

# The Importance of Woodlots to Local Communities, Small-scale Entrepreneurs and Indigenous Forest Conservation

A case study

Cori Ham



***The Importance of Woodlots to Local  
Communities, Small Scale Entrepreneurs and  
Indigenous Forest Conservation: A case study***

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- Cocks, M., Matsiliza, B. and Fabricius, C. 2000. *Private sector community forestry partnerships in the Eastern Cape: the Manubi woodlot case study*. This study examines issues around partnerships and joint forest management around a state-conserved indigenous forest
- Ham, C. 2000. *The importance of woodlots to local communities, small scale entrepreneurs and indigenous forest conservation*. Comparing issues and opportunities arising around two woodlots, this study highlights the relative importance of government-planted woodlots to different community interest groups.

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## Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Objectives of this study	1
3. Study area	1
4. Methodology	1
5. Kentani	2
5.1. Background	2
5.2. DWAF woodlot management	2
5.3. Kentani pole marketing	3
5.4. Kentani woodlot as a source of firewood	4
5.5. Attitudes towards the woodlot	4
5.6. Entrepreneurs	5
5.7. Hardware store owners	5
5.8. Devolution of Kentani	5
6. Manubi	6
6.1. Background	6
6.2. DWAF woodlot management	6
6.3. Manubi pole marketing	7
6.4. Manubi woodlot as a source of firewood	8
6.5. Attitudes towards the woodlot	8
6.6. Entrepreneurs	9
6.7. Views of community leaders	9
6.8. Devolution of Manubi	10
7. Conclusions	10
8. Acknowledgements	12
9. References	12
Appendix A	13

## **1. Introduction**

The *Restructuring Options for the Forest Resources of the Former Homelands* study has identified 93 Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAFF) managed woodlots or non-commercial plantations, with a total area of 12 953 ha in South Africa (LHA Management Consultants, 1998). These woodlots were initially established mainly for environmental reasons, i.e. to stop the degradation of natural woodland which was ascribed to the harvesting of poles and firewood. The price of wood from these woodlots has been set very low, to make utilisation of timber from them more attractive than utilisation of indigenous vegetation (Gandar, 1994 ex Williams *et al*, 1996).

The general condition of these woodlots varies from average to poor but they are important sources of poles and firewood to the people living close to them. The new Forest Act (Act 84 of 1998) paves the way for the devolution of these woodlots. The Act provides for communities to enter into agreements with the Minister regarding the management of state forests that would also include woodlots.

## **2. Objective of this study**

The main objective of this research study is to address the following aspects related to woodlots:

1. The qualitative and quantitative value of woodlots to local communities
2. The qualitative and quantitative value of woodlots to small entrepreneurs depending on them as a source of raw material
3. The effectiveness of woodlots in removing the demand pressure for raw materials from the indigenous forests
4. The current and future relationships between different actors in terms of levels of participation, contracts and interactions
5. The risks involved in these relationships and the effect of the devolution process on these relationships
6. The opportunities for future partnerships and the benefits to potential joint forest management systems

## **3. Study area**

Two woodlots were selected for this study. These woodlots are Kentani and Manubi. They are both situated in the Butterworth area of the former Transkei and are under the control of the forestry station at Ibika, outside Butterworth.

## **4. Methodology**

The area was visited during the week of 17 to 21 April 2000. During this visit community leaders, hardware store owners in Kentani, DWAFF personnel and

community members were interviewed (list of interviewees in Appendix A). The pole sales records of these woodlots were also obtained and bundles of firewood were weighed.

The community interviews were conducted at distance intervals from the woodlot. At the Kentani woodlot 2 household interviews were conducted every kilometer from the woodlot, starting at 5 km from the woodlot and working towards it. A total of 10 interviews were conducted at Kentani. This was also done at Manubi but due to time constraints only from a 3 km distance from the woodlot. Six household interviews were conducted at Manubi. The aim of this interview process was to estimate how useful the woodlots are to people living further away from them.

