

Lamentation of a Village Elder¹

Today we logged our last tree.
We will make charcoal from it.
Just like before, from all the other trees of our village.
We need the income.
But now we have no more trees.
We had no choice.

We will live for some weeks from our last tree.
It's hard work to fill the kiln.
The smoke burns our lungs.
The wood should be dried before we stack it in the pile.
But we cannot wait.
We have no choice.



Source of the photo: film [HUMAN](#) of Yann Arthus-Bertrand

¹ Article prepared by Dr. Dieter Seifert, who attempts to express his desperation to see how the African continent does not support appropriate technology to fight against the firewood crisis as expressed in his article "Traditional charcoal in Africa". The article was translated into poetic Spanish by Jordi Miralles and provided with pictures:
<http://www.terra.org/categorias/articulos/lamentaciones-de-un-anciano>

We were told that we can cut down our trees
If we plant small saplings.
But the goats have eaten the plantlets.
It takes decades until a seeding becomes a tree.
Now the chain is broken.
We believed we had no choice.

Our neighbors did the same.
They have only a few trees left.
They cannot share them with us.
They too had planted small trees.
But the plantlets dried up,
Because they were not cared.

Previously, there were many trees in our villages.
We have taken dry branches of them to cook.
Then we began to cut the trees,
For charcoal, for income, for our children.
But we did not see that we sacrificed their trees.
We trusted we would always have trees.

There were people who warned us against the charcoal.
We laughed:
There are so many trees in our village,
They will grow again.
The charcoal gives us income.
We need it for our children.



Woman carrying firewood for cooking in Zanzibar
Photo: Fundación Terra, Barcelona

At first there we saw almost no change.
Then more and more trees were missing.
Now I can hardly see a tree up to the horizon.
Our ancestors gave us a land with many trees.
We have lost the heritage.
Our children accuse us.

It is terrible now to see our village without trees.
The shadow of the trees that cools the ground is missing.
No leaves are catching the rain drops.
There are no trees to hold the soil against the wind.
The rain no longer penetrates the ground,
Runnels run across the ground and sweep away the earth.

There were people who advised us to use solar cookers.
To cook, to fry, to bake, to conserve.
We only had questions:
What to do when sun is not shining?
Shall we not eat more after sunset?
Is it really possible to keep food warm in a basket for hours
And to boil beans, almost without fuel?

We were told that good stoves consume almost no wood,
That dry wood doesn't damage the lungs.
We were told about small biogas-plants.
But we thought that we cannot realize these things.
We were thrilled by the charcoal.
And now we have no trees anymore.

Oh, why did we let pass so much time?
Maybe it is not too late for change.
We want to turn our village into a wonderful garden.
We want to learn to build solar devices.
We want to plant trees and make sure
That our grandchildren will inherit trees again

And esteem them as a present from heaven.