MAKWAWA MALAWI NEWSLETTER 2018

Bringing Permaculture to Mponda Village and Domasi Mission Secondary School

After my first visit back to Malawi in September 2015 since the Belcher family left in 1964, I was convinced that the methods of permaculture in agriculture would benefit the village of Mponda. So on my second visit in April 2017, with my sister Ramona Belcher, our initial mission was to find a Malawian permaculture teacher. We had been given an email address of June Walker, an ex-pat resident of Malawi, now in her 80's who has a permaculture garden on the shore of Lake Malawi. June kindly offered to put us up in her beach hut for a couple of nights and introduced us to Samuel Baluti. Samuel had worked in June's garden since he was 10 years old, paying his way through secondary school and learning permaculture along the way. Eventually he

trained as a Teacher of Permaculture, even once visiting the UK for a permaculture conference.

What is Permaculture?

One simple definition is that permaculture is the development of agricultural ecosystems intended to be sustainable and self-sufficient.

The three core tenets of permaculture are:

· ***Care for the earth***: Provision for all life systems to continue and multiply. This is the first principle, because without a healthy earth, humanity cannot flourish.

· ***Care for the people***: Provision for people to access those resources necessary for their existence.

· ***Setting limits to population and consumption***: By governing our own needs, we can set resources aside to further the above principles. This includes returning waste back into the system to recycle into usefulness. The third ethic is sometimes referred to as Fair Share, which reflects that each of us should take no more than what we need before we reinvest the surplus.

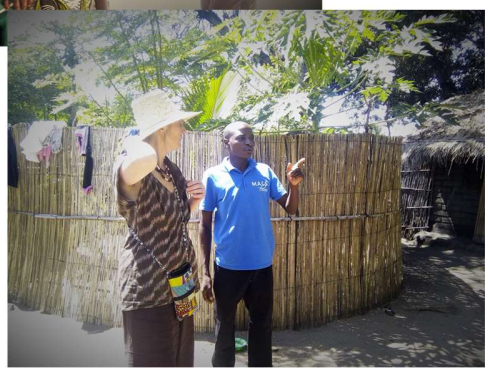
Permaculture design emphasizes patterns of landscape, function, and species assemblies. It determines where these elements should be placed so they can provide maximum benefit to the local environment. Permaculture maximizes useful connections between components and synergy of the final design. The focus of permaculture, therefore, is not on each separate element, but rather on the relationships created among elements by the way they are placed together; the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Permaculture design therefore seeks to minimize waste, human labor, and energy input by building systems, and maximizes benefits between design elements to achieve a high level of synergy. Permaculture designs evolve over time by taking into account these relationships and elements and can evolve into extremely complex systems that produce a high density of food and materials with minimal input.

The design principles, which are the conceptual foundation of permaculture, were derived from the science of systems ecology and study of pre-industrial examples of sustainable land use. Permaculture draws from several disciplines including organic farming, agro-forestry, integrated farming, sustainable development, and applied ecology.

These principles work well at the subsistence agriculture level that most Malawians live. Malawi is one of the poorest 6 countries in the world (in 2015 they were the poorest) and most Malawians rely on the food they produce. The most common crop is maize, which is not drought resistant, hence the famine hit Malawi hard over the last three years when the rains failed. Makwawa Malawi Charity sent money to buy maize. The cost of maize rose higher and higher. However, we were delighted that Mponda village shared out their good fortune to

neighbouring villages. 2017 saw a good harvest after an excellent rainy season and as yet the Charity has not been asked for money for maize this year. However, while in Malawi in 2015, I learned that most of the subsistence farmers had become reliant on a fertilizer that had been subsidised over the last 5 years but was now selling at the full price. This meant that no crops would grow without it and farmers had no choice but to pay for it. The fertilizer was runining their soil. This was when I remembered that permaculture was about creating sustainability and restoring the soil to grow an abundance of organic crops. It was imperative to find a Malawian teacher and someone we could trust. Samuel Baluti, living outside the area and fully trained with lots of teaching experience, was our best bet.