## **5. Kentani**

### **5.1. Background**

The Kentani woodlot is situated right next to the small town of Kentani (30 km from Butterworth, on the Butterworth-Qolora road). This woodlot is 42.1 ha in size and has a moderate forestry potential with an estimated Mean Annual Increment (MAI) of 20 to 25 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/a (Howard, 1998). The species composition is mostly *Eucalyptus grandis* with scattered patches of *Acacia mearnsii* in-between. The woodlot was planted between the urban town of Kentani and a patch of indigenous forest.

### **5.2. DWAF woodlot Management**

The three DWAF managers interviewed are in agreement that the Kentani woodlot is important to the local communities. They see the theft of poles as an indication of demand and a remark was made that the people prefer the poles from the woodlots situated closer to the sea, like Kentani and Manubi, to the poles available at the woodlots on the northern side of the N2 main road. This can probably be attributed to the lower wood density of the faster growing trees in this high rainfall area close to the sea.

The DWAF managers agree that a reassessment of the pole prices must be made. The only way to make the woodlots more profitable would be to charge market related prices. The danger in this is that people would complain about the prices, cut timber from the indigenous forest and steal timber from the woodlot. People would rather travel long distances to buy poles at a woodlot that charges less per pole than to buy from a nearby woodlot at a higher price. This can become a problem if products from devolved woodlots are being sold at a higher more market related price while the DWAF woodlots are still charging low prices.

The DWAF foresters feel that the woodlots are protecting the indigenous forests but that people will never only use timber from woodlots. They will continue to use the indigenous forests for certain species. According to them the people prefer poles from indigenous trees like sneeze wood (*Ptaeroxylon*

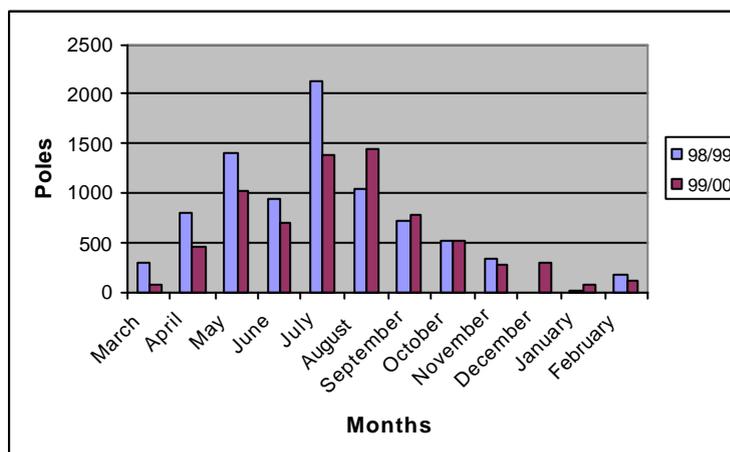
*obliquum*) for the construction of cattle kraals as this timber lasts much longer than treated gum poles. Treated poles are also very expensive, thus making them much less attractive to use. They do not think that the sale of treated poles at a much reduced price from the woodlots would stop people from using the indigenous forests. Mr Mawetu Mqalo summarised the problem by saying "R1 can be a lot of money for someone without an income".

### 5.3. Kentani pole marketing

The pole sales figures for Kentani from March 1998 to February 2000 was obtained from the Kentani office. From these figures it was possible to calculate the number of poles sold per month. In 1998 a total of 8 334 poles and in 1999 a total of 7 140 poles were sold.

The woodlot functions on a four-year rotation and 10 ha are opened every year for harvesting. The stocking for short rotation timber crops is usually between 1 600 and 1 800 trees per ha. These sales figure, however, indicate that even at a stocking of 1100 trees per ha (used for longer rotation saw timber crops), not all of the trees are being utilised. The plantation clerk admitted that they do have trees that are over the rotation age and that are too big to harvest.

There is also a seasonal trend in the pole sales figures with the highest sales during the winter months and the lowest sales during the summer months. The local people are usually engaged in agricultural activities during the wetter summer months and only spend time on house building and renovation during the winter period after the crops have been harvested. This trend is illustrated in *Figure 1*.



