

# ***SOCIAL FORESTRY NETWORK***

**COMMUNAL WOODLOTS IN TANZANIA:  
FARMERS' RESPONSE AND AN EVOLVING EXTENSION STRATEGY**

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**SOCIAL FORESTRY IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA:  
TURNING FELT NEEDS INTO A DRIVING FORCE**

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# **COMMUNAL WOODLOTS IN TANZANIA: Farmers' Response and an Evolving Extension Strategy**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper reviews the experience which has been gained with regard to woodlots in the Tanzanian National Community Forestry Programme since its inception in 1967. It begins by tracing the formative years of the programme, identifying those factors which led to 'communal woodlots' receiving such a high profile. The reasons why they proved to be an unsuccessful approach are then summarized, drawing on the findings of internal reports produced by the forest service; interim reports from various non-governmental and bi-lateral aid projects which began to play an increasingly important role in farm based tree growing after 1980; and independent surveys which aimed to develop a more detailed understanding of what was happening in particular villages. Leading on from this, the paper will show how the programme now encompasses a much wider set of tree growing and forest management practices and social objectives as part of an evolving extension strategy.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAMME**

Tree growing by rural people in Tanzania was first given formal backing in 1967 with the proclamation of a national Community Forestry Programme (formally called the Village Afforestation Programme). The role of the government body responsible for forestry, the Forest and Beekeeping Division (FBD), was then augmented beyond management and protection of forest plantations and reserves to include the distribution of tree seedlings and advice to farmers. In early years of the programme the method of tree growing promoted amongst farmers was almost exclusively that of scaled-down plantations or woodlots. It was intended by the forest service that these should be managed for woodfuel or poles for light construction purposes. Tree seedlings were raised in central government nurseries and distributed to villagers free-of-charge.

The single focus which was initially put on woodlots can be attributed to several factors. First, foresters were inexperienced in devising tree growing strategies in response to the diverse needs of farmers. They tended to rely on tree species and silvicultural techniques already well known to the profession. Woodlots were also regarded as the best means of raising trees for providing woodfuel

to rural communities; at this stage in Tanzania, as in many other countries, the extension effort was governed by an over-riding concern with the rural and urban energy crises. In early government statements regarding the programme it was stated that every rural village should be in a position to supply its own woodfuel requirements through tree growing.

Formulation of the forestry programme was also shaped by a sequence of radical policy measures undertaken by government during the 1970s including decentralisation reform and villagisation. These aimed to create the institutional channels and legislative means whereby rural people would become involved in the formal processes of land use and social planning; the underlying aim being to promote 'self-reliance' at the local level and to entice the smallholder farmer into the arena of national economic production.

The Decentralisation Act of 1972 heralded an era during which attempts were made to shift decision-making machinery closer to the people, with district and village governments given greater control over planning and the allocation of resources within areas of their jurisdiction. Responsibility for the executive administration of the community forestry programme was delegated to District Forest Offices at this time; the central office of the FBD then took on the supportive role of developing national policy for the various forestry sectors as well as advice, training and publicity.

Decentralisation reform preceded an increasing drive towards villagisation in rural areas of the country from the mid to late 1970s. This involved the enforced relocation of several million people into larger nucleated and stabilized settlements. Concerted attempts were also made to superimpose a universal collective form of land management onto the multiplicity of existing patterns of resource tenure and labour organisation.

In line with these policies, it was initially stipulated that village woodlots should be established on collective land holdings. Planting, tending and harvesting operations were to be undertaken through communal work effort under the authority of the newly established system of 'village councils' which were the formal contact point for extension services at community level. Under guidance from the forest service, the councils were ultimately responsible for setting and enforcing rules concerning management and the distribution of harvests from the woodlots.

