

Coexistence of Nature and Humans - Towards the 21st Century (3)

Part 3: Permaculture in Zimbabwe

The word 'permaculture' is a combination of the words 'permanent' and 'agriculture', and was suggested by Bill Morrison, an Australian (and his colleagues) who defined the word as a system designed to create an environment which can be eternal and sustainable for humans with great consideration given to the concept of coexistence with nature and the global environment. With the baseline notion of obedience to nature rather than forceful conquest, permaculture aims to construct a system which is ecologically healthy, economically viable and able to sustain itself in the long term.

'Fields' made according to the permacultural design appear to be 'jungles' at first sight, as they do not look so simple and organized as ordinary fields. Permaculture aims at achieving a desirable balance within the ecosystem of the field by creating diversity in cultivation, for example by growing perennial plants (trees, bushes, vegetables and grasses), fungi and root crops. Permaculture also tries to make full use of biological resources to reduce the amount of chemical fertilizers and pesticides replaced by, for example, using green manure and leguminous plants, and by predators. Permaculture does not, however, simply promote organic farming or self-sustaining compound agriculture only. It should be felt rather 'a way of life' than another method of agriculture so that, for example, landscape, wind direction and even waterflow in the event of flooding are considered in making decision on building a house. Therefore no system can be the same under this idea of permaculture.

Today permaculture is getting more popular in many parts of the world in various ways which are suitable for the local natural environment, landscape and social environment. In Zimbabwe, NGOs such as Natural Farming Network (NFN), Participatory Ecological Land-Use Management (PELUM) Association are trying to practice permaculture and promote the concept through training. One of the NFN members, Fambidzanai Permaculture Center, has a training center of 40ha in the suburbs of Harare. Here 1-2 week training courses are held in sustainable agriculture, pest control without pesticides, participatory rural appraisal, organic farming, bee keeping, and Holistic Resource Management. The center has accommodation facilities and participants on these courses come from both inside and outside the country.

Another NGO, PELUM, was established in 1992 as a networking NGO which aims at participatory sustainable resource management, and it now has branches in ten countries in eastern and southern Africa. The network has several NGO members who are working to realize community-based sustainable agriculture and rural development. PELUM places great emphasis on educational activities such as workshops and training, and two years ago it has opened a 2-year course on 'sustainable agriculture' at the University of Zimbabwe, called 'PELUM College'. This course is unique in that teaching staff consist of people not only from academic institutions but also from NGOs and the Ministry of Agriculture (AGRITEX).



Permaculture field



Chicken tractor ('weeding & manuring' by chickens)