VOICES FOR CHANGE: From Social Accountability to Sustainable Agriculture
The Civic Engagement Alliance is a joint collaboration in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.
ICCO Cooperation is an international NGO established in 1964 in the Netherlands with a vision of empowering people to build sustainable livelihoods within societies that uphold their rights. Across the 20 countries of its operation, ICCO’s programs seek to promote food and nutrition security, as well as economic empowerment for smallholder farmers and SMEs. Through engagements focused on women, youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs) at community, local and national levels, its interventions are directed towards blending nonprofit and for profit services, building climate resilient food systems and promoting youth entrepreneurship.

With support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ICCO as the lead agency in the Dialogue and Dissent program has been working with national CSOs to implement a 5 year (2016-2020) program called the Civic Engagement Alliance (CEA) in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. The Program seeks to enhance civic engagement at all levels and foster a supportive policy environment for improved livelihoods among smallholder farmers in the east African region.

In Uganda, the program is implemented by Church of UgandaTeso Diocese Development Organization (COU TEDDO), Share An Opportunity Uganda (SAO), Uganda National NGO Forum, Aridland Development Project (ADP), Advance Afrika and Facilitation for Peace And Development (FAPAD) in Teso, Karamoja and Lango sub regions. These areas are largely faced with socio-economic challenges such as; inadequate market access, limited access to extension services, knowledge and agricultural skills, which affect farmer capacity to benefit from agriculture as an enterprise.

The program employed a multi-stakeholder approach that involved smallholder farmers including women, PWDs and youth, private sector actors, opinion leaders, local and national leaders in efforts to increase awareness of the rights of smallholder farmers, social accountability and to promote inclusive planning processes for development. The recognition and empowerment of existing structures was a key approach that facilitated a positive reception of the program by communities and leaders.

This publication therefore highlights stories of empowered citizens including Community Peace Promoters, Model Farmers, Input Dealers, members of farmer networks and cooperatives, as well as Local Governments who are now at the forefront of promoting improved livelihoods in their communities.
The 5-year CEA program empowered grass root groups and opinion leaders in communities to hold both public and private sector actors in the agriculture sector accountable for the establishment of stronger food and market systems along the Maize, Cassava and Millet value chains in Lango, Teso and Karamoja sub regions.
Our Goal
Inclusive development for a fair and just economy.

Pathways of Change
1. Enhancing the capacity of implementing partners to engage different stakeholders in a bid to create an enabling environment/civic space for CSOs.
2. Amplifying voices of smallholder farmers, including women, youth and Persons with Disabilities in the creation of stronger systems that address food and nutrition insecurity
3. Facilitating improved access to markets for small-scale farmers, especially women, youth and PWDs dealing in maize, millet and cassava.
SCOPE – 5 years

Implementing Partners:
Advance Afrika, Aridland Development Program (ADP), Church of Uganda Teso Dioceses Development Organization (CU TEDDO), Facilitation for Peace and Development (FAPAD), NGO Forum and; Share An Opportunity (SAO) Uganda.

Sub regions:
Karamoja, Lango and Teso

Districts:
Abim, Lira, Soroti, Serere, Ngora

15,000 smallholder farmers equipped to demand for social accountability and socio-economic rights
Community Peace Promoters (CPPs):
Facilitate effective management of land disputes through political, cultural and religious structures.

Community Based Facilitators (CBFs):
Mentor farmer groups in recommended farming practices.

Cooperative Societies:
Increase farmer groups competitive advantage in markets.

Farmer's Forum:
Amplify farmer voices in agro-based policy formulation at local level.

Farmers Network:
Build farmer-led knowledge sharing and capacity strengthening platforms.

Input Dealers:
Establish pro-farmer private sector enterprises in communities.

Local Government Leaders:
Support and monitor CPPs, CBFs, farmers networks, cooperative societies and model farmers.

Model Farmers:
Mentor farmers in adoption and replication of recommended farming practices.
ACCESS TO LAND

A CALL TO PEACE
Ogwang Bismark, LC3 Chairman, Morulem Sub County

As leaders we appreciated the involvement of lawyers in the CEA land mediation process because they made us understand legal land ownership and distribution practices. After this, we were able to allow the Ateso living in our community to own the land, on condition that they don’t invite other foreigners to come and claim more than we have given.

