

Kwamtili Forest Project

Kwamtili Estate is a long-established cocoa plantation located in the Usambara Mountains some 60 km west of the port of Tanga in northeastern Tanzania. The Usambara Mountains are part of the Eastern Arc, one of the world's most important environmental and biodiversity hotspots. The higher parts of the mountains are covered with natural forests populated with many rare animal and plant species.

The mountain's lower areas are farmed by smallholders, with Kwamtili Estate remaining the only significant operating agricultural venture in this comparatively remote region.

Kwamtili Forest includes both the Kwachawa Mountain, covered entirely by virgin rain forest and making up two-thirds of the Estate, but also other major forested areas surrounding the mountain which constitute crucial water catchment areas. An increasing population exerts tremendous pressure on the forest, a situation which can only be managed if the local population benefits directly from Kwamtili Forest and the accompanying estate activities.



Significant effort is therefore focussed on protecting Kwamtili Forest. Aside from ensuring surveillance by the Tanzania Forest Service and the District Council, the estate works closely with smallholders from the five surrounding villages.

Apart from cultivating their land with maize to maintain a self-sufficient lifestyle, local farmers also grow cocoa which is processed on Kwamtili and sold from there. Kwamtili also leases parts of the estate to local farmers for growing maize and other annual crops.

Historically, the UsitawiNetwork club in Bern has supported "Food for Work" emergency assistance programmes that involved and brought benefits to the local population. The first was a road repair programme. Heavy loads, often up to 100kg, are transported by bicycle. Better roads, without deep potholes, made this very arduous task much easier. The

local population took part with enthusiasm, since everyone benefited from the improvements.

The second programme involved tending the estate's cocoa trees, with different people taking part each day so that everyone could benefit.



”



While the cocoa production is unique in eastern Africa it became clear in the course of these projects that protecting the environment, especially Kwamtili's outstanding forest, called for further activities based on the estate in addition to maintaining and improving cocoa production.

A successful beekeeping project with some 80 hives was launched, with the Kwamtili Community Development Project used as a framework to evaluate ways to develop and support other activities. The overriding concept considers Kwamtili Forest and the surrounding villages and their inhabitants as an integral whole, where the measures adopted benefit both the people involved and the natural environment.

Silkworm, vegetables and spice production and plantations for firewood and plywood have been evaluated in aiming to tap new and less water-dependent sources of income.

The most significant potential involves some form of "Kwamtili Private Forest Reserve" which would include using the Kwamtili Forest for a limited amount of bio-tourism. This project for a reserve would also

involve replanting indigenous trees and similar activities aimed at regenerating and maintaining Kwamtili Forest.

To better coordinate and consolidate support for Kwamtili Forest, the main shareholders of Kwamtili Estate Ltd have joined with UsitawiNetwork to strengthen activities to safeguard the forest. This includes a commitment by Kwamtili Estate Ltd to reinvest all proceeds.

Protecting Kwamtili Forest and Kwamtili Estate's unique cultural, economic and environmental heritage requires nowadays the direct support of all stakeholders together with coordination not only with local, regional and national authorities but also with international agencies, especially those active in Tanzania's Usumbara Mountains. The UsitawiNetwork aims to provide this essential framework.

As part of the UsitawiNetwork Kwamtili Forest Project, updated information and news about Kwamtili is maintained through kwamtili.org.