



PROFILE OF AFRICAN VOLUNTEERS ASSOCIATION



SOME MEMBERS OF AVA AFTER JANUARY 23 AGM

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON AVA

The African Volunteers Association (AVA) is a non-profit making civil society organisation which was registered in Uganda in 2001 as a private company limited by guarantee without capital share. The beginning of AVA is rooted in an International Conference which was organised at Uganda Martyrs University (UMU), Nkozi, Uganda, from 7–10 September 1998 under the theme of eradicating poverty. At the end of that Conference, it was resolved, that since poverty is multifaceted and multidimensional, its eradication requires full partnership with those who are disadvantaged using all possible means, organs and approaches, including NGOs, cooperatives, religious organisations and the grass-roots communities. In 1999, a National Workshop was held at UMU, and a decision was taken to form the African Volunteers Association (AVA) which was later registered in 2001 to put in place means of starting projects and institutions to facilitate sharing of material, personal and knowledge necessary for prosperity creation. Since then, AVA has found it important to refocus its objectives to be promotion of social and environmental justice. AVA has brought on board the achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include addressing unemployment, promoting food security, gender and youth issues. We have found it necessary to clarify that being a volunteer does not

just mean working for nothing: it is a serious ethical commitment to be in solidarity with other people, convinced that by sharing what we are and have we are also enriched. In fact, for AVA, volunteers are asked to contribute towards the sustenance of AVA's activities.

Through its different engagements and activities, AVA has acquired expertise and experience in:

- ✓ Managing the environment, especially in the promotion of plant biodiversity
- ✓ Promoting use of traditional medicine
- ✓ Revalorising use of African science and knowledge
- ✓ Training and skilling the youths in different areas
- ✓ Community engagement and education especially to promote health and wellness
- ✓ Research in plant biodiversity and conservation in relation management of the environment and food security
- ✓ Promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals in general

B. IDENTITY OF AVA

1. VISION

Integrated Community and Sustainable Development

2. MISSION

Working with communities to promote sustainable development.

3. CORE VALUES

- Integrity
- Solidarity
- Justice
- Voluntarism
-

4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

a. Aim

The aim of AVA is to promote social justice and environmental justice

b. Objectives

More specifically, AVA's objectives are:

1. To establish institutions and platforms for empowering people to fight poverty.
2. To create institutions and frameworks to facilitate the sharing of material and personal resources by using an African approach.
3. To facilitate the pursuit of education, training, research and consultancy in different areas to promote social and environmental justice.
4. To make known and operationalise national and international legal instruments relating to promoting social justice, and conservation of animal and plant biodiversity.
5. To contribute towards promotion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals especially in relation to gender, environment, disability, employment and food security.
6. To create and use international and international networks for promoting social and environmental justice, by prioritising African cultural practices.

5. OFFICES & UNITS

AVA has its main office at Businge, outside Kamwenge Town, Kamwenge District, at 5 km on Kamwenge-Fort Portal Road. This office is currently dealing with research, community development, training the youth, and promoting biodiversity. At Businge, AVA has established:

- ✓ The Institute for Management of Natural Resources (IMNARE) which will promote agroecology, especially in the areas of selecting and using indigenous seeds, doing agriculture that respects the existing ecosystems, using natural means of promoting and maintaining food security and enhancing soil fertility.
- ✓ African School of Open Education (ASOE) for taking charge of all that is community education and training.
- ✓ AVA Research Centre for organising, conducting and overseeing research

AVA also has an office at Kyabalongo, Butoole, Kyangwali, in Kikuube District, near Bugoma Central Forest, another contact office at Kagongo, Ibanda Municipality.

C. HIGHLIGHTS ON ACTIVITIES

1. PROJECTS AND RESEARCH

a. In Kamwenge District

i. Promoting coexistence between humans and plant biodiversity

Between February-August 2019, AVA carried out a research project in 7 villages selected from 7 parishes bordering with Kibale National Park in Kamwenge District using a grant that it received from USAID and World Conservation Society through Uganda Biodiversity Fund (UBF). We were aiming at promoting coexistence between humans and plant biodiversity. A model on such existence has been developed and a soft copy of this can be sent on request. We also documented the plant species that are still abundant, those which are declining, and those which are extirpated, that is missing in a given area but most probably available in another. From that grant we also established a nursery bed. A database has been developed on this and can be accessed by registering online on

