

Lalini Monday 11th November 2013

The Meeting was held at Nocawe Ngamlana's house and 13 people attended. We had 4 apologies.

OPENING/PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION

We never had a formal opening but after sharing a cup of tea proceeded to the garden where we did the practical demonstration. Instead of doing it in the community garden as planned



we did it in a garden across the road from the community garden. This is a newly ploughed plot that Mr. Sityebi Beza has borrowed from his next door neighbour. He is planning to plant vegetables in this plot so it was an ideal situation in which to demonstrate planting on raised beds marked out on contour.

We started by making an A-Frame and using it to mark out a bed on contour just above the lowest corner of the plot. As can be seen in the above picture this resulted in the plots running at an angle to the fence line. Normally what people do is plant their vegetables in straight lines parallel to the fence line. In fact Mr. Beza had a line with two sticks ready to do just that! The result of this practice is that the soil between the rows gets compacted, so when it rains water runs off this compacted soil as it is on a slope. The water runs off the field and is lost along with the soil that it takes with it

These beds are raised by removing soil from the path above the bed and putting it onto the bed. Beds are made just wide enough for it to be possible to reach to the middle of the bed from the path on each side. So once made, they never need to be walked on. The only soil that gets compacted is on the pathway between the beds and being on contour there is nowhere for this soil to flow to so it just soaks under the bed below the path. This makes the garden very efficient in harvesting rainwater. Mr. Beza was also quick to realise that these beds will never have to be dug over again. When something is harvested the soil can be just lightly worked and replanted without digging or ploughing. We also discussed the advantage of planting a variety of vegetables in each bed. This diversity is not only good for the soil but as different vegetables mature at different times there will always be something growing and so the bed is not only more efficient in harvesting rainfall but also in harvesting sunlight.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

Members of the group were keen for us to see that they have replanted the community garden. They have once more planted butternut and potato but have rotated the area planted. We discussed how there would be an advantage in planting a greater variety in the garden. Other possible crops that people are interested to include in future are: dry beans, sorghum, sweet potato, sunflower and pumpkin. While the same crop is being grown as last year there seems to be a shift in the way the community garden is seen. Before it was seen more as a “project” - growing crops for sale - now it is seen as space in which to produce food for themselves. When the crop is harvested it will be shared out among the members. This shift seems to have made people feel more responsible for the garden and it is more likely that the garden will be better cared for than it was last year.

HOME GARDENS

We never officially visited the gardens, but the garden at the house where we met and gardens we saw as we walked to the community garden are looking impressive and much more productive than they were a year ago. This in spite of having just gone through a fairly severe drought.

GENERAL COMMENTS

People had been talking about an offer from the Department of Agriculture to plough lands for people and to spray herbicide. When we were making the A-Frame Mr. Beza proudly showed us the maize he harvested this year. He had planted Okavango - a yellow open pollinated maize cultivar. He has milled some of his crop at the mill at Phandulwazi. This provided a good opportunity to discuss the advantages of growing maize that has not been genetically modified. Two important advantages are that it makes it possible to acquire healthy whole grain mielie meal that is much healthier than what is available from the shops. Secondly, the use of herbicides (which goes hand in hand with genetically modified maize) disrupts the reparative function of weeds. (I will say more about this when reporting on Mr. Lalose's garden in Frances)

NEXT VISIT.

We scheduled another visit for the 3rd March 2014. During this visit we will once more monitor all the gardens.

Mazotsho Tuesday 12th November 2013

I delivered 13 comfrey plants, 2 orange trees, 1 plum tree and 1 granadilla vine.

Before holding the meeting we went to the home of one of the members to do the practical demonstrations.

- Making a planting tower.
- Planting peanuts.
- Planting sweet potatoes.
- Planting Chrysanthemoides cuttings (this pioneer shrub will later be planted around gardens for wind protection).



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

After the practical work we went back to the house where the meeting was held and after lunch had a session of addressing questions or challenges that had come up since the last meeting.

