

COMMERCIAL FORESTRY

Commercial Forestry Taking Root in Schools in Mau

Primary and secondary schools have land on which commercial plantations could be established.

BY RICHARD MUIR

The Kenyan government's commercial plantations, amounting to 140,000 hectares, have not been well managed. They will not be able to supply the timber and other products from trees that the country needs. A bad situation will become worse. Salvation on a limited scale may come from the private sector which is where the Friends of Mau Watershed (Fomawa) comes in.

Fomawa's office is on Gogar Farm, Rongai, some 25km northwest of Nakuru on the eastern slopes of Mt Londiani. It is close to ideal "Commercial Forestry" country, Njoro, Elburgon, Molo and up the hill towards the

Mau. Many of the large sawmills are situated here and there are over 1,000 primary and secondary schools which have land on which commercial plantations could be established with Fomawa's help. Why is this partnership with schools a good idea? Many farms have land not needed for food crops and there is, therefore, an interest in growing trees.

Gums (eucalyptus) are by far the best tree as an investment. They can be harvested in 10 years against 25 for pine and cypress and have a greater range of uses. Timber, chipboard, medium-density fibreboard and laminates. Poles for power transmission, one million 10-metre poles are needed for The Last Mile Project, funded by the World Bank, to take power to villages. For firewood which is used by the smallholder tea factories to dry their

BELOW
A deep hole encourages good root growth, and thus excellent trees.



PHOTOS BY RICHARD MUIR



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tea. These factories do not have their firewood plantations. Kenya exports more tea than any other country, and tea has been the best cash crop since the mid-1960s. Firewood as the energy source shows a substantial saving over oil.

Fomawa has run these projects in partnership with schools since 2004. The primary purpose is to demonstrate what constitutes “Best Planting Practice” and to show that good money can be made from gums. A group of 10 schools is selected from the applications received. They must be close to each other, be accessible even in wet weather, have good soils and sufficient spare land on which to plant a minimum of 400 trees at a spacing of 3m X 3m.

An agreement outlining the responsibilities of Fomawa and each school is then signed. Where possible, all teachers and pupils as well as the local administration and local farmers are involved. Twenty schools joined in 2019 and 20 the year before. All are doing well.

Benefits

In Kenya, it has been customary for a tree grower to plant on a piece of land not suitable for food crops. All it entails is making a shallow hole, popping the seedling in and hoping for the best. That is not a good idea.

Fomawa has strong links with Finlays, the tea company in Kericho, which has a successful gum breeding programme. These clonal gums, that is trees from cuttings rather than from seed, are called clogs. Fomawa promotes best practice. A deep hole made with a tractor-mounted auger, compost mixed with the soil and a fertilizer high in phosphate to encourage root growth. Weeds are eliminated. The teachers, pupils and parents are involved in the project, which often has a spill-over effect on those with land nearby. Farmers see what is done and want to copy it. As the trees mature they become ideal places for play and study.

The trees will meet the specification for poles after 10 years and will be sold for that

TOP LEFT

Sammy Tanui in front of four month old clogs in Siwot Primary. These clogs will be 3m tall after 12 months. The height will increase by a minimum of 3m/yr.

