

# Think Piece

**Designed to stimulate  
conversations that matter**

**NGP 2014  
Summit  
Cape Town,  
18–19 June**

**Based on learnings from the South Africa, Chile and Brazil study tours, and the Edinburgh social workshop.**

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# Social Learning

Everything is impossible until it isn't. Back in 2007, NGP seemed impossible to realize. Yet along the way, NGP has built trust among participants, creating a platform between WWF, private plantation companies and public sector forestry agencies. As participants' understanding of each other has grown, it's opened up common ground where we can work toward shared goals.

This African proverb reflects how we got here:

**“If you want to travel fast, travel alone.  
If you want to travel far, travel together.”**

But this is also the end of innocence, as we realize just how far we have to travel. In a world of growing population and demand, are we providing long-term solutions at scale? No – not yet. And that's why we need to engage with you!

No one in NGP believes in easy ways out. We're inviting you to join us at our summit where we'll be pushing into the two most important and challenging forestry frontiers: social forestry and land use.

NGP doesn't have all the solutions. But we're learning more together all the time, asking the right questions and coming up with strong answers.

By engaging more with stakeholders from all sectors and complementary networks, we seek to learn from them – and to share what we've learnt by communicating the NGP case in a compelling way.

Education is the most powerful tool we have to change the world. And it's with that aim in mind that we'll be gathering together learning on common issues, from others sectors and distant geographies, at the NGP Summit.

# Social Forestry

**The challenge:** How can we mobilize large-scale investment into forestry projects that empower communities? And how can companies integrate social policies into their business, transforming the forestry sector into an agent for development in rural areas?

**The premise:** Enabling skilled, motivated local people to run successful forestry businesses and manage productive plantations on their land can secure supply, reduce risks, and benefit communities and investors.

**The opportunity:** Partnerships between forestry companies, communities and governments will unlock sources of funding to scale-up smart forestry investment that shares the benefits and ownership with communities that share their land.

A world with 7 billion people requires forestry and farming practices that produce more with less land and water, while empowering communities to achieve their aspirations. In many rural areas, forestry companies are the best-resourced and best-connected institutions around. The challenge is how to channel investment through the forestry sector into benefiting communities.

# Social Forestry

To **Investors** – as the “global land rush” accelerates, land investment risks come under scrutiny. Many have invested without understanding land risks, such as tenure. These unresolved risks push capital away from forestry investments. By integrating land, social and environmental risks more comprehensively into the financial architecture, implementing practices and safeguards to evaluate and attenuate those risks, finance systems became more resilient and a guarantee of good land investment.

To **Forestry** – investing in locally controlled forestry is an idea whose time has come. The forest industry needs a reliable supply of wood, but its core business isn't owning land. If local communities, running productive plantations on their own land, can secure that supply, forest products companies should move away from acquiring land and employing labour, and instead seek to form genuine partnerships with local rights-holders. It's a model that has the potential to benefit both sides, but requires long-term stable investment.

To **Communities** – people are generally tied to their land. They do not want to have to move. Social forestry is about empowering communities to achieve their aspirations where they live. The forestry sector is capable of providing technical skills, building capacity and channelling capital to support new businesses within the forestry value chain and from neighbouring communities. Working in partnership offers opportunities to improve livelihoods and governance.

# Land Use

**The challenge:** How can we balance the needs of different land uses in a sustainable way as competition intensifies? How do we meet growing global demand for food, energy and other products within the planet's boundaries?

**The premise:** As population, demand and land competition grow, we need forestry and agriculture practices that produce more with less land and water, reducing pressure on ecosystems while contributing to human development.

**The opportunity:** Scientific research, technological progress, better planning and management practices, and well-facilitated collaborative learning processes can help us explore solutions across sectors that protect and improve the natural environment and the social and economic conditions of local communities.

Human activities have already transformed around 43% of the world's land surface. Growing population and demand requires forestry and farming practices that produce more with less land and water. This will not be easy. Economic, social and environmental values and interests are not always compatible: the challenge is to build processes to balance demands and deal with trade-offs.

