



Newsletter No.16 - Winter 2023

Dear members

Dear patrons

Dear volunteers and sympathisers of the Mubaya Ecovillage Zimbabwe

Our goal for 2023 was to support the eco-village of Mubaya on its path to economic independence. At the centre of this is a group of women from the village and their project to run a chicken farm to produce eggs and raise chicks. In this newsletter, we provide an insight into how this Female Livelihood Project (FLP) is developing. As previously reported, there have been setbacks. The challenges for the women are great and the goals have to be constantly redefined. During this process, the core group has become smaller, but co-operation on the ground has intensified: The women meet weekly to exchange information and tackle the problems together with experts. Parallel to the development of the FLP, Michael Mubaya, the founder of the ecovillage, is also working innovatively. He has renovated a bar on the main street. Drinks are sold here and the place has become an informal meeting point.

The transition from the focus on self-sufficiency in the ecovillage to activities that also generate income only got off to a slow start in 2023 - instead of the planned end in 2022. The people are confronted with objective difficulties: The power supply is unreliable and repairing technical equipment is costly. Communication between Switzerland and Mubaya and within the village, as well as project support from afar, are a constant challenge. The aim is for the support of the Female Livelihood Project by the development association to be completed in the first half of 2024 and for chicken farming to be stabilised in mid-March 2025 after a two-year test phase, thanks to the independent efforts of the women. The Biel-based Mubaya Eco Village Development Association had planned to withdraw from its advisory and financial support activities by mid-2024. The Board of Directors will decide at its meeting in February 2024 whether this timetable should be adhered to.

We would also like to draw your attention to the fact that we have established guidelines for the protection of your data. We use your data very cautiously, only with your consent and in accordance with the legal guidelines. You will find all the relevant information via the link at the end of this newsletter.

We wish you an interesting read and thank you very much for your support.

Muriel Beck Kadima, President

Donations

By breeding chickens, the women in Mubaya are developing a project that will contribute to their families' self-sufficiency and also generate income later on. The relevant training courses were financed by the Bieler support association, which also supports the development of the infrastructure for chicken farming. The women act according to ecological principles and are self-organised. If you, dear readers, would like to help support the project with a small or large contribution, the board would like to thank you today (see below for postal account details). Your support will enable the women to earn an income independently of their husbands. Thank you very much!

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Intensive learning phase



Lots of fun working together: the women use straw to build prototypes for dwellings in which chicks hatch and are reared.

The Female Livelihood Project has suffered severe setbacks since its inception. As reported in the last newsletter, 16 chickens died in March shortly after they were purchased. These chickens were replaced at the end of June.

On 14 June 2023, twelve women took part in an intensive workshop. They were familiarised with how to handle the eggs before and during their time in the incubator and how to care for the chicks. They learnt how delicate the conditions are for successful hatching. For example, the temperature during the 21-day incubation phase must always be between 35.6 and 37.6 degrees and the humidity between 58 and 60 per cent, reaching 65 degrees in the last three days. Hygiene is also essential when operating the incubator. We can only imagine what such demanding conditions mean in a country where the power supply and technical standards are not guaranteed at all times. In late autumn 2023, it became clear that the idea of breeding with an incubator would have to be shelved - at least for the time being.



Intensive introduction to all aspects of chicken farming by experts from the Fambidzanai Permaculture Centre.





Learn how to recognise and classify the characteristics of eggs.



Familiarisation with the growth phases of embryos

The women learnt how to classify the eggs and distinguish fertile ones from others. When the ratio of cocks to hens is 1:10, there is the best chance of fertilisation. They were then familiarised with the growth phases of the embryos and the possibility of observing their development through the shell.



Instructions for operating the incubator.



View into the incubator.

The eggs must not simply be left to their own devices in the incubator: They have to be turned every 90 minutes to prevent the embryos from sticking to the shells. This means that during the three-week incubation phase, people must be present almost around the clock. On the 17th day of the incubation process, the eggs are placed in rearing baskets where the chicks can hatch in a protected environment. At the beginning of July, the women learnt how to use straw to build these simple - and beautiful - containers in which the chicks are kept warm and can grow up protected during the first few weeks.

What they had learnt could be put into practice straight away - the incubator was about to hatch the first 156 eggs.



With simple means, covered, protective dwellings are created in which the chicks are reared.

Back to the start

The realisation of plans in Zimbabwe did not happen as a matter of course. The women did not get the chickens they actually wanted to buy from the animal dealer. And the incubator soon showed technical defects that were not immediately diagnosed due to a lack of experience and which took a lot of energy to repair. During a time-consuming back and forth with the specialist and the incubator seller, the first eggs placed in the incubator were lost. The women, who had started the project with the best of intentions, were disappointed. Five of them turned away, losing motivation as they had contributed more to the project (food for the chickens, money for the guard) than they had benefited from. The women are all busy with other family tasks, from looking after the children to caring for the elderly, and if they have other opportunities to earn money, they take them.

A meeting in September 2023, at which three leaders of the project and Michael Mubaya discussed the problems and open questions with Ronah Mugadza from Harare, and defined binding responsibilities, was of central importance for the future of the project. Ronah Mugadza had previously supported the women's group in setting up their project and has a lot of experience in developing collective activities and skills.

