Bolola Baleweld

Recent afforestation linked with the establishment of a new church and associated graveyard. Under a canopy of eucalypts extensive natural regeneration of native woody plants is taking place. Due to high population density the graveyard is rapidly expanding and thus increasing woodland cover.

Name: **Bolola Baleweld**

Status: church
Site Code: SD04
Floristic Region: SD
Region: 5 (Walaita Dawuro)
Altitude: ca 2000 m
Latitude: 06º 53' N
Longitude: 37º 48' E

Woodland/forest:
Status: new (graveyard plantation)
Size: 1 ha
Dominant species:
canopy: *Eucalyptus* spp, *Olea europea* ssp *cuspidata*
shrub/ground: *Euphorbia tirucalli*
No of woody species: 43
No of species with less than 5 individuals: 5
Threats: none

Photograph: Traditional homestead with the graveyard, i.e. stand of eucalypts, behind. Under the canopy of these exotics a new native forest is becoming established.

Bolola Baleweld is situated in a region where deforestation has removed almost all natural woody vegetation (for an exception see site account for Anchucho Medihanealem). The Bolola Baleweld church and associated graveyard was established on open ground just under 30 years ago. There is now a high stand of eucalypts with some open ground.

Under the eucalypts there is much natural regeneration of native trees and some *Podocarpus falcatus* can also be observed These have been planted using seedlings obtained from the natural regeneration taking place under a large remaining tree some distance away from this church. The graveyard is rapidly expanding and each grave is planted with several trees from a variety of species.

The region used to be mainly open, following extensive deforestation, and over the past few decades a large afforestation programme using almost solely eucalypts was carried out. Today the region has trees throughout and it is often difficult to have a vista to appreciate the scale of the region.

Bolola Baleweld is one of several churches (see site account of Gununo Kidus Georgis for a similar example) have been established on previously open ground. All appear to have profuse natural regeneration of native species

History

This church has only been established for three decades, it illustrates how quickly the landscape changes through a combination of rapid population increase and widespread planting of fast growing exotic trees. Whether the establishment of a new grave for each dead person is sustainable in the long term or a shift to northern practices (e.g. Tigray) to resuse graves on a regular basis will take place remains to be seen.

Conservation status

Although at first sight devoid of conservation value, the natural regeneration of many native species indicate that this site if left untouched will eventually become a woodland with similar species composition to what would have been present here before the region was deforested.

The traditional burial practice involves the planting of a few tree species, but especially species which can be propagated vegetatively. The cloth attached to one of the sticks, indicate that the cloth wrapping the body has been torn to [prevent the grave being desecrated and cloth stolen.

Under the canopy of mainly eucalypts there is a very dense and species rich shrub layer. A new native forest is becoming established under these stands of exotics.

Threats

Levels of threat are extremely limited, grazing is difficult to assess and may be important at the margins of the woodland. Digging up of bodies to snatch cloths, if at all common, does not appear to have an effect on woodland formation.

Management

The high population density and related high numbers of burial mean that the graveyard, and therefore woodland, is rapidly expanding. In order to enhance biodiversity, it would be essential to plant native woody species of local provenance which are not readily dispersed by birds. Species solely or mainly dispersed by wind or mammals should be identified and given priority in grave planting.

Cutting of exotics, as sometimes practice to favour natives such as *Podocarpus falcatus*, should be encouraged.

