



**STATIONY PERMAKOLTORA MAROMAHATSINJO
PERMACULTURE STATION ANDASIBE**

a little story from the edge of
ZIVILISATION



www.tany.ch/permakulturstation

Salamo Tompoko – Dear Reader

In the face of the global situation we can barely talk about “national problems” any more. And because of the blending of tribes and nationalities we can also not speak about Nations and countries either. The old cultures, philosophies and ideas brought us into this situation – but they won't be able to guide us out of it. Therefore we need creativity in addition to a global cooperation, to ensure the future of humankind as well as the remaining other species on earth.

In a small village, at the edge of this civilisation, we have built a small outpost of this global transformation. Applying the principals of Permaculture, which have the potential to shift (transform) this planet from a state of disaster into a paradise.

We have been exposed to a the mix of miniature cruelties and the beauty which daily life has to offer. Alternating between global problems as well as timeless philosophy – far way from everything which is seen as “normal” in Central Europe we originate from.

It is our hope, that we have been able to put a seed into the ground, which will thrive and one day bear fruits able to nourish the many.

From Maromahatsinjo, Madagascar

Lukas, Lilly and Ruben



Imagine, you are sharing your life with an orphaned chicken, which is happily eating your cockroaches. You are working with people who have difficulties to figure out what 12x1000 is and complete throw the towel about the question of 12x1200. People who are still singing and laughing and who are poor in the one of the richest county on earth. Imagine, getting up each morning at 5:30 because the sun is raising, only to go on with a task which is nearly impossible. Welcome to Maromahatsinjo.

Phase 1: Preparation

1st Part: Arrival

October 2014

Coming from the Northwest, we are flying across Madagascar for many hundreds of kilometres, before the Capital comes into sight. Not a single forest visible any more, only the bare red-brown soil in which the old rivers are still meander, hemmed with the last green vegetation. The rivers have either water which is brown of erosion, or they are dried out.



Arrived in the Capital. Welcomed by old friends together with my 85 kg of luggage. Tools, seeds, as well as a bike. 30kg came by an volunteer in advance. This enables us to work with proper equipment.

Next step changing small amounts of European paper money into big bunches of paper. (1 Euro = 3572,6349 Ariary) And now looking forward to a few days of holiday after 5 months of intensive preparation work....



.... at least that's what I thought. We are travelling nearly 30 hours to the place – crossing 12 00 km destroyed landscape. At the horizon, the last bit of forests are burning.

Reaching the North-East you can find remains of the bio-diversity which existed here. I meet my first two potential students. I can't find rest until I've reached a small village at the beach. A room, a bed, I am sleeping. After month without weekends.



But it doesn't keep me there for long. I want to get going. Back to the capital, bureaucracy awaits me. Anyone who want to stay in Madagascar longer than 3 month encounters a trial of patience. Something, meant as a protection, can equally become an hindrance.

But it provides me with the chance to get familiarise with government circles, to meet secretaries of state, converse about the national development plans, assess possibilities how to involve Permaculture on a national level. Preparations for later. But as usual everything turns out to be differently. I am looking for students. To do this a will have to travel a few hundred of kilometres. This is “Phase 1”, for which I have counted 1 month in my time budget. I am using the time to draft a schedule, check needs, gather data. Estimated begin of the training as well as the building of the “Permaculture-Station-Andasibe”: 10th November, for three month. And a bit more time to do the most important steps to be able to leave and go back to Europe. The students have to be able to come swift on their own feet. But they are very motivated. What else can you expect?

We are offering a genuine opportunity to get a good life. I feel in me the rising anticipation towards the practical work.

A big thank you to all donors and supporters and everyone who is with me in spirit and heart. Lets develop soon a great Team. Tomorrow I am off to see the minister for the interior.

From Tana: Lukas

2nd Part: Departure into the bush

Tomorrow it's getting real. Tomorrow I depart. This night I have to sleep in a hotel, it is the first time that I am on my own. My friend in Tana has visitors from his home town, this is why I don't want to occupy his guest room. A moment ago I have written my first SMS in Madalasy language. Slowly but surely it begins that I master this originally Asian language. Just a bit, kelykely.

This morning, in the Department for immigration, I met eventually the first competent person – my visa is booked. Now I can go on. Yesterday I wanted to visit the minister for the interior and met only his secretary and had to leave things undone. Meanwhile a vendor for plants has spread out his commodities, in front of the department for the interior. This gives me the chance to do something useful. Tree shopping – 331 items. Together with the tree I have already and two ornamental shrubs, I can start tomorrow. Plus additional 80 kg tools and seeds, a bike. A few sacks rice and hope in my luggage. After years of plans, its becoming real.

About the bike: Yesterday released from its box and assembled. Today I am dashing through Tana's the dense chaotic traffic. I am the fastest traffic-member, :-)) of which am naturally proud of. At home I have a name as a traffic rowdy, but here I am fitting into the general picture. This is my new fun-sport: racing with 30km/h through Tana's streets, slalom through the maze of passengers, cars, scooters and now and again another biker. These are moments in which being Eco is cool!



^ Birth of a bike

–



^ Tree-market in tana, in front of the ministry

v View onto the edge of zivilisation





Arrived at the place we work – after passing by hundreds of burned-areas



Third Part:

“Step 1 is nearly accomplished. We have land, the students are all together, we could have even more students, but it would explode our budget. In addition I don't want to have a too big group, I want to be able to really deal well with each one of them.”

Five days ago we have been in our target area, and yesterday the second time. The situation is a huge challenge and at the same time a great chance. The Mena-Lamba District has approximately 10 000 hectare. About 1000 hectare are wetland which is under international protection law (Ramsar-Site). The remaining 9000 ha are hills or mountains (depending if seen with German or Swiss eyes ;)

There are still comparatively much primary and secondary woods, Eucalyptus woods in addition – which have been planted by a railway company in the past. But the biggest part has already fallen prey to the slash and burn process, called “tavy”. Doing this, the forest is divided into parts and it is only a question of time until the biodiversity is fading respectively the peasants will have internalised the land. You can clearly study the different stages of degradation: primary forest, secondary forest, bushland/succession and at vast areas where nothing bigger is growing any more, because the humus is missing as well as the seeds, – all carried away by the water. Next step would be the sort of landscape which you can observe in the Northwest of Madagascar (see below). The process in which Mankind in Arabia, North-Africa, China, India, Southern-Europe and many other places has created deserts, is going on in fast motion, and so is Madagascar an illustration about the past, as well as a view into the future, of mankind.

The burning RAMSAR-site, an internationally protected wetland. Often visited and filmed by BBC, destroyed under the eyes of the NGO's. In the foreground, a last bit of the original vegetation



The local and international environmentalists have very good expertise in biology, but no alternatives for the small-scale farmers. That's the reason for our cooperation.

Face in face with the burning forests and a unique humid-zone we try to adapt permaculture to the local needs. That would solve a lot of problems at once. It would end poverty, save the nature and we could seed an idea, ready to grow-green the whole country. Let's see, if it works.



With a glance into the future: we are forging plans, tools and the social bonds.

We get for our work two vacant buildings. One of it was meant to be a dispensary, a place to help the sick. Our thank you for getting it – animating it! Giving it life.

You will hear from us in the future Lilly and Luke



Phase 2: Pioneers

November/December 2014

The team of students is ever changing. We get more and more familiar with the Madagascan people. We appreciate their joy of life and meet also their lesser nice personal traits. Up to now we don't know if they are a product of colonial influences or genuine "Madagascan" .

In the Bush

We went into the bush afoot, all along the old railway tracks, onto which only handcarts are travelling. To manage the transport of all our goods, we hired 3 additional carriers. The first task to proof, who has the strength for the coming tasks. There will be a process of coming and going of team members. We only want the most motivated, the ones which will work sincerely. Three weeks we are here: the first gardens are ready, inclusive a big fence, to guard against the ubiquitous chicken. More than 30 different vegetables, herbs, and flower species are thriving. It shows, that the ground almonds are the very special hit. I have great hopes for them as a future crop, to reduce the gigantic rice consumption. They can also be a good foreign currency bringer for the



region. All sweet things are loved. The Madagascan folk consumes a great deal of sweetened condensed milk. Ground almond milk could become a healthy alternative and has not to be imported as well! These are thoughts in the great scale. The work is happening on many different levels. Very concrete here: at the ground of facts!

The Team, a crowd (in our terms) of uneducated peasant children and a few from the town, but they will not last long here. This sounds hard, but it is just like that. Maybe non-civilised is the wrong term. Because Civilisation is not really desirable. Uncultivated, yes, that's more hitting the point. I am pondering a lot about the term development, a good friend, Malagasy, told me: "The Europeans are much further developed". Contradicting I say: "The Malagasy are very well developed in their soul life. At least, not as traumatised as the Europeans are. From a psychological point of view, the Malagasy people are very healthy. I always say, the Europeans are rich in materials and poor in their heart. And the Malagasy are poor on the material level but rich in their hearts. When you see, how much laughing, singing and greeting each other, is here present – that's sort of a proof. But I am aware that it's not right to generalise too much either – but there are clear tendencies. But see, that here is poverty on the material level, is the the same way obvious, as the fact that in Europe is a "sparing habit of happy moods". This is catching me always, when I leave Europe. One who sits always in the cold, does not know the meaning of warmth and how it feels.

