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This matter please quotes Ref: **NO:**

8th August 2024

The Chief Administrative Officer,
Kikuube District Local Government,
Kikuube.

INTER-DISTRICT (KIKUUBE AND HOIMA) MONITORING OF ECOTRUST PROJECT REPORT

Introduction

The districts of Kikuube and Hoima have unceasingly grappled with numerous ecosystem threats for instance; Loss of wetland and forest biodiversity, Deforestation and forest fragmentation, Riparian habitat encroachment for cultivation, Intensive subsistence and commercial, agriculture, Oil/Gas and ancillary Infrastructure. These threats are exacerbated by climate change effects.

In an attempt to address the prevailing ecosystem threats, the two districts of Kikuube and Hoima have in common a strong collaboration with ECOTRUST who has been implementing a number of traceable and impactful environmental projects.

Currently, ECOTRUST is implementing a project called Trees for Global Benefits programme "*Eradicating Poverty One Ton of CO₂ at a Time*". This project is a long-standing cooperative carbon offsetting scheme combining community-led activities to; increase carbon sequestration, encourage sustainable land use practices, ease pressure on natural resources, and provision of performance-based payments to farmers. Therefore, the goal of TGB project is to produce sustainable, certifiable voluntary emission reductions through intentional combination of carbon sequestration with livelihood improvements at participating household level.

Regular field monitoring is usually done by the district natural resources team to reconcile what was planned vis what is being implemented. On this occasion, an inter-district project monitoring exercise was conducted following an article published Aftonbladet a [Swedish tabloid](#) by a Swedish – based journalist (4th to end of May 2024), alleging that farmers participating in 'Trees for Global Benefit' are suffering food insecurity and poverty due to the growing of trees. On top of that, it claims that children of the involved farmers dropped out of school due to the poverty associated with the project.

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The monitoring exercise attempted to establish the claims in the article by reviewing if the project is implemented in adherence to the project design, the observable and perceived impacts of the project, as well as perceptions of the local leadership about the project.

Composition of the inter-district monitoring team

No.	Name	Designation
Hoima		
1.	Harriet Birungi	District Natural Resources Officer
2.	Stuart Tusabege	District Forest Officer
3.	Florence Musimenta	District Community Development Officer
4.	Catherine Kaija	Principal Agricultural Officer
Kikuube		
5.	Mugisa Proscovia Annet	District Natural Resources Officer
6.	Kusiima Kaheesi Samuel	Principal Agricultural Officer
7.	Abitegeka Wilfred	District Forest Officer
8.	Lillian Kugonza	District Community Development Officer

Target participants

The monitoring team interacted with two categories of people in both Hoima and Kikuube districts notably; i) participating farmers and, ii) local leaders

i) Number of participating farmers visited

Nine randomly selected farmers were visited (three farmers in Hoima and six farmers in Kikuube). These included farmers whose names had been mentioned in the article as well as some that were not mentioned. Those farmers who had participated in the carbon project for over five (05) years were preferred given their rich experience and understanding of the project dynamics. Below is a table showing farmers who were visited.

Name of farmer	Village	Subcounty	District	Stage to monitor	Hactares planted
Keti Mbabazi	Kigaga	Buseruka	Hoima	12years	1
Wilson Akiiza	Kigaga	Buseruka	Hoima	11years	1.25
Rev. Fred Musimenta	Butimba	Kiziranfumbi	Kikuube	14years	2
Safari Christopher		Kiziranfumbi	Kikuube	13years	1
Tomas Mbubi	Butimba	Kiziranfumbi	Kikuube	6 years	1
Gerald Agaba	Kyakatemba	Kiziranfumbi	Kikuube	7 years	1
Yahaya Kalindugu	Butimba	Kiziranfumbi	Kikuube	11 years	1
Jackson Tumukunde	Kigaga	Buseruka	Hoima	5 years	1
Silvano Bihugyeho	Kidoma	Kiziranfumbi	Kikuube	11 years	1.5

Kikuube

Key Findings:

1. Recruitment Process

In seeking feedback on the recruitment process, the team wanted to establish whether farmers are being recruited based on Free and Prior Informed Consent. The farmers interviewed by the monitoring team were able to explain how the recruitment of desirous farmers is conducted, highlighting that the process followed an explicit and strict guideline. The bottom line was the farmer had to voluntarily express interest in participating in the project interventions. Below is an outline of the key elements of the eligibility criteria that were mentioned by the farmers.

- Should be interested in planting Indigenous trees
- Should have enough land for both trees planting and food production
- Should not have land conflicts
- Must attend the training/community visioning process before joining
- Should not have cut trees to plant trees
- And consent from the family members among others

Farmers had consented on approved plan vivo which served as an intent to purchase. The farmers also mentioned that TGB has mechanisms of addressing grievances, where farmers with concerns (irrespective of magnitude) would approach their farmer leaders, if not satisfied then proceed to village chairpersons and or chairperson of the lower local government for redress.

