

# Pack 101, Item 5

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**Rebuilding the land I – restoring forest landscapes**

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**Notes to broadcaster**

In 2011, an international NGO called the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) started a campaign in a dry part of eastern Uganda to restore the forest landscape that had been completely destroyed by years of burning bushes and cutting trees. Through a project called *Ecosystem-based adaptation*, IUCN encouraged farmers to consider planting trees so that the trees could retain water in the soil, reduce the effects of drought, and increase crop yields.

The campaign was designed to help revive the land and save it from becoming a complete desert. All kinds of vegetation had been cleared from land that used to be a forest three decades ago. Droughts were prolonged because there were no trees to help create rain. The winds were severe because there were no trees to act as windbreaks, and rainfall simply evaporated from the ground because of the lack of vegetation cover, leaving clouds of dust in the air. Crop yields were low because the soil was no longer fertile.

IUCN took several actions: they encouraged people to plant trees, provided tree seedlings for free, provided water for the seedlings, and gave financial incentives to people who looked after their trees. They also trained farmers in good, sustainable farming practices and rewarded those that followed the practices. Burning bushes was discouraged and people were instead encouraged to use dry grass and crop residues to mulch their crops. After a few years of these activities, people are beginning to see the importance of trees to the life of the soil, and they are planting more trees on their own.

Planting trees in farmland has a number of other benefits for farmers. Trees provide many types of products, including wood for construction and fuel, medicinal products, and fruit for sale and home consumption. They also provide shade for shade-loving crops, and store carbon, potentially decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. Some types of trees add atmospheric nitrogen to the soil, fertilizing the crops near them directly through their roots, and when their leaves fall to the ground.

This script is based on actual interviews. You could choose to produce this script as part of your regular farmer program, using voice actors to represent the speakers. If you do, remember to tell your audience at the beginning of the program that the voices are those of actors, not the original people involved in the interviews.

You could also use this script as inspiration to research and develop a radio program on the benefits of planting trees in your own area.

If you choose to use this script as inspiration for creating your own program, you could talk to farmers and other experts, and ask the following questions:

Do farmers in your area plant trees in their fields, or leave some trees in their fields? If they do, why? Do they benefit? If they don’t, why not?

What are the reasons for not planting trees? For example, some farmers do not have secure tenure to their land and cannot sell the products of mature trees.

Have some farmers found solutions to these and other challenges? If so, invite these farmers – or extension agents and other experts – to tell their stories on-air.

You could also host a call-in program where farmers can talk about these issues. You could invite a tree planting expert to talk and respond to farmers’ questions and comments.

This program runs for approximately 20 minutes, including intro and extro music.

**HOST:** Greetings, listeners, and welcome to the program. My name is \_\_\_\_. I am in Sanzara village in Kapchorwa district in the Mount Elgon area of eastern Uganda.

I am here to visit a few farmers to learn about the importance of trees to agriculture. Later, I will chat with a field assistant who works for an organization called the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, or IUCN. He has done a lot to convince farmers in this area that trees are the life of the land and to motivate them to plant trees and care for them.

But first we will hear from a group of farmers – Mr. Chemutai Wilfred and his friends, Yeko Swaib, and Chelangat Anna. These farmers not only learnt the importance of trees to the land, but also learnt new ways of using land effectively to grow food for home consumption and for sale.

Signature tune up and out

**HOST:** (MOVING TOWARDS MIC) Hello, sir, is this Mr. Chemutai’s home?

**CHEMUTAI:** Yes, yes. I am Chemutai Wilfred. You are very welcome to Sanzara village. This is our home.

**HOST:** I am happy to be here, Mr. Chemutai. My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I am here to learn about the importance of trees to agriculture.

**CHEMUTAI:** (CALLING) My wife, help us and bring another chair out here! Our visitor has come. (NORMAL VOICE) Thank you for coming, but the other people haven’t come yet. Yeko told me that we would all meet here, so he has gone to call them.

**HOST:** That’s okay. In the meantime, I can catch a breath as we wait for others. It’s hot here! It seems the drought is at its hottest right now.

**CHEMUTAI:** Well, it’s always this hot, actually. We have very bad droughts, my friend. But in a few years, we believe, things will change.

**HOST:** Why do you believe this?

**CHEMUTAI:** IUCN has been teaching us that if we plant trees and restore the forests that used to cover this land in the old days, it will start raining more and reduce the droughts.

