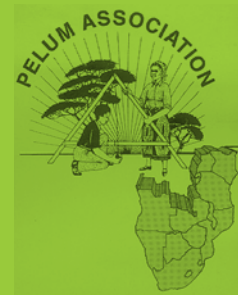


PELUM Uganda Newsletter

Participatory Ecological Land Use Management



June 2009 Issue.

PELUM E-NEWSLETTER ISSUE 6

‘Promoting Organic Farming as an approach to sustainable agriculture in Uganda’

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Organic products packaged by Amfri farms for the export market; Picture taken during the PELUM Uganda exposure visit

PELUM PROFILE

PELUM Uganda is a network of 32 non governmental organizations in Uganda that have chosen to work together to improve the livelihoods of their partners in rural communities. PELUM Uganda builds the capacity of its members so that they are better able to provide relevant and quality ecological services to partners in the community. Through participatory and gender responsive training, research and networking. PELUM Uganda promotes food security, natural resources management and use of indigenous knowledge. The network also facilitates experimental learning through exposure & exchange visits, topical dialogue and debate at national and regional level. This is in a bid to enhance members' awareness on trends and factors influencing their environment

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the June 2009 issue of the PELUM Uganda E-Newsletter.

This issue is focusing on ‘Promoting Organic Farming as an approach to sustainable agriculture in Uganda’ Organic farming is a form of agriculture that relies on crop rotation, green manure, compost, biological pest control, and mechanical cultivation to maintain soil productivity and control pests, excluding or strictly limiting the use of synthetic fertilizers, synthetic pesticides, plant growth regulators, livestock feed additives, and genetically modified organisms. Generally, Sustainable agriculture encompasses many different production methods, systems, and approaches

Organic chillie for export: - displayed at the PELUM Uganda member exposure visit to AMFRI farm.



that aim to meet the goals of profitability, stewardship, and quality of life. One of those approaches, but by no means the only one, is organic farming. Organic agriculture is generally considered to be under the sustainable agriculture “umbrella.”

PELUM’s core area is Sustainable agriculture, the form of agriculture that enables a farm to produce food indefinitely without causing severe or irreversible damage to the ecosystem.

In Uganda, agriculture involves more than 75 percent of the population and is the basis for the livelihoods of more than 3 million smallholder families. In spite of generally favourable agriculture conditions like fertile soil and ample rainfall, agricultural productivity remains low and poverty afflicts more than 31% percent of the national population. Since the late 1980s, Ugandan civil society organizations have been working with poor small scale farmers to reverse declining farm productivity by promoting sustainable farming systems, based on organic agriculture principles. Organic farming systems have been found to be particularly suitable for small scale farmers since they rely on locally available resources and build on indigenous knowledge of farmers. This allows for the development of highly productive farming systems that yield a variety of products and services that sustain the livelihood of smallholders. It also increases the food security of farmer families while the international market for organic agricultural produce offers good value for their products.

Uganda has the most developed sector of certified organic production in Africa. About 33,900 farmers

manage 122,000 hectares of land using organic methods, an area that accounts for 1% of Uganda’s arable land (IFOAM & FiBL, 2006). Although still small and far below the increasing global demand, the country’s export of organic agricultural produce has been growing substantially in recent years. In Uganda, which has one of the lowest agro-chemical usages in Africa, the majority of farmers practice de facto organic agriculture without being certified yet. (ACODE, 2006) Since no significant domestic market exist, certified organic agriculture targets mainly export markets in Europe and North America.

As the world currently wrestles with emerging challenges such as rising food prices, low agricultural productivity, climate change, and land degradation, among others, sustainable agriculture offers a wide range of solutions. This is because it guaranties environmental stewardship, farm profitability and prosperous farming communities.

The PELUM Uganda E-newsletter provides a platform for member organization to share their experiences in sustainable organic agriculture.

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Ruth Nabaggala
Stella Grace Lutalo
(PELUM Uganda Country Desk)

A Life changed through organic farming.

As told by Ms. Zenah Muhumuza &
written by RITAH LUMALA (Africa 2000 Network Secretariat)



Ms. Zenah Muhumuza a Send a Cow Uganda farmer

This case highlights the history of one farmer Ms. Zenah Muhumuza supported by Send a Cow in Mubende District who has organically grown vegetables, fruits and food crops for 12 years.

