

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

A WORD FROM JEAN-PAUL, MANAGING DIRECTOR

In the latest edition of our monthly newsletter, we are thrilled to share two significant activities that showcase our dedication to engaging with smallholders and promoting sustainable wood value chains. In Dokolo, Northern Uganda, our Agroforestry Agents have been actively connecting with the local community through community meetings known as “barazas.” Despite the digital age, these face-to-face interactions have proven essential in dispelling misconceptions, addressing concerns, and providing accurate information to farmers. These gatherings have not only clarified our program’s scope but have also strengthened our bond with the farming communities we serve. Furthermore, our commitment to sustainable wood value chains

was prominently displayed during our participation in an event held in Nairobi. Collaborating with international partners, we facilitated dialogue on enhancing various aspects of wood value chains in East Africa. We explored the potential of “mass timber” for construction and shared valuable insights from our tree planting programs in Kenya and Northern Uganda. These initiatives are pivotal in supporting smallholders on their journey to economic prosperity. We hope you find these activities as inspiring and enlightening as we do. Together, we are making a meaningful impact on the lives of smallholders and communities, all while championing sustainable practices within the forestry sector. Stay tuned for more updates, and we extend our heartfelt gratitude for your continued support.

“BARAZAS” OR PUBLIC MEETINGS AS A MEAN TO CONTACT SMALLHOLDERS

Despite social media, direct contact remains essential



A section of the farmers attentively following the proceeding of the baraza in Akworatora village in Awiri parish in Dokolo

In Dokolo, a region in Northern Uganda, the community has consistently engaged with BGF’s Agroforestry Agents. While radio has served as an interactive platform, a significant portion of the farmers faced challenges in participating due to limited access to airtime, resulting in many feeling excluded. As a result, some farmers have taken the initiative to approach the site manager at the office for information on new staff in the field, general field operations, and the necessity of holding community meetings (barazas) in specific villages. These meetings aim to address and dispel unfounded rumors, misinformation, or fears that occasionally surround the program.

How does the process unfold?

Initially, the manager or the designated Agroforestry Agent prioritizes organizing a community meeting (baraza) in the requested village, enlisting the assistance of local leaders (LC1) to

rally their community members to the designated meeting point. Farmers arrive punctually for the meeting, with men taking seats on available wooden chairs and women seated on mats spread on the ground. Following a brief prayer, the host LC1 introduces the community members and outlines the purpose of the gathering. Subsequently, one or two farmers are invited to speak, articulating their concerns or questions. The floor is then handed over to the present BGF Agroforestry Agent or Manager for their input.

Dokolo and its surroundings have witnessed the presence of numerous humanitarian organizations and relief agencies due to their recent history with the Lord’s Resistance Army and the resulting refugee situation. Consequently, many perceive BGF as just another non-governmental organization offering free assistance. Often, especially among early program participants seeking immediate benefits like free loans or cash, there is a lack of full understanding about the program and its scope. To address these high expectations, the Agroforestry Agent explains that BGF is, in fact, a private company, not an NGO. They delve into the program’s specifics, outlining the contractual obligations of both the farmers and BGF, emphasizing the farmers’ rights, and elucidating the long-term benefits they can expect to gain. Farmers listen attentively as the information is presented step by step. Subsequently, a question and answer session allows for clarification. Frequently, the majority of attendees acknowledge that their previous understanding of the program was flawed, leading to others taking advantage of their misinformation. All participants express gratitude for receiving accurate information and express a desire for neighboring villages to also host similar barazas.

As the meeting draws to a close, a significant number of attendees typically request replacement seedlings for those that perished, new farmers express interest and are registered, and others seek tree maintenance training, particularly in the context of pruning.



FAO WITH OTHER PARTNERS WANTS TO SEE MONEY GOING TO FARMERS

Unlocking finance for sustainable and inclusive wood value chains



This event was organized in Nairobi, on the 6th of November, in the premises of ICRAF/CIFOR.

There was a large audience including many international participants with a large representation from Uganda. The objectives were to facilitate exchange and dialogue among key players engaged in improving different segments of wood value chains in East Africa, to take stock of recent developments related to promotion of those value chains as well as to share examples, lessons and good practices.

The use of so-called “mass timber” for construction purposes was highlighted by a representative of the Swedish Embassy in Nairobi, with examples of high-rises and big constructions in Sweden, but also in East Africa, among which Fumba town in Zanzibar. “Mass timber” essentially is pieces of timber glued together in different ways to make it structurally stronger.

Another session grouped several speakers on the theme of wood processing for value addition, and as an incentive to expand forest areas. Among others, “Woodmill” was discussed, a company very recently set up by a group of Ugandan tree growers, which with the help of the Gatsby Africa Foundation is on track to establish a processing plant for its wood in Uganda.

In view of its experience, BGF was actively involved in the session on “producing wood in a sustainable, responsible and inclusive way, with a special focus on the role of smallholder forest and farm producers”. Its Senior Director of Forestry, Jan Vandenabeele, talked about lessons learned from its tree planting programmes in the Seven Forks area in Kenya, and Northern

Uganda, where BGF has planted trees in an agroforestry lay-out with thousands of smallholders.

Capacity building in business and enterprise management & development remains a critical barrier to access finance, while business and financial illiteracy among communities is a big bottleneck to access commercial finance. This is why BGF has partnered with K-Rep Financial Services Ltd to establish Village Banks or Financial Service Associations in the remote areas where it is working with farmers. A large amount of time and energy is spent on educating farmer groups towards financial literacy before a first loan can be agreed upon. This is real grass roots work towards poverty alleviation.