Villagisation also served to bring the issues of deforestation into focus. Both the initial establishment and subsequent growth of many villages resulted in increasing localised scarcity of forest products and land degradation. It was recognized at the time by Kjekshus (1977) that unless villagisation was coupled with the necessary inputs to create a novel technology to master the environment, the new settlement pattern would be counterproductive in economic terms and destructive to the ecological balance of the land. The community forestry programme was in part designed to provide such a 'novel technology', but villagers were initially reluctant to plant trees. It is estimated that during the first ten years of the programme, up to 1979, only 23,000 ha of woodlots were established. This fell far short of the expected target of 16 ha per village per annum (Mnzava 1980). In some places people were even openly hostile to efforts to establish communal woodlots, uprooting or cutting the plants deliberately (Lulandala 1983).

Consequently, in an effort to boost the profile and impact of the programme, a multi-media extension campaign entitled 'Forests are Wealth' was staged at the beginning of the 1980s. This was a collaborative effort between FBD and the Tanzanian Institute of Adult Education. According to Mutangira (1984) the comprehensive objective of the campaign was to 'raise the awareness of the people as regards their environment with particular respect to the conditions of existing woodlands; so that they were ready to receive the campaign inputs in the form of education, information, expertise and seedlings; consequently to embark on the task of conservation and reforestation of the land'. At this time, forestry departments in many countries had gone so far as to introduce 'labour days' on the official calendar. The 'Forests are Wealth' campaign was a far more ambitious undertaking because it attempted to achieve nationwide coverage over an extended period of years, employing an integrated range of communication channels. Priority was given to eight regions in the semi-arid heartland of the country where problems associated with land degradation were considered to be most acute, and where a mass media approach was complemented by more intensive extension practice including village seminars and peripatetic cinema.

At the outset of the campaign the technical emphasis was still firmly placed on communal woodlots. However, the campaign proved to be a significant learning experience for the newly established Community Forestry Section of the FBD. It was soon revealed that a much broader based approach to the forestry extension effort was in fact required.

## **REASONS FOR THE POOR RESPONSE TO WOODLOTS**

In the early 1980s the first detailed evaluations of the forestry programme began to appear. According to the official report on the 'Forests are Wealth' campaign (FBD 1982) the rate of tree planting in villages immediately before and after the campaign rose from 4,500 ha in 1979-80 to 6,500 ha in 1980-81; a trend corroborated by Matiko (1987) who revealed a significant increase in tree planting of more than 50% in ten out of the twenty regions of the country. However, other reports point out that a majority of successful woodlots were established by schools and other institutions rather than by farmers cooperating under the auspices of village councils; tree seedling survival rates in village woodlots were also generally much lower (Table 1). The programme continued to meet with an ambivalent or negative response from farmers particularly with regard to communal woodlots. Various factors have been noted as contributing to this limited success.

All reports refer to the logistical difficulties of establishing a viable forestry outreach service, especially those caused by the lack of transportation for seedling distribution and extension visits, as well as an insufficient supply of tree seedlings to some villages where response to the programme was more favourable.

**TABLE 1: PLANTING GROUPS AND SURVIVAL RATES IN THE DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES**

Planting Groups	Survival Rates				Total
	0-25	26-50	51-75	76-100	
Village/Communal	50	35	15	-	100
Schools	10	20	40	25	95
Individuals	14	46	32	04	96

Source: FAO, 1984:36

Reference was often made to poor tending of village woodlots as a reason for their failure, including unrestrained grazing and trampling by livestock and uncontrolled fires. Such causes were, however, nearly always symptomatic of underlying disaffection with the programme. Experience from many countries has shown that if there is a strongly felt need to grow trees, then it can often be achieved through local agreement with or without physical or legal protection measures.

Throughout the country woodlots were far too small to meet village woodfuel needs. In early years of the programme villages planted on average between 2 and 5 ha of woodlot per year. Assuming that a village of 500 households had 5 ha of woodlot to harvest annually, then the wood shared would not be sufficient because each household would receive only 0.8 m<sup>3</sup> as compared to the national average wood requirement of about 2.5 m<sup>3</sup> per annum (Mnzava, 1983). A majority of communal woodlots surviving today have been diverted to serve as an amenity resource round village offices; although in some the council has designated special uses for harvested wood such as poles for ox-carts.

