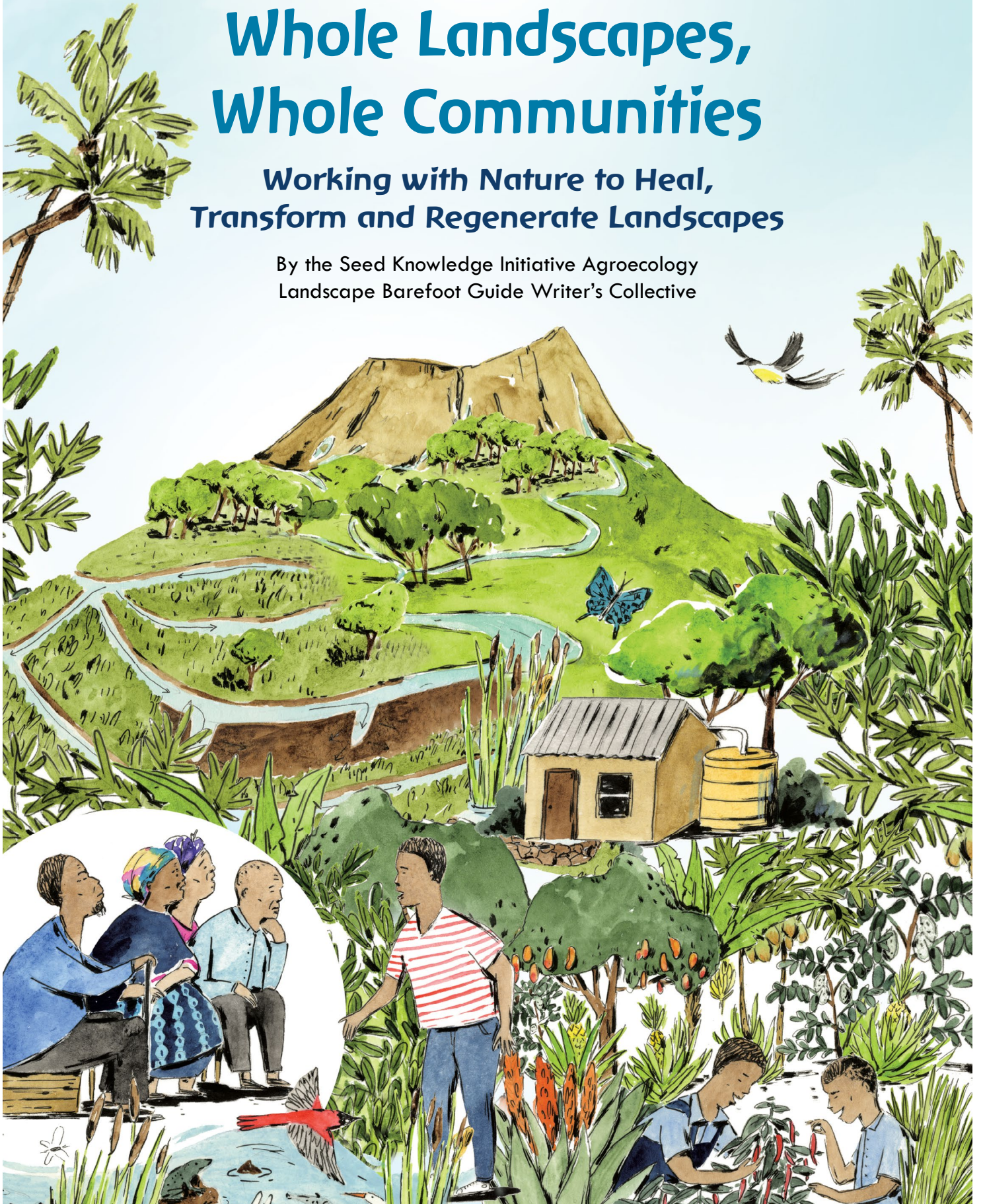


A Mini Barefoot Guide
Agroecology Series

Whole Landscapes, Whole Communities

Working with Nature to Heal,
Transform and Regenerate Landscapes

By the Seed Knowledge Initiative Agroecology
Landscape Barefoot Guide Writer's Collective



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2020



SKI 
Seed and Knowledge Initiative

www.seedandknowledge.org



The SKI Agroecology Landscape Barefoot Guide Writer's Collective

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www.seedandknowledge.org

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The Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) is a dynamic partnership of diverse Southern African organisations committed to securing food sovereignty in the region. We work with smallholder farmers to become more seed, food and nutritionally secure through farmer-led seed systems, improved crop diversity, and the revival of local knowledge systems. While we have relationships with a number of organisations and individuals all over the world, our primary stakeholders are the farmers we work with in Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The initiative started in 2013 and has since grown to include sixteen partner organisations across those four Southern African countries.

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Why we wrote this Guide

The Seed and Knowledge (SKI) partners are spread through four countries in Southern Africa. We have come together to write this Barefoot Guide because we believe that in our region we have to start working at the landscape level if we are going to be climate resilient. Even if this is an ambitious task. We already have the practices for communities to be able to work at the landscape level. What we need now is to work together and link these practices and share our different experiences, and to keep learning.

Everything we do in an environment that is dry for seven months or more, and that often receives rain as hard bursts of great volume, must be geared towards water management. It is about getting every drop of water into the ground, to maximise growth of a diversity of plants. But it is more than this. It is about people reconnecting to their land, to their history, to their culture and to each other. It is about bringing back the values that stem from our connection to Nature, while also using the latest knowledge and understanding, and implementing a holistic approach to managing landscapes. As humanity we also have the opportunity to share stories and learn from each other's successes. This mini-Guide shares the experiences from our Southern African Partners and also brings in valuable lessons from as far afield as Kenya and Burkina Faso.

This mini Barefoot Guide is also an introduction to the SKI partners' journey of landscape-level work with communities in the region. We hope it will help those communities and those working with them to think about why this landscape-level work is important, and how to go about it. We also hope that people elsewhere will read this and start talking about the opportunities we have to change how we think about the future, and how they might go about landscape-level work where they live.



A Message from SKI

Healing the land and healing the people are inseparable aspirations. This book started with a seed of urgency to revive healthy African sustainable systems for farming and eating and to do this so that it will not only benefit communities, but also the wider ecosystems they depend on.

The great unravelling of knowledge and wisdom about the land that is taking place, as we are allowing our agriculture and landscapes to be transformed into lifeless factories, must stop. This guide is a deep dive into the wisdom and knowledge of Africa while also calling for us to look into the future and explore what is needed to regenerate our landscapes and communities.

Agroecology is a science, a practice and a movement. It inspires and resonates with local knowledge systems, with many other holistic and sustainable farming approaches and with the latest scientific knowledge around soil, water, climate and nutrition. Agroecology provides a viable framework for implementing the practices that will restore the reciprocal relationship between farms and the ecosystem they are situated within. It is vital that we shift our focus beyond individual farms and think like a landscape, think like a river, think like a community.

Regenerating landscapes starts with building community relationships, invoking ownership, and crafting a shared vision for the future. This guide is pointing us in the direction of that hopeful future.

Welcome Dear Readers ...



Greetings, I am Madalitso, an Earth Law facilitator from Malawi. Since I began this work and learnt more about my responsibility to the earth and how everything is connected, I have become inspired to share my knowledge. So, today I am here with my colleague Tawana to take you on a journey through the world of natural landscape management.

Hello, I am Tawana. I was a research student at the National Herbarium and Botanic Garden in Harare. Now I'm involved in Earth Law to help people better understand the impact that we have on the landscape and how we can restore its life and vitality.



Our work has brought us to understand and appreciate farming that is inspired by Nature. We have learned how to combine local knowledge with scientific knowledge, and to apply ecological and social approaches to agricultural systems. We are much more aware of the interactions between plants, animals, humans, and the environment and how we can be part of the healing of our damaged landscapes.

Earth Law or Earth Jurisprudence

is an approach that recognises that humans are only one part of a wider community of living beings. The welfare of each member of that community is dependent on the welfare of the Earth as a whole. Earth Law states that human societies will only work and flourish if they see themselves as part of this wider Earth community.

In this book you will meet people who will inspire you with real stories of how to transform the damaged lands of our communities into bountiful landscapes in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya and Burkina Faso.

Our story begins in the Chimanimani District in South-Eastern Zimbabwe. From the craggy hills the land rises to form the great, ragged Chimanimani mountains, forming part of the border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Over 150 000 people live there, mostly part of farmer families.

In the second week of March 2019, Cyclone Idai gathered her forces over the Indian ocean. She swept across the Mozambique flats to the Chimanimani mountains. By all accounts more than 500mm of rain fell during the night of Friday 15th March and into the next day. Houses and schools were damaged, trees were uprooted, and collapsed building rubble,

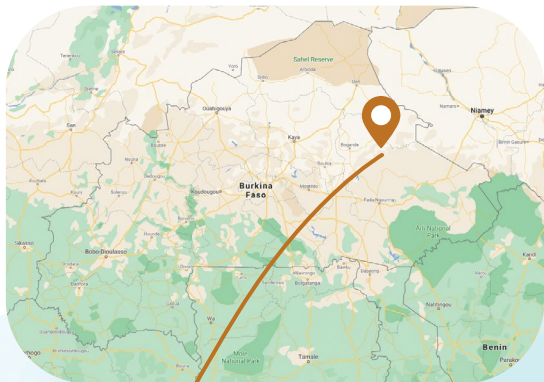
huge stones and boulders created rivers of stones that flooded the defenceless communities, leaving them devastated. 157 people died and 300 were declared missing.

As part of our Environment Leadership programme, we called an Earth Law workshop in Chimanimani, with twenty-five young people from many parts of Southern Africa. We wanted them to witness first-hand the impact of the cyclone on the lives and livelihoods of the people of Chimanimani and on the land itself.