ENDING THE FIGHTS
Asio Sarah Lilian Aloyo, Community Peace Promoter, Nyarikidi village, Morulem sub county.

“When the CEA project trained me to become a CPP, I started going around communities promoting peace. Some people burnt my house to the ground, but our farmer group planted quality cassava on my empty land in straight rows so that it would not remain idle and hosted demonstrations for farmers to learn how to make good use of land. I want to start an organization that can continue to remind my people about the goodness of peace and improved agro-input usage because it is the only way that we can start enjoying our resources.”

CULTURE AS A DEFENDER OF LAND RIGHTS
Hellen Omara Awidi, CPP, Atyenower Village, Barr Sub County

“After the CEA project taught me that as a CPP I have to involve cultural leaders in solving land disputes, I reported the case of Cidonia, a widow whose land was stolen by the LC 1 Chairperson in our village to the clan leaders. They quickly called a meeting and gave back her land. Now she is free to plough her property.”

PEACE TO BUILD
Cidonia Omara, resident, Atyenower village, Barr sub county

The CPP in my community helped me to get my land back from a land grabber who happened to be our local leader. They also taught my grandchildren how to keep my land active by planting cassava and other vegetables. Now I have even sold one acre of my land and am building a permanent house for myself.
THE BLUEPRINT: SETTING BOLDER POLICIES FOR ROBUST LIVELIHOODS

Jimmy Ochwer, District Chairperson, Abim district

Chairperson Jimmy Ochwer sees immense potential for Abim district in the agricultural sector. “You must have looked at our area; it is not like other Karamoja districts. We can proudly say we are the Food basket of Karamoja region.” However, after decades of land conflicts and limited attention to protective legal frameworks over the agricultural sector, the district was yet to fulfill its potential. He attributed the increasing attention to the sector by district leaders to continuous engagements with CEA program partners.

“Through district conferences organized by SAO, where we interacted with local farmer groups, we realized that there was a big policy gap. We decided that since agriculture is a key activity, it must be framed by a market strategy, so we developed the ‘Abim District Agricultural Productivity BluePrint’, which now highlights market linkage as one of the core areas that our district plans must invest resources to implement.”

The Chair Person is increasingly confident in the evolving policy environment, and believes that it is the start of a new chapter for farming in Abim district. “We managed to engage the parliamentary committee on agriculture and committee on budget during an inter-ministerial dialogue and we realized there are already several laws on agriculture. They are currently in the process of compiling a compendium of these laws so that at district level we can start to enforce the ones that favor our small holder farmers.”

We managed to engage the parliamentary committee on agriculture and committee on budget during an inter-ministerial dialogue and we realized there are already several laws on agriculture.
Amos Ogeet, 46, farmer, Morulem Sub County.

Amos’s family was one of many that migrated from eastern to northern Uganda due to destabilizing conflicts.

“I moved from Teso to Abim district in 2011 with my wife and 7 children and we settled in Nyarikidi Parish with many other families. However, the neighbors in Labwor sub county would always attack us and try to chase us away saying that we were trying to steal their land. There was no peace and we could not settle or develop.

Through CEA, Amos took part in mediation sessions by raising awareness about their legal rights and responsibilities regarding land ownership.

“When ADP came to our community, I learned that we have the right to be protected by our leaders. We had dialogue meetings in 2017 and 2018 with leaders and community members from both our sub counties and they taught us that the Uganda constitution gives us the right to move and live anywhere.

I joined a farmer group under CEA and learned the importance of growing enough food to feed my family and also to sell. I have started growing mostly cassava for consumption in my home and maize to sell and get school fees for my children. But if the government doesn’t improve our poor road network, then brokers (middlemen), will continue to exploit us with low prices for our high quality produce because we don't have direct access to markets.”
TIGHTENING THE REINS: LEVERAGING GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES TO CURB COUNTERFEIT SEED

Mike Ariyo, Senior Agriculture Officer, Lira District Local Government.

According to Mike, the CEA program came just in time to address a growing challenge of fake and expired agro inputs flooding the markets at all levels, that was eating away at Lira District’s plans to become the breadbasket of Lango sub region in northern Uganda.

