



Kikonda Forest – the wider picture



Taking positive action instead of just complaining about the state of world.

This is what motivated actors from industrialized countries to join forces with hundreds of people from Uganda to build up what got lost – a forest that serves people and nature, standing on a solid economic foundation. For more than 15 years we have been working together with our neighbours in rural Uganda to plant more than 6 million trees and to manage areas for nature conservation and traditional land-use. Currently the project employs more than 600 people making us by far the largest employer of the region. The timber we produce on a sustainable basis will help to build houses, cook food, build the infrastructure needed to electrify rural Uganda, and reduce the logging pressure on the last natural rain forests of Uganda and Eastern Congo.

This brief text provides an overview of why we plant trees in Kikonda and why it is beneficial for the common good.

Kikonda Forest' history began with a focus on carbon sequestration

Kikonda Forest first established contacts in Uganda in the late 1990s with the intention to plant trees for a better climate and to support sustainable rural development. The Kyoto Protocol of 1994 and the affiliated political process had given the strategic framework outlining that a problem as big as climate change would need solutions from various angles. While undoubtedly the number one priority and responsibility remains the reduction of emissions at the source, especially in the industrialized countries, mechanisms that put a price on pollution and allow for generating income from activities that reduce pollution or actively remove carbon from the atmosphere were considered as well. In a globalizing world where both businesses and degradation of nature grows faster and crosses boundaries more easily than legislation can, market-based mechanism are a vital tool to balance economic, social and environmental requirements. Since any instrument needs control, Kikonda Forest has investigated both CDM and voluntary carbon schemes and finally decided on the GoldStandard as the benchmark to measure the positive impact against climate change the project has.

“Market based mechanisms for climate and nature protection are a valuable addition to state legislation, indigenous rights and grass-root projects.”

The GoldStandard is an independent, third party standard set up and managed by a foundation supported by 80 NGOs including WWF, CARE and Rainforest Alliance. It currently has about 30 employees and 20 people as technical advisors. Decisions on what criteria shall be used to measure the carbon sequestration in forest run through an intensive review process including public consultation. For Kikonda, the verdict on how much carbon the project stores was taken by TÜV-Süd, yet another entity independent from the Gold Standard. Social and Environmental

aspects of the project were checked by SGS-South Africa against the requisitions of the Forest Stewardship Council (see also text below).

While carbon forestry was the reason why the people of Uganda invited Kikonda Forest to plant trees in Kikonda, we do at the same time manage the Kikonda forest to produce timber in a sustainable way. Every tree that will be harvested will be replanted to allow for a continuous forest cover and carbon stock.

Uganda's forest cover is insufficient to meet the needs of a growing population

In the past two decades, the forests in Uganda decreased by more than 30%. Meanwhile, the population has increased by more than 90%. Today, only 0.2% of Uganda is covered with forest plantations. That development calls for establishing new forests but it does not mean that a very large portion of the country has to be planted with trees putting forestry into competition with food production on a national scale. About 35% of Uganda is bush land and grassland that can be used for cattle-keeping. About 45% of Uganda is farmland. Only about 1% of the country's surface would need to be planted with trees to ensure there will be sufficient timber available for buildings, furniture, electrification poles and so much more! To secure the timber supply, the government has declared Forest Reserves like Kikonda "for tree farming only". Kikonda Forest on invitation of the people of Uganda, is bringing in the expertise and finance needed to develop and manage the forest.

Plantation forests to reduce land use pressure on natural forests in the tropical context

Scholars and practitioners for decades have been philosophising on the definition of forest. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation defines forest as an area of more than one hectare, stocked with forest plants with their canopy covering more than 30% and having a height of at least 5 meters. The Uganda National Forestry Authority uses the same definition. Kikonda Forest does not clear forest in order to plant trees.

