
From Tanzania: Promoting Monoculture Tree Plantations for Firewood is a False Argument

Plantation companies often argue that local populations are destroying the forests, particularly where people depend on firewood and/or charcoal for their energy needs. Thus, they argue, industrial plantations can “sustainably” provide this wood. But this is simply not true.

Industrial plantation companies often argue that it is the local populations who are destroying the remaining forests, particularly in places where people depend on firewood and/or charcoal for their cooking and energy needs. Therefore, the argument goes, tree plantations are needed to “sustainably” provide for this wood. But this is not true. Local vegetation, if well managed, can attend perfectly the local needs, as it has been the case for generations. **The thousands of hectares of monoculture plantations that have been established in Tanzania are in fact one of the causes of large scale deforestation, soil and water pollution as well as conflicts with communities due to land enclosure and grabbing.**

This is the testimony of Frank, who is active in supporting forest-peoples struggles in Tanzania for over 20 years.

I am Frank Luvanda, born, raised, and currently living in Tanzania. I work at SUHODE Foundation, a small but active Non-Governmental Organization working in addressing various environmental and social challenges in Tanzania, including disseminating the truth on the negative effects of monoculture plantations in Tanzania. I have been working with various organizations for more than 20 years. I have had the privilege to conduct several visits in various places in the country: from the Southern Highlands and Northern areas to the Eastern and Western parts of Tanzania. Among other things, I have witnessed **the imminent expansion of monoculture plantations promoted by some multinational companies, such as Green Resource Limited (GRL), and many others.** Most of these monoculture tree plantation companies prefer planting exotic tree species, mainly Eucalyptus and Pines.

Most of the lands that have been taken by monoculture plantation companies were once very important to communities, as they offered lots of benefits, such as water, firewood, animal feeds, provision of weeds used for making traditional baskets and specific soil variety used for making traditional pots. Some of the lands taken or enclosed by these companies were rich grasslands, with many benefits for communities and crucial for specific animals. Besides, for many years, before these companies deceitfully took these lands, communities were able to get better and probably the best firewood for cooking, lighting, and heating at household levels.

I want to start by categorically denying and opposing the wrong claim done by monoculture plantation companies that they plant monoculture tree plantations for firewood; that is wrong! **More than 90% of households in Tanzania are using firewood from native trees or forests, and not exotic trees, such as Eucalyptus and Pine.** According to Tanzania's Sustainable Energy for All Action Agenda of 2015, “In terms of primary energy consumption, biomass represents 90% of the energy consumed in Tanzania. Electricity represents 1.5% and petroleum products represent 8% of the energy

consumption in the country. Solar, coal, wind and other sources represent around 0.5% of the total energy...” Furthermore, when it comes to energy for cooking, the same Sustainable Energy for All Action Agenda shows categorically that 90.2% of rural households in Tanzania uses firewood for cooking and heating while 62% of households in urban areas use charcoal for cooking and heating. The biomass referred to in this Agenda document is not biomass from tree plantation companies in Tanzania!

It is true though that there is a low percentage of households in Tanzania who cook using firewood from exotic trees and crop residues. But this is common only in semi-desert areas, where native forests have been degraded. In these semi-desert or semi-arid areas, communities still use their self-planted exotic trees and not trees from plantation companies! **It is therefore wrong and misleading for such companies to claim that they plant exotic monoculture plantations to help local communities to meet their firewood needs.**

Most communities in Tanzania use firewood in a sustainable way by harvesting only branches and self-dead trees or branches found in most healthy forests. Other communities nowadays plant their own native tree species, such as Acacia Tortilis or Acacia Nilotica. Communities know precisely which specie is good for cooking, and thus, they do not collect any specie. For example, you will find no community collecting dead wood from trees such as Erythrina Shliebenii, Faidherbia Albida or Afzelia Quanzensis. Communities in Tanzania largely know how to live in harmony with nature. **Whenever there is excessive deforestation for energy demands, in the form of charcoal and firewood, then, for sure, such deforestation is connected to individuals outside those communities who, through bribes, harvest firewood and make charcoal to sell them in urban areas.**

According to my experience, through my work with SUHODE Foundation, **there are no communities who are willing or would choose to destroy the forests adjacent to them, as they heavily depend on these for various aspects of their lives**, such as provision of energy (firewood), water, medicine, honey, etc. SUHODE has been working to facilitate village governance structures to put in place local by-laws for sustainable management of their forests, including using best practices in harvesting/collecting firewood.

Most communities prefer native tree species over exotic tree species due to the fact that some native tree species have better calorific value per meter cubic (Kcal/m³) in comparison to most exotic trees. But some communities do plant their own exotic trees specifically for firewood or charcoal making. Meanwhile, **there is no monoculture tree plantation company in Tanzania assisting communities to get firewood from their excessively huge monoculture tree plantations.**

Promoting monoculture tree plantations for supplying firewood to local populations is a false and misleading argument, which only aims at **perpetuating systematic land grabbing for their own businesses and profits** and never for the aim of supporting communities to have access to firewood. As far as I know, there are very few tobacco farmers in some villages in the Iringa Rural District, namely Kidamali, Kiwere, Mfyome, Mlangali, Luganga, Mapinduzi, Nzihi and Kitapilimwa, involved in tobacco farming who buy such pieces as energy sources for drying their tobacco leaves and not as firewood to be used at the household level.

Monoculture plantation companies in Tanzania and elsewhere need to stop their treacherous approaches to get land, including but not limited to **‘unfilled and wrong promises’** to local communities. **They must stop expanding their plantations and let communities protect their land, including forests and grasslands.** It should be noted that monoculture tree plantations are

not forests, as they are aimed at the production of one single raw material, such as rubber, pulp, palm oil, timber, etc. Supporting monoculture tree plantations is equal to supporting green deserts, whereby biodiversity suffers more and means for community livelihood radically diminish.

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