

Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group

Brown Bag: Planting Trees and Improving Agriculture for Better Lives

Vanessa Henneke, The International Small Group and Tree-Planting Program (TIST)

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What is ABCG?

The Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group (ABCG) comprises seven international conservation NGOs (African Wildlife Foundation, Conservation International, the Jane Goodall Institute, The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, World Resources Institute, and World Wildlife Fund-US) with the goal of working collaboratively and efficiently and effectively to further a sustainable future for the African continent. Funding has been generously provided by The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Agency for International Development's Biodiversity Analysis and Technical Support (BATS) program of the Africa Bureau, and our members.

ABCG's Mission

ABCG's mission is to tackle complex and changing conservation challenges by catalyzing and strengthening collaboration, and bringing the best resources from across a continuum of conservation organizations to effectively and efficiently work toward a vision of an African continent where natural resources and biodiversity are securely conserved in balance with sustained human livelihoods.

Stay Involved

Information, presentations, and other resources from this workshop and others are available on the ABCG website: www.abcg.org. To keep up with ABCG, you are invited to join our listserv, follow us on Twitter (@ABCGconserve) or "like" us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/ABCGconserve).

ABCG Theme: Faith and Conservation in Africa

The International Small Group & Tree-Planting Program (TIST): Planting Trees and Improving Agriculture for Better Lives

ABCG held a brown bag presentation and discussion on September 22, 2011 11:30 am – 12:30 pm featuring Vanessa Henneke from The International Small Group & Tree-Planting Program (TIST), hosted by World Wildlife Fund. Vanessa shared TIST's inspiring work on connecting with rural communities to plant and maintain trees based on a series of "best practices," their innovative use of technology for monitoring and the critical connections to carbon, climate change and local economic development.

"Planting one tree makes a difference.
Planting millions of trees restores environments and changes lives."

The holistic International Small Group & Tree-Planting Program (www.tist.org) began in 1999 in Mpwapwa, Tanzania with Small Groups of 6-12 people from the Anglican Church. TIST empowers Small Groups of subsistence farmers in order to reduce the damaging effects of deforestation, prevent famine, reduce poverty and reforest degraded land. Small Groups plant trees and receive payment through the global carbon market; members are helping their communities and the world by taking action to improve their environment. TIST has

also developed an award-winning monitoring program to effectively and transparently track their members' impact. More than 60,000 participants in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, India, Honduras and Nicaragua, have planted over 11 million trees and continue to plant nearly 6,500 new trees daily.

TIST Approach: Small Groups and Best Practices

The TIST program approach is centered on well-organized Small Groups of 6-12 participants who base decision-making on a set of "best practices." Small Group members from the Anglican Church identified local and sustainable development goals to improve their lives, including tree-planting and sustainable agriculture, and developed the approach that became TIST. TIST believes the groups of 6-12 members make the decision-making and accountability process simple and effective. "TIST is by and for Small Groups." Decisions are made and actions carried out through the Small Groups, including what species are best and where to plant which trees for the benefit of the Group. Seminars and trainings are arranged for participants on whatever topics members want to learn about regarding improved agriculture, health, education, etc. and the information is passed on to other villagers in a tiered approach.

These Small Groups are introduced to a series of faith-based "best practices," developed at TIST's beginning, which focus on leadership and equity. For example, groups rotate leadership weekly so that everyone has an equal role and this rotating leadership provides women the opportunity to contribute and practice and gain leadership experience. TIST works directly with women and gives seminars and holds discussion to try to assess how best things can work in each particular country. TIST was recently featured in a short film done by Ripple Effect Images, which highlighted the women of TIST. An example of another "best practice" is encouraging members to give one positive comment on someone else's leadership or accomplishment. In some groups, this has led to members learning what they value in leadership and members have influenced and impacted each other in a positive way.

TIST Accountability: Technology and Monitoring

TIST has planted millions of trees and participants are held accountable through an award-winning monitoring system to show people where and what they're doing. Using handheld computers and Global Position System (GPS), trained farmers visit each tree grove and record the location, number, size and species of live trees, and also take pictures of trees and nurseries. The data, recorded and stored over time, are uploaded onto a central database and shared on TIST's website: www.tist.org. The simple website allows people to connect with phones and simple internet systems to enter and add data. This entirely voluntary program transparently and effectively tracks the farmers' progress and how their projects have grown, etc. Small Groups have their groves audited at least once a year, but members can share their data and progress anytime. All individual groves have been mapped via GPS, thanks to Google Maps, and all the data are available on the internet. It's exciting for the farmers to see their results and progress – you can see the satellite image fill in with green over time as more and more trees are planted and grow as well as pictures taken of nursery progress, growing trees, etc. According to TIST, the program has spread as participants "took it viral." More and more people became interested in the program and word spread "farmer to farmer."

TIST is creating a long-term structure for both sustainable agricultural practices and local economic development; Small Group members plant trees that positively impact the environment and their livelihoods. Over the long-term, trees improve the soil and farming conditions and more food is available with improved agricultural practices, resulting in improved community health. Farmers plant trees that protect the soil and increase crop yields despite weather fluctuations. In some areas, improved and appropriate agricultural practices have increased farmers' yield by up to 3-5 times. Small Group members also benefit from selling fruit, nuts, timber, firewood and other forest products. Better nutrition resulting from improved crops positively impacts health and provides energy for other economic endeavors. Groups have adopted new agricultural

practices to increase food production and have developed nurseries and cared for seedlings. They later share what works best for germinating and transplanting various tree species.