The forests of the tropics are exploited for timber and transformation to agricultural land. One approach to counteract this trend would be the commercial management of mix-species forests. This strategy however was developed and gained popularity in the temperate regions of Europe and North America. Contrary to these temperate forests, tropical forests have a very high diversity of tree species of which only few are of commercial value and even fewer are well researched in terms of their requirements when grown for timber. Due to that scientific background, we follow an approach called "mosaic forestry"; or, areas of intensively managed single-species forests alternating with set-aside areas that are left to natural regeneration. The National Forestry Authority has been planting Pine trees in the Kikonda Forest Reserve since the

1970s because it is one of the most suitable, site-adapted species to supply the local market. Currently most of the timber used in Uganda comes from the destruction of natural forest and bush land. In addition we are planting a variety of other species both exotic and local trees to look into alternative silvicultural options. Up to 20 % of the Kikonda Forest Reserve is earmarked as set-aside areas for nature conservation or traditional land-use. At the regional scale, our planted forests help to reduce the logging pressure from Uganda's last rain forests like Bwindi – home to the rare mountain gorillas! This approach to forest management is endorsed by NGOs like Greenpeace and WWF.

Like any other plant, Pine and Eucalyptus trees use water and take out nutrients from the soil. In fact, they use less water than many food crops like maize or bananas. The Kikonda area receives a lot of rainfall and has no free running water bodies close to steep slopes where silting could become a problem. When trees are harvested, the leaves and needles that contain most of the valuable minerals are left to decompose and be available for the next generation of trees. Kikonda Forest is in Kikonda to stay, so long-term availability of water and fertile soil are as important to us as to our neighbours and to the wildlife.

Land-use challenges rooted in unformalized tenure reforms

Land-use conflicts have been a challenge in Uganda long before any carbon forestry project was started in the country, originating from unformalised tenure reforms. They are a challenge to anybody in Uganda local and foreign, operating small or large-scale land-based operations. If carbon forestry projects or any other form of forestry, be it for conservation or for timber production, would disappear, these conflicts would not go away as the demand for land-based resources still exists and is increasing. What would be missing without projects like the one in Kikonda though would be a reliable supply of timber and projects that subscribe to a structured and peaceful way to find a balanced solution to land-use conflicts. And not doing forestry projects in a country with land-use conflicts like Uganda would also mean to shy away from participating in hands-on efforts to reduce such conflict.

“Forestry projects contribute to finding solutions for land tenure conflicts”

From early history, over the period where the Kingdoms of Uganda were a British protectorate, through Idi Amin' rule up until today, Uganda has gone through a series of land tenure reforms. None of them was implemented fully. Currently, a multitude of formal and informal regulations about land tenure exist in parallel. There is no fully functional centralized land plan allocating land to various land-use types. Nor is there a fully functional land register as exists in industrialized countries or a widely accepted system of what one could refer to as “indigenous land rights”. But

the country is not at chaos. Its people are finding ways every day to navigate through a situation which could be perceived from the outside as unsorted or as at times being unfair to individuals labelled as "indigenous". Nevertheless, this situation is getting more complicated with both increases in population and demand for land-based resources. This complex situation is exacerbated by misinformed external actors, often funded from abroad, that support single sided positions of one fraction of stakeholders in this struggle.

The grievance procedure in Kikonda Forest

To make sure that in Kikonda any complaints or grievances from stakeholders, including those of land tenure, are addressed Kikonda Forest has set up a grievance procedure. People claiming to own land or have land-use rights in the Forest Reserve in many cases do that being misled by fraudulent land surveyors or other individuals. The grievance redress process typically integrates a cross section of civil society representatives including village elders, local chiefs, the land board, the Forestry Authority and other state authority representatives, and of course, the complainant and his or her extended family. People unsatisfied with this grievance redress procedure have the opportunity to raise the grievance with the third party FSC auditors (see also text below) or the courts of law.