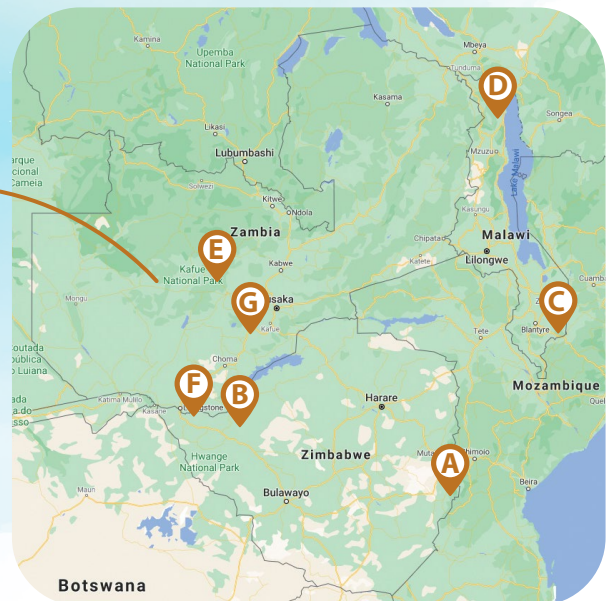
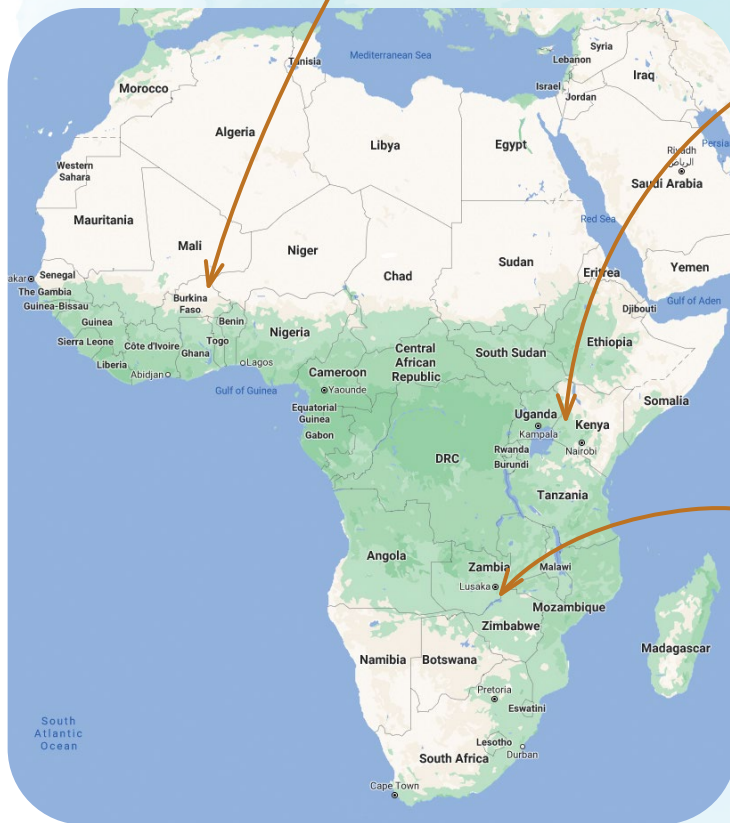
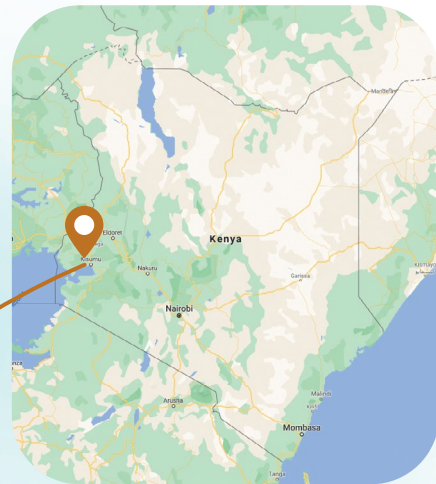
The group arrived in the late afternoon and after supper we gathered in the church hall and the workshop began. We decided to begin with the big story, inviting Amai Mercy, one of the schoolteachers in the town, to describe her experience during Cyclone Idai.

Maps of Places in the Stories in this Guide

Kokouogou Village in East Burkina Faso



Julius Astiva's Food Forest, Western Kenya



- A** Kopa, Chimanmani, Zimbabwe
- B** Magoli community, Hwange, Zimbabwe
- C** Mulanje Mountain, Malawi
- D** Lwatizi School in Livingstonia, Malawi

- E** Mwabula Village, Mumbwa district, Zambia
- F** Jambezi, Western Zimbabwe
- G** Monze District, Southern Zambia

Landscapes and life

Cyclone Idai creates rivers of stone

AMAI MERCY'S STORY

The rain had been beating down hard on the tin roof of my small house for more than six hours. I was unable to sleep. When I heard knocking on the front door I jumped out of bed and ran to see who was there. "What was anyone doing out in these rains?" I wondered.

Huddled at the front door were Farai and Zachariah, my neighbour's sons, aged eight and ten. I hustled them into the house and quickly closed the door against the driving rain.

They were soaked. I told them to take off their clothes and gave them each a towel to dry themselves and my son's pyjamas to wear.

"What happened?" I asked them gently.

"Part of our house has broken apart," answered Zachariah, the older of the two.

I listened quietly, while making them some sweet tea and bread. They were obviously in shock. They then described how they'd woken up when they heard a loud noise and saw part of their bedroom wall gone, with a gaping hole open to the dark, wet night.

Farai started to cry.

"We don't know where our mother is," explained Zachariah. "The room where she was sleeping is completely gone."

"What?! What do you mean?" I asked in shock.

"It is no longer there," said Farai, weeping. "Where's mum?"

I went to the front door, opened it carefully and leant out to look towards my neighbour's house. I blinked. There was nothing there. The whole house had been washed away and instead there was a raging torrent of water. I shut the door, shaking, and turned to the two boys. "We have to go quickly," I said, noticing the panic in my voice. "This house is now in danger." I rushed to the bedroom, grabbed some blankets from a cupboard, and put them in a large plastic bag. I gave the two boys a jersey each and told them to wrap the towels around themselves.





We plunged out into the pouring rain. I had never experienced rain as cold as the rain that night. I held Farai's hand and told Zachariah to hold the other and not let go. We headed away from the torrent of water and quickly reached one of the main roads.

We turned left and headed up the steep slope. There were streams of water rushing down on either side, so we stuck to the middle. The earthen road was slippery, and we kept falling and getting up. I was aware of a few people going the other way, but kept my head down, determined to reach higher ground with the two boys.

One of the passers-by said, "Go to the Catholic Church at the top." Slipping and sliding our way up we eventually arrived at the church door. There were many people already inside. I found a space and took out the blankets, told the boys to take off their soaked jerseys, and wrapped them up. They were shivering uncontrollably, their eyes were full of terror. After some moments I looked around. People were moving everywhere, and I noticed a group of young men carrying someone in. An older woman said to them, "Is she still alive?"

"Yes," one of the men answered. "Then put her over there," said the woman pointing to a corner of the church.

More young men came in carrying someone else. This person was dead and so they put him in another corner.

The rain continued all night and well into the next day. The same, relentless, non-stop rain. Young men and women kept bringing people in.... if alive in one corner, if dead in another corner of the church. I will never, ever forget that night. It went on and on.



When Amai Mercy finished her story, she sat down quietly, wiping the tears from her face. The group of twenty-five young people was silent. No one knew what to say.

The consequences of our “Factory Minds”



Amai Mercy's story that evening was a difficult start, and everyone went to bed quietly soon after. The next day we took the group to Kopa. This was once a bustling village and business hub of more than four hundred and fifty people. Now there were just ruins covered by huge rocks that had been washed down the river or tumbled down from the mountains during the storm. Some grass and bushes were pushing through the hard soil. All was still, except for some lone figures wandering through the piles of boulders.

As the group climbed out of the two mini-van taxis, one of the young women in the group exclaimed, “Where is Kopa, then?”

“This is it. This is what was Kopa,” I responded.

All that could be seen of Kopa was a wide riverbed of boulders, sand and stones. Soil that had obviously washed down from higher up was spread everywhere. There was no sign of human habitation apart from the wreck of a car in the distance.

“Over two hundred and fifty people from Kopa are still listed as missing. Their bodies have never been found,” Tawana continued.

Members of the group looked at each other, wondering what to think or say. Leaning forward, I asked: “This afternoon we’ve travelled down to this spot from Chimanimani town. Water always travels down too. This destruction is a direct result of what has happened higher up in this catchment. But, what did you notice on the way here?”

Mphatso, a young man from Zambia, spoke up, “One of the first things we passed were pine trees covering the land to the horizon. Then we passed a big area where pine trees had been cut down and the land was bare.”

“As environmentalists did you observe anything on that land?” asked Tawana.

“Yes,” answered Chifundo, a young Malawian woman. “You could see soil erosion. The cyclone ripped that bare land apart. Should we be growing exotic trees like pines?”

“Why not?” answered Thembi, from South Africa. “We can’t blame the pine tree. It is a valuable tree. Think of all the uses we put it to. The problem is how we grow pine trees. We see the land as some kind of factory and plant pine trees everywhere without understanding the needs of the landscape. We have to start understanding landscapes in a much more connected way. Nature does not work like a factory!”



“But how could pine trees fit into that? I just don’t see it,” answered Chifundo.

Thembi answered quickly, “The landscape should be designed carefully. Within that design smallholder farmers could grow small areas of pine trees, for example, with a jointly owned company to mill them.”

“Thembi is right, I believe, and his use of the word ‘factory’ quite accurate,” I said, impressed. “We have planned landscapes all over our region using

a ‘factory mind’ or a ‘machine mind’. Roads are put in and ditches are made to protect the road. There is no thought of the overall landscape connected to the road. We build housing settlements and storm drains to flush the water away from them, not thinking what then happens to that water. We also don’t think carefully about how we place settlements in the landscape. How could they have placed a settlement here like Kopa close to where three rivers meet? It was a disaster waiting to happen.”

What communities knew

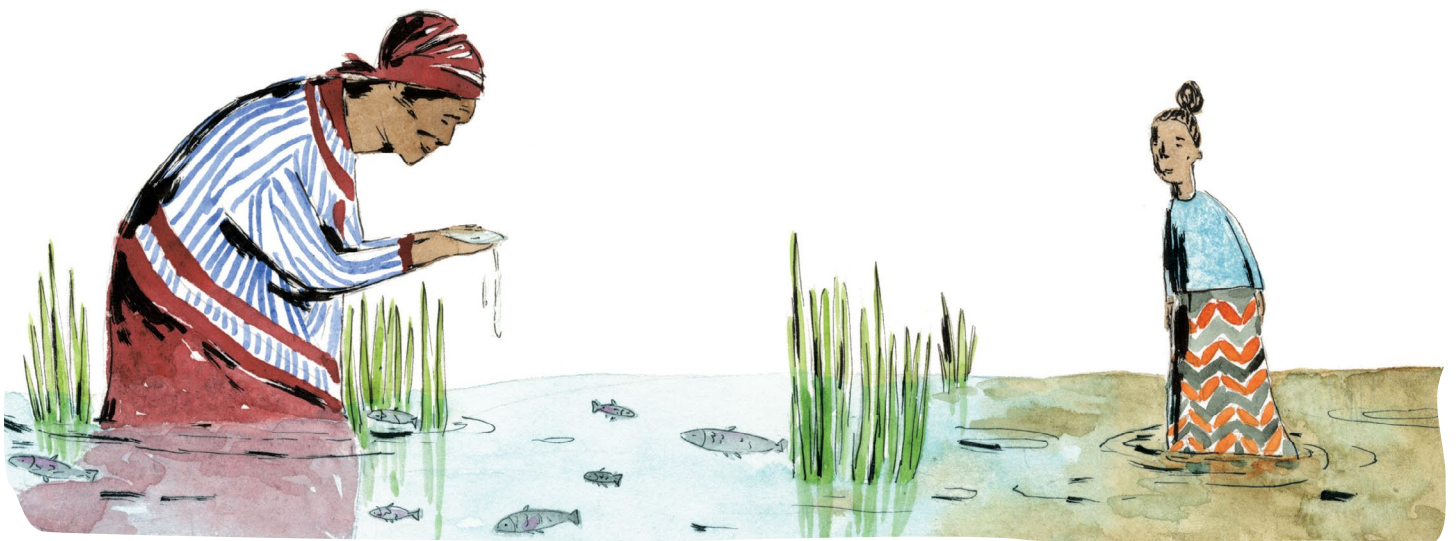
“Isn’t the problem also that no-one ever spoke to local communities about what they know and think?” asked Joyce. “I’ll bet you that local communities knew and interacted with their landscapes in the past. They had a reverence for the land that the colonisers couldn’t see and which the modern era has lost. We only think of what we can get or take from the land, not how to live respectfully within it. There used to be sacred natural sites everywhere as part of the communities’ connection to their land.”

