The 4th month in Belize

Red Bank / Stann Creek District - 26.07.2018
The visit at the Caribbean Agricultural Research & Development Institute (CARDI) in Cayo was interesting and disappointing. Interesting, because they showed us different way to reproduce plants in a LAB and they spoke about the problem with hybrid seeds. Almost all seeds you can buy in Belize are hybrids. And this problem we are also facing in our community. It is important to teach the people how to harvest the own seeds just that most of them are useless. The corporations made a very good lobbying.

We also could visit some testing plots. There they told us that they have the same issues with the soil we had and they try to improve it with different techniques. As I asked why they don’t follow the permaculture principle to cover the soil with mulch we got an answer that surprised. ‘Permaculture is no solution because not useable for farmer even less for big scale farmer. In this moment I just thought ‘Don’t they have youtube?’ There you can find more and more examples that it works out.

Even if they don’t completely abandon chemicals they try to use organic fertilizer and pesticides.
Planning session

Every three months the team from Humana Toledo (Child Aid, SeeHR, Humana 2nd hand cloths, council…) comes together and has to plan the next quarter.

For this everybody had to present his self and make a presentation about the last 3 months. We decided to make a film which was appreciate from everybody https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9QfRy_y0uE because pictures are saying more than words.

For us it was also interesting to hear about the Humana 2nd hand cloth shops. Before we just knew that there are a lot of them all around Belize/the world. Now we were able to learn that depending on the village and their citizens the shops have different articles/cloths. It also makes sense, because very countryside you don’t expect to sell a lot of high heels. Also in more touristic places like Placencia its possible to find cloths with higher prices and better qualities. And according to this the shops getting budgets they should reach.

Most of the shops were very close or over budget. Just one didn’t reach it at all. For the defense I need to say that they have a lot of other 2nd hand shops close by and the competition is extremely high. We could discuss with all what could be done to rise their sales. From handouts to more advertising on Facebook and a little survey with the clients, all ideas got a positive feedback and would be tried out. Let’s see if the next planning session is more positive for this shop.

And yes, Maria and I had also to make a plan for the next three months and to present it to Pantaleon. We have a lot of ideas but not plenty of time anymore. So we needed to give our ideas priorities and to explain why those projects and add an ’to do’ & ’to buy’ list. Not so easy without experience about construction work. We don’t know what exactly is needed to renovate a house or build a new shade. But ok, we will follow the slogan ,learning by doing’ And sometimes it is necessary to fail to learn something. I just hope we can skip failing.
Letter for the chairman

Sometimes it is necessary to write a letter. And usually this isn’t a big thing but in this case it was a little challenging.

Everything started already 1 month before with our visit at the Solid Waste Management Belize. There we found out that the DOE (Department of Environment) has a fund and they visited Red Bank and spoke already with the chairman. Now they were waiting for a letter from the council to support Red Bank.

At this point we didn’t realize how difficult it can be to write a simple letter to a ministry. Back in Red Bank the chairman had no idea what we were talking about but ready to send them a letter. Kind as we are we offered him our help to write this letter. Just before you start to write an official letter you need more information. It starts with ‘which department is responsible for it’ ,‘how the fund is called’ ,‘for what the fund can be used’ and ‘what do they need to know’

Uncountable calls & mails and 4 weeks later we got all information. Now we asked for 8100 BZ$. For that money we would like to clean up the illegal dump-side, clean and sign the road to the official dump-side, buy a mototrycycle and some drums for the waste collection and hire 1 person for 2 days per week. The idea is to create a new paid job and to bring the waste out from the village instead of burning it at the backyard or to dump it at the entrance of the village.

In the same time we would prepare the village for the future. Because it is planned to get collection station closer to the main road where the wast would be collected from trucks to bring it to recycling stations. And this just works out if they are able to bring their garbage to the dump-side.

With the support from the village council and the pastors I am pretty sure it can work out. It just needs people which have an eye on it and push it further. For sure a task for the next teams.
Battery collection system

Oh my goodness! Who could expect this?

Usually it is difficult to motivate the people to bring their batteries to a collection station. Because of this we started one in the 3rd month a little competition in the school. Who collects most batteries can win something. It was close to the holidays according to this not so many students were participating but still we collected more than 400 batteries and still every day someone comes with more. Everything great.

