

## Project Update: October 2011

Since our last update we have got the main body of the new Community Resource Center timber framed, walls mudded and foundation laid. We have the wood for the roof in the village now and this week we have the goal to get a roof on it. After the roof frame is complete the local guys will use reeds, and bamboo cut from the edge of the nearby lake to make an excellent, natural fiber, waterproof roof. We will custom fit a frame on to the roof to house the SunPower donated solar panels that will power the center and are on their way to Toliara very soon!



Ranobe kids excited about the community center progress (above). Timber framed, mud walls and natural fiber roofing materials all sourced in Ranobe (below).



## Biogas Generation II

As we started to build the center in July a colleague, friend and PhD candidate Ondra Cundr from the Czech Agricultural Institute arrived in SW Madagascar on his second trip, to set up a second generation biogas digester. Along with two students accompanying Ondra, his team has developed an original, low-cost digester aimed at providing a cheap alternative to wood cooking energy in SW Madagascar.



Left: Second generation biogas technology. Right: Deforested landscape around Isalo National Park.

On Ondra's first visit to Madagascar in 2009 he was approached by a local trekking company and lodge owner called Momo Trek in the Isalo National Park. This location is about three hours north of Ranobe, but we felt that this would be a great opportunity to test this technology with a local business owner, a good friend and supporter of Ho Avy.

Around Isalo the forest has been truly cleared and fuel (wood) for cooking is in major shortage. Thus when the owners of the lodge found out the biogas digester can produce around six hours of cooking fuel everyday and is a combination of dry and wet digestion technologies they welcomed this truly unique design and a pioneering group.

After about three weeks of setting up the digesters, the heads of Madagascar National Parks (MNP) approached Ondra and his team, offering to buy the necessary materials to set up this technology at all the camping sites in Isalo NP, one of the Madagascar's most visited national park. Ondra and Ho Avy will keep the dialogue open with MNP and assess the feasibility of this project for future efforts. Way to go Team Biogas!

### **Water Grant**

In the process of building the biogas digesters I received an email from the German Embassy about the approval of a project that we had applied for a year earlier. The project, for the first time aims to set up wells, as a reliable source of clean drinking water for the Ranobe villagers. The second aspect of the project is to implement manual water pumps, fabricated in East Africa that have diversified agricultural income sources for small scale farmers all over the developing world <http://www.kickstart.org/products/super-moneymaker/>.

Thus with receiving these funds and a strict time-limit to complete the project by mid-November, Ho Avy has been in high gear. With the help of our new, highly motivated social-coordinator Balzac, who is originally from the Ranobe region, is well educated, and has a wealth of knowledge about the local flora and fauna of SW Madagascar, things have been upbeat. People in the village take him very seriously, he is very supportive of Ho Avy's mission and most importantly he really knows how to implement projects in the region, motivating the local people to take action.



Left: Balzac (center), inquiring with local villagers about the location of new well and nursery placement. Right: Ranobe kids come out, chirping and screeching, as they enthusiastically move cement liners for new wells in the village.





Balzac leading the implementation and completion of seven new wells in the Ranobe village.

### **Gardens and Nurseries**

Since July we have been working with a small group of local community members who have taken a great lead on gardening and nursery expansion. Our leader in this project is Harry, a wiry old man with a masterful green thumb and very serious work ethic. With out him we would not have the organization, continual growth and success we have been having in the red-sands around Ranobe.

Further speeding up the growth of our greening of Ranobe, the implementation of the '*Terra Preta ny Madagasikara*' Madagascar [http://www.ruffordsmallgrants.org/rsg/projects/martina\\_petru\\_0](http://www.ruffordsmallgrants.org/rsg/projects/martina_petru_0) soil improvement project headed by Martina Petru and supported by Rufford Small Grants has produced some very noticeable results. In areas where soils have been amended with charcoal and nitrogen rich compost, we have giant squash, a plethora of tomatoes, beets, carrots, basil, and salad never grown in the village before. Harry the gardener and his wife have been the lead entrepreneurs in the village, selling these new veggie varieties at a premium, with their neighbors lining up daily to buy and try the new produce. People across the village are starting their own gardens around this local intervention and it's truly nice to see ideas taking hold and being translated into local context, one step at a time.



Left: Before. Right: And after in Harry's 'Terra Preta' greens garden.



Left: Pumpkin variety brought from Europe, planted in Ranobe are gigantic in this ideal growing environment and are a new variety of food being spread around the village. Right: Marvelous banana sunflower garden, thriving lake side Ranobe.



Realizing Ho Avy's mission: improving and diversifying agricultural opportunities.

Since August, we have also been making a strong push with our nursery project. On our trip to the capital of Madagascar, to accept the contract for the water project, I procured a variety of useful and native tree species seeds from Madagascar's national seed bank and placed an order for 30,000 nursery pots. We will engage villagers and continually fill these pots in November, until rains come around mid-December.

We have also built and stocked two new nurseries and I am pleased to report that we will have around 10,000 individual plants growing by the end of September. Right now is the best time to get as many seeds, of as many species in the ground because it is spring here, days are getting longer and we have the perfect conditions to grow almost anything here with enough water and attention.

Villagers from distant and remote parts of the region have been showing up with all kinds of seeds from rare forest plants and we have been pleased to welcome this community seed collection process that was started by Martina Petru and continues to grow in a very grassroots fashion every year.



Left: Nursery No.1, about 5000 trees are currently growing in this nursery and will be ready to be plated out around March 2012. Right: Nursery No.2, has around 2000 plants of fast growing species and 500 individuals have already been transplanted out of the nursery and into the ground in just three months!



Nursery No.3, newly stocked, with a combination of fruit, fast growing and native species has 4000+ pots.

### **Documenting Ho Avy's context in the situation in SW Madagascar**

For the last five weeks we welcomed Michael van Rooyen to the Ho Avy team, who sailed on catamaran from his home in Cape Town, South Africa to Toliara, where we met. An avid surfer, Michael makes a living as a photographer in the advertising industry. Feeling inspired, together we produced a documentary about Ho Avy's work here in Ranobe and the issues facing the SW region. A story I have had in mind for some time now, Mike did an excellent job of capturing and presenting the visual essence, developing a narrative and putting together the first comprehensive story about the situation on the ground in SW Madagascar: <http://vimeo.com/30656929>.



Michael, impressing locals, as he captures life in Ranobe.

With the culmination of all these visitors and new projects starting, we are feeling good about our progress, stability and growth here in SW Madagascar. Taking it *mora-mora* (step by step), at the pace of the season and community who are busily plowing and sowing their fields for the coming December rains.

As it is nearing the end of the summer vacation for the kids who are in high school and study outside of the remote Ranobe village (in the regional capital Toliara) I have been receiving lots of requests for English classes as my Malagasy language skills improve.

In October, Ho Avy has a new volunteer Anna coming from Germany, a young woman who is interested in conservation, music, gymnastics and speaks several languages. I have informed the high school kids, that when their brothers, fathers and I finish the center we will commence English courses. Thus lots of momentum to finish up and open the solar powered center by Christmas vacation.

Thank you all for your support and patience, as things grow we will keep you up to date with more photos and stories from Ho Avy in Ranobe.