<https://avavolunteers.org/plantbiodiversity/main/login.php>

In this project, among others, AVA others met 162 people in focus group discussions, 663 in community meetings, and 150 in end of study meetings. AVA also found out that in the areas they visited, 47 plants were extirpated (not existing in those areas). AVA succeeded in bringing to its nursery bed one of these plants known in the area as *omufurura* (*Gouania longispicata*), and is in the process of propagating it. Through this project AVA created a nursery bed at Businge.

ii. Development Response to Displacement Impact (DRDIP) Project

In August 2019, through the contacts of Kamwenge District, AVA chosen to participate in the Development Response to Displacement Impact Project (DRDIP) under the name of 'African Volunteers Association AVA participated under the formation Musheija Water Shed. The project is being funded through the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) under the name 'African Volunteers Association Indigenous Nursery Irrigation Vegetables'. AVA mobilized community members and started clearing the bush on AVA land of around 8 acres on which the group is going to do its work. They agreed to start clearing the bush. The implementing partner ADRITEX in this project is putting up a green house for raising seedlings.

iii. Collaborating with Uganda Rural Development Training Institute (URDT-I) to train youths

URDT Institute is a vocational training institute focusing on enabling 70,000 young people between 18-35 years to have dignified and fulfilling work opportunities. URDT uses the Satellite Approach to train youths for three months in collaboration with artisans and agribusiness practitioners in selected occupations under agriculture, construction and tourism, including soft skills. AVA was selected to participate in this training. Besides having its own youths, it oversees the work of other artisans in and around Kamwenge. It has mobilised, verified and selected artisans and so far two cohorts of youths have been trained since 2022. The areas in which the youths were trained include: nursery bed management and vegetable growing, tailoring, knitting, handicrafts, hair dressing, welding and metal fabrication, motorcycle repair and maintenance, and carpentry. The training includes assessment and certification by the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) which gives the trainees the possibility of going on to upgrade in their areas of interest.



SOME TRAINEES USING A KNITTING MACHINE

iv. Collaborating with PHARMBIOTRAC of Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST)

Pharm-Bio Technology and Traditional Medicine Centre (PHARMBIOTRAC) belongs to Mbarara University of Science and Technology aiming at promoting research into and use of traditional medicine. In April 2021, AVA also co-organised a week's training with PHARMBIOTRAC on the use of medicinal herbs at Businge, Kamwenge. As a follow-up to this training, 30 people under the supervision of AVA have formed a group called “TAMBIRA AMAGARA” (save life) to grow medicinal plants. AVA is the only one in the area focusing on threatened species with potential health solutions.

b. In Kikuube District

i. Collaboration with NFA to restore part of Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR)

In February 2021, National Forest Authority (NFA) of Uganda allocated AVA 100 hectares of degraded forestland to restore and hand it over after three years. In April 2021, AVA received another grant from USAID through UBF to contribute towards maintaining biodiversity in and around Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR). AVA restored 111.8ha of degraded forestland near Kyangwali Refugee Settlement using indigenous seedlings, and the work was finished by July 2022. AVA also distributed more than 17,000 indigenous seedlings to families living in 5 villages living along Bugoma CFR. In this project, here below are some of the achievements:

1. Using indigenous species to do restoration
2. In addition to buying seedlings AVA has also put in place a nursery bed with indigenous species
3. In the process AVA has managed to get 13 endangered species of Bugoma CFR which have been planted in villages or in Bugoma forest in a variety of numbers
4. The distribution of seedling was not limited to restoring the forest; AVA also distributed seedlings to more than 17,000 people, in the 5 villages bordering with the forest; AVA also distributed mosquito repellent seedling in one village

5. Using the services of people from the five villages living along the forest plus the services of refugees
6. AVA managed to establish good working relationships with the communities with which they are interacting despite the sensitivities relating to ownership and use of land in the district
7. The work of promoting biodiversity was not limited to the physical planting: AVA also trained community leaders in and sensitised community members about promoting and maintaining plant biodiversity.

Through this project AVA created a nursery bed and a botanical garden at Kyabarongo next to Bugoma CFR.

ii. Planting indigenous species on private land

In September 2022, AVA got a grant from the consortium of Uganda Biodiversity Fund (UBF), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Nature Uganda (NU), and Ecological Christian Organization (ECO) to restore and conserve degraded areas in identified villages in Butoole Parish, Kyangwali Sub-county, in Kikuube District. In this project AVA planted 4,506 seedlings on identified private pieces of land of 3 landowners.

