

P.KERKHOF, "AGROFORESTRY IN AFRICA - A SURVEY OF PROJECT EXPERIENCE".

London, The Panos Institute (9 White Lion Street, London N1 PD, UK), 1990.

A strange thing happened to me while I was in Sri Lanka. I was confronted with this very instructive book on Agroforestry in Africa. I must admit I read it in one go. Although it has become very fashionable to do agroforestry research and to plant trees in combination with crops almost everywhere now, Africa still seems one of the hot spots for it. A lot of research was started on the black continent. The International Council for Research on AgroForestry (ICRAF) is based in Nairobi, Kenya. From there a lot of field trials are started and monitored.

Development efforts have been set up in a number of countries which have been drought-stricken or face erosion and land degradation problems. A number of these projects have been implemented through large-scale operations monitored by FAO and similar organisations, whilst a great many others have been started by NGOs. The book published by Panos Institute reviews some 20 of these projects and tries to find out whether they have been successful, what their strong points have been, where mistakes were made, what can be learned from them.

The overall picture that emerges is maybe not so optimistic. A fair number of projects have not reached the initial project goals. Some had to change the scope of their activity. A number of them were stopped without the local population taking over the former project's activities. The interesting aspect of this book, however, is that the author tries to come up with some general recommendations on how an ideal agroforestry project should be planned, initiated and run.

It is clear (but of course everybody knew that already...) that local populations have to be involved right from the start in project planning and definition of the objectives. In most cases, people are not interested in planting woodfuel trees, maintaining soil fertility or stemming land degradation. These topics are too abstract. What they want is to plant trees (e.g. fruit trees) from which they can benefit after only a few years.

Alley cropping which has been very popular among researchers all over the world because it combines nitrogen fixation and soil protection with woodfuel production seems to be too complicated and troublesome for most traditional communities, so they do not want to adopt it. Projects promoting alley cropping or similar systems can therefore not expect that people will plant and maintain trees once the project

has stopped. Even during the project, it might already prove a very difficult job to get the people to do what the project proposes.

The overall picture that emerges is that in dry areas projects should try to protect those areas where the natural vegetation has not been wiped out yet. The cost of protecting these dry area woodlands is much lower than the cost of replanting or recovering 'lost' areas. In wet areas, it seems to be easier to replant degraded plots.

Another point is that NGOs are not necessarily implementing better or worse projects than official organisations. On the other hand, there are some examples of very good NGO projects.

Some of the points raised in this book, have already been treated in *Afrika Focus* through the article by Counet & Van Damme (*Afrika Focus*, Vol. 5, nr. 1-2, 1989, p. 65-78) where they presented the difficulties encountered in an (agro)forestry effort in Togo. In this respect, it is striking that among the projects presented here there is not a single one financed or executed by a Belgian organisation even though the Belgian Administration for Development Co-operation has some very good projects going on in Cabo Verde or Burundi. The only sign of a Belgian presence in the document is through an evaluation document written by University of Gent forester Jan De Winter, et al.

A positive feature about this book is that the reader can find out about some interesting projects and also about the different organisations that have tried to implement a certain policy. With each example, there comes a brief project file giving amongst others the address and the references of some documents written on the project. These constitute interesting leads to start a personal discussion with the project authorities.

The critical reader is also confronted with the very famous CARE windbreak project in Niger which has been used as the textbook example of a successful agroforestry project. Kerkhof's comments, however, are not so unequivocal.

On the whole this is a very readable publication. The text is not difficult to understand and neatly illustrated with pictures and drawings. Tables present striking figures or trends. Interested readers with no specific technical background will enjoy reading it. A very positive point is that at the end of the book the important conclusions have

been grouped together into ready-to-use recommendations which can be very useful for anyone wanting to start a development project comprising an agroforestry effort.

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