Sacred natural sites are areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to people and communities. They are also often places of great biological diversity. Linked to this biological diversity is the culture and history of communities who have cared for sacred natural sites, often for hundreds of years.

“You’re sentimental, Joyce,” said Henry before she could go on. “We can’t go back to those days.”

“I agree we can’t go back but as we go forward, we can revive those practices that restore our connection to Nature. Having sacred natural sites is one such practice,” answered Joyce. “Communities must be at the forefront of regenerating their own landscapes. It can’t be a top down thing from outside experts.”

Tawana described how soils across Southern Africa have been degrading and eroding for many years, because of practices such as clearing all trees to grow crops and how cattle are managed. Now most rivers are filled and blocked with sand. “Many of our elders will tell you how the rivers used to run all year round, bursting with life. There were many fish in the rivers and even crocodiles and hippos at times.”



“The sad thing is we all take water runoff for granted now.” I added, “And in addition to this runoff and erosion of soils, many soils have degraded due to the practice of ploughing. This destroys the structure of the soil, which means water can’t infiltrate easily and so it runs off.”

“It is a downward spiral of soil destruction,” lamented Joyce.

The Problem with Modern Farming Methods

Ploughing inverts the soil resulting in carbon being lost to the air. Carbon is essential for healthy, climate resilient soil. Ploughing also destroys fungi that create soil structure. Chemical fertilisers and pesticides add to this destruction of the soil by killing the micro-organisms that create good soil structure. The end result is soil that has little structure and a hardened surface that prevents rainfall soaking in, increasing erosion and runoff.

Looking at whole landscapes

“I heard that what we call contour ditches in Zimbabwe,” said Chipo, “are in fact diversion ditches to take water away from fields. They are not on level contours at all. The colonial government, in their top-down manner, made them compulsory to have in your field. While they may have helped stop gully formation they did not stop the loss of runoff water.”

The value of level contours

A proper contour is formed by joining all the points in a landscape that are at the same level. Effective water harvesting practices use these dead-level contours to dig horizontal ditches for catching, slowing down and sinking water. Water running down the soil surface is destructive. Water that sinks into the soil is productive.

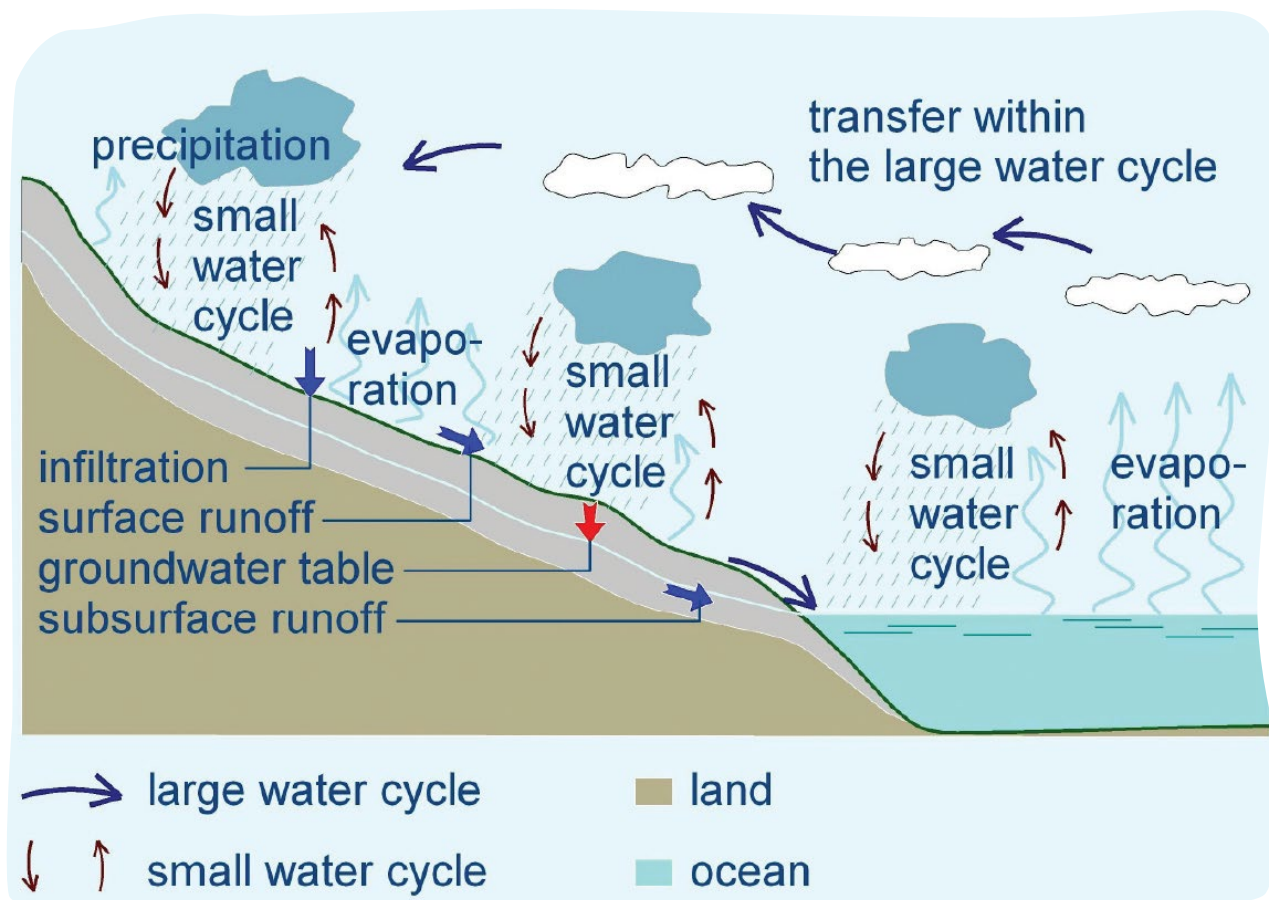
“You are right,” said Tawana, “These diversion drains were an example of treating a symptom. There was no thought about managing the landscape, and how the field is connected to its surroundings. In my area, people have cut trees at the top of the hill and now they complain that their springs have stopped, and the fields are dry. In the past there used to be strict controls on who and where people could cut trees because our ancestors understood the bigger connections between things.”

“Exactly! Living landscapes are interconnected.” I added, “We need to look at how to manage landscapes in an interconnected way. Everything is connected to everything else. We have to keep reminding ourselves of this when we think about landscapes.”

We walked quietly to the two waiting mini-vans and climbed in. I could tell that they were still in shock to see a once bustling business centre with shops, government offices, homes, gardens flattened by a river of stones. Even though they had not experienced such devastation back home, they knew that their own landscapes were slowly dying, suffering the same fate, brought about by ‘factory mind’ thinking that fails to appreciate how nature works.



Big Water Cycles and Small Water Cycles



(Illustration: from *Water for the Recovery of the Climate - A New Water Paradigm* by M. Kravčík, J. Pokorný, J. Kohutiar, M. Kovác, E. Tóth, 2007, page 20)

There are two kinds of water cycle: the big water cycle and the small water cycle.

The big water cycle is the one we hear most about. That is the cycle that brings water from the oceans. In Africa what we all know as the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) drives this.

What people often do not think about are the small water cycles. In a healthy inland environment away from the sea, up to 40% of the rainwater that

falls does not originate in the sea. It comes largely from the transpiration of trees, grasses, crops, and any plants that are alive.

So, the less trees, grasses, crops and other plants that are growing, the less of this water falls as rain. Furthermore, it is the multitudes of tiny bacteria blowing up into the sky from the leaves of trees that most effectively condense water vapour into raindrops. Healthy landscapes thus create their own rain.

Landscape Management

The wisdom of the elders



Madalitso, thank you for sharing this shocking story of Cyclone Idai in Chimanimani. What a dramatic lesson about the importance of working with landscapes! Now, dear readers, it is my turn to take you to a meeting of all ages on the other side of the country, where our young people ask the elders to tell them what life and the land was like in former years.

The cool morning air brushed our cheeks, announcing the change in season as we walked towards the group of young people who had arrived early in the Magoli community in Hwange District in the west of Zimbabwe. They were chatting together in the shade of a large mahogany tree. Madalitso and I were there to facilitate an encounter between local young people and village elders.

The idea for this meeting arose out of conversations with the young people at our Earth Law workshop in Chimanimani. We had discussed the importance of living in harmony with nature and respecting each aspect of the earth as part of a living community. We had looked at the role of the rivers, and how, for many years, we have been planting trees with a factory-mind, forgetting how connected life is.

The young people remembered stories their grandmothers and grandfathers told of rivers filled with fish and a variety of birds sitting on the reeds.

And of plentiful harvests. Now, the fields were empty, the rivers were either silent or angry and the soil was baked hard and lifeless.

So, Joyce, Thulani and Henry, participants in the Chimanimani workshop from Magoli, shared their experience of the workshop at their local church youth club. This group then decided to host this workshop of all ages. They also invited the local Nechilibi Secondary School students to join them.

They wanted to hear again the stories of how their village had been long ago, to refresh their memories and to learn how their elders had managed their landscapes to harness water. They wanted to listen to how they encouraged and thrived in biodiversity and how they built their communities to be resilient, living in harmony with their surroundings.



The elders and the youth, the past and the future, meet at last

Senior village head Ncube opened the meeting. He welcomed everyone and then proceeded to pray. His prayer was the same prayer waiting on all our lips.

“Dear Lord, help our weak hands and hearts and give us courage to stand together. Not for ourselves only, but for those whose lives depend on what we decide to do now. We have lost the wisdom you gave us. Today our ancestors’ graves are out in the sun, because of the lost trees. Give us strength and understanding today, so that we may rebuild what has been broken down, that we can find again what we have lost. May our hearts be open, and our ears listen to the stories here today. Amen.”

And then the process began. While some of the young people organised themselves into writing, drawing and singing groups, others worked on preparing the meal we would later share. Madalitso and I spoke with the elders, asking them to decide who would tell their stories. We asked that they help the young people to learn about the past by describing the landscape, the festivals and celebrations, the

food, the birds and the plants. Thankfully, we had decided on an open-air meeting, because the energy, excitement and voices rose higher as the elders became immersed in reminding each other of the stories of their past. It was almost impossible to get them back to the main meeting.

We were ready to begin the sharing, but the excitement and talking was difficult to contain. Suddenly Gogo Mamoyo got up. Her tiny body was frail and wrinkled from age and hard work, but her eyes were bright. Slowly she began to sing a song my grandmother used to sing. She started softly, and soon the others joined in. Their deep voices, filled with memories of sorrow and joy, echoed under the canopy of the great mahogany tree.

The song spoke of King Lobengula crossing the Shangani river and being taken by the flood. It says the Shangani has many waters that would take care of generations. That is why it could sweep away a king.

