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Zimbabwe Schools Program

Isabelle Chirere, Simba Muzuva, Rob Sacco (Zimbabwe)

[Submitted Paper]

History – Simba Muzuva

Zimbabwe has 6,000 schools, each one covering 4 to 10 hectares – a lot of land to permaculture. Natural Farming Network negotiated with the Curriculum Development Unit to develop a pilot permaculture schools project for 18 months. It was an opportunity to raise awareness about permaculture with Ministry of Education officials. They were given a three-day exposure. Then the heads of the schools went through the same process.

Eighteen schools were involved – two per region, so that everyone would get to know what permaculture is. Eighteen teachers in the pilot went through a two-week permaculture course. The idea was that teachers would be used as resource bases, to help build relationships with the surrounding communities.

After eighteen months there was an external evaluation which produced a good report. The Ministry has now given the go-ahead for a further fifty-four schools to be permacultured.

A team of twenty writers consisting of those participating in the process – teachers plus NGOs – produced two books, for primary and secondary. These are currently at the editorial stage and will be sent to education/permaculture people around the world for comment.

The process in the schools – Isabelle Chirere

The first activity in the schools aimed to empower the local community. Everyone was invited to attend a meeting, at which awareness was raised of particular issues, giving people the information they needed to make the decision to support the permaculture project at the school, for example problems with animals – goats, cattle – wandering into the school grounds and eating the plants. Also, informing parents of the need for them to give permission for children to tend gardens during school holidays.

Then they conducted the first observation, inviting teachers, kids, parents, and community to observe – ie to be involved in a Participatory Rural Appraisal, or environmental analysis. They mapped resources, discussed problems and identified solutions.

Then came the planning stage. They did a permaculture design, led by the permaculture teachers and a representative from the NFN, and asked the community to come up with a common goal (Holistic Resource Management).

The whole process was documented.

One school – the Nyahode District Union learning centre – Rob Sacco

Shortly after Independence, former combatants settled near the Chimanimani Mountains and formed eleven co-ops. These subsequently formed a district union, and in 1980 built two primary schools. When the first students graduated they had no secondary school to go to. There was also nothing in the way of adult education. And so Rob and Leisl Sacco were asked to set up what became the Learning Centre, based in abandoned commercial farm buildings. It opened in December 1985, catering first to adult education, then becoming a secondary school.

In 1990, the Centre hosted a permaculture course, and John Wilson conducted a design course. This led to the drawing up of a permaculture land use plan, involving the Centre's 100 acres and two dams.

In 1994, they received funding from the United Nations Development Program and implemented the permaculture design, using students. (They also have a system whereby ex-students return to work for periods of 20 days, organising themselves into work teams.) There are nine interlocking dams, a nursery, gardens, keyline system, fish farm, etc.

The Centre won the UN's Global 500 Prize.

Then Nyahode realised that despite the school, the graduates were still going into unemployment, so it developed another level of education. Fifty-nine students went into a school-leaver program consisting of one full-time year in which students could study permaculture, cabinet making and other practical skills/knowledge.

Agriculture is taught nationally in forms 1 – 4 and the Centre introduced permaculture concepts into its agriculture syllabus. Every student designs and implements a project. Because of its success, the Ministry asked the Centre to provide input into its Agriculture Syllabus. Step one: permaculture will be an option in the agriculture syllabus. Step two: permaculture will be completely integrated.

Currently the aim is to get schools to redesign school grounds. An evaluation has shown that 14 of the 19 schools in the pilot project have made major progress. Ultimately, the aim is to have every school a working demonstration of permaculture.

At Nyahode there are now permaculture clubs, voluntary clubs run by the students (65 students) along strict lines. They have their own garden, go on trips, develop projects, etc.

The school-leaver permaculture program

Two students went through the two-year Fambidzanai permaculture program and the Holistic Resource Management Program. They are now trainers, teaching eleven full-time students involved in permaculture. They run an extension nursery and fruit tree nursery, replant trees, maintain the whole 100 acre area.

Community extension work started in 1992. The Centre established a 3 hectare orchard in one of the co-ops, to raise consciousness. One thousand fruit trees were planted. Very successful project. The team has been setting up permaculture clubs in the co-ops, working with women to design and set up kitchen permaculture gardens.

Gradually permaculture is moving through the valley. As people see the success of permaculture strategies, they replicate them on their own land.

The latest development at the Centre was the setting up of PELUM – Participatory Ecological Land Use Management – a regional organisation consisting of nine countries and thirty-three organisations (sixteen in Zimbabwe). They have divided the Agro-Ecology Syllabus between them.