Now the challenge: What to do with all those batteries? I expected to call 1-2 recycling companies and they would be happy to get them. But it came a little different. After 2 days hanging on the phone or writing emails I still have nothing. NOTHING! Nobody is interested in it. Belize has no solution for batteries. It is popular to burn them or to give them into the garbage were it ends in an unsafe landfill. The result is contaminated soil and water and polluted air. And nobody cares.

Coincidentally I found a block from Laurie. She lives in San Pedro and started also a batterie collection in different shops. With success but again nobody wants to takes the collected batteries. So we exchanged our experience and this was very motivating for both sides. She thought already about to give up and I had no idea anymore what to do. The conversation with her pushed me back to the phone and I continued to penetrate the companies. Because it couldn't be that Duracell, Eveready and Energizer make a lot of money with selling their products and don’t feel responsible for their after-use.

One solution would be to bring all collected batteries to the office of the Belize Solide Waste Management. Their office isn’t very big and they wouldn’t have enough space to store them. So they had to work on a solution. After I told them my way they started to search for an other. Let’s see how this ends.
All about chocolate

We spoke with a lot of people here in Red Bank to find out who could show us how to make chocolate. For this it is important to understand that in this village almost everybody has at least a cocoa tree in the backyard. That’s why we thought there are a lot of people to learn from. But no such luck. Instead we heard that they would like to learn from us.

Thus we organized with the help from Regina a chocolate workshop for the women groups. They were very happy about because years ago someone from Humana already promised to do it and it never happened.

Regina found Fencia a women from Indian Creek to show how to make chocolate out of cocoa. Early in the morning I picked her up at the main road and started immediately to roast the beans. 4 hours it took until they were ready for peeling. Together it was done in no time. Now it was time to grind them. It already looked and smelled like chocolate. After this the chocolate had to be cooked for 1-2 hours.

They added condensed milk even I preferred to use coconut milk not because I am vegan more because it is available and very cheap. The condensed milk need to be imported, is very expansive nothing for lactose intolerant / vegan people and lowers the profit if they want to sell it.

Finally they had to form pralines by hand or could use a silicone form. After 7 hours they could enjoy there first pralines. Now I know, why handmade chocolate is that expansive. In the same time I have to say for some women it could be a great 2nd income. All they need is time and patience.
Let's put a smile on children face

This was the headliner for a dozen of emails.

The idea was to get roundabout 1000 dental kits for the school in Red Bank. Those kits should be handed out at the beginning of the next school year to all students and to teach them together with a dentist how to brush their teeth proper. Because of the fact that most of the toothbrushes are used for ages their should be a second round of toothbrushes before Christmas holidays as a little gift.

That’s about the idea. Just how to get so many dental kits for free? The first action was to post something on facebook. Many people have more ideas and contacts than just myself. Until I got the first response on Facebook I contacted Colgate, Oral’B, Crest, Trisa and many other that came in my mind on facebook and per email.

Of corse I didn’t expect from all an warm and positive feedback. What I got was always very friendly with suggestions who I should contact. My email came from the States to Mexico to Honduras to Guatemala and Switerland. I tried it in English and in Spanish always with the same result: ‘Sorry, we are not able to help!’ But not because they didn’t want to help. The main issue was to import all the material. From Trisa (a Swiss company) I got the offer that if I find a company to ship it to Belize they would like to help. But this probably would take again to long or would be to expansive. But I would keep it in mind.

And than I got a contact somehow via Francisca, a volunteer from the Richmond Vale Academy. You know how it is at facebook. Someone nows a guy that works in a company with contacts to an other company to their employee to their boss and so on. So I tried my LUCK.

The email was addressed to Darren Weiss. I had no idea that he was Dr. Darren Weiss and the President of the Humble Foundation. They are traveling to poor countries and provides material and knowledge to kids all around the world.

In the emails I explained him about the situation in Red Bank and what we are doing. He got also a link from the video we made. And he was very impressed and interested in our project because in his opinion a healthy diet / home grown food is more important than oral care. Because without that all oral care has no effect. He experienced in many countries that everywhere they add a lot of sugar and the variety of food is very limited.

Many friendly emails and a couple of weeks later I got an offer!
If there is a team continuing our project in the village he would like to come with a team of 5 volunteers for 5 days to Red Bank. All costs are covered we just need to arrange it with the school. In this way the kids are not just getting a toothbrush and toothpaste, they also get a training from Darren how to brush the teeth in a proper way. They would make and provide a lot of photos and a video from their and our work.

