

# Privatization of the fodder tree samata (*Euphorbia stenoclada*) in the Mahafaly Plateau region

## Introduction

Livestock keeping is a core activity for two of the three main ethnic groups in the study area. For both Tanalana and Mahafaly people, livestock keeping is of high economic and cultural importance. On the coastal plain, raising of zebu-cattle is however highly influenced by a strong climatic seasonality and a low supply of fodder due to the sandy soils and low precipitation rates (300-350mm/year, UPDR 2003). Open grazing is only possible for around two months of the year. From the end of November on, the cattle herds leave the coastal plain and spend the next four to six months on transhumance on the neighbouring plateau. The following 6-7 month (May to November), the cattle are fed mainly on the samata tree (*Euphorbia stenoclada*), an arborescent spurge-species with coral-like branches rich in latex.

The branches of the samata tree are cut off the plant, chopped to small pieces, and then fed to the animal to provide fodder and moisture (see Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden. and Figure 4). By this use, the trees are severely harmed but if they are not over-exploited, they regenerate after 1 - 3 years of enough rain. However, the high demand for this fodder resource has led to an actually severe over-use of many stocks: The first cutting of a young tree takes place earlier, and whole trees are cut down or cut so heavily that they die, or at least do not really regenerate. Moreover, the lower rainfalls lead to lower growth and regeneration rates. Over time, the available samata stocks have in many areas turned out to no longer be sufficient to fulfil the needs of all local herds. This development is tight with a strong privatization of this formerly open access fodder resource.

This document describes the current situation of samata and the process of its privatization. It is the summary of a case study realized in 2012/2013 in the frame of the SULAMA-project. For this study, the author has done 111 interviews with one, two or more villagers and authorities (*chef de fokontany* or *mpitankazomanga*) in 20 fokontany between Soalara and Vohombe (see Figure 1). Additionally, in 13 fokontany the author has visited pasture zones and samata enclosures for discussing property rights and the state of samata stocks in vivo with local guides. With 68 interviews, the study focused on the Commune de Beheloka (Itampolo: N=27, Soalara: N=12).

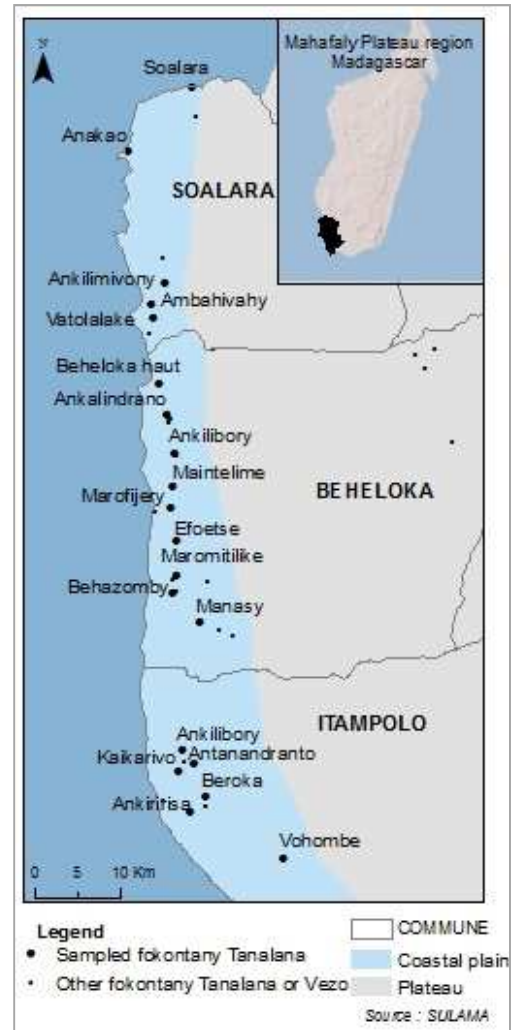


Figure 1: Map of the study region (state of commune borders from 2010)

## Results

### The tree types of private samata

While agricultural fields are the private belongings of households or extended families (*raza*), the grazing zones are traditionally a resource of open access. In the distant past, private or common property rights on samata did not exist, but there was open access to all stocks. Today, private property rights to samata exist alongside open access rights to community areas (*samata na fokonolo*).

