

GROUND UP

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A PELUM publication promoting sustainable community development

Greater incomes, better lives: Farmers show us how



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Editorial

Increasing incomes: small-scale farmers show the way

In this issue of *GroundUp* we are examining a variety of ways in which small-scale farmers are increasing their incomes, for example by:

- Finding ways to add value to their produce
- Diversifying their income, through growing new or more profitable crops
- Finding new markets for their crops
- Setting up their own saving and loan schemes, in order to access necessary credit to increase their operations

We hope that sharing these stories will help more farmers to attain financial security.

This issue also reports on some of the activities of the association. For instance, we recently trained some farmers in ecological land use management – an approach that should help them to prosper in challenging economic as well as environmental times.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue. Please contact us if you have any questions or comments.



Estelle Taylor
Communications Adviser

Cover photo: Prince Tembo shows how the pumpkin leaves on Elijah Walima's farm are benefiting from his fungi fertiliser (see story p11).

Processing foods can boost income

A recent food fair shared some good ideas for how Zimbabwean small-scale farmers can, and are, increasing their incomes.

About 70% of Zimbabweans are small-scale farmers. Farming provides at least part of the family's needs for food but the farmers also need cash to cover expenses like medical costs and school fees.

At the Processed Products Fair – held in July 2010 in Harare, Zimbabwe – the FAO Assistant Country Representative for Zimbabwe David Mfote said that “agro-processing and small enterprises, or adding value to primary agricultural produce and selling processed products, offer many opportunities that include an increase in productivity and food diversification; an increase in the nutritional value of the diets of farming and urban families; the

generation of extra income; and the stimulation of the local economy. The overall potential of agro-processing is huge. It can reduce wastage, enhance food security, improve livelihoods for low-income groups and empower women.”

The fair was organised by Volens, a Belgian NGO based in Zimbabwe. PELUM Zimbabwe and member organisation CELUCT (Chikukwa Ecological Land Use Management Trust), participated and exhibited processed products. CELUCT exhibited bottled honey and peanut butter from the farmers and the country desk exhibited packaged ingredients of a tasty local snack – called Mutakura in one of the local languages – which is boiled groundnuts with maize or roundnuts or boiled roundnuts with maize.

The other organisations and farmers at the fair also exhibited processed

products from sweet potatoes such as juice, jam and fritters, meals from millets and sorghum, dried traditional/indigenous vegetables, processed cowpeas, honey, peanut butter and herbs.

PELUM Zimbabwe sold a good number of its exhibited products and came away with a few good lessons:

- In future it would be useful to have permanent market points for well-packed processed traditional/indigenous products
- Smallholder farmers could be empowered to form private partnerships with chain supermarkets where they could sell their processed products

- Bertha Nherera, PELUM Zimbabwe

Photos below: scenes from the processed foods fair in Zimbabwe.



Traditional plant brings profits

A community project shows how a local tradition can help to revive health and welfare

The Rift Valley Stinging Nettle Community harvests, processes and markets stinging nettle in Molo and Nakuru districts. Fifteen self-help groups as well as women and youth groups are involved in its activities. Most of the community's members are small-scale farmers who practice organic farming and live in the vicinity of government forests.



Traditional but forgotten

In Kenya, the stinging nettle – referred to in Swahili as *Ilaila* – grows in forested, highland areas some 2,500m above sea level. Those living in or near the Mau forest have been using it as a traditional food for generations and it was known to be particularly beneficial for pregnant and lactating mothers. It can also be used as a food supplement for weaning children and the sick.

However, as human settlement increased, the forest was exploited and degraded. Land was cleared for crops such as maize and wheat and eating habits changed. The nutrient-rich nettle lost its prominence in local diets.

Nettle has many benefits

The stinging nettle (*Urtica massaica*) is a perennial plant belonging to the nettle family *Urticaceae* and it grows best in shaded, moist wooded areas. It has spiny hairs and when touched these break off, transforming the hair

into a needle that can inject a cocktail of poisons. This mix of poisons causes the sting which gives the species its name.

The leaves of the stinging nettle are about 10cm long, roughly heart-shaped with serrated edges. It can grow to a height of about 1m and the flowers that develop on the nettle later fall off as seeds. The plant propagates itself through its rhizomes or underground roots.

Nettle powder has a sweet, pleasantly mild taste. It resembles chamomile tea but it has strong medicinal and therapeutic qualities. Its leaves are rich in calcium and iron. Herbal practitioners and the National AIDS Council, for instance, have identified stinging nettle as an important nutritional supplement in the management and care of HIV/AIDS. It is also an effective anti-fungicide.

The stinging nettle has many culinary uses as well. It can be taken as an

infusion or health drink, added to millet or sorghum porridge or used as a weaning supplement. When cooked, the leaves can be eaten as a green vegetable.

Plant production

Initially the Rift Valley Stinging Nettle Community consisted of self-help groups working independently of each other to improve the livelihoods of local communities. In 2003 – stimulated by the Network for Ecofarming in Africa (NECOFA) – these groups came together, established the Tuko Organic Producers Association and started growing nettle as a domestic crop.

The Rift Valley Stinging Nettle Community with the support of NECOFA and the Slow Food Central Rift Convivium is domesticating the stinging nettle and supporting farmers in managing, cultivating and processing the plant. Today, some 180 women and 150 men members

of the Rift Valley Stinging Nettle Community are involved in this activity.

NECOFA has played an important role in building up the capacity of network members to manage the production, processing and marketing of nettle products. Together with farmers, it has carried out research into the technologies and conditions that would enable effective organic cultivation. It has also taken responsibility for linking farmers to market outlets and promoting and marketing nettle products at food fairs and agricultural shows.