Now, more as a month later, I still don't stop to compare. Despite my effort just to be here. It is just good for me. These people here are quite often at the border to senility, and sometimes above. The poverty of materials, is preceded by the poverty in the mind. All the heart-warmth is no help to this. My bunch of rascals is more difficult to tend than a wheelbarrow of frogs. They are able to burn down, chop down, put seeds into the ground and carry immense amount of weight. They are busy, even they like also to sit down, chat and just watch. The working morale is different than ours, and this, despite all complaints, is OK.

Snugness is also a desirable cultural value. Especially when you consider, how much havoc stress wreaks in Europe. Burnouts, senseless amounts of goods... the destruction of the world, as a result of the endless: "more, faster, higher..."

But back to Madagascar.



This is an infection I got, and the tools which whom I "repaired" myself.

I am sitting here, with a strong infection in my finger. This provides me with the time to tell you all, how things are in this place. 12 pineapples are already in the ground, hundreds of runner beans are in the beginning of climbing up the fences, which are made in the first place to keep the chicken out. There are half-high banana stalks, which are supporting tomatoes, and physalis. We have courgettes, sunflowers, borage, Swiss-chard and tree-cabbage, which want to be planted out, from the nursery part into the garden.

My gaze is gliding into the distance, I see Torotorofotsiny, a former natur-reserve, which is treated with fire, oxen, and more recently with tractors. The mindless idiocy, plus the poverty here, becomes a problem for the community of the whole world. The Madalagasy destroyed their land nearly in solo action, completely without the help of industrial farming. They are burning comfortably but steadily, a unique vegetation. What Europe has passed a long time ago, native jungle is no more existing there, here it is in its last stage of destruction. First comes the fire, then the fields, then the cattle, the goats and then the desert... In the highlands we have seen it all. The Natural protection associations are watching, with highly trained Botanists, Ornithologists, and what else of clever heads. There are protected areas, yes, and the magic word is "Eco-Tourism", only, we can't teach everyone here foreign languages to play the cheap servant for Western tourists. (Despite the money is worth a lot in this country) The Madalagasy are not a proud folk, may be they have been once. But Servants for tourists, they are also not meant to be. "Nous somme pauvre – we are poor". This is what I hear everywhere. Surrounded by a great natural wealth: soil, vegetation, fauna, climate, water, natural resources... these people think they are poor. And so they are!

“Why are the Swiss people rich and the Malagasy poor?” This question I ask frequently. As a response I earn shrugging shoulders.

It is the Mind!

We Europeans, in general, had all more difficult environmental circumstances, which forced us to use our brains. In Madagascar you survive easily, in harvesting some bananas, put some seeds into the ground and build a simple shelter. No cold to deal with, no stock piling for scarce times. Life is easy. And therefore, no development of strategic thinking, higher technology etc. It's just no need for it. This is which made the Europeans strong and wealthy, because after survival they didn't stop to evolve. Until they started to raid others. Because, what really improved our situation against all the others, was our ability to be more effective in killing. Ergo to make war.

Perhaps the Malagasy have been proud, had their belief systems, rituals and traditions. But this qualities have been by the Europeans. As most of the colonised tribes, they have been told that they are minor and underdeveloped, poor and useless. And this is their belief, even when they are sort of educated. I ask them: “Why are the white ones better?” “They are more beautiful, stronger, richer....” is the answer and I add: “And they are better in killing.”

What is Development?

I can't get rid of this question. For about 12000 years we are doing agriculture. This brought us the civilisation, inclusive all the new technologies, as well as new ways of art and culture and commodities. But also work, slavery in different shades and war.

It brought us the divorce from nature. It is our path to egoism, individualism and materialism. The Native tribes, which have partly survived to the present day, with a consciousness, spirituality and connected to nature give a clear example how it could be. Our fore-bearers had such wisdom too. Think about: Central Europe was already inhabited about 2000 years ago.

Development is not-inevitably high technical standards, but, **the quality how human needs are met.** For a lesson, I am scribbling an adapted form of “Maslow's Pyramid of motivation” onto the blackboard. I am asking about the basic needs and how we will find strategies to fulfil these needs. Food, air, health, shelter (house), energy and the connected knowledge to do it. This is the base for each following development. Next in the ladder: social connection, playfulness, family, reproduction, and so on. The question, if someone is rich, does not mean having a car and extraordinary houses – but, to have adequate strategies to provide for human needs. Going further to self-discovery and self development, curiosity and the insight, that everything is one, me therefore included. Who is now the higher or lower developed being?

Next you may ask: For how many generations is your culture functioning. How diverse and holistic are you expressing your human nature?

From this angle, Europeans do not always get the best scores. At least not in each of these sectors. But the people here in the bush don't get it either. Instead of fruits, nuts and leaves to eat, which would mean a leisurely walk once a day, they eat rice. 3 times a day! About 700 grams per person. Add some sauces, made of leaves, beans and meat. This is not only boring, but unhealthy. This sort of food needs a lot of salt, or chilli... otherwise it is unpalatable what they cook. And this on an island, which would bear all the fruits of the world, and is well known as the island of spices. Growing rice is exhaustive, and a lot of it happens in the fields, created by burn-and-slash method. Which means not only a huge amount of labour, but also erosion and changing fields, leading to the

destruction of the island. Once upon a time, it has been a green island. Today it is called: “Nosy mena - The Red Island”.

Okay, but what is the meaning of the term development in this situation? I have brought some chisels, saws, shovels, spades, hoes, a pick axe, a wood-marker, two wood planes, fold-able yardsticks and quite a few things more. Utilising them we can start, right at the bottom. Handicrafts, things which the people here are able to comprehend in their brain-state. Not great technology, but small steps. Together we will create a beautiful place, which is a productive one too. So productive, that the fruits will fall onto their heads. Learning by experiencing it! We work together, eat together, live together. I am learning about them, and they about me. I show them another side of Europeans, the more quieter aspect of Europe's culture. Reasoning, philosophy, beauty. Still connected with the ancient culture, which existed before Rome conquered it. The worlds of mystery and the deep tranquil, diving-into-oneself during the winter, when most of the outer things slowed down. The diversity of thinking and the creativity in dealing with problems. The power to take the bull at its horns instead of throwing the towel and resign to fate in the face of adversity.



The settlement is growing

We really didn't have to start in an empty space. We have got two houses in-midst of a small-but-mighty village. The history of one of the houses is typical for foreign aid projects - the infirmary.

A western organisation, in our case a German scouts club, donates a pot of money. A local organisation places the money - to friends and family members of the management - which then do the work. I am not aware to which setting and conditions it happened in this case, but I can imagine how... OK. The building has its shortcomings. One of the more serious is, that the wooden cover boards are fixed horizontally, but don't overlap. No, they are done in the way as you would do it vertically. The boards meet and are at the meeting lines covered with laths. It looks great and is nicely painted. But with each strong rainfall the water goes straight inside the house. You can't store anything which needs to be kept dry. The cover boards have to be exchanged.

Left: Reis with pasta – “... wrrrgs!” Right: Some Impression from our daily life



Second: after the completion of the house a nice photograph was produced – a decent decoration for scout's home wall. :-) But two years later, this building is still vacant. No money and no organisation for a doctor, or at least some sort of medical team, and some medicine. The paint tins are still standing around, some pieces of wood lay randomly across the floor. Sly, there was no need for pictures front the inside of the project. Lilly loves to clean, and we have been most grateful for this when we arrived. To our great enjoyment we find an impressive sign: “Dispensaire Maromahatsinjo” inclusive the logos of the donors and the names of the responsible people. Oh, before I forget, in a distance of 50 metres, there exists a water pump with a handle. Looks great, and when there are important visitors, someone comes a long and acts, like he would repair it. But water is none to get.

I try to give my people the feeling that they are precious. Because self-worth and self-trust are priority to achieve. I appreciate their work, even though, or may be because, I am a hard boss, who is trying to get the most out of them. Often I ask them to repeat a certain task, up to three times, until the result is satisfying. We have really good tools from Europe. Fiske-spades (the Mercedes of spades!), sturdy shovels, spades, a “Wiedhopfhaue” which is a special tool foresters use to plant trees, extremely strong and heavy) and a good pick axe. The boys are starting to carve the handles for the tools, using their machetes. I remove the machetes and replace them with proper, sharp carving knives. Vive'la Opinel! Most of the time it needs several attempts, but now they produce honourable tool handles. They shall love their tools, because soon they will use them. They will be their companions during days and weeks, while creating terraces, sweating in the scolding sun. First thing we build gardens and protect them, with the already mentioned chicken fences. We aim to get the vegetable production going, because this stuff is expensive here. Harvesting veggies will be an important step to independence from external money. Once they will even provide money, when we have surplus crop. Next thing to do, moving all the newcomers into the soil, all these wonders out of the European seed packages. There are the afore mentioned ground almonds, which provide protein, starch, sugar, fat, minerals and fibres.

Over and over again, I explain the connection of organic matter, which when rotted, creates good soil. The slash-and-burn method is expensive, I explain. I show how to make the bill for it. The chief of the village is listening wide-eyed. Afterwards he repeats the new knowledge proudly to his son, who came visiting from the town.