Samuel Baluti had been working in a village near the beach resort of Cape Maclear, teaching and building permaculture gardens with the villagers with great success. Showing us around the village we could see the difference he had made. April is the beginning of the maize harvest and when the passion fruits ripen on a woven trellis that provides shade as well as fruit.



The ripe avocados were huge. Most of the budget he received went on building fences to keep out the goats and the hippos on their nightly foraging excursions out of the Lake and onto the land. This is one of poorest villages in the Mangochi Region of Malawi. Most people had given up farming due to the hippos and goats however the

fish numbers in the Lake are dwindling. A return to agriculture is essential. Samuel was working closely with volunteers from the Peace Corp (USA) who allowed us to look in their village home and outdoor kitchen.

Leaving June's beautiful home, we passed the Moet School for Orphans that uses permaculture principles to feed the children fresh, home grown, organic food. They have bee hives, chickens and fish ponds where ducks live above, providing food from their waste for the fish, as well as gardens producing vegetables. They gave us a moringa tree to take to Makwawa to plant. The moringa tree's leaves are highly nutritious; the powder made from the dried leaves is a 'superfood' supplement worldwide.

We arrived at the Domasi Mission Secondary School, near Zomba, on the last day of term. The pupils, all boarders were packed to leave and it was very busy. We met up with Manfred and

Loveness, two of the young people that Makwawa Malawi Charity are paying to put through secondary school; only primary education state funded in Malawi. Both of them hope to become doctors. We gave Loveness a lift home with her suitcase and met her family. Her family was very friendly and are subsistence farmers, with no electricity.

It made quite a commotion as we handed out pencils and exercise books to the children transported and paid for by Makwawa Malawi

Finally we arrived at Makwawa, the Belcher residence until 1964 and still a Scout Center, where we were stayed for ten days, I met up with the local village chief, Hamilton, who has recently become the Head Teacher at the local primary school. He has been planning an irrigation project to run water from the Makwawa river into the village. With this water, the villagers will be able to water a second crop and provide a second harvest of maize. We discussed all the requirements and the budget which was successfully put to Robert Belcher for funding approval. The villagers also organised a ceremony of song of dance to give thanks for the maize they had received from the Makwawa Malawi Charity during the last year, when, yet again, for the third year running the maize harvest had been poor due to a disappointing rainy season.

We asked the Secondary School Head Teacher, Madame Gunde, what the school most needed and she requested a new laptop. There were only two in use in the entire school of over 400 pupils and staff. One was missing keys and the other had no battery, which proved difficult considering the regular power cuts that happen in Malawi. We presented the laptop to the Deputy Head on behalf of the Makwawa Malawi Charity.

Madame Gunde was also offered both of us the chance to teach the school leavers, who would be back at school early. Ramona, with an MA in Fine Art, taught an art class and I taught an Introduction to Re-Evaluation Counseling class. It was a delight to teach such vibrant and eager students.

Arrangements were made with the school and the village that Samuel would come and teach them a week long course in Permaculture and both these courses were completed by June 2017. We have heard from the School that the garden they created has feed the school for the last few months and the village have begun to implement some of the principles. This is very encouraging and we hope to carry this project on into the future. The irrigation project budget was not sufficient for it to reach all the village and we hope that 2018 will see this project reach its full potential.

Ramona and I also took the opportunity to visit ancient cave paintings near Dedza and climb the lower slopes of the majestic Mulanji Mountain in the south of Malawi.

We went on safari in Liwonde National Park, to visit Blantyre Museum and of course to 'hang out' on the beach at Cape Maclear. We took a boat trip to Thumbi Island to swim with the chiclids (fresh water tropical fish), common in Lake Malawi and to throw fish out to feed the fish eagles. Malawi is such a beautiful country and the people are genuinely helpful and friendly. It is not for nothing that Malawi is known as the Warm Heart of Africa.

Jaine Raine,
January, 2018.

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