



BENEDICTINE ABBEY NDANDA

BOX 25 – NDANDA VIA MTWARA TANZANIA

Ndanda Abbey's Role in Protecting the Environment through Forestation

A certain world known politician once said: "Climate change is a hox!" My reaction was: he must be crazy! Why was I so shocked? I was born near Mt. Kilimanjaro. When we were growing up about 40 years ago, the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro was always covered with permanent ice cap. Morning hours until 12.00, the slopes of the mountain were always white with snow. Today everything has changed. The permanent ice cap has disappeared more than 75% and the snow is less occasional. We also had hundreds of fresh water streams coming from the mountain to the lower plains where our village is situated. These streams are gone today and some people around the mountain have problems in getting water. These examples – with many others – are confirmation that the climate has changed and the worse is still to come if no drastic measures are taken.

Unfortunately, such climate changes are not limited in one area. In the southern Tanzania where Ndanda Abbey is situated, we experience extended draught, late rainfall, extreme heat, too much rainfall which causes floods, etc. As we write these remarks, a reconstruction work continues in the district of Hanang in northern Tanzania where extremely heavy rainfall accompanied by mad-slide caused many deaths, destroyed villages, roads, bridges, farms, communication and power lines. For us, the problem of climate change is a serious threat. It is for this reason government, non-government organizations, private people as well as church organizations like our abbey, must do whatever possible to deal with this threat.

In order to address this challenge, the Benedictine Abbey of Ndanda has decided to invest in tree planting around Ndanda, in Sakharani (on Usambara mountains) and recently in Dodoma. More than 200 acres of the land which belongs to the abbey have already been planted with different types of trees. The efforts are on-going. In our newest mission in Dodoma, more than 6000 trees have been planted in the past three years. The results of these project are very much encouraging. More trees still need to be planted. Why do we put so much time, energy and financial capital in tree planting? As Benedictine Monks we give two reasons:

1. Theological Reason:

In creation Adam and Eve are created not to destroy the land but to take care of it. We read: "Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." (*Book of Genesis, 2: 8-9; 15*). From this, it is clear that, even from the biblical perspective, the human being's primary duty is to take care of the environment, not to destroy it. As Benedictine monks we are inspired by this divine call and duty to take care of the planet. This is, of course, for the good of humanity and creation in general.

2. Ecological reason:

This second reason is of course directly connected with the one given above. Tree planting is for us very meaningful. This is because of the following reasons:

- Trees help to support carbon balance in the atmosphere. It is known that trees play a crucial role in mitigating climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide during photosynthesis. They act as carbon sinks, storing carbon in their biomass and reducing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This helps to offset the effects of human activities, such as burning fossil fuels, which contribute to the accumulation of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.
- Just like any other forest, our forests support biodiversity: Forests provide habitat and sustenance for a wide variety of plant and animal species. The complex structure of a forest ecosystem, with its different layers and niches, supports a diverse range of flora and fauna. Planting trees helps to restore and expand habitats, contributing to increased biodiversity. This, in turn, promotes ecological balance.
- Trees are important for preventing Soil Erosion. Even on our land, one can distinguish between areas which have been planted with trees and those with no trees. Erosion is more like to take place in the areas with no trees. Where trees are planted, their roots help bind soil particles together, reducing the risk of landslides and the loss of fertile topsoil. Trees also improve soil fertility by cycling nutrients and enhancing microbial activity. This is particularly important for maintaining the health of agricultural lands and ensuring sustainable food production.
- Trees contribute to effective water management and preservation. The areas which we have planted trees are clearly wetter than those who are not. They have more moisture and there is also more undergrowth. This is because the shade provided by tree canopies helps reduce water evaporation from the soil and hence preserving moisture. Tree roots absorb and filter rainwater, reducing the risk of floods and improving groundwater recharge. Clearly, the forested areas even from the sight of the eye look greener, better and beautiful. Our work is therefore to make the world not only habitable, but also beautiful. After all it is our home.

The Abbey, being a solid community, which has been around over 100 years, is committed to play its role in the care of the environment. We would appreciate to work with any partner who is interested to support tree planting, so that together we may continue to protect our common home.

Ndanda, 31st December 2023

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