



Newsletter No.12 – Winter 2021

Dear Members

Dear Donors

Dear Volunteers and Sympathizers of the Mubaya Ecovillage Zimbabwe

In this newsletter we report on the progress of our projects: The mill is finally up and running! The reservoir is completed and the people now have easier access to water! It is overwhelming to see how committed the inhabitants of the ecovillage are and how our support helps the population to lead a more independent life. For the first time, we can also introduce you to the new women's project, which aims to give the women of Mubaya Ecovillage a voice and enables them to live more independent and self-determined lives. From the interview with Michael Mubaya, the initiator of the ecovillage, you can also learn first-hand how the idea for the ecovillage came about and how great the village and the population have developed since then.

We thank all who volunteer for our project! This newsletter was written by our new volunteers Peter Schneider, Lua Dixon and Deborah Glaus. Learn more about our three new additions at the end of the newsletter. They were supported by the following dedicated translators and proofreaders: Eliane Stäubli (translation into English), Maeva Koenig (translation into French, proofreader French), Christine Zimmermann (proofreader German) and Andrea Beck (proofreader English). Iva Stachelhaus is responsible for the competent maintenance of our website and social media channels.

Enjoy reading this newsletter!

Muriel Beck Kadima

President

Latest News

Interview with Michael Mubaya

In September 2021, the Biel association “Vision 2035” published an interview with Michael Mubaya, the initiator of the ecovillage, giving a clear and compact insight into the development of the eco-village. It can be viewed at the following link: <https://vision2035.ch/mubaya/>.

In an interview with Muriel Beck Kadima, the initiator of the eco-village describes how he came up with the idea of using sustainable agriculture to create a livelihood for his extended family and 53 other farms with around 300 inhabitants of the Mubaya scattered settlement. In the process, his steadily developing farm is becoming a training centre that demonstrates the methods and possibilities of permaculture. On the way to self-sufficiency, a great deal of creativity and pragmatism is needed if drought, termites and diseases that are fatal for livestock are not to destroy all efforts.



A group of women in Mubaya harvested tomatoes together and are proud of the yield.

Alongside Michael Mubaya, who returned to Zimbabwe as a migrant from England, Catherine and Joseph Mubaya provide information: Catherine Mubaya was a migrant worker in South Africa and Mozambique before coming back to Mubaya and training in permaculture. She understands the central role of women in extended families and looks forward to furthering her education in areas such as microcredit, business management and sustainable poultry farming.

Joseph Mubaya came back to the village after his retirement - he was a teacher and headmaster in the capital Harare - and became enthusiastic about the work on the showcase farm and in the training centre. He is convinced that as a community they can fight local poverty and ensure food security. An important component of this is water management. Joseph Mubaya heads the decision-making committee of the village-wide water project, which has just completed a dam.

Our projects

The mill is running

written by Peter Schneider

Very good news: The building of the mill is up and in October the machines were put into operation for the first time. Now, the inhabitants of the surrounding farms and villages can have their corn cobs processed into corn flour here. The showcase farm to which the mill belongs can thus earn an income – a hopeful step on the long road to financial independence.



The maize mill facilitates the processing of the most important foodstuff.

Within 16 months from the initial idea to the first day of operation – and this at the challenging time of the pandemic – the "Mühle" project could thus be implemented. Ursula Singenberger in Biel and Michael Mubaya on site in Zimbabwe evaluated the project between June and December 2020 and submitted a detailed business plan and the application for a contribution to the board of the association. In January 2021, the foundation stone was laid and construction of the building started. Due to heavy rainfall at the end of the rainy season in April 2021, there was a delay, but finally the construction was completed and the selected machines were installed. In the future, the inhabitants of the village will no longer have to walk 5 kilometres to the small town of Murombedzi to grind their maize. The mill is used for self-sufficiency - but the surpluses can be used to produce maize products that can be sold on the busy main road from Chegutu to Chinhoyi. And the milling residues can be used by local livestock farmers as cattle feed. Thus, the residents of the showcase farm are able to provide a welcome service to the surrounding farms and villages—and for the Mubaya Permaculture Training Centre, there is desirable income. Flyers will be used to draw attention to the mill's offerings.



Two machines grind and refine the corn.

In the near future, the exterior and interior of the walls are to be painted and the entrance doors to the mill and the adjoining guard's room are to be made watertight after the experience with the first downpours. Verandas with protective canopies are proposed for this purpose.

Our projects

The water is collected

written by Peter Schneider

Water is the most important commodity to manage in Mubaya. In the current rainy season, which is expected to last until March, the precious wet will be held back for the first time in a new reservoir that will be completed in mid-October 2021. Some 65 local workers have been carrying stones to the site, hauling sand from the river, digging the trench for the foundation and building the dam since March 2021: 62 metres long, 4.5 metres high, 6 metres wide. When fully filled, it will hold back 75,000 m³ of water.