- How to make ointment from comfrey.
- How to grow a granadilla vine.
- How to make raised beds on contour.
- What is the price of apple and peach trees?

WHAT THE GROUP WOULD LIKE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- Making a raised bed on contour.
- They would like some parsley seed or seedlings.
- They would like some garlic cloves that can be planted.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 4th March 2014

Sompondo Wednesday 13th November 2013



PRACTICAL WORK

- Making a planting tower.
- Planting peanuts
- Planting Chrysanthemoides cuttings (this pioneer shrub will later be planted around gardens for wind protection).
- Visiting a garden to see water grass that is coming up thickly in beds. The group wanted advice on how to deal with this. Two possible reasons for this problem are acidity or water logging. The acidity can be dealt with by adding wood ash to the soil and drainage can be improved by adding well-rotted manure (fresh manure can cause acidity) or compost to the soil.

NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 5th March 2014

Frances Thursday 14th November 2013

Unfortunately the young women who have been very active in this project were unable to attend our meeting. They had the opportunity to do some piecework and earn some money and did not want to miss this opportunity. They informed Winnie only on the morning we were supposed to meet, so rather than cancel the meeting we visited anyway hoping to meet with the older members. Unfortunately the older members had not been informed so we visited a few members at their homes and visited the community garden to see what progress is being made there.

MR LALOSE

We found Mr. Lalose working in his garden. He has an extensive garden with a lot growing in it. He was busy ridging his potatoes but also has mielies, vegetables, pumpkins and fruit trees growing and everything is looking very good, everything is growing fast and looks very healthy.

Mr. Lalose has been working this land since 1985 and in the process has built up incredibly fertile soil. Not being able to afford chemical fertiliser he has made use of what he has, manure, wood ash and compost. These organic fertilisers have helped but what he has inadvertently (or maybe instinctively) stumbled across is the reparative function of weeds. He has also planted a lot of trees and the ground around the roots of these trees remains

Tim Wigley Tyume visit November 2013

undisturbed so soil fungi can proliferate without being destroyed by ploughing. The combination of trees and weeds has enabled a diverse population of soil microorganisms to proliferate in his soil.

In healthy living soil such as Mr. Lalose has developed, plants do not draw their nutrients directly from the soil but are fed at root level by various microorganisms, such a bacteria and fungi, which collect nutrients for the plants (in the case of fungi sometimes from hundreds of meters away- long threads with acid tips are able to extract minerals from rocks and bring them back to plants) the plants in turn exude sugars from their roots to feed these microorganisms. This win/win symbiotic relationship allows an increasingly productive system to develop.

When the land is cleared there is a massive die off of these soil microorganisms, as they are dependent on plants ability to collect energy from sunlight. The dead bodies of these microorganisms provide a flush of fertility which boosts the growth of new plants on the land. Not only do the crops that are planted thrive, but this fertility also supports a growth flush for weeds and these weeds set off a process of exponential growth among the surviving soil microorganisms. When these new weeds are hoed out there is another big die off of microorganisms which provides a second fertility boost for the crops growing on the land, and as long as there is enough diversity of crops planted the microorganisms can again proliferate around the roots of these plants.

Witnessing what Mr. Lalose has achieved has made me a little less adamant about the need to mulch gardens. Mulch does conserve moisture but it also suppresses weed growth and I have a new found awe for what weeds are actually doing for the soil!

MR JACKSON MSHWESHWE'S GARDEN

The wheat we planted in this garden during the workshop in May is thriving and almost ready to harvest. This was planted without ploughing simply by clearing, broadcasting seed and covering it with mulch.

This demonstrates how a cover crop in a field during winter can not only provide more food but at the same time can improve the soil. There will be no need to plough before planting the next crop. Mr. Mshweshwe has also planted a seed bed to provide seedlings for the community garden.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

Seedlings we planted in September are growing but would benefit from a little more care than they have been getting.

DATE OF NEXT VISIT

Winnie is going to ask the group to suggest a date for the next visit.