

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

A WORD FROM JEAN-PAUL, MANAGING DIRECTOR

Forestry and even more, Agroforestry can't succeed without taking care of individuals and communities near the projects. But this is a two-way street. Indeed, nothing will work if farmers are not stakeholders in the project. If they do not feel like being part, they will not provide crucial information about the environment at large where the trees are planted. This is already very clear with the GIC project which is the perfect introduction for children to the world of tree planting. It is also an extension to their parents, most of them farmers in dry areas. Projects like GIC and agroforestry with farmers are the foundation of hope and belief in mitigating and reversing climate change.

FARMERS ORGANIZATION: KEY TO SUCCESS IN AGROFORESTRY PLANTATIONS

Why and how Better Globe Forestry (BGF) works with them

BGF firmly believes that planting trees with farmers is the future, and more particularly planting trees with farmers in their fields, which is agroforestry. There are sound technical reasons for that, plus the fact that while large tracts of land for plantations are becoming scarcer, farmland is very abundant and actually needs trees more than ever as a mitigation factor against climate change.



BGF-organized Self-Help Group in Kitui county. Note that most of the members are women

The first and foremost factor for successful tree planting on farmland, notably in agroforestry lay-out, is capacity building of the landowner. Trees have to be taken care off in a proper way, to survive and to produce quality logs. This means training, and lots of it. Training in planting, protection and management. We are working with literally over 20,000 farmers. There is no way to educate them individually. This calls for farmers organization. Farmers are organized in groups, from the same geographical environment, meaning they're neighbours, although sometimes distant neighbours. The organization starts before the tree planting, from the moment a farmer signs up for the programme. It is important to note that the Government is involved from the very beginning in farmer recruitment and organization. It gives a degree of guarantee in a fluid and dynamic milieu, as farmers vary in all human aspects. They have different levels of education, different holdings of land, varying numbers of children and other family members and so on.

There exists a legal structure for this in Kenya, notably the "Self-Help Group" arrangement, that through payment of a small fee, and fulfillment of a minor set of requirements, gets official Government recognition. The group structure is standard, with a chairperson, treasurer, secretary and ordinary members. BGF assists the newly formed group to attain this standard, and in the meantime capacity building can start. There is nothing better than financial incentives to get full participation of the members, and hence we help them with holistic farm management, access to micro-credit, and a push in "table banking".

For BGF, this involves investment in a group of trainers, our Agroforestry Agents, and their logistical means, and -of course-



A member of a "Self-Help Group" proudly displays the certificate of registration of the group

their training. What did you think? In short, we find this very important, and REALLY work on it. It might sound simple, but it is not. We will leave it like this, and not loose ourselves in further explanations about contracts and digital ways to assist the process. But we offer real help to real poor people.



Another Self-Help Group in eastern Kitui county, with the drought-stricken vegetation in the background

THE GREEN INITIATIVE CHALLENGE



School children listening to the good news

Teaching school children to plant trees and bringing the knowledge home

Since the year 2014 BGF is part of a unique, and award-winning event, called the “Green Initiative Challenge” (GIC). It is a joint initiative with the KenGen Foundation and also with Bamburi Cement Ltd of the Lafarge Group, for part of its history. In brief, it is a yearly competition between one hundred schools at

a go, which one is most successful in tree planting. It takes place in the Seven Forks area, where KenGen, the major electricity producer of Kenya, has most of its dams, on River Tana, to produce power. The area is large, over a hundred km east-west, and over fifty km north-south. This is also where BGF has its melia plantation at the shores of lake Kiambere, one of the dams on the river, and where its farmer programme is based, with over 6,000 farmers contacted to plant trees for the company.

It spans 3 countries, Machakos, Mbeere and Kitui, all in semi-arid conditions where people don't have a tree planting culture because of the irregular nature of the rains.

For a period of 10 years, annually 100 schools are selected to participate in the programme, so in total a 1000 schools will have been approached, and over 250,000 school children will have been trained to some extent in tree planting in dry circumstances. This year we are at phase VIII, or the eight year, meaning we're nearing the end.

Each school receives capacity building, and about 300 seedlings to plant, and is being followed by a team of so-called Monitoring & Evaluation Agents. The school is involved in various ways, starting with the top management (the Principal), the parents (the Board of Management), the teachers (the “Green” teacher), and of course with the approval of the Ministry of Education. To capture the interest of the children, GIC even organized a puppetry theater to tour the schools, which was a great success.

A phase takes two years, to have the tree seedlings properly established, and to judge the rate of success. Once this is done, a ceremony is organized where awards are distributed, such as cash, school trips, water tanks, scholarships and books. It is a big event, out in the countryside, on the grounds of one of the winning schools, taking the better part of the day. In case of good planting practices, the school is also left with a beautiful woodlot, where children like to loiter in the shade of the trees.

In this way, BGF gets recognition for its presence in the area, and plants the seeds of knowledge of tree planting in a difficult environment. As children are, they talk at home about what they're doing in the school, and parents visiting the schools see the trees with their own eyes and become aware that they can actually do the same thing at home. And one day, they participate in a Chief's meeting, and are approached to sign a contract for tree planting on their farmland with BGF.



An award-winning woodlot, Ielanthi Primary School in Machakos County, 2019