

Friends of the Mau Watershed (Fomawa)

Newsletter No 7

January 2006

Welcome to the New Year which we hope will be happy and prosperous for our readers. A forlorn hope given the incompetence of Government. As usual this newsletter is in two parts:-

1. What is the Government up to,
2. What is FOMAWA doing.

1. THE GOVERNMENT

There are no believable signs that the Government realizes, understands and accepts that without adequate indigenous forests in the Watersheds the country will be short of water; and without adequate commercial forestry the country will be short of timber, charcoal and fuelwood.

We have pointed out before that even the cleverest Government cannot 'create' water in some magical way, nor can it be imported. Why then are the Watersheds not being protected as they should? The notion that these forests are better used to 'give land to the landless' is ludicrous, for while a few may benefit thousands will suffer. Watersheds should not be used for Political ends. They should be beyond politics with each and every party having a common objective of nurturing them for the benefit of all Kenyans. Perhaps the current drought, which is causing so much suffering, will make the decision makers realise that things must change.



Forest destruction continues in many parts of Mau with government doing less to stop the menace

Timber can be imported, but the nearest supplier is South Africa and freight alone will make the price very high on the Kenyan market. And who will suffer then? Kenyans of course. And there has been no unavoidable reason for there to be a shortage of timber NOW, and as far into the future as we can see. The reason, which is entirely avoidable, is the sheer incompetence of the Forestry Dept which is entrusted with the task of looking after commercial forestry on Government owned land. Admittedly some land has been taken away for settlement but IF the FD had done a decent job over the last decade or so, then replanting would be up to date and that on its own would make the future more secure. There may have been Government decisions with which the FD does not agree, but as the institution that is seen (quite wrongly in our opinion) as the expert in this field, it has a duty to get up and shout when an ignorant politician makes inappropriate decisions.

- There is no justification for the ban on the logging of mature trees.
- Where timber is 'sold', it is to about three favoured millers in return for the value of replanting, which in the case of Comply is so bad as to be worth nothing. Replanting done by the FD is equally bad, while Timsales has done much better. The price attached to the timber obtained by these companies is less than one fifth of the going rate for timber sold by the Private sector whose viability is undermined by the stupidity and obstructiveness of the Government in creating a false market. The FD has told us that it does this deal with these companies BECAUSE they have the equipment to add value, tongue and groove, and plywood, for example. Accepted that that is a point, but in effect most of the other mills have been put out of business, and therefore the monopoly enjoyed by the favoured three removes competitiveness to their advantage, while the rest suffer.
- The Forestry Bill has received Presidential consent, and has taken several years to do so. The FD is not forced to do a rotten job by the current legislation and it is difficult to see that a New Bill is somehow going to get it out of its lazy ways. There is talk of involving the Private Sector in leasing Government land. A good idea, and we know of one Tea Company, thoroughly competent in the growing of commercial plantations, that has tried to get into a dialogue with the FD, but has failed.
- The Government is doing nothing to encourage farmers to go into commercial forestry, but instead puts obstacles and extra costs in the way. What logic is there in insisting that a permit is obtained to fell and transport, particularly when we all know that a 'lost' permit book takes money to find.
- The illegal felling that was taking place in Koibatek near the junction to Molo on the Nakuru/Eldoret road has stopped, probably because of the publicity we caused. A step in the right direction. But further to the north east, above Rongai, charcoal making and timber extraction is rife, and must be going on with the connivance of the authorities whose job it is to stop it. The PFO, who promised almost two years ago to issue a letter endorsing the 'help' being given by two local farms who have supplied guards to augment the official ones, has still not found his pen. The conclusion has to be reached that the authorities can get on much better with their activities without prying eyes.
- Prof Wangari Maathai, on receiving her Award, was seen as having sufficient stature to enable her to insist on being listened to, and thus to make a real difference. But generally she has made little impact, and the articles and reports attributed to her show such an ignorance of the problems, and the solutions to them, that we have lost all hope that she might be the route to salvation. In particular she seems to be determined to hate commercial forestry, and attributes all kinds of evil to it. Can she really believe that the country can be better off by having to import timber? She also claims that the plight of the indigenous forests is due to the failure of 'replanting under the shamba system', but on the Mau at least there has been no replanting of indigenous forests, just destruction.

WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST TO SET THE AUTHORITIES ON MORE SENSIBLE PATHS, BUT IF PROGREE IS TO BE MADE THERE NEEDS TO BE AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY THEM THAT THINGS ARE NOT RIGHT. AND SEVERE BLINDNESS PREVENTS THIS. Why don't the citizens of this country get up and shout, and insist on a better deal?

2. OUR ACTIVITIES ON THE GROUND

Having made little progress in lobbying the Government, we have been successful with the Private Sector where it is our aim to make people better informed as that will make them better off. In other words they will have more money. We refuse to talk of poverty alleviation. As we have no real ability to make water we have concentrated on making trees. We have to tell people why trees are needed, and then to show farmers that they are simple to grow, and that they will make money from them.



