is forged in the hard school of nature, agricultural praxis

and survival in the face of changing seasons. This dialectic between biblical text and church praxis lends itself to the kind of innovation and improvisation required for the introduction of earth-care in worship and sacrament. Such integration inspires hope of institutional continuity of this ministry beyond the lifespan of present-day iconic church leaders. This, to my mind, is the major and, I trust, lasting contribution of the AAEC – not only to the environment of Zimbabwe but also by way of a challenge to world Christianity.

What is the core of the AAEC's eco-theology, the salient features of a green experience which could arrest the attention of other members of the Christian family worldwide? The richness and diversity apparent in earlier chapters preclude straightforward answers to this question. Nonetheless, even at the risk of caricaturing or being one-sided, I highlight a few noteworthy themes.

Earthkeeping has undoubtedly broadened the AIC perception of *the nature of the Christian church and its mission in this world*. The notion of the church as a healing institution was already well developed in the Spirit-type churches prior to the advent of the AAEC. This made it possible to extend the image of the church to that of keeper of creation and environmental hospital once the new ministry started taking shape. Salvation, which in the black Zion Cities and Jerusalems already had a strong this-worldly emphasis, now broadened its predominantly human orientation – Christ's death and resurrection on behalf of a wayward human race – to include all of creation. Conversion and discipleship, it was realised, could not be restricted to change and wellbeing for individuals and communities if the *missio dei* was to be fulfilled in this existence. *All the earth had to be included in the good news* and the change it brings if the new dispensation of God's kingdom, the new heaven and earth is to take shape and make sense here and now. Conversion and spiritual growth, it now appeared, are interwoven with and not separate from earthkeeping, the latter being integral to God and his church's mission to this world. The earthy dimension to the church and its missionary mandate in no way lessens the challenge of individual spiritual growth, scriptural knowledge and the sanctity of life. On the contrary, it interacts with and enriches these personal and interpersonal concerns.

In discovering its earthkeeping mission and ministry the church has experienced a phase of renewal. Placed squarely in the *chimurenga*

tradition through the direct link between the liberation of both politically and ecologically lost lands, it has become more visible, especially in rural society. Christ appears to have been rediscovered as saviour-healer and as earthkeeper par excellence. *His* new laws of love and freedom, justice and peace are reinterpreted as applying to the entire created community – humans, animals, birds, plants, all animate and inanimate beings. These laws permeate the very being of his church. Hence the church assumes both responsibility for an emerging environmental ethic and custodianship of the earth.

Although this extended and enriched image of the Christian church may not be fully evident to all the AAEC earthkeepers involved in the green struggle, the symbols of change and growth are there for all to see. The AIC leaders are the green icons, whose headquarters and schedules indicate ecological commitment, whose newly improvised sacraments and liturgies proclaim an earthbound spirituality. The ecclesiastic instruments of afforestation, the industrious nurseries and budding woodlots, reflect obedience to an age-old yet previously neglected divine commission, and a growing common will to practise earth custodianship and help enforce its laws in a way that will make a difference. To the Christian community the church now provides the religious incentive for, and legitimation of, the green struggle. In an ongoing dialectic, the green struggle in its turn informs and stimulates the church's internal growth and external missionary outreach. Hence, the process of contextualising Christianity, originally set in motion by the AICs as they emancipated themselves from Western missionary tutelage, acquires new impetus and concrete meaning as it starts to address more seriously the immediate needs of peasant society within the confines of its environment.

In the development of its image as an earthkeeping institution the church has become the vehicle of what I have called an 'existential people's theology' – expressed mainly in imaginative earth-oriented ritual, song and dance but also, increasingly, in written reflection as the need grows for local instruction and self-interpretation in relation to global Christianity. Judged in terms of Henry Venn's tree-selves principle, the AICs – which, since their inception, have, in part unwittingly, been *self-governing*, *self-propagating* and *self-supporting* institutions – have now added a 'fourth self' principle more consciously than before: that of self-theologising (Messer 1992). Significantly, local theologising

Plate 45 ZIRRCOON established a new tradition of earth-care, in which growing attitudes of love and respect for nature are noticeable. Mr Ziki, chief keeper of trees at the Muchakata nursery, lives in kinship with the quiet members of the earth-community



suggests that the war of the trees is not just a passing fad but a penetrative ministry and soul-searching experience, reaching into the inner recesses of human conscience where neglect and abuse of God's creation have long festered as one of the most serious signs of humankind's rebellion against, even betrayal of, the creator. By imposing the embarrassment of publicly confessing ecological sins and doing penance through sacrificial planting of trees, the AIC's environmental theology unmasks hidden guilt and qualifies its religiously driven earth-keeping as an inescapable way of life; the objective of which is to overcome the 'wizardry of the earth' and restore harmony and hope to creation.

