

Biovision

Newsletter August 2018

Combining old and new knowledge
Conserving resources and increasing yields



20
YEARS
REAL HELP  biovision

A future for all, naturally

Mary Kathoni

Member of the “Dunduni” farmers’ group



“If the forests decline, so do the harvests.”

Project “Reviving traditional knowledge” (started in 2011)

Biovision is working to improve the lives of smallholders and their families in four counties situated at the foot of Mount Kenya. There is a particular focus on encouraging ecological methods of cultivation, preserving indigenous crops and protecting and developing forested areas.

- **Objectives of current project phase:**
 - Train 1600 smallholders in methods of agriculture that are sustainable and more resilient to drought
 - Introduce measures to improve soils and prevent erosion
 - Produce and plant out 60,000 indigenous saplings

- **Project budget 2018:** CHF 80,843

- **Account for donations:** PC 87-193093-4

Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030):

This project contributes directly or indirectly to two of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 2 (End hunger and promote sustainable agriculture) Goal 15 (Terrestrial ecosystems, soils, biodiversity):



Working together to preserve resources

Farmers from Dunduni, a village in the Tharaka lowlands of Kenya want to preserve the trees on Ntugi Hill that are threatened by overexploitation.

Fabian Kohler, Biovision

As the home of their ancestors, the forest on Ntugi Hill has a spiritual meaning for the people of Dunduni. Despite this, it is under increasing pressure because of its use for timber and fuel and as fodder for cows and goats. Members of the Dunduni Group have realised that the health of the forest also has an impact on their farming activities. What is more, the field courses run by our Kenyan partner ICE (Institute for Culture and Ecology) have strengthened this realisation. “Many wild animals live in the forest,” explains Mary Kathoni, a member of the group. She is convinced that if the monkeys living in the forest can find enough fruit there, they will leave their fields alone. The wild bees and honey bees also find shade and food in the forest, particularly during the hotter, dry season. “Instead of going somewhere else, they remain here, pollinate our crops and fruit trees and also provide honey,” she stresses.

In addition, group members know that it is important to preserve the trees growing in their own fields. “They provide shade and prevent erosion,” explains Gerard Gikundi, Chairman of the Group. When soils are criss-crossed with tree roots, they are better able to absorb rainwater and store it. This is why the members of the Dunduni Group become very worried when they see farmers burning off the stubble after the harvest.

With professional support from ICE, the farmers take cuttings or grow seedlings of the Muthuigora, Mububua or Neem trees which are then planted in the fields or in the

forest. Several of their neighbours have already followed their example.

Muramba – the tree of life

In the sparsely wooded lowlands at the eastern foot of Mount Kenya, the baobab tree with its massive trunk and slender branches is instantly recognisable. In the local language, it is called the “muramba” or tree of life. The trunk has a spongy, fibrous texture and during the rainy season it absorbs and stores large quantities of water, which means that the trees are able to survive long periods of drought. The water stored in the trees has a significant cooling effect on the bark of the tree and the surrounding area and so they are often used as places of rest for both humans and animals. The fruit, which is full of vitamins, is also very popular and the seeds contain valuable oil. The smooth trunk makes it difficult for wild animals to climb them and so the beekeepers often places hives on muramba trees.

Members of the Dunduni group are keen not only to retain their valuable knowledge of the baobab and other indigenous species but also to disseminate that knowledge more widely. They are leading by example and planting trees so that others come to understand their importance. Group members know very well that “if the forest declines, so do the harvests”. They and other farmer groups participating in the Biovision project are showing the way by sending out a strong message about the importance of maintaining biodiversity and the resources used by humans in the area around Mount Kenya.

More information:
www.biovision.ch/knowledge



Members of the Dunduni Group become very worried when they see their neighbours burning off the stubble after the harvest: When this happens, the soils are left exposed to sun, wind and rain (top). The mighty baobab trees dominate the landscape and are valuable for both humans and the environment (right). Gerard Gikundi, Chairman of the Dunduni Group picks the sweet fruit from a young muthwana tree (middle left). The men and women in the Dunduni Group understand the importance of the trees and the forest for the crops growing in the fields (bottom left).

