

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

A WORD FROM JEAN-PAUL, MANAGING DIRECTOR

Uganda, where BGF started its tree planting activities in 2018 is known for its volcanic hills, its mountains and the lakes. The country has a huge biodiversity and many protected areas and national parks, however, its 2019 Forest Landscape Integrity Index score was 4.36/10, ranking it 128th globally out of 172 countries. In other words, the country has a bit of a problem with its forests. This situation has been going on for a while. BGF's intervention can be qualified as sustainably managed afforestation. We plant trees with a high commercial value with partner-farmers. It underlines the social entrepreneurship vision of the company. This long term approach, is a win for our investors, the partner-farmers, the environment, Uganda as a country and BGF.

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The early days in Dokolo. From left to right: Jean-Paul Deprins (MD BGF), Rino Solberg (Founder BGF), Julius Odwe (founder of YICAFA), Vincent Opita (then Vice-Chair of YICAFA)

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

After the relative isolation of the Covid-19 era, BGF headed to Uganda once more, in the form of a high-level delegation consisting of the Managing Director and the Senior Director Forestry, with the mission to put Uganda a notch higher on the BGF map.

For a mere two-day trip end of November, it was packed with meetings. First, we got the quarterly meeting of the Editorial Committee (Uganda) of Miti magazine, a happy gathering between high-level forestry experts after more than two and a half years of digital meetings. Indeed, the last physical meeting was in March 2021, and then Covid struck. The meetings of the Editorial Committees, of which we have three (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania) are vital for publishing a magazine that is intimately connected to the forestry reality in East Africa, they're all about networking and flow of forestry information.

Next came a meeting with the Director of NaFORRI (National Forestry Research Institute), Dr Hillary Agaba, regarding possible

cooperation on the Giant Lira (*Melia azedarach*), with special emphasis on genetic improvement and wood technology. The Giant Lira is BGF's flagship species in its Northern Uganda farmers programme in Dokolo and surrounding districts. It grows very well there, and fast, while producing high-quality timber. Dr Agaba surprised us with his scientific insight that the species might in fact be a complex of two closely related species, the other one being *Melia dubia*. But NaFORRI is working on it, and that's good news. Cooperation with the Kenya Forestry Research Institute is a possibility.

Two more meetings followed before taking the plane back to Nairobi, well planned so as not to get ensnared in Kampala's redoubtable traffic jams. We met a representative of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in their Kampala office and introduced BGF in its Ugandan context. We were assisted in no small matter by the fact that BGF has for many years enjoyed a fruitful cooperation with JICA Kenya. Partnerships is the way to go, and they have to start somewhere. JICA Uganda is definitely interested in agroforestry, and *Melia* spp. is a useful tree species there. JICA has shown a remarkable consistency in supporting *Melia* research in Kenya for a long period, over 30 years, a rarity in international aid matters, and this is definitely paying off.

Our last meeting was with Julius Odwe, the founder of YICAFA, a farmer grassroots organization in Dokolo district. YICAFA stands for "Yele Icom Can Atur" or "Working hard to deal with poverty, by the local people", in the local Lango language. Apart from that, Mr Odwe is many more things, and most of all a charismatic leader that loves planting trees, for many reasons. This is reflected in his honorary title as clan elder of the local people, Awitong, only conferred to individuals with outstanding merits. He has been BGF's contact in Northern Uganda from the very beginning, in 2017, and we are honored to work with him. Again, the first physical meeting after the Covid period, good to talk over many issues and planning for the future. Our Dokolo agenda is bound to grow strongly with increased tree planting, and support to YICAFA's social programme.



Field of a partner-farmer of Better Globe Forestry in Dokolo district (Northern Uganda) with sorghum growing between three-years-old *Melia azedarach* (or Giant Lira as it is called locally)

WHAT'S UP FOR BGF IN NORTHERN UGANDA?



Dokolo district in Northern Uganda

BGF started planting in Dokolo district in 2018, with the tree species *Melia azedarach* or Giant Lira as it is locally known, a close cousin of the *Melia volkensii* that we pioneered in Kenya. We were able to jump-start because of the support of YICAFA (see previous article), under the leadership of Julius Odwe. YICAFA has been bolstered through a Revolving Fund to finance cassava production. Cassava is a staple food in the area, where famine is not unheard of, and poverty is rife. The Revolving Fund provided money for seed multiplication (actually cuttings) so more farmers have access to the planting material; food production; and value adding and commercialization of surplus production. The Revolving Fund is hence used both for food security and farmer empowerment. Cassava is well suited for agroforestry practices like planting in fields with Giant Lira. Farmers that participate in BGF's tree planting programme get priority to access cassava planting material.

To date, in the short time span of 4 years, we planted 2 million trees, and signed contracts with thousands of farmers. Dokolo and neighbouring districts are well suited to tree planting, as the whole area was previously covered by rainforest, big swathes of it destroyed during the colonial time to make place for cotton growing (which turned out to be a failure). The Giant Lira grows fast, easily 2m of height and more per year, and can produce a stem diameter of 25cm

in merely 4 years. This is quite promising for early returns, with a rotation time not longer than 15 years. Harvesting and certainly transport will be simplified by the relatively flat topography, imposing less stress on logistics.

On the other hand, farmers are very willing to plant, and the following statistics show the potential for Dokolo and the surrounding districts where our activities have been taken up:

district	population*	households**	at 50%	trees***
Dokolo	215,500	43,980	21,990	3,518,367
Alebtong	266,100	54,306	27,153	4,344,490
Kaberaido	132,700	27,082	13,541	2,166,531
Amolatar	170,100	34,714	17,357	2,777,143
TOTAL	784,400	160,082	80,041	12,806,531
* official projection 2020				
** at 4.9 members per rural household				
*** at 160 trees per household				

Of course, these figures are hypothetical, but certainly conservative, while the entire Northern Uganda potential is even higher.



Yuventine Oganga of Bata village, Kangai subcounty, Dokolo district, standing in a cassava plantation underneath the canopy of three-years-old Giant Lira.