

PLANT A BILLION TREE CAMPAIGN: A tool kit to make the dream work for the youth and by the youth.



Some time this year, a campaign to plant a billion trees was launched by the international body United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). However, as much as we try to make the dream work, it is evident that there are some teething problems that are still a hindrance for many who aspire to achieve these goals. By those who “aspire” to achieve these goals, I mean those who have gone miles ahead to sacrifice their resources without demanding for any assistance from any donor organizations to do what they want to do. I am happy to note that we already have many such individuals who will go to greater lengths to make such a noble idea succeed.

It is therefore very important for all of us, who would like to make the dream a reality, to ask ourselves some fundamental questions;

- What kind of trees to plant and at what areas?
- Is the tree relevant for the community around?
- How do those living within these communities value the tree?
- Is there a guarantee that the trees will be taken care of until they pass their crucial stages?
- Are you in able to visit the trees at all time to monitor and evaluate the progress of you tree planting initiative?
- What steps are you willing to take if the trees don't succeed?

As we make these dreams come true, one very important aspect for us to note is that we are not all experts when it comes to issues to deal with trees and therefore we may be constantly be in need for proper guidance when we want to plant the trees. Coordination among various groups therefore is a fundamental tool to achieve these goals.

WHAT KIND OF TREES TO PLANT AND AT WHAT AREAS?

This is very crucial considering the fact that there are those trees that one has to think and reason hard before planting any where. Planters should know that not all the trees are planted any where. Depending on your main objective of volunteering to plant a tree, there may be need to have some consultations before venturing on the event. Some trees such as eucalyptus are really good when it comes to trees for firewood. However, as riparian vegetation, it instead cause more harm that good. This is because it known to

draw more water from underground with its deep roots. Others also apply to medicinal trees, recreational trees, and any other tree that one may want to plant for that matter. Indigenous trees are the most suitable trees to be planted within the riparian vegetation because they have the capability to cope with any conditions of the regions. Plantations are a good example. They are good for the economy but as most of them are exotic, they end up drying the rivers close to them thereby doing more harm than good. Such a scenario has been experienced in the Mau Catchments in Kenya where the main river within the catchments. The river is now always unstable compared to the past river flows.

IS THE TREE RELEVANT FOR THE COMMUNITY AROUND?

Another important aspect for those willing to plant trees is to answer the question whether the trees you want to plant for the community has any beneficial input to it. It does help to put up trees that the community does not gain any direct or indirect benefit for the community. These benefits however, must be weighed upon the risks of allowing the communities to reap from the trees when they are grown. It is therefore upon the volunteer to look for ways of convincing the community of the benefits which are more indirect rather than direct. Direct benefits usually have more harm than good to both the trees and, strategically, to the community as well. It would be therefore prudent enough to let the community know that they can also reap from the trees from activities such as bee keeping activities and ecotourism by creating facilities such as nature trail.

Communities from the rural areas may be in need of fuel trees and timber trees more than any other kind trees. It is true that this becomes a tough situation as you can not convince the community not to use the tree. However, this does not mean defeat. One may employ another tactic that will ensure that as one of the trees is removed, then another is planted. A mixture of the trees may also be planted in order to ensure that not all the trees are removed. In this case, medicinal trees and fruit trees may be encouraged here. This will make the community reap from the fruits thereby ensuring that they take care of the trees.

HOW DO THOSE LIVING WITHIN THESE COMMUNITIES VALUE THE TREE?

For a community to value the tree there must be some prior information disseminated to them on the benefits of these trees to them. It is from this realization that they will come to embrace the idea of planting the tree. Getting the community involved through self will is a crucial aspect for the survival of the trees planted. This is because they will be able to take care of the trees by their own. It does not help to plant a billion trees but only one survives. The community therefore becomes a crucial tool in making this work by nurturing the trees to their complete success.

IS THERE A GUARANTEE THAT THE TREES WILL BE TAKEN CARE OF UNTIL THEY PASS THEIR CRUCIAL STAGES

Once the community has accepted the fact that trees are integral part of their community, the next step is to convince them to take care of the trees planted. This is mainly possible if these trees are planted on individual farms. If the farms have crops, it becomes possible since as they work on their crops, they at the sometime work on the trees as well until the trees are able to support themselves. Another suitable strategy is to plant the trees on most government properties such as the hospitals, administration office lands, etc. This will ensure that the administrators will take it upon themselves to take care of the trees. It is from the crucial stages of the trees growth that the trees may be left to grow on their own. This period varies from trees to trees and again this call for consultations with the various tree experts.

ARE YOU IN ABLE TO VISIT THE TREES AT ALL TIME TO MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE PROGRESS OF YOUR TREE PLANTING INITIATIVE?

Monitoring and evaluation of the trees progress is also one of the most crucial aspects if ones tree planting initiative is to be successful. This involves post visits and ensuring that the trees arte indeed growing as expected. In many occasions, one always assumes that once the trees have been planted, it is a guarantee that they will grow. This may not happen depending on many factors, mentioned above. It is therefore upon the planter to ensure that he or she visits the trees planted to know their progress and make a decision on the next step. If you take it as you project, it would not make such a problem for you. Remember that you had invested on it by sacrificing your money and time, which are very important resources for all.

WHAT STEPS ARE YOU WILLING TO TAKE IF THE TREES DON'T SUCCEED?

Well this is what will determine you success or your failure. One interested in succeeding will always be willing to go a step further till success is met. My advice would be Plant another and try to locate why the first one failed and rectify the mistake to make the dream a success.