
Tanzania: Community Resistance against Monoculture Tree Plantations

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At first glance, the Nzivi village, in the Iringa region in Tanzania, is a village as many others in the area. Its inhabitants live from agriculture and cattle breeding, the main activities communities practice in the area. But anyone who visits the village would be amazed about the **huge extent of monoculture tree plantations in the surroundings, mainly of pine but also eucalyptus trees. Together they probably are the biggest plantations in East Africa.** By 2016, Tanzania had 583 thousand hectares covered by monoculture tree plantations, of which more than 400 thousand hectares, about 70 per cent, are located in the Iringa and Njombe regions, the so-called Southern Highlands.

But anyone who would talk with the villagers of Nzivi would discover that it is different in at least two aspects: **they decided, after learning from other experiences, to not allow investors for large-scale activities, such as monoculture tree plantations. And as a result, Nzivi still has plenty of land for fulfilling villagers' needs.**

To understand what made Nzivi's villagers make such a decision, **it is important to understand the impacts of industrial tree plantations on the other communities in the area.** During a field visit in October 2018, SUHODE Foundation, Justiça Ambiental and WRM visited, besides Nzivi, the villages of Idete, Mapanda, Kihanga, Igowole and Taweta, facing the monoculture plantations of the main private company active in the area, Green Resources, to learn about these impacts.

Green Resources in Tanzania

Plantations started to be set up in the region several decades ago, first by state companies like Sao Hill and then, since the 1990ies, plantation areas have been also increasingly promoted and set up by private companies. **The biggest private company in the country is Green Resources, a Norwegian company owned in its majority by Norfund, the Norwegian governmental development institution,** besides of a large number of other financial market investors. (1)

Green Resources profiles itself as one of the largest 'forest' developer and wood processing companies in East Africa, **with tree plantations in Mozambique, Uganda and Tanzania.** In Tanzania, Green Resources controls a total area of 74,850 hectares, of which 17,000 hectares has already been planted with eucalyptus and pine plantations. The company affirms on its website that it "believes that forestation is one of the most efficient ways of improving social and economic conditions for people in rural areas and aims to be the preferred employer and partner for local

communities in these areas.” It also states that for Tanzania “The land areas used for planting are low-value grassland that has almost entirely been acquired from local villages.”

Contrary to the current situation in Mozambique in which the company lost the certificate, in Tanzania, the company has FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification, which allows it to claim that its wood comes from ‘sustainable’ sources. It also has registered and validated its plantations for carbon storage (via the VCS system), and even under the CCBS scheme that, among others, claims its “mission” is “to stimulate and promote land management activities that credibly mitigate global climate change, improve the well-being and reduce the poverty of local communities, and conserve biodiversity.” (2)

Green Resources arrived in the communities of Idete in 1996, Mapanda in 1997 and Taweta in 2007. **The communities were enticed and decided to accept a lease agreement with the company that secured it access to up to one third of the community land for a period of 99 years.** This happened for at least two important reasons. First, because at that very moment, communities did not see the land area lost as crucial for their needs and they had no notion of the real value of those lands. But also, **a very important reason to accept Green Resources was its list of promises. Jobs, to start with, as well as the improvement of the villages’ infrastructure;** for example, building and renovating classrooms, local government offices and meeting halls, dispensaries, water sources, health and education staff dormitories, etc. On top of that, **the company also promised to share 10 per cent of the revenues generated from the carbon projects** it elaborated, which are based on the carbon ‘stored’ in the growing pine and eucalyptus trees planted in the three villages. Green Resources put these promises on paper and signed additional contracts with the communities for the carbon revenues, without the communities having a clear understanding of how this market system works.

Nowadays, many years after the company arrived, the communities are disappointed and angry. They affirm that the company promises were either not or only partially fulfilled. Currently, there is hardly any permanent job created. **Both in Idete and Taweta, Green Resources has created only 1 permanent job, and in Mapanda - considering its 5,503 inhabitants according to the village council - not even one single job.** The villagers have also many complaints about the working conditions, including the low salaries; the lack of transport for those hired for temporary jobs; the precarious or even lack of protective equipment against agrotoxins; and villagers accuse the company for not having paid to Tanzania’s social security system the amount the company discounted from their salaries for such contributions.