The Song from Gogo Moyo

Kudala Kwakungenje,
(Things were not like this long ago)

Umhlab’uyaphenduka
(The world has really been changing)

Kwakubus’ uMambo loMzilikazi
(We were ruled by Mambo and Mzilikazi)

Sawela kuShangani,
(We crossed Shangani River)

saguqa ngamadolo
(The water flooded, and we looked like we were kneeling)

Inkos’ uLobengula yasinyamalala
(Our King Lobengula disappeared in the flood)

Oh kwasekusin’ izulu,
(Oh it rained)

Yasinyamalala—
(and He the King disappeared)]



The stories of the elders pour forth

Then the moment of storytelling began. The students took out their notebooks and pencils, ready to hear, write down and draw whatever they could.

One by one, the elders started to talk of the past and as they spoke they transformed in front of our eyes. They seemed almost young as they went back on their journey to a dreamland of youth, plenty and safety. We watched and listened in awe, disbelief, admiration, and yearning, as they took turns to share their stories.



Gogo Aneni

I remember how the Siamulavu River used to flow with abundant clean water and life. On hot October days, my brothers and I would jump into the river. All the children in the neighbourhood would be there swimming and fooling around. Then we would dry off in the late sun on our way home, laughing and joking, each with a fish in hand for supper.

Gogo MaZondo

What I loved was when I could go with my mother and her friends to collect thatching grass. There were stipulated times for harvesting thatching grass, and in that time the herdsmen knew not to let livestock go to these areas before we harvested. The grass grew and flourished all around our village, so the women didn't have to camp in faraway places to gather the grass. They would sing and share stories as they collected grass to thatch the roofs and to make brooms and baskets. They went out in the morning, some with babies on their backs, others with freshly baked bread made from millet and sorghum (called amaqebelengwana) and groundnuts in bags to share. And then they would be back in time for the afternoon meal of maize, rapoko and wild mushroom soup.

Elder Ncube

Yes, I remember when we walked in the fields with our sticks and knives, to find bulbs and aloe leaves. We would easily see bushbuck, eland and sable antelope grazing and we would hear the baboons barking in the mountains. We were sometimes afraid of walking at night because of the wild cats. We would count ourselves lucky if we spotted the blue swallows making their nests in the holes dug by the aardvark or ant bear.

Mr Munkuli *We had chickens, goats and sheep. My father and uncles planned our homesteads well, making sure that the women and children were safe, with enough space to keep the animals inside enclosures. The grandfathers would find and inspect pastures, showing the young men where and when to move the animals to new pasture. There was good neighbourliness, and everything was negotiated and agreed upon, so there were few disputes.*

Mr Lunga *Yes, I remember old Mr Ngaki who had a herd of over 200 cattle. He was a wealthy man whose home was everyone's dream. There was always a celebration taking place at his house, and everyone was always invited. We would all sit outside under the mahogany and teak trees telling stories, dancing, and playing games. As children we looked after Mr. Ngaki's cattle, because we knew that he would reward us with rich meat stew and sadza.*

To us listening, this seemed like fiction. We knew amongst ourselves that currently the village could barely carry sixty cattle, let alone goats and sheep.



Then elder-man Ndukwana stood up in the middle of the crowd. His face was serious and unsmiling, turning the whole mood of the meeting.

“Traditionally we had standing rules and orders from the Chief and the elders of our day. I remember my grandfather saying I should not pound the ground because my mother would break her back! It was only later that I realised that we should be careful how we tilled the ground, because when it rained, topsoil would be washed away. Our land lost its value and has the gullies we see today. This was not the only ‘myth’ or taboo, there were many other rules. We managed our relationship with rivers, mountains, wildlife, cropping and harvest. But what changed? I’m not sure I know; but I do know that it was beautiful.”

As the stories continued, the students wrote down anecdotes, descriptions, and drawings of people dancing, healthy children playing, vibrant local economies, lush grasses, rivers, birds and the wildlife being spoken about. The story telling was dotted with singing - describing the landscape and expressing the joy that filled the hearts of those that lived in those times.

Ndukwana's words caused many elders to look down, as though to say they were sorry. Sorry for having lost the wisdom, sorry for having been misled, sorry for what was no more. There was a desperate longing to bring it all back. But one by one, the elders began to say that what has gone has gone but that there had to be another way of bringing back landscape health for all living things, including the people of Magoli and beyond.



The elders acknowledged that they had lost the relationship with their surroundings as things kept changing. People flocked to the towns and cities as land was turned to urbanised use and industrial agricultural practices, robbing the soil and the communities of life and livelihood.

Truth or fiction? A moment of reckoning...

Up to this point, the young people had all been silent, either writing, drawing or just listening. Then Thulani stood up.

“I can't believe that the elders can be so untruthful. All we have ever known is a lifeless community. People are leaving homes in ruins as the young run to the city for better lives. A few of us remain. There is no way that such abundance ever existed. There is just no way! Could the ancestors or God be mad at us, and why? Because it sounds like we are under a spell. This is too much for me to accept!”

The elders looked at the young man with sadness, trying to persuade him that their stories were true – that there once was abundance on this very land!

Thulani quietly spoke, “When we were in Chimanimani, we saw and heard painful stories of how water killed people and swept away homes and soil and left them as refugees in the land of their birth. Yet in this part of the country, the skies decided to keep the rains to themselves,

and the little rain we had ran off, wasted! So, how possible is it for us to achieve again that picture from the stories? How can we ever get it back! How possible is it to bring back the abundant landscape?”

Ludo stood up, “It is clear that everyone agrees there is no way back to the old way of living. Things have declined too much. We cannot bring back the past, however if I remember Baba Ndukwana's statement, we can bring good from the past. Can we not borrow the values and attitudes they had. Our culture had positive things that we can use even today.”

One elder blurted out, “The world has changed so much and so many of our cultural practices have been watered down. We have all lost the old ways!”



A future story begins to sprout

One of the students, Twalumba, jumped to her feet.

“I know that a lot of misfortune has been brought by letting go of the old ways and diluting our culture, but new ways of learning and communicating with each other are possible. In school, we’ve been learning that there is hope for landscape management to produce food and fibre. Today’s world has brilliant people, organisations and communities who have experimented and discovered real solutions. Are we not able to restore many good values and practices from the past AND embrace new knowledge? Let us learn how others,

who have suffered like us, are coming out of their troubles. I want to, don’t you?”

Twalumba’s words echoed through the trees as everyone paid attention to her. They nodded, agreeing that being open to learn what others are doing seemed like a good way forward.

At this point I stepped forward. The air had cleared. A new possibility was opening. The students met and came back with new intentions written on sheets of newsprint:

We will -

1. go out and collect stories of success and good practice from people and communities in our countries and across the African region.
2. come back and share the different practices with you and our communities.

The elders and young people in the community agreed that next time they met they would dare to embrace a new dawn in managing their farms and wider landscapes!

They also asked the committee to invite influential people to the next meeting, who could partner with the community and support the new practices going forward.

Then Gogo Mamoyo started singing and the whole group joined in - young and old. And on that joyful note the meeting closed. The warmth and sense of community continued as we all gathered together to share a meal provided by each household that came to the meeting. We went home nourished both in our tummies and hearts. It felt that the change was already beginning.



The lamenting is over

Where are people regenerating landscapes?

Welcome back and thanks to Tawana for her stories from the elders of Magoli. Today we go to Malawi to begin investigating landscape initiatives that promise to restore the land and some of the memories of the elders and dreams of the youth. No more lamenting! We are here to see what is possible! Enjoy!



We have gathered for our second Environment Leadership meeting in Southern Malawi, at a local retreat, about 60km south-east of Blantyre. During our time here, we will be sharing stories from across the African region and then go on a three-day hike on Mount Mulanje. When we arrived, we could see the peaks of the impressive mountain range rising sharply from the surrounding plains of Phalombe. We know that the land around the reserve is threatened by forest clearing for farming and firewood, as well as by several invasive species. But we are still excited because we know that the mountain reserve is filled with forest butterflies and birds, such as the White-winged Apalis and the Cholo Alethe, named after a nearby town. We are also hoping to see dwarf chameleons, geckos, the squeaker frog, and a rare limbless, burrowing lizard on our walk. There is much to look forward to.

The landscapes of Mt. Mulanje

serve as a water tank for the surrounding communities in Malawi and Mozambique. As long as land is healthy the high rainfall will continue to be captured, sinking into the soils of the Mt. Mulanje massif. The mountain releases the water slowly into the many streams and rivers that run off the mountain. Hundreds of thousands of people depend on this clean water.

The same twenty-five young people, with Tawana and I, are sitting on benches in a circle under a giant Msamba Fumu tree. The group arrived late last night from their various homes around Southern Africa. They are eager to share the many stories they have brought. I began:

“At the end of our last meeting in Chimanimani, we realised that most societies and communities have a destructive relationship with the land, living off the land rather than living with it. We agreed to study environmental impacts on the land, to see what role we could play in restoring it back to life.

We also agreed to look for examples of where people are reversing the terrible damage done to our landscapes.”



Chifundo's Story: Using permaculture to re-imagine the land



“Chifundo, could we start with you?”

“Yes,” said Chifundo, jumping up with that big smile of hers.

Lwatizi School, in Livingstonia in northern Malawi, is an inspiring example of managing landscapes. In the past, students spent the first hour sweeping the dusty ground to keep the school ‘clean’. They were taught that sweeping dust like this was responsible and ‘normal’.

Now they are part of the ‘Whole School Approach to Greening Schools’ Programme. SCOPE, the organisation running this programme, aims to help the children see and behave in a new way. They bring the whole school community together and help them discover how rich they are in resources. They start by helping the school to create a vision for their school. Then they learn the skills they need, ranging from permaculture, to seed saving and integrated land use design, to growing natural medicines, and carrying out value addition into products for sale, running a business, and marketing. Next, they develop an action plan.

Today the school has a beautiful orchard, full of diverse fruit trees, such as bananas, papayas, soursop, mangoes, granadilla, and pineapples. Mixed amongst these are a variety of medicinal herbs like lemongrass and different aloes. Instead of dust and swept soil, they now grow chillies and paprika, processing them into powder and ointments to sell at the local market to generate funds. They are becoming a holistic school that meets nearly all the students’ needs. Many of the parents are learning from their children and doing similar things at home!

PERMACULTURE – What is it?

Permaculture, or permanent culture, is an approach that brings together a set of techniques to design our lives and activities for long-term sustainability in harmony with nature’s patterns. Permaculture Design views the world through a lens of the interconnectedness of living systems. Everything is connected to everything else.

A few of the techniques used in Permaculture Design:

- Agroforestry, which is the use of trees in farming
- Seeing wastes as resources to be used again, recycled, and conserved
- Natural earth building techniques such as rammed earth
- Maintaining maximum ground cover by using a variety of mulching techniques
- Zero tillage and dry planting which help to maintain healthy soil structure
- Intercropping, companion planting and mixed cropping techniques
- Integrated land use design which builds connections between the elements on the land



Juliet's Story: Strengthening farmers' seed systems

"Chifundo, that was great! I wish I had gone to a school like that," I said. "Who's next?"

"I can go next!" exclaimed an enthusiastic Juliet.

"I was lucky enough to visit Mwabula Village in Mumbwa district in central Zambia with a friend who works there. She's helping them strengthen everything to do with their seed – growing, harvesting, storing and exchanging."