# Land Use

**Stakeholder Engagement** – land-use decision-making is a negotiation process to find a solution between various interests, having all stakeholders participating equally from the initial planning through to the sharing of the benefits. NGP understands stakeholder engagement as a process of collaborative learning between communities, investors and the forestry industry, empowering all stakeholders to achieve their aspirations. It requires us to build democratic, transparent and empowering processes of dialogue, which lead to free, prior and informed choices on land-use trade-offs.

**Ecosystem Integrity** – intensively managed plantations can maintain or enhance ecosystem resilience in thriving rural landscapes by conserving and/or restoring natural ecosystems, creating corridors or buffers between commercial, conservation and communal areas. Monitoring the ecological processes of water, carbon, biological and nutrient cycles allows informed decisions on land use and trade-offs within a landscape.

**High Conservation Values** – the HCV framework is a key tool for maintaining critical areas for biodiversity, ecosystem services, and social and cultural values. It is a common component across many voluntary sustainability standards schemes for agricultural and forest commodities. HCV mapping tools support land-use planners to prevent conversion of important areas for conservation.

**Economic Growth** – the forestry industry has the potential to channel large-scale investment that can empower communities to achieve their aspirations and support sustainable economic growth. Local people enabled to run their own successful agriculture and forestry businesses can become reliable suppliers to the industry, and reduce risks for investors..

A group of approximately 15-20 people are gathered in a forest, likely for a field study or training session. They are dressed in outdoor gear, including jackets, hats, and backpacks. The forest has tall, thin trees and a ground covered in pine needles and small green plants. The scene is captured from a slightly elevated angle, showing the group's interaction in the natural setting.

**Social Learning**

# Social Learning

It is widely recognized that there is a large gap between the sustainability that many in society are calling for, and what actually happens in practice. Despite the increased awareness of our unsustainable lifestyles, ample evidence of the impact these lifestyles have, and even a concern to do something about it, we still do not see sufficient action being taken.

We cannot assume that social change will automatically emerge from our interventions. It is important to understand what social change is, the dynamics of it, and the role learning can play in supporting the change society requires to move towards sustainability. To do this, it helps to carefully consider and understand how people learn informally in social contexts, and how people can collaboratively learn together. This can support our understanding of how we can better facilitate the informal learning of adults to bring about the social change required for improved environmental and social practices. Social learning is a type of learning that can support this change, and strengthen the quality of stakeholder participation processes required for the New Generations Plantations work.

## **Learning in an uncertain, complex, and ever-changing world**

The society we live in today can be termed a “risk society”. Many of the environmental and social issues and risks that we face today and in the future are unknown. Where we do know of them, we may not truly understand their magnitude or implications. A typical and highly topical example is climate change, and the risks it poses to society. In our uncertain and ever-changing world, society will not always have the knowledge it needs to deal with risks. If society is to continually adapt to this changing context, then learning needs to be exploratory and open-ended, rather than based on what is already known – which has often given rise to the risk in the first place. What needs to be learned cannot always be known beforehand. This requires a society with an ability to be critically reflexive, to work and learn together to understand the root causes of environmental and social challenges, to cultivate new adaptation practices, and to develop the capacity for change and reorientation.

Social learning, or co-learning, builds this ability by supporting the informal learning of adults throughout their lives, as they do their everyday work. It complements more formal types of learning such as degrees, qualifications and short courses. This is the type of learning that NGP supports, in its work with participants that come from a diversity of professional cultures, views, values and beliefs, in an effort to develop and to implement innovative sustainability practices.

### **What is social learning?**

Social learning is a meeting place for different perspectives of learning in a social context. It has grown out of the disciplines of psychology, sociology, education, management studies, and environmental management, among others. Social learning tends to refer to learning that takes place when divergent interests, norms, values and constructions of reality meet in an environment that is conducive to meaningful interaction. Due to the complexity of natural resource management and the increased recognition that many environmental problems stem from social issues, many managers have turned to more participatory approaches. Social learning supports this participatory approach, as it enhances the adaptive capacity of those stakeholders who have an interest in natural resource use and management, by improving their participation in decision-making.