While one of the morning-circles, one of the boys tells, he had never worked for a white person. He was anxious about the “Vazahas”, but now, he is surprised. It's rather cool to work for a white guy. Not everyone is the same way impressed. There was a young woman in the team She came from the next town, Moramanga (about 70 km away). She speaks English, French and Malagasy. A real treasure for overcoming the language barrier. Diligently she translated simultaneously my lessons. But two weeks later she cancelled via SMS. I was a too strict boss and the payment, too low. It's sad, but it spared me the decision. Frequently, she was not truly interested in the core of the matter. In this, she was not the only one in the team. But let's deal with this later. Having no translator, forces me to set priorities and to learn Malagasy. ;-)



We come closer to our aim, to assemble a reliable team as guards for the station, while I have to go back to Europe. Designers for the national part of the work are still missing completely. To find appropriate people is extremely difficult. The good ones are cautious. You meet always first the impertinent ones, they kiss your ass, because you are white. They want to profit from you, but not do any thing in exchange. They do everything to impress, but when you leave, they leave too. Ideal partners for foreign aid projects ;-)

These are the problems you have to face and deal with. My way of discerning them is, to sincerely challenge the people. When they realise that there is nothing for free, the pretenders are swiftly gone. My strategy might not be the kindest one, but the classic soft-line approach of "Cultural Understanding" leads to the result, that bum-suckers become the collaborators of Europeans. I don't want to blame everyone, not each person here is like that, there are many good people around. But it happens, that bad characters misappropriate funds and spoil the good spirits for the project. Africans are in the European world-view often the "poor victims of history", who can't be criticized and have to be encountered with "cultural understanding". But more and more, I have to realise that this leads not to understanding, but to cultural ignorance.

Here rules the pure reality. Here exists no ambulance, no legal expenses assurance and let's face it no law at all, which would provide basic fairness. Here are 23 million people living and the peanuts of foreign aid money, is somewhat a business for foreign language speaking people. I am learning Malagasy, I am not living in a hotel but with the people. I am dirty like them, and I have to fight with the same infections as they do.

The Infirmary commences to work The "doctor"? It's me - with my humble knowledge. Infections, digestive problems. Malaria, wounds, small ailments and acute toothache I am treating it by myself. The rest, I am sending off to town – if they can afford it....

In our suitcase are first-aid bandages, disinfectants, cotton-wool Pallutoxin and Antibiotics. The last two I am using sparingly. Up until now I gave it only to a severely wounded person, before his departure to a real doctor. (The patient had a deep flesh-wound, which got a first cover, using European wound plaster and pressure bandage.) Normally I am using onions, garlic, and ginger. This works very well. Even with me. The people here have a strong immune system. Otherwise they would be already dead. To endanger this immune system, through the usage of Western drugs, is irresponsibility in my books, even it is daily practise here.

Since yesterday, new in our place, are: the first apple tree, an orange, a pomegranate and two tree tomatoes.

Oh yea! Don't forget the goats... the goats....

Kind regards from the Bush,
Luke



Breakthrough

Today it was the first time, that a student has taken a wood plane into his hands. He is building a small bench for our front yard, to accomplish the social life in the village. The Malagasy love to sit around. And so on :-)

The big vegetable garden is (nearly) completely free of chickens, via a definitely more sturdy fence-system than the first one had been. We are on the learning curve. Last Friday we had already set up the terraces. The girls got very quickly what it is all about.



With joint efforts we are transforming the land into a Permaculture landscape, in which water is collected and stored. It looks beautiful, builds humus and is easy to be worked.

Today, we have began the first Swale. Many hands - easy end. I am expecting it to be finished by tomorrow. More than 100m³ retention-space. This will provide water for our big area of terraces. Now the rain may come – we are prepared to catch it. Once more, our team is expanding. We will see who will stay in the end. I am a hard master, but on the other hand, also one with compassion. This starts to bear fruits. People begin to understand and to appreciate it. When I call out “vita Miase”, they go on working, for at least 15 minutes. We live together, eat together. Not everyone sleeps here, but our social life is becoming more and more enjoyable. Eventually I discovered a guitar. Equipped it with European strings, it sounds still horrible. But none the less, it's possible to dance to it. Dancing here contains a lot of very fast bum-wiggling.

This is the beginning of a small community, which, contrary to the norm here, practices solidarity and is working together.

We are looking for something, which was destroyed by the colonisation. The Fiavahana.



Behind the work I have to find my way through the Malagasy corruption, the non-existing landholding papers and all the people you can't trust. Differentiation is of high importance. "Donate your love with abundance – but spread your trust carefully"

An European asparagus has dared to stick its head out, in its new homeland in the humid tropics, after weeks of seeming dormancy.

The soil here is sandy. It may well work out, asparagus likes sand. We have broccoli, and kohlrabi. Three of the tiniest red salad-bushes are bravely struggling in the unfamiliar environment. The coriander is growing superb. I am looking forward to it! The first 15 tomatoes are already singled out into the ground. Portuguese tree-cabbage is reaching out to the tropical sun and 19 courgettes have neatly rooted in their raised beds.

Oh I nearly forgot, the date palms are sprouting. I know, they may not bear fruits here,.. but in my opinion it's just cool!

Kind regards from a very tired but happy Luke

Maromatsinjo, Madagascar, 8.12.2014



Phase 3: Sustainability

January 2015

Now comes the most difficult part of the subject. To stabilize the project and to make it sustainable. Two weeks holidays, and one week struggle to get a visa for the Capitol, gave me time to rest and reflect. I have a phone-call with Ruben, who is new on the hill.

He is joining living there and is observing the holiday team. I am also observing people, and I encounter a mystery, in my attempt to understand.

“Afrika ist technisch gelöst, nicht aber menschlich.” *Franz Stadelmann*

“Africa is solved technically, but not on the human level”



Now I understand, that the students have been rather a sort of employees than students. Their motivation was money. In the six weeks of the programme, not once I heard questions like: “Why are we doing it this way, how does this function, do I understand this the right way, what happens if I do it this way....? They have just been obedient-recipients-of-orders. They worked well, we have created a nice Permaculture station. But when I am apart, nothing is going on. Ruben observes and reports. The people are just hanging lazy around, now and again they glance into their french-lesson-book. Garden, the plantation, water-behaviour, everything which I've tried to convey, is beyond their interest.

For a few days, I am completely depressed. I see everything falling apart. Not a nice time - a time of new orientation. We confer, and Ruben is a great aid to me. He realises, that the place is haunted by me. Without me, nothing is going on. I have to let it go. Also my role as the boss. We decide, that I move on, become a teacher and advisor, supporter and friend. The boss is allowed to leave.

It's okay when they are not interested. Why not? There is so much you can study, or nothing. Freedom is not the discussion point. But something else is also evident. It can't go on like that. We have no clue what to do next. We ordered students and got workers. Now it's the task, to win their interest, or to find new students. Or both.

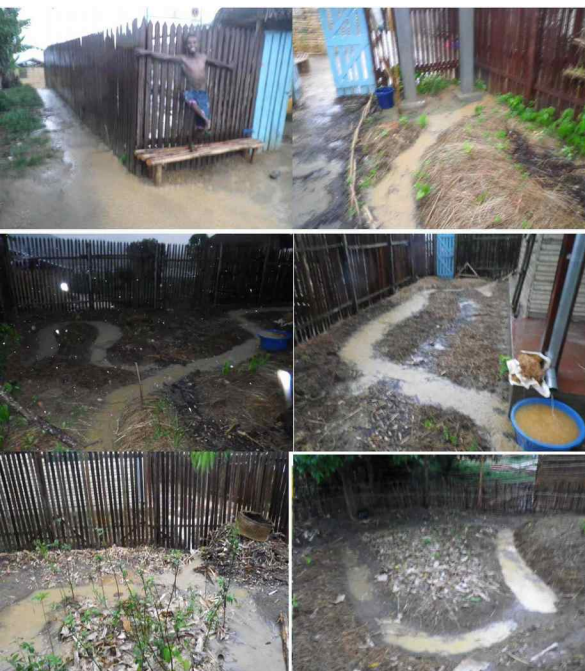
A peace-corps here tells me, that when 2 of 10 people continue the activities and become self-reliant, this it is to count as a success. Okay, this we have achieved, that's is nice – but not enough.

We don't want to loose anyone. Take Lailaina as an example. He was really eager learning English. I think, he wants to leave. Even if we try hard, his heart is looking for something else. We want to listen to the people and fulfil dreams in cooperation. Even, if the dream is a flat in the city, with TV and microwave, we have to respect it... but we will put less energy into such a dream.

“Hody aho” - I am coming home

11.01.2015

Coming back after the holidays is fascinating. The growth in three weeks is more, than I was able to imagine. Yes, we have a complete, active Permaculture plantation. Oh, and how well! It gathers water in the ditches, as well as in the pond. No rainwater is leaving our land. Everything is going into the land, filling up the groundwater and appearing, further down, as well-water.



Nearly all of the trees have rooted well, we lost only two moringa-trees. A sunflower is turning it's head towards the sun, the linseed has grown and is short before blossoming. Already 100 different crop plants populate our small patch of land. Maize, beans, peanuts, courgettes and pumpkins are not recognizable any-more. They started to overgrow each other, and this is why we can immediately begin to “plan the population”. This term replaces the old term “weeding”. Intelligently steered succession of plants is guiding into an Ecosystem, which is useful to humans. With great interest we are studying, where are still wild plants, and where not. “Busaka -- weeds”.