“As a District, we had developed ordinances to regulate the practices but due to financial constraints we were unable to disseminate them. Through the CEA program, FAPAD created dialogue platforms where we as the leaders could meet with farmers, seed input dealers and share these laws. FAPAD also pushed for the ordinances to be simplified into byelaws in the three sub counties of operation and they were finally passed in February 2020.”

The program also facilitated lobby engagements with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), that enabled the district leaders to build sustainable protection structures.

“MAAIF mandated us to create a Quality Assurance Committee, to which I will be a member, along with the Secretary Production and the CAO. After training, we will be equipped to fortify the implementation of regulations against fake inputs that have crippled our agricultural sector for so long. For years, NGOs have stood in the gap for us in this area, but through this program, we are building lasting structures.”

The district is finally moving forward with plans to promote quality seed multiplication through organized farmer groups whose capacity has been built in the development of quality seed.

“As I speak, we have groups in Barr Sub County, which are being supported to multiply local seed that can be certified by MAAIF as adequate to use and be sold to Farmers. We as the District of Lira are already making strides towards becoming the main supplier of quality agro inputs to the northern region.”
THE FARMERS FORUM: ENFORCING COMMUNITY-LED POLICY CHANGE

Lawrence Alot, Chairperson, Community Peace Promoters, Bar sub-county, Lira district.

The CPP is a well-respected and recognized community structure that has been promoting access to land and child rights in Lira district since 2004. Since 2017, they have been equipped with skills in mobilization for lobby and advocacy by CEA partner organization FAPAD. According to the Chairman, the dialogue process has been a unique and effective tool for facilitating inclusive decision making in the community. He said,

As CPPs, we created a farmer’s forum to enable all our farmers to raise their voices on issues to do with agriculture. During meetings, we invited extension workers, councilors and the district CDO and informed them that the available cassava cuttings, sorghum and millet seeds were contaminated with tiny wood pieces, and that input dealers were simply coloring poor quality maize seeds and distributing them in communities to pollute gardens.

In 2018, we participated in the sub county process of making a bye law that protects farmers from counterfeit products. We recommended that selling counterfeit inputs should become a punishable offense. The law was successfully passed in February 2020, but even before that farmers had already started reporting fake input dealers and there were many arrests...
POLICING AGRICULTURE: COMBATING COUNTERFEITS WITHIN COMMUNITIES

Peter Adude, Agriculture Officer, Kapir sub county, Ngora district.

“Through the CEA program, representatives from our production department attended regional dialogues with the parliament production committee and MAAIF, where they lobbied for the installation of measures to protect farmers from being duped into using poor quality farming inputs. In 2019 MAAIF instituted the “Agriculture Police” as a structure to be set up in every district. The police will assign specific officers to work with the district production officer and agriculture officers in sub counties to monitor and follow up complaints about expired and fake products in markets, and confiscate products that don’t meet the required standards.

Peter also attributes new innovative farmer-focused programs in his department to engagements initiated by the CEA program over the years.

“Not only did this CEA program facilitate regular follow-up of farmers in their gardens, but it also enabled us to hold exchange visits to different sub counties and districts, where we learned about the establishment of seed banks to protect traditional seed. We never had this in our plans as a district, but farmers have taken up the lessons and started using their farms to store good seed and this is improving their longevity and productivity. We as a district now have taken up quarterly farmer exposure visits as an important training tool.”

“We have a list of model farmers from the project whom we as a district can confidently call upon to test new seed varieties that are released by National Agriculture Research Organization (NARO) and promote among the surrounding communities, especially where extension workers cannot easily reach.”
OFF TO THE SEED FAIR

Pingire Cooperative Union (2016–2020)
From 953 to 1100 members
Profit growth from UGX 1,000,000 to UGX 47,000,000

10 FOLD RETURNS: FROM 3 TO 30 BAGS

David Moses Ogwang, farmer, Pingire Sub County
Before I got knowledge about quality seed and where to find good fertilizers from the cooperative store meetings, my small plot of land would get me two to three bags of maize. Nowadays I get about 20 to 30 bags. In 2019 10 of my bags were part of a batch sold to a big seed company and I made UGX 1,500,000.

SEED FAIR DAY!

