

## Project Update: March 2014

Integrating cultural values in on-farm biodiversity conservation project is in progress. From the date of previous report, a number of activities have been undertaken. These include awareness meetings on culture, conservation, on farm biodiversity conservation in both formal and informal settings.

Planting of *Ficus* spp. trees has continued with 1200 more trees planted in both sub-counties, but due to the prolonged drought (December 2013 - February 2014) only 614 managed to grow. More support has been given to the members through peer to peer visits to ensure that the trees are managed well for production of quality backcloth after maturity. Also professional advice and field visits have been conducted by the Uganda backcloth enterprise entrepreneurs with support from the project.

Negotiations are underway with families which have sacred sites within the project areas to document the taboos as well as improving their ecological integrity. Species profiling has been in the target sub-counties and a total of 54 species of birds have been recorded with 13 found to also occupy the forest as their habitat.

The team, through different partnerships, has started linking the communities to different companies and organisations which are interested in developing the backcloth into different products. At the moment, samples have been seen to African Forest in Nairobi.

One community based organisation, Kagera Tourism and Conservation Organisation (KATOCO), has been registered to institutionalise the community as an entity for better dealings and partnerships with other registered entities.

The project has been showcased at two Rufford grantees workshops in Kenya and Rwanda with more opportunities and partnerships arising from them.

The project was also boosted with equipment from Idea wild which will go a long way in facilitating capacity building of communities in research and monitoring.

<b>Planned (Outputs)</b> List the planned Results in proposal	<b>Results</b>	<b>Progress and notes</b> Progress towards that Result has been achieved (activities carried out; any notable achievements)
1. Cultural values Conservation and awareness creation		<b><u>Awareness meetings with Community members</u></b> Two awareness meetings have been conducted in the target project parishes of Gwanda and Kanabulemu in Rakai district. These were attended by 84 community members (21 women and 63 men)  During the awareness sessions, there was a recap of the previous awareness topics to the new community members at the request of those who previously attended. This was done in a participatory manner and also divided into three blocks: culture, values and conservation (with emphasis on farm biodiversity conservation). The community first discussed what they understood by the three blocks and these were supplemented by a lecture cautious of not altering the meaning of what culture meant to them. Also the intricate link between culture, values and conservation was explored and the relevance of the project to the community.

These were also informal interaction on the above mentioned topics in the different community forums and also to interest non-participant members who never attended the awareness sessions.

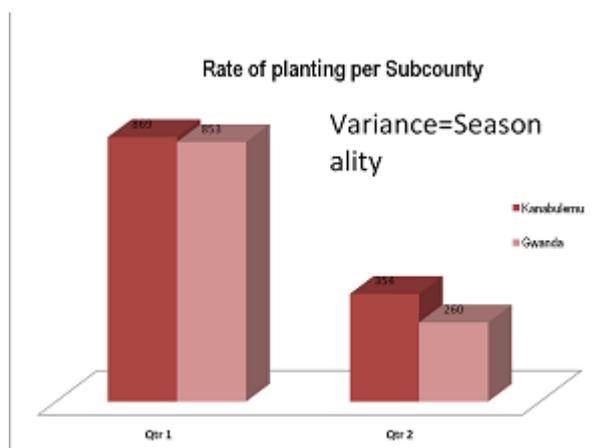
Also during the awareness sessions the community members were sensitised on the importance of planting trees, importance of Sangobay as part of the Ramsar site and forest reserves. Emphasis was put on the endangered species in the areas such as the elephants. The team informed the community members about conserving buffer zones within their community areas or gardens as alternative habitats for fauna especially birds. Among these included dispersal of fruit seeds within their gardens, increased fertility arising from the manure from trees with nutrients which are brought on the surface by only trees after they have leached in deeper layers of the soil.

