

Newsletter No. 9 – July 2020

Dear Members and Volunteers,
Dear Donors and Sympathizers of the Support Association
to the Mubaya Ecovillage,

Current events at a global level in the first half of the year have had a strong impact on life in the Mubaya ecovillage but also on the activities of our association in Switzerland. Despite the paralysis of economic activity, the inhabitants of the ecovillage have been able to use the resources at their disposal to diversify their agricultural production, undertake new work, and try to maintain their quality of life (pages 3 and 4).



In April 2020, a trip to Zimbabwe was planned to celebrate the progress made and to discuss with Michael and the community of elders the opportunity to transform the entire village into an eco-community over the next few years. This trip was made impossible because of the coronavirus crisis, but it is only a postponement. The meeting between Michael Mubaya and the committee of our association was able to take place by videoconference on June 21st. The annual meeting, a convivial and inspiring moment of exchange for the members of our association, had to take place electronically.

Contacts with the ecovillage and the members of our association could be maintained despite the confinement. However, this special period was an opportunity to meditate on the road travelled since the drafting of the 2016-2020 Vision for the establishment of an ecovillage in the community of Mubaya. Originally, our association was created to help Michael Mubaya, our coordinator, transform his native village into a self-sufficient ecovillage through permaculture by 2020. We were all aware that changing mentalities is a long-term job. Despite a difficult start, Michael has managed to set up a permaculture center that allows people in the community to develop their knowledge and to challenge some of their farming practices.

In 2018, a first workshop was held to strengthen cooperation within the Mubaya community, with more than 30 people participating. The development of this project has been abruptly slowed down by the increasingly worrying political and economic situation in the country. Therefore, in 2019, the objective was to train farmers in the region in permaculture. It was hoped that through a wider circle of insiders, the transformation could take place more quickly throughout the community. Even though some of the people trained had to leave the community for economic reasons, two people joined in the project. Thanks to your support, Michael was able to hire Mr. Antony Luneka, a permaculture expert, last year, and Ms. Gamuchirai Dambaza for training leadership and administrative tasks this year (page 5).

It is necessary to establish a new strategy with Michael Mubaya and the motivated people for the coming years. It is also a question of confirming or redefining the role that our support association will play in the future. In this context of great changes, we hope that this newsletter can give you a good overview of the current situation!

Muriel Beck Kadima, president

More about it:

Vision 2016-2020 of the Mubaya Ecovillage: click [here](#)

News from Zimbabwe

Coronavirus is still impacting the country

COVID-19 has not spared Zimbabwe, even though the pandemic remains under control in international comparisons. The effects of containment on this country, which is in the midst of a persistent economic crisis, are being felt as far away as the Mubaya community.



Government encourages Harare residents to wear protective masks on the streets (Credit: AP).

Life in Zimbabwe has oscillated since March between attempts to relax the lock-down and police measures to control movement, close shops and enforce the wearing of masks.

Even though most of the new cases of people testing positive for Covid-19 come from abroad, the statistics may still be under-reported. Already affected by austerity measures in 2019, the entire health sector would not be sufficiently equipped to deal with a worsening of the pandemic. Screening tests take a long time, especially in rural areas.

This is why the Zimbabwean government decided at the beginning of June to further strengthen containment measures as it believes that the epidemic is not yet eradicated.

According to Michael Mubaya, the living conditions of most people are extremely difficult, especially since 2019 has already been marked by drought and various economic and political crises. Residents are forced to stay inside their homes while the lack of food is a growing concern. For the poorest, it is hardly possible to compensate for the lack of food through purchases, as the price of basic foodstuffs has soared since currency inflation worsened last year.

According to Michael Mubaya, the pandemic and the famine have affected the motivation of many villagers, who feel neglected and have to cope with the pressure: "There is a widespread fear among many people, who are wondering how to cope with an invisible enemy like coronavirus and how to survive if this crisis continues," writes Michael in a report sent in May. The pandemic has also led to the cancellation of a visit to the ecovillage by members and supporters of our association scheduled for April, due to the cancellation of intercontinental commercial flights.

More about it:

VOA Africa – Zimbabwe President eases coronavirus lockdown, lifts rent payment freeze: click [here](#)

CNBC Africa – COVID-19 could prove “disastrous” for impoverished Zimbabwe: click [here](#)

Opera News – Only essential service staff to report for duty: click [here](#)

Life goes on in the ecovillage

Despite the difficult economic and public health context in Zimbabwe, the implementation of new projects continues at the ecovillage with an extra dose of elbow grease and resourcefulness.

The Mubaya ecovillage remains relatively unaffected by the coronavirus as such because it is located in rural areas. The inhabitants have to rely even more on their skills to cope with the country's poor economy.

Following the drought in Zimbabwe in 2019, inhabitants knew they needed to find even more efficient ways to store water during the dry season, which generally lasts from April to September in Zimbabwe. So, they have started digging furrows, called swales, in the kitchen garden, for vegetables and fruits

personal consumption. The aim is to retain the water accumulated after the rainy season and to provide the roots of the plants with direct access to water. Twelve banana trees and ten papayas have been planted. Kilograms of red and white beans and various varieties of hibiscus roselle have already been harvested. Some of these plants, such as hibiscus and yellow tomatoes, are dried to be preserved longer or sold.



