

Response from Green Resources (GR) to a letter calling for an end to the expansion of forest plantation activities from a group of NGOs¹, on September 21st

04 October 2016

The letter calls for an end in to the planned expansion of activities and the return of land to local communities. The letter highlights GR as one of the most active companies having acquired land use rights in three provinces, Nampula, Niassa and Zambézia of Mozambique.

Like any production system, land and labour form key elements of the system. GR as a company commits to adhering to the laws in the countries that it operates, in the execution of our work including the land acquisition process. In addition, the company seeks third party certification and audits to review its activities, to ensure they are done to best international standards. Our stakeholders are given free and prior information about the intentions of the company through various engagement channels as identified by the different stakeholders based on locally acceptable norms. This facilitates consent and informed decision making taking into account the interests of the different stakeholders.

As a policy the company does not commence activities where tenure rights are disputed and unresolved this can be partly demonstrated by the fact that only 10% of the land has been planted as noted in your letter.

The letter alleges that companies are interested in the fertile lands in Eastern and Southern African countries which tend to be part of territories from which communities secure and reproduce their living and livelihoods. However, through a series of studies, including Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA), GR ensures that it operates in a manner which minimises the negative impacts of its work and the company is committed to helping contribute to food security in the areas that it operates. Whilst plantation forests, like all crops, require fertile land which could be used in food production, it is untrue to imply that GRs activities are causing the local communities surrounding our Mozambique plantations to be unable to grow food. The organisations' plantations exist within the landscape matrix which includes various land uses, including forest plantations, and agriculture. Where possible GR, seeks to plant its forests in areas which have been abandoned, or the soil is not productive for agriculture. In addition, GR only plants in areas which have been decided on in partnership with the local communities, who ensure that they have enough land for their crops.

As with any project which uses natural resources, plantations can have both positive and negative effects on both communities and the natural environment. GR seeks to mitigate negative social impacts through open consultations, regular communications and having in place an effective grievance management mechanism. The positive

¹ The petition/letter is a joint initiative by the World Rainforest Movement (WRM), Justiça Ambiental (JA), Livangingo & UNAC.

benefits include a range of social projects (such as providing ID card and Birth Certificate Registration), and the provision of jobs. To ensure that the organisation has as positive an impact as possible on the natural environment GR has set aside buffer zones, and conservation areas, which are monitored and maintained, and the company is certified to ensure that it operates in a responsible manner.

GR has most of its forest plantations certified, which demonstrates that the plantations are managed in a responsible manner, economically, socially and environmentally in line with the requirements of internationally recognised strict international standards schemes. Exclusion of any of the pillars of the certification systems, as was done in the letter (which focused solely on social impacts) omits key information which is vital to be able to effectively review the certification system. The principles and criteria used in all assessments, the world over, have been extensively researched and investigated, and yet little of that literature is represented in your letter.

Whilst it is true (as highlighted in your letter) that some of the jobs are temporary in nature, this is common practice for any rain fed agricultural system due to the seasonality of the industry. However, there are activities that provide year round employment to many individuals, such as work in the company's nursery and many of the management related activities.

Unlike other business ventures, tree growing is a very long term project; with extended time periods before benefits are seen. This can cause concerns among stakeholders. Hence, a clear long term mission and vision with clearly stipulated objectives and targets is required before any investor would be willing to invest in the sector. This is communicated to our key stakeholders regularly. GR provides short and long term objectives of its projects as part of the consultation process in order to gain informed consent before, and during, project development.

In the letter there is an association made between long dry spells that have been experienced in the region, to the establishment of tree monocultures. To our knowledge, there is no substantiated research which supports this theory. Much of East and Southern Africa has experienced extensive climate fluctuations in recent years, and this has been attributed to climate change, predominantly due to the accumulation of the green house gasses in the atmosphere. To date, the majority of research notes that the planting of trees (including forest plantations such as those owned by GR), help to mitigate climate change. As such, the claims made in the letter, contradict the existing scientific literature available on climate change, without corroborated evidence to support such statements.

Exclusion of tree plantation establishment in Mozambique and other areas in Africa will not prevent new, nor solve the many existing, conflicts with communities across the region since not all land related conflicts are associated with plantation development. A clear and objective, root cause analysis is required to help gain understanding of the origin of these conflicts in order to address the problems effectively and efficiently.

Whilst acknowledging that the company has made mistakes in the past, GR continually tries to improve its activities to ensure that it has a positive social and environmental



impact in the regions that it works. The company welcomes objective and constructive criticism to help ensure the continuous improvement in our operations. The company has gone through a number of third party audits which has enabled it to move in a positive direction building on its strength and challenges over the years. GR would be happy to work with organisations to address any substantiated issues that have been noted in our operations, and will continue to strive to be one of the leading companies in responsible forestry management approaches.