

A CURSE AND A BLESSING IN EQUAL MEASURES: *PROSOPISJULIFLORA* IN THE RANGELANDS

Prosopisjuliflora is a famous plant for the wrong things; all we hear about it is its invasiveness, leading to loss of pasture, septic wounds caused by the thorns on animals and humans, among other environmental ills. This has been the basis of the efforts towards eradicating it from the African arid and semi-arid rangelands where it has colonized thousands of hectares of land. However, in the past few decades there has been a paradigm shift that recognizes control through utilization. This change of approach in managing the invasive species is informed by empirical evidence on the prohibitive costs of its control, as well as the benefits of the tree if sustainably management. *Prosopis*, if harnessed, has several uses that have the potential of rivaling the otherwise highly valued *Acacia* species. Its use as animal feed, which is widely documented and a testimony in the lips of many herders, among other uses such hard wood timber, building and fencing posts, shade tree, medicinal value, fuel energy, attest to the fact that it is a blessing in disguise. This is particularly valid in drylands where it has been used to restore cover of otherwise bareground associated with dustorms. On the flip side, its main ills in the rangelands have been the invasion of pastures, croplands, critical dry season reserves in riverine areas, therefore justifying it as a curse and a blessing in equal measures. The rule of the thump in such a scenario is to identify the opportunities presented by the menace, amplify them to offset the ills. Since **November, 2021, Dr. Oliver Vivian Wasonga** and **Dr. Oscar Koech** from the Department of Land Resource Management & Agricultural technology, University of Nairobi have been working with pastoralist communities in Samburu County on sustainable management of two invasive species, *Prosopis juliflora* and *Acacia reficiens*. Community representatives and Samburu County government officers, led by **John Jamaica and Tomothy Lembara** from the Department of Water, Environment, and Natural Resources & Energy have been trained in sustainable utilization of invasive species for animal feed and charcoal briquettes production.



Dr. Oscar Koech and John Jamiaca leading pastoralists on charcoal briquettes production from *Prosopis juliflora* and *Acacia reficiens* in Lerata, Samburu County