

## School gardens and planting trees



### e-Newsletter August 2010

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Zahana now has a Facebook page. With the help of Dan Lueck we now have a "clean" URL. [Please visit the website](#) and "like" us.



Thanks to one of our readers, who found this gap, we now have a [Privacy Policy](#) for Zahana. Please check our website if you are interested.

[GlobalGiving's](#) recommendation got Zahana invited as a [Global Action Atlas](#) participant hosted by the prestigious National

Aloha Markus:

We wanted to send you an update of our activities in Madagascar

### Two Growing School Gardens

Zahana has recently hired Bary, a second gardener to work in the village of Fiadanana, the first project site where our participatory collaboration started in 2005. Bary is currently being trained by our original gardener Jean in the second village (Fiarenana) and shows an equally amazing green thumb. Combined with great enthusiasm, Bary is planting and growing what he learned right away. We have the feeling we have some healthy growing competition going here and both gardeners are very active trying out new seeds and raising tree seedlings for their villages.

Geographic Society (yes the one with the yellow magazine!). Please follow the link (so you get there with a click-through from us) to the [Global Action Atlas](#).



Bary decided to put his knowledge to good use revitalizing the school garden that fell dormant after the initial enthusiasm by the woman's group in 2006. He now actively involves the school children in the planting and tending of their garden. Learning to grow vegetables as part of their hands-on curriculum means the children are raising their future school food at the same time. The seventh communal faucet in Fiadanana was put all the way out in the schoolyard so children had access to clean, safe drinking water while they are in school. A running faucet makes it possible to water the vegetable beds regularly in an environment that is quite dry and dusty. Water makes the difference between green or shriveled. Please visit our website for additional pictures.



Jean our gardener with an amazing green thumb in the village of Fiarenena has expanded his activities and is now actively involved in the school curriculum, teaching the children to plant vegetables, such as zucchini, tomatoes and carrots.

The vegetable beds were dug by a group of parents right after the official school opening in March (see that report for details) and the children have been planting and tending to the vegetables ever since. The only well (dug by Zahana), that has water all year round in the village is next to the school. The proximity to water makes it possible for the children to water and tend their plants daily. The added benefit is that the parents come to the well for their water needs as well and witness the progress of the garden.



[More about the schools on our website](#)

### **Microcredit**

Zahana's seed fund introduced new varieties of zucchini, beans and corn from a supplier that claims a 100% germination rate for their seeds. The first zucchini are already big enough to harvest and the corn and beans are doing very well.





The new tree seeds seem to grow well, too. Among other trees Zahana has introduced *Moringa (oleifera)*. Moringa, widely advocated by the national nutrition program is an amazing fast growing tree, with edible leaves and seedpods (lot of info on the Web). Known in India a "drum stick tree" the protein content of its leaves is extremely high for a plant. Moringa could become a vital plant to counteracting child (and adult) malnutrition in the coming years. We have very high hopes for this hardy little tree. Moringa's fast growing wood is of little use besides firewood, but that is ideal for the villages. In less than a year the first firewood can be harvested and people will not need to walk long distances and kill the existing trees. We are hoping this will be one of our contributions to address the ongoing deforestation disaster in Madagascar.

Both gardeners are happy to experiment. This allows Zahana to introduce new seeds with the caveat that they might not be suitable for the climate, but there is only one good way to find out: grow it and see if it takes. This is a wonderful development for us, because in the past agricultural advice has been received with great skepticism and if something did not work out Zahana's reputation was on the line.

Apples that have been requested by the gardeners are a good example. It is tricky to grow apples from seed that "fall true" or turn out to be a desired variety. To compound the challenge the climate might be too hot for apples, plants that like colder winters or higher altitude in a tropical climate. But with two adventurous gardeners it is much better to try planting apples and find out what happens

[More about Zahana's ideas about Micocredit](#)

### **A word about solar cooking and energy**

The solar water pasteurizers have been well received by the villagers. Our 'solar volunteer' Bruce has spent over two weeks in the villages and introduced a locally built model of a solar



panel cooker. Using an off the shelf car window screen (bought in the big city) and a plastic bag, this home-made panel cooker is extremely light weight and versatile. (To learn more about solar panel cookers, one key solar cooking technology, please visit e.g. solar cookers international [www.solarcookers.org](http://www.solarcookers.org)). Panel cookers have limitations, such as the plastic bag required, but are a great way to introduce villagers to the idea to use the sun for cooking. Small in size and easy to store, one meal a day of e.g. rice or beans can be cooked with this very low-tech device.

After much discussion we have realized that solar cooking should be introduced incrementally. The only sure way to learn about solar cooking is by cooking with it and getting first hand experience. Once some of the villagers have adopted the idea of experimenting with the solar panel cookers, they can be introduced to solar box cookers, another key technology.

Once they are familiar with box cookers and use them more regularly they can be introduced to the Blintzes, that is so much more efficient than anything else, that they will be convinced after the first cooking demonstration.

In addition Bruce introduced a solar panel that can recharge the community's cell phone. These small solar panels need quite some hands-on training to be used efficiently or they do not work properly. Inadequate training can easily lead to frustration if people e.g. do not recharge the batteries long enough and the consequence is that the well intended solar technology is just collecting dust. The solar panels, which also can power a light at night as well, are currently being marketed in Madagascar, but with a price tag of around \$30 they are out of reach for most villagers.  
of the festivities.



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Ihanta, Jeannette and Markus

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