



VISION AND APPROACH

MUBAYA ECOVILLAGE 2020

ZIMBABWE

Present Situation

The Mubaya Eco-village is situated about 110 km west of Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. Four generations ago, under the rule of the white settlers, this bare area West of about 170 hectares in Mashonaland was allocated to Michael Mubaya's ancestors as a reserve land while the settlers took the fertile land for themselves.

For some generations, the extended Mubaya family lived on the land in a self-sufficient way, close to nature and with supportive social structures.

Nowadays around 300 people live in 53 homesteads. But the situation has changed dramatically in the last 40 years - mostly due to climate change, overgrazing and deforestation - the area became dry, water became short, the water table sank deeper, animals and plants were reduced. The rainfall season usually started in November and went on to February. Now it has become totally unpredictable. Unusual heavy short rains are being followed by great heat drying up the fields and crops have become frequent. The crop yield has decreased and the land turned to steppe. Villagers could no longer depend on their cultivations and started to cut down the trees in order to sell the wood (as firewood) to the nearby city. Other people left the barren land and moved to the city in search for jobs.



Agriculture still went on, but with a high input of synthetic fertilizers, which degraded the soil even further. Parallel to these changes, the mentalities changed as well. People are nowadays much more individualists. Everybody is looking for his or her own survival. The African spirit of living in a bigger community and to help each other is about to disappear. Moreover, the economic and political situation of the country as a whole deteriorated. Many people depend on the money from relatives living in the city or abroad. Everybody is looking for solutions from the outside. Hardly anybody is tackling the current situation and would come up with new ideas or solutions.

Politically, the Mubaya village is in the rule of a *headman* who is liable to the regional *counsellor* who himself is placed under the *chief*. Michael Mubaya's great grandfather was the headman of the village. Today, Mr. Andrew Zvondai is the headman of the Mubaya village.

Michael Mubaya was born in Zambia and relocated to Zimbabwe in 1980. In Zambia his family had a farm and he learned to live with nature from an early age on. In 1999 he moved to England. When he came back to Zimbabwe in 2011, he deeply resented the negative changes in his village. He was looking for a way to help and discovered permaculture, a respectful method to culture the soils and to deal with the environment. He was amazed at the possibilities of greening barren land through simple methods without high cost. He then visited a number of permaculture places in Togo, Ethiopia and Switzerland. After coming back to Zimbabwe he completed a PDC training (Permaculture Design Course) at Fambidzanai Permaculture Farm in Harare.



Vision of Michael Mubaya

My dream is that the people of the Mubaya village live a self determined and self-sufficient life in harmony with nature and with each other.

I think that we can live a self-reliable life in the village. We can work with what is within our reach - that is, the resources that surround us. Like that we can take advantage of the land that was given to us and use it in the best possible way. We can repair the damages done to nature and restore a healthy environment that provides us with sufficient and healthy food. Moreover, we could generate mostly anything in the village and live off-grid. Like this, people could find meaning in living in the village and would not have to leave to the cities or abroad.

I think that it is our deed to care for the future of our children and allow generations to come to continue to be self-sufficient and master of their own social, cultural and economic lives.

I think that we can work together in the village, have common goals and support one another. Each person in the group should have his or her special role and be empowered, seen and heard. Villagers should openly participate in decisions which affect their own lives and the one of the community. They should be endowed with responsibilities for their land and community. This will give them a deep feeling of belonging and self-control over their lives.

To help us reach this vision we can take our ancestors as example. They were self-sufficient and survived without modern food. They lived



longer and healthier than people are living nowadays. They helped each other to survive in a simple and sustainable way of living by using what was available around them without hustle to exchange with silver and gold for food.

This dream meets the idea of an Eco-village defined by the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) as “an intentional or traditional community using local participatory processes to holistically integrate ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments. Ecovillages are living models of sustainability. They represent an effective, accessible way to combat the degradation of our social, ecological and spiritual environments. They show us how we can move towards sustainability in the 21st century¹.”