Some commentators observed a dislike among farmers of the fuelwood/pole species which were the major type first issued from government nurseries. Although in a survey of 18 villages in central Tanzania, Skutsch (1985) found that this was not perceived to be a major problem. In many parts of the country, however, the greatest demand was and continues to be for fruit trees rather than timber or fuel species.

These questions of species choice and the inadequate size of woodlots, rather than being primary reasons for failure in themselves, relate more to the assumption made that woodlots were for the provision of woodfuel. In fact a majority of rural people did not rank this need highly. As shown by Leach and Mearns (1988) with respect to similar initiatives in a number of African countries, planning for woodfuel projects often failed to take into account the true variable dynamics of forest production and fuel utilisation at the local and household level. Householders often decide to make adjustments to their sources of fuel, and levels of fuel use, before it becomes worthwhile growing trees for this purpose.

Inadequate planning and a lack of follow-up activities also contributed to the limited success of village tree plantings. The style of forestry extension tended to encourage the establishment of woodlots as an end in itself, but not their planning and expansion. Moreover, performance was initially interpreted on the basis of numbers of seedlings raised and distributed from FBD nurseries, rather than on field data on survival rates or on an understanding of the problems farmers were having managing the plots.

Many commentators have spoken of the excessively bureaucratic style in which development works were implemented in Tanzania at the time. Local government officers were often distracted by solving administrative problems and achieving visible results rather than entering in upon the long, complex and often un-rewarding task of involving farmers in land use planning. Skutsch (1985) found that even the establishment of a woodlot was often dependent on the presence of an attentive extension worker. Not only is the number of motivated and well-resourced extension staff limited in most parts of the country, but it has taken some years for FBD to generate in-service extension training capabilities.

Several surveys have tried to ascertain to what extent and in what ways labour was a constraint on woodlot establishment. It is frequently suggested that tree planting operations suffer from neglect during periods when the demands of crop cultivation are greatest. In a survey of 18 villages in Central Tanzania, Skutsch (1985) tested this amongst a number of hypotheses in trying to determine why some villages started woodlots while others did not, and why some woodlots failed once started. Perhaps contrary to expectation, it was found that only a small number of people in both starter and non-starter villages claimed they were 'too busy' to plant trees. A comparable response was recorded in a similar survey carried out more recently in Zanzibar (Bertram 1990).

What both these surveys do reveal is that labour considerations are important in understanding women's involvement, or lack of involvement, in communal tree planting exercises. The Zanzibar survey showed that because women householders are responsible for the bulk of the work cultivating agricultural plots, they are less inclined to become involved in tree planting activities, especially if organized through local cooperatives. Smaller, exclusively male, forestry cooperatives also existing in this area are able to set about tree planting much more efficiently. It is concluded from this that basing future women's involvement in tree growing on flexible but existing arrangements between women for labour exchange could produce better results.

Similar conclusions have been reached elsewhere in Tanzania. To generate productive women's groups, which work on the basis of cooperative action and organisation, requires a level of animation work beyond the capability of all but a handful of foresters. Reports from the Morogoro Women-Based Afforestation Project

(1988) - which was set up specifically to generate guidelines on such matters - indicate that in those places where active women's groups are not present, the forest service is most likely to achieve success by working on a broad front whilst clearly acknowledging and responding to the particular needs of women as co-managers of a household.

It has been suggested that farmers were unwilling to cooperate in the establishment of communal woodlots because of a scarcity of land. However, it was rarely an absolute shortage of land which caused anxiety; most woodlots were too small to make this a problem. Of more importance were the perceived and actual implications of woodlot planting on the tenure of that land.

Establishment of a communal woodlot often entailed the transfer of a parcel of land held individually or communally under customary law, to collective ownership under the new village regulations. In the survey of 18 villages undertaken by Skutsch (1985) it was found that the lack of a clear commitment to establish a woodlot generally resulted from conflict over this process of redesignation. Such conflict was often associated with controversy between factions within a village, in turn often brought about by the arrival of new people during villagisation.

