

Setting the record straight: ECOTRUST response to Aftonbladet's reporting

A series of articles published in May and June 2024 by the Swedish newspaper [Aftonbladet](#), under the title “Hunger Forest”, misrepresented ECOTRUST’s work and distorted the lived experiences of farmers participating in the [Trees for Global Benefit \(TGB\) programme](#) in Uganda.

The delay in responding publicly reflects the trauma and distress felt by both the affected communities and ECOTRUST team following the journalist’s conduct and the nature of the reporting.

These articles alleged that TGB farmers are facing poverty, hunger, and school dropouts as a result of growing trees. These claims are not only unfounded—they are deeply harmful. They undermine a community-led programme that, for more than 20 years, has supported rural Ugandan families to improve food security, protect nature, and build sustainable livelihoods through agroforestry.

We have reviewed the claims thoroughly. A joint investigation with district authorities in Hoima and Kikuube, alongside direct conversations with farmers and community leaders, confirms:

- All farmers visited grow both trees and food. Each household maintains a mix of indigenous trees, crops such as banana, cassava, maize, and coffee, as well as livestock—an integrated system designed to ensure long-term food security.
- Children named in the articles are attending school (except for one, who is out of school but not, as alleged, married). Many families use TGB payments to pay school fees and diversify livelihood options.
- Farmers join voluntarily, following community consultation, land verification, and training. All interviewed affirmed their satisfaction with the programme.
- Interviews used in the article were conducted under false pretenses. Quotes were misrepresented, and at least two individual cited is not part of the project.
- Photographs were published without proper consent. Farmers were told their stories would be used to showcase success, not failure.

The voices of these farmers speak for themselves. Their petition to the Swedish Press Ombudsman, signed by those quoted in the article, outlines the harm caused by this

misrepresentation. They have called for a retraction, the opportunity to tell their side of the story, and a public apology.

We fully support this call.

Independent verification and Plan Vivo's response

TGB is a Ugandan-designed, farmer-led response to climate change that links carbon finance directly to community wellbeing.

The project is currently undergoing a rigorous third-party verification audit under the [Plan Vivo standard](#). This audit, led by an independent, accredited Validation and Verification Body, includes field visits and a detailed review of project practices, farmer contracts, and payments.

That these baseless claims were published without giving either ECOTRUST or Plan Vivo a right of reply is unacceptable. It shows a disregard for fundamental journalistic ethics and for the dignity of the people whose lives the reporting sought to define.

As confirmed by Plan Vivo, these claims [are now being reviewed](#) as part of the 2025 audit. Previous audits have found TGB to be fully compliant with Plan Vivo's high standards for integrity, transparency, and benefit sharing. We have every confidence that the current process will confirm the same.

This project is rigorously monitored, independently verified, and internationally recognized as a model for equitable, community-led climate finance.

Standing with our farmers

The real story in Kikuube is not one of hunger—it is one of resilience, agency, and local leadership. ECOTRUST stands with the farmers who make this work possible. We reaffirm our commitment to their dignity, prosperity, and the truth.

Environmental Conservation Trust of Uganda (ECOTRUST)

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