

# ECOVILLAGE DESIGN EDUCATION

**FOR WOMEN BY WOMEN  
UPMHAKATSI PEACE ECOVILLAGE  
SOUTH AFRICA 2013**



The first 'by Women for Women' EDE took place at Umphakatsi Peace Ecovillage, situated in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. The EDE training for sustainability course was the second such course to be held in South Africa. The course began on the 30th April - two days after its initial starting date due to the challenges of the remoteness of the location – and lasted until the 25th May 2013. Lua Bashala-Kekana and Kosha Joubert report.





## THE RIVER OF LIFE PROJECT

This course had the aim of bringing together women in a region of our world that has some of the highest numbers of rape.

Experiences of sexual abuse are a part of what inhibits women's

natural leadership in their communities. Together, we

created a safe environment for all of us to share our

experiences and support each other in a process of

healing and empowerment. Please see an array of

wonderful follow-up projects in the document attached

'The River of Life Project', which grew out of this

course.



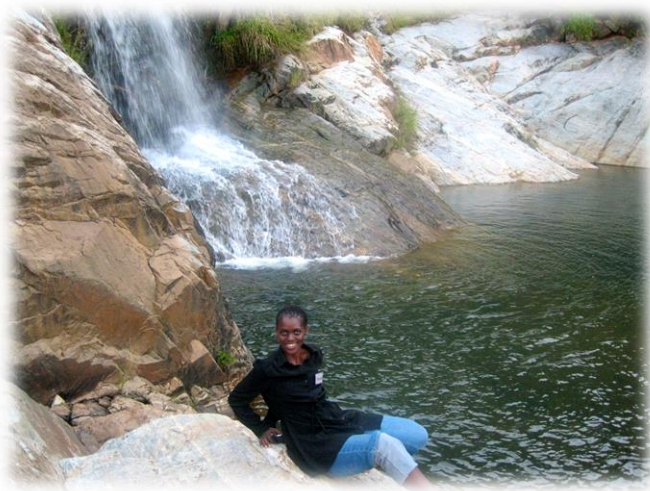
## PARTICIPANTS PROFILE

There were 20 women participants in attendance for the four-week course, ranging in age from the eldest:55, to our youngest participant aged 20. The majority of the participants were South African women from rural or township communities, others also came from Senegal, Ghana, Namibia and Zimbabwe. With us we had a former member of parliament, a former political prisoner, community volunteers, trainers, gardeners, a permaculturist, councilor, lawyer, grandmothers, married and single mothers, women who consciously choose not to have children, as well as heterosexual and homosexuals.



## COURSE RHYTHM

The day would start at 9am each morning with breakfast being served at 8am and one hour before this time allocated for



personal and group meditational and prayer practices. Some participants took this time to bathe near the flowing unpolluted river, which has been the main source of water for the community for millennia. It was exhilarating for some to practice yoga and capoeira early mornings on the flat rocks by the river.

The modules were held in sessions, which lasted 3.5 hours with half hour breaks within that time. There was also time given each morning for check in's and group prayers and afternoon sessions for songs. Most of the evenings were open; often we sat by the fire sharing life stories, poems and songs. Some of the evenings were also used by participants to present the various projects they are involved in at home. Weekends were more relaxed usually with breakfast served later and no "classroom" time, weekend activities ranged from outings to local Swati Traditional Cultural Centre, producing local household crafts, to drafting personal projects for the River of Life project, visiting local organic food producers living on the sacred mountain tops of the village, visiting and paying our respects to the local Chief and his headmen, celebrating with renowned sangoma Gogo Mahlantabeni and his initiates, learning about and propagating medicinal plants.





## HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

The first and second week wove together both the social and worldview dimensions. GEN International President, **Kosha Anja Joubert**, and GEN Africa Vice President, **Lua Bashala-Kekana**, co-facilitated the sessions together, with input from the participants along with two EDE alumni's, **Bongi Ndakisa** and **Nokwanda Langazana**, who both referred some of their community members to participate in this course, and who themselves are planning on hosting EDE's in their respective communities in the near future. Our biggest challenge was transportation and getting the participants to the very remote venue.



Once all there, the participants were inspired and uplifted by the presentations of the communities and organizations that make up the Global Ecovillage Network.



Addressing the questions of rank brought awareness to group dynamics and personal coaching sessions encouraged participants to overcome shyness and speak up about what is of importance to them. Many participants felt held by the natural surrounds and by the facilitation team,

resulting in deep processes of opening and inner awakening, that led to two participants committing themselves to follow through with their own spiritual ancestral callings.

Honouring traditional South African culture, we were blessed with the presence of **Gogo Mahlal'entabeni** and **Gogo Mathebula**, a local grandmother. She was first introduced to us as an expert broom and mat maker, but soon we found out that she is also a medicine woman with an immense knowledge around plants and healing.





The third week delved into the history of world economics and sustainable economic systems, led by **Gillian Wilton**, a developmental practitioner and freelance facilitator from Cape Town. The participants engaged in Asset Based Community Development and the setting up of our own LETS (local economic system) showcasing alternatives to monetary systems and opening up an understanding to alternative economies.