**Figure 1:** Number of poles sold per month at Kentani for 1998 and 1999.

According to the plantation clerk, Mr. Sogawula, only local buyers are using the Kentani woodlot. There are no "bulk" buyers active at Kentani. These "bulk" buyers who would buy truckloads of poles to sell in towns like Idutywa only operate from the larger woodlots, such as Kentani Hill.

#### **5.4. Kentani woodlot as a source of firewood**

From the interviews that were conducted at 1 km intervals from the woodlot it is clear that the woodlot has a very localised effect on the supply of firewood to the rural households. All six of the women interviewed in the 3 to 5 km radius from the woodlot collect their firewood from nearby indigenous forest patches. All of them said that the woodlot is situated too far away from them. Their families, however, buy poles from the woodlot and treated poles from the shops in Kentani. Some of them also remarked that they would buy loads of firewood from the woodlot for special occasions to supplement the supply from the indigenous forest.

The four women interviewed inside the 2 km radius from the woodlot were all making use of the woodlot. It was interesting to note that they collect firewood more often than the woman relying on the indigenous forest. The women using the indigenous forest had no specific firewood collection schedules, only collecting firewood when their wood stacks are depleted. The women closer to the woodlot would collect firewood at least twice a week, some even on a daily schedule.

Bundles of firewood were weighed at the woodlot entrance. The average weight of a bundle of firewood (n = 20) was 29.9 kg with bundles of up to 50 kg being recorded as well. The average number of times that a woman would collect a bundle of firewood from the Kentani woodlot per week (2.6 times) was recorded during a previous survey in the area (Ham, 2000). This brings the firewood usage per household per year in the area adjacent to Kentani woodlot to 3 732 kg. This figure correlates with an estimate by Christie and Gandar (1995). They estimate that a typical household, which is dependent on fuelwood for all its cooking and heating, will require 3 to 4.5 tons of firewood per annum depending on climate and other factors. It must be considered that this 3.7 tons of firewood per household would have to come from another source, most likely an indigenous forest, if the Kentani woodlot was not there.

#### **5.5. Attitudes towards the woodlot**

The Kentani woodlot differs from the other woodlots in the Butterworth area because of the fact that it is situated right next to an urban center. During the previous survey conducted by Ham (2000) the people of Kentani were asked about the importance of the woodlot. From the 47 people interviewed during this survey, only 4% indicated that they use only wood for cooking while 28% used a paraffin/wood combination. They were mostly using electricity for lighting and wood, paraffin and electricity for heating.

Approximately 30% of the people interviewed during the survey indicated that the woodlot is not at all important to them. According to some the Kentani woodlot is a hiding place for criminals and they would like to see it removed. Nearly 60% of the respondents from Kentani indicated that they are against the planting of more woodlots. The main arguments against more woodlots

were that there is not enough land available and that the current woodlot is sufficient to provide for their wood needs (Ham, 2000)

## **5.6. Entrepreneurs**

No entrepreneurs could be found that make use of the Kentani woodlot. There are no "bulk" buyers associated to this woodlot and no secondary industries that are relying on this woodlot for their raw materials.

## **5.7. Hardware store owners**

There are three hardware stores in Kentani; South Wild Hardware Store, Siyavuma Cash and Carry and Maseti Building Supplies. The managers of South Wild and Siyavuma were interviewed but the owner of Maseti was not available.

All of the hardware stores stock treated gum poles. The price for creosote treated garden poles (2.1 m x 100 mm) ranges between R 16 at South Wild and R 17,99 at Siyavuma. These poles are bought from treatment plants in Umtata. The South Wild Hardware Store sells on average 1 240 treated poles per month. The cost price of a treated garden pole, including transportation costs, is R 9,99.

