

# BIOVISION

Newsletter Nr. 21

## Healing with Nature

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A future for all, naturally

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In Africa, forest area is disappearing three times faster than the global average. The consequences are serious, not just for the African continent, but for the whole world.

Picture: Biovision/Peter Lüthi



Forests are much more than just wood

**“Forests and sustainable forestry (can) make an important contribution to sustainable development, alleviation of poverty and the achievement of internationally agreed development goals...”, states a resolution of the UNO General Assembly that designates 2011 as the ‘International Year of Forests’. This is particularly relevant for Africa.**

By Hansjakob Baumgartner

A great number of people in Africa live directly or indirectly from forests. A UNO Environmental Program (UNEP) report found that edible plants and animals from the forest made up between 16 to 20 percent of food supply regionally in Ghana. More than 150 species are used in this way. In some areas, forest products such as rubber, rattan, resin or beeswax play a considerable role in the rural economy. Shea butter, which is derived from the fruit of the karite tree, is one of the most used fats in the skin care industry. It is the second most vital export of Burkina Faso.

Forests are Africa’s most important pharmacy: herbal medicines from the forest are essential for the medical care of 70 to 80 percent of Africans. Wood also covers two thirds of African energy requirements.

In Africa, as it is for us, the forests’ contribution to the health of ecosystems is almost more significant than its products: Forests protect against erosion, slow down the process of desertification, lessen water drainage

and preserve springs and the sources of groundwater from which drinking water is taken.

And they are a refuge of biodiversity. Around a half of all plant and animal species on Earth are found in tropical rainforests. The destruction of their habitat is by far the most significant cause for the dramatic reduction of species diversity globally.

Nowhere else in the world are forests shrinking as rapidly as in Africa. According to the latest report from the World Food Organisation FAO on the condition of the world’s forests, forest cover reduced by 0.62 percent every year in the period from 2000 to 2005. Every second Africa loses an area of forest greater than a football field. The global average reduction is 0.18 percent.

Deforestation and slash and burn clearing are both to blame for man-made climate change. When forests are in chemical balance, they do not lower levels of CO<sub>2</sub>,

# UNDER

## BIOVISION AND FOREST PROTECTION

In the end it is always individual people who decide between destroying or protecting a forest. Biovision is dedicated to ensuring that they undertake this decision in an informed, aware and responsible way. Those affected also need an alternative, and genuinely viable means of generating income. Awareness of the worth of the forest and its ecological services is also required. Whoever knows that the forest conserves water, regulates local climate and is therefore a decisive factor in whether harvests are good or bad, will not make the decision between destruction and conservation lightly.

they do not reduce CO<sub>2</sub>: whatever growing trees absorb is released again by decomposing trees. In the meanwhile forests are huge storage places for carbon dioxide. Around 100 gigatonnes are sequestered in the organic matter of Africa's forests. That is thirteen times as much CO<sub>2</sub> released by humanity every year by burning fossil fuels. With every hectare that is cleared, a part of this escapes into the atmosphere. Around 20 percent of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide are attributed to deforestation. In Africa it's almost half.

The biggest cause of forest destruction in Africa is the hunger for land. At present it is mostly small-scale farmers that monopolize the cleared areas, but increasingly forests must also give way to large plantations which produce for export. FAO fears that this method of agriculture could be a contributing factor in the decline of forests in the future.

In the Congo Basin specifically, forestry plays a fatal role. For a tip, companies from all over the world have won concessions to plunder immense forest areas. According to the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), in the tropics of Africa barely 6 percent of managed forests are used sustainably.

To ameliorate this overexploitation, FAO has put the case for an agroforestry usage pattern that builds on knowledge adopted from local people. In addition, their rights should be clearly laid out and local institutions strengthened. The fact that this approach is urgently needed in Africa has been supported by an ITTO report, according to which only around 2 percent of

The Biovision Foundation gives both aspects due consideration in its projects: promotion of income generation independent of forests and targeted education and information for the local population.



[www.biovision.ch/forest](http://www.biovision.ch/forest)

African forest area is under the control of the local population. In Asia and South America it is one third. But international climate policy offers a possible opportunity. The REDD concept (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) is planning a system of incentives for sustainable forestry, financed within the framework of the climate convention. Developing countries that conserve their forests can for example trade in carbon certificates corresponding to the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that would be released by clearing. The services that forests provide and the populations that sustainably use and conserve them will thereby be safeguarded.

Hansjakob Baumgartner is a freelance journalist in Bern

Without traditional healers, most people in Uganda would be without medical care



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Weekly visits from the traditional healer: Wumal Ndiwalana, Project Assistant with PROMETRA Uganda, looks at the skin of a patient.

Learning from each other: Every Wednesday between 160 and 250 healers meet in Buiija Forest to train and further educate one another in traditional medicine and ecological agriculture.