"I buy all my seed from a shop. That is where you get good quality seed, isn't it?" stated Themba.

"Farmers grow most of their own seeds across Africa. They save it each year and then use it again the next year," Juliet answered. "Think of all the seeds your grandmother and mother used to save, Themba. I'm sure they had cowpeas, groundnuts, bambara nuts, many different kinds of beans, finger millet, sorghum, pearl millet and more."

"I guess you're right. I was thinking about maize seed."

"That's the problem. When we think of food, we think maize, but food is much more than maize. Food is all those different crops. In Mwabula village they did the same, forgetting all those crops and growing maize. Luckily, there were three women in the village who continued to grow all those crops and saved the seed.

"Others began to see sense and a Mwabula seed group was born. The Chief gave them land to demonstrate on. They also set up a seed bank to store their seed, as well as saving seed at their homes.

"We visited Mwabula village at the time of their annual seed fair. It was a celebration with songs, dancing and drumming. Before the celebration people exchanged seed and shared planting information. I was amazed at the diversity of seed on show, and the in-depth knowledge people had on how they grow, the taste, how to store seed well, any medicinal properties and so on. That knowledge has come from generations of experience. If we are going to talk about work on landscapes, we have to start with seed!"



Chipo's Story: Farming naturally in Julius Astiva's food forest

"If it is OK with all of you I'm going to read this story I wrote about Julius Astiva's food forest in western Kenya for our school newspaper," said Chipo shyly. Everyone nodded in encouragement.

My Adventure in Baba Astiva's Food Forest

Ferdinand drew up on the edge of the road and turned off the motorbike's engine. I jumped off and followed him down the hill towards a house hidden amongst trees.

"Hodi," called out Ferdinand, "Baba Astiva, are you at home?"

The main door of the house opened sharply. Out came a man with a huge smile. "Welcome," he said, "And who have you brought this time?" he asked.

"This is a good friend, Chipo, from Zimbabwe," replied Ferdinand. "When I told her about what you are doing on your two-acre farm, she said she had to come and see it.

She's part of an Environment Leadership programme in southern Africa."

"Welcome," Julius exclaimed. "Before I take you around my farm, let me give you some background." I nodded in agreement.

"About twenty years ago, I decided to give up teaching at a small agricultural college and become a full-time farmer. Everyone thought I was mad. Perhaps I was! I'd inherited this farm from my father, quite similar to other farms around here. Maize production twice per year had replaced the naturally thick vegetation. I could see how tired the soil

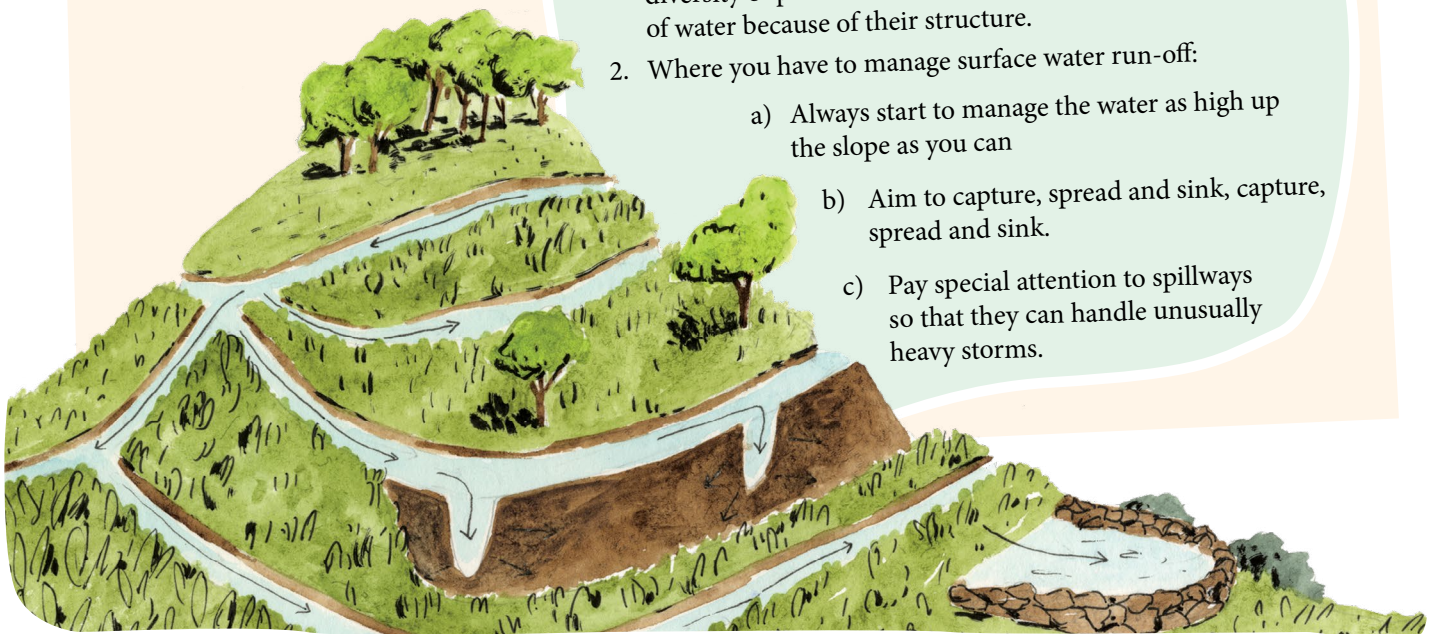
was. Soon after I moved back there was a big rainstorm and I saw how much of the rain poured off the land. It went down into the stream at the bottom of my farm at the beginning of its journey to the ocean."

Water harvesting: capture, spread and sink

"My first job then was to ensure that I capture every drop of rain into the ground. I did this in a variety of ways, combining contour ditches and large pits filled with vegetation. It was trial and error at first but always following the basic principles of water harvesting."

The basic principles of water harvesting:

1. Work towards healthy covered soil everywhere with a diversity of plants. Such soils can infiltrate huge amounts of water because of their structure.
2. Where you have to manage surface water run-off:
 - a) Always start to manage the water as high up the slope as you can
 - b) Aim to capture, spread and sink, capture, spread and sink.
 - c) Pay special attention to spillways so that they can handle unusually heavy storms.



"At the same time, I started digging a fishpond at the lower end of my farm. I needed sources of income in the short term. I thought that the water captured in the ground would work its way underground down the slope and fill my pond. I was right. The pond filled in the first year and I added another the following year. Ever since then, fish have been a good source of income for me.

"I divided my farm into sections and grew different kinds of plants throughout. Some for short term income and food, some for fruit, timber trees, and trees for making charcoal. Come, I

think we need to make a tour of the farm. That will give you a better idea than me talking."

Creating a food forest

Julius Astiva set off at a pace and I ran to keep up with him. He was obviously a man of boundless energy. We entered a lush forest and Julius stopped to explain what surrounded us. There were trees of every kind, avocados, tree tomatoes, granadillas creeping everywhere, trees for charcoal and a pit nearby in which he made this high value product. Some of the charcoal he used with his homemade biofertiliser to improve his soil. Some he sold. He was

convinced this was going to become a high value product for soil improvement.

Vegetable diversity and annual crops

Then we moved into what was obviously a vegetable area, packed with different species, many of which I recognised as 'weeds'. They were mixed together.

"How many different species do you have here?" I asked.

"More than a hundred," he said. "I'm often asked that question and tried to count once!"



On we moved to the next section where he had maize growing. Intercropped with the maize were cowpeas and pumpkins and another bean plant that I did not recognise at first.

"What's that?" I asked.

"That's velvet bean," Julius answered. "I plant them much later in the season. Once I've harvested cowpeas and

pumpkins it takes over and keeps growing over the maize, long after the rains have stopped. It must have deep roots. It is my soil improver. It feeds all those tiny creatures in the soil that make soil healthy and alive. We call them microbes. They are my workers and it is important to keep feeding your workers if you want them to work well for you."

Green manuring/cover cropping

Often just referred to as gm/cc, this is a practice to feed and build up healthy soils, and to keep it moist for longer periods. The main aim of gm/cc is to create a good home for soil microbes and to feed them. If we do that, they will make the soil healthy. The other aim for gm/cc is to provide food for us to eat. Fortunately, there are several plants that allow us to do both things. As we improve our farming, gm/cc is an especially important practice for all cropping areas.

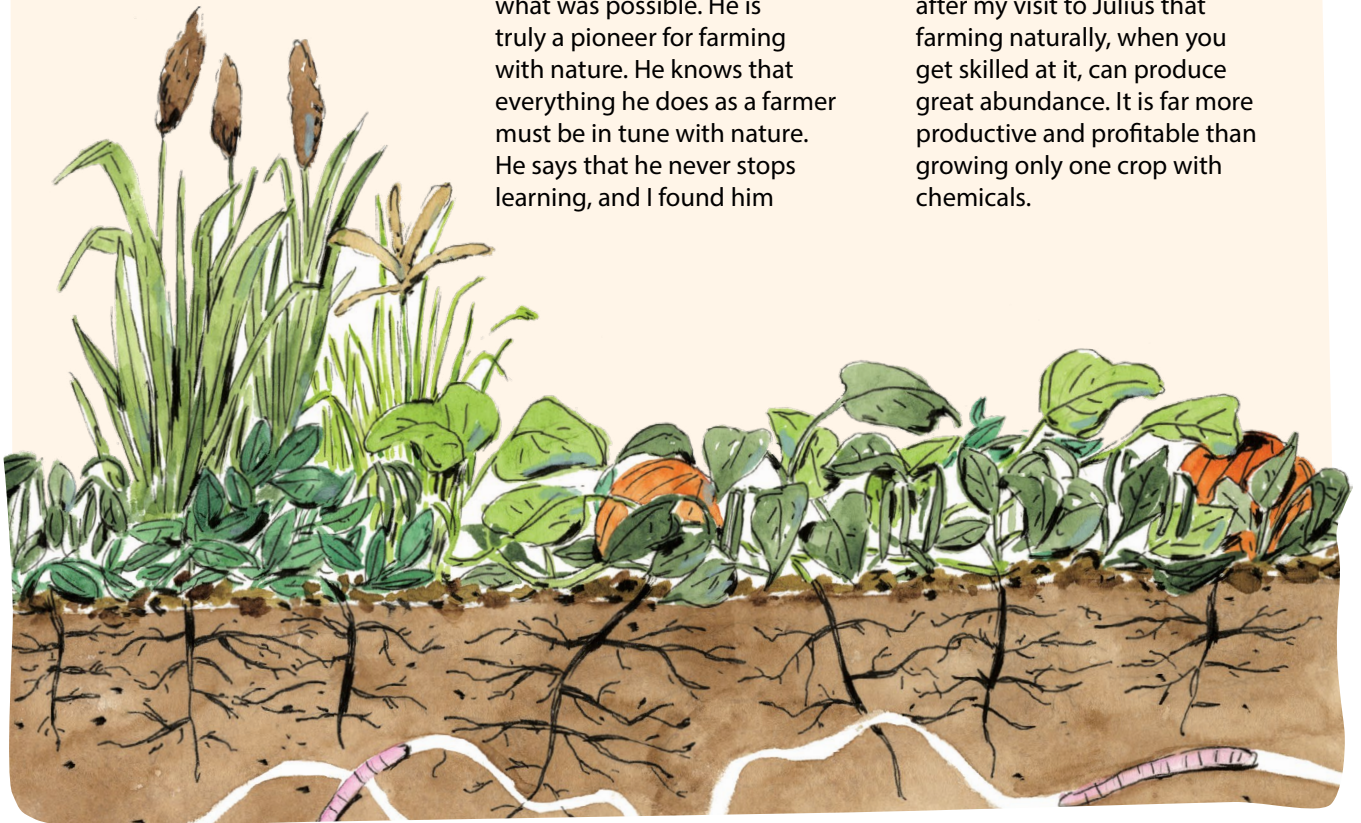
The basic principles to follow if you want healthy soil

1. Always keep the soil as covered as possible
2. Leave the soil unbroken, tilling as little as possible
3. Have green plants growing for as much of the year as possible. Green plants feed the microbes in the soil through their roots
4. Have as much diversity of plants as possible, the more the better

Most practices promoted during the 20th century do the opposite of all these principles; these principles reflect what you find in healthy natural situations such as a forest.

