



Mbale Rural Resource Centre

A community based approach to deliver agroforestry technologies to rural farmers in Eastern Uganda



Facilities at New Mbale RRC

Background

Rural Resource Centres (RRCs) are community-managed centres that offer farmers access to knowledge, quality planting material, interactive learning and linkage to networks among farmers, private sector, NGOs, and government departments. Given the importance of RRCs in delivering agroforestry technologies to farmers and other stakeholders, the Trees for Food Security Project (TFSP) implemented by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and the National Forestry Resources Research Institute (NaFORRI), with funding from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) has established a centre in Mbale District, Eastern Uganda.

Building on a previously existing structure of the lead partner NaFORRI, a Rural Resource Centre (RRC) was initiated and completed with funding from the ACIAR, becoming operational in October 2015. On the other hand, NaFORRI have offered technicians to train farmers and nursery attendants to support seedlings production; nursery maintenance, establishment of demonstration plots and long term tree trials on behalf of the local community.

ICRAF role covers technical back-stopping on seed and seedlings acquisition and delivery. ICRAF has also posted interns and volunteers at the RRC to work directly with the local communities. The RRC has installed facilities such as, a tree nursery, shaded area (with shade nets), propagators for grafting and budding, seed stands, a resource centre with a training room, three offices and separate store for seeds and equipment.

Main activities

So far, the Mbale RRC has successfully engaged farmers, extension and technical staff to implement several activities that are locally demanded, for example:

1. Farmer trainings on good tree nursery practices such as potting, soil mixing, root pruning, nursery bed construction, and seed pre-treatment and handling skills
2. Trainings and demonstrations on vegetative propagation such as grafting and budding
3. Farmer trainings on tree management - field planting and pruning
4. Linking farmers to fellow successful farmers
5. Seedlings production (over 200,000) for TFSP beneficiaries
6. Establishment of satellite nurseries.

Achievements

1. Providing a central place where farmers and local extension staff meet to share knowledge and provide feedback on project interventions

2. A source of good quality planting materials – over 200,000 seedlings produced with 79,053 seedlings valued at USD\$ 7,629 distributed to farmers. The remaining stock valued at USD\$ 11,804 will be distributed in the next planting season (Table1)
3. Provides linkage forums for local communities, district technical staff and local administration
4. Five satellite nurseries have been linked to the centre. Two of the nurseries were initiated by farmers benefiting from trainings and demonstrations.
5. RRC partners have supported satellite tree nursery operators with basic nursery equipment and materials such as polythene tubes, wheel barrows, watering cans and tree seeds, as well as training on propagation and nursery establishment
6. Learning materials such as training manuals, diagram flow charts and books have also been provided to farmers, nursery operators and the local extension staff.

Table 1: Amounts and value of seedlings produced at the Mbale RRC.

Tree species (common name)	No. of seedlings	No. of seedlings distributed	No. of seedlings beneficiaries	Income/ value of distributed planting materials (UGX) ¹
<i>Eucalyptus grandis</i> (Blue gum)	39,260	12,210	106	2,442,000
<i>Neolamarckia cadamba</i>	24,942	6,912	58	3,456,000
<i>Maesopsis eminii</i> * (Musizi)	30,069	18,059	89	5,417,700
<i>Alnus acuminata</i> (Alnus)	17,950	2,450	25	1,225,000
<i>Calliandra calothyrsus</i> (Calliandra)	23,485	12,985	89	3,895,500
<i>Melia volkensii</i> (Melia)	11,256	4,256	55	2,128,000
<i>Cordia africana</i> * (Cordia)	17,375	2,375	34	1,425,000
<i>Persea americana</i> (Avocado)	708	708	10	849,600
<i>Citrus sp.</i> (Rough Lemon)	1,230	-	0	-
<i>Sesbania sesban</i> * (Sesbania)	12,400	12,400	53	2,480,000
<i>Mangifera indica</i> (Mango)	9,500	-	0	-
<i>Albizia coriaria</i> * (Mugavu)	13,198	6,698	69	2,009,400
Total	201,373	79,053	588	25,328,200

¹Value of free seedlings distributed to farmers based on current market prices of seedlings.

Exchange rate: ISD\$ = UGSH 3,320

*Indigenous species

Selection of the twelve seedlings types produced at the RRC was based on farmer consultation meetings facilitated by the TFSP. The most demanded species were *Eucalyptus grandis* and *Maesopsis eminii*, mainly used for fuel wood and timber. At least 4 indigenous species were in high demand.

Partnerships

The Mbale RRC has initiated firming collaboration with seven local and national institutions to increase

production of planting materials, enhance training actions and support wider coverage of TFSP activities within and outside the project sites (Table 2). For example, Nabukhi Farm Farmer Group and Elgon Trust Women Group have tree nurseries in Mukoto sub-county and Manafwa town council. A list of key collaborators for the RRC (Table 2) are linked on matters such as technical capacity support, seed and equipment.

Table 2: RRC collaborators and their roles

Name of collaborator	Role
National Forestry Authority (NFA)	Land-lord/ land owner, as mandated by the Ugandan government (provides land to host the RRC, tree nursery, long-term trials and experiments)
Mbale Coalition Against Poverty (Mbale CAP)	Coordinates community tree nurseries to raise seedlings, mainly focusing on indigenous tree species
Nabukhi Farm Farmer Group	Community nursery operators, raise seedlings to supplement RRC seedling production. The group nursery is raising over 25,000 assorted seedlings of <i>Maesopsis eminii</i> , <i>Albizia coriaria</i> , Coffee, <i>Cordia africana</i> and <i>Eucalyptus grandis</i> for the April-May 2016 planting season
Gumutindo Coffee Cooperative Ltd.	Some cooperative members have tree nurseries which raise coffee seedlings, while others host participatory trials
Elgon Trust Women Group	A women group of community nursery operators, currently raising 12,000 seedlings comprising of <i>Maesopsis eminii</i> , <i>Albizia coriaria</i> , <i>Cordia africana</i> and <i>Eucalyptus grandis</i> for the April-May 2016 planting season
Manafwa District local government	Oversight and provide linkage between RRC and farmers
Bukakala Coffee Farmers Group Ltd.	Community nursery operators, mainly focusing on raising coffee seedlings



Community nursery operators training and demonstration on good potting medium



A training session on tree nursery management being conducted in the RRC

Opportunities and challenges

The RRC has good opportunities to benefit from (i) on-going research projects by NaFORRI such as the Value Chain Innovation Platform Project and the Forage Project working among smallholder farmers in Eastern Uganda (ii) more collaborators getting on board (iii) participation of ICRAF and NaFORRI technical staff. Currently, the facility is constrained on adequate reading materials, with translation to local languages and improvements on nursery infrastructure such as shade nets and propagators or polythene houses.

Future plans

The RRC has plans to expand its seedling production and training services capacities by undertaking the following:

- a) Stocking more learning materials
- b) Increasing the number of technical staff at the RRC
- c) Organising more farmer exchange visits in and outside the Eastern region
- d) Purchasing more equipment, including shade nets and green houses
- e) Establishing a well-furnished seed store at the RRC
- f) Working out modalities to ensure farmers are more engaged and directly running the RRC, while generating income for its sustainability.

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