
[South Africa: Following a road of impoverishment with monoculture tree plantations](#)

Like other countries invaded by monoculture tree plantations (or the “green cancer”, as some South Africans call them), South Africa shows that those schemes have not been aimed at ameliorating local peoples’ quality of life. On the contrary.

Adding to the information delivered by the report on the impacts of outsourcing on forestry (see WRM Bulletin N° 96), shocking statistics came out of the first forestry sector empowerment charter workshop held in East London on September 12.

"The issue of labourers getting paid between R20 and R22 [3-4 US dollars] per day is of major concern to us," said Thami Zimu, a South Coast sugarcane and timber farmer, who spoke on behalf of contractors.

"The broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE) charter should seek to give guidelines on how to avoid this."

She said the low labourers' wages were largely due to the very low rate at which sub-contractors were paid by major contractors.

One participant said it was unfortunate that the major contractors in the forestry sector were not part of the public hearings. "If they were here we would detail to them the great pain and abuse that we, including women and the youth, endure while working as labourers in rural areas. "A number of women are loaded on the back of trucks and are ill-treated, while getting low wages," said the representative of the ORTambo district.

Unequal power relations between sub-contractors and major contractors were denounced as a key cause of problems in the sector and related to the state's high outsourcing rate, estimated at about 90% of all forestry activities.

Adding to a legacy of social, economic and environmental devastation from the old colonial structures, monoculture tree plantations have nothing but followed a road of impoverishment, more inequality, exclusion and environmental degradation.

Article based on information from “South African forestry labourers are paid as little as R20 a day”, Zine George, sent by Phillip Owen, GEASPHERE, E-mail: wac@geasphere.co.za, www.geasphere.co.za