

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/

Conference Title: Using Agroforestry to Increase Food Security and Reforest Landscapes in Northern Kenya

Travel Dates: 05/06/16 – 21/06/16

Location: Samburu County, Northern Kenya, East Africa

Group member(s): Georgia Forsyth Sijpestijn

Aims: To understand the human-environmental conflicts in northern Kenya

To research other suitable locations for the Sadhana Forest project to be rolled out to.

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The Project

This summer with the assistance of the James Rennie Bequest fund I travelled to Samburu County in northern Kenya to an agroforestry project that targets food insecurity and attempts to reforest the landscape. Sadhana Forest Kenya (SFK) is the newest project of Sadhana Forest, which has already been established in southern India and Haiti, and began in 2014. It aims to combat a cycle that forms in areas that are arid and malnourished: people who use wood for cooking fuel deforest areas; less trees attract less rain, leading to increased incidence of drought, in conjunction with climate change; more drought increases food insecurity; more effort is needed to obtain food and so there is less time to be educated.

The Samburu people, who are a cousin ethnic group to the famous Maasai, are semi-nomadic pastoralists who rely on their herds of cattle and goats for food, and to trade for staple foodstuffs. This way of life makes them vulnerable to drought, as when their animals die of thirst they have few other means of obtaining food. Trees in the area are used for cooking fuel, to build their manyattas (huts constructed from animal dung and timber) and fencing. The deforestation in conjunction with grazing, which reduces tree growth and establishment, has dramatically reduced the number of trees. This has happened in a relatively short period of time as people reminisced on how the forest used to cover a far larger area.

SFK trains local people in how to plant and care for indigenous food producing trees, and educate them as trainers. They are then supplied with saplings to plant on their private land and taught how to protect them from grazing. These trees are periodically checked by members of SFK and advice given if the trees are sick or have been damaged. SFK focuses the ownership of the tree being with the Samburu people, as the tree's produce provides a supplement to their diet or a sustainable form of timber harvest. Therefore the people have an incentive to protect the trees. Ultimately the project aims to have enough families planting trees on their land to form a forest in the region. The Samburu people today move around less frequently so can see these trees to maturation.

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The Research

The objectives of the trip were to conduct research into other locations the project would be suitable for. On arrival the research aim was expanded to include online research into identifying locations suitable globally. A number of criteria had to be met for areas to be deemed suitable for the project: (1) they are classified as arid or semi-arid, (2) they are within the top 20 of the Global Hunger Index (GHI) calculated yearly by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), (3) the regions ranked highly on the GHI also had large proportions of privately-owned land, and (4) are politically stable. The research produced a list of potential new sites with metadata and a global figure of how many malnourished people could benefit from the introduction of this project.

Researching with SFK allowed a unique insight into the lives of the Samburu and people-environment interaction occurring in northern Kenya. While there I was also allowed to sit-in on meetings with local officials and understand the political barriers and assistance provided to environmental projects. There were many opportunities to interact with the local Samburu both in their homes and at the project where they worked. I was invited to tea, helped build a manyatta, went to the local church and market and took part in the check-ups of the trees at people's homes.

The JRB funding allowed me to go out to this project by paying for the flights and travel to the project.