The manager of South Wild would be unwilling to enter into a partnership with a community who is managing a woodlot. He feels unsure of the long-term sustainability of such a partnership. He is however willing to buy the poles from the community at a higher price than what is currently being charged, treat them and resell them at a more affordable price than the current price for treated poles. He thinks that the current wholesale price of poles is too high. He remarked that the biggest constraint to development in the area is the condition of the roads. By treating poles locally it would be possible to save on transportation costs.

The manager at Siyavuma Cash and Carry would be willing to buy poles from a community, if the treatment plant is properly managed. He is willing to explore the option of local market poles but has not experimented with the sale of dipped or painted poles yet.

## **5.8. Devolution Kentani**

The DWAF personnel feel that the devolution of the woodlot will help to control the theft problem. They feel that if the woodlot would belong to the community they will protect it because they will have a sense of ownership. The risks involved in community ownership according to the DWAF foresters lie in possible bad management of the woodlot. They think that DWAF must train the communities but they see business training as one of their weaknesses.

According to the manager of South Wild Hardware Store can problems with the devolution process be expected as many of the woodlots are situated on

boundaries between villages. This would make it difficult for communities to agree on things like management committees. He suggested that the Kentani woodlot should be devolved to the Kentani municipality.

During the questionnaire survey that was conducted by Ham in 1998 in the Kentani area, the respondents were asked if a community would be able to manage a woodlot. Only 38% of the interviewees from Kentani reacted positively to this question. Some of the reasons for the community's inability to manage the woodlot were:

- No experience in woodlot management
- Lack of organisation within the community and subsequent misuse
- Uncontrolled harvesting

This negative attitude towards the woodlot may be an obstacle in the devolution process. The management of such a woodlot could become very difficult if people see it as a place where thieves can hide rather than as a potential source of income.

## **6. Manubi**

### **6.1. Background**

The Manubi woodlot consists of 199 ha of a mixture of eucalypt species planted in compartments that are scattered throughout 3 227 ha of indigenous forest. The main species are *Eucalyptus grandis* and *Eucalyptus cloeziana*. The area can be defined as rurally remote with the nearest town being Kentani (the woodlot is situated on the Butterworth-Mazeppa Bay road, +/- 60 km from Butterworth and 40 km from Kentani). The woodlot has a high forestry potential with an estimated average MAI of more than 30 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/a (Howard, 1998).

### **6.2. DWAF woodlot management**

The Manubi woodlot and indigenous forest complex falls within a "grey" area in the DWAF management system. The eucalypt woodlots and the indigenous forests are interwoven but the management of the woodlot falls under DWAF Community Forestry and the management of the indigenous forests under DWAF Conservation Forestry. This makes decision making a complicated process. Manubi is a perfect example of a forest area where joint forest management systems can be put in place.

According to Mr. Nkgonjizwa, the conservation forester at Manubi, the biggest problem at Manubi is the illegal harvesting of poles and medicine in the forest. He recently confiscated a storeroom full of medicinal bark and roots and has a whole pile of confiscated poles next to his house.

People prefer poles from the indigenous forest for the construction of cattle kraals as they can last up to 80 years compared to 20 years for a treated gum

pole. People also prefer the indigenous timber for firewood as it burns slower and makes better coals.

He feels that people should not be totally banned from the forest but that a better control system needs to be developed. Instead of banning people from taking poles from the indigenous forest, the people from the communities close to Manubi must be allowed to harvest for instance a limited number of poles for the corner posts of their kraals. These people must then help to prevent others from outside the area from harvesting poles in the forests. Thus selected and regulated use with a bit of community policing.