Dinah Agot, farmer, Pingire sub county
For the first time our sub county held a Seed Fair Day in March 2020 at the Cooperative. We displayed quality inputs we had produced in our gardens and also interacted with many big seed companies. They taught us how far we can go if we work together as farmers.
Maximizing Cooperative Societies for Quality Seed Multiplication

Steven Dokol Agela, Agricultural Officer, Pingire sub county, Serere district

CEA partner organization COU TEDDO supported the revival of farmer cooperative societies in Ngora, Serere, and Soroti districts to promote the practice of bulk marketing of farming produce. According to the Pingire sub county agriculture officer, the local cooperative has largely contributed to increased productivity in the locality.

“Before this program started, farmers suffered because quality seeds were expensive and to get them, one would have to travel distances. So, they would settle for cheaper low quality seed in nearby open markets. Farming yields were really low, as a production Department we only met 25,000 of our targeted 50,000 tons of maize in 2016/17.

Through the revival of cooperatives by this program in 2018, farmer groups in Pingire have found a platform that brings them together regularly to bulk their produce. We as a sub county have also found it easier to reach out to them regularly with information on where and how to access quality seeds, as well as lessons on how to replicate their own quality seeds each season. With high expectancy of good profits from sales at the cooperative, we have seen such a drastic increase in production of maize to 60,000 tons in the sub county in 2019/20 beyond our target of 50,000 tons.

The program has therefore helped us as a district to reach our goals.”

we have seen such a drastic increase in production of maize to 60000 tons in the sub county in 2019/20 beyond our target of 50,000 tons.
ON THE FRONT LINE

Melvin Osele Ochan, CBF, Kapir Sub County, Ngora district.

Since COU TEDDO trained us as CBFs on quality farming methods and seed multiplication, we have been able to revive our Kapir Cooperative Society. As CBFs, we have taught farmer groups the importance of using quality seed in improving productivity. I personally registered and opened my own input dealership at our trading center, which I stock with quality declared seed from certified seed companies regionally.

I have learned that as an input dealer, I play an important role at the beginning of the agriculture value chain. I endeavor to stock my shop with quality inputs that can enable farmers to produce high quality yields, which can be marketed by the Cooperative. Now all farmers, including PWDs can access quality seed without having to travel as far as Soroti. One of the PWDs who has benefitted from this initiative is Stella Ajibo.
I mainly grow soybean, tomatoes, onions, cassava and potatoes and through the CEA program, we were taught to access quality inputs to ensure that we have healthy harvests.

No Limitations

Stella Ajibo, 35, CBF, Kapir Sub County, Serere district

“I have been a farmer for over 10 years. Even when I had an accident a few years ago, which injured my leg, I still loved agriculture. I mainly grow soybean, tomatoes, onions, cassava and potatoes and through the CEA program, we were taught to access quality inputs to ensure that we have healthy harvests. However, because the certified input dealers were only found at the district offices, I faced great challenges. The distance was one but also many times I would find challenges in cheaply transporting the items. I had to incur hiring costs, and at the end of the day, I would make losses. So sometimes, my solution was to just use what was available in the nearby open markets. Because of this, I only produced low yielding cassava.

During some CEA dialogue meetings with the sub county leaders, I raised this as an issue. After some time, one of the CBFs in our area went ahead to open an input shop at Kapir trading center, which is a short walking distance from my farm. Since then it has been easier for me to buy and transport quality seeds, chemicals and fertilizers to use in my garden.”
Salaama Alice Opada, CBF, Omito village

Food insecurity loomed large over Omito village in Serere district, with the majority of families living from hand to mouth in the midst of plentiful harvests. Salaama, a local CBF trained by CEA partner COU TEDDO to champion quality pre and post harvest handling practices among farmers says, “It was common for people to sell their whole harvest and use their profits to buy food for home.” Through the CEA program, she represented Serere district at a seed symposium in Kampala, which gave her added insight into practical solutions to food security challenges.

