

LESSONS FROM RWABAGOMA KITENGA ON CLEARING EUCALYPTUS FROM NABAKAZI WETLAND BUFFER ZONES.

Broadcast on Community Green Radio / Radio Kiboga Overview

Community Green Radio hosted a live talk show featuring residents of Kiboga and Rwabagoma Kitenga sub county in Mubende, who have been leading wetland restoration in their areas. The participants shared firsthand experience of clearing eucalyptus trees from the buffer zones of Nabakazi wetland to allow natural rejuvenation. The discussion aimed to document lessons learnt for a wider CGR listenership across Gomba, Mubende, Kiboga, Kassanda among others.



Plate 1. Participants during the radio talk show



Plate 2. Participants during the radio talk show

The talk show was attended by community members from Kiboga and Rwabagoma in Kitenga who included the chairperson of the local wetland management group, a women involved in replanting, an elder with traditional knowledge of Nabakazi wetland and other wetlands linked with it. David Kureeba program coordinator and Joan Nanteza from the CGR outreach team and Nsamba Peter the radio program moderator and who recorded the session.

Key points discussed included;

a) Why was eucalyptus cleared

Participants explained that eucalyptus planted inside and along the buffer of Nabakazi wetland had drastically lowered the water table. Springs that once flowed year-round dried up, and crops near the wetland started failing during dry seasons. The community, with support from NAPE through provision of pangas, axes, and protective gear, agreed to remove the trees from a 30-meter buffer zone of the wetland. They stressed that cutting was done selectively, leaving indigenous trees and shrubs to support regrowth in the wetland ecosystem.

b) Farmer managed natural regeneration

Within a short period of clearing eucalyptus from the wetland, participants reported visible changes. Water began pooling again into previously dry sections, papyrus, and wild yams started regenerating slowly without planting. Birds started returning slowly, and the intensity of frogs' voice were also registered. The elder noted that medicinal plants like omugyombwe and omululuza that had disappeared were now sprouting. The Woman added that she was optimistic that the cutting of eucalyptus allowed the returning of wetland vegetation which improved hopes of accessing basket-weaving materials and grass for thatching houses in the near future, as well as mulches for their gardens for improved crop yield.

3. Lessons learnt for wider listenership

There are about four practical lessons that were learnt from the talk show and these include: Community ownership comes first Restoration worked because the decision to clear eucalyptus was made by the community after discussing water shortages and crop loss. Use what you cut: Felled eucalyptus was used for firewood and construction by households, which reduced resistance and ensured no waste. Protect the buffer, not just the center: Leaving a wide buffer free of eucalyptus and crops allows the wetland to filter water and recharge groundwater naturally. Follow up with indigenous planting: Where natural regrowth was slow, they planted local species like Luganda: omuvule and musizi obtained from community nurseries supported by the program.

4. Challenges and how they addressed them

Participants admitted initial resistance from households who feared losing timber income was resolved through community meetings and demonstrating alternative income from beekeeping and Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP). They also noted the need for continued patrols to prevent replanting of eucalyptus in the buffer.

5. Conclusion

The Rwabagoma Kitenga experience shows that wetland recovery is possible when communities have the right tools and knowledge. The returning water and biodiversity in Nabakazi wetland have strengthened local resilience to drought and improved livelihoods. CGR listeners were encouraged to visit the site, replicate the buffer-zone approach, and contact the station's outreach team for support. As the chairperson concluded: "We cut the eucalyptus, but what we really planted was hope. If we protect Nabakazi, it will protect us back in this era of climate change where our area is hit hard by dry spells"