

Michael Mubaya, project manager, January 13th, 2019.

Overview

Despite a very difficult situation in the country, the year 2018 had positive impacts on the development of the Ecovillage. We managed in our third year of activity to achieve some progress in the community building especially through a workshop that was attended by 16 homesteads and 22 participants under the name Training for Transformation. This actually enlightened the villagers to understand how the village could be transformed into a sustainable community that can live holistically together, living as one people with common aims and goals. As our community is an existing community that independently had adopted its way of living for a very long time, changing it into a permaculture project cannot happen overnight. This process has started now. Although it might still not be understood by everyone why they should change from conventional farming into using 100 % permaculture principals, we have great achievement so far as quite a number of participants who had attended the workshop are ready to engage into a further common process.

As far as permaculture is concerned we noticed that it's a big challenge in our conditions to apply it in a pure way. As we depend completely on the harvest to feed the people at the centre we cannot afford to lose crops. We therefore are not able to always respect these principles as they often need time to find solutions to new problems by exploration and experimentation. The lesson we learned is that we need a reserved portion of the fields and gardens which is only there for permaculture experiments. If there is any pest or other problem, solutions will be looked for in a permaculture way. Thus the amount of harvest that is needed for self-sufficiency is not touched if there is any problem which we need to tackle with conventional means. For the permaculture field and garden only organic means will be used. If there is no success and the plants die there won't be any impact on our food sufficiency, but experiences made and lessons learned for the future. We therefore will in future keep separate fields and each time when we were successful with permaculture we can transpose the idea on bigger surfaces.

Since my neck surgery in 2017 I'm still not fully recovered. Also for this reason I needed to hire field workers. Since we are still on the preliminary stage of the development of the Ecovillage it was not easy to fully engage in the very demanding biochar project as it needs a lot of time for the precise data collection and experiments.

Harvest in 2018: Fields and gardens

We have planted two hectares of maize/corn beginning of 2018. In the past years we get more and more affected by El Niño, which causes global changes of both temperatures and rainfall. In in south-central Africa, including Zimbabwe, conditions are drier than normal



from December to February and the start of the rain season has become very unpredictable. This was proved by the late start of the season in 2018 as well. We normally get our first rains in November (2017) we had our first rains in January (2018). So we decided not to plant on a bigger space although we needed to have a bigger space since our animals are increasing in number. We need to produce our own feeds to bring the cost of feeding down. We were able to have vegetables until September 2018. We also employed a few workers during this year.

Animals

Since we lost the sheep and the goats from thieves we did not add more as we are not too sure to lose them again. We were more fortunate with the pigs. The number has increased to 20. We have not yet bought the animals for the fishpond as we only finished the pond before the rain season 2018/2019.



The Shop

In Summer thieves had broken into the shop. After repairing the wall, we had to suspend the operations of the shop due to economic problems. It was becoming difficult to find the basic goods to sell in the shop and too time consuming to look for them for a reasonable price. The prices are not stable due to high inflation that the country is experiencing for some months already. So there was no income coming from the shop in the year 2018. As the village people have to resign to buy the basic food they wouldn't buy vegetables or herbs from our gardens.



Projects 2018

Despite the hardships we managed to accomplish some of the projects that were on our agenda for 2018. It was not easy because of the deterioration of the economy, it became a race against inflation, most companies were adjusting their prices to suit the inflation, but the income of the people did not change at all to go with the inflation.

Masterplan Design / Community Development

At the mid-term of the project we decided to spread the knowhow of the Centre to neighbouring homesteads and include them in the next development phases. We therefore invited an external

permaculture expert, Bornface Matimba from Fambidzanai permaculture farm, Harare, to conduct a target survey. Mr Matimba is a permaculture expert with vast experience in permaculture and sustainable livelihood. The outcome of the survey is including all permaculture elements in a symbiosis: Observation of the climate factors, resources, landscape characteristics, water management on the neighbouring homesteads. Together with him a masterplan was designed later in the year based on the Permaculture principals from Bill Mollison. This survey was conducted in March, 2001. The study identified several challenges which if not addressed may lead to increased losses of the environmental resources and economic activities. Most of the challenges documented cannot be attributed to a single entity, but rather are a result of the collective actions of the surrounding communities. The study recommends an array of structural and non-structural alternative plans, which when implemented together over time can help to transform the community into a viable and vibrant Ecovillage and ultimately improve on the environment, health, and the socio-economic viability of the community. However to achieve the above mentioned status requires a shared vision and a multi-sectorial approach (see Report on the Website).

