What is Permaculture

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Permaculture is a design approach to create regenerative, sustainable systems. Envisioned over 25 years ago by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, from Australia, it has now spread to over 120 countries. Though its conception was as a land based system, its effectiveness has moved it into urban settings and to being applied in various social, political, and economic environments.

Permaculture was created through the synthesis of many design systems, with the emphasis on nature as the penultimate one. Similarly, the insights and value of traditional and indigenous practices and knowledge are acknowledged along with the necessity of adapting these with our current understandings and the appropriate technologies of today's world. What Permaculture seeks to do is to create three-dimensional designs that are site specific and sustainable. By bringing together elements (orchard, water system, farmer, cow, etc.), techniques (organic framing, natural building, etc.) and strategies (microclimate, relative placement, etc.) a system is designed or altered based on regenerative relationships. It is these regenerative, beneficial relationships that give a system complexity, three dimensionality, and thus, resiliency.

Permaculture principles are a list of attitudes, approaches, and actions that are practical and not system specific. These along with certain tools and techniques allow for a holistic approach and interaction with any type of system. As a tool of analysis it is an excellent way to look at existing programs, strategies, and interventions to assess their interactions, linkages, and success'. It is a way to reach an understanding of the various influences and flows involved in a system, be it self help groups, village, or organization. Second, it provides insights and principles by which to intervene or interact with a system. As there is neither a truly independent system, nor sterile 'environment' this aspect is of significant importance. Thirdly, as we have already stated, Permaculture is an excellent approach for designing resilient, site-specific systems, be it disaster preparedness, HIV/AIDS, or women's empowerment.

The world can be looked at as the convergence of many different flows. From 'natural' (wind, water, soil, etc.) to human (social, resources, transportation, etc.) to invisible (economic, information, etc.) which interact and create patterns. These flows form our world. Recognizing this, Permaculture teaches Pattern Literacy and Pattern Application. This, along with Sector Analysis (site specific flow mapping), Zonation (a tool for structuring time) and other techniques and tools, Permaculture focuses on creating regenerative relationships that are the key to resilient, sustainable systems.

From its inception Permaculture has quickly spread around the world where farms and other sites are successfully applying its' ideas, techniques and strategies. As further testament to its applicability, Permaculture is now being applied in many urban and suburban areas. In many developed countries these applications hold much promise for dealing with the many issues associated with mass populations.

Permaculture in the last few years has been moving into the invisible structures. In the United States a Permaculture credit union has been formed and 'green' investment firms are using Permaculture principles and ideas to create resilient, sustainable investment systems. Environmentalists and social activists are using Permaculture to give depth and complexity to their approaches to many issues we are dealing with today. These applications are possible because Permaculture is a design system that focuses on relationship and not so much on object.

Permaculture is a multi-faceted, in depth design system that will help us create appropriate, site-specific designs that are both sustainable and regenerative.

It is important to understand that Permaculture is not so much about giving you new and improved ideas, techniques, and strategies, though there is some of that. What Permaculture does is allow for a deeper understanding of the situation at hand and, with its principles and strategies, a more holistic, effective way to interact with or design a system. What Permaculture offers are skills and principles by which we build our awareness of why or why not something was successful. Through this insight we can build on what is successful and modify others to become more successful.

Stepping up another level, Permaculture is an excellent way to weave together the different parts of an organization so that a unity and synergy can be created. In this way unforeseen benefits and ease will raise within the system.