

Project Update: July 2013

July 2013 was aimed at grounding the project activities into the community. Two workshops were held:

1. The Gombe Sub County Leaders Workshop (16th July)
2. The Community Project members' workshop (28th July)

The Sub County Leaders workshop targeted heads of Local Councils I, II & III, Local Council III Councillors and other core Sub County leaders. On the other hand, the Community members' workshop targeted project beneficiaries and any other members who wished to attend. The beneficiaries were identified by community leaders based on the existing level of degradation on their land and their ability to pass on their experiences to other village mates.

During both meetings, we shared with the community and the community leadership our ideals, objectives and core purposes with regard to environment and sustainable development. We further shared with them our proposed work plan and what was expected of them pertaining to the various project interventions. Since the core focus of the project is indigenous Knowledge (IK), the workshops were also aimed at ascertaining the community's (and community leaders') level of appreciation, consciousness and understanding of indigenous knowledge and cultural meanings attached to forest conservation. On the whole, the following objectives guided the deliberations:

- To introduce the project to the community leaders and the community
- To share on how to use indigenous knowledge for environmental conservation
- To establish ways of implementing the project

1.1 Launching the project in the community

The Gombe Sub-county chief thanked the TEEP-Initiative team for their interest and commitment to environmental conservation work. She encouraged leaders at all levels in the sub-county to embrace the project and make it attractive to people under their jurisdiction. She called for transparency in all activities of the project and promised to cooperate at all levels of project work.

In a special way, the community appreciated the project and the TEEP Initiative since the founders (project leaders) hail from Gombe where the project is being implemented. They pledged their cooperation during the implementation process and asked the project leadership to always continue 'checking on them' and giving them advice throughout the entire period.

1.2 Sharing experiences on how to use indigenous knowledge for environmental conservation

1.2.1 Community views/thoughts concerning the Baganda Traditional Ecological Knowledge, spirituality and cultural beliefs with respect to environmental conservation

Members acknowledged that when they were growing up, some trees and water sources had taboos. One member made the following comment,

'For example, they would tell us that Jjirikiti tree does not cook (should not be used for cooking). The Jjirikiti tree is medicinal and in Buganda, under it is the traditional burial ground for dogs. Using it for cooking or for other purpose would depopulate the tree, causing scarcity of its medicine and burial grounds for dogs. Those which would be selected for medicine would be near homes, yet others to symbolically be used as burial grounds for dogs would be distanced

from settlements.' The practice of ethnomedicine preservation is very relevant today and as such, it ought to be revitalized.

Traditionally, people would foresee trees which are likely to fall and through taboos restrict people from going near them. Even when planting trees, those which can easily fall or break, would be planted far from homes. Important trees would however be identified and be planted near homes for easy access. For example; medicinal plants would be kept near homes, yet homes would be kept far away from potentially dangerous big trees. Superstitions would also be used to deter people from destruction /abuse or cutting of big trees.

In addition to tree/forest conservation, taboos and superstitions would also be used in the protection of water sources and water quality. Taboos would be against carrying dirty containers to water sources and (for females) visiting them while in menstruation periods.

A participating female leader noted, "Environment is what we are fighting for, but it is most degraded by elites. Even if we plant trees in villages, rivers (streams) are being filled with wastes in towns. The government should first tackle the problem of streams being encroached. Traditionally, people were not allowed to encroach on swamps and wet lands." Another respondent informed us that in the western parts of the country, wetlands are still conserved unlike in the central parts. Participants were asked how about if local council authorities take the lead in influencing conservation through by-laws and other possible measures, which they saw as positive initiative.

We were informed that in a bid to keep and protect trees long ago, people would take them as memorial objects, associated to key events in families or communities. They would be planted or associated to new births, seasons of good harvest, death or visitation of re-known social/public figures. Trees would as well be symbols of authority, which had/have to be protected. For example, we talk of '*Mutuba gumu*', '*Mituba ebiri*' etc. as a sign of progression in the hierarchy of leadership and influence in the Baganda socio-political setting. '*Mutuba*' is a tree name but with associated leadership symbolism.

One respondent advised that the local population needed sensitization since some people cut trees out of ignorance of the effects of this practice. Others do the same following the example set by leaders, government official and elites. For example, government official and investors; both foreign and local encroach on wetlands. Poor people also indiscriminately fell trees seeking to benefit from the resource, just as the rich are doing.

Trees are leaving objects and they can be good for tourism like *Kinene* in Busubizi. This is a big tree in Mubende district, which attracts multitudes of people and around which both Christians and traditionalists have points of worship. A participant asserted that "we are here, we can get a common voice, that all wetlands go back to the possession or protection of the central government or to the Mengo government (Buganda cultural leadership)". Examples were given of people in the local community who used to protect wetlands and forests, but upon whose death the protected areas were destroyed.

1.2.2 Do you think indigenous conservation approaches are still applied?

We asked the participants whether they think indigenous conservation approaches are relevant today. This what they had to say;

Some people still apply them, others don't. For example, in this village we had a respected/feared small forest. There was a belief that when you cut it, something bad would happen to you, but it was recently cut down without fear. This era is of no fear and respect.

The IK has been diluted. The taboo trees and places have been tampered with without fear. However, we have had of cases where things don't go well, some people come back to consult with spiritualists. Some people no longer apply indigenous conservation approaches because of intermarriages, population increase, migrations and wars. These circumstances change many things as new people mix with indigenous communities and people copy from each other. When you intermarry, practicing cultural indigenous Knowledge may become hard, and there are people who come to destroy the good you have.

2.0 Identifying propagation materials

The project steering committee members in liaison with the community elders have been able to gather tree seeds and to identify tree cuttings that will be used as propagation materials. The focus of next month will be to

3.0 Conclusion

On the whole, the community and their leaders have received thorough grounding in issues of environmental sustainability and conservation. Together with the community elders, the project youth have been able to appreciate the relevance of IK and cultural meanings in environmental conservation. Members have acknowledged the fact that IK faces a lot of challenges with respect to cultural dilution that has been brought about by intermarriages as well as forces from Modern Knowledge (MK). However, they believe that IK and MK can co-exist. As the project steering team, we have equally learnt a lot from the community and are confident that these experiences will enhance our abilities to competently execute our respective tasks. Therefore, given the above, we feel that the community is now ready to embrace the practical project activity of tree planting/re-afforestation.

4.0 Way forward

- It was resolved that the project focuses on planting indigenous fruit and medicinal/income generating trees. The following fruit trees were selected: jackfruit, avocado and guava fruit. The indigenous income generating/medicinal tree species selected included: *musizi*, *musambya*, *muvule*, *kirundu*, *kokoowe*, *mutuba* (selected from the proposed list in project application).
- It was suggested that the project also considers extending the tree planting exercise to schools and places of worship. This is because these institutions possess a great deal of land that would be good for *Muvule* propagation. Muvule tree has a maturity period of 50 years.
- It was resolved that each of the selected households involves their children in the project activities in a bid to sensitize them about environmental sustainability.
- The community members and their leaders agreed to work together for the success of the project.

Below are some of the photographs taken during the Leaders workshop & Community members Workshop:



Left: Mr. Ben Kabiito conducting environmental sustainability consciousness for the Sub County leaders at Gombe Sub County Head Quarters. Right: Local Council leaders and Councillors keenly following the workshop proceedings.



Leonard engaging participants in an interactive IK & ecological sustainability group discussion.



Participants sharing a light moment during break time & Village leader Mr. Asiimwe sharing his thoughts and ideas with fellow participants.



Some of the community members in a group photograph (Leonard is at the front- dressed in checked shirt).