

Linking Ugandan farmers to organic and fair trade markets



Introduction

Uganda, a landlocked country in Eastern Africa, is marked by a climate as diverse as its people. The north is dry and has harsh weather conditions while the South is lush and green, thanks to more rainfall. In the South and central region, all types of vegetables are grown as well as fruit and coffee. The dry soil in the northern areas is suitable for chillies and sesame (locally referred to as simsim).

Everyone who has visited Uganda agrees that its fruit and vegetables are delicious and of superior quality. However, the farmers who grow them barely make enough money from their sales to provide for their families.

For this reason the Trade for Development Centre partnered with NOGAMU, the National Organic Agricultural Movement of Uganda, to ensure that farmers are able to sell their entire harvest at a fair price and grow their businesses sustainably.



*Above: Sesame seeds or 'simsim' © Canadian Centre for Agriculture
Previous page: farmer in front of her grain storage in Abim, northern Uganda © TDC*

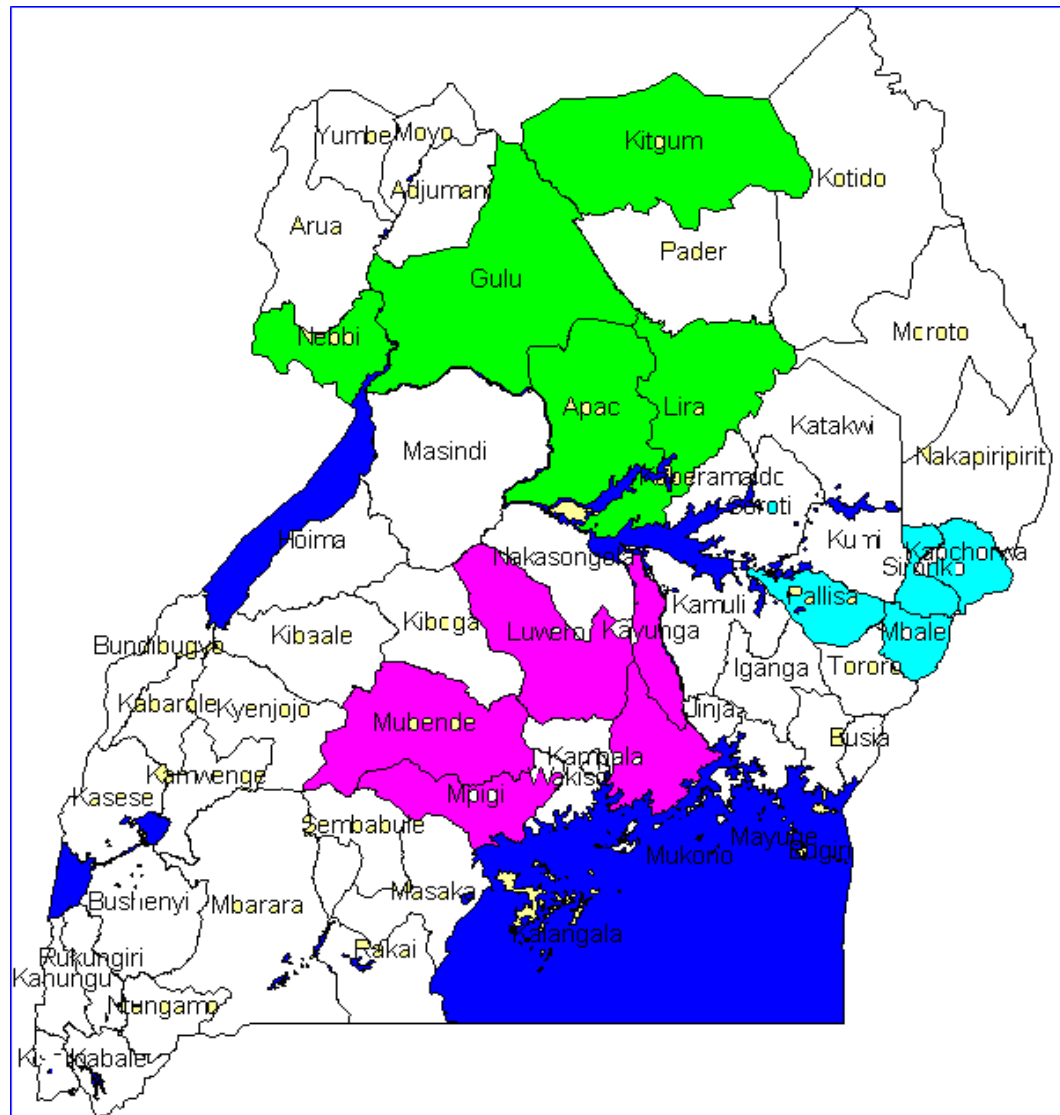
Getting organised first

The NOGAMU project, developed with the support of the Trade for Development Centre, was aimed at establishing income-generating streams for these individual smallholder farmers.