In June 2009 PELUM-Uganda organized for member organizations a workshop on sustainable agriculture Zenah participated on behalf of Send a Cow Uganda & shared her testimony on how her life has been transformed through organic agriculture.

Zenah grew up in Ntungamo, Western Uganda and moved to Kampala after she got married. Her husband neglected the family after he had lost his job and Zenah, decided that she and her 6 children migrate to Mubende to occupy the 6 acres of land that her husband had

bought. With no knowledge of making a living from agriculture, Zenah started cutting the trees on the land to make charcoal so as to raise money for school fees well as for home use. She had never practiced farming but was introduced to the idea of by Send a Cow which gave her a heifer.

Zenah therefore started her farming with the heifer & also begun to grow fruits & vegetables. Zenah decided not to use inorganic fertilizers or synthetic pesticides on her farm, thereby allowing her vegetables and fruits to be grown organically. She remembers that her neighbors were highly skeptical of her as a newcomer who was trying to farm in what Zenah termed as 'the pest capital of the world'. Zenah however, went on with her organic farming.

Zenah found that she had easy access to a huge supply of cow dung and green manure from her vegetables. She recalls that when she first began, most animal producers were rather careless with their waste management and viewed manure primarily as a material that required disposal. Zenah began compost the cow dung in open windrows before application to her farm. She feels that the composting process helped to stabilize the nutrients and make the Nitrogen less vulnerable to leaching on the sandy-textured soils.

Zenah follows a 4 to 5-year crop rotation on her farm land. She begins the sequence with high-value crops such as carrot and eggplant. Cucumber is next in the rotation, followed by a leafy vegetables such as lettuce. The last crops in the rotation are generally potatoes. A relatively heavy application of compost began the 5-yr rotation and then a lesser amount of supplemental compost is applied as needed to the following crops.

Many vegetable crops have a small seed size and require a well-prepared seedbed to obtain good germination and the desired plant population. Zenah prepares many nursery beds whose plants & trees she sells.

Zenah first began selling her produce from a stall at a local farmers market to get experience with consumers and their preferences. However, with the heavy time demands associated with operating a farmer's market stand, she realized that she could not successfully grow the crops herself and then sit at a retail outlet all day. She changed to selling her produce to 3 hotels (Nakayima, Star and Equator) hotels in Mubende on contract basis. Individual buyers also contract her directly to supply a certain amount of produce. She currently earns

between Ugshs. 700,000 – 800,000 (US\$ 350-400) per month from her farm produce. Her income has greatly improved through farming.

“For many years, my farm has been a hot spot for many visitors from all walks of life”, she says. The frequent visits are a source of inspiration and pride as it gives family prestige when I get invited to represent all farmers in my district at international events”. In February 2009, Send a Cow facilitated Zenah to attend an agriculture workshop in UK on behalf of all farmers supported by Send a Cow.

Zenah is very proud of organic farming. “Through organic farming, I was able to educate my 6 children up to university level, buy more land and also construct a permanent house. Because of the benefits I reaped from agriculture, my husband was encouraged to come back to his family since the home was financially stable.”

Zenah's husband is now supportive of her farming through providing technical advice, since he is a trained agriculturalist.

Pests were a major challenge when Zenah began her operation and she recalls losing entire crops to pest damage. Since then, she has learned to stagger planting dates, avoid pest-sensitive crops, and carefully scout fields to minimize pest damage. She observes that pest damage decreases steadily through the years. When necessary, predatory insects and organically certified pest control materials are used on her farm. Weeds were another major challenge to successful vegetable production for Zenah however, this was overcome through cultivation and hand hoeing as primary methods of weed control.

SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION:

Experiences from Namayumba, Wakiso District

***By Namazzi Gloria Veronica,
Agency for Integrated Rural Development,***

Agriculture is one of the major land uses in Uganda. Over 73 % of the rural population in Uganda is engaged in subsistence farming and thus depend on land. With the ever increasing population, (30 million), together with other factors like the land tenure systems, conflicts and civil war, poor government policies, environmental

degradation, etc, there is a lot of pressure put on land. The challenge, therefore, is how to use this renewable resource (particularly in farming) sustainably so as to benefit today's generation without compromising future generations. It is against this back ground that in 2001, following a Needs Assessment, a Sustainable

Agriculture Project focusing on soil and water conservation and management was introduced in Nzu and Buwasa villages in Namayumba Sub County in Wakiso District in Uganda. The overall objective was to improve soil productivity through soil and water conservation and management practices. Specifically the project aimed at:

- Improving household crop yields through soil fertility management and water conservation.
- Improving environmental conservation and protection among small scale farmer households
- Improving small scale farmer households' incomes.

Methodology

Needs Assessment

Prior to project intervention a needs assessment was carried out. Various Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools were used to identify and prioritize the various needs/problems of the community. It was found out that the major problem faced in these villages was reduced agricultural productivity as a result of soil degradation.

Group approach

Two farmers' groups were selected. Each group comprised of 25 members of which majority were women. The group members taught other community members. This approach created a spirit of togetherness and strong linkages among farmers, joint planning and pooling of Labour as well as joint access to extension services.

Community capacity building

The selected farmers were trained on different methods of capturing surface water run off. These include: the use of cut off drainage channels, contours and grass bands. Farmers were taught how to establish the above and extension services were also provided so as to empower the farmers.

Working through partnerships

Different stakeholders were involved and included; local government officials who played a vital role in

farmer mobilization, community members who are the major beneficiaries and also contributed resources as well as civil society organizations (CSOs) personnel who offered technical support.

Results

According to the project evaluation carried out in 2006, 80% of farmers had gained food security. This was measured in terms of number meals a day, variety of foods and the nutrition aspect of the meals consumed. Farmers report of increased crop yields especially in areas where soil and water conservation practices had been established. This was due to improved water retention and fertility within the soil. They also said that crops are not adversely affected during the dry season as they can still use up the moisture and organic matter stored within the soil.

Farmers reported of a reduction in costs incurred on irrigation and purchase of artificial fertilizers. This income was used to develop other farming activities.

More so, better environmental conservation within the areas has been achieved. This is a result of limited use of artificial chemicals, reduced deforestation in search for virgin land, reduced soil erosion and soil fertility loss. Farmers are aware of the need to conserve their soil through different ways. They are also aware of the need to include organic matter in the soil which has led to positive results.

Majority of farmers appreciated the group approach and said that it had greatly improved their confidence, motivation and independence. They also noted that it was an opportunity to learn, share skills and knowledge as well as resources with other farmers.

Soil fertility plays an important role in agricultural production. It is therefore paramount that it is maintained. Farmers need to understand soil fertility not as a way of adding artificial fertilizers but that soil is a living and a self renewing resource.



PELUM Uganda visit to the Lweza Organic farm



A well mulched banana plantation

Information and communication strategy

Farmer groups were taken for exposure visits to other farmers who had excelled in soil and water conservation and management. This was to create awareness and enhance knowledge and skills through sharing experiences and success stories.

Information Education and communication materials were developed illustrating on how to go about the different methods of soil and water conservation. These were in the local language easily understood by all farmers.

Demonstrations of soil and water conserving technologies were established at selected farmer homes. These were used as a reference and replicated by other farmers on their own farms. Group members' participation was paramount in setting up these demonstrations during the practical sessions.

Village meetings were also held. These helped mobilize community members, share skills and knowledge as well as a tool of community ownership of the project

Impact on rural Livelihoods and agricultural development

Generally there was an improvement in rural livelihoods as a result of the above intervention. Project farmers were found to have improved food security. This was determined from the number of months where farmers experienced food shortage. Project farmers experienced 1.5 months of food shortage compared to 3.1 months experienced by non project farmers (Bachman 2005). More so, the diets of the project farmers improved. This was attributed to the fact that a variety of crops were grown due to improved soil fertility. Better nutrition led to fewer occurrences of poor nutrition diseases. Therefore less income was spent on treating such deficiencies.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Please submit articles to:
Email: pelumuganda@utlonline.co.ug
before 21st September, 2009.

Under the theme:
'Documentation for effective
Advocacy and Lobbying'.

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