Ecovillage

I have visited several Ecovillages to see how they realize their dreams of a “lively community planning together how it wants to evolve in all its dimensions, that is social, economic (i.e. providing for their daily needs), ecologic (i.e. respecting the cycles of nature and protecting biodiversity) and cultural/spiritual (i.e. using local health practices or promoting cultural and artistic enrichment and expression)²”.

One of the places I have seen is Tamera in Portugal. The people of Tamera succeeded in transforming an arid place into a wonderful green environment and growing a community of 170 people. They live completely off-grid and are a place for inventors to try out simple

¹ <http://gen.Ecovillage.org/en/article/what-Ecovillage>

² <http://gen.Ecovillage.org/en/article/dimensions-sustainability-0>



technologies. The Tamera village is especially strong when it comes to peace building, conflict management, spiritual unity and new men-women relationships.

In Ethiopia I visited the utopic village Awra Amba founded in the 1970's by a farmer who wanted to promote equality between both sexes. Most of the village's labour force works communally and money is flowing back into the village and the profits are split evenly. This way of doing things has helped to lift the village out of poverty and now, some 40 years later, family income, literacy levels, life expectancy, gender equality and economic growth are by far exceeding the national average.

Both of these Ecovillages have in common that they were initiated by one or several people who spread an idea and found people who joined their enthusiasm. They found a place to realize their dream. The Mubaya Ecovillage is quite different in that it has existed for many years as a village community. Our challenge is to convince the people who live there to join the ecological way I live and propose. However this new way of living is not completely new to them as they still remember their parent's and grandparent's way of coping with everyday life.

I hope that the Mubaya village can be transformed with its present structures into an Ecovillage. Thereby I know that we have to be very open to respect the people who live here with all their needs and visions.

The change will be gradual. Until 2020 I'd like to set up a model site, a training center, a water retention, participatory initiatives and a guest house that allow the village to change into an Ecovillage.



At the same time I hope that the Mubaya village will serve as a living example of a shift of life into a simple way of living to the greater part of the country as a whole and hopefully empower local people elsewhere.

Core values

The Mubaya Ecovillage shall be transformed through the people living there. There is no political body to force anybody to change. Even though for some recent projects I was able to gain the support of the headman, who is the political leader of our village.

In order to change, we need to respect some values. Right at the core of this Ecovillage have to be:

- respect, love and trust each other in order to build something together and rely on each other
- a feeling of togetherness and being concerned about the bigger issues of life as a community
- trust in nature that it can provide us with everything we need. We have to care about this precious nature so that it will be supporting future generations

These values are no more part of our primary modern life concerns, which means we have to "rediscover" them, promote and further develop them. This will be a major issue in transforming the existing Mubaya village into an Ecovillage.



The people

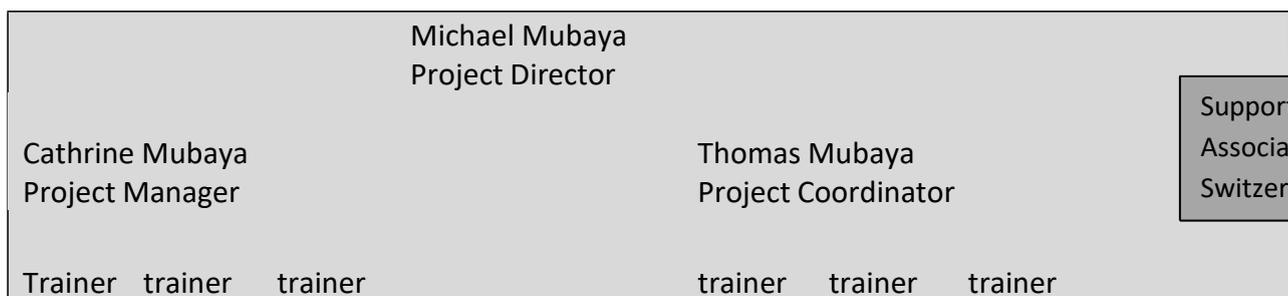
At present, 300 people from different walk of lives live in the Mubaya village. Some people live a more traditional life in the small huts, others have built modern 4-bedroom houses. Some live there continually, some only come for weekends. Some depend on money from relatives abroad, some have jobs in the cities and others are traditional farmers using the freely distributed fertilizer from the state. Some people have a training, others barely read or write. Some people are poor, some rich. The people are still somehow related to each other although through moving in of the wives' families are much more heterogeneous than before.