**HOST:** (SHOCKED) There used to be forests in this land?

**CHEMUTAI:** Yes! In this village. In this sub-county. All over Kapchorwa district. Everywhere!

**HOST:** What happened to the forests?

**CHEMUTAI:** People cut them down for timber and charcoal.

**HOST:** When was this?

**CHEMUTAI:** (WITH ANGER) When we lost all our cattle! (EMOTIONAL PAUSE) In the olden days, the people here were cattle herders. That’s what we lived on; people barely grew any crops here. But years and years of cattle rustling stripped us of all animals and finally people had nothing to live on. (PAUSE)

**HOST:** I am listening.

**CHEMUTAI:** They couldn't grow crops because they didn't know how to do it. But they had to live. So they looked around and the only way to survive was to sell timber and charcoal.

**HOST:** So they started cutting down the trees.

**CHEMUTAI:** Yes, that’s when they started to cut down the trees. Of course, some people had begun to grow food, and they were burning the bush to clear the ground. In a short time, the whole plain was completely without greenery.

**YEKO:** (MOVING TOWARDS MIC) Are we late, Chemutai?

**CHEMUTAI:** Yeko, you are welcome. Thank you for bringing the rest. This is our visitor who is recording us so they can hear our story on the radio.

**YEKO:** Hello, sir, my name is Yeko Swaib. You are welcome to Sanzara.

**HOST:** I am happy to be here, Mr. Yeko. Is this the rest of the group?

**YEKO:** Yes … This is Chelangat Anna, and this is Yeko Sophie.

**HOST:** Hello, Chelangat; you may know more about the past than Chemutai. Tell me something … Mr. Chemutai was telling me that in the olden days, the people here were cattle herders and no one knew how to plant crops.

**CHELANGAT**: Chemutai told you the truth. We lived on milk and meat in the old days. We didn't plant any crops at all. But when we lost all the cows, we had no choice but to scratch the ground to get something to eat.

**HOST:** What crops did you grow?

**CHELANGAT:** Cassava and maize.

**HOST:** What else?

**CHELANGAT:** That’s it.

**HOST:** But I can see *matoke* plantations over there, and over there (*Editor’s note:*Matoke*is the commonly used word in Uganda and much of East Africa for the starchy, cooking banana that is a cousin of the sweeter banana species*.)

**CHELANGAT:** All the *matoke* plantations you see in this village are no more than three years old.

**HOST:** Really? Why?

**CHELANGAT:** When IUCN came to this village, they found bare ground. No trees. No crops. Droughts were killing us. They told us that if we could plant trees, and some crops, we could save our land … that it would rain more.

**HOST:** And that’s when you planted the *matoke* plantations?

**CHELANGAT**: Yes, and many other crops: maize, sweet potatoes, sunflower, beans, and so on … crops that we had never grown. But it’s the *matoke* that we are truly thankful for.

**HOST**: Why?

**CHELANGAT**: First, they do so well in our soil, and second, they fetch very good money. So now our children have food to eat, and we have the money to send them to school.

**HOST:** You said *matoke* gives you good money?

**CHELANGAT:** Yeah. Very good money.

**HOST**: Compared to what other crops, for instance? Chelangat?

**CHELANGAT:** Compared to maize, for instance. A kilo of maize sells for just 400 shillings [*about 15 US cents*]. A whole 100-kilo sack gives me only 40,000. And that’s after all that hard work of planting, weeding, harvesting, drying and threshing. On the other hand, one bunch of *matoke* can be sold for 30,000 shillings, at a fraction of that trouble.

**HOST**: Mr. Yeko, do you have a *matoke* plantation?

**ALL:** Every one of us here has a *matoke* plantation.

**HOST:** I’d like to take a look at some plantations … Yeko, is your plantation far away from here?

**YEKO:** No, it’s just up the hill, by the cliff. We could walk there if you like.

**HOST:** I’d love to.

**SFX:**  TRANSITIONAL MUSIC

**HOST:** We walk up the hill toward a rocky cliff. Yeko lives with his wife and children right by the foot of the cliff. From where I am standing, this looks like the highest point in Sanzara village. I can see the rest of Sanzara village down below stretching towards Sipi River in the valley. Beyond the valley is a large plain that goes on and on till Mount Moroto some 100 kilometres away. It is quite breathtaking, except for the puffs of smoke rising from the ground, a reminder that the people of the plains still burn bushes as a farming technique.

Right behind me is Yeko’s home, a pair of brand new wood-and-wattle houses with shiny iron roofs. On one side of his home is an assortment of crops, and on the other side is Yeko’s *matoke* plantation.

**YEKO:** All this from my house to the foot of the cliff is my plantation.I am really thankful to IUCN for training us to grow and manage *matoke*. It’s a good source of income, and yet there is so little work required.