The fourth week focused on ecology with a strong emphasis on permaculture led by **Linda Kabaira**, program coordinator for the Rescope project in Zimbabwe. Having overcome a near fatal accident on her way to the ecovillage without a scratch, we were all delighted that she made it to be with us. Having only taken one day to rest from the car crash, Linda decided to continue with the training, all of us extremely grateful to the universe for her safety. For many of the participants this was the best week, as the practical knowledge of permaculture is one based on nature and intrinsically built within each and every one of us, and therefore recognized as very much needed in our modern world.



Peace Activist **Sarah Tobhi Motha**, founder of Umphakatsi Peace Ecovillage also facilitated the EDE during weekends and GEN Africa Ambassador **Lucky Kekana** supported the training by organizing the infrastructure and managing all logistics.



# KEY TRENDS

## **SOCIAL:**

What Worked:

- Living with different people from various backgrounds and learning about each others beliefs, cultures and connecting spiritually
- Purpose and intention of the programme and the sense of community built early on formed a solid foundation for which participants could embrace the programme on all levels.

What could be improved:

- Communication in regards to directions for getting to the ecovillage and transportation
- Host community could be more directly involved and present for participants to engage with

## **WORLDVIEW:**

What Worked:

- Understanding Dragon Dreaming and working on the River of life project were very inspiring, first time for many to give undivided attention to their dreams
- Amazing to connect with traditional healers and learn about medical plants and herbs on the land

What could be improved:

- Length of the training with no breaks in between to digest information
- Selection of participants so that learners are on same level of understanding

## **ECONOMY:**

What Worked:

- Learning about Asset Based Community Development exposed participants to a new way of seeing their communities
- Setting up and using our own LETS brought home the various currencies that are often taken for granted

What could be improved:

- Length of training with no break, fatigue was setting in

## **ECOLOGY:**

What Worked:

- Learning to recycle, reduce and reuse and making composts
- Learning about Permaculture and the connections between all forms of life in a practical way

What could be improved:

- Considering climate when organizing next training as it was at times very cold to sleep in the tents
- Training room was too small to comfortably hold everyone





## QUOTES FROM SOME PARTICIPANTS



"The 4 week designed programme was well planned, organised, and it delivered the requirements of the participants. It helped me to gain more knowledge on understanding the concept of ecovillages, and added to my understanding of permaculture." Phumla – South Africa

"The humility and honest attributes displayed by facilitators has shown me the other dimension of life. The EDE training has created a sense of satisfaction in my heart, which has been open and empty for a long time. It created a sense of belonging that has been missing in my life. It opened a door to look at life... and consider the impact of my actions to the environment. Above all else the EDE training created appreciation of other religions, other people, animals, the connection to nature and the purpose and effect of relationships"



"In a very big way I now have better understanding of the matter and have the willingness to get started in our own country (Namibia), I also feel more comfortable to talk about the issues (as I feel more informed). It has provided me with the impetus to start with my inner search and re-look at different issues regarding my life." Visolela – Namibia



"Appreciative inquiry made me appreciate myself more and actually realise the potential I have and the qualities I bring to the world. It has evolved in a big way. I have always thought I need a lot of money to sustain myself but I have learned that there are alternatives and that I actually just need enough to sustain myself. This EDE has changed my mind on sustainable living."Maureen – RSA



## FOLLOW UP PROJECTS:

**River of Life Project:** *"Weaving webs of kindness and trust for women's empowerment Bringing sweet hope to places of harshness"*

The inspiration to found this network of support between women, linking North and South in a fruitful dialogue and exchange came from the river, which flows through Umphakatsi Peace Ecovillage.



### **Skills Training:**

We organized a 10-day skills training workshop as a direct outcome of this EDE. The Skills training workshop was facilitated by Lua Bashala-Kekana, Lucky Kekana and four other women who took part in the Women for Women EDE.

The Villages surrounding the two ecovillages face a high unemployment rate of 80%, the majority of the youth migrate to the cities in search of work as do most men, leaving behind women led households. HIV/AIDS amongst youth in the region is also as high as 75%.



The Skills Training Workshop addressed the issue of unemployment amongst the community members of the region near the two ecovillages (Umphakatsi Peace Ecovillage and Ehlanzeni Ecovillage) where the EDE was held. This training was viewed as part of phase two of the EDE, directly aiming to bring in practical skills that once learned can become a source of sustainable income for the families living on and near the ecovillages.

During the Ecovillage Design Education training the participants assisted the community members in identifying the Aloe Ferox plant as a plant, which if properly and sustainably harvested could (as it grows abundantly in nature) be a source of income for the community. It is a plant that bears medicinal value and is also most commonly used in cosmetics. Lush Cosmetics together with Heidehof Stiftung funded the EDE. Lush also funded the Skills Training Workshop and are happy to support the community in establishing their own local cosmetics enterprise. Besides the Aloe Ferox, the communities also decided to produce Marula Oil and were supported with the purchased of an Oil Press for this purpose. Local women for millennia have used organic Marula Oil as a cosmetic. Lush is currently exploring the possibility of purchasing supplies of the oil and other plant based oils from the community. We are also exploring setting up beehives for the production of bee products.

**Dragon Dreaming Africa:** Dragon Dreaming founder John Croft and his wife Bernadette Otto in partnership with GEN Africa are organizing a Intensive Dragon Dreaming Course as well as a training of trainers, which will be held in South Africa. The Course will be to support the women of the River of Life project in realizing their projects and The Training of Trainers will be for members of GEN Africa and those whom have completed EDE's.