The theme was ‘Protect Our Seed’ and there were so many presentations from CSOs, donor organizations and the government that were talking about the need to restore silos and seed banks in our community to protect indigenous seed. I shared this information with our farmer groups and the district at a dialogue meeting when I returned. Our group went ahead to create a demonstration farm, which we set aside to plant quality declared cassava stems, potato vines, groundnuts and maize seeds using the farming methods we have learned from the CEA program. We started storing the best seeds at harvest and we now distribute them amongst ourselves during planting season to improve our yield.”
BRIDGING THE GAP: CHANNELING EXTENSION SERVICES THROUGH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Jennifer Awor, input dealer, Lira district

Understaffing of technical staff in sub counties continues to be a challenge in the provision of quality extension services to farmers in Lira district. Through the CEA program, partner organization Advance Afrika was able to build the capacities of farmers and extension workers in key life skills for lobby as a means to expand the resource base for data to support advocacy for increased funding for the sector. Jennifer, a local farmer was inspired by learnings from the program to step up her contribution to the goals of the district.

“I registered and certified ‘Niye Farmer’s Home’, my input dealership after a life skills training in 2019, where I had the opportunity to share and learn from experiences with farmers and extension workers from the district. One of the key issues we discussed was the lack of adequate extension services to our farms, and for the first time we learned that the technical wing was too understaffed to follow up all the fake input dealers in the district.

As a trained agronomist I set up a checklist of questions which I would ask farmers whenever they would come to buy seeds or chemicals or tools from my shop. Once in a while I would follow up my customers on their farms to monitor the products and offer hands-on training. I became so popular and I was even able to open a new shop in Lira town. I hope to start a weekly farmer platform where my customers, other farmers and input dealers can come and discuss issues surrounding agro-inputs. This will definitely give us as input dealers the information we need to step up our quality of service delivery.”
OUT WITH THE OLD: IMPROVING EXTENSION SERVICES THROUGH BETTER COMMUNICATION

Moses Emma Onika, Agriculture Officer, Lira sub county

For extension services expert Moses, communication skills have always been essential to his work. He says the life skills for lobby training was an eye-opening experience that further equipped him for his field work.

"I learned through life skills training that it’s important to strengthen channels for two-way communication to thrive between me and the farmers.

Nowadays after field visits, I encourage farmers to record in a book any issues that they find while applying any new tools that I recommend. By the next meeting they are able to clearly outline specific issues which form the basis of our trainings. It has even become easier for me to present more comprehensive reports during our departmental meetings, and enable more focused planning.

During some department meetings, we also invite model farmers, provide them with improved seed samples, which they use to create demonstration farms to test the quality of inputs and more importantly, provide for their families."
HONOURABLE COUNCILLOR: A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

Josephine Awilli Odyek – Female PWD Representative, Abim district local government Council

Mother of two Councillor Josephine joined politics in 2016 to pursue her passion of bringing attention to the socio economic plight of PWDs in her community. However, with the collapse of the Abim PWD Union in the early 1990’s, she had found immense challenges in putting up the adequate fighting force to bring change to her constituency.

“When we would be arguing in Council, the views of the seven types of disabilities (physically impaired, visually impaired, mentally sick, epileptic, albino, youth, women and little - dwarf persons) were not voiced equally and that was a big issue for me. So when SAO engaged us as PWD representatives in a community dialogue, where our district technical staff were also present, we were able to interact with PWD farmers and collect evidence that there was a need for more representation at the district. Our passion as district representatives was to re-establish the disability union at all levels and ensure PWD voices had a support platform.

“With support from SAO, we convened the first meeting of the PWD Union in 2017, where we discussed modalities of establishing the Abim PWD Union at all levels in Abim district’s 24 sub counties. The Union representatives at the sub county always report issues affecting PWDs in social and economic aspects, which helped us to start the process of registering PWDs in order to plan better for them.”
SEEING THE BIG PICTURE: BREAKING BARRIERS TO INSPIRE QUALITY FARMING

Okello John Lawrence, 35, Kachoro Village

“I was born with a disability in my limbs, but my parents raised me on the farm and I have so much experience and passion for farming.”

Lawrence’s passion for farming propelled him to the position of Chairperson of his farmer group called Okii United Seed Business.

“Growing up, I always knew agriculture would be my source of livelihood. I didn’t get professional training, but I learned the basics, which helped me not to let any physical challenges hinder my dreams.”

According to him, the onset of CEA further enhanced his group’s ambitions to succeed in agribusiness. “I remember ADP advised us to start multiplying our own seed. They taught us how to put aside only the best seeds from the harvest for replanting. By using this practice, we were able to save money that we previously used to buy poor maize seeds, and we reinvested in better quality from certified input dealers.

