

Discover Newsletter for colleagues in Africa

November 2023

Uganda Visit – 14 September to 5 October



Dear Friends,

Many apologies for lack of newsletters since May!

Over 3 weeks I visited a total of 15 partners and projects and was massively impressed and encouraged.

In contrast, I was not encouraged by what I saw as I covered 3500 kilometres travelling around the country. The population explosion is all too apparent, as is the loss of forest. Many hills lack tree cover. Apparently in the hundred years from 1921 to 2021, Uganda lost 41.6% of its forest cover. In 2021 only 12.4 % of the land has forest, and that continues to decline. This is partly because Uganda consumes about 400,000 tons of charcoal every year¹. Could this have contributed to causing the terrible floods that Uganda has been suffering this year?

While the international climate crisis is largely responsible for climate change, Uganda is doing nothing to help itself! Except for Discover partners! Partners of Discover are planting trees, practising agroforestry and, best of all, training farmers and school children to do the same. Every tree planted helps to make droughts less severe and to reduce the danger of flooding!



Makabuli Yusuf pointed to the distant hill on the Elgon Mountains and said, “Mother is cold. She needs a blanket” by which he meant that the earth was bare and needed to be covered with trees.

I am grateful to 15 partners for showing me their work. Let me share just a little of what I saw:

Here is one outstanding example: I visited farmer Kabugho Deborah, a neighbour of Robert Bwambale, in her very lush garden in Maliba. There were so many plants of all shapes and sizes, I had to ask her what they all were. She told me she had banana, coffee, mango, avocado, vanilla, jackfruit, okra, beans, cassava and maize. She confirmed that the mixture of plants of varying heights leads to a much better harvest. Deborah is proud because she can pay the school fees, and for books and school uniforms, for her 4 children with the income from her harvest. The family also has plenty of fruit for themselves and eat a very healthy diet. Deborah has more plans – like many other progressive farmers, she also plans to keep bees and build a fishpond.



¹ See <https://illuminem.com/illuminemoives/deforestation-in-uganda-causes-and-recommendations>

This is an excellent example of agroforestry. Not only is the amount of tree-cover increased, but the harvest from one plot of land is also significantly greater. I was thrilled when Robert told me that every farmer in Maliba has planted trees on his farm, and continues to ask for more seedlings, and today, because of the improved harvests, no children in Maliba are suffering from malnutrition.

Robert and Deborah are lucky because their soils are very fertile. This is not the case everywhere. You may benefit from these tips from Kihuluka Eric.:

1. To start agroforestry, plant bananas at intervals of 5 feet at the bottom of very large holes. After 10 weeks, plant a tree in some of the same holes so that the trees are 20 feet apart. The banana plants provide the trees with water. As the trees grow, the banana plants in those holes are overshadowed and die.
2. Keep animals, especially pigs – these are an important component of agroforestry. The agroforestry garden can produce a lot of fodder, and the composted animal manure makes a massive difference to the success of the maize and other vegetables.

Makabuli Yusuf advises that in the agroforestry garden one includes root crops such as turmeric and ginger, mucuna as ground cover and creepers on the trees such as passion fruit.

Alongside the agroforestry garden, I learnt some ways to improve the environment and to generate income at the same time:

1. “Give a pig”. Judith Nambi gave a female piglet to another woman farmer, who then raised the sow and sold 2 of the piglets it produced to pay for feed, and then gave one female piglet to another woman farmer.
2. Keep bees. Colleagues of Makabuli Yusuf told me that one beehive can yield 10 kg of honey. William and Anna Mwesigye produce bee venom and propolis from their beehives, which they process and produce medicines which they sell and also use to treat covid and HIV.



3. Do you struggle to find money to pay school fees? Yusuf’s colleague Kharambo Stephen (in the picture, left) collects, sorts and cleans a large number of seeds of many species. Instead of paying school fees he provides schools with seedlings and plants them with pupils and teachers.

4. Grow and market mangoes. This farmer colleague of Judith Nambi has 200 mango trees on his farm, mixed with a range of other plants, e.g., cassava and coffee. From one tree he can earn 1.5 million Uganda shillings – over 300 US dollars. Of course, he can only do this because he has found a market.



Soon I will circulate my comprehensive report. In the meantime, you may enjoy listening to a few interviews I recorded, here on our homepage: <https://discover-src.net/en/news/>

Best wishes,

Keith