Mung-beans are great masters in suppressing wild plants. They take on the function of pioneer plants, fix nitrogen in the soil to be absorb-able by plants, produce a large amount of biomass and give a harvest in the end on top. They are more expensive than rice, and therefore a good source of income. Certainly, as food they are also great. Maize is growing high enough to escape the beans. This makes it a suitable combination as a starter crop after the landscaping work, when soil has been moved. Maize and mung-beans. The first generation of plant societies. We have only to be alert, that the small shrubs and trees are not overgrown and suffocated. One of the courgettes, which was quite large already, fell prey to the faster growing plants. One has to be on guard in this phase.

The design of the system is the following: As a stable long-term vegetation we will have many trees. They can be expected to need a small amount of work, but also produce soon some harvest. An orchard with a lot of grass, which has to be cut, is not equal to a forest garden. After only nine weeks, we have already a lot of green beans. We are able to cut some down, to make space for something else, like mangos, pineapples and peanuts. If we would have planted potatoes, right at the beginning, they would be ripe by now. The maize needs also no more long. A peasant family can be food-independent with this system, and will be able start selling products six month later: mung-beans, maize, potatoes, peanuts, tomatoes. Yes, tomatoes are very expensive out here. Only with the tomatoes alone we could have a decent income (above average). On about 3 % of our land, which is only about 8% of the land used for planting here per person, we could earn our money! The Malagasy reckon that 2.3 people can make their living on about 6000m².

From our approximately 80 tomatoes which we have planted, 25 survived, that's sufficient. We are learning. First: the chicken-fence is not working properly (this is why our tomatoes have been depleted. Second: plant always more than you need, especially if you have to live of it. New tomatoes are already germinating and it is also possible, to grow some by using cuttings. Three months later we will have a stable income. On our place four people have been working for six weeks, five days a week (actually we have been more people, but we used a lot of the time for education and other work also). Now we have only two people remaining with two hours per day (a reduction from 160 hours to 20 hours weekly). This will be once more reduced, to possibly five hours all inclusive per week. In addition, daily time for harvesting and eating the fresh fruits and vegetables. But is this really "work"?

Let's talk a bout the perennials which need not replanting all the time.

In two weeks we will have the first guavas (wild plants which we have spared), in three weeks there will be the first pear-melons, in five months figs, in one year tree tomatoes, bananas, (we have already some, but if we would have to plant new it would have taken a year), sugar cane and strawberries. In three years time pineapples, possibly the first apples, pears, plums, mulberries, grapes, coffee... just everything. If someone had built a proper house, he could become a pensioner. Donat would be 23 years old. Growing his children while already being a pensioner. When he is 50, he can harvest palisander-wood and pay the university for his kids. This costs 5 Euros per student. The work on the land is basically done, now we have to concentrate onto the people.

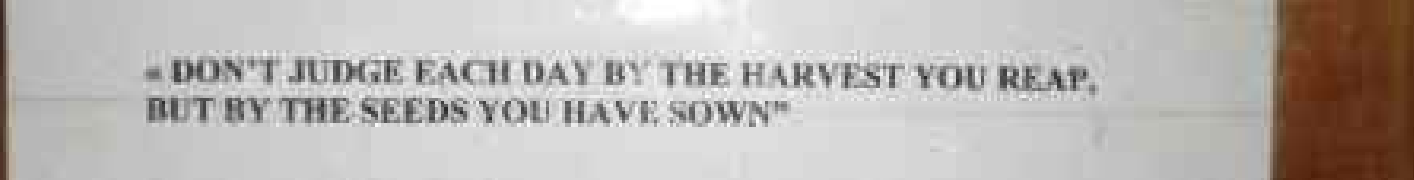


Still quite tired from the journey, overwhelmed by the gardens and completely clueless, how to go on, a challenge arrives at our doorstep. 12 people come along, expecting work and especially wage. We didn't call them, but rumour told that I am back.

Ruben is such a precious soul. He is helping me to sort it out. To define the next goals. Most of the newcomers are illiterates. But they have eyes, can look around and like to do so. It was fine having been the conductor while settling the project ASAP. Now, what has been created can be studied and learned from it. The priority now is, to conquer their hearts and gain their interest. Presently I am sitting quietly. Not as the boss, but the teacher awaiting his students. They do not know what to make out of this. The "Authority-Lukas" has disappeared, a new one is there instead. One, who is just sitting, waiting. I observe, trying to ground myself. I have no idea what might happen next. The group is gathering. We are holding our morning circle. After greeting and introducing each person, I start to talk. The words just come to me. "It's January, we have a new programme. It's time to put into practise what we have learned!"

No idea where this came from. "We will do home-visits as advisers and you are invited to approach me with your questions when ever you want. Look at the plantation and share ideas. The work here is completed, now it's time to circulate the knowledge all over the region." Questioning glances return to me. "Any questions?" I say. "Ähm, Lailana takes the word. He finds words for what was hovering in the space all the time: "And what about the wages?" "There are no wages. You will work your own land. Why shall I pay for this?" I am the same way startled as they, it changes everything. Discussions in Malagasy language are rising, I don't understand a thing, but can imagine it.

"Today is study day", I am going on, "we will eat together and learn." Everyone stays and we had the longest and best lesson ever. I am really curious how this will proceed. Two of the people wish already to know, when I would come for a visit. We schedule a time. This is a spark of hope in this tense situation.



« DON'T JUDGE EACH DAY BY THE HARVEST YOU REAP,
BUT BY THE SEEDS YOU HAVE SOWN »

"Don't judge the day by its harvest but by the seeds which you have sown"

One thing has transformed today from knowledge into wisdom. To honestly say, that you don't know any further, and just trust that the right thing will turn up, can really be helpful. Thank you Papa, this lecture I have now internalised.

Mipetraka an'Maronatsinjo – to live in Maronatsinjo

To have no more a paid programme, brings up a new question. Who will live here, and what will the boys, who have no land themselves, do? Donat, Nell and Simonette, I think, will stay here. Rovo is asking, if he can live here too. I explain, that I am am positivve about tehm living here and using what grows in the garden. Tere is also Lalaina, who wants to take part part in this. He is the local mini-dictator's son. I schedule a meeting for the afternoon, to sort out how we want to live together on this place. All day long they sit around. Simonette is cooking and doing the dishes. The "men" - boys in fact- are not contributing to the communal needs. Ruben speaks to Nell, if he would like to do something. "Yes!" "What? Garden electric...?" "Electric!"

Ruben is talking the things through, which have to be done in the electric installations. For two weeks they are waiting to be done. We are happy, thinking now there is some life coming into this.

Ruben is waiting for self-motivated action and now it seems to come. After clarifying what needs to be done, Ruben left... and Nell is once more back to pick his nose. They played a game together, which I had brought from Antsirabe. That's the way the day passes. I am driving to visit Dina and give advise for his farm. The same with Blandine.

After coming back, we start the meeting. I ask how they imagine living here together and how things might go on. Awkward silence, glancing in all directions - but towards me. When I thought they have pierced 100 new holes into air by staring into space, I commence to talk. I ask each single one: "What do you want to do?" "Work, study and to live here?" Aha! Then I ask "Why did you not do anything while I was away?" "Nous attend toi!" "Le commande?" "Qui!" At least they have learned some French in this time. They are waiting for my orders. I am saying: "There will be no more orders. But what we could do, is a list of things which have to be done, as an orientation." So we compile tasks, which have to be done and I promise to display the list.

"Any other problem to talk about?" "Yes, money!" "What for?" "We have to pay for the school of our brothers" Nell and Rivo answer. 30 000 AR (Ariary), appr. 12 Swiss francs for January. "Where did the money go which you have earned up until now?" "Zita – disappeared. Fety – Christmas and new years party..." Madagascan planning! That's the problem for the majority of the population. One thinks not about the future. After the mandatory telling off and lecture, I say: "School is important." I explain, that the association Tany will give support for such topics. Like a wizard, I pull a monthly budget out of my hat. I bring to mind, that half of the budget is already used up, because two of the group members had drunken away the money. I ask, if the others are can agree to this. Great discussion, ending with an okay. The same way we went to more of the topics. Without much of explanation, I settle the resolution by consent and empower the group, to make their own decisions. Once more, the topic of wages is coming up. I explain that it has no logic. They will get a house, accomplished gardens, food, start capital, while at the same time, the others have to do all this by themselves. They have here the opportunity to start a business and create wages this way. That's not enough, they want an immediate wage. Why? "The parents expect, that we bring money home!" I remind them, that the same parents send the other kids to school and pay money for this. I suggest, they shall talk with their parents, and we from Tany are adamant, we will not pay the parents, for giving gifts to the children. They shall come and bring their parents with them. Despaired they try to reduce the wages, but I stand my ground and don't understand the world anymore. Are they not realising what they get here? Once more a discussion in Malagasy. In one voice they claim "Without payment we won't stay!" I am shocked, also in regard to loosing my home-crew. None the less. Fear is a bad advisor. Short chat with Ruben. We let them go. I am shocked, smashed to the ground, do not know how to go on. Question myself, what have I done wrong? Ruben is backing up the decision. We are eating together and then they leave. Then we are alone. Deep inside, I am glad that it happened. It happened without planning. The old group spirit, which lived on money, in which I was the boss and the others had to run, in which the "White" has orchestrated the "Blacks" – it is dead. Only us, the goats and the hen. Cleansing, ready for transformation.



New people from Tana and Europe

23.01.2014

Yesterday new faces joined. Haja and Marco from Antananarivo, Miguel from Spain. Haja and Marco seem to be highly motivated. Both are speaking French. They have a good deal of professional experience and knowledge under their belt. (Building and electric) We hope, that in union with them, we can climb onto a next level, and also, that they won't make the run as soon as the other city people have done. Today Ruben wrote. "Good students you have got here." A light at the horizon.

