

Growing extra trees, shrubs raises smallholders \$50/year

By [Gilbert Nakweya](#)

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When smallholder farmers mix trees and shrubs into their lands it increases their revenues by almost \$50 per person per year, a study has revealed.



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The practise – known as agroforestry – has long been promoted as a way to protect the environment by reducing the risk of drought and preventing soil erosion.

However, the research study in Kenya reveals that there is also an economic incentive for farmers to take it up.

"This is just under US\$50 per year per capita, or about three per cent of overall household consumption expenditure," explains Karl Hughes at the World Agroforestry Centre, who was the lead author of the [study](#).

During the study, published in the journal World Development this month (7 January), the team investigated the level of tree and shrub growing among 432 smallholders in 60 Kenyan villages where agroforestry had been promoted for over a decade.

They matched 61 villages not using agroforestry to the 60 villages across Bungoma and Kakamega counties of Kenya where Vi Agroforestry, a Swedish non-governmental organisation programme, had promoted agroforestry to smallholders.

Uptake low

Judith Oduol, a co-author of the study and an agricultural economist at the World Agroforestry Centre, says that while agroforestry has been promoted for its potential to rehabilitate degraded landscapes, its potential for improving status of the

recipients of technology such as household income, food security and helping people cope climate change consequences is limited due to low uptake.

"Adoption of agroforestry and other natural resource management practices is still low in low-income countries," says Oduol, adding that there is a need for new approaches to boost the scale-up and adoption of innovative agroforestry interventions.

But Augustine Bunyasi, a smallholder farmer who adopted agroforestry about a decade ago, says that most rural farmers may have not adopted the practice for lack of information on the need for agroforestry.

"A farmer wants to understand why every activity on the farm matters," says Bunyasi. He calls for increased sensitisation, especially on the socio-economic benefits to smallholders in villages.

This, he says, should be done through peer groups to have a lasting impact rather than using non-locals to sensitise the smallholders.

Oscar Simanto, the head of Forestry Extension Management Department at that Kenya Forest Service, says that he is not surprised the study found agroforestry to have increased household incomes of smallholders.

"The power of agroforestry systems as an important source of rural incomes and food has not been fully exploited," he says. Simanto cites challenges facing agroforestry in Kenya including the biased sharing of benefits in favour of men at household level, poor access to markets, and weak institutional capacities of associations to represent the interests of farmers.

He also said there were inadequate support services from agricultural workers who teach farmers new knowledge and practices to help farmers acquire critical information required for growing quality trees.

"In order for agroforestry to thrive beyond subsistence, the government should purposively provide a conducive policy and legislative environment and incentives for its development," says Simanto.

This piece was produced by [SciDev.Net's sub-Saharan Africa English desk](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gilbert Nakwanya is a journalist from Kenya interested in coverage of scientific issues with a bias to the developing world. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Communication and Journalism degree from Kenya's Moi University. He is currently pursuing Master's degree in Communication Studies, Development Communications major at the University of Nairobi in Kenya.

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