
Farming God's Way training in the Dakatcha Woodlands, Marafa, Kenya

March 2010

A Rocha Kenya & Bountiful Grains Trust

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ARK Report C#2010.01



Introduction

The Dakatcha Woodlands are an area of *Brachystegia* Woodland and *Cynometra* Forest mosaic just north and inland of Malindi on the Kenyan coast where several species of rare and threatened species of birds and other taxa are found. The most critically threatened are the Clarke's Weaver *Ploceus golangi* which is endemic to Dakatcha and the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest 20kms to the south, and the near-endemic Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae* – Africa's smallest owl. However, the Woodlands are under serious threat from both clearance for charcoal, logging for furniture and construction material, and more recently almost total eradication for the creation of a jatropha biofuel plantation by an Italian company (c.f. www.arochakenya.wildlifedirect.org for more information).

A Rocha Kenya has a vision for working with the communities of the Dakatcha Woodlands to help them both understand the value and importance of the woodlands both because of the rare and unique biodiversity found there as well as because the forest is important for environmental services such as bringing rain and acting as a carbon sink. Ultimately, however, we long for Christians in the Dakatcha area to truly grasp that the woodlands – and their farms – are part of God's precious creation that he has given us to look after and use wisely, not destroying it but rather honouring and respecting it as God's possession.

Farming God's Way (FGW) is an excellent means of teaching biblical ethics and discipleship training in a practical and relevant way that will also mean a dramatic increase in productivity from the farms of those who put it into practice. Because it increases production of food from otherwise impoverished land, implementing FGW means that in the Dakatcha situation farmers can grow sufficient to feed their families and hopefully even sell to make money to pay for school fees etc – thus reducing the pressure on them to cut trees for timber or charcoal and hopefully making them more supportive of protecting the forest rather than letting it be turned into a jatropha plantation.

A Rocha Kenya is excited with the prospect of working with the Bountiful Grains Trust and their recognised FGW trainers in Kenya, in particular Pius Mutie who has worked with us in training in Dakatcha already. We eagerly look forward to seeing the difference this will make in the lives of people living in Dakatcha and the effect on the conservation of this amazingly precious part of God's creation.

This document reports on FGW training carried out in the Dakatcha Woodlands / Marafa area with funding gratefully received from the Community Development Trust Fund through our partners NatureKenya.

*Colin Jackson
A Rocha Kenya*

Farming God's Way Training, Marafa – Pius Mutie

I got to Malindi town in the evening of Saturday the 20th March as we had agreed with Tony Kanundu with whom I am attached at A Rocha Kenya for the Farming God's Way programme in Marafa District. I was requested to lodge at a hotel in the town as all the rooms in Mwamba were occupied. The next morning, I ganged up with Jonathan Baya aka "JB" who would accompany me to Marafa. We were only able to get to our destiny by 20:00 hrs. This delay was caused by trouble with the vehicles and bad roads. I barely managed to get a room and I thank God for that.

Our programme included training farmers in five (5) areas in the order listed below:

1. Baricho
2. Mulunguni
3. Sosoni
4. Adu
5. Marafa

We manage to get to Baricho which is the furthest west of Marafa at 9:00am "on time". This is at the water reservoir near river Galana. Across the river is Lango Baya for those who've been there. We found the people not ready so we went to the Chiefs house first to apologize for failing him on 29th January. This is the day Mr. Katana had requested him to invite people for the training but we never turned up due to logistic challenges. That time I myself travelled all the way to Malindi only to be turned back as I had earlier informed you.

We now realise that there is another meeting scheduled for the same people at the same venue by Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group. We agreed that we start Farming Gods Way training first then give way to the other group when they arrive. Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group is a forest conservation group that was funded by Nature Kenya.



The training was officially opened by the Assistant chief at 10:00Hrs

After the opening prayers, we did a self introduction guided by the below listed questions:

- Name
- Occupation
- One like
- One dislike

- ✓ Most participants turned out to be farmers
- ✓ Most like:
 - Farming and God
 - Learning new things including new farming methods
 - Making new friends

- × Most hate
 - × Poverty
 - × sin
 - × Drought
 - × Poor Harvest
 - × Begging



The participants introducing themselves

We sampled a few farming methods as used by the participants conventionally and also took voluntary data on the crop production data patterns of the volunteer participants. One thing became very clear out of the data and the self introduction, that there is the need for more food and training as stipulated in the FGW handbook by Grant Dryden.