### **Social learning and sustainability**

Social learning embraces the notion that contemporary risks require new ways of thinking, learning and doing that are contextually situated, and supported by processes which promote the development of dialogue and reflection, with the ultimate goal of taking action and supporting change. It supports the development of critical understanding, critical assessment, and the commitment to transform society. Knowledge should not be seen as static or fixed, but as a process of sense making within particular social and personal contexts. Social learning is therefore seen to be a reflective process that can support society to work towards sustainability. Social learning acknowledges that once solutions have been found, the goal posts have often already moved, and better solutions need to be explored. When learning and sustainability are seen in this light, many of today's "best practices" become tomorrow's worst; sustainability becomes a never-ending journey of continual improvement.

### **Elements of social learning important to the New Generation Plantations platform**

#### **1. Valuing processes over products**

The processes of social learning are as important as its outcomes. The crux of social learning is not what people need to know, but rather how people learn, what they want to learn, and how they will be able to challenge and transcend societal norms for a more sustainable future.

#### **2. Changing values, beliefs, ideologies and assumptions**

Only through learning do we develop the values, concerns and attitudes which make up our perception of reality. And only through participative learning about new information and ideas different from our own do we test our values and concerns against reality, and re-orientate our attitudes and actions. The social change that is required for a change in values, beliefs and ideologies in how society uses and manages the natural environment will therefore require a special type of learning. This approach needs to take place in rich social contexts where people with a diversity of views, assumptions, values and ideologies are provided with the opportunity to safely discuss their worldviews without fear. However, it is crucial that this discussion takes place within a facilitated

environment of moderate disagreement and divergent views, since this is the trigger for learning.

#### **3. Disagreement as a precondition for learning**

Disagreements are often avoided, rather than embraced. However, the conflicts that emerge from discussing divergent views should be seen as a prerequisite for the type of learning required to improve sustainability practices, rather than as a barrier. If used in a positive way, this can prevent complacency, encourage innovative thinking, and legitimize the deliberation process.

#### **4. Facilitating thought processes**

Thought processes that can support deep and meaningful individual and collective learning and potentially catalyse transformation include empathic and alert listening; participants being aware of their own emotional responses to what others say; sharing what they consider others' misperceptions; explicitly suspending their assumptions and opinions in the company of others; halting the impulse to always argue on "non-negotiable" issues; being open, honest and collaborative; and revealing tacit thoughts in the open and exploring with others if these thoughts resonate with them.

### **5. The importance of reflexivity**

The concept of reflexivity is a critical aspect of social learning, especially in response to the growing environmental and social risks that NGP deals with. Reflexivity helps people move away from seeing learning as being about expert-derived, predetermined solutions and the right way of doing things. Instead, it becomes a process of individuals or groups developing the knowledge, values and competence to participate more fully and effectively in making their own choices and taking responsibility for developing solutions and actions to complex and continually changing problems.

### **A journey of self-discovery**

Social learning is differentiated from other forms of learning by full participation and trust, and shared exploration and investigation between participants. There is critical evaluation of existing knowledge and problems, engagement with a broad array of views, and feedback from others on our own views. From this type of learning, new understandings and knowledge are co-constructed and applied to deal with real-world problems.

Social learning involves practice, or 'learning by doing', where participants learn through a journey of collaboration and self-discovery. However, practice and investigation need an enabling environment. This is why social learning will succeed only when it takes place in collaborative partnerships of shared interest, that are built on mutual respect, trust and tolerance, share a common language, and aim towards a shared objective. Social learning that can support people to deal with risk rather than certainty depends on meaningful participation with others. It is this type of social learning that is important to the collaborative work of NGP and its diversity of participants.



# Social Forestry

# Social Forestry

Discussions of the social aspects of forestry have, in the past, tended to have a narrow focus. We need to go beyond this. Social forestry isn't just about community forestry, income and employment for local people, or small-scale development projects. And it's a mistake to focus only on welfare – whether that's ensuring decent working conditions or providing housing and schools for neighbouring communities. Forestry is increasingly expected to address a range of social issues. That could be strengthening civil society organizations, helping local enterprises to develop and improving food security in developing countries. Or it could be providing leisure, learning and business opportunities in Scotland. The last thing we need is another new term for forest management. So let's assume *all* forestry is social forestry.