Among the people of the Mubaya village I could find two persons who share my ideas, Cathrine Mubaya and Thomas Mubaya. Both of them did a permaculture course and hold a permaculture design certificate.

We start the work in the village as a trio with me as the project director, Cathrine as project manager and Thomas as project coordinator.

Later on we will train some trainers to multiply the Ecovillage ideas.

Thanks to my friend Muriel Beck Kadima in Switzerland, I found other people interested in the project. They support us through an association, mainly with financial means.





Challenges

Many challenges await us to transform the Mubaya village. The most important of them are:

1. lack of water and food insecurity (climate change))
2. the mindset of the people living there
3. international market economy
4. financial input to start with the most urgent projects

1. The climate change causes lack of water which causes food insecurity. The UN declared the rain season 2015/16 a regional disaster expecting hunger in the entire region. The area is dry and the water table is very low. The only rain season we have, usually from November to February, has become very unforeseeable. Unusual heavy short rains followed by great heat drying up our fields and crops are becoming more frequent. Moreover, the soils are impoverished due to many years of monoculture. Also the cutting of trees and overgrazing left the land unprotected and furthered erosion, which further impoverishes the soil. Growing vegetables and crops for ourselves is a necessity. It is the most urgent issues for the population and we'd like to tackle it first. We say "hungry bellies do not want theories, but action".

2. Changing the mindsets of people and imbuing them with the core values of a self-sufficient and simple way of living in a small village is a long-term issue. At present, many people are individualist-minded, mostly interested in a modern westernized life or government handouts and wanting to live in the city. They represent wealth and



happiness by materialistic goods and believe in the “manna from heaven”. Becoming active themselves to change their situation is not a prevalent mindset.

3. The international market dictates the market prices in Zimbabwe. Prices can rapidly change and people are not able to buy the most important necessities. Furthermore we have annual government agreements to distribute free fertilizer and other agricultural products to the people. This is not an act of kindness ... It rather makes them dependent. Also these fertilizers are synthetic and pollute the plants and destroy the soils. They do not help to preserve the soil. Making people more self-reliant is a challenge that we tackle together with the other two afore-mentioned challenges.

4. Finally, we need some financial input and awareness programs in order to transform the village. If we do not have this, the transformation will take too long a time.

Approach

Permaculture demonstration farm

We believe that permaculture is - at least to some point - the answer to the climate change, water shortage and food insecurity problem. Dan Hemenway defines permaculture as follows: “Permaculture seeks to design sustainable lifestyles based on conditions unique to each place and designed according to the same principles by which nature integrates other species into her ecosystems. While permaculture

³ <http://permacultureprinciples.com/principles/>



obtains its design principle through careful study and search for comparable principles in nature, permaculture strategies are based on the realities of the 20th century.”

We believe in learning by doing and by showing how change can happen. We therefore have designed one homestead with about 9 hectares of land as a model of an eco-homestead. This gives us the freedom to experiment the best ways of growing vegetables and fruits as well as the integration of animal husbandry and water retention landscapes. Later on, we will become a training center.

In this way the villagers get acquainted with the idea of permaculture and have a place where they can learn and practice permaculture.