Standards for the organisation and work have been defined rules and statutes of the statutes of the FLP, and are to be distributed to everyone in writing. Important findings for daily practice were identified at the meeting. For example, it emerged that the feeding of the chickens needs to be optimised. The women shared the chicken farm with Michael (who owns the building). However, the outside area was taken up by Michael's chickens. The women's animals did not dare to go outside and therefore ate too little. Michael was asked to keep the outside area regularly accessible for the women's chickens. It also became clear that the home-made feed mix of soya beans, maize and peanut shells resulted in far fewer eggs than bought-in feed. The use of a specific concentrated feed increases egg production fivefold. Of course, this feed comes at a price. If the women want to increase the number of eggs, there is probably no way around using this concentrated feed, even if certain health and ecological questions arise with such a strong intensification of egg production.



Ronah Mugadza guides the women through their project with flair and expertise.



Optimisation of feeding: Purchased feed is portioned.

The Biel sponsorship organisation has requested a three-month budget for the start of production. The women drew up a budget at the meeting in order to recognise how many eggs need to be sold until a balance between expenditure and income is achieved and a profit can be expected. It became clear that eggs alone generate much less revenue than the sale of chicks. This has made the women realise that the repair of the incubator should be taken in hand if they want to ensure a certain income with a joint operation. However, the natural reproduction of chickens for their own use is understandably more appealing to them - and it is also quite successful. For example, women who had their own chickens hatch eggs from the shared chicken farm at home recorded practically 100 per cent success rates. This also means that they have chickens at home that are capable of hatching - an ability that many laying hens have lost through breeding.

The repair of the incubator was started with the support of the Bieler support association. A trial run with 60 eggs was intended to show whether the whole process, from hatching the eggs to selling them, was successful. Unfortunately, this test could not be completed due to a power cut (more on this below). Power cuts are frequent in the rainy season. Unfortunately, the existing solar panels are not sufficient due to a lack of sunlight.

The women have formed teams to work in the henhouse, with the incubator and for marketing and sales. Chickens and eggs should only be sold for cash and no longer on credit. Forms are used to keep records of egg production, sales and the use of labour. The women also meet every Thursday to discuss the current situation and maintain a WhatsApp group. The management of the project was also put up for debate, as several women were disappointed by the lack of communication from the manager. They surmised that she was afraid to address the problems with the Biel sponsorship organisation: the low number of eggs, the lack of resources for buying food, paying the night watchman or repairing the incubator, for example. Another person was appointed on an interim basis to replace the absent manager.

Two weeks later, the topics were taken up, updated and discussed in greater depth at a follow-up meeting. It became clear that patience was also expected from the sponsoring organisation when it came to implementation. For example, for whatever reason, Michael Mubaya had not yet discussed the idea of temporarily removing his chickens from the farm. In the meantime, he has now moved his chickens elsewhere and is leaving the space entirely to the women's team, as agreed at the end of 2022. Furthermore, the sale of three cockerels could not yet be finalised as the potential buyers did not have the necessary money.



The women acquire a great deal of knowledge and develop skills for completely new perspectives.

They have made progress on the subject of feeding. Every day, they record how many grams of feed the animals receive. Feeding is to be ensured by purchasing feed for three months so that feeding does not suddenly have to be cancelled due to a lack of money, as was previously the case. It was decided to stick with the Australorpe chicken breed. It was also decided from whom the eggs for the complete incubator would be purchased if the experiment with 60 eggs was successful. It is agreed with Michael Mubaya that he will finalise the work on the new water tank for the chickens. Several budgets were used to calculate the expected yields from the production of eggs and chicks. If the forecasts materialise, the women can expect good yields. Every Monday, the deputy manager draws up a report recording the progress made.



The fruits of their labour: thanks to targeted feeding, the hens laid 50 to 73 eggs per week in October.

Mother hen husbandry

The next piece of bad news came at the end of October 2023: the eggs had to be removed from the incubator following an interruption to the power grid. An evaluation revealed that upgrading the autonomous solar power production with more panels and powerful batteries would cost USD 1,700 - too high a price to be completely independent of the public grid. The women decided to continue rearing chickens without an incubator - due to the unreliability of the power supply and the high personnel costs during the three-week round-the-clock presence at the rearing centre.

Instead, the women will - at least for the time being - focus on traditional chicken farming. They now want to use the funds for "analogue" chicken farming: Buying more hens, setting up the temporary coop on Michael Mubaya's property so that the chickens can breed themselves. And the women want to buy feed. Mother hen husbandry is the goal! They can also keep the unsaleable cockerels because of the larger number of hens. "Me and my group want the project to grow! We want to do our best," writes the leader of the women's group.



Dorcas (left) and Catherine: the two leaders of the project.

