



# An ECOVILLAGE in Bangladesh

Kurt Rhyner

assured me that it really is a broad variety which is cultivated here.

The Ecovillage concept was developed in Australia, where Mondal Hakim, the founder of DUS did his postgraduate studies on management and design for an ecological way of living. Back in Bangladesh he transformed his own village into this project to organize a sustainable way of life in the three dimensions, ecology, economy and social. It is clear that the 307 families who live in the village generally enjoy a better quality of life than in other villages of Bangladesh, which according to official sources is one of the five poorest countries in the world. The majority of the families have begun to use modern sustainable management to manage their own fields, such as crop rotation and wide plant variety, instead of monoculture. The courses for social awareness and technology seem to have a good impact.

When we visited the Micro Concrete Roofing tile production workshop, which was set up three years ago by EcoSouth consultant Marcelino Castro, we encountered a group of children on their way to the mosque, where they attend school. The workshop functions well, although it doesn't have a big enough

market to work the entire year. However, the workers are grateful for the opportunity to earn some extra money. Next week they will head to the north of the country to produce 8500 tiles for an architect.

At this time the Village nursery has tens of thousands of Neem plants, the tree which was named "tree for the new millennium" by the United Nations. Hakim is also president of the Neem association, as well as a commercial company that produces multitudes of Neem based products. They offer everything from soap, body lotions and medicines, to insecticides. A few days later, when visiting a supermarket, we came across the Neem beauty line on a center shelf at the entrance.

It takes five to six years for the Neem tree to produce the first harvest of fruits and leaves, which are the base product, and after eight years a regular harvest can be expected. The Ecovillage has received the rights to reforest an abandoned train track 76 km long, a program that will provide work

and income to peasant families living along the route, while, at the same, it increases the availability of prime material for this ecological production.

Hakim becomes enthusiastic when he talks of plans and a trip to the tea plantation, where they have used Neem based herbicides instead of chemical ones. He wants to convince the landowners to plant Neem and other trees that are appropriate for natural medicine. His goal is to break the monoculture, that make it difficult to fight plagues. The next point would be to convince people to start producing MCR tiles so they can offer their workers better housing. At the moment the houses are made from zinc, which is almost unbearable because of the tremendous heat during most of the year. The president of the "Tea Board", the state organization that coordinates the activities for this important export product, is convinced of the idea.



## Dare to Share Fair

Martín Melendez

The "Dare to Share" fair held at Swiss Development Cooperation headquarters in Bern at the end of March, attracted more than 125 participants from all over the world in a knowledge sharing endeavor that included workshops, exhibitions, small presentations and bilateral meetings.

I went to check the Encarta to find a definition for the word "fair".

At their beginning fairs were periodical meetings of sellers and buyers with their merchandise, which was the only opportunity to interchange their goods. Usually the fairs were held during religious festivities. Then in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the United States, fairs more and more were converted into big industrial exhibitions and in Europe some fairs specialized around one single industry.

Bern, the city in which the offices of the Swiss government are located, served as a stage for the "Dare to Share" Fair, a meeting dedicated to the interchange and the management of knowledge.

For two days people from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania and Europe discussed in workshops, and made small presentations and exhibitions about their Know-how and how they use it.

The EcoSouth Network had an exhibition stand where we showed how we communicate our information. Perhaps what attracted the most attention was the way EcoSouth colleagues communicate face to face, with the "Three Bs" system (bread, bed and beer) that keeps costs low. This characteristic form of maintenance of who



shares their knowledge with you is well known in central Europe, where even today you can find apprentices (especially carpenters) that after graduating will travel the world for a bed, food and some money to spend, without charging the real worth of their work offered.