Kikonda Forest' legal concessionary agreement

When Kikonda Forest started working in the country, it did so via invitation of the elected representatives of the people of Uganda. The need for timber and sustainable rural development in the country alongside the fact that the land that was offered to Kikonda Forest for lease had been allocated for forestry purposes in 1963 already and was clearly demarcated on the ground added to the conclusion, that planting trees in Kikonda is beneficial for the country and its citizens. Based on that, Kikonda Forest agreed to sign a tree farming license running for 50 years. The license allows Kikonda Forest to grow trees in Kikonda and harvest them. In order to maintain the forest long-term Kikonda Forest has to generate a robust income and profit. The license and the laws of Uganda do not permit Kikonda Forest to allow any other party to take over land inside the boundaries of the forest reserve or allow anybody to use the land for cattle grazing or any other form of land-use. The land-lord remains the National Forestry Authority, and it is this state agency that is responsible for enforcing its intended use. Requirements from the National Forestry Authority regarding the terms of the agreement including several rises of the annual rent fee have been accepted by Kikonda Forest.

The boundaries of the Kikonda Forest reserve are well known to local populations and were demarcated with 1 x 2 x 1 meter trenches at each corner of the boundary line when Kikonda Forest arrived. About 10 years ago the government had the initiative to dedicate up to 10% of the forest reserve to community tree planting and Kikonda Forest supported the idea. Being the land-lord it was only NFA though who had the legal right to sub-lease parts of the reserve to

entities other than Kikonda Forest. Hence it was also the NFA's responsibility to determine which group of people would qualify as being regarded a "community" in this scheme, which of these communities would be given land and how to control the implementation of tree planting. As no action from NFA materialized, Kikonda Forest went ahead to establish a limited trial of such planting activities with people living on land immediately adjacent the forest reserve. NFA though did not favour such trials and ordered them to stop in 2007, further announcing that they would manage the process. Ever since then, no tangible progress has been made.

Cattle grazing in the forest reserve and collaborative forest management

According to the legislation, cattle grazing is illegal in forest reserves. This state decision is a major point of frustration among cattle keepers, who often incorrectly believe it is Kikonda Forest' decision. Rearing cattle does not have to be in conflict with forestry. Only when trees are young and tender are they susceptible to damage caused by cows trampling and rubbing on them or goats eating the top shoots. Once the trees pass the age of about 3 years, domestic animals can graze under the trees. At all times, cows can graze in the grass lands and bushland of the reserve that are demarcated as set-aside areas. Grazing is not only a potential source of income for our neighbours, it also reduces the fire risk by removing inflammable dry grass. In consequence, Kikonda Forest is very much in favour of allowing well managed grazing in the forest reserve. As mentioned however, the Ugandan forest laws prohibit livestock rearing in forest reserves. In talks with Kikonda Forest, the forestry authority opened up a bit in that regards by indicating that through a collaborative forest management (CFM) agreement such grazing could be allowed. Being the land-lord, it would be again NFA to determine who would be allowed to (commercially) benefit from grazing rights and what compensation would be paid to the state. While Kikonda Forest would appreciate the implementation of such a CFM agreement sooner rather than later, NFA brought forward the valid proposal that the authority would prefer, as a first step, to physically walk the boundary of the reserve once more, replace the existing corner trenches by a system of concrete boundary pillars and record all cases of people claiming to have land rights in the reserve. After several delays the first tranche of this process was finalized in the second half of 2015. What is still open though is the settlement of land claims that were brought up during this exercise. Local chair persons, the local land board as well as the judicature bodies of the state of Uganda are the bodies that rule upon the validity of the claims brought up. They affect only a minor portion of the forest reserve and Kikonda Forest is awaiting the results of the local claim settlement process and the closure of a CFS agreement before supporting community tree planting or actively encouraging cattle grazing inside the forest reserve.

