



COMMUNITY OUTREACH CENTER FOR RANOBE SW MADAGASCAR



Situation:

Ranobe village is an ever expanding, impoverished rural community located in southwest Madagascar, thirty-five kilometres north of the provincial capital Toliara. It is an entry point to the Ranobe spiny forest, one of the last extensive and most threatened patches of forest in Madagascar.

In Madagascar the majority of people survive by directly harvesting natural resources, such as exploiting native forests to make charcoal. Deforestation is a massive problem in Madagascar, with the SW spiny forest being the most impacted over the last 20 years. Only eight percent of the original forest in Madagascar remains.

The Ranobe community has dedicated to creating a better future for them and for Madagascar by engaging in a number of projects focused on reforestation, alternative and sustainable technologies and new income generation. These efforts have been lead by the non-profit group Ho Avy (which means future in Malagasy) and New Latitude who started working in the area a few years ago and is implementing long-term grassroots projects

promoting environmental stewardship. With the assistance of Ho Avy, the local people established their own community association, FIMPAHARA, as a way to organize their efforts.

FIMPAHARA means the association dedicated to propagating and planting trees. Together Ho Avy and FIMPAHARA have established three extensive plant nurseries and have started growing thousands of seedlings of native and endemic plants, fruit trees and food crops. Further innovations have taken root in Ranobe such as fuel effective rocket stove made from local mud, methane biogas digesters for clean cooking fuel and man powered treadle pumps.

FIMPAHARA and Ho Avy are making vast improvements to their community and the local environment but there is potential for so much more to be done. The next project for community improvement that FIMPAHARA and Ho Avy will focus on is building a Community Outreach Center for the village.

Objectives:

The Community Outreach Center in Ranobe will be a source of diverse education, integrated sustainable development projects and health interventions. It will give an inspirational home to engage more community members in already on-going and future initiatives in Ranobe.

A community center can provide a peaceful environment outside of the busy village for people to focus and work effectively on building lasting human capacity in Ranobe. The Center will be a source of pride, strengthening local efforts and encouraging community members to reach out to other communities in the area to share the innovative knowledge they are gaining.

Set-Up:

The Ranobe Community Outreach Center will have three pavilion style buildings, each with their own purpose. There will be a Children's Pavilion, Women's Pavilion, and Community Pavilion along with a storage area. The Community Pavilion will be the main gathering space for the community. It will have benches, moveable tables, a chalk board for lessons, and an attached lockable storage room. In the Pavilion, the community will be able to gather for social events, meetings, and classes. It will give FIMPAHARA a home base where they can meet and display information about their organization and its efforts. This center will educate visitors as well as international researchers and volunteers to the Ranobe village.

The Women's Pavilion will simply promote the empowerment of the local women. It will be a place dedicated to working for a better future and learning how to make that possible. Furthermore a women's association will be created and classes will be held to develop alternative sources of income with hand made crafts, like basket weaving, hand pressed medicinal oils and oils for local soap production. The pavilion will create a space for women craft work to be organized and materialized. It will also be a space for the local ladies to gather and cook together on environmentally friendly biogas digesters, which have already been set up by Ho Avy and FIMPAHARA in the village. There also will be fuel effective rocket stoves and solar ovens. For local women and their children these improvement will equal a reduction in the amount smoke inhaled, time spent harvesting wood and cooking on a daily basis.

The smallest pavilion will be the Children's. This will be the place where village children will gather for education and play. There will be low tables for them to work at with a stock of art and creative supplies, something they have never had access to before. Some of these materials have already been donated to the village by the University of Michigan Eco-Explorers who visited Ranobe in May 2010. This area will provide a space for both formal and informal lessons about the environment, creative games, health and sex education taught by visiting volunteers and community members. This place will provide a much needed area for local children to come together to learn in new and creative ways.

Surrounding the pavilions will be community gardens, a nursery and fruit tree orchard. FIMPAHARA has already donated land and worked with Ho Avy to create three plant nurseries, an agroforestry demonstration site and several community garden plots. The Community Center will provide another space for them to cultivate food and local plants and demonstrate their commitment to reforestation. These gardens will also serve as living examples to visitors about how to improve local gardening techniques using simple methods such as mulching and composting soils and improved technologies such as treadle pumps and drip irrigation systems.

Details:

The Ranobe Community Outreach Center will be constructed with local materials by community members. The Center will be built in a central field on a well used path that runs through the village. This will be an excellent location for centralized meetings and to introduce visitors to the community. The pavilions will be built using traditional building materials and methods with poles of local katrafay timber and a woven vondron (*Typha* sp.) thatch roof. Benches and walls will be made with sand bags covered with cob.

Budget notes:

Ho Avy, New Latitude and Eco-explorers: Students from the Art and Design School at the University of Michigan promote the Community Outreach Center by raising funds for the Center's construction materials, furnishing, gardening and landscaping supplies. Furthermore, we are seeking funds for the Center's maintenance and upkeep for at least 3 years and costs for operating programs that will involve hosting workshops by professional environmental educators, health practitioners and local craft technicians.

Vision and Importance:

A Community Outreach Center in the Ranobe village will facilitate strengthening the community by diversifying education and community development adaptations. It will provide a much needed space for learning, meeting, working, and displaying information about the community's innovative efforts in reforestation, improving agriculture and health education gained by working with Ho Avy. This Community Center will benefit the local people by formalizing, focusing and distributing this knowledge to become a regional training center focused on a broad array of community development and environmental stewardship practices.

The Center will be operated in close collaboration with local school in Ranobe, Environmental Education organization Sokapila and Health organization PSI.

Some first sketches of the center design: (by Trisha Previte) – note the different Pavilions are not detailed yet