### **6.3. Manubi pole marketing**

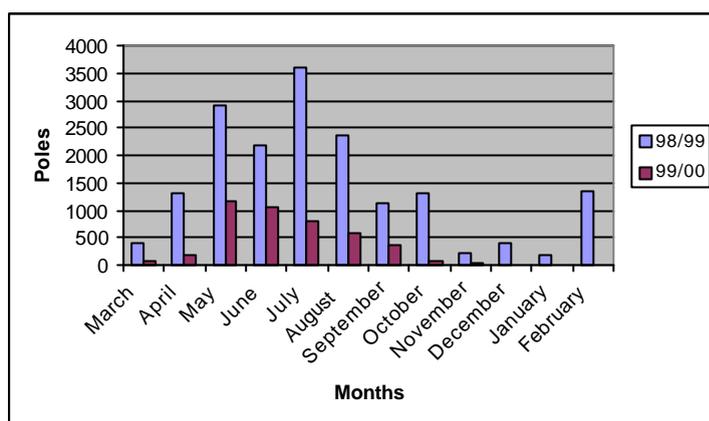
The pole sale records for Manubi from March 1998 to February 2000 were obtained from the woodlot office. The sales for 1998 were more than double that at Kentani with 17 378 poles being sold. They were however drastically lower for 1999, with only 4 423 poles being sold. The high sales figures for 1998 can be attributed to a local pole treatment plant that was operational in 1998. This plant was however closed down in 1999. There was also a "bulk" buyer from Idutywa (Mr. Mbelo) operational in the woodlot during 1998. He bought up to 190 poles at a time, mainly during winter.

If the size of the Manubi woodlot (+/- 200 ha) is taken into account the sales figures are well below the number of poles that should be available per year. If the woodlot was operated at an eight year rotation, 25 ha must be cut per year to maintain a normal forest with equal areas per age class. This would mean that at least 25 000 poles should be available per year. Manubi was thus utilised at only 17.7% of its true potential in 1999.

The geographic location of Manubi can possibly be blamed for this low utilisation. Woodlots like Ngunduza, also on the Butterworth - Mazeppa Bay road is much closer to Butterworth. The road to Manubi is in a very bad condition and according to the woodlot clerk buyers like Mr. Mbelo prefers to buy from the woodlots closer to Butterworth than Manubi. The bad road conditions can also be blamed for the closure of the pole treatment plant at Manubi. Apparently one of the reasons for the closure of this plant was the high maintenance cost to vehicles.

The pole sales records follow a seasonal trend as with Kentani. No sales were recorded during the first two months of 2000 due to the heavy rains and subsequent inaccessible roads. The seasonal trend in the pole sales figures is illustrated in *Figure 2*.

The *Eucalyptus cloeziana* trees have a higher wood density than *Eucalyptus grandis* and the poles are much heavier. These poles are not so popular amongst the local people. It seems that the reason for this is not only the weight of the poles but also the fact that it is more difficult to nail them and they split more easily. It seems that this species choice also contributes to Manubi's lack of popularity as a source of poles in comparison to the other woodlots.



**Figure 2:** Number of poles sold per month at Manubi for 1998 and 1999.

#### **6.4. Manubi woodlot as a source of firewood**

From the interviews that were conducted at 1 km intervals from the woodlot it is clear that the Manubi woodlot has an even more localised supply effect than the Kentani woodlot. The four households interviewed within a two kilometer radius of the woodlot and forest edge were all using a mixture of indigenous timber and gum. They were mostly using the eucalypt wood to start the fire for cooking and explained that the indigenous trees provide better coals and burn better.

This use of indigenous timber for firewood may be explained by looking at the woodlot in relation to the indigenous forest. At Kentani the woodlot is much more accessible than the indigenous forest, which is situated on a steep slope. At Manubi the woodlots are situated within the indigenous forest and people must walk through the forest to get to some of the woodlot compartments.

At a three kilometer radius from the woodlot none of the interviewees were using wood from the woodlot for cooking. They collect firewood from indigenous forest clumps.

Community members at Gqunqe, a village approximately 5 km from Manubi, were interviewed during a questionnaire survey in 1998. Of the interviewees (n = 52) 90% were collecting firewood from the indigenous forests in the area. Only 5% of the interviewees would occasionally buy firewood from the Manubi woodlot (Ham, 2000).