I was amazed and inspired. Julius Astiva had shown me what was possible. He is truly a pioneer for farming with nature. He knows that everything he does as a farmer must be in tune with nature. He says that he never stops learning, and I found him

bubbling with ideas on how he can improve. I realised after my visit to Julius that farming naturally, when you get skilled at it, can produce great abundance. It is far more productive and profitable than growing only one crop with chemicals.



Thembi's Story: FMNR reaches out across huge areas in West Africa

Thembi was next. He had decided to investigate something called Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) that many farmers across West Africa are using, resulting in thousands of hectares having much more tree cover. He learnt this story from a farmer in Burkino Faso.

BILANA OUOBA'S STORY

I am Bilana Ouoba, a 65-year-old farmer from Kokouogou village in Eastern Burkina Faso, head of a household of 25 people. I practice several new farming methods to improve soil fertility. One is called Farming Managed Natural Regeneration of trees. Before, you were thought to be crazy to grow trees with crops. We used to cut down all the trees and shrubs. When we learned about the FMNR technique in 2015, and received training, this innovation caused a lot of controversy and reluctance in our community.

I started to do some tests by protecting small trees growing in my field. This agroforestry method improved soil fertility and moisture, giving better yields. I also harvested pods from the *Philiostigma* tree in my field. This has become a major source of income. The pod is cracked open, the seeds removed, and the pulp eaten as a snack or as emergency food. The tender leaves are chewed, and the juice swallowed to treat stomach-ache, coughs, and snakebite.

The first year I started harvesting the *Philiostigma* pods, I earned enough money to buy three lambs to fatten and sell. The technique of protecting or regenerating trees on our land really came to save us, the women, who were suffering from infertile soil and lack of money to care for our children. Protecting *Philiostigma* trees in our fields has become a common practice by women here while women without these trees in the fields have to search for it in the bush.



Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) adapts centuries-old methods of woodland management, called coppicing and pollarding. The practice produces continuous tree-growth for fuel, building materials, and food and fodder. Selected trees are trimmed and pruned to maximise growth, while promoting optimal growing conditions for annual crops or grass. When FMNR trees are integrated into crops and grazing areas, there is an increase in crop yields, soil fertility, organic matter, soil moisture and leaf fodder. There is also a decrease in wind and heat damage to the soil and thus less soil erosion. In the Sahel region of Africa, FMNR is an especially useful tool for poorer families and communities. It can increase food security, resilience, and climate change adaptation.



Viyani's Story: Managing livestock grazing to regenerate land and rivers

"Now we turn to you Viyani," said Tawana, "you're the eldest amongst us but still a young man. You did not have to go and look for an example. You are doing it yourself. Tell us what you've done."

Viyani's eyes lit up. He loved being able to share his story. He began in his melodic voice:

"I watched the Jambesi river near my home in north west Zimbabwe grow wider over many years. Each year it filled up with more silt. This was a river that used to run all year when I was a boy. I caught fish in it and swam in its depths. I did not know what I could do about this silting until I attended a course at Dimbangombe. There I learnt the importance of planning livestock grazing. If they keep moving to new ground and do not come back to the same place for some time, grass can grow well and spread. More grass means more groundcover, which means more water goes into the soil. There is less runoff to fill streams and rivers with silt. It is as simple as that."

"If it is so simple why don't we see it happening?" asked Chifundo.

"These days people let their livestock go anywhere and everywhere. They wander all over the place. When I went home after the training, every time I heard cowbells I would go out and talk to the herders. I would ask them to keep their cattle away from my stretch of the river. They did as I asked. As a result, the eight-metre-wide silted river narrowed to three metres. Here look at my pictures."

People crowded around Viyani to have a look.

"So what?" asked Chifundo. "This looks good but what then?"

"As a result of this small action the Chief called everyone together and they created thirteen joint herds and started planning the grazing. It is still early days, but everyone is learning a lot and moving in the right direction.

We have begun a long journey together to recreate the abundance that elders speak of. People are excited about the opportunity to restore the land, rivers, crop production, as well as livestock and wildlife living together in harmony."





Holistic Planned Grazing

Together with animal impact, Holistic Planned Grazing (HPG) is a process that, if well implemented, can maintain soil cover and keep grass plants healthy and productive. The implementation of a grazing plan meets the needs of livestock, plants and the farmer while enhancing the function of ecosystem processes. The catch is in communities bringing their livestock together - what is called a land management herd. This herd will be managed to graze in a way that will avoid the unwanted effects of animals wandering and feeding on the same grass-plants (overgrazing) with little or no recovery, causing bare ground. Landscapes like ours need robust management to enhance diversity and bring rivers back to life.



*As we can see, we have at our disposal many skills to regenerate our landscapes. **And these are only a few examples of what is happening.** We know how to help soil become alive again. We have approaches to design the land in a way that imitates nature. We can manage livestock to improve and not damage the land they graze on. It is quite possible that we can turn around our degrading situation and begin to revive landscapes everywhere. Then the only water leaving any landscape will be clean water. This will be water that first enters the soil, flows underground, and then emerges above ground via springs and streams that flow into rivers.*

*The trouble is that these practices are in isolated pockets. We need to connect them into processes that address whole landscapes. This will mean people in communities working together, with determination and persistence. It will mean them looking at all parts of the landscape in an integrated way: fields, forests, hills, grazing areas, rivers, homesteads, roads, all are connected. Regenerating landscapes will be hugely beneficial. But it also takes time and effort. People need to reconnect with each other, with their land, and with their culture in a way that reflects deep caring and reverence. This must be the basis of their determination and persistence. The next and final chapter looks at the **process** for communities to start doing this.*



I will not dance to your beat

A POEM BY NNIMMO BASSEY

(Nnimmo is a Nigerian architect, environmental activist, author and poet)



I will not dance to your beat
If you call plantations forests
I will not sing with you
If you privatise my water
I will confront you with my fists
If climate change means death to me but business to you
I will expose your evil greed
If you don't leave crude oil in the soil
Coal in the hole and tar sands in the land
I will confront and denounce you
If you insist on carbon offsetting and other do-nothing false solutions
I will make you see red
If you keep talking of REDD and push forest communities away from their land
I will drag you to the Climate Tribunal
If you pile up ecological debt
& refuse to pay your climate debt
I will make you drink your own medicine
If you endorse genetically modified crops
And throw dust into the skies to mask the sun
I will not dance to your beat
Unless we walk the sustainable path
And accept real solutions & respect Mother Earth
Unless you do
I will not &
We will not dance to your beat



20 April 2010

Read at the opening ceremony of the World Peoples Climate Conference Summit

Bountiful Landscapes

When communities work together

*Welcome back, friends. Weren't those such inspiring stories! For me they demonstrate what is possible if we work creatively together in community-led processes to transform our landscapes. **But HOW do we design and facilitate such processes?** That is what this chapter is all about.*



First let us introduce you to two dear colleagues and experienced community facilitators; Thandiwe Zulu and Mulilo Pembe of the Abundance Community Based Organisation. They work with communities in Monze district of Southern Zambia in the transformation of damaged landscapes. Together they have developed a wide range of methods and approaches to support communities. You will hear their story of designing and facilitating community-led landscape processes. A community here means a group of people from several families that share a given location. In the context of rural southern Africa, a community could be a single village but more likely it is made up of several villages. Enjoy!



A landscape initiative begins to unfold over a cup of Chibwantu

Ever since the members of the Permaculture Club at Kaumba secondary school presented the results of their research into the revival of degraded water catchments in such a dramatic way, they became the heroes and heroines in the community. Their work made a real impact on Thandiwe and Mulilo.

When Thandiwe and Mulilo sat down to a meeting with the local Supervisor of Agricultural Extension, Mr. Jonas Phiri, at his house, they used the research of the School Permaculture Club as a starting point.

After the formalities, conversation turned to the traditional food festival that was held the month before. The District Agriculture Office and the Zambia Forum for Healthy Food (ZFFHF), a non-governmental organisation, jointly organised the festival. Abundance CBO was a leading member.

Just then Megai, Jonas's wife, emerged from the kitchen with her grandchild clinging to her dress, casting a shy gaze at the visitors. Megai had brought with her a plate full of sliced chikanda, a traditional snack made from yams and groundnuts and a jug brimming with chibwantu, a non-alcoholic traditional drink made from root extracts and cereals.

“Now I can confirm that the traditional food festival had an impact!” remarked Thandiwe admiringly. “Healthy, rich and diverse traditional foods like these are exactly one of the results we wish for in this landscaping work! Congratulations, Megai and Jonas, you are living the vision!”



“And in doing so we honour our ancestors and set an example for the youth!” exclaimed Jonas, raising his cup. “Good health to all!” as they all did the same.

“Jonas, do you remember the group of learners from the Kaumba Permaculture Club at the festival that used drama to present their trip to Chimanimani in Zimbabwe?” asked Mulilo.

“Yes, very well. In fact, I joined the standing ovation!” Jonas exclaimed.

“Well, you’ll be pleased to know that those young people have since carried out some research into how communities can transform their landscapes,” added Thandiwe, eyes shining with pride and straightening her back, as she flipped through the pages of her notebook. She told them how they’d held meetings with the children and teachers.

“What is particularly important is that it is not us coming in from the cold to get people excited. Through the work of the Permaculture Club, we have an opportunity to enhance and spread the youthful energy that is already there. We can wake up all sorts of sleeping possibilities!”

Mulilo chipped in, “We think the time is right for our team to facilitate a meeting with the Chief and his *ndunas* next month. At that meeting we will

bring the Permaculture Club to tell their story and share their research. Then suggest to the Chief that he allows the community to explore transforming the whole water catchment in the chiefdom.”

“This may be too good to be true. Remember that Headman in Mutondo village who would not stop letting his cows graze in the school grounds at Musikili school? And I cannot imagine the infamous drunkards in Chulu village cooperating in this work,” Julius gazed thoughtfully into the distance. “But let’s not forget that we have the Twatasha Women’s Club which has members from both Mutondo and Chulu villages. These are strong and determined women. With support they could lead the way and the rest will surely follow. Okay, I’m sold!”

“Great, so let’s put our heads together and chart a road map to engage the target community.” Thandiwe concluded.

