

Implementing the ACIAR Trees for Food Security-2 Project: Our Observations, Experiences and Lessons from Uganda

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1. Introduction: Over 30 million people in Uganda depend on farming for a livelihood. However, there is a decline in farm productivity, over-exploitation of trees and deforestation. Accordingly, most farmers have become resource-poor, food-insecure and vulnerable to climate change. The Trees for Food Security -2 (T4FS-2) project is implemented in the Eastern Highlands of Uganda to address soil and water conservation and food insecurity through promotion of locally adaptable agroforestry options supported by appropriate input systems. During implementation, the project has demonstrated the importance of trees and shrubs to stakeholders working under different farming contexts.

2. Project sites and Methods: The project is implemented in Manafwa, Bududa and Mbale Districts, Eastern Uganda. The stakeholders are engaged through establishment of a Rural Resource Centre (Figure 1), satellite nurseries, Participatory Farmer and Long Term Trials (Figure 2), farmer training and consultative workshops, farmer field days, household and market surveys as well as community feedback workshops. In our third year of implementation, we share some experiences and lessons.



Fig.1: Project Tree Nursery at Mbale RRC produces quality seedlings which are distributed to smallholders and planted on farm to get various products 1: Neolamarkia cadamba timber, 2: Bean stakes, 3: Calliandra honey 4: Fruits

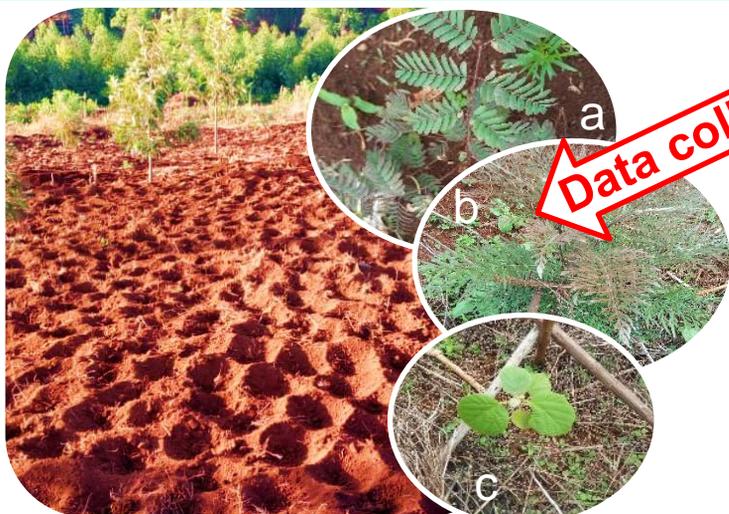


Fig. 2: Beans introduced at the project Long Term Trial established and Buginyanya Zonal Agricultural Research Institute (Bugi-ZARDI). The trial has three species including a) Albizia coriaria, b) Grevillea robusta and c) Cordia africana

Lessons

1. Benefits from forestry related projects are easily received and more appreciated by the groups than the individuals, except where special attention and interest is demonstrated. Hence, interests of individual groups are essential in planning projects.
2. Times have changed and so the grounds for bargaining livelihood needs have followed. The farmers have evolved to value time and multitask in order to survive. They seem to envision every development initiative as an opportunity to earn income.
3. Maintaining regular interaction with the participating community is important for sustaining the local people's hope of achieving the intended benefits of the project.
4. Much as money and other material gains are helpful in encouraging local support of project work, utmost care must be taken not to over do it, otherwise the outcomes and sustainability of future projects are compromised.
5. It is important to develop formal agreements on roles and expected benefits to various stakeholders.
6. Local communities can accept to participate in a new project and work with the project team through an existing community-based organization. Such an organization must have a good record of trust, openness and good accountability to the people.

Observations and Experiences

- a) Tree planting is vulnerable to weather variability and climate change effects and damage by animals. The effects of climate change and weather variability are seriously felt in all the Implementation sites.
- b) The Rural Resource Centre (RRC) in Mbale District is gradually transforming into a community meeting, training and social learning place. Cohesion between farmer group members is checked and enhanced.
- c) We are encouraged by the support and interest demonstrated by the local governments during the project activities at the various trainings sites.
- d) Soil erosion by landslides and running water is a serious and eminent threat to food security and livelihoods. The farmers are very vigilant about soil and water conservation technologies introduced and aggressive to any suspicious activity such as soil and water mapping or land survey.
- e) Support from government and donors agencies has initiated and increased streams of income from selling a variety of products including firewood, fruits, timber and poles. Timber species have become very popular
- f) Project sites are becoming better appreciated as places of learning new ideas. Both the farmers and local government have expressed a need to spread these ideas to other parts of the region.
- g) During trainings in some places, the farmers demanded to be paid some allowances to compensate for the time committed. We established that this has been a situation created by some NGOs operating the area.

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