As a result, the Rift Valley Stinging Nettle Community has been able to progress from producing small quantities of stinging nettle powder using a pestle and mortar to growing large enough amounts to justify industrial milling.

The Rift Valley Nettle Company – with the help of such organisations as the Slow Food Movement and the Terra Madre – has been working to stimulate the international market for nettle powder. In 2004, for example, nettle products were exhibited at Terra Madre's annual international meeting of food communities in Italy.

Many community economic benefits

There are challenges – from gathering, drying and marketing the product, to documenting its benefits – but about 1.5 tonnes of ground nettle powder is being sold annually and these sales have had a strong

“**One elderly woman - who had lost her house and livestock due to ethnic clashes - has bought a new house and livestock with the proceeds from this project.**”

socio-economic impact. Stinging nettle products are now an important source of income for all members of the Rift Valley Stinging Nettle Community, especially women and young people.

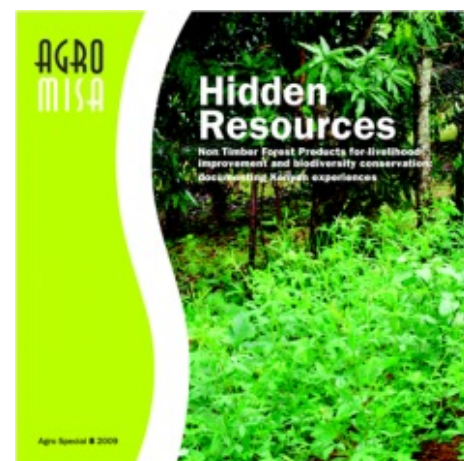
One elderly woman – who had lost her house and livestock due to ethnic clashes – has bought a new house and livestock with the proceeds from this project. Another member, a young man whose resources did not allow him to further his education, is now able to help his family and support his younger brothers and sisters through school. Other members of the community are using money earned from nettle production to participate in a revolving fund to enable them to meet household expenses and school fees and generally improve their standard of living.

That story was from *Hidden Resources*, a new book by PELUM Kenya. *Hidden Resources* documents community forest management practices that have helped to provide community, environmental and

economic benefits. It's a timely book, since poor management and exploitation has reduced forests to just 2% of the country.

If properly managed, forests provide many useful products for people besides wood: spices, essential oils, fodder, resins, gums, latex and dyes, tanning materials, ornamental plants, wildlife products, medicines and foods, for example. They have a huge potential to improve community health and welfare and restore and conserve local biodiversity. The case studies reveal how communities came to realise the potential of their forests and so stopped taking actions that were destroying them. Documenting the experiences was a critical first step. It's now important to share the stories widely.

Hidden Resources was prepared with the support and collaboration of many, including Agromisa and CTA. It is available from PELUM Kenya (pelumkenya@pelum.net, www.pelum.net) and available as a PDF on the PELUM regional website (www.pelumrd.org).



New opportunities found

In Malawi, growing mushrooms is helping women to boost their income

About 52.4% of Malawians are poor, 22% ultra poor – not able to meet the minimum standard for daily recommended food requirements. More than 70% of the poor and ultra poor are women due to factors like illiteracy and lack of access to productive resources.

However, Malawi, like other African countries, is blessed with a very rich biodiversity, encompassing biota in our fresh water and marine ecosystems, in our desert climates, in our dry savannahs, in our savannah woodlands, in our forests and in our various soil types.

Malawi's rich biodiversity and other natural resources can be used to



This school-leaver had been unemployed since she left school. Now mushroom farming brings her a good income.

promote sustainable human development, especially poverty reduction. Some of Malawi's biological resources, which were conceived as unwanted weeds, can be developed into new cash opportunities that could serve as agents for employment creation and poverty alleviation.

Edible mushrooms can be developed into dietary supplements. Edible mushrooms are rich in protein, vitamins and inorganic mineral nutrients and also grow very fast. In some cases harvesting can be every two to six weeks, allowing several crops per year.

Mushrooms are an important alternative income-generating activity because they are in high demand both in Malawi and abroad. In Malawi, most of the consumer requirements are imported since domestic production, which is estimated at 6.5 tonnes a year, is insufficient to meet the demand which currently stands at 80 tonnes a year. The supply gap is satisfied by imports, mostly from South Africa and Hong Kong, yet Malawi has the climate and all the raw materials for the growing and harvesting of mushrooms.

Project builds on opportunities

Thinking of these opportunities, the Enterprise Development Training Agency (EDETA) embarked on a mushroom-farming project. The

project was initially financed by Oxfam UK and Ireland. EDETA's trainers were trained with the financial and technical support of the UNDP Malawi and worked in partnership with the University of Malawi, Chancellor College Biology department. The organisation is working with 878 mushroom farmers. The mushroom farmers are earning an average of K110, 000 (approximately \$725 US) per group of five people for each cycle of four months.

Key to business success is the issue of access to markets. Marketing and market development is pivotal to success. EDETA therefore puts emphasis on training in marketing and business planning to all potential mushroom farmers.

Mushrooms are highly perishable. EDETA collaborates with partners like the Chancellor College (Industrial Support Unit) to train people in quality control and quality management in order to qualify under the Malawi Bureau of Standards for certification purposes.

Mushrooms: good economics

EDETA realised there are several advantages to mushroom farming:

1. Manageable technology.

Mushrooms are easy to grow using simple technology and do not require a large piece of land. They can be grown behind one's house.

2. Poverty reduction. The mushroom industry provides an important alternative income-generating activity to poorer members of society, especially women, because they are in high demand both in Malawi and abroad. It is a 'pro-poor economic empowerment activity' since it has the potential for reduction of household poverty.