We therefore have found an access point to speak to them on Farming Gods Way. We started by looking at the relationship between God and farming. The participants are

amazed to realize how important God actually is to their farming. God is the master farmer and he actually commissioned us to farm and take care of the land "Gen. 2:15 Farming is the first occupation/profession".

We encouraged the participants by sharing with them the average yields for Sub-Saharan Africa and the other comparable data like hunger, soil erosion and grain needs. At this point, we showed them some of the photographs showing better yields and it gave them the greatest urge to learn what to do to improve their yields and therefore their living standards.

At this point I find it necessary to employ a skit in the form of a story which goes as follows:

There was a young graduate who was seen in the village of say Baricho to do community development work there. He found it impossible to access the community. After inquiring, he was told that the only person who could assist him was the village wise man. Being a graduate, the young man didn't see what a primitive illiterate old man could offer a qualified, 'civilized' man. He therefore stayed put. He tried to employ all the tricks in the book to counter this challenge but it was not to be. Time was not on his side. After much ado, he decided to give the whole foolish idea a thought. He sent for the wise man and gave him an appointment to come to his office. The old wise man sent back an emissary that he would not be available. Anger was now boiling in the young man. He saw this as a great dishonour. After all, it is the village that required him and his development agenda to improve their livelihoods. One of the young men in the village encouraged him to request for an appointment with the wise man at his convenient time and place after all, what difference would it be to him? He accepted the advice and this time he was given the appointment at the wise man's home. When he finally arrived for the appointment equipped with all sorts of paraphernalia, the old man offered him a seat next to him. Tea was brought in a teapot and two cups. The host started serving tea to the young man as he talked to him, looking him steadily in the eye. As he did this he put too much tea in the cup and as it got full, it started overflowing. The young man shouted "Hey man, can't you see that the cup is full? It is overflowing" The old man stopped and without blinking answered back "That is your problem, you are full, in order to get in new ideas into your head, you must first pour out what you already know to create space"

The moral of the story is for all who want to embrace FGW to first for go the conventional farming methods as Mr. Grant did with his university degree in agriculture. Out of this, we crafted a saying which we told all those who got stuck in their old ideas "mwaga" which means "pour out" in Swahili.

At around noon, the Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group people came and we gave them time to finish their programme which was made easy by the fact that we had spoken so much conservation already. The community accepted to adopt a community forest conservation concept by Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group.

The participants unanimously agreed that we continue without lunch break since they came from too far away and could not go home for lunch and back for training. The training would however stop at 14:30Hrs.

At this point in time, we introduced the four keys to FGW:

1. In Time
2. Without Waste
3. To High Standards
4. With joy

We tried to compare the importance of time to the farmer and other professions:

NB

- ✓ If a doctor is late for an operation, he postpones it to another day
- ✓ If the teacher skips a lesson or is unable to cover a topic, he sets time to recover
- ✓ If the president forgets to sign an act of parliament into law today, he can still do it tomorrow, next week, month or even year and the country continues to use the previous one

- ✗ If a farmer does not prepare the land in time: Lateness in planting
- ✗ If the farmer does not plant in time: Poor or no yield
- ✗ If a farmer does not weed in time: Yields are very poor
- ✗ If a farmer does not apply fertilizer in time: Poor yield
- ✗ If a farmer does not harvest in time: Major losses due to weevils

BE WARNED

"Every day of delay in the performance of farming activities translates into major yield drop and therefore great economic losses!!!!!!!"

The above reasons makes farming a great profession. The one most reliable job in the world without which the world cannot survive. This in itself should give the farmer pride and high self image.