We want to use the following permaculture methods

- composting
- compostable toilets
- vegetable fields
- orchards
- mulching (the organic way to improve our soils)
- water retention
- animal husbandry
- reforestation
- fish pond
- bio digester
- eco-buildings
- solar energy
- herbal processing



By doing this, we want to show people that we can replace the freely distributed synthetic fertilizers with our animal manure, compostable toilets, bio digesters and compost, produce healthy organic food and restore fertility and life back into the soil. Slowly the example will be further spread and copied by the people of the 50 or so homesteads.

Support the villagers' ecological initiatives

By seeing our successful demonstration farm, people may become interested in permaculture, in opening a small business to process the food or any other activity supporting a holistic and self-sufficient village life.

We'll therefore offer different workshops, trainings and programs like:

- reforestation initiative together with the state forestry commission
- courses in handcrafts (for ex. weaving)
- giving people access to a library
- water retention workshops
- trainers' training
- courses in small scale income generation on local level
- course in sustainable energy (bio digester, solar energy etc.,)
- permaculture based community garden, including school children in order to provide for their own healthy meals at school
- food processing

In order to catch the people's interest in environmental issues, already in 2013 a workshop was organized with an expert from Togo to learn how to build solar ovens and dryers and how to use them. This pilot



project, called *sun for food*, encouraged us to believe in the transformation of the Mubaya Village into an Ecovillage.

Becoming a national platform for ecological issues

Later, we would like to become an exchange platform and inspirational place for other people/communities in Zimbabwe (and even further away). People could come and share the village life. They could do internships or seminars. International experts could help us to move even further in our quest of self-sufficiency and repair of the environment.

Therefore, we would like

- to organize cultural exchange programmes
- to build a guesthouse
- to construct a shop
- to install a library and internet
- to create a kindergarten/school

Financial Independence

We are lucky to have the support of the Swiss support Association to the Mubaya Ecovillage. In 2016 it could already help realizing several of our most needed projects.

However, we try to realize as many projects as possible without exterior help. We wish to generate income by selling our crops and animals, by workshop fees (though some workshops for the villagers are free), by selling food-transformation goods, by operating the guesthouse.



We hope that by 2020 we will have created a financial secure basis in order to accomplish all the bigger investments and that we are able to do the follow-up and the maintenance of the site ourselves.

Global Market Independence

In Zimbabwe and other African countries people depend on the global economic market. Prices rise sometimes rapidly and people are at the mercy of it. Creating an Ecovillage also means becoming partly independent from this global market as we produce our own food and energy. This can give people a sense of security that they haven't experienced for a very long period of time.

Let's join hands and meet in 2020 together with a lot of other happy bellies and healthy people!

Projects

	Permaculture Demonstration site	Village transformation	Workshops	Training centre
2013			Workshop Solar ovens and dryers	
2014	internal planning and preparation for PDC			
2015	PDC training			
	Sinking of borehole 1			
2016	Planting of garden on the 9 hectare eco-homestead	sensitization meeting	Food processing workshop	
	Animal husbandry (pigs, chicken, rabbits)	Dam restoration		
	Drip irrigation			
	Security fence			
	Construction with eco-bricks			
	Swales			
	Fire guards			
	Borehole 2			
	Tree nursery			
2017	Soil enrichment through planting legumes (nitrogen)	Planting of (indigenous) trees and fruit trees	Forestry commission on tree planting	Water retention workshop
	Compostable toilets		Water retention workshop	
	Beehives and processing honey and planting of trees.	Restoration of another well in the village	Health and nutrition +medicinal herbs workshop	Library and internet
	Fish pond			
	sheep and goats			
2018	Common Kitchen and Bio digester.		Training for nearby teachers	Kindergarten and early learning center for children
	Solar pumps instead of electrical pumps for water		Course in sustainable energy with expert from England	
			Workshops for handicrafts	
			Course for income generation and business creation	
2019				Establishment of training and hosting center
2020				Ecovillage certification