



Agroforestry a priority in modernizing Ugandan agriculture

Agroforestry in action

World Agroforestry Centre

At a glance ...

Uganda recently launched an ambitious plan to modernize its agriculture sector as part of its poverty eradication strategy. Unlike other agricultural modernization

plans, which focus on mechanization and high-tech systems, the plan focuses on ensuring that subsistence farmers have better access to a wide variety of sustainable, low-input agricultural techniques—including agroforestry.

While to most people the idea of agricultural modernization invokes images of mechanization and high-tech systems such as biotechnology and genetic engineering, Uganda's Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) does not actually focus on mechanization or high technology. Rather, it is a novel plan that embraces many ideas, including low external-input, sustainable solutions as provided by agroforestry. The plan's vision is to turn agriculture into a worthwhile commercial venture, particularly for small-scale farmers.

Dr John Aluma, the deputy director general in charge of research at the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) says, "The PMA's focus is subsistence farmers, whose basis is a multi-product farming system in which trees are a major component. Therefore, you cannot talk about modernizing agriculture without integrating agroforestry on these subsistence farms."

Technically, modernization implies the use of improved varieties, improved productivity and producing for market, rather than mechanization. Trees with high-value products are very good examples of such specialized production for identified cash markets. Also, the PMA places strong emphasis on conserving or rehabilitating the natural

resource base. Soil management through contour hedges and improved fallows are already used very successfully by thousands of farmers in Uganda.

Dr Aluma believes that the coming of age of agroforestry in Uganda stems from the research work done by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)/Agroforestry Research Networks for Africa (AFRENA) project based in Kabale in the southwest of the country and Kifu in Mukono near Kampala. A strong advocate of agroforestry, Dr Aluma explains: "We had informal dissemination of agroforestry techniques over the last 15 years. The politicians were watching very keenly." The high point, according to him, was when the Centre organized a visit for several members of Uganda's parliament to western Kenya where they observed agroforestry in action. On their return from this motivating trip they demanded that agroforestry be 'nationalized', he says.

Community impacts

Watersheds

Biodiversity

Land regeneration

Better policies

Empowering women

Climate change

Capacity building



Dr Aluma observes that agroforestry was already a research priority programme in NARO, so when the MPs added their weight behind it, “We couldn’t have asked for a better opportunity. He helped organize a high-profile workshop for Ugandan parliamentarians, the first of its kind in the country, to drum up support for agroforestry. Key speakers at the workshop included the former director general of the World Agroforestry Centre. Attending the workshop were the ministers of agriculture and environment, the prime minister’s office, members of the parliamentary committee on agriculture and natural resources, other MPs, and NGO and investor representatives.

The workshop had tremendous impact in Uganda and gave the

impetus needed to finalize the relevant section in the PMA, where agroforestry is covered as a distinct unit. This basically says that agroforestry must be part and parcel of agricultural modernization, says Dr Aluma, one of the architects of the plan.

The PMA will operate in line with Uganda’s decentralization principles, in which much power and responsibility has been devolved to the district and subcounty councils. To ensure that the agroforestry component is not lost during the drift to the districts, further public awareness undertakings must be implemented, Dr Aluma says. This should not be difficult, as most of the local government officials are already interested and aware of agroforestry, courtesy of the work already done in

most districts by the World Agroforestry Centre/AFRENA project and NGOs.

Dr Aluma believes that with the methods that the PMA is employing, such as the establishment of the agroecological zones and the 12 district agricultural research and development centres, coupled with the efforts of partners such as the National Agriculture Advisory Services, NGOs and community-based organizations, it will not be long before agroforestry is practised by smallholder farmers throughout Uganda. The difference might lie in the level of operation or involvement—but at least a start will be made in every district and in right direction.



World Agroforestry Centre

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The World Agroforestry Centre improves human welfare by reducing poverty, increasing cash income, especially among women, improving food and nutritional security, and protecting natural resources. It works to enhance environmental resilience by replenishing soil fertility, conserving the soil, enhancing biological diversity, and sequestering carbon.

Established in 1978, the Centre is an autonomous, non-profit research body supported by the donors of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. The World Agroforestry Centre conducts strategic and applied research, in partnership with national agricultural research systems and a wide variety of non-governmental organizations.