

Project title: Saving the Environment through Alternative Livelihoods (SEAL Project): A Pilot Project of Dragon Fruit Growing in the Acholi sub-region, Gulu City, Northern Uganda

Northlight Green Services (NGS) in partnership and Hanns Siedel Foundation – Kenya, through funding from The Global Project on Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change (GMACC), is implementing the **SEAL Project – Saving the Environment through Alternative Livelihoods**.

NGS Uganda is an Indigenous Non-Governmental Organization presently operating in Acholi Sub-region, Northern Uganda. Set up as a platform for Social Research, Innovations, Advocacy, and community capacity building for the socio-economic recovery and transformation of Northern Uganda especially in Acholi, West Nile, and Lango sub-region. The mission of NGS is *“to Conduct and Promote Research, Innovations, Advocacy and Community Capacity Building for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation of Northern Uganda especially in Acholi and West Nile sub-regions”*

NGS works to strengthen local participation and ownership in prioritizing solutions to development challenges; enhance the knowledge and capacity of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups to speak up and participate in pertinent issues affecting their well-being, as well as contribute to or influence policy development and action; and with evidence-based and context-specific interventions also designed to address environmental and climate change risks and vulnerabilities in Northern Uganda.

Background to the Project.

NGS Uganda through a rapid assessment and consultations has established that the widespread degradation of the environment in Northern Uganda is attributed to limited livelihood opportunities. Most smallholder farming households are unable to afford alternative livelihood options that are less detrimental to the environment. The Acholi sub-region continues to experience protracted and severe poverty, gender inequalities, mass youth unemployment, and social dislocations. As a result, the majority of the population earns a living through activities that are nature-based and destructive to the environment such as Charcoal burning which is so rampant in Northern Uganda.

There is generally a steady decrease in the quality of the land due to destructive farming practices like rampant bush burning to clear land for cultivation, continuous tillage, and indiscriminate tree felling for the booming charcoal business, among others. These present smallholder farming households with multifaceted challenges that undermine their adaptive capacity, potentially binding them to protracted vulnerability if not tackled holistically.

As NGS we are convinced that Environmental education and related interventions without Alternative Livelihood options most likely will have a limited impact on saving the environment. Charcoal producers need to be introduced and trained on other sustainable income-generating activities. This will ensure they have a source of income to meet their financial needs and hence lower their interest in cutting down trees to make charcoal.

Therefore, NGS designed a project the SEAL Project- *“Saving the Environment through Alternative Livelihood for Charcoal Traders: A pilot project of Dragon fruit growing in the Acholi sub-region (SEAL-Project)”*. **The SEAL Project is NGS's philosophy and approach to environmental conservation.** Through this project, a Demo Learning Centre for the **propagation of Dragon Fruits** will be established at the NGS Regional Office in Ogony Village, Gulu City.

NGS is setting up A Demo Learning Centre

NGS envisions an unmatched need for establishing a **learning center** where various innovations in the **production of dragon fruits**, cocoa, avocado, and other fruits will be demonstrated to inspire learning and adoption.

The center will provide hands-on training for charcoal traders, youth, women, and learning institutions on the propagation and growing of fruit trees which will be integrated with soil and water conservation technologies and permaculture for maximum benefits.

While setting up the learning center, NGS will as much as feasible preserve and maintain pre-existing indigenous tree cover to enhance natural regeneration through technologies like Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration and strive to popularize this among farmers in areas of operation.

Achievements

In the initial phase, May 2024, with support from we established 120 units of dragon fruits, into which Perma gardens will be integrated as feasible to propagate cultivars while illustrating recommended land management practices. The dragon fruit plants are drought-tolerant perennials, less laborious to produce, and of high market value locally and beyond. The center will provide reliable extension services, seedlings/cultivars, and other quality planting materials. Within a year and a half, the center will have over **12,000** cuttings available for distribution to identified charcoal traders and farmers (youth and women), and schools who will be mentored to replicate the enterprises and become out-growers.



Dragon fruit cutting at one-month-old (NGS)



Day 1: Collister M



Trainer demonstrating pruning of dragon fruits (courtesy NGS)



Demonstration of tyre – dragon fruit (NGS Uganda)





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