Betsy Nakate with the medicinal plants that she uses in the treatment of Aids. In Uganda, traditional healers are pillars of healthcare.

Photos: Biovision / Peter Lüthi

Human and Environmental Health

## The Garden Pharmacy

With her finely drawn face and young age, Betsy Nakate does not exactly present the picture we in Europe conjure when we think of an African herbalist (see title picture of this edition). But Mrs Nakate is a traditional healer in Kyangoma, around 60km southwest from Kampala in Uganda, where she lives with her husband and four children on a small farm. The farm can only be reached by following a winding path through rolling hills, past small fields and shady groves of trees. The scenery is idyllic, but the reality is harsh for people here and their livelihoods are modest.

On one side of the farm are two small houses, where flowers, herbs and shrubs thrive in the shade of the trees. "That is my herb garden with around 150 different healing plants", Betsy Nakate explains proudly. She knows the name of all of them and knows how to cultivate and nourish them, when to harvest them and which parts can be made into salves, infusions or teas. "We only use the leaves, flowers and bark of the plants, but not the roots, because this would harm the plant and nature", she explains. The traditional healer makes around 50 different products from her plants and knows which complaints and diseases they will treat. She cares for patients from fifty families in her village. In addition she sells or gives away her medicines. "Of course it would be very good for me and my family to earn money", she says and adds emphatically "but saving lives is so much more important."

### Medicinal plants and ecological farming

Mrs Nakate belongs to a group of around 250 men and women small-scale farmers being trained by PROMETRA Uganda, a branch of the NGO of the same name, to become healers. Every Wednesday Mrs Nakate travels to the meeting in the forest of Buiija, where traditional healers from the Mpigi District learn from one another under the guidance of PROMETRA. As well as learning traditional medical care, they also learn ecological cultivation methods, with which they can markedly improve their agricultural harvests. This is very important as they could never live from their work as healers alone and must ensure their livelihood as small-scale farmers.

The activities of PROMETRA Uganda fit well with Biovision's strategy. This project in Mpigi has been supported by the Swiss foundation since 2009. The healers are very important, not just for medical care for the people, but also for their function as role models for environmental health and in particular for the conservation of threatened forests.

[www.biovision.ch/projects](http://www.biovision.ch/projects)



A newly-trained 'Mosquito Scout' analyses water samples for mosquito larvae.  
Photo: Biovision / Verena Albertin

Stop Malaria in Ethiopia

## Trees against malaria mosquitoes

Fewer mosquitoes mean less malaria – this is the simple equation in the fight against this dreaded tropical disease. The carriers of the disease live in high density in the larval stage and are scarcely mobile in bodies of standing water such as puddles or pools, worn out tyres or plastic refuse. In these breeding sites the larvae can be easily and more efficiently dealt with rather than later in the adult stage, as mosquitoes.

For years the Biovision Foundation has been supporting icipe\* projects in Kenya that successfully eradicate mosquito larvae using environmentally friendly means. These experiences are now being applied in a pilot project in Ethiopia. Using the Kenyan model, local people in Gibhe Valley, south of Addis Ababa, are being trained as Mosquito Scouts. Special attention is given to the use of extracts from the leaves and bark of the neem tree, which are being tested for efficiency in decimating mosquito larvae. Neem is widespread in Ethiopia and can be used cost-effectively by those affected for ecological mosquito control. Initial results are very promising. In addition, the production and sale of neem saplings can be good way to make extra income for the people of the project area.  
[www.biovision.ch/projekte](http://www.biovision.ch/projekte)

\*African Insect Science for Food and Health, Nairobi. [www.icipe.org](http://www.icipe.org)

Commentary

## Healers Serving People and Nature

60% of Ugandans utilise Traditional medicine (TM) and healers for relief of symptoms and in chronic and difficult ailments because Uganda is poorly serviced with western medicine. There is one doctor for every 25,000 people. Switzerland's density of doctors is a hundred times higher, with average of one doctor for every 250 citizens. Healers have significantly contributed towards combatting AIDS and its secondary disorders in Uganda where HIV/AIDS is widespread without medication for thousands of suffering patients. Healers are role models in respectful handling of cultural biodiversity, natural forests, medicinal plants and indigenous knowledge. Healers value forests for health-giving services, habitats of medicinal and non-medicinal species, favourable climate, water flows in rivers and springs, and psychological well-being. This is very important in a time when habitat loss, degradation, over-exploitation, climate change and lack of propagation of 'wild' plants, are contributing to steady erosion of this indigenous knowledge on biodiversity. PROMETRA Uganda NGO focuses on the cultivation, care and documentation of medicinal plants with a deliberate aim of poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation despite lack of scientifically demonstrated value, weak market structure and lack encouragement. Healers needs and PROMETRA activities are transformational, availing collaborative opportunities between researchers, healers, doctors and local communities towards, improved healer's practice, documentation, health, sustainable biodiversity utilization, household/community income, clear policy directions on cultivation and commercialization of medicinal plants, value addition and poverty alleviation.

