



Captive breeding of crocodiles as a climate change adaptation strategy in southeast Zimbabwe



The GoZ-UNDP/GEF: **Coping with Drought and Climate Change project** is working with small-holder farmers in Chiredzi district to demonstrate the potential of captive crocodile breeding as an alternative source of livelihood and strategy for drought risk management and climate change adaptation in changing climates. A pilot demonstration site has been established in WARD 7 of Chiredzi district focusing on crocodile breeding.

Background

Wanted more dead than alive –in the wild, the predatory reptile can be a menace to villagers for attacking people and valuable livestock. In a store, a crocodile leather handbag on display invokes love at first sight for most fashionistas. Growing global demand for croc-patterned luxuries has turned crocodile farming into a profitable industry – with more than US\$200 million in annual international sales of skins alone. The high-end leather goods produced from crocodiles earn ten times that amount in retail sales, according to the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Crocodile Specialist Group. Against this background, captive crocodile breeding has been identified by farmers in Chiredzi district as an option for diversifying livelihood strategies given the increased rate of crop failure associated with changing climates.

Farmers in this impoverished part of Chiredzi are legally allowed to operate, as well as to sell skins and meat from their stocks. A combination of education, awareness, and economic incentives has tamed long-standing community fears of the crocodile. Farmers pick eggs from the nearby Runde River which is infested with crocodiles. Each nest can have 30-60 eggs. The eggs are carefully transferred to incubators that have been established in the crocodile breeding area. Humidity and temperature are carefully controlled to allow for successful hatching. Incubation period is about 80-85 days. In the first year of the project, the farmers produced 318 hatchlings out of 350 eggs picked. The target is 1000 hatchlings per year.

Partners and collaborators

The Parks and Wildlife Management Authority of Zimbabwe (Crocodile division), Chiredzi RDC and the farmers are major collaborating partners in this project.

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