3. Saving and earning of foreign exchange. Malawi imports about 70 tonnes of mushroom a year, mostly from South Africa and Hong Kong. Expanding local production will save foreign exchange.

4. Development of employment opportunities. Small businesses, such as mushroom farming, help to develop employment opportunities and economic progress. The hundreds of mushroom farmers EDETA works with would have been unemployed if they did not choose self-employment.

Farming is not difficult

EDETA encourages the farmers to grow the oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus sajor-caju*). This is because it uses raw materials that are easily found and are friendly to human health in contrast to buttonhead mushroom which requires chemical fertilisers, chemical insecticide sprays, calcitic lime and molasses, which are not easy for a poor person to find and not friendly to human health. The organisation also promotes *Lentinula edodes*, an edible mushroom which has medicinal value that boosts immunity and has a market niche in the present day where HIV/AIDS, TB

and other common diseases have compromised body immunity. It is also believed that this type of mushroom has anti-tumour and anti-cancer effects. EDETA also promotes *Pleurotus ostreatus*, *Ganoderma lucidum*, a purely medicinal mushroom, and, lastly, *Agaricus bisporus* (buttonhead mushroom). The farming process for oyster mushroom is as follows:

Step 1: Mushroom house construction (one week). It has to be constructed according to given specifications. Key construction materials are poles, bamboos, dry grass and plastic sheets. Mushrooms can either be grown in shelves or in polythene bags hanging on a string in a room thatched with grass.

Step 2: Substrate collection and formation (two weeks). Each type of mushroom species has its own recommended materials for making the compost.

Step 3: Spawning, or sowing, of the mushroom 'seed' (two weeks).

Step 4: Incubation (four weeks). This is the period when the spawn germinates until it colonises the container. Incubation is done under specific scientific conditions.

Step 5: Mushroom house management – humidity control, ventilating, watering and harvesting (one-two months) – is critical to the rate of germination, quality and amount of harvest.

Step 6: Fruiting, harvesting and marketing. Mushrooms re-germinate



EDETA puts emphasis on training in marketing and business planning to all potential mushroom farmers.



three-four days after harvesting. The process continues for two-three months, allowing for at least three crops a year.

Environmental benefits

Most water surfaces in Malawi have been colonised by the damaging water hyacinth. The weed can produce huge biomass in a short time. Water hyacinth coverage on water surface blocks sunlight. The absence of sunlight encourages growth of certain algae that competes for nutrients and inhibits growth of plankton that almost all the fish eat. It also affects water chemistry by increasing carbon dioxide concentration, absorbing large amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus and reducing oxygen content of water. This can completely eradicate fish. Evaporation from its leaves – 13 times more than that from clean water – causes water dams and rivers to dry off quickly, causing water shortages.

An effective way to remove the weed is by using it **as a substrate for oyster mushroom farming!** Mushroom farming will increase the impact of water hyacinth removal.

- Emmanuel Mlaka of EDETA, a PELUM Malawi member.

In brief: a market linkage approach

PELUM Tanzania member Faida Market Link (Faida MaLi) outlines how it links farmers to markets through its 10-step market linkage approach

1: Enterprise selection

Facilitator's main activities

Conduct market research
Review profit prospects
Review environmental issues

Critical issues

New enterprise is difficult to handle
Market dynamics
Alternative outlets exist

2: Selection of company

Facilitator's main activities

Review company's expertise and business skills
Gather information from clients
Review end markets

Critical issues

Good track records
Openness/provide information
Willingness to engage in cost sharing

3: Selection of farmers

Facilitator's main activities

Review if climate is suitable
Participatory review of farmers' expertise/resources base
Review economic activities

Critical issues

Farmers eager to participate
Continued food production
Environmental concerns
Gender issues

4: Bring parties together

Facilitator's main activities

Explain the contract
Agree partners' responsibilities
Ensure all sign the contract

Critical issues

Everybody understands the contract and its conditions
Clear activity/time schedule
Develop trust among parties

5: Assistance to company

Facilitator's main activities

Assistance to further develop key business skills
Assist in obtaining finance
Analyse market outlets

Critical issues

Company willing to provide inputs, finance, extension
Buying/payment procedures
Long-term perspective

6: Assistance to farmers

Facilitator's main activities

Business skills training
Group formation
Ensure extension services
Promote savings/credit

Critical issues

Group leadership
Appropriate extension
Food production
Side selling

7: Involve others

Facilitator's main activities

Link with relevant GOs and NGOs
Share the work
Train other organisations

Critical issues

Positive attitude to private business
Active involvement
Replicate/adapt approach

8: Support to linkages

Facilitator's main activities

Find solutions for problems that arise
Intermediate in conflicts
Link to specific expertise

Critical issues

Strong commitment of all parties involved
Develop trust
Flexible assistance

9: Monitoring and evaluation

Facilitator's main activities

Participatory review of experiences
Implement improvements
Joint planning of follow-up

Critical issues

Systematic data collection by farmers and company
Learn from mistakes
Long-term perspective

10: Facilitator withdraws

Facilitator's main activities

Further development of the linkages
Approach new partners
Start new linkages

Critical issues

Pull-out strategy known from the start
Allow partners to do the job
Review experiences

Faida MaLi is a non-profit company with a social mission of empowering women and men in rural Tanzania to access markets through capacity building of community-based organisations and implementation of the market linkage approach.

The participatory market chain approach

The participatory market chain approach (PMCA) is a participatory way of solving problems small-scale farmers have in getting their produce to market.