Kikonda Forest and its neighbors

Knowing that legal agreements alone would not be enough to gain a "license to operate" through the consent and support of the wider public, Kikonda Forest has from the very beginning been in a dialogue with the people living in the neighbourhood of the forest as well as with relevant stakeholders countrywide. This dialogue started in a customary way by hiring local people to manage the tree planting and explaining the purpose and needs of the project to neighbours. This direct, informal interaction remains a vital part of our stakeholder consultation and grievance redress. To give a simple picture: our neighbours meet key people of our project as they literally live next door, when they see them in the forest on workdays, at the local bars watching soccer on Saturdays or going to church on Sundays. As the project grew in terms of areas being planted, this process was formalized, professionalized and it is still being developed further. In 2007 a bachelors theses based on several weeks of research was written, the same year one employee was dedicated full time to support village tree planting initiatives and serve as a key contact. In 2010, the NGO "Heifer international" made research regarding the needs of the cattle keeping part of the local communities. In 2011, a team of five field researchers toured the Kikonda area for more than two months leading to a social impact study. Since 2012, a full department of more than 10 social scientists and extension workers is now interacting with our neighbouring communities every day to foster livelihood improvement and keep the communication between all local stakeholders going.

Kikonda Forest is now the most important employer in the Kikonda area providing jobs to currently app. 600 people. As a significant part of salaries are spent in local shops, the small scale businesses around the forest have received additional benefits. Together with the people in our neighbourhood we have additionally been implementing various development projects for many years, including:

- secure safe drinking water for local communities
- donating tree seedlings and forestry advice
- supply of educational material to schools
- agricultural extension service to increase crop and cattle rearing yields for local small scale farmers
- women loan and savings organisations
- cattle watering ponds
- cattle corridors throughout the plantation
- HIV sensitisation
- herbal medicine workshops
- entrepreneurship trainings (chicken farming, piggery etc.)

FSC certification as a third party account of sustainable forest management

For the management of our forest we receive a lot of positive feedback from our neighbours and local stakeholders. Nevertheless, we have been asking ourselves the question, if our activities are broadly acceptable in terms of reaching our goal to run a forestry project that is truly acceptable in a social and environmental way while at the same time being economically feasible. This quest lead us back to the Rio Summit in 1992 where the world came together to look for solutions for global environmental challenges. High on the agenda was the protection and sustainable use of the world's forests. While in the 1980 and 1990 boycotts of import of tropical hardwoods to Europe or North America for some governments and NGOs seemed to be a suitable tool to counteract deforestation, it soon became clear that the problem is more complex. Not only logging for high-value timber threatens the "lungs of the earth" but the growth of the world's population and living standards going along with increasing need for agriculture product for local consumption and export. Global trade dissociates the end-consumer from seeing the ecological footprint of purchase decision making it even for responsible buyers hard to assess their global impact. On a small scale geographic basis such adverse effects had already been successfully contained through national legislation leading to a ban of certain chemicals, establishment of national parks etc.. On a global scale, with hundreds of different countries, different legal systems and different perceptions of urgency regarding protection of nature, the Rio Summit fell short of establishing global laws to protect the forests. But here the idea gained popularity, that more than one way (legislation, indigenous land use) should be endeavoured to achieve good global governance. One of the most important alternatives turned out to be voluntary standards for good practice. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is such an entity. Brought to life by NGOs such as Greenpeace and WWF, today it is the most widely accepted "rule book" for forest management. Its members, be them from NGOs, indigenous groups, trade unions, individuals or from the forest industry form a democratically structured body that debates and decides on how forest shall be treated. A standing committee on indigenous rights especially focuses on integrating the rights of first nations. From local working groups to the global General Assembly it brings together a diverse group of people from the environmentalist to the multi-million dollar business executives. Heated discussions and lengthy decision making processes demand a lot of energy, good-will and persistence from the actors. But the result is worth-while: never before in history have stakeholders from around the world formed a "parliament" to determine how humanity should manage forests. The process remains open for any interested stakeholder. Staying out of such a "parliament" and promoting stereotypes of ecologically sound forestry are generally not economically feasible or alternatively, businesses from abroad that ruthlessly exploit developing countries might generate flash headlines here and there. However, the global community of forest stakeholders has moved much further ahead to a constructive collaboration and dialogue.

