Discover Newsletter – January 2023

Agroforestry becomes mainstream in Kaliro District, Uganda

Dear Friends,

I have often written about the very remarkable work of Eric Kihuluka and the Mikwano Project in Uganda. He and his colleagues have established a "Farmer Field School" for training farmers in good agricultural practices.

An example of agroforestry: Coffee plants thriving under large trees such as markhamia and the sycamore fig.

Already, over 200 schools now have vegetable gardens, and in many cases the produce from them supplements their school lunches.

Since our focus has been on planting and protecting trees, Eric and his co-workers have planted over 34,000 trees in Kaliro District, in collaboration with farmers on their land, and in school, health centre and church compounds. The farmers are pioneering the practice of agroforestry, that is where trees and vegetables are grown on the same land.

Eric reports that agroforestry is yielding many benefits:

- From the same plot of land, a double harvest is given, of vegetables and / or animal fodder on the one hand, and the products of the trees, which include fruits and herbal medicines on the other. This is good for both nutrition and income.
- The vegetable garden is protected from the burning heat of the sun, the ground cover results in less evaporation, and when the torrential rains fall, the trees enable the rainwater to soak gently into the ground, thus preventing soil erosion.
- Families suffer less stress – there are fewer family conflicts and fewer problems of sexual harassment, rape and unwanted pregnancies.
- Firewood is available by trimming the side branches of the growing trees, so women and children no longer need to walk long distances to collect wood, and the groundwater is conserved, making the collection of water for household use and for irrigation easier.

Nonetheless, Eric and his team have faced major challenges. Many farmers used to lease their land to larger concerns that grow sugar cane and were tempted to do this again. This means less hard work for the farmer but risks the family running short of food and money before the year is out, as well as resulting in deterioration of the fertility of the soil.

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Many volunteers were active in the village meetings. They knew that if their relatives didn't have food or sustainable income they would suffer badly.

Together with agricultural officers and many volunteers, a major campaign was launched. They held meetings in no fewer than 174 villages in which the benefits of agroforestry were clearly explained. With success!

Earlier this month this work was recognised in a remarkable way. Eric wrote, "The Ministry of Agriculture and the World Bank, through Kaliro District Council, have given us a demonstration site of more than 10 acres for forestry practices, horticulture and vegetable growing. They have told us to make 5000 holes of which 1700 are for trees. We are already starting with the first thousand holes."

As well as making the land available, the authorities are providing the irrigation system, including the necessary pipes and water pump. But every success brings its own challenges! Eric and his team are obliged to produce the tree seedlings, banana suckers, vegetable seeds, and labour.

The potential benefits are enormous. Over 300 schools from 4 districts and 240 villages will have access to this site for education and training. They will contribute to the work involved and benefit from the produce of vegetables, animal fodder and fruits.

Volunteers working hard digging holes ready for manure and tree seedlings in the 10-acre site.

I present the budget below. We would be grateful for any contribution towards this total. Could you, for example, sponsor 10, 20 or more trees?

Best wishes,

Keith Lindsey

Agroforestry Demonstration Field – Total budget £5500

1500 tree seedlings @ £1 each	£1500
4500 banana suckers @ 60 pence each	£2700
Assorted vegetable seeds:	£625
Employment of 8 staff for 6 months:	£670

(After the first 6 months, it is hoped the garden will be self-supporting)

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