This is one of those opportunities which are unbelievable. The value of this offer is enormous. In November Maria and I are not here anymore but it is just AMAZING and we are extremely happy. Thanks to Darren and Francisca. Now we just need to find out how we can organize everything around. Though it isn’t that easy to import 500 dental kits in your hand luggage I am positive to find a solution for it.
We had to wait some weeks and I think 2 times it was postponed but finally it happened. The village had a meeting where Maria and I had the opportunity to talk to some of the villagers about waste, especially batteries.

At this meeting the Belize Forest Department from Belmopan was present and spoke about some issues the farmers have with the jaguar, tapir and other animals. Also they had a couple of different topics like deforestation, protection of wildlife, wildlife tourism and more. Of course they brought also some prices, because without ruffle less people are attending. That is very typical for Belize, if people should come to your event you need to offer them snacks or prices.

At the first ruffle … ![hand sign] 🎁 … I was the lucky one and got a schoolbag with notebooks, pencils etc. This kind of prices we really can use, well done Forest Department! The new owner of the bag will be one of the students from Red Bank.

After two hours of information and discussion it was our turn. We got the chance to talk in front of roundabout 40 people. Our main concern was the battery collection. We talked about health issues a battery can cause and how easy and big the impact/change would be if we all start to bring back the used batteries to some selected shops. In general the feedback was very positive now it is time to act and to see what happens.

Soon we will install the collection boxes to the shops and hope people are using them. And than I really hope that the Solid Waste Management Belize can provide a solution for the collected batteries.
Beat the plastic

The Ministry of Environment had a national video competition about plastic. We had max. 60 seconds to show which negative influence plastic has in our life and what we are doing to fight plastic waste.

On a Thursday we had to get the results, but nothing. Therefore we didn’t expect anything anymore and called it ’Nice try’ but a couple of days later the message: 1st place and 1000 BZ$. All the money will be used for the school in Red Bank. We are extraordinarily happy 😊. (PS: Since we are not Belizean Pantaleon sent it to the jury)

Extending our tree nursery improve the fence

For our next big Open Day we have planned to give all visitors a tree as a ’thanks for coming present’ and for this we had to extend our tree nursery. To keep the costs very low we used pallets for fencing and some palm leaves to shade it. The soil we bring bag by bag by bicycle from far to our house. An exhausting job but we filled already 380 new planting bags. All the trees we seeded before we could already give away.

Presentation about batteries

Pantaleon asked us to make a short presentation about the environmental impact of batteries because he realized that even the people from Humana don’t know enough about. And how to speak about an issue if even you are not aware of?

The presentation was for sure necessary! Now they have a better understanding why it is so important to collect batteries and store / recycle them properly.
Meeting with DOE

After receiving our letter from the council it took just 2 weeks and the Department of Environment showed up in the village to check our situation. The chairman invited me to the meeting and we spoke about the support the village can get from the department and what has to be done next. Finally I found out were the official dump-side is located. It is not possible to find out where it begins and where it ends. Also a reason why the people started to dump their garbage everywhere. Together with the DOE we decided to clean up everything and to get a new place. Usually it isn’t a new place it will be just bigger and the want to dig a hole so for the people it is very visible. Drums and signs will be also provided from the department. Even if the fund isn’t as high as we hoped it is a good start. Now it takes some time until the department nows how big the area of the new dump-side has to be and the government (because it is governments land) agrees to it. In the meantime we can continue inform the people about the impact of burning plastic.

3months report for Mozambique

Even we made the video about our first 3 months we had to write a report for the OWU in Mozambique. So we took the chance to summarize and update our 3 monthly reports. It took some time and yet it was nice to read everything again and bring back in mind. Even if it feels sometimes like we are spending a lot of time with waiting for someone or something, we did a lot.

Meeting women / new fundraise for sewing machines / giveaway seeds

It is not easy to find something everybody is interested in. But most of the women from Rosas group would like to learn to use a sewing machine. For this first we need to get some of them and for this they need to make a new fundraising. Our concern is just that finally there are 3 machines for 16 people and this would create problems. Because what if after a couple of workshops just 5 want to continue with seeing but everybody put a lot of effort in the fundraiser? What if something breaks at the machine, who is responsible for it? Who keeps the machines? … Important questions which should be answered before the fundraising starts.

