By Steven Nsamaza

Since 2010, Rwanda vowed to increase forest cover to 30 per cent of the total national area equivalent to 790,140 ha of forests by year 2020. Beside this, the forest policy intends to create a favorable environment for flourishing forestry business based on the wood industry.

Consequently these targets are also expressed in terms of forest generated incomes. One of the farmers who target to garner on forest income is Ruboya Hoseya from Mukingo, Gatagara Sector in Nyanza District.

Following years of low earnings from his farms Ruboya decided to change the tide of his farming methods while ensuring conservation through forestry farming.

When The New Forests Company approached local authorities in its outgrower program that support local farmers with free seedlings, Ruboya was among the first on the list and he received training from NFC forester on how to implement the requirements to plant trees on his farm.

“There are many benefits to farm trees which I did not consider before but since I was sensitized by The New Forests Company, what I will harvest in the future is a sure deal,” Ruboya says.

Besides, the seedlings given to us were not entirely trees for timber but we were given fruit trees as well, which will also help raise our incomes, Ruboya narrates.

Paul Hanganimana, the NFC Extension Forester says that his company gives free seedlings to local farmers to grow wood-lots and fruit trees, makes follow ups to check on performance of the trees and advise farmers when to thin and prune. “Before distributing the seedlings to farmers we draw lists of everyone interested which is conducted at cell level and this is intended for planning purposes and later we sign non-binding contracts,” notes Hanganimana.

NFC’s Extension Forester says that even though they keep a close relationship with the farmers they have distributed free seedlings with technical training, farmers keep right to sale their trees to anyone of their choice because of the non-binding agreement. Though in such scenario, the outgrower should abide with giving first refusal to NFC.

Since launching the out-grower programme in 2015, NFC has distributed 714,779

seedlings to date planted on 541.7Ha and has already benefited 1,417 farmers.

“Our philosophy as a forestry company is economic, social and environment oriented,” says the NFC extension forester.

We equally consider sustainability of all the three aspects,” said Hanganimana.

Mudenge Edison, another farmer in Mukingo cell says that the support by The New Forests Company is exceptional with the fact that they provide free seedlings, offer knowledge on how to plant trees and make follow-up on what we planted and this is done at no cost and we are not obliged to sell these trees to them.

“This is exemplary,” according to Mudenge, this company support us to grow trees that will bring us incomes at the same time we are conserving our region. For Ruboya Hoseya, he has planted trees on three hectares which is half his land with all seedlings provided by The New Forests Company.

Planting trees has not taken any of my land because I carry out intercropping as was advised by the experts from the company, notes Ruboya.

He says that, the planted crops together with the trees are looking very well and is not worried with what people have always said that trees simphony water from other crops. However, he planted his crops following the correct spacing as advised upon and was given improved seedlings.