In 2019, we used our one-acre demonstration garden to grow maize. At harvest we selected the best seeds and divided them into five cups for each of our 30 members to plant in their gardens. As expected, we got a great harvest and from our profit, each of us bought or rented half an acre to plant on a larger scale. Our goal is to raise our maize production to 60 acres by December 2021 and start selling quality seed to farmers. So far, two farmer groups want to buy our cassava cuttings and maize seeds from the next harvest!
VOICES FOR CHANGE: FROM SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Emmanuel Eteru, 29, marketing officer, Network

Around February 2020, I advised the committee that our farmer groups should plant soybeans, maize and cassava because my market research showed that they were relevant. We bought 200 kilos of quality soybeans from a regional seed company, which we sold to our farmers at affordable prices. My hope is that we shall be able to totally cut out the middle man because they use dishonest scales.

Joyce Anato, 30, maize farmer, client, network store

When I heard about this store, I brought my produce and was surprised to find them measuring in kilos, not basins. Prior to this, middlemen would find me in my garden and pay me UGX 300 for the equivalent of one kilo of maize, but here at the store, one kilo is UGX 1200. I can also borrow money to pay school fees according to the number of bags I have at the store.

Andrew Banya, 52, Production officer, Network

Since we were elected as a network we have become the farmers’ voice. When big buyers come, the district refers them to us to negotiate on behalf of the farmers who store with us. We believe that together we stand, divided we fall. So we encourage farmers to store high quality produce with us and strengthen our negotiation power.
BARGAINING POWER: ABIM WEST FARMER’S NETWORK
Marketing 170 tons of monthly produce
Bulked by 3 Farmer Associations at 3 Parish stores
Reaching 764 farmers in 63 villages
FARMER FOCUSED MARKETING

Jino Ogwang, Production officer, Abim district.

“Our Mandate is to ensure food and income security for the population, the majority of whom are smallholder farmers. SAO and ADP came to our department to promote three value chains, cassava, millet and maize in Morulem, Abim and Lotuke sub counties under the CEA program. They raised the issue of limited extension services within the sub counties and we realized that one extension worker per sub county is not enough.

The program facilitated us to document cases from the field, which we presented in a regional forum with representatives from the parliamentary committee for agriculture and other key decision makers. As a result, our district received a vehicle, five motorcycles and three tractors in 2018/19 financial year, which we are using to increase our presence in the field to support farmers.

We also had several meetings on how to support farmers with linkages to markets and market information. We worked with SAO to create the Abim West Farmers’ Network, with the main aim of enabling farmers to jointly stock maize and cassava and benefit from bulk marketing.

Since we were part of its initiation, we see the network as a long term structure through which our production department can directly influence improved farming and livelihoods practices in the district in the absence of enough extension workers on the ground. We are now striving to build the capacity of farmers through the network to boost production in order to meet requirements of big markets.”
LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Patrick Bobolian, Abim District Representative for Persons with Disabilities

Councillor Patrick joined politics to possibly inspire PWDs living in Abim district to overcome any obstacles in their lives. According to him, the CEA program offered the best opportunity to confront unfair terms and conditions that made farming seem like a distant reality for PWDs.

“Through training in lobby and advocacy, I was able to speak out clearly during Council meetings about the challenges PWD farmers face in competing for the same markets as able-bodied farmers. For example, when transporting produce even to a nearby market, I have to rent a bodaboda of UGX 10,000 while another farmer will just carry it and go. This is expensive and I end up losing my profits!”

“Through this project we have seen small bulking stores planted in Lotuke, Morulem and Awach sub counties, which help to market within the community and even send bulk produce to the network store in the district. The managers of these stores have been instructed to prioritize production of PWDs so we no longer have to move long distances. As a farmer myself, I recently harvested my peanuts and cassava. They are now at the store in our sub county and all I’m waiting for is a call to pick up my money when they have successfully sold it.”
ALL FOR MY 35 CHILDREN

Samuel Ben Okello, model farmer, Abim West Farmers Network.