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### Yahaya Sekagya, Uganda

Dr. Yahaya Sekagya studied dentistry at the state Makerere University. Today he is a spiritual healer and director of PROMETRA Uganda. This NGO promotes traditional medicine and human health as well as reciprocal exchange between traditional African medicine and western medicine. PROMETRA is Biovision's partner organisation in Uganda. Dr. Sekagya was a guest speaker at the 2010 Biovision Symposium in Zurich.  
Photo: Biovision / Peter Lüthi

[www.infonet-biovision.org](http://www.infonet-biovision.org)

This internet platform from Biovision provides free, up-to-date information on organic farming and income generation in East Africa to state agricultural advisers, experts from goal-related organisations and farmers' groups. Here is an example on the topic of medicinal plants.



Generating income without destroying the forest: cultivating Kilimanjaro basil in Tanzania

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#### Basil harvests

The leaves of Kilimanjaro basil can be plucked after four to six months. In contrast to other plant cultures it is not dependent on the seasons, making a regular income possible for farmers.

#### “Naturub”

An essential oil is derived from the dried basil leaves which contains basil, camphor, tarragon and ursolic acid, and which is made into a kind of African tiger balm called „Naturub”.

Photos: Biovision / Peter Lüthi

Click on Infonet-Biovision

## Ocimum kilimanscharicum

*Ocimum Kilimandscharicum* (Kilimanjaro basil) originally comes from East Africa but is also cultivated in India and Turkey. This round, evergreen, perennial shrub belongs to the Lamiaceae family and grows to 2m high in the tropics. It has tetragonal, lanuginous branches and oblong, opposite and serrated leaves. These contain aromatic oil with white crystals that can be extracted through distillation. The crystals smell of natural camphor.

#### Agricultural Aspects

- ▶ *Ocimum Kilimandscharicum* (Kilimanjaro basil) thrives on clay or sandy soil with annual rainfall of around 1250mm, in tropical temperatures up to 900 metres above sea level.
- ▶ It can be propagated from cuttings or seeds
- ▶ The leaves can be harvested three times a year for at least three years
- ▶ The plant is avoided by animals. Its thick root structure protects against erosion
- ▶ The plant is undemanding and cultivation is not labour intensive. Harvesting the leaves and processing them into oil is, however, time-consuming.

#### Medical properties and application

In East Africa basil extract is traditionally used to treat colds, coughs, abdominal pain and diarrhoea. It is also used as insect repellent against mosquitoes and also to protect harvests from plant pests. *Ocimum kilimandscharicum* has been classified by research as

Protagonists in Biovision Projects

## Hypolimnas antevorta

In Papiliorama in Kerzers (Fribourg) it is one of the attractions, it is coveted by collectors: with a wingspan of 9 to 11 centimetres the splendidly-coloured Great Eggfly (*hypolimnas antevorta*) is one of the giants of the butterfly world.

The species is found in Africa's tropical forests in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The butterfly feeds on a diverse range of plant juices and nectar. The caterpillars feed on acanthus plants that primarily bloom in the tropics and resemble mint plants. After mating the female lays her eggs on the underside of such a plant. After a few weeks the caterpillars emerge, pupating from many layers.

The species name is mystical: Antevorta is the name of an Italian goddess of childbirth who could see into the future. If the butterfly also has this miraculous capacity it can make no use of it: after pupating it lives for only one and a half months.



*Hypolimnas antevorta* also occurs in the forests of the Eastern Usambara Mountains in Tanzania, where Biovision supports local people to cultivate medicinal plants without destroying the forest, which aids conservation of biodiversity.

Photo: Flickr (left). Biovision / Peter Lüthi (right)

an aromatic plant with bioactive qualities and can be used in pharmaceutical products, aromatherapy and in pest control.

Visit Infonet-Biovision online:  
[www.infonet-biovision.org](http://www.infonet-biovision.org)



„The time that I invest in visiting PROMETRA's forest school is not lost.“

Says Deo Sekabira Salongo.