Miguel wrote immediately after having heard about our project. He is courageous. His first trip out of Europe leads him right into the "third" world. We are spontaneously on the same wavelength. I wonder how working together will be and look forward to it.

With fresh courage for the case, it is also easier to see it in a wider context.

At the edge of the Civilisation

January 2014 - and at the same time, since 12 000 years.



This is the edge of Zivilisation. In the back the vanishing forests, in the front an "ecotourist" lodge.

Civilisation... the result of agriculture. You can philosophise and analyse a lot about it. Or just observe. It brought us operas, football, mathematics, the war, cities, concrete and steel. Civilisation should not be seen synonym with culture or cultivated. One observation is crystal-clear. Civilisation is based on destruction – destruction of nature, destruction of other cultures and nowadays even the destruction of chemical, physical and atomic balance, as well as the functioning of our planet. In Europe, one of the centres of of this sort of human culture, you can find merely civilisation. One doesn't realise any-more, that one is in civilisation. Because, there is nothing else, it seems to be "normal". Like for the citizens of old Rome.

In Madagascar we are in the "province" of "neon-Rome". Harsher morals, wilder, less "civilised", governed by a mighty power far away. The politics: Stadtholder, administrating the provision of goods and tributes. Just like once in Rome. Back then, the borders have been pushed to the edges of central Europe, now the edges are pushed to the far ends of the planet. Only – there will be nothing left, at the last edges of civilisation.

Something, which started once in Mesopotamia and in present Turkey, set off by a small group of lunatics, who built cult places and first plantations all around it – has resulted in the destruction of

several hundred millions of hectares genuine habitats, totally destroyed. A lot of ecosystems lost, by changing them into plantations and cultivated areas. Now on the point, to get rid of the remains of what has been home for plants, animals and humans.

We are at this frontier, this edge. As I visit my students I am standing immediately next to genuine nature. When they learn to apply Permaculture, instead of slash-and-burn method, the further advance of civilisation will be stopped. When they become more productive on their land, they can even withdraw, and nature will be able to grow back. Which means, the process reverses, and can be an s,all scale example for: civilised people make an end to their cancer-like growth, become cultivated people in harmony with themselves, as well as their homeland, their point of origin = Genuine Nature.



Smoke is rising in the distance, pulling me out of my thoughts. Huge task, and already a small victory. Dinat built, completely on his own, a small “Permaculture-garden”. I give advise for his work, he has still a lot to learn, but he is proactive. Self-motivated active!!!

Fantastic land. This youngster has created some simple terraces and a drainage canal. There is also more to learn about. And – the best, he worked on his land. Without money. His shovel is rather meek. But, I am adamant that he is using it for his start project. He shall experience what quality of tools truly means. When he has finished he will get good tools. He will have deserved it.



Our Pet-Hen

There has been this little hen with a broken wing. It was already there, but we didn't give it any attention. Then, I was in my vacancy, and Ruben at the Station, the hen came back. Wing healed, but the hen picked on, that you could no more recognise it.. nearly nude, an orphan. We have the habit of chasing each end every chicken away from our grounds, because they will damage our garden. But, this little one aroused Ruben's compassion and has sneaked into Ruben's heart. It was small enough, not to be a threat to the garden, this is how it started to live inside the "FekeAko" - the fence. A special love-story evolves. At the same time it is a superb example, about the creative force of coincidences. This hen is not only interesting, full of fun and affection, but also useful. *Everything is working in Permaculture.* When we chased out the chickens, we lost also their positive input. They used to eat up leftover foods which otherwise attract flies, they eat seeds and most important - annoying insects like cockroaches, fleas and similar.

But back to the love story. This little shit-producer has conquered my heart, dried chicken-shit is easy to clean up. Inevitably the pros outweigh the cons for this creature.

Chicken, especially the young ones, use to follow their family. They roam though the area in clusters. Always in search for the best worm and for their substitute mother. This human might be just busy, cleansing rice and producing some waste, ready to be picked up. Our little hen was a pitiful outcast – and we became its new crew. It is following us around the garden, into the house and if possible also into the bed. (The mosquito-net is a convenient barrier).

Our behavioural studies about chickens and their way of communication, is a popular hobby and leads to interesting observations. About one hour before sunset, the chicken are going home. The little ones gather under mother's wings, to cosily stay there overnight. Our hen comes with a persistent "Triilp, Triilp, Triilp", to remind us: it's about time! No matter what we are doing right now – this is the time the hen needs it cuddles. It wants to be taken onto our knees, or is crawling into our shirt. With this behaviour, it has won my heart too, it's just too sweet!

Our luck – we have a clean pet-hen.

Regards from Maromatsinjo, Ruben and Lukas!



Last time in Andasibe there happened to be a meeting with our new cooperation partner. We had produced conflicts, without intent. A fundamental part of modern Madagascan culture is, not to talk about conflicts. This is why I learned, over several bends via the grapevine, that there is a problem. I had to cycle 12km, to talk about a conflict with my neighbour – in his absence.

The problem, seems to be the fact that we are composting human faeces. The locals are thinking we are using it in our garden. No one is asking about details. It is Fady – tabu - to use human faeces. Generally this is a useful rule. We would like to develop this rule further. We explained several times, to different people, our method. But the different aspects to look at the topic, has not been understood – did they listen at all?

Additionally, there have been quarrels about our right towards the land, on which we are working. The hearing with our neighbour, who somehow owns this land, are put on ice. Originally he wanted to lease it out to us, plus more land, to get even more money out of us. When we smelled the rat, we withdrew. We have not been willing to pay money for the land, out of what reason? It is rather cheeky, especially considered that his son is getting an education with us for free.

In the end, there was also a problem with group of holidaymakers. A small group of students had kept an eye onto the station while I was away and in exchange, they had a place to stay, eat and study. The first and second they did, study much less. Now, their understanding was, that they would be paid for looking after the place. This, they've got wrong. They had received some decent holiday money. Thank God, I have a receipt for this. After my return I've sent everyone home to apply Permaculture in their own place. It was also a fact, that no one wanted to stay here any longer without a payment. The students have been disappointed and, instead of talking it through with me, they turned to the chief of the district. He was not able to do anything for them, so they turned to the mini-dictator, who happens to be our neighbour (you realise, he is playing now several roles in this theatre). He went to Andasibe to our cooperation partner in Mitsinjo. All of them are so naive, we can observe each step they are doing. We can see Nell and Lailana running to the chief to make a call to Antasibe. Why? But this provides us with additional knowledge what's happening, without being personally addressed. Meanwhile the whole region is informed about it and knows, the white man is bad and he is cheating.



We are still alive

11.02.2015

There is a lot happening and we have much to do. Therefore only a few lines. We are sure that we have been able to solve the conflicts. We didn't go for the expert's advise which would have been "cultural understanding" and adapt, or even evacuate. No, we did it our own way. In Madagascar no one talks about problems. So we have been advised, also not to talk about it. But, we decided to bring the topic up, openly and honest, facing the risk, to make matters worse.

We are well. The same is our pet hen, which has got a name now - "Bon-Chance". There is a new one in addition, Emma, an adult hen-lady. So please don't worry, our place is evolving as well as our connection with our human fellows here.

More, when the project is completed and I will have time for holidays and to work on a PC.

Lukas

Last stage: The world is owned by the courageous

Time has passed. I am sitting cosily in a beach bungalow. It's hot.

4 weeks hard work happened since the last news. 12 months al in all. Now the last things have to be organised. Agreements put into writing. Preparations my departure and most important: relax, unwind leave the stress behind. It might well be that this is a benefit for humankind and that I've gained a lot of experience. But at the same time it is also very exhaustive and is draining my substance. It is hard labour, and despite all the idealism and enthusiasm for the case – this is a hard Job. For body, psyche and spirit. So I will write a little bit into the computer and will then go for holiday.

But certainly, I will tell you the end of the story. This we be one of the joyful tasks.



Politics – once again

After having had slandering behind our back and some people perceived us to be quite in a danger, we took our time to sort problems out and put things straight. First thing was a misunderstanding in Europe. Some good friends and acquaintances encouraged us, to let everything go and care for our own security. Thank you very much for that. I mentioned that we didn't follow the experts advise and have been somehow disregarding them. They have been the local "palefaces", especially one who lead into a nat at all helpful way of understanding the situation. To keep a long story short, he advised us, to pack our stuff and leave. He thought, the fact that we have been all of a sudden three white people, two of them from Tana, would be "very dangerous..." the rest of it I've told before. It's not my thing to wash dirty laundry, so I won't do it now. But it is important for me to reflect on these experiences. Such incidents might happen in a similar way on other places and development aid projects, too.

What I refer to is the way hoe "cultural understanding" can be misunderstood and lead to false considerations. Sometimes lack of courage to face problems may also play a hand in this. It's quite easy to understand not wanting to see, that many of the Madagascans will cheat you. One man, who had worked a lot in Madagascar warned me. He worded it in a pointed way in saying: The

Madagascans are “Clan-egoists”. This happened in Switzerland. He further told me, the Madagascans are not concerned about the common welfare, which might be true in other African countries too. A white man coming to help, is like any other white man. A “big wallet waiting to be emptied”. With tourists they deal slightly different, towards them they act as they would be interested in the common welfare and “fully for the case”. But have a closer look and you will see what they are really doing, and understand the situation differently. Far too often I have seen it with my own eyes, that what they are interested in is having a car, more privileges a good salary. But not the case. Yes, even westerners do not (any more) believe that developmental work can be successful. They execute programmes without real meaning and make it comfy for themselves. Certainly this is not true for everyone of them but I have seen enough.

