



ZAHANA

RURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

Newsletter November 2010

Zahana Updates: What success really means for our village



The new school in our second village Fiarenana

Dear Friends of Zahana: Madagascar has made it into the news lately in print and the radio (at least here in Hawaii). It is rare that Madagascar gets mentioned at all in the Western media at all and then it is seldom good news.

The recent events emphasize for us once more how vital it is for Zahana to continue working with our village communities, despite national and international events. Political steps taken by the international community, such as stopping all non-humanitarian aid to Madagascar (since early 2009) by the USA and the European Union are diplomatically strong signals, but who suffers the consequences the most are once again the poorest of the poor.

It has always been our guiding development philosophy to make life in the villages so livable and attractive that it is worth staying there with your family working the land.

Zahana's work goes on

Zahana feels we have the responsibility to stick to our commitment and continue working with our village partners. This is only made possible thanks to your generous support. As you plan your end-of-the-year giving, we hope that you will remember Zahana. As in years past you can donate to Zahana either by writing a check or donating on-line via GlobalGiving. We have ready to use Zahana gift cards that you can download off the website as a do-it-yourself project. Please contact us if you don't have access to the Internet and would like some of our cards, so we can give them to you .

Thursday, December 16 is another Bonus Day at GlobalGiving, our on-line donation option. Every donation is matched by 50% until they run out of matching funds (They ran out the last time around.) Or you could use some of the great tools offered by GlobalGiving, such as a registry or company matching funds. Please check our website for details.

A lot of development problems connected with urbanization and sprawling slums attracting impoverished farmers can be avoided if people are not forced to leave for the cities in an often futile search for a better life.

In a culture where people are deeply rooted and spiritually connected with the soil of their ancestor's tombs, outsiders are always looked on with suspicion. The desire to stay and live where you are born can work to our advantage by collaborating on improving their own community. Getting, for example, access to clean water and a school right where you live are such steps that make development goals not only achievable but in keeping with deeply rooted cultural desires. The latest report from Zahana in Madagascar illustrates our success quite drastically:

"In Fiadanana where they got the safe drinking water since 2006 through seven communal faucets the impact is tremendous. A key reason why we found teachers willing to move to the village of Fiadanana was the availability of clean safe drinking water. It is the only village in the area that can make such a claim.

Mparany, our Zahana teacher, reported that since he has been living in Fiadanana no death of child was reported. The only death in the village was a woman who had surgery in the hospital of Tsiroanomandidy for appendicitis some 2 months ago. Berthine, a member of the women's group, confirmed that before Zahana in the "hard times period" (époque dure) between October to December it felt like almost every day one child passed away from diarrhea. (She said 26 deaths in 2 months.) She explained that people from Fiadanana now have to carry their water with them if they have to go to another village, since their stomach didn't feel well drinking the water from the other villages."

Nursery and our master gardener in the village of Fiarenana: Jean is our master gardener in the village of Fiarenana. Zahana hired him in 2009 to revitalize the once existing nursery in the village from many years back. Initially hired short-term to grow coffee plants for the village, Zahana has now hired him permanently.

Jean has proven an invaluable asset with his amazing green thumb. He is very knowledgeable about the local plants, can grow almost anything, and has decades of experience as a gardener in his region. Jean is very involved in the school gardens and under his guidance the student are able to plant, and tend to, a schoolyard full of vegetables. Zahana's microcredit projects, mainly our seed funds, or potatoes, are closely tied to his activities, guidance and supervision.

Inspired by the example of Jean's success in our second village (Fiarenana), our first pilot site of Fiadanana now has a second Zahana gardener as well. The new gardener is working closely with Jean as his apprentice, but also has some amazing results growing trees for the school.

One of his greatest assets is that he is willing to experiment. While most farmers are traditionally skeptical when it comes to new crops, Jean is willing to just plant it and see if it will grow. As a paid staff member of Zahana he has a guaranteed income and can afford the "luxury" of trying out if something new will grow at all, even if he is not sure it will yield him a harvest. If a new crop succeeds under his care his credibility and trust with the community make it much easier to introduce something new.



Planting trees in the schoolyard

Planting Trees in the schoolyards of both school in our villages: The two gardeners Zahana employs are worth their weight in gold. As part of our development efforts, Zahana has bought a variety of tree seeds recommended by the Ministry of Forestry. Our two gardeners now successfully tend for our newest tree saplings.

One of the new introductions by Zahana is *Moringa Oleifera*. Moringa is a very fast growing tree with edible leaves and seedpods that are exceptionally high in protein. Once established, the fast growing trees need to be cut constantly so the leaves and seeds can still be reached easily. Moringa wood has not much use besides firewood; an added benefit in our very deforested area, such as ours.

Zahana was only able to buy a small amount of Moringa seeds so far that have been grown as an experiment. Since there is currently still a limited amount of Moringa trees, the gardeners decided to plant them with the school children around the schools. Both schools have access to water all year round on the premises. The gardener's little helpers make sure that each tree gets watered diligently with great care daily. Based on the available literature, Moringa trees should provide protein rich leaves for the school children within a few months and then for years, or decades to come. Our plan is to plant an additional 2000 trees within the next year, to actively counteract deforestation.

Potato Seed Fund in Fiarenana: For the second time, the 'seed fund' with potatoes has been a great success in our second village (Fiarenana). Each participant got 2 kg (approx. 5 lbs US) of potatoes in June of 2010. Potatoes had been planted after the rice harvest in the same fields that are currently being prepared for the next rice crop again. Each farmer was able to harvest between 20 - 40 kg of potatoes from the 2 kilos of seed stock, a great return on our initial investment of 200kg of potatoes. (See last year's experiment on our website under "microcredit".)

In contrast to the last time farmers did not only eat all the potatoes in the "époque dure", the hard time between rice harvests. Some sold potatoes in the neighboring small town to get access to much needed cash. In contrast, one farmer, who decided not to sell his crop said: "It does not make sense to sell potatoes in the market and turn around in the market and spent the money on buying rice to eat. So we ate all of our own potatoes instead and it was very tasty". This is an amazing development in itself, in a culture where rice is the only food considered a "real" meal. (See our webpage on rice.) This second time around the Zahana gardener in the village encouraged everybody to keep some of the smaller potatoes as seed stock for the next planting season. He also agreed to continuously cultivate potatoes all year round to test if they can be planted in other seasons as well successfully.



Zahana.org

A Good potato harvest in 2010



Solar water pasteurizer in action

The donated solar water pasteurizers

have been accepted well by the community. Zahana has a few solar water pasteurizers per village (see website) and they are being used in the schools for and by the school children. In our second village (Fiarenana) the only well with water all year round has recently been dug in the schoolyard. Safe drinking water remains an issue when using ground water. The teacher uses the solar water pasteurizer to make the water safe to drink for his students. He stores the bottles with pasteurized water in a shelf in the classroom to cool down to room temperature. As one girl told: "If I get thirsty I just get up and walk over to the shelf and drink water out of the bottles. I can do this any time I want."