#### **6.5. Attitudes towards the woodlot**

In the survey that was conducted by Ham in 1998 in the Kentani area three rural villages were compared in terms of woodlot utilisation. Two of the villages are situated fairly close to woodlots (Gobe approximately one kilometer from the Kentani Hill woodlot and Feni, approximately 1.5 km from the Mabululu woodlot) while the Gqunqe community is situated approximately

5 km from Manubi. From this survey it was interesting to note that the woodlots were used extensively for the collection of firewood and poles in the cases of Gobe and Feni but that the people from Gqunqe relied more on the indigenous forest for their fuelwood and building materials. In Gqunqe 60% of the interviewees indicated that Manubi is too far away from them and that they would like a woodlot closer to their village (Ham, 2000).

The people from these rural villages rated the woodlots as much more important to them than the people from Kentani. The people from the rural villages would like more woodlots in their respective areas and were also much more optimistic that a community could manage a woodlot than the people from Kentani were.

## **6.6. Entrepreneurs**

As stated previously there was a very primitive pole treatment plant at Manubi. A family living just across the road from the main entrance to the woodlot operated the treatment plant. The treatment plant consisted of a tank that was filled with creosote. A fire was made under the tank to heat the creosote and the poles were then dipped in the tank. The treatment plant was closed due to the bad road conditions.

The owner of this treatment plant was interviewed in 1998 and some very interesting figures were obtained. The owner bought untreated gum poles from the woodlot at R 1,60 per pole. These 7.2 m poles were then cut into shorter lengths. According to the owner he could treat approximately 600 poles with one 200 liter drum of creosote that would have cost him R 400 per drum. Treatment would thus cost R 0.66 per pole. He sold the poles at R 10 per pole. This would mean that if he had cut only two poles from the longer untreated pole he could make a profit of R 8.54 per pole, excluding labour costs (Ham, 2000).

There was also a "bulk" buyer who bought up to 190 poles at a time from the woodlot. He sold the poles at Idutywa. This buyer no longer buys from Manubi as it is easier for him to obtain the poles from the woodlots closer to Butterworth. The new Butterworth-Kentani tar road passes right in front of the Kentani Hill woodlot only 20 km outside Butterworth.

It is sad that these entrepreneurial opportunities were lost due to bad road conditions. Another potential opportunity would however be in the field of tourism. The Mazeppa Bay hotel is situated only 7 km from the woodlot and the forest. During informal discussions with the owner of the hotel in 1998 he expressed interest in eco-tourism ventures. He would like to organise guided tours through the forest and was willing to assist with the training of local forest guides. Such a venture would be much more sustainable in the long run than buying and selling ventures.

## **6.7. Views of community leaders**

During workshops that were conducted with the Transitional Rural Councils of Kentani, Idutywa, Butterworth and Willowvale the council members indicated that woodlots are very important and much needed in the rural areas as they are the only sources of timber. According to the members of the Kentani TRC (under whose authority the Kentani and Manubi woodlots falls) even more woodlots could be planted. Although electrification of the area is underway, they emphasized the fact that electricity is not necessarily used for cooking (Ham, 2000).

Mr. Ndile Ndzotyana, the TRC councilor for the Manubi area was asked about his ideas regarding the Manubi woodlot. He sees the woodlot as a very important part of the landscape and is afraid that the indigenous forests will disappear and that the area will become a desert. He is in favour of regulated use of the forest but said that this will be very difficult, as the people who are usually stealing from the forest will never attend community meetings.

### **6.8. Devolution of Manubi**

During an interview with Ms. Lungu Maswana, Deputy Director Conservation Forestry in the Eastern Cape, the following points were raised:

- The Manubi woodlot will be transferred to DWAF Conservation Forestry in the near future
- It will be managed just like any other indigenous forest
- Joint forest management systems will be investigated
- The forest will not be devolved to communities in the same way as the woodlots
- There are apparently no real benefits that communities can derive from the forests but an assessment study will be conducted to investigate various options. Some of the options include tourism and sustainable medicinal plant harvesting

## **7. Conclusions**

The Manubi and Kentani woodlots are both unique woodlots in the sense that Manubi is situated within a large forest complex and Kentani is situated right next to an urban town. Both of these woodlots are not utilised to their full potential in terms of the supply of poles to local communities. People would come from far to buy poles from these woodlots but they have only a localised effect on the supply of fuelwood. People living more than one to two kilometers away from these woodlots are collecting fuelwood from the nearest indigenous forest patch for everyday use.