The fact, that the white people don't speak the language of the folk, but the language of the colonialists (here French), that they prefer to live in a hotel instead of the shabby huts of the poor results that they are only in contact with the educated minority. And this is how it comes to the saying: “developmental aid means: the poor man in the rich countries give money to the rich ones in the poor countries.”

Far too often you can see posh cars of UNICEF, the FAO, or WWF, Conservation International and what names there are about. In them well dressed Natives, fat-bellied – which indicates here wealth. Let's go back to our case.

We have often been advised to keep our head down and to play according to the rules here. Which means in the first-line to be an ass-creeper to the existing hierarchy and to dance to their tune. This means also. Thousands of meaningless “Réunions with lot's of talking but little happening for Nature and people. In the traditional way we have to speak with the bosses and to do what they say. But in this corrupted bunch the result is, that they attempt to betray us by every trick in the book. Pretending to go for conservation of nature but still going on busy burning-an-slashing themselves. How can we respect “traditions” which are the core of the problem?

We are not only here to teach about new ways of agricultural methods. But much more to deal with the people here. And it's a fact. Most of them like us, we are well-known and have earned the respect of these simple-minded people. We live together, eat together, work together, pick the same parasites out of our feet, laugh and sing with each other. Sometimes serious, but most of the time jolly. They give us a lot, and we are trying to do our part.

“Everyone wants that things change, but go on to repeat to do the same as always!”

This doesn't count for Europe....

We visited the Tangalamena, the traditional leader of the region. He didn't dislike us. In the contrary he was friendly. You could even say that from this day a friendship has developed between him and us. We laugh when we meet and he wants to know the news. I sense it when they lie. He is sincere. The temporary District-chef is to well known as a tricky character. He reminds me to my grandmother, she was a good gardener, but as a person a dragon. He was the one who ran to Andasibe to stir up the the folks against us. And in his role as catholic priest he is doing the same to let the wind go against us. One person in between 2000 residents. But one with influence. He wants to get rid of us – that's clear meanwhile. Our neighbour, onto who's land we are. The one with whom we are still conferring...

... I recall the words: love thy neighbour. Despite all the crimes and slander by the church – the essence of the message still exists. And this is why we, fully in line with the murdered revolutionist Christ, are going to talk with our neighbour. I put papers onto the table, which are showing we have

paid all the wages (this has been debated). We negotiate to get the land, promise to support him and are show goodwill to be of benefit for the region. Then we learn, we have been denounced from a different direction and are able dissolve this. It worked a miracle to say “we know the tradition of Madagascar, not to talk about problems. But we want to solve them and this is why we have to talk about them”. This triggered something in him. Maybe it's also to do with wisdom of old age. Additionally we because we have on several occasions showed him our respect. Not respect for the bad character, but towards him as a human being. We always chat with him about his health. He has a severe lung problem. Nearly each time I recommend him to inhale with Eucalyptus, which is growing here in abundance. Each time he affirms to do so, but he is taking pills instead. He will perish by doing so... when ever we meet him, it is worse.

All in all we are able to soothe the waters and most people are back in our league... Not least due to the Joker we have been keeping in our sleeve. But before I tell about this there is an intermezzo, small but oh my... It will show you what it means to stand at the frontiers of Humanness.

Bib-kely; Parasy = (the sand flea)

An particular pretty detail of our hill are the sand-fleas. About the size that you can just see them. They like it to bite themselves into feet and more seldom into hands. “Bip-kely” the Madagascan name – has not only caused long-lasting linguistic discussions, but also led into deep philosophical thoughts. Why do parasites exist? What's their function an an ecosystem? Elimination of the weak? But to for this they would not really be the best. They are annoying, but still fairly harmless. Maybe the sand-flea's significance is more towards the sand. In this case I would be the useful one, in providing a nursery. Inside me the little rascal puts his eggs into, stays for a while before the whole bunch of new fleas spreads to have new adventures out in the world.

We are bad hosts! This way, while picking out fleas from our cutaneous folds and the toes, deep philosophical thoughts are born and some small ones too – but not a new generation of fleas. Because we try busy to eliminate them all. Each Madagascan owns a safety-pin to finish off the “Bip”. A daily pleasure. We do the job with knives, scissors and scalpel, and study the different levels of depths they are found in.

The same way as the studied fleas, the Madagascan people are a mystery to us. With each found answers they become even greater mysteries. Our Karma might be fairly untouched by the massacre of the fleas, because it prevents further suffering. However, what we are dealing with, is an attempt to prevent a far greater devastation from happening. But we are not driven by fear about the catastrophe which is hanging above all of us. No, in the first line it is our thrill of anticipation about something, which is fantastic and able to smooth out age-old mistakes, humans have performed. The growth here is so enormous, so that in 2 months time we will drown in green beans. It is predictable, that in five years we have here a paradise. Small effort - high results. Sometimes we feel envy and consider to stay here. But its not only the fleas which keep us from doing so, but also the culture. We are Europeans. And these people are Madagascans. Why are they not listening? Why are they not taking it on. This way to work is so obviously successful and is bringing fantastic results. We don't understand this. They always repeating that they are poor. But they are swimming in wealth. This climate is so wonderful. Everything is just growing like mad, rain, warmth, soil free of toxic agrochemicals. Here are already so many native nitrogen fixing plants, restoration of the land is a cakewalk.

Our water-system functions incredibly well. No rainwater is leaving the system, even when there is a rainfall of 35mm in a night. The terraces are free from erosion, which means each tiny bit of humus we build stays there and enhances the fertility. Paradise is a poorhouse compared to the opportunities in this country. This is what we try to show the people here. But what are they focused

on? Onto money and cheap mobile phones. OK I say they can earn money with their harvest. I explain things like cash crop, market, development of capital. It could be so easy here. Yet still... I get the impression, they don't get it. Once more the observation – they don't listen. May be they listen but don't have the ability of abstract thinking. This is not an accusation, but just daily observation. Therefore we are building an example. So that they can see, feel and experience it.

They do willingly what we tell them to do. It was like this through the whole start up phase. They have been the employees, and I am the boss. This was efficient for the beginning, but now it leads nowhere. Now we can only wait and see. We are entering supervised succession, in which a stable vegetation develops. Mung-beans are called Muramaska which means “easy to cook”. They are my new favourite crop to start of with. They overgrow everything, much faster than any wild plant. Combined with Maize it's a fast crop, good soil and little labour.

We like to substitute the function of natural pioneer plants (commonly known as weeds) with plants which can be used. Here as well as in Europe “weeding” is a thing of the past, we select. Beans, maize, ground almonds, peanuts, pumpkins and acacia trees. We have for sure already planted 40 pineapples. We love eating them. This way each enjoyable meal gives also a new plant. Just stick it in the ground and wait. Even apples and pears are easy-peasy to propagate here. Cut an branch, put it into the ground. That's it. Not even 5 years and you can harvest. Pineapple 3 years, from then on yearly harvest. Bananas one year. Both of them propagate themselves. The only thing is to go at the right time through the garden and harvest. On top of that: lychees, apples, pears, plums, Madagascan cherries, cashews, coconuts, mangos, jack-fruits, ... mangosteen (*Garcinia mangostana*), which I have secretly imported.. in Tana I found some figs. That's how you imagine paradise, or not? If the boys here would take it in, they could in five years be pensioners. Donat would be 23 years old then, Lailana 28...

But how can you make them understand? How to ignite the fire in them? When we explain: plant tomatoes, then you have tomatoes in six month, then you will need to spend less money, in the contrary you can even earn some with it, tomatoes are expensive here. Then they say: “ But I want to have the tomatoes now, and not in 6 months time...”. The ability to think, especially into the future, is just not developed. I've got the impression, that most of them have a little happy bird whistling a jolly tune in their head. This sounds mean, but it is very difficult to really understand their state of mind and to describe it. They are jolly, friendly, and most of the time honest. Like children.

When you give them a task, they are doing it dutifully all day long. To be proactive... no chance. To think in progression... to figure out a way, how to reach a goal and to accomplish a desire... very difficult. Technical and methodical it would be a walk in the park to create a paradise here. But on the human level a challenge.

Okay the first Permaculture plantation exists, labour time has reduced to 4 hours daily (one person for a garden who can provide for 3 people), and this effort will dwindle further more. Now we are able to concentrate onto something else. Concentrate on fleas in the foot and folks with nonsense in their head.

EPP – The School - “Ecole Primaire Public”

Already in November I met Claude. “Dada-Be Claude” - Grandpa Claude that's how they call him here. He is a pensioner and represents a French NGO, which is primarily focused on schools and the children. They distribute notebooks and pens. In our small village they have recently built a canteen for the school, and guarantee to provide, for the next five years, a lunch for the children. This helps to make the school more attractive.

Our village counts 35 souls and the school has 215 pupils. They come from the entire region. To be

more precise, they are approximately half of the regional children, but at least they come. The area is vast and bleak. “What if they would plant their own food? We could create forest-gardens and vegetable beds. This will provide more variety of food and simultaneously they can experience a new way of agriculture.” I explain a bit more and show the system we have already set up. “What's the cost of it?” “I will send you an offer.”



