

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

A WORD FROM JEAN-PAUL, MANAGING DIRECTOR

Improvement of the biological assets, and overcoming logistical challenges. They seem unrelated but nothing is less true. Continuous improvement is the common factor which for the trees we call 'research' and for the logistics 'creativity'. It would fill a book of many pages to go into details of both very important aspects of our operation. We however believe that the sample this newsletter is highlighting, might be an eye-opener for all who are genuinely interested to know more about the captivating learning curve of forestry in the African ASAL. Enjoy!

WHY ALL THIS RESEARCH?

BGF is of the opinion that it will mightily reap



Root formation of *Melia* explant, in-vitro. Through proper care, this tiny seedling will become a large tree

Since at least 2009 BGF was involved in research with serious partners, such as the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, the University of Nairobi, and several departments of the Faculty of

tree. The tree selected for this purpose will have to be very carefully selected, to avoid costly mistakes, in several respects, like having lots of trees that are particularly and suddenly liked by a pest or disease.

On the positive side, a particular strain of the species can be selected that is notably resistant to drought, but still a good and fast grower, extending the range where we can plant, as well as achieving higher yields in the face of increasing temperatures due to climate change, a curse that is already hard hitting in the East African region.

In other words, the cloning process offers quite some possibilities, and I'm sure we haven't seen the end of it. Not only BGF, but also farmers will benefit, from the sale of higher volumes of logs, and from yearly collections of fruits, for seeds & seedling production, and for eventual manufacture of bio-insecticides for horticultural use. The latter prospect might derive from the anti-feedant and insect repelling properties of *Melia*, as proven in several scientific papers ensuing from the same cooperation.



Study of *Melia* bio-insecticide on protection against the sweet potato weevil, a globally occurring and difficult pest

Bioscience Engineering of Ghent University in Belgium.

This was good as Corporate Social Responsibility, in the sense that we contributed to quite some students (Kenyan and Belgian) obtaining their degrees, be it Master's or Doctoral ones, but also furthering research into multiplication, silvicultural characteristics and use of *Melia volkensii*, our main species in Kenya so far. Without dwelling too much on the past, what are we looking at for the future? We're looking at several things. We do have now a solid scientific protocol for multiplying *Melia* in-vitro, that is, cloning the trees from minuscule plant parts in a lab, which holds promise for millions of individual clones or identical replica of the same

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES IN DRYLAND AFFORESTATION



A compilation of problems hidden behind the tree numbers planted

Transport challenges

This cannot be underestimated. We are talking about dirt roads covering distances of at least 30km, with seasonal rivers crossing them, and little maintenance by the county governments. The roads are really bad during the rainy season. They become slippery and unpassable. This is a major trial especially when we have transports of seedlings from our nurseries to our farmers which coincide with the rains. Trucks do get stuck the whole day with the rivers overflowing and paralysing the movement of vehicles. We have overcome this challenge through continuous improvement of the logistics.

Availability of goods and services

Despite our push to source for products and services from the local community to support and fight poverty within these areas, it is difficult to get quality commodities in the local shops in the area. The shops stock products of low-quality adapting to the purchasing abilities of the community. It can be difficult to find a simple service such as a garage or even a petrol station. The few people who have some skills are not able to use them even with qualifications on paper. This, if not anticipated, can be cause of delays in our operations. We are often forced to source for these products or services from the capitals (Nairobi or Kampala) and send them to the sites. It particularly can affect repairs of motorbikes. This can only be mitigated with preventive maintenance.

Communication between head office and sites

In the countryside, the internet is very slow or not there, and if it is available, it is 2G. Some areas do not have mobile phone

connectivity. This causes problems, especially when a team of Agroforestry Agents (AAs) is operating in a far-away area and must communicate and report at the end of the day. Also, when an AA gets a motorbike breakdown, he might try to call for help and find out there is no network.

Delivery of goods to sites

With bad roads, no reliable public transport, and the great distances to find better shops, this gives headaches as someone has to travel a distance of over 60km to get to the supplier. This means half day wasted if not a whole day. Even where suppliers agree to deliver, a delivery can take as long as a whole week. This always calls for proper planning and evaluation of our suppliers and building good relationships with them.

Availability of specialized manpower

It is hard to find able technicians in the countryside, like for electricals, plumbing etc. We must travel as far as 60km to find such technicians. The few we find locally often hide their understandable lack of knowledge, and when given a job they must be tightly supervised as their quality norms are lower than ours.

Availability of suppliers compliant with tax laws

This is a rare thing in the rural areas. Most businesses are family shops without any registration making it difficult to find suppliers that are tax compliant. It is BGF's policy to work with suppliers that are compliant with tax authorities. Luckily the tax authorities are aware of these challenges and can provide guidance on how to deal with them.

Medical facilities

As in every operation, workers can hurt themselves, get unwell or even be bitten by a snake. Medical facilities are often far away and special procedures needed to be created and explained to cater for emergencies when they occur.