TOP RIGHT

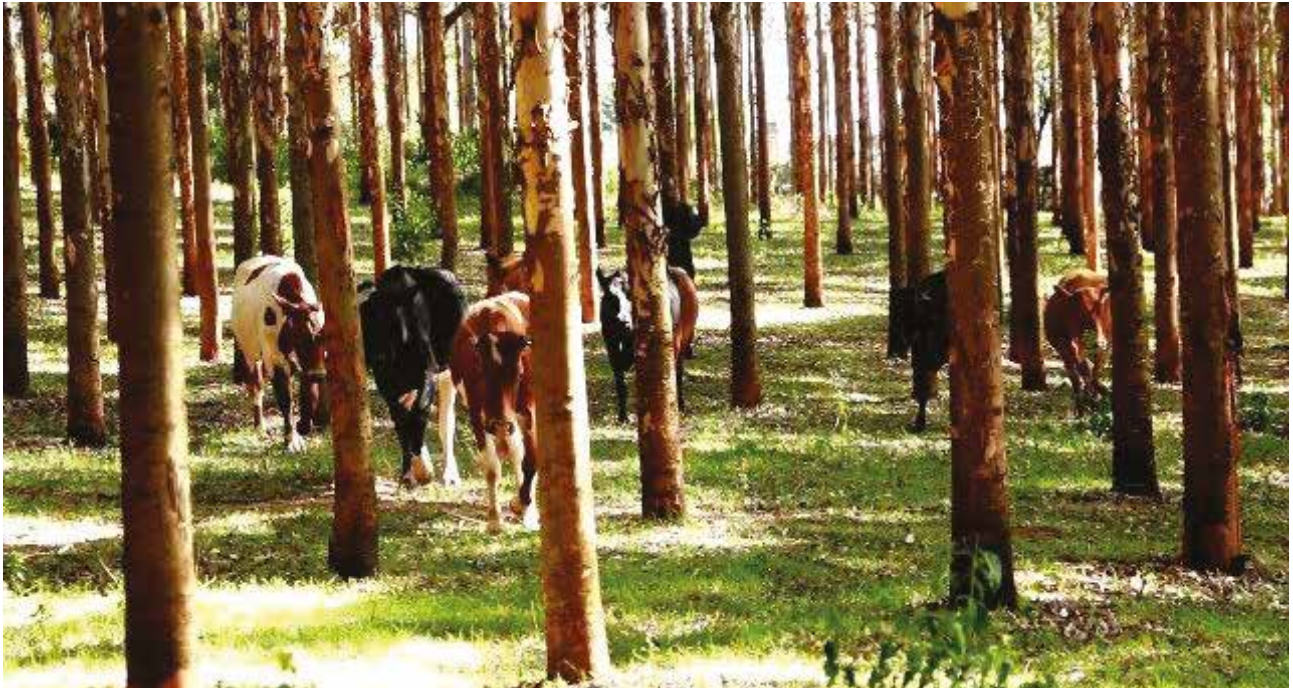
Cecelia Kirobi with pupils in two year old clogs on Mianzini Primary.

BELOW LEFT

Discarded bottles are commonplace and children bring them to school. The bottom of the bottle is removed and planted upside down (Plant a Bottle, Grow a Tree) beside the clog. This system is effective in keeping the young clogs alive.

BELOW RIGHT

Pupils studying under six year old gums.



purpose if the demand exists. The market is changing constantly and Fomawa will give advice. The school will make money, which can be used for a capital project.

Farmers who grow trees will also benefit from Fomawa's advice on husbandry, and in due course, on marketing.

Fomawa's project has been welcomed with great enthusiasm by various ministries and by the schools and those involved with them. It sets a high standard for others to follow and demonstrates that it is worth looking upon gums as being a sound investment; but only if they are cared for in the approved manner.

Knowledge and understanding of best commercial forestry practice are increased, the environment in schools is improved, Kenya gets a contribution to what it needs. Besides, while they are growing the trees do their bit by mopping up carbon dioxide -- so much in the news today with its effects on climate change and global warming. That should be welcomed.

Fomawa does not know of any other organisation in Kenya that is promoting the highest standards in commercial forestry in areas suited to commercial plantations. There is a long list of schools which have applied to join us but we cannot take all of them on due to a lack of funding.

We would like to form partnerships with people, companies, et cetera, which would like to support what we do for the benefit of Kenya and, for that matter, for the world at large.

For more information please Google our documentary, "Fomawa, Growing Trees with Communities in Schools". It was done on a

The East African Wildlife Society has an advocacy and programme priority of conserving and rehabilitating indigenous forests, as they remain under pressure for a variety of reasons. One of those reasons is highlighted by this article. The lack of professionally and sustainably managed commercial forest plantations has led to illegal logging in the indigenous forests in order to accommodate the demand for timber in the construction industry, the furniture industry, the plywood industry and a source of energy by way of providing a few examples. The initiative described in this article, should therefore be encouraged and supported.

TOP

A 3 hectare plantation of clogs, five years old, done by a farmer with help from Fomawa. Cattle keep the grass down and thus eliminate the risk of fire. The trees grow well and are 18 metres tall against the benchmark of 15m.

shoestring and is not brilliant, but tells the story. Or get in touch with Richard Muir, muir@africaonline.co.ke (+254) (0) 722-795-681, or Bernard on bernardgoodluck@gmail.com +254) (0) 721-811-57. ●



RICHARD MUIR joined James Finlay the Tea Company, in 1960. He was the executive chairman of the parent company in the UK from 1990 to 2001 when he retired to Kenya on a farm at Sachangwan northwest of Nakuru. He became chairman of Fomawa in late 2001 and has since then been promoting Best Practice in Commercial Forestry, particularly gums.