

## The Portal in the ZEST

In the year 2013, a bunch of tech enthusiasts got together and started asking a most profound question. Why was it so hard to get information in Zimbabwe on almost anything and everything? What they knew was they had tech skills, a country with a mobile penetration of over 80% (now over 100%) and a burning desire to spread information digitally. After a few meetings, it was decided this new initiative needed a name and a real purpose.

The initiative was codenamed Hurukuro! This means in the native Zimbabwean tongue (Shona); Discussion or interaction. We chose the latter. This initiative was going to develop and create interactive digital platforms and concepts for the purpose of spreading information and services to the people who need it most. The team (no more a bunch) did not waste time; they identified one of Zimbabwe's key economic sectors as their forte and starting point, Agriculture. Currently Agriculture in Zimbabwe has seen marked increase in Government, Private Sector and NGO investment with little or no improvement in productivity. Though this has been attributed to a number of factors, the key one is that the 1.6 million smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe lack knowledge on sustainable crop production processes and decision support systems to support these practices.

That very same year, the very first opportunity popped up. The team met with an NGO called SAT (Sustainable Agriculture Trust). SAT in collaboration with G.I.Z Zimbabwe had successfully started a massive national programme aimed at empowering and equipping government agricultural extension workers within Zimbabwe. This project was called ZEST (Zimbabwe Extension Worker Support and Training). This programme was a multimillion Euro programme funded by the EU.

The team was tasked by SAT to build a portal. This was not just any old portal; this portal was designed to be targeted at extension workers, smallholder farmers and agriculture stakeholders to disburse information on agricultural issues in Zimbabwe. Was the team up to it? Would they crash and burn at the first attempt? Thankfully the team was and this culminated in the birth of the ZEST portal. The portal was completed and built by November 2013. It had sections of information on best agricultural practices and techniques, market trends and prices, climatic and weather data, Agri-industry news updates and contact details for input suppliers and other private sector organisations. (See screenshots at the end).

This was the team's first major triumph in the pursuit of Information dissemination and related services. In early 2014, Hurukuro Consultancy was formed. From a bunch to a team to Hurukuro! Exciting times for farmer lie ahead.

# Screenshot



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more than  
a portal

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81°

Forecast 50°  
Precipitation 40%

58°

Forecast 50°  
Precipitation 40%

## About ZEST

### Background and Objectives

On 20 December 2012, EU approved the GIZ/SAT project proposal to improve quality of and access to agricultural extension services for sustainable practices in agriculture and natural resource management.

The Action will develop methods to improve the quality of and farmer access to agricultural extension services for sustainable practices in agriculture and natural resource management in the target districts, document and analyze methods and impact for dissemination and potential role out. The improved quality and access to agricultural extension services in the Action districts and subsequently in other districts of Natural Region IV and other Natural Regions is expected to improve farm management practices, increase productivity, production and incomes, and improve and sustain household food and nutrition security and overall livelihoods of smallholder farming households in Zimbabwe. All this will ultimately contribute to the national goals of poverty alleviation and promotion of agriculture-led growth in line with regional and continental goals while helping Zimbabwe to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or reducing hunger, poverty and conserving natural resources.

### The Project

The specific aim of the Action is to develop and test methods and means to improve the quality of and farmer access to agricultural extension services field crops, livestock, horticulture and management of selected related natural resources in Natural Region (NR) IV of Zimbabwe. This is expected to increase and sustain profitable smallholder agriculture. The Action will contribute to the goal of improving and sustaining food, nutrition and income security and overall rural development through four specific outcomes as follows:

**Outcome 1:** An effective extension system which is demand driven, needs-based, and integrates both public and private sectors is developed and tested for smallholder farmers in Centenary, Chivi, Gutu and Masvingo districts in NR IV of Zimbabwe

**Outcome 2:** Strengthened and more effective public sector extension service delivery in the Action districts

**Outcome 3:** Smallholder farmers are more effective in accessing, utilizing and influencing extension services and messages for increased and sustained productivity

**Outcome 4:** Best extension models and practices, and promising options for private sector involvement in smallholder extension services are shared with other similar programmes and with the public and private sector

## NEWS

News and updates about ZEST achievements and developments including stories of change, innovations, research results synopsis etc.  
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Zest Portal Launched. News and updates about ZEST achievements and developments including stories of change, innovations, research results synopsis etc.  
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### About Us

On 20 December 2012, EU approved the GIZ/SAT project proposal to improve quality of and access to agricultural extension services for sustainable practices in agriculture and natural resource management.



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