

Newsletter No.10 – December 2020



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

I'm happy to let you know that we have a new team who has prepared this newsletter, after Yannick Saucy ended his great job in July this year. The new team is composed of Mickness Aeschlimann, who wrote the current issue, Simona Materni and Marc Peter Stalder.

As announced in our last newsletter, we evaluated the past years' activities at the ecovillage Center established by Michael Mubaya and other motivated people there. We came to the conclusion that a new strategy was needed as it turned out to be rather difficult to change mentalities and habits in a whole village concerning agriculture and husbandry. Permaculture is a good base to become independent of expensive chemical fertilizers and pesticides. It also contributes to healthy and nutritious food the whole year through. But this doesn't seem to be enough for the villagers to apply this rather work intensive method. In order for the project to develop further, new ideas were discussed, focusing also especially on women, which will hopefully be implemented in spite of the impact of the COVID-19 virus on the people. You will find updates on the current COVID-19 situation in Zimbabwe on pages 2-3. Recently, a survey was conducted by the permaculture demonstration and training Center on the situation of women and their challenges and wishes for the future (pages 3-4). Finally, you will find some information about the very promising income-generating project of a grinding mill on pg. 5.



We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter!

News from Zimbabwe

Current COVID-19 Updates

The Covid-19 pandemic is reported to have deteriorated the economic situation in Zimbabwe. Due to hyperinflation, the economy is declining, and food prices are increasing steadily. While the majority of people in the formal sector are losing their employment, the situation is even harder for people in the informal sector. Michael Mubaya describes the overall situation as economically and politically unbearable. He observes that basic human rights are being violated by those in power, and the consequences mainly affect vulnerable groups such as women, children, youth, the elderly, HIV/AIDS victims and the disabled. While hospitals lack sufficient capacity and food is expensive for most Zimbabweans, the fuel crisis has caused widespread shortages and lengthy queues at petrol stations across the nation.



According to Gamuchirai Dambasa (the new colleague at the Center; see last Newsletter; in short: Gamu), the unavailability of transport is a challenge that has affected the majority of women in terms of the restrictions on hospital visits or the collection of medicines, especially contraceptive pills (leading to the rise of unplanned pregnancies). Even though the strict measures are now being eased and people are allowed to

move around freely, the transport costs, charged in USD, are not bearable and most of the population cannot afford the costs unless they receive financial support from their relatives abroad. An example of how critical the current situation is, was the recent death of a woman in the village of Makota, next to Mubaya, who was asthmatic and had no access to her medication as a result of financial instability.

Given that most of the population are vendors, the strict restrictions imposed by the government have affected their businesses and, because of restriction violations by the vendors, there has been a rise in police brutality. Gamu further added that some female vendors in Murombedzi have been beaten and arrested by police officers for selling their products in shopping malls during the lockdown. Apart from detaining these women, the police officers imposed fines that were higher than the amount of money the women earned on a daily basis. In her recent report on the effects of corona on women, Gamu highlighted the lack of access to health services in local clinics and hospitals due to the limitation of maximum number of patients per day. She states that, *“Pregnant women are more vulnerable during the lockdown and did not receive adequate attention due to the lack of protective equipment, leaving health workers afraid of being exposed to the virus”*.

Apart from the high rate of corruption and the economic hardships experienced at the national level, there has also been an increase in domestic violence and rape at the household level during the corona lockdown. As the abusive partners often spend time at work and only see their

family in the evening, female victims of domestic violence now have spent time indoors with their perpetrators during the lockdown, which has led to further abuse. Considering that most women live hand-to-mouth and work in vendor businesses, the strict measures to keep them indoors without any government support has caused hunger and further abuse by their partners. The current situation for women in Zimbabwe is apparently intolerable and filled with fear. One Zimbabwean gender activist stated that, *“People, they are now saying that there is no difference between living and dying because when we stay in houses we die of hunger, if we go out, we die of the pandemic, so it’s better to go and look for food”*.

Read more about it:

Zimbabwe increases fuel prices as economic crisis deepens: click [HERE](#)

Gleichberechtigung kann nicht warten: Voices of Zimbabwean Gender Activists: click [HERE](#)

The devastating effects of COVID-19 on maternal health in Zimbabwe: click [HERE](#)

How the women in the Mubaya ecovillage cope with the lockdown

Lessons learned from previous workshops

Economic empowerment remains a critical matter for female farmers at the Mubaya Ecovillage. With the eagerness to become financially independent from their partner's income and to strengthen their capacity to cope with financial crisis, the female farmers in the Mubaya village have made admirable efforts to secure food independence for their households and gain economic power.