Jonas leaned forward, “I would like to suggest we start with the *Guidelines for Facilitators* I learned last year on a course I took on how to engage communities.” He disappeared into his house and returned with a file. “Ha! Here it is, have a look!”

“Read it to us, Jonas!”



Working with Communities – Principles for Facilitators and Leaders

- A. Community ownership of the initiative AND process is the foundation of sustainability.** If the project is owned and led by outsiders, whether NGOs or donors, the initiative will die when they leave. Always ask: “Who is participating in whose process?”
- B. Include all stakeholders.** Being included, they will bring their support and resources so that they can play their part in regenerating the landscape. But if we exclude stakeholders, they may feel threatened or resentful and sabotage the initiative. Local government structures are a key group of stakeholders who may facilitate or hinder the work at community level.
- C. Help to surface local and indigenous knowledge and expertise.** This is often hidden in the stories of the elders. If you honour and enhance these, then the community will feel respected and empowered and will be more receptive to outside knowledge and expertise.
- D. Strengthen healthy existing community structures.** It is important to respect, use and strengthen existing structures and processes so that they can carry the initiative into the future for when the project and funding end.
- E. Look for ways to encourage people to take initiative and leadership of every task.** Do not try to act the hero or saviour.
- F. Be enthusiastic but help people to find and grow their own enthusiasm and will.** But be careful of bringing too much. If people seem unenthusiastic about something important do not assume that they do not care. Their willingness may be dampened by fear, self-doubt, conflict, or resentment of some kind. Learn to surface and deal with these.
- G. You must NOT take sides in any conflict.**
- H. Go beyond conventional technical work.** Transformation includes changing old power relationships which disempower some unjustly, like gender discrimination, or which keep farmers impoverished because of their dependence on powerful agro-corporations.
- I. Seek to actively and creatively bring out the best in government.** Let them engage with and experience the community for themselves. Value their role. Assess together when it is necessary for government to participate and provide services and how, e.g. earthworks, infrastructure etc.
- J. Have clarity on the role of funding.** If money is donated with inappropriate conditions this can destroy local ownership.





“Those are great!” said Mulilo, “I presume that in work with government we would also include rejecting the old colonial gully prevention projects where people were forced into labour, which still holds a stigma for landscape level work.”

Jonas paused to observe, “Yes, I agree. And I can also see now that we must show these to donors too and help them understand that these Principles are the source of the good results they also want!”

“Yes, Jonas, well said.” Thandiwe replied in a soft voice, “In fact, we should ask the community and stakeholders what Principles matter to *them* first and then share some of ours too, having a discussion just like this, and with the donors.”

They were all nodding as Thandiwe said this, letting her wise words sink in.

The orange sun was setting, and a silence descended as they sat quietly contemplating what they had been discussing. It was a rare moment, each one feeling that something important had passed between them, deeply connecting them to the work they were embarking on, and to each other. Tired, but content that they had made good progress, they decided to call it a day and arranged to meet again to complete their preparation.

Things start to become visible

The trio met again two days later, back again on Jonas’ verandah, to continue the preparation.

Mulilo started the conversation by observing:

“We must always ask ourselves, as facilitators ‘Who is participating in whose process here?’, looking for ways that communities feel that this is their meeting or workshop, where we are the invited facilitators, rather than they being the invited guests.”

“Now that’s a different way of looking at things!” said Jonas, “Once you say it, it is obviously the right approach, but it is not what often happens in our work. I like it!”



Over the next three hours the trio drew up a preparation plan for their role in the initiative. They knew that out of this process, they needed to have inspired and enthusiastic leaders who are willing to promote the initiative out of a united purpose, and shared principles and process.

This is the plan they developed. It had four phases and was made up of a number of parts and activities. In their discussion they emphasised that the ideas and outcomes of all the activities needed to be carefully documented.



Regenerating the Magoye water catchment area

PREPARATION PLAN



Phase One: Fire

Building relationships - Trust and Clarity

Cultivating awareness, ownership, trust and inspiration

In Phase One the aim is to raise awareness about the importance of landscapes and gain agreement and commitment on a community-led landscape initiative: its purpose, principles and process. The leaders, community and facilitators must support this with strong ownership and mutual trust. Trust in the facilitators is key to helping people be open and honest in working together. The leaders and facilitators also agree to work together to bring out the best in all stakeholders.

Activity 1: The community leaders and facilitators get together to prepare themselves

- Start with connecting* at a human level, to build human warmth and trust in each other and the facilitators.
- Explore and discuss* the purpose and principles for the process. Hold a brainstorm process to create a map of all the stakeholders by sector showing the degree of influence expected from each stakeholder.
- End with grounding*, coming to an agreement to launch the initiative/project, roles and next steps.

Activity 2: Holding a Community Dialogue

All households from each village invited

- Start with connecting* to bring warmth and connection to the meeting through a presentation of local cultural activities and performances, e.g. the Permaculture Club to perform their drama and briefly share their Whole School Development approach.
- Explore the context*, asking people to describe their current situation, issues and challenges around seed, food, nutrition and environment. A local CBO facilitator shares the history of the landscape and tells a story of how landscapes can be transformed.
- End with grounding*: ask the community to show its willingness to participate in the initiative, electing thirty representatives (with the help of the facilitators) to carry out a baseline survey with three elements:
 - Recapturing the oral history of the village.
 - Documenting the changes that have happened to the landscape over time.
 - A map of the village showing all the households and their state of seed and food security and their land management practices.

This would be the foundation of the Phase Two to follow.

Well, that was a good start. It is important to realise though that this is not a recipe but just an example of how to go about doing community-led processes. I like that there is emphasis on participation. And did you notice that the community themselves are taking the lead and even doing the baseline survey, which is usually done by consultants. Let's see what actually happened in the community meeting.



Community Dialogue in Kapete village, Chongwe district, Zambia

The village secretary, Mr. Michelo sounded the drum as a reminder to the community to gather for the meeting. Soon they streamed in from all households, curious to hear about the new proposal.

Mr. Sakala, the Headman opened the meeting.

“Welcome everyone! Thank you for being here. Let us welcome the Permaculture Club as well as Thandiwe Zulu and Mulilo Pembe of the Abundance Community Based Organisation. They have been working on farms and with the school project to improve soil fertility. We have all seen and enjoyed the fruit and herbs from their gardens!”

The community cheered.

Mr Sakala continued, “The Club will perform their drama and share their story of the whole school approach, and then Ms. Zulu and Mr. Pembe will make a presentation on the work that they’ve done so far, both at the school and in the community.”

Three people rose to applaud the work that they had seen done by these groups. It was an enthusiastic beginning.

After a short introduction of who they are and their organisation, Ms. Zulu and Mr. Pembe introduced the proposal.

“The aim of the project is to revive the landscape so that we can improve access to clean water. It will improve soil cover, and encourage and increase biodiversity. This will mean that we’ll be able to reduce soil erosion and siltation, and improve soil fertility.” Ms Zulu said clearly.

Mr. Pembe then stepped forward; “The community must lead this initiative. We need you all to be involved! Together we can make a difference. Please make small groups and share your thoughts, ideas and what’s not clear to you.”

A little later, the facilitators asked them to share what came up in their groups. They kept the atmosphere light, encouraging the quieter ones to speak their minds. An hour later people fell silent, satisfied with the answers.

A show of hands indicated agreement to proceed with the project. The community members selected thirty representatives to be their voice, hands, eyes and ears for the project and to ensure involvement of everyone.



The next day, representatives worked in three groups of ten people each. They had specific tasks. They huddled in deep discussion, some interviewed the elders, and some were spotted pointing out different parts of the landscape to each other and making notes. Ms. Zulu and Mr. Pembe moved between the groups, answering questions, and offering tips.

GROUP TASKS

Group One: Recapture the oral history of the village.

Group Two: Focus on the changes that have happened to the landscape over time.

Group Three: Draw a map of the village. Show all the households, their state of seed and food security and their practice of managing growing crops and breeding animals.



Later in the day the three groups shared their findings and discussed the report-back, which was to happen the following day. They could not wait to share what they had learnt with their neighbours.



On the third day the whole village gathered again to listen to their representatives. The presentations were detailed, passionate and informative. Villagers discussed how they never knew how things had changed from what it was like in the past. It was good to hear more about their neighbour's situations. Some even started to believe that they could make their land beautiful again. By the end of the session people were excited and eager to get going.

They agreed on a plan and dates, and after a final song everyone left filled with the promise of a brighter tomorrow.



Well, that was quite a process engaging with the community to ensure ownership and enthusiasm. This is the most important foundation on which to build any community initiative. But now that the most important groundwork has been laid by our friends they must continue to prepare and facilitate the ongoing process.

Mulilo, Thandiwe and Jonas realised that the Phase Two would mean working with the community to come up with an integrated design of the landscape. This would include training local resource persons as trainers, facilitators and advocates in integrated land use design to become confident champions of Integrated Land Design. Have a look what they came up with over the page!



Phase Two: Air

Developing a landscape vision and design

In Phase Two the aim is for the community to come up with a design for their landscape and what is needed to carry it out. This should begin with the development of a vision in a process like this one:

- What was the landscape like before? The baseline study report will already have captured this.
- It is getting better or worse?
- Why are we here today with our degraded land and do we want to continue on this journey of desertification, or do we want to go in a new direction?
- Creating a common vision together and everyone agreeing on a common destination.
- Creating a Map together.



Activity 1: Preparation - Training of trainers in integrated land design

A two-week course run by the local CBO and Permaculture trainers – at least twenty-four local resource persons will leave with knowledge and skills in Integrated Land Design. This will include how to facilitate the community design process. Not only do they acquire the knowledge and skills, but they become confident champions of this process.

Activity 2: Design of the water catchments

The facilitators support the community to design the regeneration of their water catchments. Maps of the water catchments show the planned earthworks and other relevant interventions. The community gains solidarity and confidence to take charge of their landscapes.

Activity 3: Skills and resources assessment and mobilisation

Skills: Carry out an exercise to see what skills are already there and where there needs to be strengthening. The process helps the community to value what they already know and to identify what capacities they must still build.

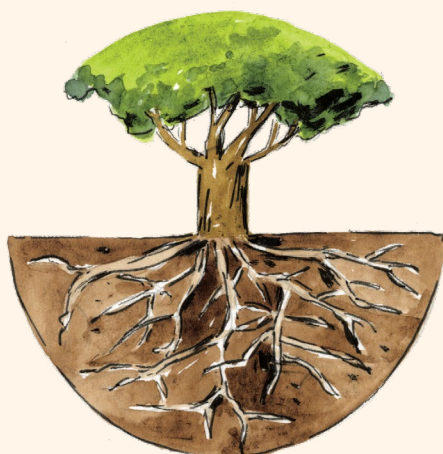
Resources: The resources needed are mapped out and potential sources are identified. A plan is developed to mobilise resources.

Phase Three: Water

Facilitating Change and Development

Observing, deepening and caring for the relationships and the commitment of all the people involved.

- Look for ways to encourage inclusion and for quieter people to find their voices. If people stop participating find out what is the matter. If there is conflict or power struggles speak to the different parties and see if you can heal the divides.
- This is the invisible work that enables the soul and spirit of the initiative to come alive in all who are involved.
- The Landscape Champions undergo training sessions in which they gain knowledge, skills and attitudes to implement the project. This is not just technical capacity development but personal leadership. Help them to take responsibility for caring for the relationships and commitment of all.