Redesignation could be strongly resisted by those who owned or had usufruct rights over a parcel of land identified as a site for a communal woodlot. This resistance was often strongest in those villages least disrupted by villagisation where pre-existing decision making groups maintained a stronger hold over the allocation of land and other resources.

Uncertainty over the tenure of land brought under communal woodlots was also bound up with apprehension about who would actually benefit from them. Skutsch (1985) found that in a significant number of villages where the decision was made not to start a woodlot, people expressed a degree of mistrust in the village council. This problem was compounded by the fact that no clear guidelines were laid down for the legal status of communal woodlots. Shanks (1988) found that in some villages, several years after establishment, people were still uncertain as to whether the woodlot was in fact the property of the village or of the forest department.

In recent years, the laws governing the allocation of land within villages have been greatly relaxed. In many parts of the country people are moving away from the nucleated settlements and returning to lands abandoned at the time of villagisation but over which they have retained some degree of customary tenure. However, this does not automatically resolve uncertainty over the status of land which was formerly brought under collective control.

The survey of farmer's attitudes to tree growing in Zanzibar by Bertram (1990) revealed that over half the respondents were of the opinion that tree planting changed the ownership status of the plot. The report suggests that as a result of this local leaders may be unwilling to allow tree planting on communal land due to fears of land grabbing by certain individuals or groups.

This report also confirms the view that land scarcity is stated to be a constraint to tree growing only in areas of more intensive agriculture where the proportion of land claimed individually is also greater, although this does not reduce the desire of farmers to plant trees in such areas.

## **NEW APPROACHES**

Re-examination of the policy on communal woodlots in Tanzania is instructive because it was conceived to be part of a wider government strategy to achieve self-reliance in the rural areas. Skutsch (1985) has recognized that the limited success of the programme in its early years is surprising in view of the major reforms made by government. A formalisation of land rights, the decentralisation of decision-making powers and the creation of strong units of social organisation (e.g. the village councils) at grass-roots level are frequently cited prerequisites for successful social forestry. Yet fundamental reasons for the limited success of the woodlots programme lay precisely within these realms. Villagers frequently felt uncertain about or resisted the redesignation of land for woodlots, and the system of village councils did not prove to be a universally accepted or effective mechanism for involving farmers, especially women, in their planning. Apart from reflecting the particular and in many ways unique circumstances of rural development in Tanzania, what does this apparent contradiction suggest for the ways in which social forestry can or should be managed?

In recent years the community forestry programme has evolved rapidly in response to the changing political climate in the country. During 1985, the new president of Tanzania, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, made an inaugural speech which again stressed the importance of tree growing, and the new Party Chairman Mwalimu Nyerere spoke on the radio about the country's tree loss, advising every Tanzanian to plant five trees a year henceforth. Suddenly, the implication was clear that, at the highest level, permission was being given for a change from the woodlots policy to one which sanctioned and even encouraged individual tree planting. This new policy arose logically from moves towards recognition of the importance of private land-holding rights for farmers.

Coinciding with this the Community Forestry Section began formulating an updated strategy for the programme which it advocated as part of in-service training seminars for forest officers and extension field staff.

One of the implications of the decentralisation reform moves of the 1970s was that, except in a few 'pilot' villages, the central office of FBD has had no direct control over the resources put into village forestry. This situation has been lamented because it reduced the efficiency of the flow of information and expertise in the extension system (Kowero & Temu 1985) and because it means that district foresters are subject to the competing demands being made on limited local government expenditure (Kihyo 1987). Nonetheless, decentralisation has meant that the 'brain' behind the programme, the Community Forestry Section, has been less encumbered with administrative duties and therefore freer to learn from the mistakes made and to develop innovative approaches for which it has gained a good reputation.

Quoted directly from an internal FBD document (Mtallo & Gerden 1987) the updated strategy, as of 1987, runs

as follows:

### **DECENTRALISATION OF NURSERIES**

The aim is to encourage and assist villages, schools, non-governmental organisations etc. to, as far as possible, produce their own seedlings.