Social forestry is about all stakeholders participating – from the initial planning through to the sharing of the benefits. “Stakeholder involvement” is one of NGP's four key principles. It means that we need to do more than just carry out consultation exercises and minimize negative impacts – we should be looking at ways to learn together from each other as a way of empowering communities to achieve their aspirations.

Many of the social problems in plantations landscapes are symptoms of a deeper malaise of poor governance, such as injustice, poverty and unemployment, food insecurity, lack of education, and land tenure systems under stress. NGP needs to focus more on how to tackle these issues. One principle is to include communities in plantation design, providing an opening for people to register land titles and gain legal recognition for their customary rights to natural resources.

## Tenure

Almost all landscapes are inhabited or used by people with some form of claims of rights of control over the land and its resources. The way in which people gain access to land and its resources is defined and controlled by sets of rules that societies define through systems of tenure. “Land tenure” is the catch-all phrase used to describe “the relationship, whether legally or customarily defined, among people, as individuals or groups, with respect to land”.

Land tenure systems “may be well defined and enforceable either in a formal court of law or through customary structures in a community, or they may be relatively poorly defined with ambiguities open to exploitation”. Land-use rights are often classified as formally recognized or statutory

rights (those that are explicitly acknowledged by the state and may be protected using legal means) or informally recognized, customary or “traditional” rights (those that lack official recognition and protection). But this is not always very useful as informal rights may, in practice, be quite formal and secure in their own context, while statutory tenure drawn up by central government may lack legitimacy at local levels and therefore require enforcement by government agents which can pose further risks. Additionally, this distinction is becoming blurred in many African countries where formal legal recognition is provided to customary rights, through legislation (such as in South Africa) or through political alliances (such as in Ghana, where national political elites bolster the authority of traditional chiefs). Regardless, customary land tenure systems remain the most important system through which people manage and gain access to land and its resources throughout much of Africa.

Plantation forestry companies make large (in scale and value), long-term investments into areas. The nature of these large commercial investments is such that they require long-term security of tenure. Many have argued that full security is an ultimate condition for such long-term investments and that this can only arise when there is full private ownership of the land. This is true in some parts of the world (such as many developed countries

from which plantation forestry companies and their investors hail), but not in others (such as many countries in Africa where plantation forestry is expanding). This view has probably pushed the plantation forestry sector to seek deals that offer as close to full land ownership rights as possible. In doing so, they often reduce tenure security for others in the short term and possibly for themselves in the long term, and miss out on opportunities to make investments that create more resilient local economies and shared value or benefits.

Security of tenure is the certainty that the rights to land held by a person, community or enterprise will be recognized by others and will be protected in cases of specific challenges. Although it cannot be measured directly, it is affected by more than one source of security, the community within which a person, group or enterprise is found being one – when your neighbours recognize and respect your rights of control of land, your tenure security increases. Other sources of security are government (political recognition of some rights) and the administrative state (formal legal system), but may also include coercive structures (in the absence of effective state governance, warlords may emerge). These sources often act together, and security of tenure can vary from context to context. The important point, however, is that rural communities are part of the picture.

There is relatively strong evidence that clarity of tenure is beneficial to rights holders, businesses and governments alike, and supports economic development. Measures to clarify tenure could be broadly beneficial and an important outcome for local rights holders. This does not necessarily mean transformation to totally formal statutory land administration with recognizable legal rights to property, particularly not immediately or as a precondition for investment. There are suggestions that formalization of the administration of land rights is only beneficial in certain situations; there are other ways of formalizing rights of communities that keep the land registered in the name of the community and leave it to undertake its own land administration. This may help to protect communities against encroachment from outsiders but may also enable communities to enter into legal contracts or agreements with companies.

Let us compare two examples of clarified and unclarified tenure in South Africa, where land tenure is comparatively clear compared to other countries. At Kranskop, clarified land tenure following land settlement agreement has opened the way for partnerships and benefit-sharing approaches between Mondi and Siyathokosa and Eyethu trusts. By contrast, at SiyaQhubeka, unresolved land claims are straining relationships with some groups within neighbouring communities,

undermining hard-earned gains, and even posing risk to the safety of staff and plantations.

