

**Friends of the Mau Watershed (Fomawa)
Gum Growers Group G3**

Note No: 4: Gums For Poles

1. In Kenya gum trees have always been used for poles by both KPL and Telkom. On a very small scale concrete poles have been used.
2. KPL's requirement this year is for 450,000 poles, and with the rural electrification scheme this is anticipated to rise by 10% year on year. We have no figures for Telkom. But at the least they will require some smaller sized poles to replace rotten ones. A best guess might be a demand for 500,000 poles in 2008, which would rise to around 800,000 within six years.
3. This year something less than 100,000 were obtained within Kenya. The nearest source for imports is S Tanzania, perhaps one thousand Kms from Nairobi. Freight costs are high as there will be no return load. Uganda is importing. Kenya imported from as far as Finland, (pines) and Chile, (gums).
4. Until perhaps fifteen years ago sufficient poles were available within Kenya. The FD supplied some as did the Tea companies once they had satisfied their need for firewood. The Government now has no gum plantations suitable for poles. A few of the tea companies are now growing gum specifically for poles but as all/most of their land is fully committed it is unlikely that they will increase the area under gum for this purpose.
5. One of the tea companies has 250ha dedicated to gum-for-poles. They clear fell after twelve years and get around nine hundred poles/ha of various sizes. On that basis between five and six thousand hectares would need to be dedicated to poles of which the tea companies might contribute one thousand. In most of Kenya land holdings are not large enough to permit the owner to invest in plantations. There is much talk of the Government promoting tree planting in the semi arid areas, but this is unlikely to be achieved on any worthwhile scale. That means that within the area in which Fomawa operates, where there are often land holdings of substantial size, the opportunity for investing in gum-for-poles is great.

Where planting is at a greater density than 3m by 3m, which gives 1100 stems/ha, perhaps 1000 after some deaths, it would be sensible to thin to that density after four/five years. Timsales might buy these thinnings for their fibre board. This needs to be explored further.

6. Current prices paid by poles treating companies to the farmer who fells, and brings the poles to the plantation's edge; the purchaser paying for loading and transport, are as follows.

| Poles Specification | Centimeter at chest height | Average (mm) | Unit Price Kshs. |
|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Medium | | | |
| 10.0 metres | 630-720 Cm | 450-510 | 2,400 |
| 12.0 metres | 690-780 Cm | 450-540 | 3,000 |
| 15.0 metres | 840-930 Cm | 480-570 | 4,900 |
| 18.0 metres | 960-1050 Cm | 510-600 | 6,200 |
| STOUT | | | |
| 10.0 metres | 780-930 Cm | 525-675 | 3,200 |
| 12.0 metres | 840-990 Cm | 585-735 | 3,950 |
| 15.0 metres | 1005-1155 Cm | 615-675 | 5,850 |
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These prices are sufficiently high to make the long term investment worthwhile. It is desirable that anyone with gums suitable for poles to sell, are aware of these prices. Fomawa will try and coordinate sales between farmers/groups of farmers, and Cabro and Timsales. Deals should not be done with 'middlemen'.

What are the upsides and downsides?

- (a) If the requirement is as anticipated then the value of what is grown in Kenya has to be compared with the cost of imports. On that basis there is room for prices higher than in the table.
- (b) KPL might stop its expansion, but this is likely to continue provided there is power to be transmitted. However if demand falls there is timber to fall back on. There is going to be a huge gap between supply and demand for decades to come. Traditional timber species such as pine and cypress can only be grown commercially in the higher and wetter areas, and because these timbers will not be readily available then the market will have to fall back onto gum even if it is second choice at present.

The conclusion is that there is no great risk in planting gum for poles.

In our discussions with one of the tea companies we have recommended that they should plant a small area with saligna which seems to be the most favoured variety of gum as timber. The idea is that the saligna will then be thinned to the same pattern as pine and cypress, and in due course it will be seen which produces the most timber per ha per year. It would be sensible for farmers to plant saligna for timber on a limited scale. Fomawa will have a small number of saligna seedlings available in April 2008.

While some of the camaldulensis/grandis crosses have been planted, most particularly in the hotter areas for which they were designed, it is still too early to say with certainty whether they will outperform grandis. Knowledge as to what does best where, and what does best for poles or timber, (might be the same and might not) is very limited. Kefri and the KFS have no advice to give, and it is therefore desirable that all plantings are monitored in the hope that some worthwhile information, which could lead to increased profitability, will come out.

Remember that the growing of gum will be more profitable if ALL growers work together. There is much more to be done. In particular, while the Government makes statements that it is encouraging farmers to grow on a commercial basis we have not seen these encouragements in any material form; and matters such as permits, the involvement of Nema, tax and VAT still need to be resolved.

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