Villagers admit that some infrastructure promises have been fulfilled. But at the same time, in Mapanda for example, villagers are still waiting for a new village meeting room. Only after the community put a lot of pressure on the company, it finally promised to build it this year. Nevertheless, the new meeting room is not built yet. In Taweta, the only improvement that villagers remember is the renovation of two classrooms. The office that Green Resources built in this village for administering the plantations in the area has been closed and looks abandoned.

Carbon revenues were only shared with the Mapanda village, where the community received two carbon payments of 30 and 33 million Tanzanian shillings, paid in 2011 and 2014 respectively. These two payments amount to about US 40 thousand dollars, a very low amount for a community of more than 5 thousand people with many infrastructure challenges, as, for example, to improve its water supply. Even so, **there was no transparency in the way in which the amount paid to the community was defined.** The community was not aware of the total value of the revenue acquired by the company or if the amount channelled actually corresponded to the 10 per cent of the revenues

or not. **The villages of Idete and Taweta have not received any carbon payments until now.** In a public presentation of Green Resources available on internet (3), the company complains that “carbon finance has been a disappointment”, but states that nevertheless “Green Resources has generated USD 2 million (...)”. If one calculates the 10 per cent of that amount, the villages should have received at least US 200 thousand dollars - significantly more than what the Mapanga village received.

The three communities that we visited regret they gave vast tracks of their land to the company and that their access is now restricted, including for collecting straw and clay in areas still to be planted. When asked if they agree with the company’s argument that these lands are of ‘low-value’ or ‘degraded’ (as Green Resources and other tree plantation companies use to argue), they said unanimously that that is a complete lie. They consider those lands to be very valuable, fertile and important for the communities and their future. **Nowadays they need to ask permission if they want to enter the land.** In Idete, villagers worry that they cannot collect anymore a type of reed used to make traditional baskets, that especially women produce. **A woman villager is also concerned about the escalation in HIV/AIDS cases due to the increase of outside workers in the villages’ areas.**

Another villager argued that there is no comparison between the losses the community is suffering by giving out their land for 99 years, with the benefits obtained until now. Villages are concerned about their future. One woman of the Idete village reflected with high concern on how her children can probably still be able to farm, but **her grandchildren will not have space for their food crops and livestock, which means poverty will increase.**

It is of no surprise that the three communities want the lands now occupied by Green Resources back -or at least a part of it. By reflecting on the future of their villages and families, they want to be sure that they will have enough land for the thousands of villagers in their communities, especially in the near future. They nevertheless face a big challenge by having signed an apparently legal contract where they agree on leasing out their village land to the company. **But what is the legitimacy of such a contract when it was approved based on a list of unfulfilled promises and when the company’s activities put at risk the future of the entire community?**

The findings found in the field suggest the questioning regarding the truthfulness of the company’s statements when noting that in Tanzania the company claims it is operating exemplarily and is a preferred partner of local communities in the area.

Information as power

The story of Green Resources in Tanzania shows once again how **plantations companies always need to secure access to a huge land area in order to operate.** It also shows how **these companies do this based on a number of false or very badly fulfilled promises in order to convince the affected communities to give away their land.** The stories and experiences from communities facing Green Resources or other plantations companies are very important for other villages to learn from and reflect upon.

The villagers of Nzivi got to know on time about the experiences from other villages by talking to their neighbouring communities, and, concerned that they might come into the same situation, they decided not to trust the promises and to say *no* to any company that wants to control significant parcels of their land, such as Green Resources. **They decided to secure their own control over and access to their land for the future generations.**

This does not mean that the villagers of Nzivi would not accept any investment at all. The leaders told us that they separated a relatively small area of the community land for investors, but only for those that do not aim to take over significant parts of their land and are also interested in supporting the community in services that the community consider important but are now precariously offered, like education and health. They see that this different type of investment could be in their benefit while at the same time secure their fundamental right to access their own land, forests and grassland, which they depend upon for their very survival.

Unsurprisingly, no investors appeared yet to make a proposal to the community. This illustrates how far away the profit-oriented interests of investors like Green Resources and the private and Norwegian state investors behind it are from the interests and needs of rural communities in Tanzania, like Nzivi.

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1. <http://www.suaire.suanet.ac.tz:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/1659/SAID%20ASIAD.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
2. <http://www.greenresources.no> and <http://www.climate-standards.org/about-ccba/>
3. [http://www.greenresources.no/Portals/0/pdf/GR_NewForest_for_Africa_170316_\(new\).compressed.pdf](http://www.greenresources.no/Portals/0/pdf/GR_NewForest_for_Africa_170316_(new).compressed.pdf)