Involving the different actors of market chains, it seeks to generate group innovations based on a well-led and well-structured participatory process that gradually stimulates interest, trust and collaboration among members of the market chain. These innovations can be new products and processes, new technologies or new institutions, benefiting the different actors of the marketing chain directly or indirectly.

The only fixed elements of this approach are its three phases.

Phase 1 of PMCA is diagnostic research, typically taking two to three months and involving between 20 and 40 qualitative interviews. In contrast to conventional market research, the gathering and evaluation of technical or quantitative information is less important than getting to know and understand the key actors of the market chain, with their interests, problems and ideas. Findings from the interviews are presented and discussed in plenary. Then two or three smaller working groups are formed, based on topics of joint interest identified through the interview session. In this sense, this event is used as a first occasion to share ideas and interests among the different stakeholders.

Phase 2 of PMCA aims in each thematic group to define and analyse potential business opportunities. The group meetings have a strong demand-oriented focus. Six to ten meetings might suffice to analyse carefully the different joint opportunities. At the final event of this phase, the identified market opportunities are represented by each working group and discussed with a wider audience.

Phase 3 of PMCA concentrates on the implementation of all activities needed to put in place the suggested market opportunities. Usually, three to six months are necessary to implement the planned activities and launch the generated innovations at the closing event of the project.

- Adapted from the website of the International Development Research Centre (www.idrc.ca)

Case study: Rwanda

Two of PELUM Rwanda's members offer trainings to small-scale farmers in the participatory market chain approach: Rwanda Development Organization (RDO) and DUHAMIC ADRI.

The training is provided to farmers in order to develop the entrepreneurial spirit, to reinforce their capacities of negotiation of markets and to make them more adaptable to changing markets and conditions.

The RDO training helps to identify bottlenecks in the supply chain and develop plans and strategies to overcome them. The focus is on testing and resolving constraints in the production of banana, beans and soybeans.

DUHAMIC ADRI has been training farmers on the marketing of the production, calculations of the production costs and analysis of profitability of manures, on the modern farming techniques. The farmers working with DUHAMIC ADRI specialise in the production of maize and soybeans. The training has helped farmers' entrepreneurial capacity, resulting in them getting better prices for their products. Farmers DUHAMIC ADRI has trained are selling seeds at 400 Rwf a kg (\$0.70 US), up from 120 Rwf a kg (\$0.20US).

- Celestin Hitimana, PELUM Rwanda



Training by DUHAMIC ADRI

Cooperative efforts pay off

PELUM member ORUDE is helping farmers through its sub-county savings and lending cooperative known as SUSALECO

The SUSALECO is a group-based approach to savings and credit cooperative development. It is an empowerment scheme that builds capacity and provides credit access to women and youth. With SUSALECO, women have access to credit that is favourable to their rural conditions and they in turn plough back the profit/interest into their community to stimulate the local economy.

SUSALECO was set up by PELUM member ORUDE. During its formulation, founders looked for ways of generating capital from within the community without necessarily seeking out bank loans. To achieve this, they employed the services of FIT Uganda and Kabarole Research council to come up with the SUSALECO model.

A SUSALECO consists of 250 farmers: 10 groups of farmers each with 25 members. People subdivide within the Susaleco based on members' income-generating activities, interests and other social characteristics. Their leaders monitor them. ORUDE then

supports each unit to identify its viable income-generating activity that the unit would like to promote in order to increase savings.

Each circle is headed by a female chairperson. Men are encouraged to join the circles but aren't allowed to fill certain leadership positions like that of the chairperson. Each circle offers loans that have security attached. If a person defaults, security is taken or the shares belonging to the people who seconded the defaulter for a loan are taken. Each circle sets its loan interest rate. Family members are encouraged to join a particular group but not to dominate the leadership of the circle. Each circle has a funeral fund used to support members who lose close relatives.

To become a member of SUSALECO, one has to be at least 18 years old, pay a one-time membership fee and an annual subscription fee, buy at least five shares, pay for a passbook and have a minimum savings amount.

An individual can borrow three times the value of his/her shares; a group

can borrow three times the collective value of their shares.

One of the most successful SUSALECOs that ORUDE started is Mafubira Rural Savings and Credit Cooperative society limited (MARUSSACO). MARUSSACO operates within Mafubira sub-county and its members are permanent residents. MARUSSACO offers loans to its members based on a person's shares within the circle. Currently the microfinance has UGX 11 million in shares (\$4,760 US), UGX 3.5 million in savings (\$1,500 US) and UGX 16 million out in loans (\$6,900 US). The loans are agricultural loans (paid within six months), business loans (four months), social loans (three months) and emergency loans (four months). All loans have a 3% interest per month. The default rate isn't very high; loans are expected to be guaranteed by their farmer groups.

Esther Timbiti, bank manager at MARUSSACO, says ORUDE's trainings have helped. "We have learnt a lot on how to be good leaders. We always thought that men should lead in everything but ORUDE has empowered us to be women leaders and actively participate in the development of our community."

- Adapted from a PELUM Uganda report

Photo: SUSALECO members and PELUM Uganda visiting team



Rural financing a success

Small-scale farmers in Kenya are improving their livelihoods through community banking

Inades Formation International – Kenya runs a rural finance programme known as Solidarity Fund for Development (sofdev) in four locations in rural Kenya’s Mwala and Matinyani districts.

The level of resources mobilised so far gives motivation towards building an institution that if managed properly would rival the mainstream financial institutions in financial service delivery in the rural areas.