“The program started with 100 farmers and steadily grew to over 1500 in five parishes”

Seasoned farmer Samuel put his years of solid experience to work helping the CEA program to plant strong, independent demonstration gardens in five parishes within his sub county. “As the Secretary of the Abim West Farmers Network, I was happy to turn my farm land into one of the first demonstration sites for farmers to learn good practices that can improve productivity. We would invite farmers to learn from different scenarios in my gardens, like the benefits and dangers of broadcasting seed versus line planting. Then they would replicate the good practices in their fields and the project would facilitate our network to monitor and give support to those farms. Overtime, we have mentored over 1500 farmers to also use their gardens to teach others.”

Nowadays at harvest time, more farmers have enough quality dry seeds to bulk at the network store. We even plan to buy a grinding machine to process maize seeds into flour so that we can sell at even higher prices. For sure if our children learn the principles I am teaching, they will not need to look for anything else to cater for their families.”
STRONGER TOGETHER: “APURUMING” NO MORE

Ogwang Phoebe, 50, LC1 Chair Person, Oyaro village

“Farming in our community has been difficult mainly because of the continuous problem of cheating middle men. For a long time they would come to our farms to buy our produce with a big cup which is called “Apuruming”. It means, the “farmer is a fool”. Using this cup, they would measure the equivalent of a kilogram of cassava and pay as low as UGX 300. So I always had to rely on my husband’s support in my garden because the money I would get from these middlemen was too little for me to do anything for myself.

When our farmer group, Oyaro, joined the CEA program, we were trained by SAO about the power of bulking. They taught us that if we store produce together, we can target bigger buyers who will pay us much more money. In 2018 when the Network store opened, we started getting practical lessons on how to produce quality seeds that buyers want. I used my next harvest of white Sorghum to test the store. To my surprise, I received UGX 100,000 shillings for my small amount of sorghum, which was enough to re-invest in a bigger garden. So I confidently rented about two acres on my own and I have planted soya, maize and millet. With my next earnings, maybe I can start grinding some of my maize seeds for added value.

Maybe I can start grinding some of my maize seeds for added value.
Alayo Josephine, 32, auditor, Emorkikinos women’s group

Our group saves collectively at the association and you can take loans from there. I bought 20 bags of cassava stems using my loan. It was expensive because they had to bring the quality I wanted from Serere district but after only one month of selling these quality inputs to local farmers, I was able to pay back my loan. I even had some interest, which I used to buy some two acres of land and now I am planting 20 more bags of cuttings, which I shall dry and store at the association store in the sub county for collective marketing by the farmers’ network.

Simeo Omara, 27, Secretary, Ayeye youth group

I saw that getting credit from my group is very important because once I got my first loan, I was able to buy two acres of land and five goats, which I am rearing for sale. On my land, I have also planted some quality cassava cuttings, which will give my family very good food. I will also put aside enough to bulk at our association store, that way I will make better profits than selling alone.

Christine Akello Oryono, 27, money counter, Adea Fal class Group

When I got my loan from the group in 2019, I immediately bought and planted sesame seed on my small plot of land. I managed to harvest six bags of simsim, which I bulked at the association store. I got back a good amount of money and I was even able to return my loan with interest. I also built a mabati (Iron sheet-roofed) house with four rooms and two doors.

Awilli Juliet, 28, Secretary, Adea Kwan Ber Group.

In 2019, I borrowed money, which I used for buying produce from farmers. I would transport it to markets in Soroti and I made some money, which I used to buy some two acres of land. This year when issues of the Coronavirus came, I switched to farming and used the straight line planting methods that I had learned from the project. I planted gnuts, maize, and beans on my land and now I am expecting a good harvest, which I plan to bulk at the association store for higher profits.
STRENGTH IN NUMBERS: Harnessing VSLA for Commercialized Agriculture

Adea Farmers Association VSLA

Formed in 2019

Membership: 12 farmer groups

Weekly group savings of 5000 per member.
WHAT NEXT! CONSOLIDATING COMMERCIAL MINDSETS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS IN FINANCE

Jimmy Owinyi, branch manager, DFCU bank, Abim district

DFCU bank has partnered with the CEA partner SAO to promote financial literacy among farmer groups in Abim district since 2017. According to the Manager, the partnership has gone a long way in inspiring changed mindsets among farming communities in regard to financial management.