The excavation for the foundation and the construction of the dam was a joint effort of more than 65 people.

Mubaya and its surrounding villages are located in an arid area with high summer temperatures. Michael Mubaya describes the lack of water as the main obstacle to the development of the ecovillage. The water reservoir will help to better withstand the months of drought between June and December, which are dramatically exacerbated by climate change. The quality of horticultural products will become marketable, livestock will no longer die of thirst during the dry periods, and even the planting of orchards (papaya, mango, peach) will become conceivable. In general, the new dam should have a stimulating effect on the development of the ecovillage, as it convincingly demonstrates to the inhabitants of the four settlements on whose land it is located the progress that can be achieved through community work. "It took more than eight years to bring water to the people," writes Michael Mubaya. He is all the happier that the dam has now been completed. The availability of water has been the biggest concern since the beginning of the ecovillage project. Initiated by Michael Mubaya and formally launched at the beginning of 2020, the water. The Water Management Committee, initiated by Michael Mubaya and formally established at the beginning of 2020, led by the former headmaster and teacher Joseph Mubaya, has happily brought the long-awaited project to a conclusion with the fundamental financial support of the "Mubaya Ecovillage Zimbabwe" Association, resolutely overcoming some difficulties. The village leaders, the engineer Bilton Simago, the Geneva geologist Thomas Schopper, the extended Mubaya family and the workers of the four villages that will use the reservoir have contributed significantly to the success.

Based on the experience gained, Joseph Mubaya advises the following measures for next projects: In order to motivate community members more for participation from the beginning, more explanatory awareness-raising workshops should be conducted in advance. Village leaders should be assigned specific tasks to improve the situation in their own village, which will also boost the mood and commitment of the residents. In addition, budgeting for the next project should be carried out in cooperation with all actors so that no expenses are forgotten (remuneration, meals, transport, travel expenses, etc.). Otherwise, participants will find themselves in stressful situations due to a lack of funds, as they are primarily absorbed in providing meals for their families on a daily basis.

The new dam has not solved all the water problems in Mubaya. The next projects to cope with the droughts are on the horizon: Repairing a second, older dam and drilling a water hole in a place where topographically no dam is possible. The heart of the project, the Mubaya Permaculture Training Centre itself, also does not have enough water year-round to irrigate the showcase farm's gardens and fields, according to Michael Mubaya. Aerial view shows the fields around the training centre suffering from drought.

The solar-powered pumping station only works when the sun is shining – there is no power storage (battery). In addition, the current borehole is apparently three to five meters away from the highest yielding area and should be relocated. The five-year-old water tank is leaking, and the frame supporting it is sinking into the softened soil. A new foundation should be constructed to secure the water tank. According to Michael Mubaya, a second 5,000-liter tank would help irrigate the fields year-round and produce better, marketable quality produce. Michael Mubaya also suggests evaluating possible sites for a second dam – which would eliminate the need for more boreholes and thus also protect the level of the water table.



As soon as the first drops fall in November 2021, the cattle are drawn to the new water reservoir, which is bordered by the dam in the background.



The training centre/showcase farm needs more water: the dryness of the fields is obvious.

Our projects

Women's microcredit and chicken breeding project *written by Lua Dixon*

In - still - too many countries, women's voices fail because of their financial dependence on men, which prevents them from making their voices heard. This is also the case in the Mubaya village.

For this reason, the new community project to be introduced in the ecovillage from 2022 will be dedicated to women, giving them the opportunity to acquire a basis for microfinance. By selling eggs and chickens in the village or even in the region, they will be able to start an economic project under professional guidance that will free them from patriarchy. A pilot group composed of women will manage the income and constitute itself as a microcredit group. This will consist of providing small loans to members who do not have access to conventional bank loans. In addition to the purely financial aspect, microcredit programs also have an impact on local development. In fact, they affect sectors as diverse as agriculture (village communities, farmers' cooperatives, professional agricultural associations), crafts (artisans' groups, women's craft associations), the financing of the social economy (savings and credit cooperatives, village banks), social protection (health insurance funds) or education. Like that, they help to improve access to basic social services, health care, family planning and clean water.



The three women who form the core of project.

According to FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) statistics published in the [report](#) "National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods" in 2017, 54.6% of agricultural workers are women who spend up to 16 - 18 hours per day in agriculture. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for this work to be underpaid or even unpaid. Because of this lack of income, they have no way of obtaining a bank loan. Patriarchal culture dictates that a male figure from their circle (husband, father, uncle, brother etc.) takes control of their property. In addition, women rarely have access to education. In their culture, the duties associated with the household leave very little time for the learning necessary to start a business.