In a plantation forestry context, clarifying land tenure requires bringing together rights-holders, businesses, NGOs and government. This necessitates a government that has willingness and capacity to engage in such a process. It also requires good governance, which is almost more important than the land tenure system or clarity of property rights to tenure security. Property rights alone have little impact on land tenure security without good governance and an effective enabling environment (such as trustworthy land administration, honest and fair enforcement and judicial services, access to finance, affordable access to legal services or macroeconomic stability).

Governance of tenure is the way in which the rules of land tenure are applied and made operational – in other words, the way in which it is determined “who can use which resources, for how long and under what conditions”. Weak governance is the cause of many tenure (and other) problems. Corrupt tenure practices or failure to protect tenure rights can lead to social instability, unsustainable use of the environment, reduced livelihood strategies, and weakened investor confidence and economic

growth. Unfortunately, weak governance can be prevalent in both formal statutory land administration and informal or customary tenure arrangements.

Institutions (of different kinds) and governance capabilities evolve slowly – the first step toward good governance has to be “good enough” governance. This recognizes that expectations need to be checked and trade-offs expected, but some progress is being made toward sustainable social and economic development, and improved environmental management. Strengthening governance is an ongoing process. It must involve different actors who are willing and capable of working together, and who recognize their respective roles in supporting efforts to improve governance across all levels and in not undermining institutions. Plantation forestry companies should consider their role in this, as the process of improving governance is likely to be essential in creating quality institutions and strengthening the enabling environment for business and economic development.

### **Investments**

Responsible investors take social risks very seriously. Social issues around plantations have a material impact, making companies need to carefully

identify and assess all potential social (and environmental) risks to avoid unnecessary surprises, and put in place measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate possible problems.

Plantation forestry developments involve investments of different types by various stakeholders. These stakeholders include rights holders, investors, companies, sometimes non-profit organizations and government, who invest time, money and energy in supporting/opposing/negotiating plantation forestry projects. Investments are not only financial. They might also be investments in time of people (such as spending time engaging with communities outside of what is required, setting up associations or lobbying government etc.). The very act of investing (financial and other) has impacts that change the way something works. This change may lead to more than just a financial gain for an investor or the companies involved – it can lead to other benefits and/or negative consequences for other stakeholders (affected parties). These investments therefore come with responsibilities.

In some areas, forestry companies may represent the most capacitated organization that a community is likely to encounter. Forestry may be the best hope an area has for development and jobs, if forestry companies

recognize the important role they play and the responsibility they have, and partner effectively with socio-economic development organizations and processes. This presents a challenge and places a lot of expectations on companies, which add to the complexity of operating in such areas. Forestry companies need to find ways of working smartly with partners, development agencies, government and local communities to catalyse and enable development.

On the whole, private sector investments in plantation forestry in Africa follow the conventional resource-led paradigm, in which capital seeks natural resources, and as a side effect, needs some labour. Emphasis is placed on renting or buying the rights to natural resources and investors negotiate compensation for access, perhaps adding some corporate social responsibility initiatives. But this approach often fails to build business partnerships, or create any shared value, because it fails to recognize the importance of labour, skills, markets, capital and institutions. A rights-based system could do this better. Such a system makes local control centrally important to the process, recognizing local people's autonomy and their rights to determine the land's destiny, and to gain income from its effective management.

Either system can have profit as a core objective. The reality for investors is that there are always going to be people in the landscapes in which they operate. In many places, supporting local economies will have long-term benefits for investors. Finding more meaningful and effective ways of sharing benefits and creating shared value can help reduce business risks over the long term. These benefits might not always be seen, but potential costs and risks are massive.

Some companies face a huge challenge in trying to redress the harm they have done in the minds and feelings of people..Foresters, investors and lawyers may see costs and benefits in black-and-white legal and financial terms, but examples like SiyaQhubeka and Kranskop show that it is way more subtle than that. Communities need to feel they have a stake in plantation forestry and have a sense of ownership – it's not just trickle-down economics. Disenfranchised and unhappy communities pose a risk to forestry (and other) businesses. Communities have to see the value in plantations, as two statements that were regularly repeated on the South Africa study tour illustrate: "You can't protect forestry with a fence" and "a box of matches is very cheap" (implying a risk of arson from disenfranchised communities).

