



# STRONG WINDS IN EAST AFRICA

by Celia Nalwadda



**T**he winds of change are currently gaining strength, now blowing through the forest sector in East Africa. The winds are bringing with them a clear shift from public to private sector, especially in the area of commercial plantations. This was just one of the many conclusions to come out of a SPGS/CFA Workshop held in Uganda from 22nd-24th April, 2009. The Commonwealth Forestry Association (CFA) clearly shares the vision that SPGS and UTGA have - namely, to promote and support this private sector investment into plantations.

The Workshop was entitled *“Developing a Commercial Forestry Industry in Eastern Africa: promoting regional cooperation through using case studies from the region”*. It certainly exceeded any expectations we at the SPGS had. The networking alone was fantastic, with many excellent contacts being made for future collaboration. There were representatives present from both public and private forest sectors in Kenya, Tanzania, S. Sudan and Uganda. There were also people involved directly with forestry education, training and research as

well as representatives from two major private investors in the region – namely, Africa Forests (Tanzania and S. Sudan) and Green Resources Ltd. (Tanzania, Mozambique, S. Sudan and Uganda).

The main objective of the workshop was to have commercial forestry recognized as a business with a good potential for developing an industry in the region as well as publicizing the pivotal role played by the private sector in achieving this goal.

To set off the workshop, we had the privilege of Hon. Aston Kajara, Minister of State for Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Investments) delivering the opening speech. He noted the unique nature of the commercial forestry business and commended the private sector’s efforts towards developing the industry. He also welcomed the idea of a regional forum to address current and future challenges of the sector and pledged government’s support in ensuring security of the investments. Jim Ball (CFA Chair) also delivered a keynote address, giving a global perspective on plantation forestry (see HeartWood p.9).

Delegates then got down to business with an update of what is happening in the four countries (Kenya, S. Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda) as regards to commercial forestry. The huge level of investment by both Green Resources and Africa Forests was very encouraging. The SPGS and UTGA models attracted great interest from the foreign delegates too. It was also interesting that all the state forest operations (except in S. Sudan) expressed plans for them to remain as major players in the commercial forest sector – presumably for them to raise revenue in the future (although it was not clear whether the public funds would materialize for such a large scale investment).

It also came out that the challenges faced in the different countries were very similar - for example, land tenure issues, inadequate financing, limited research support, ineffective communication channels and limited technical support in terms of experienced and knowledgeable foresters. This pointed to the need for a regional approach, and delegates were given a working example of the East African Tree Biotechnology Project that is multiplying and disseminating eucalypt hybrid clones in Uganda, Kenya

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and Tanzania. Of course it wouldn't be proper workshop without some serious socializing and so the first day was crowned with a sundowner cocktail to clear the minds of the delegates in preparation for the tough work ahead but also to form important social networks in an informal setting. It must have been the infamous Kampala traffic jam that delayed so many delegates!

Day two was dedicated to identifying the specific challenges and suggested solutions to the four broad themes of: the Investment Climate, Training, Communication and Research. Participants split into groups based on their area of specialization or interest and were guided by a theme group leader. The two hours flew past whilst the groups sifted through pertinent issues and came out with workable solutions. They also nominated individuals to follow up with particular tasks.

The workshop came up with a number of resolutions out of the thematic group discussions which are to be sent to governments, private investors, communities, growers associations, NGOs and development partners.

The visiting delegates were on the third day taken on a safari to visit Ferdult Engineering Company, a commercial tree grower (supported by the SPGS since 2004) in Lugazi, near Jinja. The group had interesting discussions on many issues relating to not just plantation silviculture but also how the SPGS is achieving its results and how the project could be adapted for other countries in the region.

Finally, it was clear from our feedback forms that participants greatly appreciated the idea of bringing together key players in the sector from within the East African region. Many proposed making it a regular event but let us first digest what came out of it. The SPGS and CFA are coordinating the process of drafting resolutions from this gathering: these will be published in the next SPGS News but will be posted earlier onto the web at – [www.sawlog.ug](http://www.sawlog.ug)

*Editor's Note: Celia is an SPGS Plantation Officer as well as CFA's Youth Officer.*

## PROSPECTS FOR INCREASED COMMUNITY SUPPORT



*by Charles Odeke (SPGS Plantation Officer)*

Word is spreading fast as the numbers of communities requesting for support under SPGS's Community Tree Planting Initiative continues to rise. The main reason has been the results seen on the sites already planted by SPGS-supported communities: "seeing is believing" they say!

We have received 60 applications from community groups in 23 districts requiring a minimum of 3 million tree seedlings for community planting. The list is long and this would tie up SPGS staff completely if we were to keep everybody happy. Hence the SPGS needs to think strategically how to deal with such demand as we plan for the project's next phase.

With guidance coming from the recent study of SPGS by consultants for the EU and Norwegian Government, the future of the community tree planting support seems brighter. First, the SPGS might be able to increase the current support to accommodate the demand for seedlings. Secondly it could increase its capacity to handle the expansion – though clearly more staff will need to be recruited. The ultimate goal is not just expanding, but to see the communities planting better and their Associations more organised.

The community support will largely be fine tuned to its original structure of supporting communities surrounding the commercial planters. The supported commercial clients will themselves be in clusters, depending on where they are concentrated. For good reasons, the community support will more or less be concentrated on the identified clusters. We welcome any thoughts on our community support.

Otherwise, by the time of going to press we had delivered 7,500 pine seedlings to 2 Mukono communities, 14,000 pine seedlings reached another 2 communities in Nakasongola. Plans were under way to deliver 19,000 seedlings to 3 communities in Gulu, and some 33,000 seedlings to 4 communities in Western Uganda. Wanyange Tree Growers Assn. in Jinja was in line to receive 6,000 seedlings first to test their interest, provided they have prepared the land on time. Details of what transpired will be in the next SPGS News.



*The foreign visitors at Ferdult's Lugazi plantations.*