

Economic significance of premature harvesting for farm forestry smallholders in the Mount Meru area, Tanzania

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As East African countries face increasing destruction of natural forests and diminishing stocks of forest plantations, and as poverty alleviation continues to be a major development goal, academic and practical attention is being paid to farm forestry undertaken by smallholders growing softwood. However, there are few detailed examinations of the softwood timber value chain in these countries. The present study discusses signs of premature harvesting in the farm forestry in the Mount Meru area of northern Tanzania, and examines the economic significance of timber sawing and marketing for softwood farmers from the perspective of rural timber traders on whom timber yard retailers in urban and trading centers rely greatly for access to information on rural timber availability. As reflected in rural timber traders' transaction strategies, premature harvesting was found usually to be a result of poverty, or less frequently as a way of maximizing income for farmers with access to sufficient land for woodlots; thus, the sale of premature trees is not necessarily disadvantageous to farmers. However, it was also found that the sale of small-diameter trees negatively affects the farmers' share of sales proceeds from mature trees, especially if these mature trees are sold in small quantity and are put together with small-diameter trees in a tree set for a single transaction. Moreover, farmers do not organize themselves into producer organizations under the current individualized production and processing. Although smallholder forestry certainly generates income from outside rural areas in the rapidly urbanizing regional economy, careful investigations are needed as to how the sales proceeds are distributed among the different rural participants in these transactions.

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