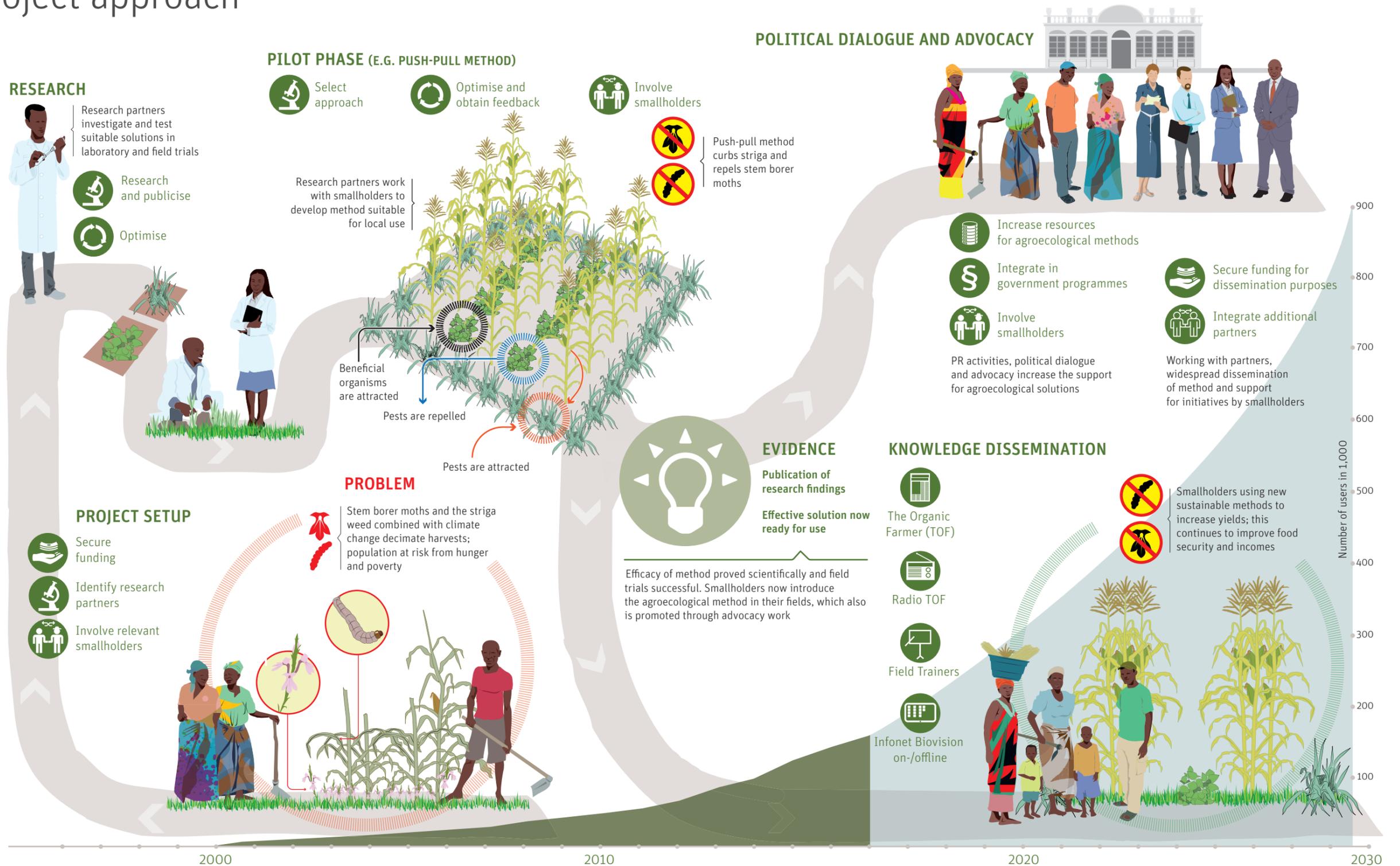
At the interface between research and sustainable development: The Biovision project approach

Biovision supports smallholders and their families achieve long-term, sustainable increases in yields without damaging the environment. This requires new knowledge and innovative methods. However, in the past applied agro-ecological research was sadly neglected.

Andreas Sicks, Biovision

In order to support agro-ecological approaches we often work with research-oriented partners, who use scientific methods to develop, test and prove the efficacy of individual methods. To identify practical solutions, it is particularly important to involve farmers at an early stage as this allows the development of customised approaches that are actually suitable for local conditions.

Such development processes produce innovations that are evidence-based as they reflect research data from both laboratory and field trials, the contents of scientific publications and concrete experience in practice. These research outcomes when combined with the practical results from pilot projects provide a solid basis for spreading further innovative approaches and new technologies.



Andreas Sicks, is a geographer and Head of Development Projects at Biovision.

These methods are spread further by direct partnerships with Foundations and other NGOs, who implement the projects. The various media outlets developed as part of the Biovision farmer communication

programme ensure direct contact with smallholders and their families.

At the political level we work with local and national governments in sub-Saharan Africa

in order to spread the application of successful approaches much more widely. Key players in this respect include farming organisations, the private sector and universities.

We are also active at the regional and global level, promoting a policy framework that takes greater account of ecological systems of farming. Our aim is to encourage international funders, research institutions

and political decision makers to give greater support to the transition to a knowledge-intensive, multi-functional system of agriculture.

