

Mount Elgon Seedbank Project

With Makabuli Yusuf February 2022

Background

Over centuries Mount Elgon in eastern Uganda has been subject to deforestation. In the colonial era, indigenous hardwood trees cut and exported. Residents have cut trees to make space for cultivation, and for building, furniture making and firewood, not realising they were destroying their life support system. According to a paper published in 2011, the period 1995–2006 marked a considerable loss of woodlands and forest cover, particularly on steep concave slopes¹. Global Forest Watch report that from 2001 to 2020 the Mt. Elgon National Park lost 255ha of tree cover.

The results have been devastating. Many landslides have occurred, mostly on the steep, deforested concave slopes. In October 2018 torrential rain was followed by landslips, which buried villages and caused the death of 40 people, injured many more and destroyed homes and crops. More landslips could occur at any time.

In 2017 the Mount Elgon Tree Growing Enterprise (METGE) was established with the aim of planting 25 million trees on Mount Elgon. By planting so many trees, METGE aims to help the local communities to improve crop yields and thus food security. Particular emphasis is placed on empowering under-represented groups, especially women, youths and people with disabilities in sustainable agroforestry and land management practices.



Yusuf speaking during a conference of Discover partners in October 2019 in his forest of indigenous trees.

METGE works with four local NGOs that run a total of 39 nurseries located in villages of the slopes of Mount Elgon. These partners are Share an Opportunity, Salem Brotherhood, MEACCE (Mount Elgon Agroforestry Communities Cooperative Enterprise) and Bungokho Rural Development Centre.



Part of Yusuf's tree nursery at Salem

Project leader Makabuli Yusuf

Yusuf has worked with the Salem Brotherhood for 22 years, since 2000. Long before METGE was set up in 2017, Yusuf had established a large tree nursery at Salem and an extensive forest of indigenous trees. Yusuf has a deep knowledge of and a love for trees.

Many Discover partners have benefitted from his knowledge and experience. Colleagues in Masaka, Lira and Arua have taken seeds and seedlings. Most recently Yusuf hosted a group of Discover

¹ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.catena.2011.11.004>

partners from Kasese District in the west of Uganda who plant and care for trees on the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains.

A team of project officers from the 4 implementing partner projects of METGE visited Yusuf in November 2021 to ascertain the possible local tree seed sourcing in our area. Yusuf was identified by METGE as being a local supplier of tree seeds. The market for seeds is therefore secure.

Seed collection project

Yusuf collects seeds from women in many villages. They are brought to a central location where they are quality sorted, packaged and labelled. Some seeds must be soaked in water to enhance their germination. The seeds are then sold to METGE.

Amongst others, the seeds include those of trees

- a) indigenous to Uganda, e.g., musizi, Albizia, African mahogany, *Melia volkensii*, markhamia, *Prunus africana*, *Terminaria supabar*, *Warbugia ugandensis*, *Cordia Africana*.
- b) that increase soil fertility, e.g., *leucaena*, *calliandra*.
- c) that bear fruit: e.g., pawpaw, orange, jackfruit, avocado, mango.
- d) with other purposes, e.g., jacaranda (beauty), *grevillea* (timber), neem (medicine and shade) and moringa (food and medicine).



Collecting dried *Melia volkensii* seeds from Budaka District from youths. They will now value trees for seeds and conservation, and be able to buy books, pens and school uniform.

Benefits of the project

The seedbank project is both an educational project and a community business.

- The community learns the importance of trees for mitigating the worst effects of climate change in general, and for preventing landslides in particular.
- Women in the villages who collect seeds have an income which helps them to support their families.
- Farmers, both men and women, and youths learn the importance of trees and are encouraged to plant them and care for them.
- METGE has a reliable, local source of seeds and does not need to purchase seeds or seedlings from elsewhere. The seeds will be planted in nurseries scattered over the foothills of the Elgon Mountains.
- Indigenous species, some of which are even threatened with extinction, are conserved. Ultimately the new habitats will yield a rich biodiversity.

What the project needs

Motorbike to collect seeds from communities	4,700,000
Tarpaulins 2pcs @ 80000 for drying	160,000
2 training workshops for project participants in seed collection, tree conservation, seed processing, the value of trees @ 500,000	1,000,000
4 Buckets for processing @15000	60,000
Transparent containers 12pcs @ 5000	60,000
Stationery: accounting books, invoice slips, delivery notes, receipt books and acknowledgement slips	50,000
Weighing scale @150000.	150,000