Project Update September 2026

Dear Friends,
May God's peace be with all of you!

It is time to write about what I have seen and been a part of in the past couple of months, and I have a good morning to work on this here at Gamboula, Central African Republic. (CAR)
Since June 14 we have been out of Congo due to the Ebola outbreak in the far east of the country, which is more than 500 miles from our region. There have been no confirmed cases of Ebola in any of the provinces we normally work in yet, until yesterday. A person arrived on a boat to the Mongala River port of Akula in the South Ubangi province as announced yesterday. The man was sick and was transferred to the Gwaka hospital south of Gemena and died there. It has been confirmed that he had Ebola. He had come from the eastern Congo. This is not good news for anybody that I can think of. We pray that this one death will not be the beginning of an outbreak in that area. Health workers have quarantined 38 people who had contact with this young man.
I was granted permission to make a 10 day visit or so to Karawa, where we live in Congo, last month. I was able to do that and crossed back into CAR on the 16th of August. I have done my three weeks out of Congo now and am free to travel to the USA any time after this.
Meanwhile, while I was in Congo, other matters aside, I was able to visit the Kanana Center Development Farm and visit several of our Agroforestry Participant's fields to see how they are doing. The reports I have been getting have been generally good, but there was this problem with a disease killing many trees of the one tree species most useful to our conditions for soil improvement and firewood and building material production. We have a plan for continuing with that species using new planting material from an area where there is no disease problem and making sure we don't plant any new trees from there within at least 50 yards from where any that had been affected were planted. That effort will take place next year.
This year we decided to have all the participants plant another species of Acacia that is not affected by this problem. This has been a bit of a challenge and has cost us a bit more too, because this alternate choice has one major issue that the Acacia angustissima doesn't have, and that is transplanting this new tree with good success requires that it be planted in a nursery in planting bags and then removing the bag carefully in the field as it is being planted. Doing this gives a high percentage of success of around 90% by my own guess. I did do some counting and follow up, but not enough to give a better guess than the 90% survival rate. This means we have to have planting bags while the other tree doesn't need them and is transplanted very well, bare rooted, because it has a tap root that is like a thin carrot that stores energy. If any care is taken to keep the bare roots from being overly exposed to the air and sunlight during the process, survival rates of that tree

being transplanted in this manner run about 98.5% according to our experiments and experience. Therefore the A. angustissima is much easier and cheaper to work with and less labor intensive as well. Transporting 600 seedlings of A. angustissima takes one person carrying a bundle or two, of bare-rooted seedlings wrapped in leaves and perhaps a wet cloth. If there is a trail good enough to allow a motorcycle to get to the field, they can be transported that way much more quickly. These we plant by putting a shovel into the ground and wiggling it back and forth just enough to make a gap in the soil wide enough to slip the tap root of the seedling into it. Each plant is then healed in. Those 600 seedlings can be planted in about two hours at a high rate of success of around 98.5%. Of course, the soil needs to be rather soft for this to work. Around Karawa most of our soil allows this kind of transplanting.

By contrast the A. auriculaformis doesn't have a real tap root. It has branching roots that go in all directions. This means that it doesn't transplant well bare-rooted and needs to be in bags in a nursery. We don't' have a good source of bags in our area and have to make them ourselves from large market bags that are bought and cut into six parts and heat sealed with a piece of hot, thin rebar. Holes need to be dug, and the bags need to be removed, and the seedling carefully placed, making sure not to break apart the soil around the roots from the bags. Then soil from the hole that was dug needs to be carefully brought back around the seedling at the correct level for the seedling to not have soil inches deep on the stem, nor at risk of the roots being exposed. This takes more time and energy, than the first tree mentioned. Besides this it means needing to transport all the bags with the seedlings to the field. Those Participants that are planting larger fields of more than an acre are making nurseries next to the place they want to plant, but all of this makes planting this new tree much more of a chore than the A. angustissima.
I hope we can return to using the Acacia angustissima as our main tree again next year and avoid the extra work.
Once established, the A. auriculaformis grows quickly and even continues growing, through our dry season, but slowed down a bit. This species enriches the soil just as well as the A. angustissima but has a five-year cycle instead of a two-year cycle. We need to do some experiments with this tree species to see if established trees can regenerate fast enough to reduce the time to three or four years. It is good for people to have both of these tree species and a couple of others I haven't talked about here, each one with their own pros and cons.
I didn't have time to get to Loko, given how bad the road is and my short time at Karawa, but I was able to go to Kanana and back one day, and that was an encouraging visit. The hot news issue there was that there were a lot of mangosteens on the trees and they were ripening. This year all the mangosteen trees that I know of, from Congo to Cameroon flowered about three to four months later than normal. We usually start getting ripe mangosteen fruit in late April and

