



Charcoal plantations reduce deforestation

by Meindert Brouwer

Tree plantations for charcoal are an important solution to reduce deforestation and pull people out of poverty at the same time. Worldwide Fund for Nature WWF, local ngo's and tree planting farmers are proving that every day in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The production of charcoal is combined with the production of energy-efficient cook stoves for a greater impact. Charcoal plantations can significantly reduce pressure on natural forests all over Africa and in rural areas around the world.

EcoMakala, the solution is called, 'makala' being the Swahilian word for charcoal: sustainable charcoal produced in tree plantations set up by WWF and its partners to reduce pressure on forests inside Virunga National Park, where people have gone to burn charcoal and collect firewood on a massive scale in the past two decades.

Developing tree plantations for charcoal outside Virunga National Park was part of a large scheme to tackle one of the three major threats to Virunga: deforestation. The other big threats are poaching and plans to drill for oil. The scheme to reduce deforestation was twofold: the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) of DRC was to scale up patrolling on the borders of the park by increasing its number of ecoguards to keep charcoal burners and firewood collectors out. Parallel to that, WWF and local partner organisations were to create new sources of charcoal outside Virunga by developing tree plantations and hence reforest the degraded hills and mountains outside the national park. Virunga is the oldest national park of Africa and one of the most important on the continent because of its variety of landscapes and