No entry for malaria mosquitoes

Nyabondo is located on a plateau above Lake Victoria. The area has high levels of rainfall and is ideal for arable farming. However, the rain also has its downside. Nyabondo has the highest incidence of malaria in Kenya and so Biovision and its partner *icipi*, the international insect research institute are finding new ways to control malaria mosquitoes in an environmentally friendly way.

In the latest field trials, a system known as “House-Eave Screening” is using nets to seal the gap of up to 10 cm between the roof and the walls. This prevents the mosquitoes getting into the houses. So far, 80 buildings have been protected with nets by the mosquito scouts from the local association “Mosquito Control Nyabondo” (MOCON). Prior to installation, the insect researchers from *icipi* carried out a thorough inventory of the number of mosquitoes in the trial houses. After installation, the number of mosquitoes is re-counted and compared with the numbers in control houses that have not been sealed. Analysing this data will show the decline in mosquito numbers and so the extent to which the risk of infection has been reduced. For Rose Ochieng, whose house has already been sealed, the answer is clear: “Eave-Screening works. We are stung much less often by mosquitoes since it was installed”. | sg



The mosquito scouts from MOCON (Mosquito Control Nyabondo) fit a mosquito-proof net between the wall and the roof.



Whenever Rose Munde, a government agricultural adviser is asked for help by farmers, she always has her tablet computer with her so that she can consult the offline version of “Google for Farmers”.

INFONET for farmers: Much better than Google

Rose Munde is a “Plant Doctor” from Machakos in Kenya and knows a great deal about plant cultivation, pests and diseases. However, sometimes her knowledge is not enough for a rapid diagnosis and so she always has a comprehensive encyclopaedia with her so that she can quickly find the answer.

Peter Lüthi, Biovision

Modern communication tools are a part of everyday life in Africa as well and so Rose Munde always has her tablet computer with her when she goes out to advise farmers locally. The small device weighs only 300 grams but contains detailed information, photos, information charts and maps that would previously have required several heavy tomes. It was Raphael Okoth, a smallholder from Western Kenya and Monique Hunziker, a project manager at Biovision who in 2004 laid the foundations for the “Infonet Biovision”, an Internet platform for agriculture in East Africa. Today, the website is even accessible from your smartphone and the information is also available as an offline application, making it available at any time

even without an Internet connection. The Infonet Biovision contains background information on all aspects of ecological plant cultivation, animal husbandry, human health and a considerate use of natural resources.

First choice: Infonet Biovision

Members of the Project Team draft the content; this is revised by scientists and then adapted by experienced practitioners. Rose Munde is one of many who are convinced by the reliability of the information. “Infonet-Biovision is my first port of call because it concentrates on data that is really relevant to Kenya,” says the government agricultural adviser. The information is very reliable and is written in simple language that farmers can easily understand. I also think it very important that the Infonet Biovision is free to everyone,” she stresses.

Decide for yourself:
www.infonet-biovision.org



The agronomist Belinda Weya, a member of the Infonet-Biovision team in Nairobi coordinates the compilation and checking of content. She writes and edits the texts and uploads the data.

Globi congratulates Biovision on its anniversary

In our 20th anniversary year, we have received many messages of congratulations, including one from Globi. In the book “Globi, der schlaue Bauer” (Globi, the smart farmer), Globi introduces environmentally friendly ideas on his farm and even travels to Africa. The book was produced in 2014 in cooperation with Biovision.

Each week we upload a new video to our column “Reflections on our anniversary” with different personalities talking about what Biovision means to them.

Visit our website!
www.biovision.ch/anniversary



In a video statement on our website, Globi is one of those who talks about the work of Biovision.

Imprint

Newsletter 51, August 2018, © Biovision Foundation, Zurich

Published by Biovision, Foundation for ecological development, Heinrichstrasse 147, 8005 Zurich

Editorial Peter Lüthi

Production Dunja Taleb

Text Fabian Kohler, Andreas Sicks, Simon Gottwalt, Michael Bergöö, Peter Lüthi

Languages This Newsletter is available in German, French and English.

Translations Sue Coles (English), Daniel Wermus (French)

Cover photo Cattle at a watering hole on the River Thingithi near Marimanti, Kenya Photo: Fabian Kohler/Biovision

Other photos Fabian Kohler/Biovision: Pages 1, 2, 3; Peter Njoroge/icipi: Page 6 left; Samuel Röösl: Page 7 right; Peter Lüthi/Biovision Pages 5, 6 right, 7 left and 8

Design Binkert Partner, Zurich

Printing Koprint Alpnach AG, Alpnach

Paper quality Cyclus Offset (100% recycled)

The Biovision Newsletter is published five times a year and is available on subscription for a minimum donation of CHF 5.-.