Permaculture Design Course

When we started thinking of drafting a master plan for the Ecovillage we thought it was a good idea to send some people from the village to go and get trained in permaculture. So we started looking who could best suit our needs. The aim was to find people willing to integrate and strengthen the existing team afterwards and which would conduct the implementation of a common Masterplan.

In 2018, we managed to send four people from the village to participate to a Permaculture Design Course in the Chimanimani mountains at PORET CENTRE, from 17th -27th of July, conducted by Julious Piti. The training was conducted by John Nzira a Zimbabwean permaculture expert now based in South Africa. This was actually a good move for us because we sent people who had there homesteads included in the area which was assessed in March 2018. From the reports and the feedbacks it showed to be very important. The participants were very happy. They thank the association for making this training happen and also for the fence they got from the association as a token for participation in the permaculture design course. Testimonies from the team confirmed that this training was very useful moving towards the development of the ecovillage (see Report on the Website).



Discussion with Julious Piti after the training



Participants P.D.C at PORET CHIMANIMANI

Training for Transformation

After the assessment in March we did a Training for Transformation with the same expert, Bornface Matimba, and 22 people for a week in October. It was facilitated at the centre of Mubaya Ecovillage. Initially we wanted to do this training with people from the four homesteads only which had sent participants to the P.D.C Training. Training for transformation was a response to the idea of the Master Plan and was a very big eye opener to the villagers who attended the training. The facilitator emphasized that everyone in the community has a role to play in eco-projects, since the eco-village would affect the whole community in one way or the other. He also pointed out that trained farmers should be able to see into the future e.g. siltation of dams and or dangers of deforestation. Trained farmers should have hope, focus, patience and motivation. The Workshop's learning objectives were to strengthen leadership and team work and to improve communication and motivation. Discussed purposes of transformation were (i) to empower the community to identify challenges and the best corrective measures, for example construction of dip tanks, planting of trees and (ii) to break the culture of silence by building self-confidence and willing power to take up things. The concept of transformation is to empower the community to be able to address the challenges of hunger, poverty, unsafe and insufficient water supply, oppression and unpaid labour, lack of food and exploitation of natural resources (see report on the Website).



Participants at TFT TRAINING



Serving food during Training for Transformation

Dam Restoration

Finally the former existing dam was scooped by the end of 2018. I am happy to say this is done now in spite of some difficulties due to logistical problems. We were able to call a company which was working on a dam in the nearby village. So we didn't have to order a company from Harare which would have costed much more. Water has started accumulating now and I hope by the end of the rain season we will be able to get a full dam. The spill wall has still to be restored.



Dam under construction



Finished dam



Fish Pond

This is another project that was long over-due. We are very happy that it's almost complete now. At one point we had some water in it but later had to realise that the plastic liner that we had used was not good enough, so we eventually lost all the water, but now through more advanced consultation we managed to find out the right canvas to use that is strong and lasting. So we are going to use the other plastic which is already there as an under layer and then we put the strong canvas on top.



Pond under construction



Finished pond



Ecovillage Development Training

I participated in a training for trainers conducted at SCOPE ZIMBABWE. Scope is an organisation which is working with schools all over Zimbabwe on permaculture projects and is also a member of G.E.N (Global Ecovillage Network). The training lasted for a week, the main objective for this training was to learn how eco villages are developed and managed. This was a very useful training now that we are in the preliminary stage of our eco village. I actually learned a lot that could be of great help in the running of our eco village, e.g. to honour traditional wisdom while integrating positive innovation and also how to invest in fair trade and ethical systems of exchange. I was also empowered on how to work with waste as a valuable resource. This training was attended by participants from all over Africa. It was followed up by a G.E.N regional Conference that lasted for another four days. During this conference the executive of G.E.N Africa was changed and first discussions held to establish the next country to host the next G.E.N AFRICA CONFERENCE.