I have outlined how the AIC's grassroots theology 'defines' the creator God as insider and the traits characterising its christology and pneumatology in the dialectic between scriptural texts and earth-care, between AIC prophetic tradition and the customs associated with traditional rituals and ecology. Because of the AIC leadership's lack of scholarship one cannot expect their theology to be fully informed by in-depth scriptural studies. Nevertheless, as I have indicated, certain biblical texts and truths have been discerned and, through constant proclamation and consideration in a group context, are starting to function as signposts of the green passage which the movement is prepared to follow. In the AAEC movement as such the conviction predominates that scriptural norms and the guidance of the Holy Spirit sanction and inform its beliefs and programmed activity. Hence, despite considerable freedom and variation in religious expression and spontaneity in liturgical improvisation from one tree-planting ceremony to the next, the basic convictions discernible in group consciousness reveal a remarkable consistency. This has made possible the kind of theological distinctions and generalisations that I have made in the previous three chapters.

Thus there is no question in AAEC circles about the immanence and presence of Mwari the creator, both as an inherent force in nature and as a personal being with anthropomorphic attributes who communicates with human beings. Neither is there any doubt about Mwari being the prime mover, the one who activates, inspires and empowers all earthkeeping endeavour, or about the realisation that God's call to such a ministry leads not only to some legitimate satisfaction at a service rendered but also to the hurt of suffering with God in an abused and par-

tially destroyed creation. The perception, too, of a Christ figure who brings atonement to all the world is unmistakable. He is the earth-keeper who, through his church, extends his healing mission to mend and bring wholeness to the entire cosmos. He relates to Africa's ancestors as an elder brother who, in human dignity and humility as well as in divine sovereignty, appropriates and fulfils the age-old task of guardianship of the land.

Equally strong and uncompromising is the belief in the Holy Spirit who is the source of all life and who inspires and calls all human beings to conversion which, by its very nature, encompasses the vocation of earthkeeping. The Spirit is the one who confronts and combats the earth-destroyer. The Spirit writes the daily script of the strategy adopted in the green struggle. And the Spirit exposes, through the army of prophet-guardians, the perpetrators of *uroyi hwenyika*, so that evil may be expelled and all the relationships of the earth community be reconciled anew.

These, then, are the main traits of the AAEC's earthkeepers' understanding of divinity, the main traits of a theology informing environmental reform while simultaneously being moulded by the green struggle itself. When all the strands of motivation, belief and action are woven together a powerful statement takes shape – a clarion call to Africa and the world to heed the divine charge to care for the earth.

NOTES

- 1 Mr Willem van Harderwyk, a water engineer formerly of a Dutch development agency (SNV), and Mr Ronald Teufel, of the German Development Society (GDS), were most helpful with the planning and development of the *Muchakata* nursery on the Beitbridge road near Masvingo. As an agro-forester, Teufel helped to set up an experimental woodlot next to this nursery. GDS subsequently agreed to appoint an agro-forester early in 1997 for a lengthy period of service with ZIRRCON. This enables us to add a professional dimension to our afforestation programme, particularly in the monitoring of woodlots, survival rates of trees in relation to soil types, climatic factors, religious and social dynamics in after-care, etc. Ms Fieke Vermeulen has been assisting ZIRRCON for several years in public relations work, the development of women's clubs and institution building. Her presence and insistence of the regular formulation and revision of clear goals and assessment of performance each week by all staff members have contributed towards improved

planning, systematised fieldwork, self-critical awareness among staff, and an improved overview for the director at any particular time of the individual schedules of staff members. Vermeulen also promoted a fund-raising drive launched by ZIRRCO and the IUCN – the World Conservation Union – and aimed at support from the Development Corporation Ministry of the Netherlands Government. For a while the services were obtained of Ms Eva Holmbach, a volunteer from the Africa Groups of Sweden (*Afrikagrupperna*). She worked closely with Ms Raviro Mutonga, coordinator of ZIRRCO's Women's Desk, and rendered a valuable service in assessing and facilitating the funding of women's development programmes.

2 As already indicated in *African earthkeepers*, volume 1:117, ZIRRCO's initial activities were sponsored first of all by myself and then by the European Community (EEC). Subsequently the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe (EZE), stationed in Bonn, Germany, became our main sponsor. Recently EZE committed itself to extending its support of our institution for another three years. Smaller grants for particular projects were received from the Netherlands Embassy (for tree-planting ceremonies and woodlot fencing), the Wild Geese TV programme at Hilversum (which provided for our main nursery, Muchakata, on the outskirts of Masvingo town), the Haella Foundation of Utrecht (water schemes and afforestation) and the Zimbabwe Project (afforestation). Considering that we have just received a multi-million grant for three years from the Development Cooperation Ministry of the Netherlands Government via the IUCN (World Conservation Union) Regional Office of Southern Africa, it is apparent that Dutch development funds, next to those received from the EZE, increasingly become of pivotal significance for our work. In addition, the German Development Society (GDS), subsequent to allowing one of their foresters, Mr Teufel, to assist with our nursery development programme, has seconded a full-time agro-forester, Mr Antar Spiong, for several years' service in ZIRRCO's ecological department. This society has also recently donated funds for the development of our Women's Desk. After lengthy discussions between ZIRRCO and WWF, followed by feasibility studies in the field, the latter is prepared to assist with the drafting of funding proposals for ZIRRCO's establishment of two game sanctuaries which, if realised, will amount to a novel experiment in the communal lands.