**HOST:** What do you mean?

**YEKO:** I only weed once a year because of the mulching. When I place dry elephant grass on the ground throughout my plantation, it stops the weeds from coming up. It’s a very small amount of work but during the rainy season, I can harvest 120 bunches a month for four months in a row.

**HOST:** Wow! That’s so good. And how much money do you get from a bunch of *matoke*?

**YEKO:** Between 20,000 and 30,000 Ugandan shillings.

**HOST:** That is a lot! How do you transport your produce to the market?

**YEKO:** The buyers come here with a truck. They fill their truck with *matoke* and they fill my hands with money.

**HOST:** And how did you earn money before the *matoke* plantation?

**YEKO:** I didn’t.

**HOST:** And yet, sir, now you are a rich man!

**YEKO:** (LAUGHS) I am not a rich man yet, but I am not doing too badly either. I built my new home with money from *matoke* alone. And I have had this plantation for just one and a half years.

**HOST:** Oops! I almost fell in the trench! What’s this used for?

**YEKO:** This is one of the things we learnt from the IUCN training. The trenches catch rainwater so it doesn't wash away the topsoil. This elephant grass planted on the upper side of the trench holds the soil from uphill. When the grass gets too old, I cut it and use it to mulch my *matoke* plantation. But I am thinking of another use for it.

**HOST:** What’s that?

**YEKO:** I want to buy a cow.I think with a cow giving me milk, on top of all this food, I will surely develop a potbelly. (LAUGHS)

**HOST:** LAUGHS

**SFX:**  TRANSITIONAL MUSIC

**HOST:** After touring Yeko’s plantation,we walk back down the hill. On the way down, I notice many young trees all over the place. I ask him why he’s planting all those trees.

**YEKO:** Trees reduce the effects of wind. Without these trees, heavy winds would blow my *matoke* trees to the ground. And my cassava and all these other crops.

**HOST:** Is this something you learnt in the IUCN trainings?

**YEKO:** Yes. And not just that. They taught us that when you have trees around your farm, they hold the soil firmly in place so that soil erosion is reduced. And when the trees shed their leaves, the land becomes fertile.

**HOST:** But when trees grow in your field, don’t they make it hard for crops to grow well?

**YEKO:** Let’s cross that bridge when we reach it. (PAUSE) What we learnt in the IUCN trainings is that we have to plant trees so that we can restore the forests that used to cover our land before all the trees were cut down.

You know, we have very bad droughts here. And when it rains, there are a lot of floods. IUCN told us that the reason these conditions were happening to us is because we had cut down all the trees. So planting trees and restoring the forests will reduce the droughts and the flooding.

**HOST:** Okay… but you didn't answer my question, Mr. Swaib. Won’t the trees make it hard for the crops to grow well when they are mature?

**YEKO:** Not at all. As you can see, trees are mostly planted on the boundary of fields, so even when they grow, they won’t be a burden to crops. Those that start to hinder proper crop growth can be cut. After all, they are our source of firewood and logs for building.

But also, we were told to plant the right tree species in the right places. So we plant those trees that are friendly to crops in the gardens. They are called agro-forestry trees. We also plant other types of trees along farm boundaries, and along roads and paths and other areas.

**HOST**: I see. And how many trees have you planted?

**YEKO:** About 200 so far. And I am still planting.

**HOST**: How big is your land in total?

**YEKO**: It’s three acres

**HOST:** Where do you get the seedlings?

**YEKO:** I got them from IUCN.

**HOST:** How much did you pay for them?

**YEKO:** They gave them to us for free. They gave seedlings to whoever wanted them.

**HOST:** You mean some people didn’t want to plant trees?

**YEKO:** Yes. Many people thought that after planting trees, the government would come and take their land – you know, chase them from the forests. That’s why many refused to plant the trees … or do anything that IUCN was training us to do, for that matter.

**HOST:** How many people planted the trees?

**YEKO:** Many people. When you stand here and look across the whole village, can you see a lot of green? Before the IUCN training, all this land was brown and bare.

**HOST:** So would you say that the people are now realizing the importance of trees?

**YEKO:** I think so. But of course in the beginning, many people planted the trees so they could get the money that IUCN was giving.

**HOST:** What was the money for?

**YEKO:** For every tree that you planted and nurtured, you received 900 shillings from IUCN. That’s part of what motivated most people to plant trees. Not me, though. I had already started planting the trees when they introduced the 900 shillings.

**HOST**: But you got the money, too?

**YEKO**: Yes, I was rewarded like everybody else.

**HOST:** That was Yeko Swaib talking about how *matoke* has improved his finances, the crucial importance of trees to the environment, and how farmers in his village are trying to restore the forests that were cut down.