There are different ways of approaching and engaging with local communities, and advantages and opportunities from exploring and implementing different ways of working. Without detracting from their core business, forestry companies have to find ways of facilitating economic development and job creation. Mondi in South Africa, for example, has approached this through setting up a subsidiary, Mondi Zimele, that provides enabling and asset investments to deliver both public goods and private assets.

For plantation forestry in Africa, investments need to move toward rights-based systems, and seek to support resilient local economies. This will be an ongoing, long-term process. Ultimately, however, it is likely to be the most likely path to sustainable and productive forestry that reduces risk and secures the company's licence to operate.



Land Use

# Land Use

Companies involved in NGP have done some impressive work to maintain and restore natural forest and other ecosystems. So how can we build on the companies' management plans and go beyond FSC requirements to create "living landscapes"? Managing and recuperating ecosystem integrity and ecosystem services is a big part of this – with all the benefits that brings for nature, human well-being and the economy. There are big opportunities to build true partnerships between the forest sector and society – a big challenge, where there have undeniably been conflicts in the past. And there's also potential to use the process to improve local governance and create mutually beneficial partnerships with government, communities, NGOs and other land users.

So how do we make the leap from local to landscape? How best to make the case for better land use to government and society and motivate others to get involved? Can we build on multi-stakeholder initiatives that are already under way in certain areas? Is it possible to tap into government priorities and funding – as WWF and Mondi did with their wetland restoration work in South Africa? Or to influence policy, as in the Brazilian legislation that mandates landowners need to conserve a proportion of native vegetation?

## Landscape approach

A landscape approach provides a concept and tools for planning and managing different land uses and balancing social, environmental and economic objectives. It involves thinking, planning and actions that go beyond individual sites and interests into the broader context, where people share (both risk and value) and shape the socio-economic, governance and ecological components of their setting. Landscapes can be defined and delineated conceptually, incorporating not just a physical or ecological boundary (often a catchment or sub-catchment), but also social, governance and economic elements.

In the case of plantations, the landscape – socio-economic and ecological – is the broader context within which plantation forestry operates. Forestry is the dominant economic actor in some areas and may fund additional environmental, social and economic projects. This is important for managing risks on forestry land, but it also poses broader questions about the role forestry should play in the development and sustainability of that landscape. How can we create more diverse rural economies, building on what forestry knows and taking into account good practice? How does a forestry company understand its role as an agent of development, and key influencer in such landscapes?

A landscape approach to plantation forestry should be seen as part of a company's risk management and of its broader socio-economic relevance. Bracken Timbers, the subject of a field visit on the South Africa study tour, is a medium grower that has taken on certain responsibilities outside of its core business to support social, economic and ecological elements of the landscape in which it operates. It has done so in simple ways that illustrate an understanding of the local socio-ecological context, such as growing agricultural crops alongside plantations to provide year-round employment, and that are also important to managing its own business risks, such as from fire and other social issues. This demonstrates that even medium-sized operations can influence landscapes positively, especially with the relevant tools, some resources, and capacity or potential for leverage (through partnerships with donors, government or the private sector).

Bracken Timbers provides an example of a new way for medium growers to do business, recognizing that they are part of a landscape with social and ecological infrastructure that they have a role and responsibility to support – for the good of their business. The way that the company operates is creating shared value with the communities of people that work for them and live around them.

But there is only so much individual businesses can do. Sustainability challenges and development are dependent on the broader context and should be addressed through adequate and appropriate land-use planning and decision-making that is able to:

- Reconcile local, national and international priorities
- Take into account local rights holders
- Follow due process in terms of stakeholder involvement and impact assessment,
- Be explicit about potential win-lose outcomes and appropriately weigh up options.

This requires good governance, which is unfortunately often lacking. What do plantation forestry companies do in such cases? An example comes from Ghana, where APSD is investing in necessary skills and expertise to map the landscape in which they will plant. They are assessing suitability for different types of agriculture in the area so as to best plan their plantings, but also to avoid land with high agricultural potential. In this way APSD is doing land-use planning in a manner similar to what government might do. Could it go one step further and do more to increase local communities' awareness of the value and potential land-use suitability of the land they own in a way that helps to create shared value over the long term?

