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TIST & CAAC Win Environmental Finance's Highest Honors

June 27th, 2016 Clean Air Action Corporation's (CAAC's) TIST Afforestation Program was voted “**Best Offsetting Project**,” and CAAC was declared “**Best Project Developer - Forestry & Land-Use**,” in a global ranking conducted by **Environmental Finance magazine**. These recognitions demonstrate that some of the world's poorest farmers are willing and capable of combating the climate challenge by improving their farms, restoring degraded land, increasing biodiversity and wildlife habitat, and working with each other to raise incomes and improve lives.

“There are at least five billion acres of badly degraded land that could be returned to productive use by farmers, to improve access to water, boost crop yields, and increase climate resilience. At the same time they are improving their local environment and economies, farmers will remove billions of tons of carbon dioxide from our atmosphere,” said CAAC President and TIST co-founder, Ben Henneke. “Partnering with farmers is an opportunity to immediately make a big dent in global greenhouse gas levels and buy time for low carbon energy technologies to develop and scale-up.”

In 1998-1999, following a series of mission trips to Tanzania, Henneke and his wife, Vannesa, founded TIST—“The International Small Group and Tree Planting Program”—with 77 smallholder farmers in the Dodoma region of Tanzania. The program has since expanded into three additional countries—including Kenya, Uganda, and India—and

attracted more than 77,000 members, who together have planted tens of millions of trees, and kept more than 16 million trees alive and sequestering CO₂.

“We met and worked with farmers who were living in increasing drought and poverty caused by the degradation of their small plots of land. They had no source of cash income and no information about how to improve their land and crop yields. TIST farmers now earn carbon prepayments for trees they plant and keep alive on their farms,” explained Vannesa Henneke. “At the same time the program helps them organize to work together to develop and share ‘best practices’ that improve their lives in many ways.” Through seminars, TIST farmers develop policies and Best Practices that guide their positive actions. “Most of the policies in TIST have been developed by farmers themselves. We already feel this is farmer-owned program, where participants’ voice matters” adds Eunice Wambui.

Farmers form “TIST Small Groups” of 6 to 12 participants, who assist each other in collecting seeds, starting nurseries, planting and maintaining trees, and implementing other projects such as bee keeping, and vegetable gardens. A system of rotating leadership encourages women and less educated members to participate actively and take on positions of growing responsibility. At monthly “Cluster” meetings, TIST Small Groups gather to share information on topics such as Conservation Farming techniques, trees for animal fodder, and prevention of HIV/AIDS. “TIST’s partnership with local farmers has offered many people an opportunity to serve their communities towards improving local and global environment,” says, Naman Karani.

“Working with the smallest farms and the poorest farmers and still keeping the costs low is a major challenge ” explained CAAC Vice-President, Charlie Williams. “The sheer volume of smallholdings spread across four countries presented a potential monitoring nightmare. From the start we knew we had to create a mobile, scalable system capable of accurately keeping track of millions of trees planted on thousands of small plots of land.”

In 2001, long before digital tools became widely used in developing countries, TIST created an award-winning monitoring system based on hand-held computers and GPS and began training some of the farmers to become “Quantifiers,” responsible for