For fundraising they want to raise little chicken and later to sell them as BBQ again. Now they need to find a place to raise them and share the responsibility and costs (feet, water, electricity) fairly.
Preparation for new projects

To find new projects didn’t take a lot of time. More time it takes to find out what is needed, from where to get it, the costs and, not less important, to find a solution for the financial part. But the most annoying part is always to wait for an answer if we can start and when we can start. There is a lot to do but not much time left.

Maria thought about to build a nice playground. First she had to get the ideas, than to bring it to paper and to present it. But than we couldn’t find the material at the recycling company and at a regular shop it is too expensive. Like this we spend 2-3 days and at the end of the day she has to find an other project. But we try to stay positive and will find something else.

Drain clean up at mainstream & meeting with shop owner

The idea was to clean the drain at the main road with some people from Humana and the village. But if we arrived and Pantaleon had a look it was quickly clear that manpower is not enough to get it done. So he called the Ministry of Work to check if they are anywhere near by to get it done. Unfortunately all machines were in Belmopan but soon they will be in our area and than they will try to clean it up.

The story behind: We spoke with the shop owner about his situation at the main road since we would like to help him to rebuild it a bit. At this talk he mentioned that he has a problem with the water because the drain and the culvert are completely closed. And if there is a heavy rainfall (we are at the beginning of the rain season) his shop and house are flooded. Because of his situation we would like to help so we tried to get some people to clean up everything but since it is too much and everything is full with water we need heavy machines. At least it should get done in the next weeks.
Coconut planting with the TG’s
Every year the TG’s in Belize have a building week. In this week they come together for 4 days and plant trees. This year they want to plant 50 acres of coconuts and they invited us to join the planting action.
We were 14 divided in 7 groups and the goal was 600 trees every day. For this it was necessary first to dig a hole (1ftx1ftx1ft) put 2 pounds of chicken manure, a layer of soil, 50g of another fertilizer, again a layer of soil, than the coconut, fill it with soil, compress everything so it is stable and to fix it with a stick.

Maria and I did it 150 times in 1 and a half days (than we had to go to extend our visas). It was very exhausting, hot and dirty. For this we could stay in the TG’s houses with a nice shower, very comfortable beds and good food and spend a bit time with the TG’s.

Preparing leadership training
Every summer Humana People to People is supporting the communities with a summer camp. Some youth have to organize it in their village and Humana provides the material needed. This camp is mainly for very young kids to prepare them for the first school days. And Pantaleon asked us to prepare a leadership training for these youth. Since we never made a training like this it is kind of difficult to find out what is needed. But finally we made it. A big thanks to Leon, our PDC-Teacher, we could use a lot of his material related to permaculture in our presentation.

Corn mill clean out
This building should be a new classroom for the school. Since it was used as a storage room for a long time it is necessary first to get rid of a lot of garbage. For this we hoped to get help from the youth group to remove everything useless from the old corn mill. Just that they didn’t show any interest. Finally we asked the women
group and were very happy to welcome 8 women, Bryan from the peace corp, Mr. Coc from the school and some kids to get it done quickly. 3 hours and the house was clean and ready to for the next step.

**Chicken wire**

Finally!!! We almost cant believe it. The chicken wire arrived. The women group were fundraising the money so they can have their own home garden. But already at the end of May they should get their wire but the supplier could not deliver any for almost 2 months. So we are even happier that we could hand over the chicken wire. Meanwhile the chicken already destroyed most of our garden we made before. What a pity!

**Trailer**

Time after time it is necessary to repair your equipment. So did Pantaleon with the trailer from Humana. It got new lumber and a painting. Just the Humana sign was removed. So Maria and I tried our best and the result is pretty okay.

**Visit a farm**

Thanks to Alex and Maynor it was a very nice experience to visit their farm. Very proud they showed me their work and discussed a lot of different ways to farm. Both are still very young and try to do their best. Soon they will harvest their corn and they asked me to help to build a shade to store it at their farm. Almost everything is already prepared, they just need a pair of hands to assist them. And I would love to do it and can’t wait to spend more time with the guys.
Birthday
If one of the family members has birthday than it should be celebrated, even more if this is Jonathan. So I spend a couple of hours in the kitchen to make a nice cake with the limited ingredients we could get. He was very surprised and happy to share his cake with all people around. Happy Birthday Jonathan!

Reginas Open Day
Regina soon has her open day and for this she asked us to prepare a poster about nutrition. Maria had the great idea to make it bigger and on a board which we can use also for other open days. Alex had to assist us a little to get the outlines of a human body on this board. There we added information about moringa, burning plastic, milk, vegetables and much more.