To achieve this, NOGAMU is convinced that the first step for farmers is to organise themselves into groups or structures to become more empowered. *“Ugandan farmers grow their crops all alone in their family gardens. They do not work together as neighbours. So we try to change their thinking,”* explains Musa Muwanga, the Chief Executive Officer at NOGAMU.

After numerous field visits and village meetings in the different areas of intervention and with the help of several local colleagues, NOGAMU was able to track different farmers and explain the benefits of forming a structure or a cooperative with others who grow the same crops. They convinced them and helped them register their structure as a formal cooperative.

The National Organic Agricultural Movement of Uganda (NOGAMU) is an umbrella organization which unites producers, processors, exporters, NGOs and other institutions and organisations that are involved in the promotion and development of the organic sector in Uganda. Established in 2001, it is now one of the biggest Business Support Organisations (BSOs) providing a range of services to the sector.



Map of Uganda, the coloured areas show where the project was active and which type of produce:

Northern Region [Lira; Ammolatar; Gulu; Dokolo, Apac, Lira];- Sesame and Chillies
 Eastern Region [Namutumba, Iganga, Kamuli, Buyende]- Coffee, Fruits (Mangoes)
 Central Region [Mubende, Mpigi, Mukono, Wakiso and Buikwe] – Mixed Vegetables

Farmers standing strong together

It did not take long to convince farmers of the benefits of working together. Their biggest motivation to join a cooperative is the security that they will sell their entire harvest and receive a better price, around 30% up to 100% higher according to NOGAMU. However, this requires large quantities of produce. Through information meetings NOGAMU explained to the farmers that adding up small quantities to reach 20 tonnes of sesame to fill up a standard 20 foot shipment container for example, is necessary to do business with bigger buyers.

These buyers are usually approached by NOGAMU. Three stronger cooperatives/ farmer groups also received business skills governance and price negotiation training allowing them to conduct negotiations on their own.

A new cooperative always receives business management skill training first. A new cooperative must elect a leader. This was easier for some groups than for others because many farmers do not trust or simply do not like 'that one annoying neighbour' but NOGAMU guided them in the election of a management and in setting up a monitoring structure for the management group, with safety measures to prevent corruption.

Sesame field © UG Food and Business Knowledge Platform



Farmers invest in the future by producing sustainably

Another goal of the project was to launch organic farming. NOGAMU helped the farmers to establish an organic quality management system, which is necessary to obtain organic certification. This turned out to be a challenge.

certification standards into the local languages and simplified them as much as we could. But the organic and the fairtrade certification requirements are not very relevant to African culture. It was difficult for the farmers to understand. For example, they were told to use formal documentation and to keep records of the growing process of their crops for the certifier. But farmers are not office people. They are not used to record keeping.” Luckily, Muwanga said that overall, they did notice the farmers’ willingness and the understanding of becoming certified, whether it was organic or fairtrade. “Climate change is very noticeable in Uganda, especially in the dry north,” Muwanga adds. The farmers were grateful to learn how to conserve water as they realised that it makes them perform better and produce a better harvest. “



Banana sellers in Western Uganda © Shelley Heugen

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Musa Muwanga, Chief Executive Officer
at NOGAMU



Road market in Western Uganda © Shelley Heugen

NOGAMU at the forefront of this big project

The final step for the cooperatives, after becoming organised and producing a quality organic or Fairtrade harvest, is to sell at a good price. This is NOGAMU's strength: *“ We know where the markets are as we have links with both farmers and markets. We organise farmers into groups, develop their capacity and link them to the buyers that we know,”* says Muwanga.

The results do not lie: over 8,700 farmers joined a cooperative and 100 internal inspectors were trained in European, Asian and American Organic Farming regulations. The target of 30% female leaders of cooperatives was also set. As many of the cooperatives mainly comprise women (sesame growers are all women), 70% of the leaders are female! And finally, 3 large cooperatives were trained in implementing organic and fair trade quality management systems and were linked to one local trading company and 3 exporting companies.



Farmers promoting organic products at the entrance of Victoria Mall in Kampala, Uganda © NOGAMU

Although the farmers are part of a cooperative, many of them still prefer to work as individuals, especially when it comes to marketing. Some farmers do not inform the group and sell some produce individually, thus breaching the agreement they have to sell as a group. Underlining the importance of the benefits of fairtrade and organic produce is far from over. NOGAMU also feels there is a need for national regulation and branding of the genuine organic products to ensure consumer health and safety.

For Mrs Olivia Kayongo, the benefits of being a member of a cooperative became clear within the first months of her membership: *“I can earn over USD 150 every two weeks for organic mixed vegetable products branded sales from my supplies to specialty supermarkets and home deliveries. Yet ours is just a new farmers group! It has made a big difference for my family, my children can now go to school,” she says.*



Mrs Kayongo in her strawberry garden in Masuliita in the central region © NOGAMU

Conclusion

“ We know where the markets are as we have links with both farmers and markets. We organise farmers into groups, develop their capacity and link them to the buyers that we know,” says NOGAMU.



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Sources:

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http://www.nogamu.org.ug/index.php?page=nog_mvq