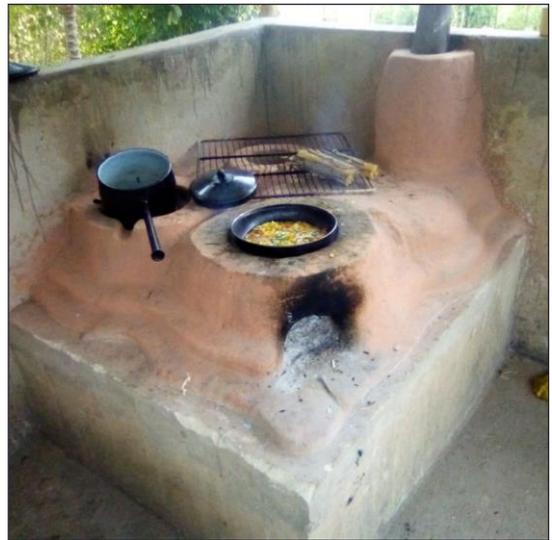
Swales allow rainwater to be stored by a system of gullies that are dug into the ground.



The solar dryer makes it possible to diversify the use of certain edible and medicinal plants.

The herbal and the seed gardens have been refurbished to share the surplus with the whole community. There are trees such as moringa and banana trees, as well as medicinal plants such as artemisia. Another garden with crops for sale is expected to be established by the beginning of the next rainy season because there is not enough water to allow the crops to grow properly before then. To allow all these plants to grow even faster, the residents now have thermal compost enriched with a micro-organism called 'EM'. This thermal compost is a very effective natural fertilizer, also called bokashi.

The inhabitants have built their own pizza oven and a cooker, also known as a "rocket stove", in order to improve daily life. Constructed directly from clay soil and straw with holes in it, the rocket stove uses much less firewood to cook the food. The green house of the permaculture center is now ready for work. There are several varieties of tomatoes, carrots, garlic and cabbage. The inhabitants have also started to mold nearly 20'000 bricks to build new living spaces in order to welcome volunteers, students of agronomy, and other visitors.



The rocket stove is used to heat yellow tomatoes and boil water.



Inhabitants took time to decorate their new pizza oven.



Dried products from the ecovillage to be sold in a local supermarket.

More about it:

First quarter's on-site Report 2020: click [here](#)

Tenth Acre Farm – What is Permaculture Swales: click [here](#)

Two new workers at the ecovillage

Two specialists joined the ecovillage since the beginning of the year to share their knowledge in agroecology and permaculture.

Permaculture is based not only on an almost intimate knowledge of the land being cultivated, but also on agrological principles. This is why the inhabitants of the ecovillage have decided to surround themselves with two people with diplomas in different fields of agronomy, with the financial support of our association.



Gamuchirai Dambaza is plastering hives to protect bees from other insects.

Gamuchirai Dambaza has been in charge of the ecovillage training component since July, as well as various organizational and administrative tasks. This 24-year-old woman obtained her diploma in agroecology from the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment at the University of Bindura. She is a specialist in biological pest control and soil fertility issues. In addition to the theoretical knowledge she passes on, Gamuchirai is already active in the cultivation of various plants.

Antony Luneka was hired as project supervisor for most of the center's activities in January. Mr. Luneka worked for four years with Scope Zimbabwe before joining the ecovillage. He holds a degree in Permaculture Design (PDC certificate) and has extensive experience working with different farming communities in Zimbabwe.

More about it:

Scope Zimbabwe: click [here](#)

Faculty of agriculture and environmental sciences at the University of Bindura: click [here](#)

News from Switzerland

General meeting 2020

Many activities had to be cancelled or postponed in Switzerland at the beginning of the year due to the lock-down. For this reason, the committee of our association decided that the General Assembly would exceptionally be held electronically this year. As at past annual meetings, the purpose was to adopt the 2019 annual activity and financial report and to validate the minutes of the previous year's meetings. Members voted via email.

All the statutory points were unanimously adopted by the members who participated.

News from the ecovillage via videoconference

Although Michael was not able to visit Switzerland this year, the members of our Committee were able to speak with him about the situation in the ecovillage on June 21 via Internet. This included continuing the process of evaluating the projects carried out during the 2016-2020 period, a process initiated a year ago. The general situation described by Michael explains in large part the difficulty of transforming the village of Mubaya into an ecovillage. Political tensions are not conducive to the implementation of innovative projects. The economic context often does not allow the implementation of large-scale projects with sufficient, regular monitoring.



Members of the committee have contacted Michael Mubaya via videoconference.

This is why it was decided to focus on making the Ecovillage Training and Demonstration Centre available to villagers interested in permaculture. On the other hand, the members of the Centre will have to invest more time in the development of income generation to guarantee their autonomy from 2021 onwards.

Flea markets

Saturday August 15th | 07:00-14:00
Old town of Biel/Bienne

All the flea markets organized in Biel/Bienne to raise funds for our association had to be cancelled at the beginning of the season due to the lock-down.

We are pleased to launch this very useful activity from July on. At the time of the mailing of our newsletter, only the date of August 15 is confirmed, but other flea markets could take place in the old town and on the Esplanade of the Kongresshaus/Palais des Congrès until the autumn, if sanitary conditions are good.

Big thanks

The committee would like to thank three people who decided to end or reduce their voluntary commitment in favour of our association:

- **Ursula Rätz** for her commitment since 2017 as a member of the committee and of the Commission for the examination of requests for funds, which she helped to set up; she will continue in this commission as external expert.
- **Marie Bousseau** for the organization of our trip which should have taken place in April 2020.
- **Yannick Saucy** for the writing of this newsletter since 2018 and his help in creating content for the website and Facebook page of our association.

We are also grateful for the commitment of all our volunteers, without whom the activities of our support association would not have the same impact.

We hope that you and your loved ones have not been too impacted by the exceptional situation at the beginning of the year. Hoping that the worst is over, both in Zimbabwe and in Switzerland, we would like to thank you warmly for your support.



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