Linking local knowledge and values practice and research: an African perspective

Most support for small scale forestry from government and donor agencies in Tanzania has until recently focused on community forestry. Over the past decade, some 300,000 ha of pine have been planted on village land as Non-industrial private forestry (NIPF). This privately driven development has happened ‘below the radar’ and totally changed the knowledge needs of NIPF growers. Meanwhile, the low and inadequate level of funding of public forest extension has enabled space for donor agencies to become the main actors in formulating and implementing support for private forestry on village land.

Based on rigorous qualitative fieldwork in Iringa and Njombe regions involving two different categories of NIPF growers (resident villagers and urban-based domestic investors), government forest staff and development agencies the study examine forest extension needs and approaches and the engagement (and lack of) of NIPF growers in Government and Donor supported forest extension and management.

Donor agencies have a highly technical focus on reducing the productivity gab between NIPF and large-scale commercial forest plantations. They seek to transfer ‘high-input high-output’ silviculture management practices through establishment of demonstration plots where trees are planted under optimal conditions and by granting input subsidies through the local government forest extension staff. However, while there is clear scope for increasing productivity, the study finds that the technical solutions promoted by donor agencies were developed with little or no dialogue with NIPF growers and as a result are poorly adapted to their socio-economic context and not compatible with community land use and tenure patterns.

The study finds that the aim of NIPF growers is seldom to maximize area productivity, but rather to optimize their total land use and to ensure an acceptable productivity while minimizing capital and labor inputs. NIPF is largely based on local knowledge, using local tree varieties, traditional silviculture management and localized wood lots to fit into local land use patterns. The first group of NIPF (resident tree growers) established wood lots on land categories such as infertile land or former grazing pastures. The second group of NIPF (urban-based domestic investors) aim at the best possible production with limited investments.