Sofdev is a community-owned and -managed savings and credit delivery approach suitable for rural areas with potential sustainability using community-based resources and structures. The main features of the approach include:

- Community mobilisation for financial solidarity through savings initiatives
- Mobilisation of resources within the community at individual and group levels
- Development of community structures to form management committees
- Development of management and financial control tools/instruments

All sofdev units are registered with the government as self-help financial institutions.

Target group

Sofdev’s credit and savings approach targets the communities involved in on-farm and off-farm activities in

agriculture, livestock development, small-scale enterprise and income-generating activities. This community credit and savings approach lays emphasis on solidarity savings, fixed savings, current savings, agriculture-based loans (fruit farming and livestock rearing/keeping) and income-generating and social credit (*jua kali* activities - small entrepreneurial and artisan activities – and school fees loans).

The aim is to bring economic empowerment in the rural areas by introducing a self-generated and -managed financial system through which people get access to reliable and affordable savings and credit assistance for development and poverty reduction.

Members partipate

To become a member under the

programme, one must be a mature Kenyan citizen and a resident of the locations of implementation, participate in the programme in accordance with the set rules, be prepared to be a member and participate in savings mobilisation, pay a non-refundable registration fee and buy at least one unit of solidarity savings.

Things going well

Through the mobilisation of local resources (bricks and sand) from members and a little support from Inades Formation – Kenya, members of Mwala sofdev were able to construct a three-room office where they are currently serving their members.

They have also been able to establish a satellite office in the neighbouring location (Kyawango Market).



A cattle dip constructed through a loan from sofdev.

Over the period the members have been able to pool resources (financial and human), some of which were spent on fixed assets (office construction). One sofdev unit (Mwala) has been able to establish a satellite office at Kywango Market to capture the larger southeastern part of the district.

Through technical support and continuous trainings by IFIKO, the sofdev has been able to build a pool of fairly competent managers from among its members, offering services on a voluntary basis. Repayment rates are between 85 and 90%.

There are adequate resources (human and financial) in the rural areas and with proper training and management, guidance and genuine

collaboration, a lot can be achieved in terms of development, even without external funding support.

The culture of savings is slowly but steadily taking root in the rural area, thus the opportunity for the sofdev unit to grow.

Major financial institutions are still not keen on venturing into the 'unbankable' world and even a few who penetrate to these communities still want collateral securities which the majority do not have. This has left a wide 'playing field' for innovative financial intermediaries such as the sofdev units.

- Bernard Kitonyi, managing director, Inades Formation International - Kenya

Sofdev at a glance

Membership	3,105
Members with at least one unit of savings	2,004
Direct beneficiaries	3,603
Savings mobilised	Kes 10.7m (\$133,000 US)
Loans disbursed	Kes 7.7m (\$95,700 US)



Sofdev customers

Advantages of sofdev

- Empowerment of the local communities to take charge of their development agenda through active participation and involvement
- This initiative does not depend on external resource and influence, thus the potential of sustainability
- The empowerment aspect leads to localised organisational structures and strengthens self-esteem
- The approach builds a local capacity in the community in screening members' applications, vetting credit applications and monitoring loan disbursement and repayments
- A low interest rate and the interest collected help to meet operational costs
- The income to each sofdev unit is directly proportional to membership recruitment efforts, loans disbursed and rate of recovery
- The savings and credit delivery method has wide penetration in the rural areas with a high degree of efficiency
- Community-based micro-finance promotes access to credit in terms of gender, income and geographical location
- Ability to tap external resources through partners in development, including governments

Exporting: a good idea

Farmers in Uganda are increasing their income by joining up with SULMA FOODS.

In June 2010, PELUM Uganda organised a workshop on farmer entrepreneurship for its member organisations. As part of that workshop, the participants travelled to Kikyusa sub-county, Luwero District, 60km north of Kampala, to visit SULMA FOODS, a privately owned family business that was started in 2001.

Fruit, vegetable growers helped

SULMA is currently working with 700 farmers in Luwero, Mpigi and Lugazi, both organic and non-organic farmers. The organic products are certified by EU regulation for Organics by CERES from Germany and UOS by UGO Cert Uganda.

SULMA specialises in growing, processing, packing and exporting honey, fresh and dried fruits and vegetables. The production range is pineapples, apple bananas, cooking bananas, passion fruits, sweet potatoes, hot peppers and honey. Approximately 10% of the production comes from a 'nucleus' or main company farm and the other 90% comes from farms on out-grower schemes.

While the company is doing well, the main market of the products is Sultanate of Oman, Dubai, Germany and Kenya and exports are currently facing challenges: the financial global crisis means many of the expatriates who were working in

Dubai and consuming these products have left; air freight out of Entebbe is high; fuel and packaging costs are high; competition; and changing consumption trends – consumers in Europe are moving away from fresh fruits (the current food trend is on 'baby products').

Beekeepers helped

SULMA works with 300 beekeepers in Luwero District to produce organic honey. Quality is the basis of their growth in terms of production systems and they lay emphasis on the internal controls system. They work on plans and they have a business plan that is renewed every five years. They also have a strong marketing team that works domestically. As a means of promoting their products, SULMA gives samples free of charge and distributes flyers in and around Kampala.

New markets created

SULMA has exploited the opportunity presented by the East African community by taking advantage of the loosening of the border restrictions; goods can now move freely across the borders of the East African countries without being taxed. SULMA has carried out several trials in Nairobi and has three organic shops in Nairobi and supermarkets willing to take on its products.

- Adapted from a PELUM Uganda report

Fungi boost

A farmer's son has invented an organic fungi-based fertiliser that should help small-scale farmers to increase yields and boost profits.