TIST Connections: Carbon and Local Economic Development

In addition to what income they gain from forest products and improved agricultural yields, TIST expects to provide long-term revenue for the Small Group participants through the sale of greenhouse gas credits, specifically carbon. Trees use and store carbon, the storage is measured and the results are sold as greenhouse gas or carbon credits, so the planted trees provide a “virtual cash crop.” Small Groups receive payments for all trees planted and maintained through the carbon market, contributing to their livelihoods and local economy.

TIST wanted to help contribute to giving people a sustainable income and program and saw many projects fail. After extensive program assessment, they considered connecting farmers to the business of carbon markets. Small Groups receive a \$0.02 cash stipend for every living tree per year and later will receive 70% of the net revenue from carbon sales, which is deposited into Group bank accounts. The stipend provides needed income for families and encourages Groups to devote time to care for the trees’ survival. Selling carbon credits can be difficult because you can’t see or smell it; it’s the absence of the thing you can’t see. TIST values and best practices come into play here – they are “servants to each other” with a certain level of integrity and trust, which turns out to be credible and sustainable from a business perspective. TIST received “The World’s First Dual Validation and Verification” from VCS (Verified Carbon Standard) and CCB (Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards) in May 2011; the only carbon offset program in the world to have achieved dual certification.

More Information on TIST

- TIST’s website: <http://www.tist.org/>
- TIST’s electronic brochure: <http://epaperflip.com/aglaia/viewer.aspx?docid=ea2ea207e1354670a2504f2e318e663f>
- Women of TIST featured in a short film produced by Ripple Effect Images: <http://vimeo.com/15880359>
- TIST’s field data: <http://www.tist.org/tist/newquant.php>
- TIST on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/TIST-The-International-Small-Group-Tree-Planting-Program/121617521188419>
- TIST in National Geographic: <http://library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1104566295527-59/NATIONAL+GEOGRAPHIC200.pdf>
- TIST receives “The World’s First Dual Validation and Verification”:
<http://www.tist.org/tist/docs/Press%20Release%20Worlds%20First%20Dual%20Validation.pdf>

Brown Bag Discussion Topics

Discussion during Vannesa Henneke’s presentation on TIST was ongoing; the central themes based on questions asked are below.

Program logistics

- Information about TIST has been spreading “farmer to farmer” as people become curious. People meet in small groups in the villages and share information with others who are interested through seminars – people come for training and to find out how the program works.
- A new group is established and registered with people’s names and a number in order to weed out those who aren’t seriously interested in the program. A quantifier takes a baseline survey of the number of trees in an area. New groups establish nurseries and start planting trees within six months. After a year, a quantifier goes in to count trees. People keep track of the results and can see the difference.

- Initially when TIST began they faced a bit of resistance in working with women; however, now the organization contains a greater percentage of women Small Group members. The initial resistance is why they developed the best practice of having two leaders – one man and one woman. They believe the women that joined initially had stronger leadership roles in the community. In recent news from one region in Kenya with, the women didn't come to meetings at first; however, WWF helped to get some initial meetings started. The men saw the meetings open to everyone and the women saw the meetings open to women after a few attended. Now half of the attendees are women even though it's difficult for women to leave their households to attend the meeting – it's worth it to them.
- Though there is a lot of work going on Kenya regarding tree-planting, the difference in TIST's approach as opposed to the Green Belt Movement (GBM) for example, is that the TIST groups are much smaller. GBM groups are large – too large to meet in a person's home. TIST believes the smaller size of the groups sets the stage for support, encouragement and accountability – the Small Groups are the foundation. The GBM pays for planting but not monitoring. With TIST, the quantifiers count live trees and the payments for each live tree go to the Small Groups, not individuals. What TIST has done is brought people who wanted to plant trees around something and it's enough to have made a difference.

Economic impact

- TIST pays \$0.02 per tree per year but the program does not cover nursery costs. Covering these initial expenses is logically difficult, on one hand. However, TIST believes that because they do not cover nursery establishment costs that people are more empowered and creative because they're not waiting for anything. Groups pull people in for seminars and information sharing and discuss ways in which to overcome costs, i.e. make their own polypots for tree seedlings from rice bags, etc. instead of purchasing them.
- Each Small Group has a contract for carbon payments and rights to the credits and each Small Group splits the funds differently. TIST believes this helps women and children who typically don't won land gain something financial from this environmental service. TIST doesn't ask them for the land title, etc. While it is difficult to endure that money isn't being taken from women or children after payment, this contract system is part of their best practices system.
- For TIST to grow and for the model to expand further out of Africa, more funding and support are needed. The first programs were funded but that is just one piece – TIST wants to be able to offer support and entry to any famers that want to join. TIST is looking into partnerships with other organizations, such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS) as one way to keep expansion costs down. It is essential to keep their own costs down to ensure that the program can get to farmers quickly.

Connecting faith and conservation

- TIST started as a faith-based effort and then expanded. No one has to be of a particular faith to join and in fact Small Groups around the world represent different religions. The best practices are all faith-based but there is a business and monitoring element as well.
- There are many large-scale faith based organizations working in different areas. While started as a faith-based organization, TIST allows anyone to become a member of a Small Group. TIST wanted to eliminate the constraints and limitations to growth. Working with faith-based organizations is another tool and way to enter a community and reach out to people through influential leaders and allow growth. While TIST is faith-based, they don't reach out strictly through faith-based organizations, churches and communities so as to not exclude interested persons.
- There is the concept that God gave stewardship, not domination. This stewardship was corrupted after the fall, which is not a surprise. Using this concept of stewardship to encourage sustainable environmental management is a good place to stand.