It seems that the geographic placement of the woodlot plays a very important role in woodlot use. If the woodlot was placed in such a way that the community members have easier access to the woodlot than the indigenous forest, as in the case of Kentani, they would rely on the woodlot for fuelwood. At Manubi it is easier to collect fuelwood from the indigenous forest and people also prefer using indigenous timber as it burns better and lasts longer.

The people living close to the Kentani woodlot are removing large amounts of fuelwood. It can probably be argued that the woodlot is not very successful in the supply of fuelwood as people living more than two kilometers from the woodlot are collecting fuelwood from the indigenous forests. It must however be considered that if the woodlot was not there, the 3.7 tons of fuelwood that a household uses per year would have come from other sources, most likely the indigenous forest. The same can be argued for building poles. Without the woodlots the 7 140 poles at Kentani and the 4 423 poles at Manubi that were sold in 1999 would have to come from another source, again most likely the indigenous forest. People living in areas with no woodlots are complaining about the total destruction of the indigenous forests (Mavis at Cebe, Winterbach at Wavecrest, Cengane at Ncizela, pers comm).

Both woodlots have problems that can discourage entrepreneurial partnerships. The bad roads to Manubi and the distance to the main town centers have already claimed two business ventures and there are currently no business interests in Manubi. The negative attitude of the people from Kentani towards the woodlot can also be a stumbling block in the development of business ventures from this woodlot. People see this woodlot as a hiding place for criminals and not as a potential source of revenue.

It is however not all just doom and gloom. Tourism ventures might be an option for Manubi if partnerships can be formed between local hotel owners, communities and DWAF. The hardware shop owners at Kentani would be interested in buying treated poles from the woodlot and an analysis of the operational costs of the previous treatment plant at Manubi indicates that treated poles can be sold at lower prices while good profits can still be maintained.

The devolution of woodlots will have an impact on business ventures and conservation as it is generally felt that with a sense of ownership the communities will look after the woodlots and will be able to reap the benefits from business partnerships. The situation is however not so simple. It seems that business men are reluctant to enter into partnerships with communities as they are not sure of the long term sustainability of such partnerships. This was illustrated by the hardware store owners at Kentani who are willing to buy poles from these woodlots but were skeptical about partnerships with communities.

Woodlots should be seen in the wider context of social development and rural poverty. There are so many other development issues in the Kentani area, like the road condition that are hampering development, that woodlots are not really a priority to the local people. Only when the more critical development issues have been addressed will people start to look at these woodlots and see their true potential.

## **8. Acknowledgements**

The assistance of all the people who were consulted during this study is gratefully acknowledged.

## 9. References

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People interviewed during this study - Appendix A

## Appendix A

The following people were interviewed during this study

Mr. Mqalo	DWAF, Assistant Director, Community Forestry in the Eastern Cape
Ms. Maswana	DWAF, Deputy Director, Conservation Forestry in the Eastern Cape
Mr. Gcilitshana	DWAF, District forester
Mr. Tshetu	DWAF, Butterworth Area Forester
Mr. Nkonjizwa	DWAF, Forester at Manubi
Mr. Xababiya	DWAF, Clerk at Manubi
Mr. Sogawula	DWAF, Clerk at Kentani
Mr. Ndzotyana	TRC Councilor for Kentani
Mr. Hulley and	
Mr. Mbentsula	South Wild Hardware Store in Kentani
Mr. Boucher	Siyavuma Hardware Store in Kentani
Mr. Cengane	Ncizela area where there are no woodlots
Ms. Mavis	Employee at Wavecrest hotel who is living in the Cebe area where there are no woodlots
Mr. Winterbach	Wavecrest Hotel owner
Two men and six women	at their homes in the Manubi area
Ten woman	at their homes in the Kentani area

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