It happened by chance. Prince Tembo, a scientist, noticed that some millet seeds that had dropped on the ground on some mushroom mould grew very well. He experimented with other seeds – like maize, tomatoes, oranges and strawberries – and found similarly good results. After further research, Mycorrhizal Fungi Perfecti Company was born.

While this is Mr Tembo's first year of selling he already has dozens of satisfied customers – farmers, landscapers and horticulturalists.

"It has really performed quite well, especially on the trees," says Elijah Walima, whose farm near Lusaka, Zambia contains over 100 fruit trees as well as greens and tomatoes. "Immediately there was a difference. The oranges were so sweet." A 10-year-old avocado tree that had never fruited before has started to fruit since they've applied the fertiliser to it.

While Mr Walima uses the fertiliser for environmental reasons, others do for cost reasons.

"We've got challenges with chemical fertilisers – the price is just so high," says Alwini Kacha, a farm manager. He has found that the fungi fertiliser will fertilise a hectare of strawberries for just \$60 US.

Training in ELUM helps farmers

In September, PELUM Association trained 19 participants in ecological land use management, focusing on conservation agriculture

This training covered the construction of a ferro-cement tank, manure handling and preparation, integrated smallholder dairy farming, soil and water conservation measures, soil tillage and fertility methods, organic farming and value addition through processing. It was an intensive programme over five days – 70% was practical exercises and 30% theory work.

Participants came from Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Most were experienced trainers who are involved in training of rural farming communities.

The training was organised by PELUM Regional Desk, PELUM Tanzania and CHEMA (Community Habitant Environmental Management), a training centre and PELUM member.



The participants and trainers.

Day 1: Compost

After the preliminaries we were introduced to soil improvement using compost manures. Three compost types were discussed: vegetation compost, 14-day compost and trench compost. Composting is an important soil improvement technique which is made from materials of animal and plant origin which have been decomposed largely through aerobic decomposition. This can be useful as a fertiliser and soil conditioner and it can be used as a natural pesticide.

Compost is easy to make as long as the materials are available and it can be prepared even by the small-scale farmers without many external inputs.

Day 2: Water harvesting

The second day started with a presentation from water engineer Wilking Shuma, who explained how



Without a water tank, the family has had to carry water to their home.

to construct a ferro-cement tank as an affordable water harvesting technology.

Unlike most stone and brick cement tanks, the ferro-cement tank is usually cheaper to build and requires less labour, is able to withstand shock better, because ferro-cement is more flexible, and is portable due to its light weight.

We then visited the site where we would build a tank: the homestead of Vitalis Celestine and wife, a family unit of seven with neighbours close by. We chose a building spot near the house to allow the rainwater to be collected off the roof.

After site identification, participants started clearing the site and bringing in construction materials: cement, hard wire, soft wire and chicken mesh. The family had contributed the sand, water, rocks and stone aggregates for the tank. By the end of day we had managed to complete the foundation and most participants were exhausted.



Participants pleased with the day's work on the foundation.

Day 3: Tank work and trees

We started the day by curing the foundation of the ferro-cement tank, pouring water on the foundation to lengthen the setting time so that the foundation becomes strong as it sets slowly. After the curing we dug the inner circle of the foundation, removing the topsoil since it contained a lot of organic matter which would weaken the bound with cement mortar. The day progressed well and by 15:30 we had completed the concrete slab.

Having seen that we needed lighter and less involving work, our facilitators took us to an agro-forestry plot called Mavuno where we were shown different agro-forestry trees and the famous fanya juu and chini. Agro-forestry is a systematic combination of trees, crops and animals on a farm to achieve mutual support. Mr Bitakwate, who manages the plot, told us how important trees are as erosion stoppers, providing habitats for organisms and

improving the soil. Trees have other uses: as building material, a source of energy, a buffer against the wind, soil moisture retainer and food and shade for animals.

Day 4: Compost, biogas, contours

The day started with a discussion led by Esther Njeri who talked about soil improvement using compost making. She said that soil fertility management is mainly based on the principles of recycling organic matter on the farm. Good soil management entails good tillage practices, erosion control, good soil structure and optimum soil life. There are many ways of making compost. The methods we discussed were boma compost, trench compost and liquid manures.

The boma compost is made by collecting the bedding – grass and other plant materials – from the cattle kraal. The bedding is heaped and ash added to it. It is covered for three to four weeks and is then ready to use.

The trench compost is prepared in a dug trench. Different organic materials are placed inside the trench, ash is added and the trench is covered for two to three weeks, after which it is ready to use. Compost benefits the soil by improving drainage and moisture absorption. This makes growing in various types of soils easier and more productive. Compost also benefits the plant matter grown in the soil by providing nutrients to the plant's growing area.

Liquid manures can be used to supplement compost manures during the growing period of the plant. When using, you dilute with water and apply to the base of the crop.

The afternoon was devoted to practical exercises on soil tillage, soil improvement and water harvesting, finishing the water tank.

We also visited a biogas plant that is under construction. The plant once complete will be using green banana waste. Biogas is produced by anaerobic digestion or fermentation of biodegradable materials such as biomass, manures, sewage, municipal waste, green waste and plants. Biogas can be used as a low-cost fuel in any country for any heating purpose, such as cooking. It can also be used in modern waste management facilities where it can be used to run any type



A community biogas plant.

of heat engine, to generate either mechanical or electrical power. We also visited a community biogas plant that has been working for the last 20 years within the communal area at one farmer's homestead, for cooking and lighting.

Late afternoon was devoted to the construction and use of the A-frame, a tool constructed using simple locally available materials like sticks, string, nails or fibre rope and a stone. It is used to peg dead level contours in a field. After measuring the contour line, a contour bund can be established by use of soil, dug from below the line and ridged above the line. These are commonly known as fanya-chini. On the ridges you can plant grass to stop erosion.