A “March against Monsanto and Syngenta” took place on 19 June in Basel – a sign of how urgent it is to make fundamental changes to our food system; something that will be made possible if Switzerland votes Yes to the Fair Food Initiative.

Yes to the Fair Food Initiative

On 23 September 2018, the Swiss people will vote on the Fair Food Initiative. Our President, Hans Rudolf Herren explains why he will be voting Yes.

Michael Bergöö, Biovision

What is the Fair Food Initiative?

The Initiative seeks to encourage the production of foodstuffs on farms that are in harmony with nature, kind on the environment and animals and where workers are treated fairly. In concrete terms, that means diversity rather uniformity from farm through to fork, more regional and seasonal foodstuffs and less food waste: Something that we called for back in 2008 in the IAASTD Report (World Agricultural Report).

Why are you and Biovision supporting this initiative?

There is an urgent need for a change of course. Only if agriculture uses resources efficiently and adapts to climate change can we guarantee enough food to feed the global population in future. We must stop favouring products that harm the environment and end the discrimination against sustainably produced foodstuffs: We must make the latter more attractive to the consumer. We must pay farmers a fair price for their efforts by applying the true-cost principle: We must reward benefits

created for the environment and society. With this Initiative, we are one step closer to our vision of a world with enough healthy food for all, produced by healthy people in a healthy environment.

What are the advantages to the farmers in Africa?

The Fair-Food Initiative expressly tackles Switzerland’s international trading relationships. Many developing countries are net importers, i.e. they are “flooded” with surplus foodstuffs from industrialised countries, who can produce them more cheaply by paying product-related subsidies. The Initiative seeks to reduce these unfair trading conditions: Stronger demand for sustainably produced foodstuffs from developing countries – in particular tropical fruit, vegetables, coffee and cocoa – will have a positive impact on the lives of smallholders and their families. These farmers will achieve a higher price for their produce, working conditions will be fairer and they will also look after the fragile environment. The Initiative takes a holistic approach and fully embraces economic rationality, social justice and ecological responsibility as defined in the UN Agenda 2030.

More information:
www.fair-food.ch (in German or French)



Story from the life of Roland von Ballmoos, Erlenbach, Switzerland “Many said I was mad”

Peter Lüthi, Biovision

Throughout my life, I have always had people who encouraged me,” says Roland von Ballmoos. For example, he learned an incredible amount from his mother. “She was the brains in the family and did the accounts for the family business”. In contrast, his father was a visionary. “From him I have my passion, the spirit of adventure and my love of fast cars,” he says with a smile.

His parents produced films for the offset printing industry. Their company had an excellent reputation that extended as far as Germany where customers placed a high value on quality and a guaranteed quick service for the production of glossy brochures and books. As a student, Roland drove his father’s car over the border taking the litho-films to the printers. The next morning, he would turn up on time for his first lecture in the ETH Lecture Hall.

In 1969, whilst still a teenager, he left his grammar school in Baden and spent a year in the United States where he attended a High School in Cleveland and enjoyed the more accessible teaching. In 1981, he completed his doctorate in chemistry at ETH, after which the young catalyst specialist was

welcomed into the research team of the US giant Mobil Oil at Princeton (New Jersey). Roland von Ballmoos worked hard, was reliable and tenacious; he rose quickly through the ranks, He later joined the Engelhard Corp (now BASF) as a member of its management team.

In 1993, Roland’s partner fell seriously ill and she died two years later. Her death shocked him to the core and he decided to change his way of life completely. He moved back to Switzerland.

At the start of the new Millennium he found his true calling as the joint founder of EMP Consulting AG and became its Chairman. Working with SMEs, he developed visions, implementation strategies, business plans and helped companies achieve them. He also ventured into projects that would previously have been considered unachievable.

“Many said I was mad,” he says with a grin. However, he was successful. For example, he and his team worked with the company Lantal Textiles AG to develop cushioned seats for

large aircraft. They contained no foam but worked using air. The key feature was a small air pump and the associated software. Passengers could change the hardness of their seat and even turn on a massage mode. Anyone who has travelled in Business Class with SWISS, Lufthansa, Etihad, Air Canada and many others will be familiar with these seats. Even Bertrand Piccard and André Borschberg, the pioneering solar aviators use one of these air cushions in their “Solar Impulse”.

His unshakeable resolve to realise what seems impossible is something that links Ballmoos with the Biovision founder Hans Rudolf Herren. Roland has decided to remember Biovision in his will and has left it a legacy. “You have a grand vision and you are implementing it,” he says. “We humans have destroyed too much of our planet”. He regards the work of Biovision as a convincing

“Biovision has a grand vision and is implementing it”

way to change that. “Help for self-help is an approach that in an adapted form can be applied anywhere in the world and so I am pleased to help Biovision grow,” he says.