This speaks to the potential of companies to become more proactively engaged in land-use planning as a way of creating more resilient landscapes with forestry as part of them. The benefits of doing this could also extend to clarification of land tenure, providing a baseline for ecosystem change, identification of high conservation value areas, reaching beyond just forestry to other land uses (such as agriculture), and better relationships and potential partnerships with a variety of stakeholders. This does represent an upfront investment at a time when start-up or medium-sized companies have tight margins and are years away from any profits, but it is the sort of investment that is likely to have long-term gains.

All of this could influence social, ecological and governance elements of the landscape. It should facilitate integrated planning of more diverse landscapes capable of maintaining a higher degree of ecosystem integrity and supporting more varied job or livelihood opportunities.

Looking at the case of small growers in Ozwathini, also visited on the South Africa study tour, we see how locally controlled small plantations on communal land are providing income to local people, and how this is being used to control spread of invasive alien plants (an environmental

stressor on biodiversity and water). The Ozwathini landscape mosaic, in comparison to neighbouring areas of large-scale commercial plantations and sugarcane, is more diverse (which is better for biodiversity), less modified (better for maintenance of ecosystem functioning and delivery of ecosystem services), more resilient, and more supportive of social elements of the landscape (works within the communal tenure system, is locally controlled, generates more local jobs, and does not preclude other land uses in and around the woodlots). Ironically, it is more difficult to get certification for wood products from Ozwathini's small growers than it would be to get certification for the large, privately owned plantations. This is an issue that will need to be addressed for all small grower operations to avoid unfair market barriers and realize the potential return on investments in partnerships with local small growers. It would represent yet another shift in the way we think about the business of plantation forestry, especially in Africa.

The example of the agricultural area near Ozwathini also serves to highlight another question: how can plantation forestry reach beyond the plantation boundaries to other sectors, such as agriculture, in order to create positive changes in the landscape? It would appear, from the landscapes visited in South Africa, and from what study tour participants had to say about other

regions in Africa and the world, that agriculture also has big challenges in terms of implementing sustainability principles. The need for well-established standards, market-based mechanisms (certification) and tools to enable sustainable practices is common across sectors.

NGP is one forum that can help facilitate such discussions. Market forces and policy changes are required to see a landscape approach really come into effect. Otherwise, how do you get another land user to apply good governance in the landscape? However it happens, strong relationships with neighbours and stakeholders and across sectors are fundamental to a landscape approach. Like improving governance, building relationships, providing opportunities for sharing and establishing links across sectors is a long-term endeavour.

### Addressing degradation drivers

Maintaining ecosystem integrity and avoiding environmental degradation are naturally elements of the landscape approach. There is also little need to highlight the linkages between ecosystem integrity, ecosystem services of benefit to people, human well-being, and poverty reduction and resilient local economies – all of which are important elements of sustainable plantation forestry operations.

Plantation forestry has been known to be a driver of ecosystem degradation – though it is seldom the only such driver in the landscapes in which plantations are found. However, the environmental issues of plantation forestry are largely known, and there are well-developed tools to address them. For example, NGP participants' management plans will include measures to prevent the spread of invasive alien plant species, avoid planting in freshwater ecosystems such as wetlands and riparian zones, and protect and enhance areas of high conservation value. Of course, this does not mean that environmental issues are any less important or require less attention. But with the tools available for assessing, avoiding, mitigating and offsetting environmental impacts of plantations, there should be little reason for plantation forestry to be an agent of ecosystem degradation.

In fact, responsible plantations can help restore degraded landscapes and enhance areas of ecological sensitivity or high conservation value. Participants on the South Africa study tour saw how SiyaQhubeka Forests applied these tools to plan and manage its plantations around iSimangaliso Wetland Park, a World Heritage Site, with multiple benefits. But are start-up and medium-sized plantation forestry companies likely to use these tools? Do they know about them? Can they be adapted (if necessary) to

all environments? Can smaller companies absorb the time and additional cost of expertise to apply them, and then implement their findings? Has an effective case been made for their use?

