

TIST trains the poor for a prosperous life

By Lawi Joel

A PRIVATE organisation in the heartland of Tanzania is working with the miserable poor to restore hope in the villages and far beyond in foreign countries.

Tanzania International Small Group and Tree Planting Program - TIST, is training villagers in various parts of the country to recondition and improve their environment for a better living.

To make a degraded piece of land fruitful again and give the villagers a life with a meaning, TIST first trains and encourages them to plant trees to give the soil a protective cover.

So far the organisation has planted over two million trees, one million of which have survived the rigours of weather. This activity has restored many areas of wasteland into fruitful plots, rewarding the local communities with bounty harvests.

"The idea started in a casual talk with the villagers in Mpwapwa in 1998," explains Mrs Henneke who, with her husband G. Henneke, co-organise the programme. The following year TIST was born.

The Anglican church in Mpwapwa, organised hundreds of small group with 10-12 members. Small group members imagined the kind of lives they wanted for themselves and their children and began developing the plan that became TIST, the organisers explain.

Beginning July 21 this year TIST organised environmental seminar in Morogoro for all its working groups.

"I am particularly happy with the seminar because it is representative of seven nations," observes Prabakar Srinivasan, TIST Project manager in India. Delegates came from US, UK, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South

Africa and India. More impressive to Srinivasan was the fact that women composed over 30 per cent of the gathering.

The organisers explain that TIST goes beyond mere 'sustainability' by this generation meeting their needs in a way that enhances the ability of future generation to meet their needs.

TIST employees who had no prior computer skills are training to take over all data management. In the evening, these same computer facilitators are used to train young people in the community. Participants also have the chance to gain valuable business skills through the administrative and record keeping aspects of the project.

Small groups are excited by this program and know it will leave a legacy for their children, the organisers say and add in one of their documents that: "This is why TIST grew from 40 groups in one region in Tanzania in 1999 to 758 small groups across three regions and two countries in 2002, and why over one million trees are alive today as a result."

Participants and employees of the organisation use different types of technology to accurately measure growth and location of each tree, they explain in the website.

Now known simply as The International Small Group and Tree Planting Programme, TIST is designed to achieve integrated sustainable development objectives including taking actions that reduce greenhouse gas concentrations in the air, soothing hearts where there has been miserable souls by teaching them to reclaim their lost glorious environmental past.

Today, TIST which started in one of the poorest regions in Tanzania, a poorest county itself, operates in India and is spreading its wings to Uganda

and Kenya. In South Africa the organisation "will be established after my return," quips Clifford Mdaka, a South African conservationist invited to the seminar.

Mdaka implies his country needs TIST most. "In my country they don't cut down trees any more maybe because there are no more trees to cut down," says Mdaka who comes from Gottenburg village in Limpopo Province.

TIST sterling success story is no other place than Mpwapwa itself, where it was born. Raphael Chinolo a resident of Mkoroma village in the district narrates how with the land management education he received from TIST, he became the provincial most creative farmer- *mkulima mbutifu katika wilaya*.

Chinolo digs holes on his piece of land, once dismissed as too barren for any good, one foot deep, two feet apart. "I feel a hole half-way with cow-dung and mix it with soil," he explains.

The remaining empty half traps the runoff water. In each hole Chinolo plants two maize seeds. No matter how scanty the rainfall, Chinolo says he always gets enough water to grow a bumper crop of maize, one of the local dominant crops in Mpwapwa, a district where acreage yield averages three bags. Most of the provincial forest has been depleted in the last 50 years. TIST aims to reverse the change.

Previous to the new method of cultivation, the piece of land then called *balango* which means a barren piece of land in the Gogo language had a yield of about five bags of maize per bag.

In India, in the state of Tamilnad TIST has 138 groups from six villages in one district only. Ardrikesavan Kesawan from Vedal village says the village has been without rain for the last 2 years. Now they are earnestly planting trees

under the TIST project.

The going, however, is not easy for TIST. Many people, unaware of what its objectives and goals are, are slow to accept it, explains Prabakar Srinivasan, TIST project manager in India.

The organisers explain that the programme's commercial goal is to sequester carbon and create greenhouse gas carbon dioxide-equivalent credits that are low cost-per-ton, and in a way that is consistent with best practices of sustainable development.

Sustainable development usually means that the society "meets the need of today without compromising the ability of future generations to also meet their needs."

For TIST, it also means the programme will result in a longterm beneficial impact on the participants and habitat, says the organisers.

Tamilnad residents usually live faraway from their land plots. This makes them unable to guard the young trees they have planted.

"Other people therefore just come and cut them down for firewood," Srinivasan says. Their cows also trample on the young plants.

In Tanzania livestock cause the same problem.

It is so discouraging to many conservationists TIST is trying to develop to train others.

To encourage the fainting hearts, TIST, sponsored by Clean Air Action Corporation (CAAC) pays its members in the tree-planting project 4/- per tree planted as an incentive.

The earning, meagre though it may be, will support the family of Kesawan. But that money, to most of them, is not why they are restoring the lost land cover.

"The trees have other benefits too," Kesawan observes. "The land belongs to me. The tree belongs to me. I am happy with the incentive."