Using an A-frame.

Day 5: Value addition, zero-grazing

In the morning, Bornface Matimba of Fambidzanai Permaculture Centee in Zimbabwe shared his experience on organic dry land conservation farming.

Mid-morning was time to tour a processing centre at Matunda Mema, which is buying organic produce from local farmers and then drying and exporting it. They are currently drying pineapples and bananas. This

has improved the income base for the locals.



A zero-grazing unit.

From the processing plant we went to a zero-grazing unit owned by Mr Kileo. The four-cow unit produces 160 litres a day. Zero-grazing is a system in which animals are not allowed to graze freely; instead the feed is brought to them. With zero-grazing, animals are not exposed to pests and disease, there is controlled breeding, pastures don't get damaged and it's easy to collect manures.

The last port of call was a banana winery project, a community-owned and -run project. They use organically grown bananas that come from the members and process them through boiling, fermentation and distillation. At the moment only local people are consuming the wine.

The winery visit marked the end of the training and participants were treated to a dinner hosted by CHEMA and PELUM Association to refresh their brains and to complete the networking.

Thanks guys and expect more in the next training. Bravo!

- Wilfred Miga, Regional Agriculture and Rural Development Officer

Great workshop!

After reading the invitation letter, I became fully convinced that this course was very good for me because it addressed the issues that I teach at Baraka Agricultural College, a training institution in the Kenyan Highlands.

My main drive was to learn from others, especially those from other countries, to enrich my teaching.

It was a big surprise to see all trainees being active and fully involved in all the activities. This created a very good environment for learning. Out of all the training I have attended, this was most unique in that sense.

Sharing of rich experiences gave the training more weight that not only killed the monotony but enriched the content of every topic that was covered. We appreciated that people at different levels, programmes and countries had diverse ways of doing things that, shared, made for better results.

Apart from the actual training content, I learnt that farmers have now become more aware of what services they need from the providers and are ready to work towards meeting the targets they set. It is therefore important that all of us change our mindset so we perceive farmers not as only beneficiaries but as equal learning mates.

- Francis Kamau, Baraka Agricultural College

Healthy meals for patients

The benefits were clear: “We now have three meals a day instead of just two. We have butternuts, which are like pumpkins, which we eat at breakfast or as an afternoon snack,” said Mrs Dube, one of the beneficiaries of a nutrition gardens project run by PELUM Zimbabwe.

The Nutrition Gardens Project is a Ministry of Health and Child Welfare project being executed by PELUM Zimbabwe. The gardens are improving the nutrition of people with TB and HIV and also orphans of parents who died from TB or AIDS.

Nutrition is an important component towards support and care of TB patients. Studies have shown an association between TB and malnutrition. TB makes malnutrition worse and malnutrition weakens immunity. Therefore adequate nutritional intake during TB care and recovery is needed to fully restore nutritional status during and following TB treatment and microbial cure. The gardens provide vegetables and legumes to help the body stay strong and fight sickness. Food handouts are an expensive source of nutrition which Zimbabwe cannot

afford. It tends to rely on donors for these. However, with the gardens, patients are supported, initially with start-up materials. Patients or their relatives can then grow their own food and boost their nutrition.

The project provides to a group of beneficiaries fencing material like 1.8m diamond mesh wire and treated poles; seed starter packs; tools; and training on organic principles of growing vegetables and improving water argumentation supplies to reduce labour of watering by beneficiaries.

The seed starter packs are made of winter crops, summer crops and crops that can be grown year-round. The starter pack has a mixture of legumes, cucurbits, leafy crops, root crops, fruit crops and herbs. The leafy crops amongst other vegetables also comprise traditional/indigenous vegetables such as spider plant (nyevhe/ulude) and amaruthus (mowa/imbuya). The legumes include cowpeas. These traditional vegetables have been found to be highly nutritious in protein, iron, calcium and beta-carotene.

Communities contribute to the

nutrition gardens by providing labour, building materials such as river sand, pit sand, bricks, water and other locally available resources. To improve on the sustainability of the gardens, they form garden committees and develop constitutions to guide management of the gardens.

A total of 11 nutrition gardens were established in Phase 1 between November 2009 and February 2010. The gardens are supporting 235 people in Manicaland, Masvingo and Matebeleland South provinces. During phase 2, expected to finish this month, 16 more gardens, benefiting 288 people, are planned.

One of the main offshoot benefits that has been highlighted by the beneficiaries of Phase 1 was that the gardens are like support groups for the patients. They get to know each other, share experiences and encourage one another on the importance of taking medicines. Patients that are not bed-ridden indicated that the gardens provide them with something to do and shows that even if they are sick they can still work for themselves.

- Bertha Nherera, PELUM Zimbabwe



A tour of one of the nutrition gardens.

New alliance for food sovereignty

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa is showing policy makers that food sovereignty will come if they help farmers adopt African sustainable farming practices. We helped to set up the alliance in November 2009.

We are pushing African leaders to:

- Champion small African family farming systems based on agro-ecological and indigenous approaches that sustain food sovereignty and the livelihoods of communities while not neglecting other appropriate farming models
- Protect the rights of the African people to indigenous seeds, plant and animal genetic resources and combat bio-piracy
- Resist the corporate industrialisation of African agriculture, which would result in massive land grabs, displacement of indigenous peoples, especially the pastoral communities and hunter-gatherers, and the destruction of their livelihoods and cultures
- Reject the corporate takeover of African land, food production systems, indigenous knowledge and resources
- Bring to an end the continued exploitation of African resources for the consumerist demands of the North

The members of the alliance represent many small-scale farmers, pastoralists, hunter-gatherers, indigenous peoples and environmentalists from Africa. The members are African Biodiversity Network (ABN); Community

Knowledge Service (CKS); COMPAS; COPAGEN; ESAFF, The Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers' Forum; Friends of the Earth Africa; GRAIN; Indigenous peoples of Africa

Coordinating Committee (IPACC); PELUM Association; PROPAC; ROPPA; La Via Campesina Africa/UNAC; Women for Change; and World Neighbours.