And that's it for the moment. We turn the chat towards the challenges of our project. A few weeks later I sent him the offer, I don't talk about it, just in case the thing turns out to be only a bubble. But then it came as the greatest Christmas-present I ever could have wished for: We, a tiny Swiss association create in order of a French ONG a school garden. The garden will be bigger than the one I created for the school in Tamatave in the past. It provides us more work for our boys and we can extend our programme. On top the respect for Permaculture and trust into our actions increases. Great stuff!

At the day in January when I let them all go, I already knew about this job. When we have been gliding into all the problems, I knew it, and was really scared we would loose everything. But now the problems are solved and we can run ourself into the matter.

Taratasy [paper, document, invoice]

But first we have to endure negotiations with the responsible guys, followed by a paper warfare. This is an annoying task. Ruben is taking on the planning and will be the manager of the project on site. This is a huge challenge for a student with little experience. I am really happy for him to get this chance, want to push a bit his learning. On the other hand, I am extremely grateful that this time I have don't have to shoulder the big thing once more on my own. This is why I bite my teeth into the bureaucracy, to keep a clear back for Ruben in his challenge. Which means to travel once more to Andasibe. I am not really happy about it. We manufacture two papers, each of them in French and Malagasy. Our new secretary is a wonderful help, to admit that without her we wouldn't manage would be more correct. Each time 4 papers for 5 parties equals 20 papers... and 80 signatures plus punches of rubber stamps are to collect. I look at it as a game, how else could I bare this with my practical nature? I am used to seal a contact by handshake. An then to start it. Okay, “public-private partnership” :-)

We are going for the blessing from the major, our cooperation partner Mitsinjo, the district chief, the chairman of the school, the headmistress. Blessing to carry money and a cool project into their land. We also go to Tangalamena, out if respect, but also because I like him.

I can't help myself!

It is one of the largest projects in my entire career, and at the same time the most exiting one.

I love handing it to Ruben, but still I can't help it to deal with it myself. Also in my role as a coach for Ruben. This is only in the secondary line about food for the children. But in the first line about pedagogy and teaching at the root of the poverty – poverty in the mind. There are 3 lady-teachers for 215 children. An always drunken chef who cares for the two classes of children who are teacher-less. He is shouting, uses the cane to discipline them and forces them, day in day out, to call out loud the multiplication tables. Unbelievable but true.

In between he is running into the kitchen, to check everything is in order. When he comes back he is hitting the bunch who went wild in the meantime. He forces them back into this way of conditioning. Naturally they can't calculate anything after this, forget about mathematics. What they learn is “follow the leader” – and do what you want behind his back.

The school-yard is a joyless affair. A surface which had no care after being treated by a bulldozer. It is a ruff slope. Everything in straight lines, life-energy disappears here. A high fence, similar to one around a prison, surrounds everything. Here is nothing inspiring or to give wings to the next generation. Here grows the next nose-picking, slash and burn generation, and a minority who escapes to the city to join the general madness there.

Children need a protected space, and from 7 years onwards a close space which warrants adventure. It has to be beautiful, to lift the spirit as well as a space where creativity and dreams can evolve. It needs beauty, to balance the rough, dull world which is jolly but in intellectual poverty.

For the nutritional aspect I advise Ruben, to give the water a chance to infiltrate into the ground from above and to enter from there a high and wide landscape of terraces. To ensure Each square-millimetre is precious and shall be used to ensure that we can feed so many children with good food from such a small amount of land.

But now I let Ruben do his job... there are enough things for me to do on the first station and with the programme for the future.

Ruben is writing...

When I came it was just towards the end of the first project phase. Most things had been already organised. The gardens built and nearly finished, plants are peaking out of the ground.

In summer I attended a Permaculture design Course, in Terra Alta, Portugal. The term Permaculture I knew for quite a while, read books about it and was a member of the Regional association in Brugg (Switzerland). But the course itself was a real eye opener.

In the Course I realised, that all the lovely people who are working with Permaculture could transform the world in a paradise. With all these techniques concepts, knowledge they have developed we could make the world green nourishing an a place worth to live on it.

This had touched me. I decided to go deeper into this topic. This is why I travelled to Madagascar. With a backpack full of shovels, a bile and some ore tools.

In Madagascar I gave myself some time to arrive. The garden was built, we had purchased parts for an electric solar installation, which I then transported on my bike through the jungle. The students had their holidays. Me too.



Did you ever take the time to observe a runner-bean growing? It's interesting, the sprout gets longer and longer, tilts and starts to turn to the right. In a few hours the plant had turned around its own axis, until it meets something it can get hold of. Then it starts the winding process growing along the pole. Always to the right. Some I have wound toward the left. They stopped to grow, left the pole until they found a way to grow once more towards the right.

:-) so much about the energetically importance of the constructive, clockwise spin. (Go and have a close look how trees are growing.)

Okay, then there has been this school opposite our front-door. I tried to motivate the people to re-think the design of the ground around the schoolhouse. First they declined, telling me to be unable to do so. How true this actually is I couldn't understand at this time.

To work with people who have never exercised to think about something, to imagine things, in space and time – is very exhausting and a true challenge. In addition the limiting language barrier.

I choose French speaking people, motivated them to join the planning. But still, all of a sudden they have only been standing there. I asked, what's the matter, why are you not doing anything? “ Nous attendons votre parole ” we are waiting for your orders. Hmm. The order was clear. Planning the garden. Okay I've got it, it's not working this way, I have to give more detailed suggestions: Where would you like the terraces to be? Where the fruit trees? Etc...

The project takes off. I have drawings about the land. Sit down to observe the school activities, the sun, the wind, the rain. I hire 14 people, distribute shovels, hoes, wheel barrow, machetes, axes and so on.

Three of them, who speak the most French I gave the role as foreman. Set up small groups for different tasks. Carrying wood for the fence, weeding, digging.

Lukas offered to be on hand with help and advice, which I willingly accept. It helps me to feel more confident. After all, it is my first project. There is a big area and many people to deal with and I don't speak their language. In addition I have not really a clue in which way the whole thing might develop and how it will look like.

Lukas is very tired from the passed year. He needs some rest. I take this task.

I try to use his kind support only for short moments. I learn a lot about designing lines, looking at space, observing the terrain, feeling for the space, psychology, possibilities of design. How do I emphasise a main entrance in distinction to a side entrance? Where do I want to have many people and where do I want to have them less? How do I lead their ways through the place in daily life? How do I make them feel welcome on the path which we are building right now? Will they use it, or create their own short-cuts? How do I deal with the water?



Soon I realise, that my picture, about formation of landscape, is different from Lukas'. His way to look at it is new to me. I am learnt about it at a point when already many people are busy shovelling. It nearly rips me apart. Now I am building a project according to Lukas' ideas, but still struggle to tune into it. Have lots of people who want exactly to be told where to shovel, where to hammer a nail in. People who can only work with precise orders. On top of this it starts raining and we want to finish soon. The soil changes into mud, wheelbarrows get stuck. We have only two more weeks before my flight back. And still many cubic metres of earth to move, many metres of fence to be built.

I realise that the shaping of the ground was too much for me, especially because I should and wanted to adapt to Lukas' design. I am just not experienced enough for this.

Luckily Lucas has recovered, he takes on half of the group. My part is now the fence, lots of wood to be processed. It's difficult enough because of the language barrier. And being a Swiss I come nearly into a crisis. When I say make a distance of 120 cm, the worker does sometimes 118 and another time 122 :-). tsy manin, doesn't matter. All in all things work out, each day we adjust our goals. We realise that we underestimated the time-frame. We start to work Sundays and really make it to a finishing point, right in time for the party.

I like these people. They laugh a lot. Enjoy their life. They have their problems. They are different. I am pondering each day about the advantages of their way of life. Who can say that my way of life is the best? I am open. But still there is a lot I can't understand. In my opinion they are in a field of consciousness, in a way of life, which makes life very hard for them. Because of the inability to grasp the concept of future, they can't make the connection like "I want to eat fruits like the Vazaha (white-skinned)" to: "Oh, I could also plant some trees next to my house" they are unable to understand this. Therefore I have pity with them and am glad to have grown up in a different world. At least some advantages. :-)

But it also brings me disillusion. I can see the influence, see the difficulties, to bring world-changing concepts like Permaculture to Madagascar. It's still a long way - there is so much to do!

For now I my personal need is some people with whom I am intellectually on the same level, with whom I am able to talk. Let's go to Berlin, to Switzerland and then to Portugal!





“Thank you Ruben! You are and have been the greatest, without you it would never have gone so well. Wonderful to have found such a buddy! Thank you, misaotra betsaka, merci, obrigado, gracias, danke!”

At the station

Meanwhile there has developed a homely social life. The group is ever changing. The Spanish stayed for a few weeks and the students from Tana (which turned out to be nice but useless). This brought vitality, and exchange with the locals. What was sold to us as a danger, was actually a cultural enrichment. Here exists a huge abyss between the city and the country population. The town-people need urgently to learn from the county-folks. Especially about humane qualities. Bon-Chance, the pet-hen grows bigger, and despite it is in all our hearts, it has to grow up and go out into the world during the day. It has learned to scratch in the garden – and to harm it. Sadly it is peeking through the Fefe, a heart-ripping scenery. Like parents who sent their kids out into the world.

