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## **“CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME” BETHANY LAND INSTITUTE CHANGES YOUTHS WELL-BEING IN LUWEERO DISTRICT THROUGH THE USE OF INDIGENOUS FARMING SYSTEMS**

Nyombi Simon is a head of training programs at Bethany Land Institute in Nandere parish. Programs at Bethany include environmental conservation and outreach. The institute addresses environmental challenges affecting Uganda, such as poverty, environmental degradation, and food insecurity. The approach used integral ecology which is a combination of agro-ecology and spirituality. This means in the farming systems used focus on treating every component of the ecosystem as God's creation providing a favorable environment for both living and non-living things.

Bethany Land Institute was started by 3 British friends who started by discussing the different challenges affecting Uganda at the celebration of their 25 years of priesthood, that's how Bethany Land Institute came into existence in response to Pope's letter. In 2018, the Kasana Luweero diocese secured land for the initiation of the institute.

The inspiration for this program was from Pope's letter that was published in 2015 titled "Care for our common home." The training institution takes on youth from Primary seven as a minimum qualification, reaches out to communities through the community outreach program, farming groups

The three programs at Bethany Land Institute were named after the three siblings mentioned in the story of Bethany i.e. Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

### ***The Lazarus forest***

This is a physical classroom for environmental conservation education where trainees and farmers and the community learn about how the environment can effectively be conserved, through tree planting, different agroforestry systems, how to raise trees from nurseries, and how the nonwoody trees can be economically used in ecotourism. Currently, the largest natural forest in Luweero is the Lazarus forest which covers 244 acres of land.

### ***Mary's School***

It's a program that trains youth and farmers to change their mindset towards agriculture production. The caretaker is trained in the principles and practices of conservation agriculture based on integration, zero waste, indigenous seed, non-synthetic inputs, and

minimum tillage (all this is on a foundation of hard work, love, and care for creation). It involves agro-tourism destinations in livestock (dairy cows, pigs, poultry birds, goats, rabbits, fish farming, pasture establishments, feed processing crop production (banana, vegetables), and soil management (organic manures and pest repellants).

### **Martha's market**

This offers training in agro-business leadership and eco-sustainability, and if one visited Martha's market, he/she has the opportunity to see the viability of integral ecology farming approaches on a large scale, post-harvest handling, and value addition; this is where also one gets nursery tree seedlings and a variety of agro-products.

All this was done to reduce the excessive environmental degradation through human activities (use of herbicides, pesticides, and other agrochemicals), poverty, and food insecurity in Uganda. The use of chemicals affects the quality of air, water, and the natural growth of plants and animals which has resulted in a population with complicated health issues that cannot be addressed.

Some of the activities included; raising tree seedlings that were supplied to the community most especially the endangered tree species like mvule trees covidex trees, *Terminalia*, *Molina*, rosemary, and other herbal trees intercropped with other crops; BLI mobilized over 25 variety indigenous banana plants from the community that they were preserving because people have ignored them yet very nutritious and useful to one's health, bean varieties like lima beans and many more. The institute also promoted the use of compost manure, fertilizer from Tithonia, and animal urine (human, rabbit, etc) which they made and always encouraged the community to avoid chemicals and adapt to the organic fertilizers and manures that existed at BLI.

### **Achievements**

At the very beginning, the bishop availed 14 seminarians by then who some are now priests as pioneers to be trained in these activities/ programs at BLI and these have acted as ambassadors of the institute outside the parishes where they were. BLI had so far partnered with 3 schools( 1 secondary school and 2 primary schools), two village communities in the radius of the institute have been also impacted positively and replicating what was trained

About 25 trainees had completed 2 years of training at the institute and currently, 30 trainees undertaking certificate award training.

## **Challenges**

Space limitations in terms of accommodation and training halls and only 32 trainees can be accommodated yet more people want the program. The outreach program was still limited by space as farmers are stopped from accessing the institute because of the numbers.

## **Recommendations**

*Simon says, "If one used the hybrid seeds that means every season one has to buy other seeds which makes it expensive, also purchase of the agrochemicals always in long run turns to be expensive. All the nutrients we have come from the soil so much respect should be given to the soil such that it can give us what we deserve. Let all be responsible for the environment as we respect nature. In all attempts to create wealth let everyone embrace environmental preservation."*

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