### **TREE GROWING WITHOUT THE USE OF NURSERIES**

Trees can many times more successfully and more economically be grown through using cuttings, saplings, stumps and direct sowing rather than planting seedlings raised in a nursery.

### **DEMAND ORIENTATED SEEDLING PRODUCTION**

This item of the strategy concerns to what extent the kind of seedlings provided in the central FD nurseries correspond to the demand of the recipients and that the seedlings are distributed, planted and tended in such a way that a reasonable survival rate is achieved.

### **SOIL CONSERVATION - AGRO-SILVIPASTORAL FORESTRY**

Integration of tree growing, soil conservation, fodder production and agricultural crops on the same piece of land.

### **CONSERVATION OF NATURAL FORESTS**

This point raises questions such as: to what extent has the local FBD demarcated natural forest areas close to villages and established a contract with the village on how to properly use it for a sustained yield (ie not burn, not graze but cut branches)? Has FBD assisted villages close to encroached watershed areas (catchment forests) to establish alternative sources of fuelwood and other forestry products?

### **PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

The other aspects of the strategy will be successful only if the FD cooperates fully with the people in its extension services. NGO gatherings must be a main activity in the work plan for the FD. The ultimate aim must be to make the people as much as possible self reliant in satisfying their own tree related needs.

It will be noted that from a technical point of view the official menu for community forestry has widened

considerably to include agroforestry practices and natural woodland management. Implicit in the strategy is the expectation that provided the forest service can support the production of cost-effective planting stock, farmers are more than able to decide for themselves where, for what purposes and how (i.e. individually or cooperatively) they wish to grow the trees.

Decentralisation of nurseries is taking place in many districts. This can entail more than just a redistribution of resources to improve supply from government nurseries; some projects are taking it a stage further by attempting to transfer the entire means of production to the farmers, thereby de-mystifying the whole process and technology of tree growing (Shepherd 1989). Prompted by the promise of cash returns farmers in many places, but especially in more densely populated areas, are now embarking on seedling production or tree growing for cash sale.

But if the FBD is content to let the market set the limits of individual tree planting to a greater extent than before, the new strategy implies that collective action is still required with respect to management of areas of natural forest which exist within the boundaries of villages in some regions. In addition, there is the question of future policy towards people's involvement in the significant areas of forest reserve which represent an invaluable resource for the country. In one region of Tanzania alone (Tabora), for example, there is twice the area of government forest reserve than in the whole of Kenya.

The radical policy interventions of the 1970s undoubtedly had a significant and lasting effect on social, political and economic life in the rural areas. Yet it is also apparent that the process of directed social transformation at village level is exceedingly difficult to facilitate and sustain. In the more remote parts of the country a significant proportion of smallholder farmers have not been fully incorporated into either the national cash economy or the formal administration of development. Many farming communities maintain a range of non-formal organisational mechanisms for dealing with land use matters which, in places, operate in virtual isolation from the workings of formal government.

These locally active patterns of social organisation can, under some circumstances, be enlisted to support a variety of rural development initiatives including common property resource management. For example, the existence of a long established system of dry season grazing reserves together with strong mechanisms for policing them, has allowed foresters in one part of the country, Shinyanga, to successfully negotiate and establish a number of village forest reserves (Kilahama 1988). But when local and national priorities diverge, most notably with regard to destocking and labour intensive soil conservation efforts in semi-arid regions of the country, as well as the communal woodlots programme, then local feeling has been able to keep even the most concerted development interventions at bay.

The final point of the updated strategy refers to the participatory means by which foresters should enlist the support of farmers in tree growing activities. Yet this is still rather loosely defined in terms of cooperation and self-reliance. Experience from the communal woodlots programme suggests that participation in the Tanzanian context is less a matter of the extent to which farmers are prepared to participate in the organisational structures created by government, but the extent to which representatives of government, including foresters, are able to participate in the organisational structures farmers create to manage resources in their own area.



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