2. Land Use Planning

The farmers that were visited had an average of 1.5 Hectares land holding. It was observed that the farmers had a smart layout/allocation of the land; with the homestead surrounded by indigenous trees, banana plants (eating type), coffee, cocoa, cassava, and maize. The components observed on the farmers' homesteads were a proxy indicator of; good agricultural risk management, climate change adaptation/mitigation, socio-ecological resilience.

3. Tree Growing Practices

The farmers who were visited were found engaged in agroforestry practices. They attested to ECOTRUST promoting agroforestry under the project and all the fellow beneficiaries were practicing a similar concept on their private lands. Specifically, the farmers were practicing one of the following agroforestry practices; Boundary, Dispersed Interplanting, Woodlot planting of trees.

The farmers had planted either of the following indigenous tree species; Measopsis Emiiniil, Albizia, Kahya Anthotheca-Mahogany, Makhamia whose choice was dependent on the tree management objectives. The survival rate of planted trees was over 75% of what was planted, and two farmers were found to have done thinning (culling of weak trees) and beating-up an indicator of proper tree management.

4. Incentive Model

All the farmers that were interviewed were acquainted with the payment schedule and terms (based on achievement of target regardless of whether credits are sold or not).

Whereas the farmers complained that the amount of money being little, they mentioned that there were a number of benefits derived from the tree enterprise and below is a list of the benefits narrated by the farmers

- The agroforestry system that they were implementing on their parcels of land had helped them to be relatively food secure.
- The community was getting ecosystem services e.g good micro-climate, herbal medicine, fuel wood from some of the trees they planted.
- The trees planted along the perimeter of the farmers' parcels of land was a deterrent of land conflict thus land protection.
- The payments that farmers had received had been used to pay school fees for their children, buy scholastics for children, and improving their shelter.

5. General Community Well-being

The visting team sought to establish the Project's impact on overall community welfare. The The project has been able to support a total of 2,196 farmers in both Hoima and Kikuube districts (see table below)

District	Subcounty	Number of farmers			Remarks
		Male	Female	Total	
Kibuube	Kiziranfumbi	1,048	272	1,835	Recruitment of farmers was on a continuous basis, and farmers had to voluntarily express interest before activating an eligibility criterion
Hoima	Buseruka	787	89	361	

The farmers were found to be more of model homes in the area; tree growing ambassadors, practicing agroforestry, they never had incidences of Gender – Based Violence, the farmers and their families were visibly looking healthy, and they were food and nutrition secure (three meals a day).

6. Overall Perception

Trees for Global Benefit is held in high esteem by both the leaders and the community in general. The village chairpersons and parish councillors whom the team interacted with made a number of positive remarks about ECOTRUST and specifically the carbon project highlighting that *it is evident in the community that the project has been;*

- *Vital in conservation and restoration of degraded areas especially the Wambabya catchment,*
- *The small incentive that farmers were getting was making a difference in people's lives,*
- *The tree planting activity was helping to maintain the connectivity between Wambabya and Bugoma central forest reserves given the unceasing land use land cover change in the landscape,*
- *The project was indirectly helping to offset the negative impacts of infrastructural development around the area for instance the construction of the; airport, oil pipeline, and upgrading of airport road.*

The community are sternly concerned about the disparaging nature in which the newspaper article has described them. The community leaders attributed the unfortunate article, to a few elements in the community who were fabricating false stories about the project. These elements were said to have been coached on what to say to the journalist by a certain environmentalist who previously worked in the landscape. The said environmentalist has used this food insecurity and school dropout story before to denigrate other projects for instance; in 2019 Compulsory land acquisition: cut- off dates should be time bound, and in 2023 Petrochemical industrial park in Hoima, Uganda

The leaders highlighted that the children whose names and pictures were published as having dropped out of school are actively attending school (except for one). The list of all the schools and the classes that these children attend is available.

7. Areas of Improvement

- a) **Grievance Redress:** Whereas the project has invested in empowering communities to self-manage, we believe that there is need to classify types of grievance to identify those challenges that may be beyond the capacity of the farmer leaders. These would need to be escalated to ECOTRUST straightaway for intervention in a timely manner.
- b) **Payments:** Farmers complained of both delayed and relatively small payments

Conclusion:

The monitoring team observed that although there are areas of improvement, the allegations in the article were totally unfounded. All the farmers that were interviewed had a good balance of crop production and tree growing, with a diversity of both food and cash crops. The components observed on the farmers' homesteads were a proxy indicator of; good agricultural risk management, climate change adaptation/mitigation, socio-ecological resilience. There is nothing about these farmers, their homes and the landscape in general that should justify the allegations in the newspaper article.

We conclude that the Aftonbladet story newspaper by a Swedish – based journalist is based on falsehoods and half-truths. We therefore recommend that the district security committees of Hoima and Kikuube consider carrying out a thorough investigation on what appears to be part of a well-calculated attack on smallholder access to carbon markets in general. TGB is a model project, promoting the integration of trees on farm as a livelihood strategy, generating livelihood and environmental benefits far beyond carbon sequestration.

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