

AFRICAN FORESTRY MEMBERS UPHOLDING THE INTERNATIONAL FORESTS DAY

The United Nations General assembly declared 21st march the International Day of Forests in 2012 to celebrate awareness of the importance of all types of forests. As the world commemorates the 11th international forest day this year, it is important to contemplate its theme; “forest and sustainable production and consumption”, as we undertake efforts to organize activities involving forests and trees such as tree planting campaigns. It is also important to acknowledge efforts in line with the theme that have so far been achieved by locals, nations, and the world. The theme defines forests as a vital component of life. All possible life on earth is somehow related to forest existence; houses we build, the water we drink, the medicines we use, the air we breathe, papers we write on, packaging materials we use, and many other socio-economic activities that link our daily lives with trees and forests in varying ways. Furthermore, forests might just be an inventive and effective option for locals/nations to consider towards sustainably achieving development. With the current resource utilization methods accelerating excessive environmental and climatic changes, deliberate actions must be taken to protect the well-being of our future generations.

In Tanzania, efforts made by several African Forestry members have proven to be in line with this year’s theme. They have managed to show communities surrounding them that life can be made possible through establishing and exploiting forests sustainably. These members conduct community development programmes by using resources from plantations they established. Resources used range from human resources, equipment to monetary resources. The programmes not only aim at supporting local civilians surrounding them, but also to make them believe in commercial forestry as a better alternative option for sustaining life. These members include, but not limited to; -

Green Resources (GRL)

Green resources is a company that specializes in tree planting activities in two districts found in two different regions in the southern highlands. These are Kilombero and Mufindi districts found in Morogoro and Iringa region respectively. The company has a department of community development that has the task of building positive relations between the company and surrounding villages that leased land to the company for establishing plantations. It does so by implementing community development projects that the company and the villages had agreed upon when processing land transfer from villages to the company.

Through the community development department, the company allocates a budget of TZS 200 million each year as their corporate social responsibility towards fulfilling the agreed projects. The main sectors involved in the projects include health, education, water, and infrastructures. In the education sector, the company has managed to construct and renovate classrooms, offices and staff houses and thus help to alleviate the crisis facing primary and secondary schools in several villages surrounding the company, most importantly the shortage of classes. Furthermore, the company

provides education on proper tree planting techniques accompanied by the provision of free seedlings. Approximately 200,000 seedlings have been donated by the company in the past three years as one way of empowering its surrounding villagers to engage themselves in commercial forestry. In the health sector, the company has collaborated with the government to improve standards of health services and working conditions of health attendants through providing hospital beds, constructing a maternity ward, staff houses for nurses and doctors. The company also considers itself socially responsible for establishing infrastructures (i.e., village government offices in Chogo village) and maintenance.

Furthermore, the company has invented a new system of assisting villages in which the agreed projects have been fully completed by creating a social development fund that annually provides 1.25 USD for every hectare measured from the company area to the village that leased the land. For example, in 2022 TZS 19 million has been donated to Uchindile village due to 6668 ha that the village leased to the company. Apart from the fact that 80% of the total employees of the company are from the surrounding villages, the social development fund also enables locals to realize the importance of the company's presence in their daily lives.

New Forest Company (NFC)

Immediately after being established in 2009/2010, NFC formed a cooperative social responsibility department with the aim of supporting villages that leased land to the company for establishing commercial plantations. It also aimed at reducing the risk of occurrence of forest fires in the company's plantations as well as the surrounding village plantations. The company supports 18 villages in Kilolo district (Iringa), and all the villages benefit from the company in one way or the other. NFC has managed to build hostels in secondary schools and thus enabling more study time for students that had to travel long distances to go to school. This has improved grades for most students and reduced early and unplanned pregnancy cases. In the health sector, the company has collaborated with the government to build dispensaries as well as houses for medical attendants/nurses/doctors, thus increasing efficiency and effectiveness of services provided by these dispensaries. Previously, it was difficult for patients to acquire immediate health services out of working hours as doctors/nurses resided far from their working station. The company has also managed to introduce beekeeping projects in these villages. Villagers are organized into groups and empowered in establishing beehives. The main benefit obtained from these projects is honey, which is used as food, medicine for illnesses such as coughs, and money through trading honey. Seedlings for both fruit trees and timber trees are also donated by the company along with education on proper tree planting and silvicultural management of trees. Furthermore, the company has facilitated the formation of women empowerment groups that mostly operate as Village Community Banking (VICOBA). These groups are mainly for savings and loan acquisition. Villagers have concluded that they are very useful in solving immediate problems that regularly face them such as paying farming costs and school fees.

Kilombero Valley Teak Company (KVTC)

The Kilombero Valley Teak Company (KVTC) produces *Tectona grandis* (teak) seedlings every year for two main purposes; firstly, for replanting in harvested compartments that belong to the company and secondly, for obtaining teak stumps that are freely distributed to communities surrounding the company. The distributed stumps are part and parcel of a community development project initiated by the company known as KVTC out-growers support programme.

The project has the following goals.

- To build strong positive relations between the company and the surrounding communities.
- To alleviate poverty by creating direct and indirect employment opportunities that will generate more income to out- growers surrounding the company.
- To raise the household economy of out- growers.
- To promote land value addition by planting trees.

The programme was initiated in 2008 and it previously dealt with assisting individual villages surrounding the company. Improvements were made and from 2012 the company started dealing with individual farmers. Up to date, the programme has reached out to more than 600 farmers and together they have managed to plant 1,200 hectares with teak. The programme also involves providing tree planting and silvicultural practices education, free provision of herbicides, and 50% coverage per each management cost involved before rotation age is reached: such weeding costs, pruning costs, and thinning costs. The tree planting project conducted by KVTC has been very helpful to out- growers since it was difficult for them to obtain stumps in the previous days.