Food sovereignty indicators

- Healthy and culturally appropriate, respecting the taboos, norms, practices
- Ecologically sound and sustainable
- Puts people at the heart of system and policy
- Defends inter- and intra-generational interests
- Systems determined by farmers, fishermen and pastoralists
- Empowers peasant and family farmer-driven
- Transparency on agreements
- Guarantees food and income for all
- Ensures rights to territory and biodiversity
- Implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality
- Promotes equality among racial groups, social classes and gender
- Led and managed by traditional institutions
- Community driven and community owned
- Respects spirituality of the community
- Revitalisation and revaluing of traditional knowledge

Family farming campaign continues



Mary Jo Kakinda, our secretary general (second from left), was in Malawi in October for the African launch of the campaign to get the UN to declare an International Year of Family Farming.

A letter from John Wilson

Money makes the world go around: a jingle I remember from my childhood. It's true in many ways. Money is the blood stream for any particular economy, and for today's global economy as a whole. One can't but marvel at how we humans have used the concept of money (having an independent measure of value for some products and services) to create sophisticated ways of running our affairs.

If we trace history rapidly, to see the big picture we see: hunting and gathering, settlement, barter, use of something independent to measure the value of labour and products, more trade, access to more 'things' as a result, banking, loans/credit, gold standard, insurance, derivatives, collateralized debt obligations (CDOs)...

'Too clever by half' is another saying I recall from when I was young. I think this is true for the monetary system we have today. We've taken a very useful concept and we've been too clever with it and lost our common sense. One of the reasons we had the financial crash in 2008 was because very clever mathematicians created very clever formulae to enable 'toxic' loans such as the sub-prime mortgages we've all heard about to be traded all over the world with top triple A ratings. Clever....and fatal. And this is just one dimension of how the financial institutions were 'too clever by half'.

Furthermore, the current monetary system is not sustainable. The creation of money is on an exponential curve. For example, it took from the 1600s to 1973 to generate the first trillion dollars of money stock in the USA. It now takes less than four months to create a trillion dollars and it's getting faster and faster, which is exactly what an exponential curve is. It will be four weeks, then four days, then four minutes.

Another key characteristic of the current monetary system is that it is concentrating wealth in elite hands at all levels, nationally and globally. Put simply, the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. It's like a funnel. So, we have a monetary system that is dangerously risky and could collapse, with huge implications for everyone, a monetary system that is not sustainable and that is very unjust. This is the backdrop that I think we all need to be aware of when we talk about money. We need to think strategically and wisely and creatively about our work with farmers and communities when it comes to money.

How do we help communities become stronger and more resilient with this kind of backdrop? No easy answer! Here are three aspects that I feel we need to be thinking about:

Keep money circulating locally as much as possible: As I write this letter I haven't seen the rest of GroundUp but I suspect that there are a number of articles about how farmers can add value to produce and market their produce more effectively and so increase their cash income. It goes without saying that this is crucial. But it must go further than this. If money is the blood stream for an economy then how can that money 'pump' more within the local economy? What needs to be done to enable money to stay local rather than being sucked straight out? How can we work with communities to enable this greater circulation of money locally?

Alternative currencies: I think we must seriously start looking at alternative forms of 'money' to complement existing currencies. This links to point i) above, since local currencies enable money to stay more local and for longer. This really needs us thinking out of the box. At the same time local currencies are not something new and we can draw on experiences both now and in the past from many parts of the world. We have to be bold and try things out. It's also possible to develop concepts like time banking, a form of local currency that builds on what many communities do anyway by pooling their labour to help each other out, often to complete bigger tasks.

Wealth is not money: I think we need to start conversations everywhere about what is wealth. In today's world too many people too often mistake wealth for money, as does the dictionary! Money can help measure wealth to some extent but obviously it is not wealth. What about the soil on which a farmer depends or the perennial river that provides water all year to communities all along its banks? What then is wealth? That's what we need to discuss everywhere. Families and communities need to talk about and agree on how they can move towards a wealthier life in all its fullness and in a sustainable way.

Money is a technology and as with all technologies we need to understand it and ensure it serves us rather than us serving it.

John Wilson was PELUM Association's first coordinator.

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About PELUM Association

Since 1995, PELUM Association has been working to improve the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and the sustainability of farming communities, by fostering ecological land use management.

PELUM Association is a network of over 200 civil society organisations involved in rural development in East, Central and Southern Africa. We:

- Share skills and knowledge about good practices and techniques
- Undertake research and demonstration projects
- Lobby for policies that better support small-scale farmers

Through these approaches, we are increasing farmers' ability to improve their livelihoods.

Our work is paying off. We have spread knowledge about ecological land use management, water and marketing to many thousands, having:

- Trained thousands of extension staff and farmer-trainers
- Distributed thousands of publications
- Organised numerous workshops, fairs and conferences
- Brought the voice of the small-scale farmer to bear on Government policies and programmes

We operate through 10 country desks as well as a coordinating regional desk in Zambia. The country and regional desks are governed by boards made up of member organisations.

Contact us today to find out how you can get involved.