Ecovillage development training at scope Zimbabwe



Certified team at Scope Zimbabwe

Additional Bore hole / electric pump installation

This project was a continuation of an existing project. When we sunk the second bore hole two years ago we experienced a technical problem and the project was abandoned after 30m of depth. The reason why the project was stopped is that the drill bit got broken and then we decided to deepen the first well from 40m to 60m. We installed an electric pump and later a solar pump on this bore hole. After having successfully installed the first bore hole from electricity into solar power we encountered some problems. When the sky is covered with clouds the solar system automatically stops pumping because it is connected in DC (Direct current, solar to pump). Now we want to install the second bore that was drilled two years ago to use it as a support to the solar system with electricity. Like this we can substitute the lack of water when the solar pump is not working or increase the amount of liters to complement. The electric pump was successfully installed in the former abandoned borehole and connected to the water tank.

Biochar

We embarked on a biochar project with money funded by the Agro Society Switzerland Ghana (ASSG) in the beginning of the year. We started with simple experiments since we did not have much knowledge with bio char. Initially we were supposed to bring down the charcoal powder from across the border in Zambia, because there is no large scale production of charcoal in Zimbabwe. While we were still deliberating on the issue, we finally agreed to start on a low scale. Instead of bringing in tonnes of charcoal we decided in March to buy imported charcoal in bags to use in our experiments and ponded it ourselves. We then directly put it into the soil.



From June on we did some experiments in a greenhouse with leguminous plants (beans), corn, tomatoes, grape and pine apples. We are still working on small experiments in the green house. In this initial stage we noticed that the main challenge is to find the good mixture of bio-char, organic matter and soil (see our Progress Report 2017/2018 on the Website).



The challenge that we are facing at the moment is manpower with scientific knowhow to work with. That's why I had suggested to look for students from universities whom I can work with in order to be very precise on data collection and evaluation of the observations. It is a very demanding field to deal with because there is no experience about it in our soils. ASSG has made experiences in Ghana with soils in the South that were not very acid and therefore didn't produce much result. After they continued in the North with acid soils and obtained very good results. Our soils have a good PH degree. We therefore first need to find out what could be the good mixture and the good organic fertiliser to improve the charcoal with in order to obtain positive results in our fields and gardens. We finally managed to meet some students from Bindura University who showed interest to be working with us on attachment for a year.



Note

2018 was a bad year economically in Zimbabwe, even worse than the previous year. After the country had experienced a political coup mid-November 2017, elections took place on July 30th, 2018. In the presidential election, Emmerson Mnangagwa, who became President as a result of the 2017 coup, ran for re-election as the ZANU–PF candidate (majority party). Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC–T (main opposition party) leader expected to run against him, but died in February 2018, and Nelson Chamisa, the new party leader, replaced him as the MDC Alliance candidate. In results that were disputed by the MDC Alliance, Mnangagwa won with 50.8% of the vote to Chamisa's 44.3%, giving him the majority needed to avoid a runoff. Mnangagwa won six of the country's ten provinces, while Chamisa won four, including the two metropolitan provinces, Harare and Bulawayo.

Within days after the election, there were protests by the Movement for Democratic Change opposition. The army opened fire on demonstrators and bystanders and killed several people. In the following days, many opposition supporters were arrested, according to opposition leaders and human rights groups. Zimbabwe's elections, the first since former president Robert Mugabe's ouster in November 2017, were meant to relaunch the country on the international stage and attract foreign aid and investment. Unfortunately, this didn't happen.

The country kept on sinking economically and politically despite what they called the new dispensation, the flow of money did not improve at all it even got worse, the price of commodities sky rocketed by 350%. This brought some hardship across the spectrum within communities who already had a tough life. For example on January 8th, 2019, the raise of fares for commuter buses results in the fact that many working Zimbabweans who are operating below the poverty datum line, cannot afford to go to work anymore. Ordinarily, a civil service employee earns a net salary of \$400, which can be sucked up by just the bus fare and the lunch expenses that one incurs on a daily basis. <https://mailandtelegraph.com/2019/01/08/commuter-omnibuses-hike-fares/>

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