Farmer Tree Nursery as a Catalyst for Developing Sustainable Best Management Land Use Practices in Lake Victoria Catchments Ecosystem

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Support to farmer nurseries is classified as either hard referring to material inputs (tree seed, water, tools and fencing) or soft (information, training and backstopping advice). Against a background of poor services for smallholder farmers in the Lake Victoria basin, it was hypothesized that a number of support agents operating at the grassroot level together with farmers themselves provide the different support functions needed in the establishment of farmer tree nurseries. Through financial support from Inter-University Council of East Africa coordinated VicReS Project, a collaborative project involving Kenyatta University (Kenya), Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) and Mulingano Agricultural Research Institute (Tanzania) has been able to initiate reforestation/afforestation activities in Lake Victoria catchments ecosystems of western Kenya and western Tanzania. Through the initial activities, a total of twenty four farmer groups have been identified in western Kenya and supported through capacity building and supply of basic inputs for tree nursery seed bed preparation and management. The groups have been able to set up tree nurseries and are now managing seed beds with a total of 450,000 agro-forestry seedlings, mainly Grevillea robusta and Casuarina spp. The farmers intend to distribute the seedling among the members for planting on farm boundaries, around homesteads and woodlots within their homesteads and sell the surplus. Preliminary findings show that there is an urgent need to facilitate grassroot level support systems with larger participation from the national extension service for provision of training and backstopping advice. Strengthening the human capital of farmers and service providers emerges as critical in increasing impact. Farmer nurseries are shown to play a number of important and interrelated functions in building natural, human and social capital. Monitoring and evaluating farmer nurseries in catalyzing these three functions should therefore receive proper attention in assessing impact of sustainable land use systems. Policies need to be well articulated to address some of the major constrains identified in the Lake Victoria catchments ecosystem.