Phase Four: Earth

Grounding and Sustainability

Implementation, Monitoring, Learning and Celebration

The aim of this phase is to develop plans and implement them.

- Taking the message to friends and family. Sharing the ground cover demo at home with friends and family, at church and community meetings. Duplicating the simple message of ground cover everywhere.
- Wet season mobilisation and planning (Sept/Oct/Nov). Reconnect and re-establish traditional ceremonies celebrating the return of the growing season.
- Dry season mobilisation and planning (April/May). Reconnect and re-establish traditional ceremonies celebrating harvest, abundance and diversity.
- Ongoing follow up and monitoring until there is common understanding and agreement.

Activity 1: Implementation

Representatives of all stakeholders produce a work plan. The project is implemented with the community taking ownership. Collaboration with researchers will be important here and these should help to build a component of action research into the implementation work. The action research will enhance learning from experience which will also be shared beyond each individual community through existing communities of practice.

Activity 2: Monitoring, Learning and Sharing

All involved learn regularly from their experiences and share good practices. There are regular reviews and exchanges with other communities. There is a strong focus on ensuring that the project can keep going. The experiences and lessons learnt are documented and shared with stakeholders.

Documentation will require special attention and may require collaboration with other agencies and external expertise.

Parallel to the implementation and monitoring will be the engagement and collaboration with relevant government agencies and the use of some strategic events to share relevant advocacy messages with policy makers.

A gate opens to a landscape of new possibilities

“Have we left anything out?” asked Jonas.

Thandiwe’s face was beaming with excitement about this process. “As the ancestors used to say, ‘we make the path by walking it.’ We will have opportunities to revise this plan during our regular reviews and I’ve heard that we’ll be collaborating with others in a continuous learning journey. We’ll share experiences and support each other along the way.”

By this time the winter sun was hanging low in the western sky and the temperatures were beginning to drop.

Jonas smiled, “Thanks for the great experience, my friends. Although I’m feeling nervous, I know that if I trust the community and give them space to think for themselves, they’ll succeed. That’s my challenge, not to get anxious and rush in to save them when they’re struggling.”

“Yes, they’re also on a learning journey, just like us. I remember my mother always saying ‘you never remember what you are taught, only what you learn!’ Keep that in your pocket, Jonas!” Thandiwe laughed.

“We have to leave now,” announced Mulilo. “Thank you for your kind hospitality,” he continued as he reached out to his cup to take the last sip of chibwantu.

Jonas walked his guests to the gate as they continued to chat away at the great expectations they had over the next many years of exciting work with the community.

“You’ve helped me to see the importance of incorporating schools in all this work,” remarked Jonas as he opened the gate and let his friends pass through. “The students are surprisingly resourceful and energetic,” he concluded.

“Let’s get our final prep sorted out on WhatsApp this week,” added Thandiwe as she took the path that was diverging to the right towards her home.

“Bye for now,” they all chorused.

Jonas stood there at the gate watching his friends leave. Holding the rough post he smiled at what they had achieved so far and what the future held. A gate had now opened for the community to step through and journey as one into a landscape of new possibilities. Nothing was guaranteed, but he looked forward to walking alongside, learning and discovering the way forward with all the people he now knew, respected and loved.



Cultivating Wholes within Wholes...

Dear friends, this Barefoot Guide comes at a time when the earth is most vulnerable. With climate change we can expect many extreme weather events as well as change and variability in the seasons. We need to be ready for these. We saw the devastating effects it had in Chimanimani. Now, more than ever, we need to be managing whole landscapes to make them more resilient to extreme events and climate variability. There is no more time to waste.



Tawana



Madalitso

For too long we have had an extractive and exploitative relationship with the land. We have been taking what we can without thought for the future or the long-term effects. We've failed to manage landscapes in a holistic way, not understanding their interconnected nature or valuing diversity.



Mphatso

Through the Earth Law workshops, I came to understand the close relationship between water and trees and how it forms a big part of landscape management. I now realise that if we manage water effectively, allowing it to spread and sink in the ground, rather than running off on the surface, we will go a long way to ensuring healthy landscapes.

Through the workshop with the elders, I realise that we can't go back to former times, but we can learn from them. Traditionally, all across Africa, communities had a close relationship with their land and Nature. Rivers in our region used to run all year with clear water, deep pools and were full of life. These showed us the health of a landscape. Now we have to embrace new knowledge, change our destructive attitudes and honour landscape stewardship.



Twalumba



Julius

I've learnt about practices that can help us manage land in an ecological way. These practices are effective and are finally becoming more widely recognised. If we can share knowledge and skills about these practices and bring them together into effective processes, we can make a huge difference wherever we are.

Through my work in communities, I understand that landscape management is a people process. Communities must own the process and they must go at their own pace. My task is to listen, to help them develop confidence and assist them in keeping up the momentum. These landscape management processes are new for most people, so learning at every step of the way is essential.



Thandiwe

In Praise of the Earth

FROM A POEM BY JOHN O'DONOHUE

Let us thank the Earth
That offers ground for home
And holds our feet firm
To walk in space open
To infinite galaxies.

Let us salute the silence
And certainty of mountains:
Their sublime stillness,
Their dream-filled hearts.
The wonder of a garden
Trusting the first warmth of spring
Until its black infinity of cells
Becomes charged with dream;
Then the silent, slow nurture
Of the seed's self, coaxing it
To trust the act of death.

The humility of the Earth
That transfigures all
That has fallen
Of outlived growth.
The kindness of the Earth,

Opening to receive
Our worn forms
Into the final stillness.

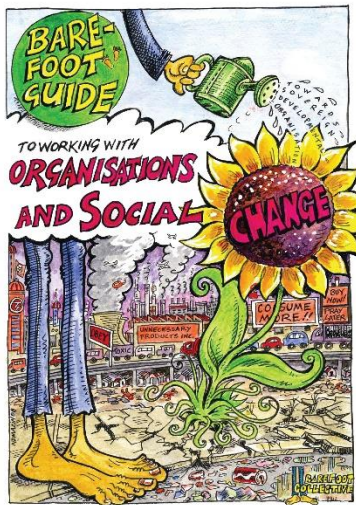
Let us ask forgiveness of the Earth
For all our sins against her:
For our violence and poisonings
Of her beauty.
Let us remember within us
The ancient clay,
Holding the memory of seasons,
The passion of the wind,
The fluency of water,
The warmth of fire,
The quiver-touch of the sun
And shadowed sureness of the moon.

That we may awaken,
To live to the full
The dream of the Earth
Who chose us to emerge
And incarnate its hidden night
In mind, spirit, and light.

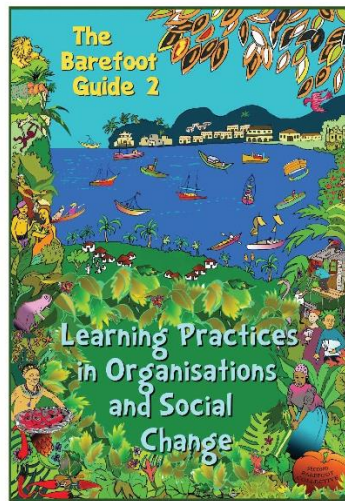


from *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*, by John O'Donohue

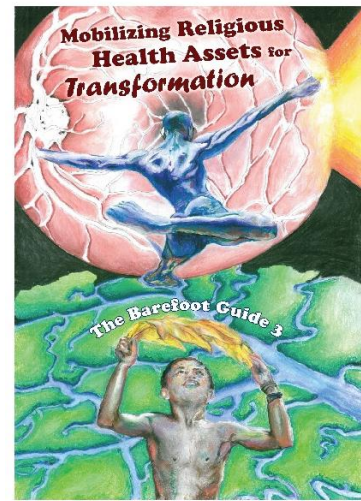
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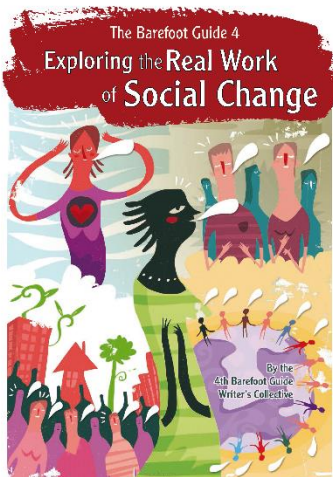
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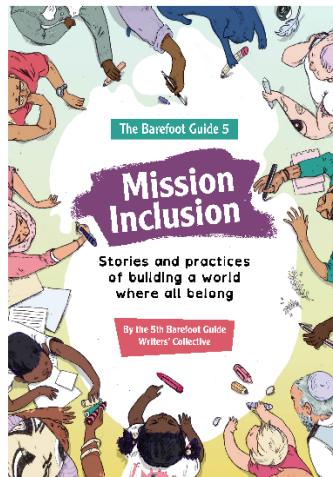
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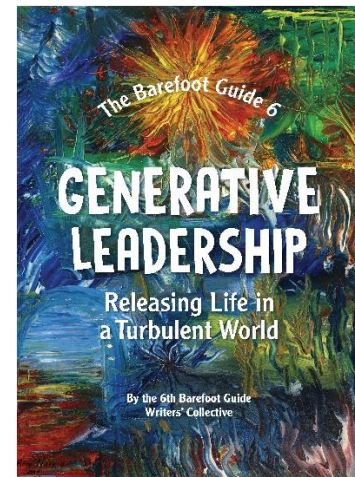
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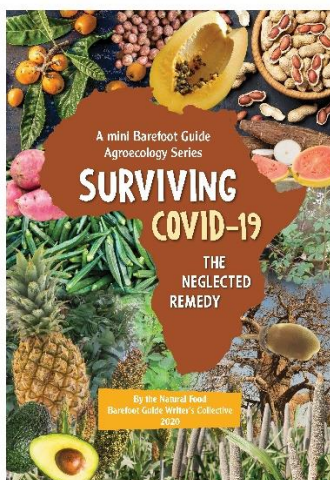
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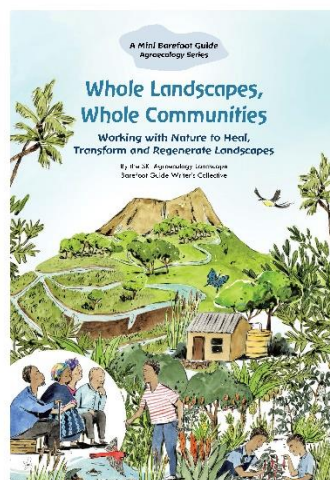
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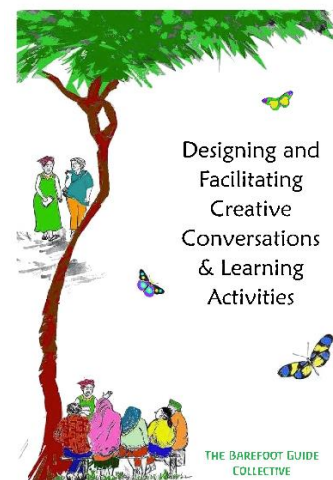
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English • Français



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