

Project Updates: February 2017

Since 2014, Nature-Care-Cameroon has been assisting some four communities in the Kumbo watershed with initiatives to support reforestation and promote best agroforestry practices through the establishment of a community agroforestry seed bank for local seed production. In November 2016, N-CARE was successful in a 12 months Rufford Booster Grant project to support local community participation in the sustainable seed bank management for agroforestry practices and ecological restoration of the Kumbo watershed. The Booster Grant is expected to contribute in empowering farmers as well as members of the newly created management committee in the various project communities with skills that will ensure the sustainable management of the seed bank especially after the project life span. The seed bank once mature, will serve as a local refugia and biodiversity hotspot, in an area devoid of wildlife habitat, attracting threatened plant species that once existed in the eco-region and this will presents opportunities for replication in other communities.

Additionally, women farmers already trained and supported in bee farming, will utilise the seed bank as an apiary for honey production. The *Albizia lebbek*, *Schefflera abyssinica* and *Newtonia lanceolata* tree species provide excellent shade, bee habitat and pollen from these trees make excellent and highly priced white honey already certified as a Geographical Indication Product.

Eco-tourism is a fast growing enterprise in Cameroon and the creation of this seed bank will add to the eco-touristic potentials and help bring in some income from visitors thereby improving the community wellbeing and hence the need for the community to protect the seed bank. Also the seed bank will be used as learning and research site especially from students and researchers on natural resource management.

Within this reporting period, four major significant activities were carried out:

Firstly, a total of 32 farmers who are also members of the newly created management committee conducted a 1-day learning visit to the Mbiame community forest, one of the successful conservation sites in the region. During this visit, which comprised a guided tour of the community forest especially on the degraded sites as well as areas undergoing reforestation, participants were shown the various measures being taken by community members in Mbiame to ensure that the intact forest is safeguarded from fire and other human activities that could lead to the destruction of the forest. At the end of the guided tour to the community forest which also comprised a visit to the community apiary and the water source, members of the management committee were led to a working session in the community hall during which time, speakers with well-grounded knowledge and experience in community forest management and natural resource management were invited to share their experiences with members of the management committee. Key topics of discussion during this session included, amongst others, how communities can generate funds from the community forest to sustain activities, sustainable exploitation of non-forest timber products, detection of illegal activities in the forest through organized monitoring, community mobilisation, conflicts management and lobbying.

Secondly, over 68 farmers already trained and supported in bee farming converged on Yeh village, one of the project communities, in their very first interactive meeting with other honey stakeholders, notably buyers of honey and by products as well as leaders of honey cooperative organisations operating in the region. During this forum, bee farmers were able to exchange ideas and experience with regards to the existence of different market opportunities as well as quality assurance of the products. With expert knowledge sharing and advice from leaders drawn from already established honey cooperative societies, farmers were drilled on issues related to the working environment in a honey cooperative and member's expectations. It should be noted that this forum was very timely considering that the peak harvesting period of honey is very near; hence the forum was not only intended to address issues of quantity but also quality which must be ensured especially during harvesting, use of handling/storage equipment and transportation. The next forum is already planned in the next 2 months and will dwell on the different market opportunities that exists for honey and by-products both locally and internationally.

Thirdly, three different follow-up training events on agroforestry/conservation agricultural practices were organised in all the project communities to farmers who already received this training during previous interventions. Interestingly, over 48 individual farmers who were not initially trained during the previous sessions joined the various groups and equally benefitted from these trainings. The follow-up training was very timely as it was organised during the period farmers are currently involved in different land preparations ahead of the planting season expected in mid-March or early April. This training further gave the farmers an opportunity to have a mastery of how to produce organic fertiliser using locally available material and to reduce the use of chemical fertiliser on crop cultivation. A total of 237 farmers were reached in this training in the various project communities. They are also expected to pass the knowledge gained to their families as well as other farmers. At the end of each training session, copies of the training manuals were distributed to the various groups to help facilitate future training.

Lastly, a total of 2134 fast-growing and multi-purpose agroforestry seeds belonging to eight different species were sowed in two of the four existing community agroforestry tree nurseries. The various tree seedlings will not only be planted out in the various community water catchments as well as in the community agroforestry seed bank especially to replace those that are being affected by the dry season, but will also be integrated in the farming system, use as live fencing as well as fodder for livestock. Additionally, individual farmers are now using the knowledge learned in tree nursery management to establish their private nurseries where they shall be expected to sale the trees produced to other projects or to be used in their private land to create their own forests.

Other activities carried out during the period of reporting includes fire prevention campaigns organised in all the project communities to protect the various community water catchment from any fire out breaks, re-enforcement of the fence at the community agroforestry seed bank to prevent stray animals from destroying the young trees out-planted here and mulching of the various trees planted in the seed bank.

In the next few months, the project shall be organising an enlarged training for old and new farmers on the functionality of a honey cooperative. Their market skills shall as well be developed and they shall be linked to buyers in the major towns to sell the products.



Group work during different training sessions



Farmer presentations during different trainings stages



Different stages of demonstration during the various training sessions



Training sessions on the production of organic fertilizer



Training of farmers on the production of organic fertilizer using local available materials



Farmers pose for a group picture shortly after the practical demonstration on the production of organic manure



Guided tour in the community forest



Members of the Management Committee during a learning visit in Mbiame



Farmers are now using the training manuals to facilitate the training process



Visit to the site where the community has harnessed water from the community forest



Partial view of the newly planted trees in the community agroforestry seed bank