Three different types of private property rights on samata exist (see Figure 2), which differ greatly in the degree of their social and legal acceptance:

(1) Most common are private rights on the samata trees around the livestock corrals located (*vala na biby*) on common grazing grounds.

(2) The grazing grounds also contain samata stocks marked as private. The marks (*piqué*) consist of planted lines of cactus, and are also used for marking the borders of agricultural fields.

(3) In the agricultural area, people create samata enclosures by fencing stocks. As these enclosures existed formerly for protecting grass (*boka*), the samata enclosures are also called *vala n boka*. People have also created samata plantations (*mamboly na samata*), which are fenced if located in the grazing or agricultural area, but not if located in the village.



Figure 2: 3 types of private samata: around the corral, enclosure, marked with cactus (from left to right)

Whereas the private rights to corral and marked samata relate only to the trees themselves, property rights to samata enclosures also include ownership of the land itself.

As the villagers do not have knowledge on methods of artificial multiplication with cuttings or seeds, people increase their private stocks by transplanting small trees from the common grazing areas to their enclosures. While this practice is socially accepted, it hampers the regeneration of the wild population on the grazing grounds.

### The process of privatization

The emergence of private property rights was driven by the cumulative behaviour of appropriating villagers. A formalization of these newly created private property rights was never forced by the appropriators, but only took place much later in the course of the regulation process. Appropriation of samata trees started 50 to 60 years ago, and accelerated 20 to 30 years ago, especially after 2000. It was fostered by the growing scarcity of community stocks, unequal distribution of already existing private samata and the emergence of a samata market. In the beginning, appropriation was not banned by any community rule or ancestral taboo, but only restricted by social norms of 'do not be

selfish' or 'do not take more than you need'. Non-appropriating villagers were said not to have cared at first about the new individual claims as they did not perceive samata as a scarce good. Furthermore, private property rights were mostly accepted for a variety of ideological reasons.

Despite the initial laissez-faire attitude towards the new private property rights, over time many villagers started to feel uncomfortable with the accelerating appropriation. The widespread fencing of large parts of the communities' grazing areas was increasingly perceived as unfair and selfish behaviour. This discontent did however not prevent many appropriators from fencing, who are said to be 'strong' people. This 'strength' is attributed to economic wealth, but also a personal indifference towards provoking conflicts and social gossip among the villagers.

### The process of rule creation

Over the years, complaints by villagers to the chefs de fokontany and the local traditional clan authorities triggered village meetings aiming at discussing the problem and agreeing on a solution in consensus. Many village communities created new community rules restricting appropriation by a consensus of the village community gathered in a meeting (only men actively take part). However, the necessary consensus was not reached everywhere. The earliest community meeting and rule creation took place in the fokontany of Marofijery (Commune de Beheloke) in the mid-1990s. In most other villages, meetings aimed at regulating appropriation did not take place before 2010. For the Commune de Beheloke, the biggest step towards creating new rules was a meeting of all chefs de fokontany held at the commune office in 2010. After a new regulation was created by the chef de Commune, the fokontany convoked community meetings to spread and discuss the new rules. As a result, even communities that had still not decided on a regulation were forced to directly apply the regional rule (at least de jure), which prescribes that everybody is allowed to have a maximum of one hectare of private samata.

According to reports till End of 2013, the mayor of the Commune de Soalara did not participate. The mayor of the Commune de Itampolo visited the fokontany and tried to convince the villagers to find a solution to unregulated appropriation. In both communes, a regulation has not been crafted regionally, and in many villages local rule creation is still an ongoing process. The local rules also set a certain maximum size for an individual's total holdings, or for the size of each parcel paired with a maximum number of parcels per person.

However, some fokontany only created rules for some of the three appropriation forms. For example, the fokontany of Ankilibory (Commune de Itampolo) fixed the size of private corral samata and forbade marked samata, but during field research said to 'still work' on an agreement on samata enclosures.