3 Ms Irma Aarsman, for instance, made several documentary films and produced an extensive report on 'The role of Shona Traditional Religion in ecology' in part fulfilment of a doctorate in anthropology at the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands. Ms Marcelle Manley has completed an outstanding master's dissertation at Unisa, South Africa, entitled 'Blood and soil: Shona Traditional Religion in twentieth-century Zimbabwe' – a study which focuses

largely on the changing religion-political roles of chiefs in recent years. Dr Tinus Benade is scheduled to do research on the TEE (theological education by extension) programmes for Zimbabwean AICs, with ZIRRCO's assistance, for his doctoral thesis at Unisa.

4 My attendance of conferences and seminars focusing on ecology or including eco-theological themes included the following:

1990 July, Nermic Symposium on AICs, Wits University, Johannesburg; September, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Theological Conference at Stellenbosch University

1991 January, South Africa Mission Society (SAMS) Conference on 'Mission and Ecology' at the University of Pretoria; July, International Conference on World Evangelization, in Brighton, UK
September, Anthropological Conference on 'Healing, Wholeness and Resistance in Southern Africa, at the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands

1992 Ecumenical Foundations of South Africa (EFSA) Conference on 'Church and Development in Southern Africa' in Stellenbosch; August - October, lecture tour: US universities, including conference on 'The Africanization of Christianity' at Claremont University, Scripps College

1993 ZIRRCO's first interfaith conference, in Zimbabwe, on 'Earthkeeping: Future Strategies'; June: Faculty lecture of the year on 'Environmental Theology' at Unisa, Pretoria; Nermic Symposium on AICs at Wits University, Johannesburg; December: HSRC conference on 'Church and Development in Africa' in Malawi

1994 February, conference on 'Theology and Environment' at the University of Botswana, Gaborone; June, conference on 'Interaction between Christian Religion and African Traditional Religion' at the University of Zimbabwe; September, conference on 'Strategies for Africa: the Contribution of Traditional Authorities to Development Democracy, Human Rights and Environmental Protection' at Accra University, Ghana

1995 March, presented the Director's Seminar ('Traditional Religion and Earthkeeping in Zimbabwe') at Centre for the Study of World Religions, Harvard; March, presented the Walter Rodney Seminar (video lecture) on 'The Role of Religion in Environmental Reform in Zimbabwe' at the African Studies Center, Boston University; April, attended the International Association of Mission Studies (IAMS) conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina; chaired the workshop: 'Healing the Earth'

1997 January, organised the international conference on 'African Initiatives in Christian Mission' at Unisa, Pretoria.

5 The most important of these articles, most of them originally drafted as conference papers, are the following:

'Towards a sacramental theology of the environment in African Independent Churches', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 1991.

'The liberation of creation: African Traditional Religious and Independent Church perspectives', *Missionalia*, 19(2), 1991.

'African Christian Theology and the challenge of earthkeeping', *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, Luzern, 1991.

'African Independent Church pneumatology and the salvation of creation', *Theologica Evangelica*, 1992; *International Review of Missions*, 1993.

'Healing the earth: traditional and Christian initiatives in Southern Africa' *Journal for the Study of Religion* 6(1), March 1993.

'African Independent Churches face the challenge of environmental ethics', *Missionalia* 21/1, November 1993; also WCC publication: D Hallman (ed). *Ecotheology - voices from South and North*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1994

'Contextualizing environmental theology at Unisa', *Religion & Theology*, 2/1, 1995.

'Mwari the Liberator - oracular intervention and Zimbabwe's quest for the 'lost lands', *Missionalia*, 23(2), August 1995.

'Environmental reform - a new venture of Zimbabwe's traditional custodians of the land', *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, Birmingham, UK, 1996

'Earthkeeping in missiological perspective: an African challenge,' in *Mission Studies*, XIII (25-26):130-188; 1996

'African traditional religion and earthkeeping,' in *Discussion Papers in African Humanities*, African Studies Center, Boston University, 1999

'AIC designs for a relevant African theology of missions', forthcoming in *African Christian Outreach*, Conference Proceedings Unisa (eds) M L Daneel & D Robert