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PERSPECTIVES

A multi-purpose species: woman

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● Foresters, like doctors of medicine, prefer speaking Latin, and classify their surroundings according to shallow or deep root systems, nitrogen-fixing ability, yield capacity and multi-purpose use. Because of the wood energy crisis, foresters today give special attention to species that generate easily on low-nutrient soils and that survive in difficult environments. Unconventional scientific research in this field has recently identified a species that might be a key factor in combating the energy crisis: woman.

Applied research shows that this species has an outstanding ability to adapt well to different sites and that it establishes easily, requires little care, is renewable when properly treated and has a high potential to enhance economic development. Further, the species is native to almost all parts of the world, with no known fixed environmental requirements. Yield varies according to region and soil fertility but, generally, woman should be regarded as ideal in areas of low fertility suffering energy shortages.

It seems that the plant has been known locally for a very long time, but, being used only for domestic purposes, it has not gained any wider reputation. Laboratory tests, however, indicate that it is a multi-purpose species highly useful in several sectors, particularly forestry. This fact has

already been discussed in several symposia. While the present under-utilization of the species is therefore almost scandalous, it can probably be explained by territorial jealousies or discord among experts.

Some attempts have also been made to introduce woman into forestry departments in developing countries. The response so far is polite, but a trifle sceptical as to the purpose of such an exercise. The existing flora is considered sufficient to safeguard the vegetative equilibrium. Introducing a new component would uproot traditional management systems as well as requiring a botanical inventory and later the establishment of special nurseries to raise woman seedlings. Such an enterprise is considered both too revolutionary and far too costly.

It should not be denied that highly qualified foresters with international experience share such fears and apprehensions. Because of its genetic structure, woman can be both aggressive and quick-growing and should be cultivated only in areas of extreme energy shortages, particularly where climates and soil conditions are harsh. In more hospitable environments, where no acute shortages exist, such potentially invasive plants should be introduced only with great care. The threat of their weediness is too great.

Nevertheless, donor nations seem to ignore the reluctance in certain quarters and are now frequently including woman in project proposals in order to support alternative, low-cost energy systems.

As a gesture to compensate traditional foresters for this unorthodox matchmaking, it has been suggested that Latin should be used as a mode of communication at the field level. ■

In 1984, an issue was published with the theme "Women in forestry". This ironic contribution implies the challenges women faced in gaining acceptance in this previously male-dominated field.

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