What resilience! It is impressive to see the vigour and meticulousness with which the eleven women currently involved in the group continue to drive the project forward. The setbacks at the beginning had to do with the lack of expertise, experience and organisation of those involved - so they were able to overcome them. The events made it clear how time-consuming and demanding the rearing of chickens is and how much attention it requires. The women could do nothing to overcome the technical and financial obstacles. However, they have now recognised their own strengths and abilities and are coming to terms with the situation. They will draw up a budget for their new project and sign a rental agreement with Michael, the founder of the ecovillage, which will secure their continued use of the land. Michael has vacated the part of the barn he previously used. It is important that the women have a sufficiently large barn at their disposal. Later, they will build their own new barn with support. The first task now is to buy a few chickens that are ready to breed and to ensure that the chickens can breed undisturbed in a house. As the consultant Nosizi explains (she corresponds with the group via WhatsApp and will be able to visit Mubaya in person again in January 2024), the women know how to recognise chickens that are ready to breed. Once the group's cohesion and work organisation has been consolidated and the power supply is secure, they also want to put the incubator back into operation. This may be possible after the rainy season in March/April 2024.

As planned from the outset, the Bieler Support association wants to withdraw as soon as possible, as the autonomy and independence of the villagers has been a major concern of the Support association since the beginning. Since December 2015, it has been committed to the development of Michael Mubaya's ecovillage and has co-financed and set up corresponding projects - most recently, the Female Livelihood Project with chicken farming. Initially, support was planned until 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the cooperation was extended and was supposed to last until the end of 2023. However, this will not be possible so quickly in view of the constant new challenges. We are therefore still reliant on support. The Executive Board will discuss the next steps at its meeting in February 2024.

The current projects of Michael Mubaya

Michael, you are working on a three-part project to generate income for you and the Mubaya Eco Village (MEV). Please tell us about the start of part 1 of the project, the bar on the main road. How did the project get off the ground?

The bar project was underfunded. But we are trying - given the economic circumstances in the country - to deal with this as best we can. The bar is primarily aimed at our local community. Older people in particular enjoy our drinks. In addition, young adults, mostly miners and transporters, increase the number of guests.

What about the competition?

In terms of competition, we are well positioned. The nearest bars on our street are five kilometres away and we have managed to reach all the locals within a five-kilometre radius. We have also noticed that drivers stop at our place to do their shopping on the way. The distance from Mubaya Eco Village to the bar is 200 metres. It is also close to the mill building.

As part 2 of the project, you also want to run a shop. What goods do the local people need most? What should be offered in the shop?

The shop will be located in the mill building. The nearest shopping centre is five kilometres away from Mubaya Eco Village. The shop will make everyday life easier for our elderly residents who have to spend a lot of money to buy groceries. The shop will be a convenient shop for our residents. It will offer basic foodstuffs that are normally bought for domestic and daily use.

Who will be in the shop selling every day? Is selling perhaps also a way of employing a group of older people in the village?

We intend to employ another person to run the shop; unfortunately, we cannot employ an older person in the shop as the work is very extensive and we have to travel to the cities to buy goods. The way the financial system works in our country requires an energetic person who can also keep up with the ever-changing exchange rates.

Can the people in Mubaya afford to buy the things on offer in the shop?

Yes, people in the village will be able to buy the goods on offer in the shop; motorists and passers-by will also benefit from the products on offer, as we have the advantage of being very close to the main road. And we intend to have cool drinks and water available for our motorists.

How do these potential customers find their way from the main road to the shop? How far is it from the street?

The shop is located about 150 metres from the main road. We have created a path for drivers to turn off the road to reach the shop.

As part 3, the business area that is closest to the character of the Mubaya Eco Village is to be reorganised: This refers to the sale of agricultural products that the MEV grows itself. It is also planned that local farmers will be able to offer their goods for sale there. Will the neighbours join in? Are you happy about this opportunity to work together?

For the sale of agricultural products, we currently have problems with this because there is no structure for it. However, we have sold directly from our gardens. The challenge at the moment is that customers ask for extras without paying. For example, a customer comes to buy mustard leaves and realises that there are also tomatoes and onions. He simply asks for some to cook for the evening and it's the same tomorrow. Some products fall through the cracks like this without bringing in any revenue.

We would like to involve locals if they have something they would like to sell at the vegetable stall. So far, MEV is the only farm that sells vegetables to locals. We have not yet started selling to motorists.

Miscellaneous

Our volunteers

Without the work of numerous volunteers, our vision in Zimbabwe could not be realised. We were able to count on Muriel Beck Kadima and Peter Schneider to edit this newsletter. Maeva Koenig was responsible for the French translation and Eliane Stäubli for the English

translation. Yannick Saucy (F), Andrea Beck (E) and Christine Zimmermann (D) were responsible for proofreading. Christine Zimmermann was responsible for the design. Iva Stachelbaum placed the newsletter on the homepage and distributed it via social media. Simona Materni was responsible for the mailing.

Note on the protection of your data

We would like to point out that we have stored your e-mail address exclusively for the purpose of sending you information from the association. We treat your data with absolute confidentiality and do not pass it on to third parties. Detailed information on the protection of your data can be found on our homepage.

Link: <https://mubayaecovillagezimbabwe.org/de/datenschutzerklaerung/>

Next issue

The next newsletter will be published in summer 2024.

We wish you a wonderful festive season!

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