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## South Africa: Timber plantations and the Graskop community

Large scale monoculture tree plantations have been imposed globally, erasing other ecosystems, changing water patterns, eroding the soil, creating poverty. Within a project of the South African NGO Geasphere to examine such impacts on rural people's livelihoods and culture in the Province of Mpumalanga, Godfrey Silaule conveys a vivid picture of how people from the Graskop community suffer such distortion:

"Firstly I would like to pass my greatest sympathy to the family of Ma-Nyathi whom I interviewed in my first visit in the area; unfortunately I could not get her whole story recorded in full, but one can take note of her words when she said that if her area had not been turned into timber land, she would still be going strong from the riches of the traditional medicines and emantuli (traditional fruits) that were removed to make way for those timber plantations. Her heart was visibly worried about all the changes she had seen so far. She passionately talked of the past as if she was reliving it. She told of the forced removals of her family to make way for eucalyptus and pine trees and how her brothers and husband struggled to make ends meet from the low income that they received working in that industry.

As though she knew that her days were numbered she talked about her visit to her people's graveyard in the area from where they were removed while she was still young, and about the changes that had been brought by plantations in those areas. The rivers and slopes were now obviously dry and wetlands had disappeared. She was visibly moved to note that her father's one time garden had turned into shallow gravel after all the top soil and its nutrients were washed away by rain. This obviously has no meaning compared to what the shareholders consider hard-earned profit, but for people like myself and Ma-Nyathi huge questions must be asked on what will happen if this persists in the next 20 years: will our children and grandchildren be able to claim that the fruit they are eating is a real product of the soil's nutrients?

Her daughter who welcomed me and gave me the sad news of her death told me how her mother had urged her to bury her among her ancestral graves because of the calmness of the forest and the forever bird songs that she heard on her last visit with me. She then told me that her mother, a one time herd girl, once told her that people used to survive without money but with all the fruit borne by our traditional forest. She insisted that her mother had no power to voice her dislike of mono culture but she hoped that I would be able to bring the attention that was needed, especially to both government and large scale mono producers who constantly rape our nutritious soil every day in the name of profit maximisation. May her spirit rest in peace."

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