The last chicken fences get tightened up, and the design of the place prepared for our absence. We find a “Mama-Dispensaire” and an agro-technician. He is expensive, a bit older and is cheating us already after the first week. Despite this we have to keep him. He is the most able one we could find, but this doesn't mean much.

I confront him openly, bring to mind, that we all should leave the bad habits behind. Build a new community of honesty and trust. I hope he does a good job. And to be fair, he is not too bad either. He is busy nursing fruit trees, knows how to weed, has knowledge about Swales and erosion and has a general idea how to prevent erosion. He knows leguminous plants and nitrogen. Cheers, we have an expert who will care for our project and provide our youngsters with knowledge. Mama-Dispensaire is an unmarried, young, single mother from the next town. Her unfortunate situation might well be the reason why she took on the job. We support her and provide a place to live. Here she can learn languages, medicine, gardening, and permaculture. May be she appreciates our approach. Until then she is hopefully a good custodian of house and homeliness. At her side we place Rivo, we had always sympathy for him and he is loyal. It's not very romantic but considering the situation it is too early for romance. In our Maslow's pyramid of needs it is in the first line about survival and the basic needs. Healthy, sated and a roof above the head, that's already a lot. Mobile phone and electricity great, the rest is presently not yet of high importance.

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Bon-Chance doesn't come back. We are all sad about it. She disappeared like fallen off the face of the earth. Wild theories are constructed. Has it been stolen by our enemies? Instead Emma, our old chicken-lady became tame. Every evening she comes, inspires us to plan how we could find the appropriate setting to include chicken into Permaculture design. Sadly she stopped laying eggs. Wait and see. For now it is important to forge a stable group and care for a good social life, take lots of our materials with us and let the station survive on a minimum base.

Slowly, so we hope, there will grow a group with new ethics, different values, higher culture – however it might look like. We hope for solidarity, honesty, and trust. Much more than for great harvest and outer success. I hope the old man will not disturb too much this plan... maybe he can change too and join the new way of life?

The three farmers

Dinat, Donat and Lailana, the three most interested students, will create on their home places terraced landscapes. This is the last success we can book. Three Permaculture farms, or let's say the realistic chance of getting there.

Dainat created already over Christmas a small plantation and Donat was also busy. Lailana, as the last, is the son of our neighbour. *Yes this particular one*. Lailana has just be proven to be busy, he was our best worker and has on his place build over the last weeks, a first terrace landscape in a real good quality. His parentage doesn't matter to us. He is a good guy and he will fully benefit from our programme. All three of them will get wage, advise and practical support from our expert and the seeds for the first cultures.

In the next months they will create always 1 hectare of terraces per person in the next 8 months, using shovels, hoe and pickaxe. For us it will be a next level of experience and a large testing area for different plants. We are really wondering, how independent the boys will be and especially, if they did really understand what it is all about. We will see. It is an important step forward in the greater picture. With the terraces we will stop the erosion and recreate humus, install stable systems, gain better harvest and (as our long-term goal) stop the slash and burn process. All the conservation efforts. All biodiversity programmes ... stand and fall with the peasants. Eco-tourism is not the solution, it may help but doesn't solve the basic problem. If we want a future worth having, then we have to create new methods but more important, grow a new culture for the next generations of farmers. Here in Menalamba, in whole Madagascar and in the entire world.

Menalamba

this district is about 9000 hectare big. Bordering to the biggest mine of the world. The area is world-famous for it's special frogs. About 1 000 ha are wetland are (in theory) under international protection. It is the so called Ramsar site, which is a international protection agreement for wetlands.

(The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Info found in Internet and added by Vaida=translator)

Menalamba is located between two big protected jungle areas. It could be reforested. And therefore become one connected big area. There are efforts by our partner Mitsinjo to cooperate with a Finnish NGO, but simple mathematics proves, that it will not gain anything. They are just too small. They reforest officially 25 ha, which adds up to 250ha in 10 years and in 100 years 2500 ha. But be aware, at the same time will be more forest destroyed by the ongoing slash and burn method. This is a good example for development aid workers who don't believe themselves...

Why else are they doing their work?

Before we are able to successfully reforest, we have to stop the peasants. If we count 1 ha per person, for farming, logistic and Infrastructure, then 7000 ha would remain for nature. Enough to put the whole wetland under protection as well as adding a corridor with forest. For sure we could combine our techniques by coordinating our efforts. In this case we would reforest more than 25 ha

per year. (Using intelligent succession). This might sound too fantastic, and yes, most of the development aiders don't believe themselves that it can be done. But why start the whole thing if we don't believe in it anyway? WE believe, that we can win the hearts of the population, using shovels, laughter and hard words. And providing a positive role-model. We believe, the Red Island Madagascar can go back to be green. We believe, that it is possible to end world hunger and poverty. We believe, that humankind can manage to tackle this, tackle to solve the immense problems we are facing. This is why we are willing to pick fleas out of our feet and work hard without immediate success.

Poverty and wealth

What is this anyway?

One way of poverty is relative: Poverty is “having less than the others.”
in the contrary to be rich: “to have more than the others”.

At home in Europe I am “normal”. I have neither especially more or less than the others. But here I am rich, and the others poor.

When I was little, I always had the feeling to be poor. We had less than the others, we have been 5 children and my father didn't have a gigantic salary. But still. I knew others who had also not more. But they didn't have the feeling to be poor. We haven't been poor, especially considered poverty I can see here. It was the feeling.

These people are in fact rich. They have a rich land and enough space. 50 years past colonisation you can't say it's the bad white man's fault. What else is it then? For a long time I carried this question, and came to the conclusion, poverty happens to be in the head, the mind. When you believe to be poor you are poor. When you believe to be rich, you are rich. This now may sound harsh towards the Poor. But nonetheless I am observing: it is the mind, which creates wealth or poverty. Not inevitably wealth in the senses of “having more than the others”, but wealth in the meaning of “to live in abundance and have enough”.

For example, when I am planning a house out of the paradigm of poverty, I will get a house according to this. “Oh, this will be a huge amount of work. “et voilà”, there you are the slave. You are not thinking about this house out of a feeling of abundance, but lack. And it will be visible in the result. So many people are slaves of their houses, even they are often nice houses. But they are products of fear not to have enough. (there are more things to this: the system of mortgages and interest payment, the class society...) But when I imagine a house out of the feeling of abundance, then it will be a great house. And if I have little, then it will be a nice house built with a “small budget”. There are enough examples for both attitudes. Only a little example: you can build houses out of logs. You don't have to buy expensive beams, every thing can be cut out of straight logs. You stack them neatly like a firewood stack and then fill the gaps with clay-mortar. Nearly no other method is as economical as this – given you have forest. You don't need beams for rafters, you can make everything using rods. Rods are less costly because there is less labour involved. But to do so, you need a creative mind, willingness to go your own way, and to break the box of thinking “that's the spirit”, that's “how everyone is doing it”. And it needs the will to be wealthy.

Conclusions and Rèsumèe

People here believe they are poor. Therefore they are. Something which sounds like the distortion of the law of cause and effect is at least as true as the usual way of interpretation. Our work is therefore a work with the mind and spirit of the people. When we just go and drop a lot of material wealth in front of their feet, it will perish swiftly. This is the typical example of a failed

developmental aid project. Conclusion: "They are not caring for anything".

One gives them advanced technology, tractors, electricity, machines, houses, and then the things break down, collapse and perish. This has a simple reason. The mind and spirit can't keep up. It is in this sense, not only that they feel poor. Their whole mind. Their culture, their habit to think – or not to think. It doesn't fit with the tractors and diggers. WE are starting at Adam and Eve level, or at least at the Greeks, to meet people where they are and walk together with them. Mechanics is not only technique but a way of thinking.

On top of this: humanness, culture, philosophy. We are not aiming to convince them about something particular, tell them how they shall think. But encourage them to think for themselves. To give them the means to develop themselves. Let's see what comes out of this.

May be these are new concepts and ideas about foreign aid, may be not. There might well be others who do it out of the same spirit. That's not so important. What is important to us is the planetary cooperation of especially the young generation. Because it is all about the future. All the older people are welcome to join, or at least not to stand in the way.

Donet, our neighbour, has in the end handed the land over to us. He was all of a sudden no more sure about his ownership. On this evening I have visited him once more to share a cup of tea with him.. A tea he had never brewed by himself. I mixed it with tea-tree oil to enhance the inhalation effect. He slept all through the night to the morning, the first time since long. Nature medicine has convinced him. I hope to meet him in the autumn as a healthy man. Most of the infections have cleared up. Parasites have no more been there for quite a while and the party guests liked the school-garden very much. Our small station has permanent occupants, is tidy and ready to be breathed life into it.

Oh last not least – Bon-Chance. I saw her with her family happily reunited. She walked around looking for worms, picking seeds and life a lifestyle of a partly domesticated - partly wild hen.

A Manakara – see you!



The last Page:

The Projekt “**Permakulturstation Andasibe**” is entirely planned and done by young people from Germany, Switzerland and Madagaskar. It is meant a an engagement for a new together from a new generation. We overcome yesterday, work hard today to have a better tomorrow.

Andasibe is a small Village in eastern Madagascar with one of the oldest protected areas.

Maromahatsinjo is a very small village in the district Menalamba, it hosts a primary school for the surrounding villages and now also our permaculture project.

The association tany in switzerland keeps the whole thing running. We thank to all donors and supporter, especially the Lush Charity Pot, the permaculture association of switzerland and the Bad-Schinznach for the generous support.

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Bye!