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GlobalGiving's recommendation got Zahana invited as a Global Action Atlas participant hosted by the prestigious National Geographic Society.

facebook-icon 6 Zahana now has a please "like" us if you are on fb.

GlobalGiving Bonus Day June 13, 2011

Aloha Friends:

We wanted to share with you these wonderful pictures of the solar cookers in our village schools. For a while now, we have been working on introducing solar cooking as one of the options to save precious firewood.

solar-cooker-zahana

Zahana has been able to team up with ADES, an NGO dedicated to solar cooking, that produces these all-Malagasy made solar box cookers in the country. (ADES stands for: ADES Association pour le Développement de l'Energie Solaire Suisse – Madagascar.) We've able to benefit from ADES's over a decade of experience promoting solar cooking in Madagascar.

We sent a Zahana representative to visit their workshop in the far south of the country to be trained in learning and teaching solar cooking. A seven days voyage from our villages, he was able to bring solar box cookers back with him, take them to the villages, and train the teachers on site on how to use them.

We have many photos about our solar aspirations on our website. For us, this is only the first step of what hopefully will become a much bigger project. One piece of exciting news is that ADES is in the process of opening an office in the capital, which will make it much easier for us to obtain more solar cookers, since we may not have to take the long trip down South anymore.

To learn more about how solar cooking works, watch out 2-minute YouTube movie or the Deutsche Welle seven minute TV documentary about ADES.

In this newsletter we wanted to take a step back, and reflect on the bigger picture later down in the text.

This was inspired by watching the TEDx talk by David Damberger: "What happens when an NGO admits failure". We learned that many water systems built in Africa don't function much longer than one or two years, for reasons eloquently explained in this TEDx talk. We encourage you to watch it. It is an outstanding 13-minutes critical analysis by an insider who has built many water systems over the years and has implemented the lessons learned in an innovative and inspiring way. Without mentioning it explicitly, he also presents a good case why GlobalGiving's approach of matching donors with projects directly is better for both sides.

Reforestation in Madagascar

IMG_8624

We're happy to announce our reforestation program is going well. Since we started our ambitious program to plant 15,000 new trees, both villages have decided to dedicate all tree seedlings in the nurseries to this ambitious project. More about reforestation on our website.

GlobalGiving: Bonus Day June 13

Bonus Day begins at 12:01 am EDT on Wednesday June 13, 2012. The formula is simple: your donations to Zahana will be matched at 50%. Last time GlobalGiving ran out of matching funds, please try early in the day if you want to supersize your donation by 50% with the click of a mouse. There is a total of \$75,000 in matching funds available. Once funds have been depleted, no more donations will be matched. Details

Why we work the way we do

But now to the before mentioned bigger picture:

Many of you remember that Zahana set out in 2005/6 on the adventure to build a clean, safe water system. It was our very first participatory development effort. Still flowing uninterrupted for six years now, it is providing clean water for over 1000 people. Way up in the mountains, some 2.5 km or 1.6 miles away from the village, a clean spring coming out off the ground is channeled with pipes into a water storage container on the mountainside. From there it flows, gravity fed through PVC pipes into the village. Collected in a second large water container at the edge of the village, the water flows into seven communal faucets that are accessible by all.

Kid-at-green-faucet

We built this water system by recruiting and hiring the water technicians (the people who actually build systems), and paying them to live for three months in the village. Living in the village community, far away from home, the technicians built the water system together with the villagers. This way, not only did they put in village sweat equity, digging trenches, cutting stones, carrying cement and sand, and laying pipe, that made the system more affordable; but they learned how their water system functioned.

Zahana-making-stones

Cutting the stones for the water reservoir

As an added benefit, the community was trained by the water technicians on how to fix the system, should it break one day. All systems built by humans are bound to break sooner or later, but now the villagers are not only prepared on what to do, but also hopefully have the skills to do it themselves without outside help.

IMG_0522water_in_village

As an additional safeguard, one man, jokingly referred to as the 'water police', has been assigned to walk up and down the water system every day, to check for leaks or potential problems. Besides the salaries for the water technicians, Zahana paid for materials the villagers could not afford, such as PVC pipes, the water storage containers and cement with your help. (also see: metal fences)

It is exactly the participatory element that made it so successful. Zahana worked with the villagers to build their water system together, instead of an outside organization coming in and building it for them, making it 'their water system', not 'ours'. With this proud ownership of 'their water system', comes the responsibility to take care of it and maintain it. The only complaint being (that makes us quite proud in turn): people from Fiadanana don't like to drink the water in other places anymore, and are now forced to carry their own water with them, if they are leaving their village.

It wasn't easy to find water technicians willing to live in a rural setting for many weeks, and work with an untrained workforce, since this was and is quite a novel concept in its cultural context. But it paid off in more ways than one, because we were able to build the water system for less than 20% of water systems (normally) cost and it is still flowing strong for almost 6 years. Although, still the single biggest success for us is that no child has died of diarrhea since the clean water system was built.

fence-school-zahana 2

Participatory development means, and that is at the heart of it, to trust people that they will do their best, when you give them a chance to take charge for their own development. That is neither easy nor commonplace (not only) in the development community and requires a lot of work and dedication. And there will always be failures and mishaps along the way, as much as we all would like to avoid that. And: Yes, it does require outside money, too. In a country such as Madagascar where a farmer may “make” less than US\$ 300 in a year growing rice with backbreaking manual labor, we will always need people like you supporting our efforts to make this participatory development possible.

Yes, everybody wants to know, including us, how do you measure success? Well, get a glass of water (most likely it comes out of a tap or even a bottle for you), and take a good long look at this clean, crystal clear, safe drinking water, and think where it comes from - before you quench your thirst.

Ihanta, Jeannette and Markus