„The knowledge that I have gathered there greatly helps our health and our harvests.“

Photo: Biovision / Peter Lüthi

A day in the life of Deo Sekaira Salongo and Goneth Natikonde

## „We have a good life!“

Deo Sekabira Salongo's eyes shine with the sheer joy of living. One believes him when he says that he and his family have a good life. „We have enough to eat and we are healthy“, he says contentedly, pulling his children close to him and casting a hopeful look at his wife, Goneth Natikonde. She agrees with him, but differentiates: „Our life is good – especially after the harvest.“ She would like to keep more cows as it is a quicker way to earn money. Deo nods: „That would provide more manure and therefore a bigger harvest. We can't increase the soil“, he explains, „but we can increase the harvest!“

Their house is somewhat remote on the edge of Kigon-go village, southwest from Kampala, near to Lake Victoria in Uganda. When you visit him, you have the feeling of stepping into a forest. Large trees and many shrubs stand side by side. It is not a forest, but a farm. Deo let the trees remain or planted new ones. They give shade for maize, rice and bananas, and also coffee, vanilla and medicinal plants. In between stems and leaves, 15 chickens forage for food, two cows, a calf and a bull doze, tethered under the shade of the leaves. A metre above the ground, three pigs are grunting. Deo constructed the pigsty as a pile dwelling on a gently sloping wood platform, so that the slurry runs to the lower end, and from there to the manure heap on the ground. The manure is very valuable to him, as is the compost he makes professionally.

The married couple switched to organic farming in 2001 after Deo completed a course.

Everything has its time

## A legacy for Biovision

All life must come to an end. That's why it makes sense to put things in order in good time. Perhaps you would like to leave a legacy behind and continue to do good beyond your lifespan. You have the opportunity to include organisations such as the Biovision Foundation in your will. With a bequest you can ensure that your will is carried out according to your wishes.

If you have any questions or you would like to order our free advice booklet on leaving a bequest, please contact Reto Urech on +41 44 341 97 19 or [r.urech@biovision.ch](mailto:r.urech@biovision.ch)



[www.biovision.ch/legate](http://www.biovision.ch/legate) Photo: Biovision / Peter Lüthi

## „People come to us because we have better quality“

„Conventional farming has many negative side effects,“ he explains. „Chemicals destroy soil life, and therefore the soil too. And pesticides and fertilisers are expensive.“ Manure and compost, however, are free, and thanks to organic farming, crop rotation and mixing crops he has much better harvests than before, he reports. In 2005 Goneth and Deo began cultivating medicinal plants. Since then he has been going on Wednesdays to the forest school in Buiija, which PROMETRA Uganda leads with traditional healers from the district. He is fully supported by his wife. „We spoke about it and decided that he should take the course while I look after the children“, she explains. The knowledge gained is applied on their farm – which is doing much better than others in the region. When asked about his market advantages despite being in a bad position set apart from the street, Deo does not hesitate for even a second: „Customers come to us because we have better quality!“



Rachel Agola, organic farmer from Kenya and Dr. Hans Rudolf Herren, President of the Biovision Foundation at the ceremony for the One World Award in Legau, South Germany. The award is given to personalities who have dedicated themselves through innovative projects, engagement and courage to a better future. It is conferred by the German organic enterprise 'Rapunzel Naturkost' under the patronage of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement). Photo: OWA

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One World Award for 'Push-Pull' Projects

## Women farmers, Hans Rudolf Herren and Biovision are lauded

On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2010, the Kenyan organic farmer Rachel Agola, with Hans Rudolf Herren and the Biovision Foundation accepted the second international 'One World Award'. She was lauded for the successful development and application of the organic 'Push-Pull' method to protect maize plants from pests in East Africa. Rachel was very moved: "I am standing here as a representative of all small-scale farmers in Africa, and would like to thank Biovision above all for their work and the dissemination of the 'Push-Pull' method. This helped us to improve our livelihood. By tripling or quadrupling the maize harvest we can finally combat hunger in the country."

[www.one-world-award.de](http://www.one-world-award.de)

### You can help people in Africa.

Thank you for your donation  
Donation account PC 87-193093-4



Active for Biovision

## Birthday celebration to show solidarity

Thomas Juen from Effretikon, on the occasion of his milestone birthday, decided to show solidarity with Africa rather than receive presents himself. He chose the project 'Bustani ya Tushikamane' in Morogoro, Tanzania. Alongside friends and relatives he invited a representative from Biovision to the party which introduced the project to the horde of guests. 2100 CHF was collected which will be used in Morogoro to train men and women farmers in organic farming. Biovision sincerely and warmly thanks Mr. Juen and his guests for this most welcome support!



Photo: Claudio Juen

Advance notification of book release

## Biography of Hans Rudolf Herren



At the beginning of May the orell füssli Verlag is publishing a book about the first Swiss World Food Prize laureate, Hans Rudolf Herren. It was authored by renowned NZZ editor Herbert Cerutti, to whom Herren spoke about his childhood on the farm in Wallis, of his first experiences of organic pest control in Engadin, his research years in Africa, his work with the Millennium Institute and the implementation of his vision as President of the Biovision Foundation. You can get the book from May 2011 at your bookstore or order it from the Biovision Foundation: [www.biovision.ch/shop](http://www.biovision.ch/shop), Tel. 044 341 97 18

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