Through horticultural production and small livestock, women are working hard to provide for their families and to gain ownership and control over productive resources. A number of women in the village have attended different workshops in previous years, such as Solar Cooking and Rocket Stove construction in 2013, Food processing and Herbal medicine in 2016, training for transformation in 2018, permaculture design course in 2018 and ANAMED in 2016.



The knowledge and skills acquired from these workshops have enabled them to improve water management and farming skills to dry vegetables, fruits and herbs. With the aim of improving the financial situation of women, Mike Mubaya has recently emphasized the need to fund a weaving or pottery project, considering that such programs can have great potential to serve the community by providing training workshops in technical skills and the production of fabrics and pottery products for resale and

presentation. He sent a proposal to the administration of Awra Amba (a small Ethiopian village specializing in weaving as a vital part of the economy) for a female weaving exchange program.

Gamuchirai recently conducted a survey among women in 12 households who participated in food processing workshops. In evaluating the lessons learned by the female participants, she discovered that all of these women have vegetable gardens and dry their own harvests. One of the female farmers in the village, Mrs. Mukasa (60), asserted that the workshop was helpful as she is now able to dry mangos. She stated, *“The workshop was very powerful, and I learnt how to dry fruits. From then I started to dry mangoes and I gave my daughter in South Africa to sell them for me and I am getting more profit”*. Another farmer, Mrs. Masumo, who previously worked with Catherine, a herbal expert, is now processing wild herbs such as Zumbani (Lippia) and Mufandichimuka (resurrection tree). Gamu further reported that the knowledge Catherine acquired in the Anamed workshop in Cameroon was widely shared and passed on to her friends, who now harvest their wild herbs and process them into powder. The women are currently exhibiting at agricultural shows and people from Harare are coming to their homesteads to buy these herbs in bulk so that they can resell them. One of the farmers runs a nursery and sell trees to schools. She stated, *“ I managed to buy cement to build my house with money from my nursery”*. She reported that the nutrition garden and nursery is paying her plenty and she is now helping her husband to buy some supplies for family-based projects. Other income generating activities practiced by Mubaya women are the rearing of indigenous chickens, broilers and goats.

Even though the women have engaged in projects that generate a modest income, they face challenges such as insufficient markets and lack of water that disrupt their agricultural activities. Since access to irrigation systems is extremely limited, they have no choice but to rely solely on seasonal rainfall. Mrs. Dzvene, a farmer in Mubaya, stated that, *“Our area is quite arid and does not receive too much rainfall, so we are now dumping our fields since it does not give us good yields. I have two wells, but they went dry, so my projects are going down and now I’m drying my vegetables and tomatoes for family consumption”*. On this basis most women are now drying vegetables and tomatoes for family consumption.

The table below provides an overview of the challenges and recommendations identified by Mubaya women in the recent survey conducted by Gamuchirai:

Challenges	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water woes • lack of capital • Market • lack of interaction with great farmers • Electricity to refrigerate fresh products like fruit smoothies • No cooperative garden • Shortage of equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drilling a borehole • Capital • Search for markets • Attending food festival and shows • To introduce a cooperative garden • look and learn visits

The Grinding Mill Project

Potential income generating activities



A maize grinding milling machine

A long ago stated and still major goal of the Mubaya Eco Village Demonstration and Training Center was the financial independence from foreign capital sources. Now there are five propositions as to business activities: a maize grinding mill, a mushroom farming site, a poultry farm, a guest house, as well as a seedling bank. Over the past few months, Mike Mubaya and Ursi Singenberger have written a business plan for the grinding mill, the first project to be implemented.

This project has a high financial potential as most Zimbabweans cultivate maize on small scale farms, grind the harvested maize and eat it daily as their staple food called "Sadza".

Up to now, the dwellers of the Mubaya village had to walk 5 kilometers to the small city of Murombedzi to grind their maize. Mike's and Ursi's Business Plan and detailed financial forecast could convince the committee of the short- and long-term profitability of this business idea. Alone in the Mubaya village there is a potential grinding market of \$400 per month. Moreover, the Training and Demonstration site could sell the grinding residues as stockfeed to local animal husbandry farmers as well as sell both products to people passing on the well frequented main road from Chegutu to Chinhoyi. The committee wants to sponsor the starting capital for this project.



A plate of Sadza

We thank you warmly for your financial support and wish you all the very best for the holiday season!



“Merry Christmas” in Shona, the language spoken at the Mubaya ecovillage

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