“Smallholder farmers in this area do not generally look at farming for its commercial value and so they consume the majority, if not all their produce and miss out on the potential benefits of commercializing their labor. Our bank has been able to train farmer groups under CEA about how to plan, budget, jointly save and grow their finances. We also engaged some of the best performing farmer groups in a country-wide innovation competition to help our bank create an online application to support investment clubs to thrive. Although they didn’t get past the district level, at least they got to be a small part of a long process that resulted in the launch of DFCU country-wide “Investment Club Application”.

The app provides indiscriminate services to savings groups from VSLA to huge investors by providing platforms for planning, record keeping and cashless transactions that are cognizant of the unique needs of every target group.

“Probably the best part about the app is that it does not require a smartphone because we know most farmers own analog phones. They only need to type in the code and they will be led through a system that offers guidance in the local language, to set up accounts and operate. We hope to orient the farmer groups on the platform and enable their VSLAs to grow to the next level.”

Our bank has engaged some of the best performing farmer groups in a country wide innovation competition to help us create an online application to support investment clubs to thrive...they got to be a small part of a long process that resulted in the launch of DFCU countrywide Investment Club Application.
DON’T SCATTER SEED

Felix Owilli Awio, secretary, Okii United Local Seed Business

ADP took us for exchange visits in Kole and Lira districts. In Kole, we visited a group in Bala sub County where we learned that when you scatter seeds while planting, you put too many in the ground, but in line you will know even the number of the holes where you have placed your seeds and you can plan your harvest better.”

PLANT MORE TREES

Dennis Isaac Opio, 21, Omito village

My mother is a member of a farmer group and she has been teaching me how to grow sesame, millet, beans, cassava and maize. I attended two meetings from my mother’s farmer group where I learned the importance of planting trees in our compound to protect the environment and improve our soil for agriculture so I helped her to plant some trees.

UNITED WE STAND

Vincent Isamat, 20, Kakor Village

I have been watching my mother since she joined a farmer group and now I have learnt that agriculture can do a lot for you when you do it in a group. Ever since my mother started planting and selling with the group, she has been bringing home more money. By the time I’m 30 I want to be a farmer and an engineer.
Isaac Ogwang, 29, input dealer, Ajalo village

For 29-year-old Isaac, saving his community in crisis was top of the list when he joined the farmer’s platform in 2017 and benefitted from empowering dialogues with sub county and district leaders that resulted in the enactment of byelaws to protect him and other farmers from exploitation by sellers of counterfeit inputs. However, not even the decision to open up his very own input shop within the community prepared him for the magnitude of his contribution to society.

“I started selling many different seeds that I accessed from certified seed dealers in Lira town in 2017. Whenever farmers would come to my shop, I would slowly explain the differences between fake and genuine products. Even the sub county started noticing that farmers could identify and report fake products easily. I also talked to them regularly about seed multiplication and how it can reduce their headache with input dealers.

By the time our country was locked down because of Covid-19 in 2020, many farmers had already started drying and storing quality seeds from the harvests they had got after my training. Even when there was no means of accessing markets to buy quality seed, they were able to sell quality seed to others in the surrounding community. Right now, I can call all those ones micro input dealers and I am proud to have been able to help them start.
GOING MOBILE

Ogwang Phoebe, Abim

“Since COVID-19 came, we can no longer buy and sell the way we used to in open markets but we still need to make money. Now to protect ourselves and customers in the nearby communities, our farmer groups have decided to make phone appointments. Customers make phone orders, we prepare and stack the desired quantity in the garden. After they send mobile money, they can go and pick up the order.”

TRADING LOCAL

Salaama Alice Opada, Serere

“When the lockdown came, business was really slow because the markets were closed. Still we survived by concentrating our trade on our communities. I hope other communities did it like that also, to protect themselves from outsiders.”

STORING TOGETHER

Richard Oonyu, Ngora

“We had planted quality cassava cuttings on quarter an acre of land before the lockdown. We found this so useful for our families because we couldn’t access normal markets; so we were able to distribute the roots amongst ourselves and survive. This motivated us to continue doing things together like this.”
CONTACT US:
Plot 1608, Kironde Road, Muyenga; P.O. Box 33333, Kampala, Uganda

We Help Farmers and Small Businesses Grow

Member of the
actalliance

www.icco-cooperation.org
www.civicengagementalliance.org