A farmer marks his shamba for hole digging



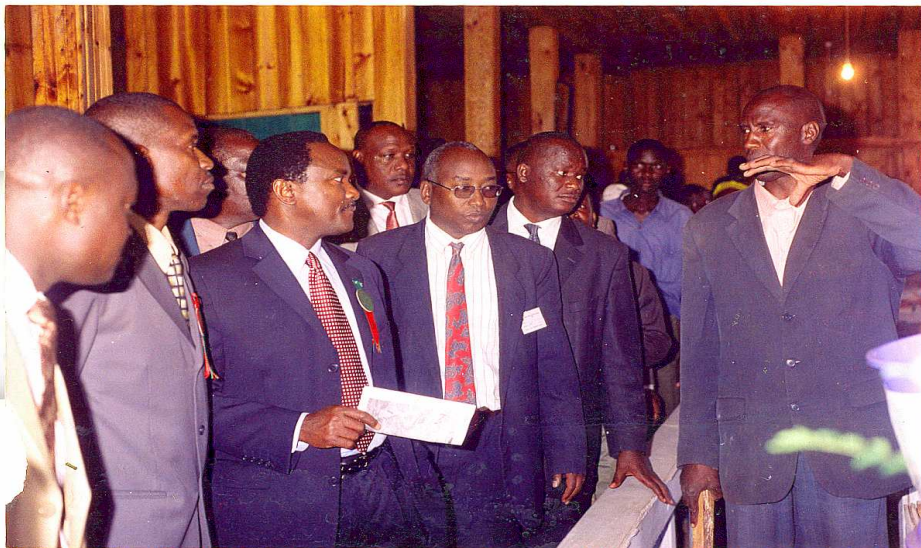
Moses Rono of Fomawa digging planting hole within Mau

(i) Education.

Fomawa undertook a four month programme on thirteen primary and one secondary school on the Finlay Tea estates in Kericho. The aim was to highlight the problems facing the Mau Forest which lies on the eastern boundary of the estates and to emphasise that it is within the power of everyone to help. This was done by showing the Fomawa film; by going through the posters showing the fundamentals of tree planting, and by practical demonstrations.

Pupils took part in a competition to draw topics which are affecting the Mau and six of the best have been used in the 2006 calendar. Congratulations to all those who took part.

The programme was reviewed on 28th October 2005 when senior Finlay management led by Edgar Mutai, teachers and pupils met to discuss what had been achieved with James Kariuki of Fomawa. The opinion was that it was a success, but it was accepted that greater impact might be achieved in schools in more rural areas where the parents had land on which tree planting could be done.



Former Environment Minister, Mr. Kalonzo Musyoka visited Fomawa stand during the last year Nakuru Agricultural show.

- Action Aid and the Finnish Embassy have between them provided funds for tree planting in twenty schools in Bomet and Nakuru Districts. The funding will cover stock proof fencing, holing and two hundred seedlings. The schools can plant more if they wish. Pine, cypress and eucalyptus saligna will be planted at the higher altitudes, and the

grandis/camaldulensis eucalyptus crosses which do well at the lower altitudes will be planted around Rongai.

This tree planting on its own should make a significant impact on teachers, parents and pupils, but it is intended to reinforce this by carrying out the educational programme at the same schools.

- During 2005 Fomawa:

Had field officers stationed in Rongai, Kuresoi, Keringet, Bomet and Rongai. A total of 30 tree nurseries were supported in the same areas in 2005.

A total of 435,757 seedlings were planted comprising pine, cypress and eucalyptus. The survival rate is around 95%. Occasionally there are problems with looking after young trees at schools during the holidays and the aim has been to find methods of planting and maintenance that are as foolproof as possible.

(ii) Funding

1. As mentioned Action Aid and the Finnish Embassy have donated for tree planting at schools, and the former kindly funded the calendar.
2. James Finlay has been the largest donor and we have received substantial funding from the Finlay Flower project Maxhavelaar.
3. DFID, the overseas funding agency of the British Government have become firm friends and have supported us with finance and a vehicle.
4. Unilever Tea Kenya funds a field officer and the Scottish African Safari Park donates five thousand pounds by way of recognising where its animals came from. (Africa rather than the Mau).
5. While we have sufficient funds for the activities planned for this year some of the donors commit themselves for specific periods at the end of which their funding might stop. As it is our wish to be able to continue for many years we intend to start a small tree harvesting project, and this should provide a dependable long term source of funding..

(iii) Events and Publicity

While we believe that the people we help are the best publicity we have participated in the following events and have also broadcast our views whenever the chance has arisen;

- Field Day at Kibaraa Primary School in Kuresoi District.
- Nakuru Agricultural Show.
- Kenana Farm Open field day
- A talk and film show at the Njoro Club

(iv) Office and staff

Our office continues to be on Gogar Farm at Rongai- Nakuru District. We intend to start a small tree nursery there this year.

The team is led by Jacob Mwanduka who is gaining a well deserved reputation among 'people that matter' for being effective. James Langat is in charge of the three Field Officers and tractor drivers. James Kariuki deals with education and Eugenia Mwasi is the anchorman in the office. They are all doing an excellent job and are encouraged by the enthusiasm with which the messages we put across are received.



Chairman

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