D. PARTNERSHIPS

In trying to implement its objectives, AVA has created important partnerships whose implementation is at different levels. Among these the following should be mentioned:

1. Office of the Prime Minister which is helping us to implement the Development Response to Displacement Impact Project (DRDIP) project as will be described above.
2. National Forest Authority which allocated AVA 100ha to restore in Bugoma forest.
3. Kamwenge District Local Government, especially the Office of District Natural Resources.
4. Local leaders in the 7 villages where AVA made the study in Kamwenge districts
5. Kikuube District Local Government with which we have a Memorandum of Understanding.
6. Mbarara University of Science and Technology especially through its Pharm-Bio Technology and Traditional Medicine Centre (PHARMBIOTRAC) with which we organised a week to train the community on using African medicine.
7. Makerere University Biological Field Station, at Kanyawara, in Kibale National Park, in Kabarole District.
8. Kibale Association for Rural and Environmental Development (KAFRED), Kamwenge.
9. Kamwenge Bee Keepers Cooperative Society and Credit (KABECOS), Kamwenge
10. Partners for the Land and Agricultural Needs of Traditional Peoples (PLANT), in Ireland, in which two Directors of AVA are also Directors of PLANT.
11. Franciscan Brothers Adraa Agriculture College (AAC), Madi Okollo District which helped to train two cohorts of young people chosen by AVA in sustainable agriculture.
12. Ibanda University.

E. THE CONCEPT AND OPERATIONALISATION OF VOLUNTARISM

It is important that we explain what it means to be a volunteer since AVA is grounded in the concept of being and acting as a volunteer because voluntarism is a concept which is easily misunderstood in the world of today dominated by the idea of remuneration, profit making, lucrative undertakings etc. All these are not bad in themselves, but the founders of AVA realised that these have their own limits. Voluntarism should not be taken to mean simply working without being paid or rewarded. This is one aspect of it; for AVA this is not the essence of voluntarism. In fact, members of AVA, in addition to what is expected from them are asked to share what they are and have with others. The members of Board of Directors contribute their time and expertise: the members of the Board of Directors are not paid. Those who enrol as members of AVA are also asked to contribute their time and expertise for the services of AVA.

For us being a volunteer also means looking for means to be in solidarity with others, especially the most vulnerable. Therefore, being a volunteers, is not just an idea: it is a serious ethical commitment to look for means to remove what dehumanises others, that is, all that takes away or diminishes our humanity, including our human dignity and identity. In this sense voluntarism takes us beyond the frontiers of calculated rendering and paying back. We realised that we are not necessarily better than those who might not have been as lucky as we have been. We also realised that all of us, who we are or what we have, comes from what so many people known, and sometimes unknown, have contributed towards our lives. What we are and what we have therefore does not always come from what we deserve or from what we have invested in through our personal efforts. Voluntarism for us is not only a commitment to work for human justice. Nowadays it must include a component of promoting environmental justice since humans can only live and survive if we respect and promote what sustains ecosystems, namely living (biotic) things, of which humans are a component, and nonliving (abiotic) things. In this system there must be mutual and beneficial interdependence and interconnectedness.

F. MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

AVA is governed by a Board of Directors qualified in different areas, and here below are their names, designation and contacts:

	NAME	DESIGNATION	CONTACTS
1	Peter Kanyandago	Chairperson	0772696032
2	Venie Tinkumanya	Vice Chairperson	0772785650
3	Agnes Nabbose	Company Secretary	0772639453
4	Robert Ayebazibwe	Member	0782550326
5	Patricia Akiisa	Member	0785640906
6	Justine Barekye	Member	0772494857
7	Bonaventure Turyomumazima	Member	0782955732

G. CONTACTS

- (1) Main office is at Businge, Kamwenge-Fort Portal Road, P. O. Box 1503 Kamwenge, Kamwenge District
- (2) Registered address: P. O. Box 1464, Mbarara
- (3) Field office: Kyabalongo, Butoole, Kikuube District
- (4) Contact address: Kagongo, Ibanda Municipality, Ibanda District
- (5) Telephone: +256772696032 and +256772639453
- (6) Email: pkanyandago@gmail.com
- (7) Website: www.avavolunteers.org