

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

A word from Jean-Paul, Managing Director

Dear reader,
Kenya has been subjected to spells of drought and flooding more often than in former years and this affects 70 to 80% of the population. The BGF tree planting programme in arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) is therefore increasing in importance. Our interventions are a contribution at the human scale for solving a universal problem: climate change!

RESEARCH ON *MELIA VOLKENSII*

In the framework of our international cooperation with the University of Nairobi, Kenya Forestry Research Institute and the University of Ghent (Belgium), a workshop was organized in Nairobi on 30th August, on the theme “IN-VITRO PROPAGATION OF *MELIA VOLKENSII* AND ITS DERIVED BIOPESTICIDES”.

In case the theme sounds confusing, let us enlighten you.

Part one is simple enough. It's about propagation -more specific clonal multiplication- of the tree species through in-vitro techniques, meaning in glass containers in a lab. After years of work, we now have a workable protocol to take a competent technician through the whole procedure of mass production of melia. This is a big prize, one that BGF will exploit in the coming years through establishing such a lab for massive cloning of some elite strains of melia, translating in significantly higher yields of our dryland mahogany quality timber.

Part two refers to the existence of some chemical components inside the tree, like in the leaves, bark, fruits & seeds, and roots, which have a repellent and even killing effect on various insects. In other words these chemicals are insecticides, or pesticides in a wider context, and they are natural, hence “biopesticides”. And they are derived or extracted from *M. volkensii*. This should make it clear.

As one can see, both research results are of importance to the company. The advantages of cloning melia are obvious enough, while farmers and horticulturalists, both big and small, are offered an alternative to the traditional pesticides to



Group photo of H.E the Belgian Ambassador with all participants to the workshop. Photo UoN



The Belgian Ambassador in his opening words to the audience of the workshop.

From left to right: Douglas Miamo (representing Department of Plant Science & Crop Protection, University of Nairobi), Prof Moses Nyangito (Dean, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Nairobi), Prof Stefaan Werbrouck (Ghent University, Belgium), His Excellency Peter Maddens. Photo BGF

combat the presence of noxious sucking insects that damage their crops. The beauty of the biopesticide is that small-holders can prepare it themselves through a simple aqueous (watery) solution that can be sprayed on their crops. It virtually costs them nothing, and this has been explained and shown to them during two field demonstrations in rural Kitui county.

To be honest, these insecticidal properties of melia were “traditional or indigenous knowledge”, formerly known to farmers, but as happens so many times it started to be forgotten or neglected, and at this point there is scientific proof, down to the identification of the molecules that do it. This was accomplished through several MSc and one PhD theses.

Now how is this of importance to the company? Firstly, an explanation of a workable fabrication of the insecticide will be part of our farmers training, so farmers can benefit from it, and secondly it is not a completely unreasonable expectation that somewhere in the future they are in an opportunity to collect plant parts and sell them to a company that specializes in commercial production of the biopesticide. This is not farfetched as you might think. Synthetic pesticides, as opposed to natural ones, have proven to pose several potential environmental and human health risks and as such are increasingly being curtailed in several countries, to the benefit of natural, non-persistent, botanical pesticides.

This particular workshop was graced by the presence of the Belgian Ambassador to Kenya, His Excellency Peter Maddens, with representatives of Kenya Forest Service, the Forest Society of Kenya, JICA (the Japan International Cooperation Agency), the KenGen Foundation, and more, apart from the organisers among which ourselves.

BGF CONTINUES WITH ITS FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CERTIFICATION



The meeting on 6th September 2022, left to right: Halima Abdulkadir, Jean-Paul Deprins, Lawrence Muema, Samuel Nakhone, Frida Salim, Paul Opanga, Annah Agasha, Jose Tagle and Peter Alele

On Tuesday 6th September, 2022, an important delegation from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) paid a visit to our Head Office in Nairobi, to discuss progress on the certification process of our plantations and hence our future timber production from *Melia volkensii*. From FSC's part, there was Paul Opanga (Manager Labour Issues), Jose Tagle (Deputy Director Global Network), Annah Agasha (Coordinator, Eastern Africa), Peter Alele (Regional Director FSC for Africa), and Frida Salim (Marketing & Communications). BGF was represented by Jean-Paul Deprins (MD), Jan Vandenabeele (Senior Director Forestry), Samuel Nakhone (Executive Director Forestry), Lawrence Muema (Finance and Operations Director) and Halima Abdulkadir (officer in charge of FSC certification).

Foremost on the agenda was the speed of progress of the certification requirements. BGF confirmed its commitment to be ready for certification by end of this year. This regards a section of our partner-farmers,

later on to be extended towards all the farmers, once lessons-learned can be applied for a wider approach. The same can be said for the certification of our plantations, in Kitui and Lamu counties, and our partner-farmers in Northern Uganda. It's a fact that certification requires quite some work, to be compliant with the 10 principles of FSC. Other points of discussion was a future training & capacity building for BGF staff, while FSC made a promise to give coverage on our certification efforts through their country offices in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The latter point matters for BGF, as those are the countries where our funding originates, with a population quite conscious about responsible forest management, which is what FSC is all about. For FSC, our certification is important, as we will be the first company in Kenya which will certify small-holder farmers growing trees in an agroforestry context. Which is the way of the future.