Figure 3: Zebu cattle eating chopped samata

## The new property rights on samata

Given these different attempts to regulate appropriation, officially valid rules for samata vary between villages. In most villages, rules regulate appropriation, but do not restrict the use of community stocks. The regulations set a certain maximum size for an individual's total holdings, or the size of each parcel paired with a maximum number of parcels per person. Consequently, holdings exceeding the permitted size have to be reduced or given up.

The communities officially accepted the private property rights on samata enclosures and corral samata. Both types are equipped with the whole bundle of private property rights, including the right of alienation. However, the right to samata around the corrals is tied to the usage of the corral and thus to the existence of a herd. In order to avoid further appropriation, most communities



Figure 4: Samata transported to the village by ox chard

agreed on allowing only one corral per herd. Private rights to marked samata were declared invalid in most communities. Rules indicating how to respond to non-compliance, for example not reducing oversized parcels, were only created in very few fokontany and then indicate sanctioning fees, but no fixed deadlines for appropriators or authorities.

The villagers' knowledge on valid rules was often rather limited and even in the same village diverging opinions existed. Thus, the information given about the locally and/or regionally permitted sizes is contradictory with varying sizes given for the same fokontany. In the Commune de Beheloke, statements about the extent of private area permitted around the corral range from a radius of 5m up to 100m and from 0.5 to 1 hectare space.

## The situation of rule implementation

In most communities, the regulations for samata appropriation are far from being successfully implemented and enforced. The great majority of interviewees perceived the ongoing privatization as 'bad' and many even favoured a common property regime without any private property rights. At the same time, most interviewees showed resignation and did not believe that the regulation could ever 'work out'. The interviewees related the reasons for the failure of implementation to the behaviour of all actors involved: Many interviewees perceived a lack of local sanctioning, although sanction rules and fines were often created. The fokontany heads were said to remain passive towards the appropriators out of the same fear of vengeance by 'strong' people that caused villagers to not report illegal private holdings. It was also stated that the fokontany heads were in general the wrong actors to successfully enforce or even create a binding regulation. The commune heads were also blamed for passivity, e.g. not reacting to the fokontany's request for assistance in the enforcement. The villagers were accused for having agreed on the regulation, but afterwards continued appropriating.

As for the lack of enforcement the regulations is not a 'rule-in-use', many interviewees perceive it as invalid or not existing at all. Thus, they do not condemn others for 'fencing as much as they can'. In

villages with no areas left to appropriate, not owning much samata is perceived as a personal lack of far-sightedness or the ‘bad luck’ of ‘having come too late’.

### Access and distribution of the stocks and a new market for samata

Today, the private samata stocks are unequally distributed among the villagers. In the same village some people hold large private parcels which are more than sufficient to cover the demand of their herd, while others own only few private parcels or none at all. Many people depend on the purchase of samata and the use of the community areas which are often much more depleted than the private stocks (see Figure 5). On a regional scale, common and private stocks are of better quality and quantity in the south, especially south of Behazomby. In the northern villages, the total amount of local stocks was often perceived as insufficient for feeding all cattle of a village.



Figure 5: Private samata stocks (left) and community stocks (right) in the fokontany of Marofijery (Commune de Beheloka, at the top) and fokontany of Ankiririza (Commune de Itampolo, below)

A regional market for annual usus fructus rights on samata stocks has emerged since the mid-1990s, with a heavy price increase after 2010. Rights are sold for harvesting a certain amount of trees (one tree cost between 300 and 5,000 MGA, 0.08-1.38€), but mostly for the trees of a certain area. As an example, the cost of an amount of samata needed to feed 15 cattle for 5 months range between 17,000 and 855,000 MGA (around 4.8€ and 242€, median 75,000 MGA) or if paid in cattle between 0.14 and 4.69 heads (median 0.5, mainly two-year old female animals called *tamana*, data from in 2012/2013). Prices are slightly lower in the southern region, but mainly depend on the personal relationship between seller and buyer and their negotiation. As a consequence of better stock quality and lower prices in the south, while looking for cheap samata or for good free samata in the community areas many herders temporarily migrate southwards. This has turned into a new transhumance movement inside the coastal plain.

Reference: UPDR (Unité de Politique pour le Développement Rural), 2003. Monographie de la Région Sud-Ouest. Antananarivo.