2. On-farm biodiversity Conservation

**Planting of culturally significant trees**

The planting of trees has continued within the communities with more members (over 20 farmers joined the project farmer's group) from the community embracing the project concept. Currently 55 farmers are involved in tree planting within the two target sub-counties (54 men and 1 woman). The gender variance is attributed to land tenure systems and beliefs that backcloth process and tree planting is a masculine activity. It is important to note that although the number of trees planted exceeded 1200 in the second project quarter, those which grew are less (614). This was attributed to the prolonged drought (December 2013 to February 2014) which happened after planting. The team encouraged the community project focal person (CPFP) to record the exact number of trees even those which dried up.

The CPFP also noted that some of the affected community members had not attended some of the tree planting training and might have missed out on the insights and knowledge required. It was unanimously agreed that more need to be planted in the coming rains to replace them.



**Figure 1** : Number of trees per sub county

The community mobiliser was encouraged to marshal the already trained members to mentor others and build their capacities to minimise losses given the increased demand for the *Ficus* trees in the area. Continued support has been availed to the community mobilisation team to

implement project activities at field level.

From the time of planting the community have conducted two peer review visits to see the progress and quality of the trees because in turn they affect the value of the backcloth produced. These were done in conjunction with the trainer in backcloth planting and processing. Through their indigenous knowledge, some of the trees which were bent were straightened and some with unnecessary branches were removed. Those with scars were also covered through application of indigenous knowledge.

#### **Restoration of sacred sites**

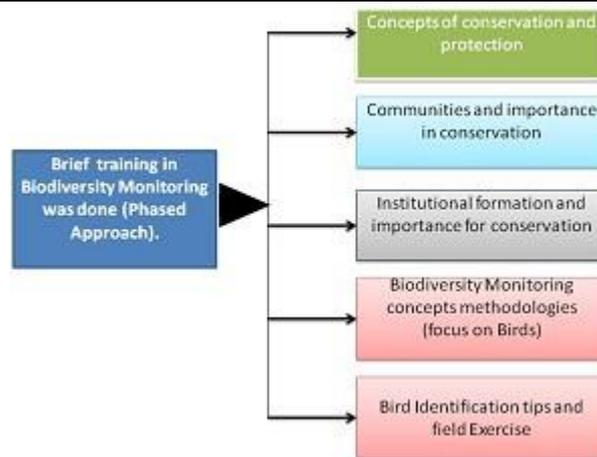
The project intended to restore sacred sites within the community but this has not yet been done. The delay is attributed to discussions with the site owners and others claim that they are still waiting for messages from the gods although they are willing to participate in the restoration of such sites. They need to select the species to be planted and they were tasked to look for the availability and propagation methods where necessary or look for alternatives as early as possible. The project had suggested *Maesopsis eminii*, Musizi, but this is still under debate.

However, efforts are also underway to document the taboos, values and cultural significance of sacred sites and the information shall be disseminated to the communities through subsequent project phases.

#### **Undertake research and surveys to generate information for monitoring:**

A preliminary study was done in the two communities to establish the species diversity of the area. 54 species were recorded in the community gardens with 13 species found to occupy both the forest and community land. These were dominated by; scaly francolin, great blue turaco, Eastern grey plantain eater, black and white casqued hornbill, grey parrot, Ross's turaco among others.

One of the team members participated in the common birds monitoring program conducted by NatureUganda near the project site. The participants were convinced to have a monitoring session with the project community members. 10 community members participated in the identification of birds both by call and sight. The community were encouraged to identify youths to participate and for this exercise six youths participated. In total 25 species were identified. Prior to bird identification a brief was given on biodiversity monitoring and its importance. This will act as the start up for a more detailed training yet to be conducted.



**Figure 2:** Model used during delivery of the brief

3. Improved livelihoods of the community members

**Backcloth synergies**

Although the project’s interventions have not yet materialised in monetary terms, the team has started looking for different partners to create market synergies for the backcloth yet to be produced and the products which can be made from it.