Back in the town of Mbale, at the IUCN offices, I meet Christopher Lutakome. He is the field assistant who has worked with the farmers in Sanzara village since the beginning of the project.

**HOST:** Mr. Chris, you are part of the team that worked with the farmers in many villages in the Mt. Elgon area to ensure that the forest was restored.

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** That is correct.

**HOST:** Tell me something: What were these villages like before the project started sensitizing people about replanting trees? In particular, tell me about Sanzara village, downstream of the Sipi River.

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** It was terrible. It was dry, it was hot, and it was very windy. Very few crops did well in conditions like that. You really wonder how the people survived! And yet only two decades or so ago, that place was a forested area.

**HOST:** I understand the trees were cut down for timber and charcoal.

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** That is correct. The lack of trees had left the land unfavourable for agriculture. Like I said, the land was too dusty, too windy, too dry, and so the few crops the people tried to plant never yielded much.

**HOST:** What kind of crops were people growing?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** It was only cassava and maize, and maybe some sunflower. Something needed to be done as soon as possible or else a catastrophe was on the way! That's when IUCN, through the *Ecosystem-based adaptation* project, decided to embark on a plan to restore the forest landscape of the area.

**HOST:** What happened first?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** We sensitized the people about what was going on. We told them that if the vegetation that had been cleared could be restored, their lives would be better. We encouraged them to plant trees. Some of them liked the idea, but some didn't.

**HOST:** Why did some not like the idea?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** Many thought we were tricking them. They thought that if they planted trees in their lands, they would create forests and the government would chase them away from the forests.

**HOST**: Hold on, Mr. Lutakome. What gave them such an idea?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** Different groups of people have invaded Mt. Elgon Park continually over the past few decades to build homes and use it as their own. But the government evicted these people. For some reason, people in this area thought they would also be evicted if they planted trees.

**HOST**: In that case, I can understand why people would be opposed to planting trees.

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** It was not easy. But fortunately, a good number of people realized IUCN was only trying to help, and they were willing to plant trees. But they faced challenges.

**HOST:** What kind of challenges?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** On the one hand, they didn't have seedlings, and on the other hand, the land was too dry to nurture young trees.

**HOST:** What happened then?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** We offered free seedlings and solved the water issue. We piped water from the river and brought it closer to the community so that those who planted trees could water them.

**HOST:** Wow! Watering two hundred trees every day must take a lot of conviction. How did you convince the people to make that kind of effort to rebuild their environment?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** Well, we put aside a fund to motivate people. We paid people 900 shillings for every tree that was planted and nurtured to the point where it could grow on its own. This motivated many people to plant trees and look after them.

**HOST:** Have you started to see a difference in Sanzara village now, as a result of the trees that have been planted?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** A huge difference. The village is now much greener than we found it. This is partly because of the young trees everywhere, and partly because of improved farming practices.

**HOST:** You trained the farmers on farming practices too?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** Yes. These people were traditionally cattle herders. They didn't know much about growing crops. And yet their land had huge potential. So we encouraged them to plant all sorts of crops that were new to them, like *matoke*. We trained them on mulching, on irrigation, on soil management and so on. We discouraged bush burning. We even took them on a trip to other sub-counties in the same district where farming practices were better developed.

**HOST:** That must have motivated them to change their lives, right?

**CHRIS** **Lutakome:** Oh yes. And of course we rewarded people with a few shillings for efforts like mulching, irrigation, digging trenches, and so on. Now there are many *matoke* plantations in a place that had none two years ago. There are fields of maize and Irish potatoes and beans and so on, in a village where almost no crops were grown before the project.

Now trucks leave the village to take crops to major towns. This was unheard of five years ago. I believe that in ten years Sanzara will be a completely different village altogether. I believe that the droughts are going to diminish as the trees grow. I believe that more trees will be planted as the people see the changes they have created themselves.

**HOST:** That was Mr. Chris Lutakome, an IUCN employee who has been working with the farmers in the forest restoration campaign. Whether the forests will be fully restored remains to be seen, but maybe 15 years from now, someone will be shocked to hear that, a few decades earlier, there was not one tree standing in Sanzara. Just like I was shocked when I heard that Sanzara village used to be a forest. If everything continues to go well, this can very possibly happen because there are so many young trees planted everywhere in Sanzara village.

Today, we’ve heard a lot about how planting trees can improve farm incomes, and heal damage to the environment.

Remember to tune in to the program next week, when our topic will be \_\_\_. Goodbye for now from me, \_\_\_.

## Acknowledgements

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**Sources of information**

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