Widespread awareness of these tools still needs to be improved, and adaptation for application in different environments would still be required. For instance, the wetland delineation method presented on the study tour, which was adapted from approaches used in the US and refined in South Africa, was not known to all participants. This could be a useful tool for plantation companies, since it is an FSC requirement to protect water resources and put in place measures to do so – though it is not specified how.

The use, adaptation (if necessary) and implementation of available tools does come at additional cost. Often their use is required to get appropriate licences and certification of timber products (certification is an important driver of good practice in the absence of policies and/or adequate enforcement in some countries). But some start-up companies lack the resources or motivation to adhere to environmental measures or follow best practices.

A major driver of deforestation in Africa is charcoal production. Although there are places in Africa where plantation forestry might be in grassland areas, it is more likely to take place in forested or woodland areas where deforestation is a major problem. In Ghana, for instance, where charcoal makes up 80% of the energy supply, 60,000 hectares of forest are lost a year, with up to 400,000 people making illegal charcoal. These are epic proportions for any environment to sustain and for any government to deal with. Plantation forestry as an alternative, sustainable source of charcoal that takes pressure off remaining natural forests is a major reason why WWF is engaging with plantation forestry in Africa.

But charcoal from plantations is not yet competitive with charcoal produced from illegal logging, and people prefer charcoal from hardwood species for cooking. Governments need to create a stronger enabling environment to encourage sustainable charcoal production – possibly by reducing tax on charcoal produced in sustainable ways.

The majority of afforestation and reforestation across all regions of Africa is happening with introduced species. Encouraging the planting of tree species that are not indigenous poses unknown but potentially significant environmental risks. This risk should not to be taken lightly and the specific

implications of such environmental issues for local contexts need to be assessed. A range of tools and expertise exist to assess this. The business case for making the upfront investment in undertaking appropriate assessments and utilizing available tools has already been touched on in the above two sections. It should also be clear from the lessons learnt in South Africa, where private companies have had to bear the cost of retroactively addressing environmental issues of plantation forestry.

Commercial forestry plantations in South Africa lie predominantly in grassland ecosystems, many of which have endemic and threatened biodiversity and deliver important water-related ecosystem services. Forestry plantations replace the natural vegetation with introduced tree species (which can become invasive if not well managed) that use more water than the native vegetation, which means less water for downstream users in a country where water is a scarce resource. Due in part to the National Water Act (No 36 of 1998), which identified plantation forests as water users, and in part to maintaining a social licence to operate, forestry companies were motivated to delineate wetland areas and riparian zones and pull back trees to the ecologically defined buffers. This has cost the industry hundreds of millions of dollars - but has helped to ensure

productive forestry can continue to operate, and to secure functional freshwater ecosystems for downstream users.

There are often multiple drivers of ecosystem change in the areas where plantations operate, often with social causes (such as civil unrest, unsustainable natural resource use and livelihood strategies like slash-and-burn agriculture). These can seriously undermine ecosystem functioning. By contrast, plantation expansion in degraded landscapes can, if well managed, help to rehabilitate forest areas and ecosystem functioning. In such cases plantation forestry companies are already benefiting the socio-ecological landscape – but should responsible plantation forestry do more to address other drivers of ecological degradation?

It is clear from examples in South Africa that the impacts and costs of not dealing with landscape impacts upfront can be astronomical down the line. But are companies being enabled to avoid making the same mistakes in other parts of Africa? Do they have the tools they need to integrate environmental information into their planning and management decisions? How can we do more to facilitate, educate, aid and share?



**The New Generations Plantations (NGP) platform ([www.newgenerationplantations.org](http://www.newgenerationplantations.org)) is a place for sharing knowledge about good plantation practices and learning from each other's experience. As well as improving their own practices, participants seek to advance plantation management more widely by sharing information and leading by example. NGP engages with other plantation companies and governments, along with civil society organizations, other land users, major buyers of forest products and the finance sector.**

**We aspire to consensus among leading private and public stakeholders that plantations should contribute positively to the welfare of local communities and should not replace natural ecosystems.**