

Discovery

housed the past four winters at a very Tolkien-esque inn called Riverdale Hall on the banks of the Tyne, where the Geordie dialect, like the local ale, is good and strong. "It's not just about the work," says Gilmour with some pride. "We are facilitating a cultural exchange."

Nor are all the planters Canadian. Will Todd, from Leicester, is one of Flat Cap's best. Determined to save money to help the community land trust he belongs to purchase some property with help from a forestry commission grant program, Todd says that hard work is a habit his society needs to relearn, no matter who is doing the teaching. "A lot of English would be happy to earn £50 and go home," he says. "I'm not happy now unless I'm planting 2,000 trees a day and making £100, and that's because I'm hanging around with these Canadians."

With a new Tory government and a tighter economy, the rules allowing foreign workers are being revisited in the U.K., and Gilmour is prepared for his business to change. "We want to hire more local planters and to use the Canadians to mentor the British ones." The future of tree planting is in carbon credits, he says. Gilmour wants to approach Sir Richard Branson with a plan to offset carbon from his Virgin empire with tree planting. Could be an easy sell. Long before Branson became a billionaire, one of his earliest capitalist adventures was growing Christmas trees.

Allan Casey



Despite the need, very few locals plant trees in the "green and pleasant land."



"Ecopreneur" Guelord Luveni Lukaku waters a moringa tree, which has both nutritional and medicinal qualities.

Opportunities abound, says Carole Robert, BDA's founder, acting general manager and chair of a board of directors that includes former Prime Minister Joe Clark. Global trade in plant-based medicinal, nutraceutical and cosmetic products topped \$60 billion in 2004 and has been growing ever since.

"We believe in trade, not aid," says Robert. "If we can bring the quality-control standards to the African ecopreneurs, they will be able to enter this huge market and

gain revenue by being entrepreneurs rather than waiting for charity."

Aside from building human capacity, the program sustains valuable and increasingly rare forested lands, which act as carbon sinks and havens for biodiversity. This is worth money, which is where another Montrealer, David Oswald, comes in. Among other things, his company, DE Design and Environment, specializes in untangling international environmental protocols for the benefit of his clients.

Oswald is helping BDA raise money, for example, by getting the foundation qualified to sell Voluntary Emission Reductions, a form of carbon credit, through the Plant-Action Project, a complex process that requires months of paperwork and multi-stage auditing.

"I really like the challenge of bringing order to disorder," says Oswald, whose diverse roster of clients includes Calgary's new Telus World of Science and Irving Oil. "You may know what the objectives are, but it's not clear how to get there."

The Congolese government now wants Oswald to help formulate a countrywide environmental strategy with a focus on forest carbon and carbon markets. If this program succeeds in protecting the Congo Basin, which holds roughly one-quarter of the world's tropical forests, and helps grow medicines there as well, we'll all be indebted to Africa.

Lisa Gregoire

REFORESTATION II SEEDS OF CHANGE

We are so accustomed to talking about aid for Africa that it's a strain to imagine the continent saving itself — and maybe saving the rest of us too. But, in a small way, that's already happening.

Take malaria, a scourge that kills more than a million people in Africa every year. Sufferers are often prescribed Coartem, which contains a chemical derivative of artemisinin, an extract from the perennial herb *Artemisia annua*, or sweet wormwood. For the past few years, a Montréal-based foundation called Biotechnology for Sustainable Development in Africa (BDA) has been training entrepreneurs to cultivate *A. annua* and other medicinal plants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to provide drugs for us, jobs for local farmers and a chance to reforest a region devastated by war.

Under the three-year program, "ecopreneurs" learn how to cultivate and process specialized plants as well as how to run a sustainable, community-based business. In the final year, the BDA Foundation, which has already built a plant-processing centre in Luki, DRC, acts as an incubator for nascent startups, a few of which are on the cusp of launching.