“Planted forests following FSC standards are endorsed by NGOs such as Greenpeace and WWF”

For the Kikonda Forest, the FSC standards on top of national legislation set the minimum baselines of performance. Our project team includes foresters and social scientists trained at African and European Universities, colleges and schools making them well acquainted with natural forest management, commercial forestry, biodiversity protection, safe chemical usage, stakeholder consultations and conflict mediation. Standing on solid economic grounds through generating an income and profit is another FSC requisition. And it is our target since, contrary to many often short-lived donor funded projects, we structured and manage the Kikonda Forest project in such a way that it can stand on its own feet. In order to develop the standard further, the FSC working group of Uganda constantly looks into topics such as adequate housing of field workers, water quality protection, soil fertility management, biodiversity improvement, land tenure, gender equity and many other aspects that balance forest management between the demands of society and nature. Once a year an independent third party auditor examines our performance compared to these standards. This audit process is open for public input, meaning that everybody can raise concern about the performance of the company. This complaint log becomes part of the general audit report. If rated valid by the auditor and not being ironed out by the company it will lead to the withdrawal of the certificate.

Voluntary certification processes hence form a crucial part of what is often referred to as “green economy” and “payment for environmental services”. As mentioned above, responsible behaviour of each individual as well as state legislation remain a keystone to ensure social and environmental good conduct in land-use. But it is no contradiction to supplement these efforts with mechanisms that allow for business and income generating activities which at the same time contribute to nature conservation and livelihood improvement. Recent history tells that ideologies rarely lead the simple way in the shiny future they promise while approaches that integrate a variety of strategies might not be as “fancy” at first glance but have a higher chance of success.

The impact of unfounded negative media attention

Besides a number of positive media and scientific coverage such as in Miti-The Tree Farmers Magazine for Africa, Sunday Monitor Uganda or Radio Hoima, the Kikonda Forest project has been criticised by some publications in European countries and other parts of the industrialized world. Most of them are fundamentally opposing the idea of financing tree planting for carbon sequestration in developing countries through the sales of carbon credits. In a rather simplistic manner they claim that such activities would allow industrialised countries to emit more CO₂ than they should and would be to the disadvantage of the people and nature in Uganda. Very few

of them have made any effort at all to enter into a constructive, lasting dialogue with Kikonda Forest or other stakeholders of the project.

While the negative publications might be driven by the wish to reveal perceived grievances and to improve the livelihoods of the people of Uganda, they tend to show only very limited aspects of the situation on the ground. Often based on short-term visits and conducted with an ideological pre-determination, they bear the risk of misleading those who are genuinely interested in bringing positive, lasting and balanced change to land-use in Africa as well as supporting the battle against global warming.

The legacy of Kikonda Forest is in the forest

We have been working in Uganda for more than 15 years. Compared to the age of old-growth forests this is a blink of an eye. In this short time span we have been able to plant more than 6 million trees and lay the foundation for a peaceful and lasting land management. Kikonda Forest is to supply timber needed desperately in the region for building houses and cooking food, creating jobs and supporting local businesses. The set-aside areas in Kikonda form one of the largest privately financed areas for nature protection and traditional land use in the country.

The area where we operate is battered by a growing demand for natural resources, an often inconsistent land-tenure system and a challenging governance environment. But since we contribute to finding a solution to these local challenges with global impact we are here. Being humans, we make mistakes every day. But staying away and only complaining about the sorry state of the world is not an option, nor are old-school hand-out methods of development sustainable or effective. Not planting trees in Kikonda would be unfair to the hundreds of Ugandans and citizens of other nations that work hard every day to maintain Kikonda Forest being a benefit for society and nature. And it would put an end to one of the few cases where people from Uganda and abroad are doing business together and at the same time fight climate change, protect nature and improve livelihoods.

Let's keep on planting.