- No wastage of time. Time is a resource shared equally to all. The poorest person has 24 hrs a day as does the richest. Proper use of time pays.
- No wastage of rain "God's first blessing to man. "God is faithful, He gives rain equally to the good and the evil..."
- No wastage of land: proper spacing of crops
- No wastage of human resources. If farmers are to work at least 3 hours a day, there would be a lot of crop production. Make use of the dry months of the year collecting God's Blanket

Everybody admires a well constructed building. The walls are straight, the windows are equally distanced, everything is nice to look at. Are our farms nice to look at? Are the crop rows straight? Is the spacing properly done? Is God's Blanket well spread over the land? Are the weeds kept under control? Are the standards kept? And most of all, how does God see your farm from heaven? Can God ask "Satan, how did you see the farm of my servant so and so?" Does your farm give glory to God?

When your farm is prepared in time, and your farming activities are done without waste to keeping very high standards, the joy of the Lord will be upon you.

At the end of the first training day in Baricho, we had received a total of 24 participants. As the Assistant Chief stood to give his word of encouragement, he pledged to give maize for

making maize meal for the next day and the other 2 days in Mulunguni and 2 in Sosoni both of which fall in his area of jurisdiction. The participants pledged to buy beans for relish. May the Lord bless him.

The attendance dropped the next day mainly because there were people who had come on the first day primarily to attend the forest conservation meeting I had mentioned. The second day was however faced with a new challenge – the Kenya Red Cross Society was distributing food from outside the Chief's office which is not far from our meeting venue. We therefore started with only a few participants – but on time! However, by the end of the day we had 18 participants.

This day started with a skit to remind ourselves what we learned the previous day. A sewing thread was rolled into a ball. The participants were requested to stand in a circle in the training hall. The facilitator started by stating one thing he can remember from the previous day's training. Once the participants agree around the circle that it was indeed something they had learned in the first day, he called out the name of a participant he knew in the circle and threw the ball of thread to him/her but remained holding the end of it. That participant also stated what he/she had learnt and then passes the thread ball to the next participant. This process goes on for some time until there was a thread network formed. A number of participants are left outside the web. We then asked the ones in the network how they felt. They felt great that they are involved and in the network. The people not connected felt left out and neglected.

The moral of the skit. It does not help to only remind the participants to remember the teaching they hear but teach them to be careful when they go out there in the field about the way in which they go about using their knowledge. Farming Gods Way is not owned by anybody. Do not boast to those not trained and make them feel outcasts, rather talk to them kindly and make them feel a part of God's plan for mankind. Share the knowledge. "Freely you have received, freely give"

This day's first lesson is the step by step implementation of the Farming Gods Way technology:

- The reconnaissance of the land for contour observance.
- "No burning".
- The weeding at root level: "No digging".
- Setting out with the 60mm and 75mm terrain ropes.
- Correct size and digging of the planting stations.
- Basal dressing with Farmyard manure, anthill soil or DAP.
- Covering up slightly with soil to leave 5cm depth.
- Arranging of three seeds properly distanced across the planting hole and properly above the fertilizer or manure.
- Reinstating the ground fully.
- The demonstration of thinning to an average of six plants per planting station
- shallow weeding during plant growth
- The importance of post harvest weeding.



"Step by step implementation" – Pius teaching at Baricho

This was followed by the practical setting up of the Well Watered Garden (demonstration plot).

Well Watered Garden

The participants had a great time practicing the FGW steps in a practical way at the well watered gardens.

One important note is that the fencing diameter was slightly smaller than the required size. If possible, I would recommend this is corrected to a minimum of 8x8m. The Baricho garden was the most affected by this error such that one line of crop was not possible to plant.

Follow up monitoring is necessary in between the two top dressing times. This is something that Mr Katana should be able to do. Farming Gods Way normally recommends trainings and mentoring for five consecutive years which - something we are keen to do with ARK.

The participants had a joint request: "Seeing is believing". They felt that they could get more confidence in FGW if they saw it being done practically somewhere where it had worked. They therefore wanted to come and have a look at my farm in Mpeketoni. I had a feeling that some didn't actually believe it was possible. I made a promise to talk to Colin Jackson about sponsoring at least two participants who did their best in their farms per training site to travel to Mpeketoni and see for themselves. That's a tall calling.



Well Watered Garden practical preparation

Ends...