

Project Update: January 2010

ho avy: growing for the future; what's to come in 2010 and beyond

A gentle slice of moon on the star crowded sky of southwestern Madagascar just set gracefully and yet another day is over; we are now in the second half of January 2010.

And what day is today: Monday, Wednesday or perhaps Sunday? Easily we lose track when in the field, especially during our prolonged stays just beyond one week time – keeping busy in the nursery, forest and the village of Ranobe with several community participatory projects - keeping the momentum of excitement and action. The dynamics are encouraging and there is wonderful energy flowing.

So what day is today? Today... is a nice day ... And yet, every day is somewhat special; ups and downs along the journey to the ultimate balance. Capacity building is about trust building and about generosity, patience, humbleness as well as discipline. It's a wonderful lesson for all of us, for ho avy team and for FIMPAHARA.

And what is the fresh news? Ino vao vao? As expressed in Malagasy. Aha... tsiy vao vao, is the universal answer - there is no news (even though there actually are news). In fact, misy maro vao vao - there are many good news in the process of 'growing for the future'. And so let us fill you on those:

Work in our three native tree nurseries has been truly a rewarding time; reconnecting with nature and sharing the cheerful time with FIMPAHARA members actively involved. It's been a pleasure time of nature observations, provided that we are situated between a nice patch of most continuous forest in southwestern Madagascar and diverse agricultural land. Our nurseries attract a lot of incredibly interesting wildlife. Spectacular wildlife moments are abundant: we have been observing several local endemic species of frogs, a slim worm sized transparent skink *Voeltzkowia* sp. 'pallida', about which not much is known, ancient looking dragonflies, beautiful butterflies and their colourful caterpillars, bizarre insects, flies, beetles and even a 'may fly' specimen looking quite prehistorically.

The forest is culminating in its green coat refreshed by spectacular flowers of the most bizarre shapes and structures, opening after couple rain storms, the first just before Christmas and in the first week of January, each yielding about 20 mm. Days have been pretty hot here with maximum to 39 °C and up to 70% humidity, so we like to spend our lunch breaks at what we call 'a la plague' (on the 'beach' of the lake Ranobe) in a shadow of graceful bananas. Since the beginning of January we have a very good track of weather measurements logged by our meteorological station; great tool for long term monitoring of climatic changes.

Trees in our two nurseries that are filled up to their top capacity are doing well. New species are germinating continuously and we have been monitoring their growth each month. Replanted trees have each gotten their unique tags for long-term monitoring. FIMPAHARA receives introductions to plant growth monitoring. Ho avy together with FIMPAHARA is finding local solutions to upcoming issues such as herbivory, nutrient balance

and plant survival. We have been supplying the saplings with compost tea, with solution of local natural insecticides: the soaked bark of katrafay (*Cedrelopsis grevei* and soaked crushed leaves of nemo, *Azadirachta indica*), keeping the insect herbivores off and strengthening health of the seedlings; this is part of our nursery maintenance lessons we have engaged FIMPAHARA into.

Our third nursery has been constructed by the end of the year and we have been filling it up with pots rapidly. It is an extensive nursery 4m wide and 16m long with a capacity of more than 6000 pots; at the moment we have 4000 pots waiting for planting in just few days and we are continuously filling new pots. Anticipating the seed planting to be finished by the end of January we will be up to 10 000 pots with growing native plants. This is certainly an exciting progress, during which FIMPAHARA takes the lead on the nursery activities. The children are a dynamic component in that progress; they have been engaged in pot filling and cheerfully carried bags on their heads, one boy has carried a pot filled with soil on his nose; laughing when we called him 'mifioky' (which is the vernacular name for the endemic ephemeral chameleon *Furcifer labordi* (meaning the one with long nose who can whistle). We have been designing the third nursery to combine native, food and medicinal plants, using the full potential of the nursery and proximity to the agricultural field for future tree transplanting to agroforestry schemes.

Last Sunday we had an important meeting in the village, during which FIMPAHARA and ho avy organized a guided tour through the three nurseries, potatoes cropped land, our two new completed biogas instalments, of which the first one has started to produce biogas already, just after two weeks. This is certainly one exciting alternative to the local cooking options being that open fire and charcoal from the endemic forest wood. One night, returning from the nursery after the sunset, Ondra, our biogas technician grabbed our attention and whispers: come over... I'll show you something – taking us to the biogas storage tank, he lit the burner and ... a powerful blue flame lightened up the scene. We have natural gas! It's methane produced by anaerobic fermentation from zebo dung and water.

The villagers were impressed by the flame, and with the fact this may reduce the amount of wood they burn to cook their daily rice. More than 75 members of the community, the local land and land management association (GELOSE), local forest service (SAGE), WWF, the inter-communal association MITOIMAFI, ho avy and FIMPAHARA have gathered to carry discussion on forest protection and sustainable use within the new protected area being finally zoned. All the involved parties have officially approved and verified by their signatures on the meeting minutes document that FIMPAHARA will be conserving, patrolling from further wood cutting and charcoal making and assist ecological restoration within an area of up to one thousand hectares behind the nursery. This is certainly an incredible step forward with prospect of sustainable conservation of the unique spiny forest in Southwest Madagascar. We are currently drafting and discussing further agreements between individual parties and discussing the local land policy (dina) for the protection and enforcement. The next couple months will be an exciting time to get these documents finalized and implemented.

Along with the nursery works many activities have been carried on in the village through the interactions of ho avy and FIMPAHARA: an effective wood burning mud stove built by ho avy

as demonstration has been already replicated in the seasonal home at rice fields, new well with natural and effective filtering system put in place, language exchange has become popular and we have finally started and are highly energized for building our reforestation center which will be developed over the next month.

For more information about our progress look at the issue 3 of the newsletter of the program ho avy:

http://www.hoavy.org/pdf/handao_ho_avy_newsletter_3_09.pdf

Recent photo galleries can be viewed at:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/martina.petru/FinalPicasaNewYear#>

<http://picasaweb.google.com/martina.petru/ForNFWebblogging#>

Project information on foundation web sites:

http://www.ruffordsmallgrants.org/rsg/projects/martina_petru

<http://naturefund.de/index.php?id=919>

http://permaculture.org.au/project_profiles/africa/ho_avy_madagascar.htm

<http://permaculture.org.au/2010/01/25/ho-avy-growing-a-future-for-madagascar/>