Currently backcloth samples have been sourced from the community sent to African Forest in Nairobi to explore the possibility of promoting it under the theme of “**Wearing the Forest**” as an extra ecological benefit from the forests or trees on the top of others like wind breakers, contribution to rain.

Some community members who had mature backcloth trees sold the seeds to the project for distributions hence contributing to their incomes. The high demand for the cuttings also increased the price which has affected the project cost although it does not cause a remarkable twist on the project.

4. Information sharing, partnerships and Institutional formation

**Community Based Organisation Formation**

The team is already working with one community based organisation (CBO) in Gwanda sub county, Mutebena Kyebe Tourism Association MIKESATA. In the other project intervention Sub county (Kanabulemu), through a participatory manner, the constitution was formulated and later the CBO registered with Rakai district Local government under the names of Kagera Tourism and Conservation Organisation (KATOCO). This institutionalises the community for effective advocacy and increment of dealing with institutions and companies.

With support from the project, the community based organisations are in liaison with the local chiefs of the Buganda Kingdom to provide them with land to have a community plantation for more backcloth trees to satisfy the demand of the industry in case market is sourced.

**Rufford grantees Conference in Mombasa-Kenya and Kigali-Rwanda**

The project was showcased in two Rufford grantees conferences. In Mombasa (21<sup>st</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2013), a poster was presented which attracted more opportunities. As reported earlier, African Forest, is

	<p>interested in working around the backcloth to promote it as a cloth.</p> <p>Also from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> February 2014, the project was showcased at this conference during group presentations.</p> <p><b><u>Equipment grant from Idea wild</u></b></p> <p>The project won an equipment grant from Idea Wild. The equipment will be used to boost the monitoring component of the project. Five pairs of binoculars and one telescope were received. This will go a long way in improving project reporting and data collection by the community members. This equipment will be handed over to the community officially after the robust bird monitoring training.</p>
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### **Changed circumstances and Challenges so far encountered**

From the design of the project, no major changes have been noticed but some challenges have been encountered.

**Weather:** The access to the project site lies in a flood plain towards Lake Victoria. Sometimes the project team loses time which has a hitch on the project budget.

**Community events vis-a-vis project work:** At times the team plans to have activities in the project area but we end up spending more time in the community due to unpredicted occurrences like death within the community.

**Gender Concerns:** Some partners of the project especially the district local government have noted that the project is dominated by men especially as far as bark cloth processing is concerned. They have encouraged the project team to factor in the gender concerns in the future designs of the project. The project team has encouraged more women especially the youth to participate more in the bird monitoring training and efforts are underway to source for support to make marketable crafts from the backcloth.

**Under looking the Concept:** Given the fact that youths of the area are predominantly engaged in fishing and some constrained by lack of land, majority have not embraced the concept and they still consider it as backwards and a slow process of bringing in money. More awareness creating efforts are underway to engage them in the project activities using fellow community members as the change agents.

### **Looking ahead**

- Bird monitoring training with two sub-counties (Gwanda and Kanabulemu).
- Geo referencing of planted trees and sacred sites.
- Negotiations of sacred sites restoration within the community land.
- Targeting the early rains for planting of more trees.
- Continued capacity building in tree planting.
- Peer review of farmer's gardens.
- Sub county councillor's and district meeting on project progress.

## Project in Photos



Community member showing extent of growth of one of the Ficus spp planted in the gardens



Community members during peer-review of Ficus trees progress with trainer



Project team having an informal meeting with the communities to create awareness about on-farm biodiversity conservation through cultural values approach



Team leader, having a preliminary chat with selected community members on bird identification skills and importance to conservation



Community members having an induction bird identification field trip with re-known Birder, Roger Skeen during opportunistic visit after Common Birds monitoring in Sangobay region.



Community members displaying backcloth samples to be sent to Nairobi in quest for markets



The young encouraged to be part of the project as a means of sustainability: Community members after one field activity.



**Project represented:** Team leader show casing the project during Rufford Foundation grantees conference in Mombasa.