The proposed project would also offer them practical benefits, such as flexible working hours or working close to home, so that they can continue to fulfil their household duties while working.

In order to expand their knowledge, some women from the village have already participated in short workshops related to ecology in recent years, including solar cooking, the use of medicinal herbs, food processing and permaculture. However, this was not enough for them. They wanted to be trained in a way that would give them a longer-term economic perspective. They decided to raise chickens themselves and sell their products.

The new project foresees that a pilot group of about 20 women will be able to tackle the larger programme together. Catherine Mubaya, who became the leader of the pilot group after a vote of the members, managed to bring together 18 women – aged 23 to 49 – who had previously participated in some workshops and were committed workers. The participants in the project want to change and acquire new skills that will benefit both them and the village.



The women participating in the project have gathered to discuss the next steps.

The goal is that they can start and run their own joint business to be financially independent. Each must ensure that the eggs are sold well, that the income is managed efficiently and that the microcredit group provides loans. In addition, the entire project will follow permaculture principles to protect the environment.

The pilot group will provide a friendly and trusting space, both to face the challenges of the project together and to support each other in everyday life.

In the first phase, the women involved in the project will attend courses in management, microfinance and permaculture-style chicken farming.

The future trainers met with the women on September 30th to draw up a timetable and to record their existing skills in this area. The further course of the project is still uncertain. It will depend mainly on whether the women, who live in the patriarchal culture, are able to make

decisions. It may seem insignificant to us, but women's over-dependence on men has limited them in learning how to make decisions and run projects of this nature smoothly.

If the project is successful, the next step would be for the women to lead meetings and discussions about what they have experienced in order to pass on the knowledge they have gained about ecology and economy to the community.

This project will bring more mutual help and support to the community - especially among women who, thanks to solidarity, will be able to fight for their rights and finally make their voices heard.



Miscellaneous

Support the women in the Mubaya Ecovillage!

In Newsletter No. 11 we announced our participation in the Portissimo Market in Port (BE). Most of the proceeds should have gone to the women's project of the Mubaya Ecovillage. Unfortunately, the Market had to be cancelled due to the ongoing Corona pandemic, which meant that our main source of income was no longer available in 2021.

Our women's project has the potential to change the lives of Catherine Mubaya and all the other women of the Mubaya eco-village forever. The women should finally be able to show their strengths and earn their own money. In order to make our vision come true, we need *your* financial support. Help us with your donation to give Catherine and her comrades-in-arms a voice for a self-determined and hopeful future. The women of Mubaya Ecovillage and we thank you in advance!

To our new volunteers

Without the work of numerous volunteers, our vision in Zimbabwe could not be realized. For the editing of this newsletter we could count on three new writers.

Peter Schneider was an editor/journalist (including Tages-Anzeiger, Schweizer Familie, Bieler Tagblatt) until his retirement three years ago and worked for the cultural department of the city of Zurich (Museum Helmhaus). As a journalist, several journeys took him to Africa. He is happy to use his knowledge for the media work of the Mubaya Ecovillage project.

Lua Dixon is a sophomore in high school, loves writing (including poetry and fictional stories), and is very interested in the human and environmental challenges in our world. This newsletter is the perfect opportunity for her to combine writing and her interests. She is excited to be part of the editorial team and the Mubaya Ecovillage project.

Deborah Glaus has recently graduated in law and is now preparing for the bar exam. Supporting other people to lead a self-determined life is very close to her heart, which is why she finds it great to be able to contribute to the people of the Mubaya Ecovillage by editing the newsletter.

General Assembly 2022

We hope that we can finally have a general meeting again with face-to-face meetings – not virtual! The next general meeting will take place on 21 May 2022 at 16:30 in Biel. All volunteers are cordially invited to the aperitif afterwards. The invitation with agenda and registration form will follow soon. We are already looking forward to a large attendance and thank everyone for their loyalty!



Now also on Instagram and Facebook!

We are now also available on various social media! Follow and like us on Facebook and Instagram and get news from Zimbabwe or the Friends.

Instagram: www.instagram.com/mubayaecovillage/

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Mubaya-Ecovillage-107848131756629/?ref=pages_you_manage

Next issue

In the next issue we will report on the further steps in the women's project and on the hopefully positive effects of the reservoir on the groundwater level. Depending on the depth of the reservoir, a borehole is needed in part of the village so that water can be brought close to people, animals, fields and gardens even in places where the construction of a dam is not possible for geological reasons.

We wish you happy holidays and a happy new year!

Association Mubaya Ecovillage Zimbabwe | Beundenweg 52 | CH-2503 Biel

contact@mubayaecovillagezimbabwe.org | www.mubayaecovillagezimbabwe.org

Post account: 89-132954-1 | IBAN: CH44 0900 0000 8913 2954 1