

Agroforestry aimed at stabilising climate and improving livelihoods

BY PROSSY NANDUDU

TREES SHIELD KOBOKO FARMER'S LAND AMIDST SEVERE DROUGHT

jackfruit, and oranges, among others. From 1993, Banya boasts of 60 mango trees, over 800 avocado trees, and over 60 other tree species.

FOR SUSTAINABILITY
While pursuing his journey, he was later spotted by the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), who, working with other experts in tree growing, decided to teach and show Banya and his family the proper way of growing trees, under the agroforestry component.

Joseph Ebinu, the programme Manager of CRS, said that he is being supported under the Investing in Forests and Protected Areas for Climate Change Smart Development Project of the Ministry of Water and Environment.

The project, which is being implemented by CRS, aims at increasing uptake of agroforestry in the three regions of Western Uganda, Acholi subregion, and West Nile. So far, 13,922 hectares of land have been earmarked for the project, and 10,509 households have enrolled onto the project. "From this group, 2.4 million trees have been planted," Ebinu added.

Ebinu explained that farmers are supported with an assortment of tree species, focusing on trees for food, timber, fuel wood, and those that can be intercropped with food crops such as coffee and bananas, among others. For Banya, Ebinu said that he was supported with 200 tree seedlings, accompanied by training alongside other community members.

Farmers in the targeted areas are also supported with high-value crops like cocoa, coffee, and livestock, among others. He explained further that agroforestry was singled out due to the high rate of forest degradation in the selected areas, which also happen to be refugee host communities.

"Degradation is caused by two things: fuel wood and charcoal. Over 90% of food has to be cooked, and the source of fuel is trees, so people are chopping trees to get wood. That's why we include trees for fuel wood in the assortment of trees we give to beneficiaries," he explained further.

Although Koboko district is among the districts that suffer prolonged dry spells that prevent food production in the West Nile region of Uganda, 77-year-old Abdulai Yusuf Banya has managed to sustain his farm for 39 years with the help of trees. The initiative was driven by passion and the desire to have food for his young family.

Banya, who initially wanted to become a teacher, failed to achieve his goal. After completing primary seven in 1970, he stopped studying, simply because he couldn't raise enough money to keep himself in school. While on the long holiday, Banya impregnated a girl. In some homes, the act would have culminated in punishment, but for Banya, it was a different case.

His father, who wasn't paying for his school fees before, advised him to bring the pregnant girl to their home and offered him a second opportunity to go back to school. Determined to study and become a teacher, his results failed him. That is when his uncle offered him a job as a shop attendant.

Having performed well, he was rewarded with capital to start his own shop. "By the time the war broke out in 1979, I had saved sh1.7 million. I kept that money, and when Museveni took over power, I first remained in town to observe the situation," Banya narrated to journalists who recently visited his farm in Koboko district.

At the end of 1986, Banya contacted his area sub-county chief to help him find a piece of land for both settlement and farming. "Between 1986 and 1987, after Museveni took over, I asked the sub-county chief from Koboko that I wanted a place to dig. He helped me find a piece of land of about five acres, that is how I started growing crops in 1987," Banya said.

Determined to grow food crops for both home use and for the market, he planted crops like bananas, maize, cassava, groundnuts, and beans, among others.



PHOTOS BY PROSSY NANDUDU

Banya (centre) receiving an improved coffee plant tolerant to drought



Banya explains how trees have sustained his life

STRATEGIC TREE-PLANTING

Eric Francis Acanakwo, the country representative of the World Agroforestry Center, added that through Catholic Relief Services (CRS), they want to address multiple land issues, including the kinds of trees to be promoted. He explained that through partnership, they are promoting the use of indigenous species that have been in the landscape but have been wiped out by the influx of refugees in some of the selected regions. Acanakwo explained that they have databases of tree species that existed in these areas. To make sure farmers embrace the knowledge, they don't decide for them which trees to grow; but we engage with them and discuss the challenges foreseen, the pros and cons of growing some tree species.

VISITORS' ADVICE

Following the visit from LWF in 1991, a group of farmers from Canada also visited his farm but were particularly interested in the sustainability of the food production on Banya's farm. "After touring my gardens with my son, they wrote something in the book that I didn't understand very well. They also wrote their names. I contacted a friend to

understand what they wrote about my farm," he narrated. One of the observations from the visitors was that his soils were sandy, meaning they couldn't support food production, especially bananas, for long

They advised him to integrate trees into his farm. The team advised that by growing trees, these would sustain him in old age.

They also wanted to know who else in the family was involved for continuity in case disaster struck. While he was still digesting the message, a hailstorm came in 1992 that destroyed most of his banana plantation, forcing him to implement the advice. Although he didn't know what kind of trees to grow, Banya focused on fruit trees like mango, avocado,



HAVE YOUR SAY

Write to us on climate change on greenug@newvision.co.ug