early May with June being the heavy harvest month and July tapering off. It was May that the trees started flowering. What climate nuance took place to change the flowering time to this late date escapes me, but all the trees over a 500-mile distance seemed to have gotten the same memo. The only thing I can see that is a bit different in our rainfall records is that this past dry season was wetter than normal, though not a record amount. Since we started taking rainfall records nearly 50 years ago, we have had some exceptionally dry, dry seasons and some exceptionally wet dry seasons. I can't see that this dry season was much of an exception, though it was the kind we always hope to have.
Meanwhile, the buyers of the mangosteen fruit were thrown off their schedule and even though there are a lot of ripe fruit now, very few buyers have been coming to get them. I'll report on what took place in my next letter. Uncertainties like this are good reasons to diversify the farm with other crops that are capable of producing some needed income.
Tea is one of those crops we are trying to get going. This next year we will be able to harvest some tea as our more mature bushes will be ready to be trimmed and harvested every few weeks during the rainy season. I was happy to see that finally our tea field is starting to look like it will do well. Tea will provide some income each month for eight months of the year.

The new 3.5 acres of Café Africa variety of coffee is looking really good too. It has just had its second year birthday in the ground and is already producing a few beans.
Just over two years ago we were able to get around 200 very poor looking hybrid Tenera Oil palm seedlings from a neglected nursery in Gemena. I got them for a good deal since they looked terrible, and were barely alive anymore, with dried leaves and many of them laying on their sides in their bags rather than standing up. They were just right to get rid of! I do know something about Oil palm trees. I know that Oil palms will normally respond to improved conditions quite well if they are alive at all when planted. We planted 2.5 acres of these palms at the Kanana farm and some of them are flowering now. So, they have done quite well.
If anyone knows what Rambutans are, our orchard at Kanana was in the middle of a bumper crop. We have at least 12 varieties of Rambutans in that orchard, and we tried several fruit from most of the different types. They vary quite a bit from large red oblong fruit to small round yellow fruit. Some are very sweet and others a bit tart. Some are-cling free, and others not. They are all good, but some are better! The last one we tried was one that we have always considered one of the best. It is on the far side of the orchard. I mentioned to the Farm Manager from Loko who was with us that day that this was the one we always wanted to get to as soon as possible. There were a number of fruit within easy reach of a short stick and one of our main Agroforestry Participants who was with us, went over and got a few. When the Loko Farm Manager tried that one he said, "This fruit has just insulted all these

others.” The farm sells Rambutans too, but they ripen at the same time as the mangosteens which are much more highly esteemed, so they don’t get nearly as much for them as they should.

I wish many of you could come visit the work here, but know that isn’t possible. We don’t even know when we will be able to get back to Congo with the Ebola crisis still growing. Nevertheless, it was encouraging to see how the Kanana farm and the Agroforestry work are progressing. This is all developing because of your support. There are a few of you who have been giving regularly and that is highly appreciated. There are some who give once in a while, and some who give once a year. However you want to do that, thank you! It is much needed to keep this program going until the Farms can perhaps continue on their own as new crops come into production. The Agroforestry part is something that really makes a difference in food production to individual families and that strategy needs to continue growing for some time to come. Eventually, we hope that this form of increasing food production sustainably will become well known and be adopted by many villages, as has already been done by three that we know of now. The knowledge is spreading and people are getting the food they need because of it.

At the moment, we are very low on funds for the program and may have to cut back severely in October if we don’t get some more funding soon. I know there are many good organizations asking people for help all the time. I am asked all the time too. I understand there is only so much each of us can do.

I believe this project is doing about as much as anybody could possibly expect with a goal of just over $18,000 per year assisting two large experimental and development farms and an Agroforestry project with 40 participants, besides a few other things. So, if you are able to make a contribution of any size, I thank you in advance on behalf of my Congolese partners that are an exceptional team doing a great job.

Blessings on all of you;

Paul



Red, sweet rambutans loaded on the tree.



Two year old Hybrid Oil palms at Kanana



Two year old Cafe Africa var. Coffee at Kanana



Tea bushes start to look good at Kanana with Farm Manager Mr. Kosso on right.



Ripe mangosteen fruit and green ones in back ground in the leaves at Kanana



Participant Mr. Sengabo and Agroforestry supervisor Mr. Nginzo, on the right in Acacia auriculaformis grove just two years old.



Small round yellow, tart rambutan



1. Agriculture in DR Congo - ECC Giving

or use this QR code to giving site.

2. Below is the link for Paul's and Sheryl's support to give to this new budget year October 2026 - September 2027. We are in need of an extra $7450 this coming year. If you feel like you can give a pledge, please let us know or if you are able to donate a one-time gift that is wonderful too!! We appreciate all gifts and prayers!!

Paul and Sheryl Noren's link for support giving is:
Paul & Sheryl Noren - The Evangelical Covenant Church

or this QR code

You can donate, also by sending checks to the
Evangelical Covenant Church,
PO Box 773420
Chicago, IL 60677-3420

Please add a note as to what account you want your donation to be credited to.

Thank you for your continued financial and prayer support.

We are blessed!!!

Paul and Sheryl



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Our mailing address is: