

THE AGROECOLOGY PRODUCTION SUSTAINABILITY PLAN FOR WOMEN AND YOUTHS UNDER CEFROHT COLLABORATIVE IN UGANDA

1. BACKGROUND

During project implementation of the 7th AEF grant, the collaborative led by CEFROHT trained women farmers and engaged in agroecology. As a key component of the project, the two earth markets were established to enable the complete cycle of realising the benefits of agroecology. The collaborative trained small holder farmers both in peri-urban and rural areas to produce agroecologically and supply the earth markets. Through earth markets, the collaborative conducted consumer awareness programs at the earth market through enabling consumer farmer interactions and through public consumer awareness and interactions.

Although this is the case, the markets continued to suffer low supply from the women agroecology farmers. Many times, consumers were disappointed when they demanded for agroecologically produced vegetables, fruits, food staples and there was no supply. CEFROHT therefore applied and was awarded a grant from the Agroecology Fund to work with the collaborative and women agroecology farmers and youths through a participatory approach to develop a production sustainability plan and a market strategy.

2. INTRODUCTION

During the business planning project implementation and the many participatory meetings and working with the consultant, several supply constraints were identified including, lack of land, organic input issues, limited or no training in the areas of agroecology, no access to water sources, cultural and social issues among others. Therefore, CEFROHT has led the collaborative with two women and youth groups, and local governments to develop two strategies; that is, an agroecology production sustainability plan and a marketing strategy for farmers' produce in the rural and peri-urban areas in Uganda.

The above are based on the identified supply constraints. A sustainable production plan based on addressing the supply constraints faced by women and youths who are dominant in agriculture and now agroecology; and a market strategy are therefore critical pathways to overcome the above-mentioned challenges facing women and youths in the agroecology sector.

3. THE IDENTIFIED SUPPLY CONSTRAINTS AFFECTING WOMEN IN AGROECOLOGY IN CENTRAL UGANDA.

The women and youths farmers through this planning development with the consultant discussed that the identified supply constraints are triggered by different factors some of these are in the control of farmers while others are not, these constraints affect the supply of agroecological production and supply as discussed below.

a) Limited access to Land and illegal evictions

According to the outcome of the responses and discussions in this business planning exercise from women, youths, collaborative members and the consumers, a significant obstacle faced by the majority of women farmers was restricted access to land. Women and young farmers have found it challenging to get land. The vast majority of women are landless and rely on their husbands' fragmented land to survive. Women and young farmers also found the current land-related customs and laws difficult and costly to navigate when it came to resolving land-related disputes, which continue to be the main issues with land use. Women also lacked knowledge of property rights and how to assert their entitlements. They also highlighted the complicated land tenure systems that prevent them from owning land. This limitation makes it more difficult for young and female farmers to adopt agroecological techniques, which call for adequate farming acreage, secure land ownership, and usability.

b) Low soil fertility

Young and female farmers reported low yields of poor quality, which they attributed to insufficient soil fertility. This can be explained by the fact that the quality and amount of food produced are determined by the health of the soil. Farmers mentioned overcultivation without "feeding" the soil, a practice that has caused a deficiency of nutrients in the soil. The farmers also mentioned soil erosion and mining, as well as inappropriate and unsustainable agronomic techniques and management of soil health and production, all of which have negatively impacted the land over time and resulted in a low supply. They also mentioned that, even when they would have loved to have animals and poultry integrated in their farming, these are costly to buy.

c) Limited organic input solutions to pests and diseases

Farmers mentioned challenges of pests and managing pests and diseases both in their crops and livestock. They lack knowledge and skills to make

effective organic agro-chemicals that could act as fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. More to that, women farmers face challenges accessing these inputs due to financial constraints, lack of market access, and limited availability in rural areas.

d) Poor or no storage facilities

Farmers faced significant post-harvest losses and were faced with the difficulty of inadequate or non-existent storage facilities. Many female farmers had trouble storing their produce, which caused some of them to sell it in a rush. This is also evident in the cattle industry, where producers have had to sell off piglets and calves to make room for expansion.

e) Climate change (Rampant dry spells)

Farmers reported significant changes in weather patterns and trends. In recent years, farmers reported rampant dry spells and hailstorms which affected production cycles and the farmers attained low or no yields due to their heavy reliance on natural weather cycles. Women farmers lacked access to reliable water sources for irrigation, which limited their ability to sustain agroecological practices year-round. Therefore, adequate water resources are crucial for sustainable agriculture, especially in regions prone to drought or erratic rainfall.

f) Limited access to Knowledge and Training

Women reported having restricted access to education and training because of their multiple duties, which include childcare, domestic chores, and agricultural work. Due to their busy schedules, they were unable to fully take advantage of training sessions, extension services, and other agricultural education opportunities, which prevented them from learning essential skills and information. Therefore, their ability to successfully adopt and apply agroecological approaches was hampered by their lack of access to knowledge and technical skills.

g) Limited access to Finances

Accessing financial services was another challenge. The participants retorted that credit and loans can only be acquired with security which majority of the women do not have limiting the opportunities to invest widely in agroecology. Limited access to finance constrained their ability to purchase inputs, invest in infrastructure, or scale up their agroecological enterprises. Women and youth farmers lacked the required capital that would have helped them to enhance their agricultural output.

h) Hard transport means for women

Lack of access to and the cost of transport often limited the mobility of women and their possibility to transport crops to market centers. Gender differences in marketing were to some extent explained by the fact that women did not own means of transport and some didn't afford transport costs to market places. This therefore limited the possibilities for women to participate effectively in the marketing activities.

i) Lack of certification:

It was discussed that many consumers were asking for proof if the products had no hazardous chemicals. Through the discussion with the consultant and the collaborative, that there should be urgent pursuit of the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS).

4. OPPORTUNITIES

Although women are facing a number of challenges in agroecology, there are also some opportunities to tap from as follows;

a) Growing Consumer Demand

There is a growing demand for organic agrifood products both domestically and internationally, presenting opportunities for agroecology producers to tap into premium markets. Even locally, communities especially among the elite are beginning to differentiate between organic and inorganic.

b) Innovations towards inputs

Agroecological approaches prioritize soil health through practices like composting, cover cropping, and minimum tillage, which can improve soil fertility, structure, and water retention. In both rural and urban/peri-urban areas in central Uganda, farmers are learning to integrate crop and livestock.

c) Policy Advocacy

There are opportunities for advocacy and policy dialogue to promote supportive policies and incentives for agroecological production at the local, national, and regional levels. Overall, while there are challenges to overcome, the outlook for agroecology producers in Central Uganda is positive, driven by increasing awareness of sustainability issues, growing consumer demand for organic and eco-friendly products, and the potential for agroecological practices to enhance resilience and livelihoods in the face of environmental and socio-economic challenges.

d) National Organic Agriculture policy

Presence of the National Organic Agriculture Policy (December 2019), the Government of Uganda recognizes the huge potential for Organic Agriculture, both for increased and sustainable food production to safeguard food security as well as for enhanced income for farmers. Although the sector is currently export-driven, branded organic products are slowly penetrating the shelves of local supermarket chains and restaurants, attributed to the growing health consciousness and wellness trends in the country.

d) Network of Agro ecological Symbiosis

Presence of this symbiosis which is putting down so many concepts about agroecology and also providing support to different organizations in agroecology.

5. THE PLAN GOING FORWARD TO TACKLE THE CONSTRAINTS

Below are the planned actions being that were identified by the planning exercise to address the above supply constraints faced by women and youth farmers.

- **Products:** The participating women and youths in the development of the plan and the strategy agreed to first concentrate on four identified four (4) key vegetables which include tomatoes, onions, green-pepper, African eggplant (locally known as Nakati).
- **Markets.** There was a consensus that for now, they should concentrate on developing one market first. So, the farmers in the rural side, will send their produce to the peri-urban market because they agreed that it will fetch more revenue than the rural one. They also agreed to change the venue to a more corporate targeting place.
- **Promotion:** The women and youths asked CEFROHT for both online and mainstream advertisements support. This needs both personnel and infrastructure like gadgets and internet. There was also agreement to have targeted clients to whom delivery can be made. CEFROHT agreed to work with the women to look for support for a motorcycle as a first steps into this delivery strategy and for the long term a vehicle.
- **Support over identified supply constraints:** For efficient and effective implementation of the sustainability production plan and the market strategy of the identified key vegetables by the women and

youth farmer groups, and the general development of the earth market, the following were identified as needed support requirements.

- ✓ **Organic inputs:** The consensus is the fact that soil fertility is too low for all women farmers who participated. There was therefore a general agreement to have support for inputs for fertilizers, chicken and pigs' feeds/alternative protein, and pesticides.
 - a) **Black Soldier Flies.** They agreed to adopt the Black Soldier flies as part of the production circle. This has four critical support elements, that is, waste management, alternative protein, organic fertilizers and more income and health. Therefore, CEFROHT will work in support of every household farmer to have a small Black Soldier flies' project for that purpose in support of sustainable production of vegetables identified. CEFROHT has already partnered with Makerere University and Ento organic farm to set up a Black soldier fly larvae (BSFL) facility which will produce a nutrient rich organic compost (frass) which is used as an organic fertilizer. The women farmers will rear BSFL on both home decomposing and collected waste from the markets to produce frass fertilizer to be used in gardens and sale off the excess for income.
 - b) **Livestock Integration.** Another aspect for soil health and fertility was agreed as livestock integration. Some agreed to have pigs, other members agreed to have goats and a chicken as part of their farms for sustainable production. The women and youths asked for support. Each household estimate is USD 200.
 - c) **Fertilizers.** CEFROHT has partnered with a Makerere University professor manufacturing organic fertilizer and willing to sell to women on reduced price of USD 15 per liter for an acre of land.
 - d) **Pesticides.** There was a consensus to use ash, lemon grass and pepper as good pest repellants. More to that, intercropping of pepper and lemon grass in gardens was emphasized. However, some farmers asked for support. Again, CEFROHT is working with the Makerere Researcher to sell to women at a subsidized price of USD 20 per liter per

acre. Farmers will also be taught how to make organic concoctions out of ash, lemon grass and pepper to act as organic pesticides. Additionally, CEFROHT entered a partnership with Prof. Kasozi Livingstone from Makerere University to produce organic biopesticides at subsidized prices that will be supplied to farmers and sold in the markets as biopesticides.

- ✓ **Seeds' access:** a) For all the above vegetables, farmers identified the challenge of seeds access and after a thorough discussion, members agreed to plant both the indigenous and improved breeds. CEFROHT will be working with the Uganda National Seed Bank in case of indigenous seeds and connect with other actors like PELUM and AFSA. b) They also asked CEFROHT to support them to start a seed enterprise to supply seeds on either credit or affordable prices as part of the sustainability production plan to ensure continuity in their production processes.
- ✓ **Government opportunities:** CEFROHT will work with the women and youths to tap into government supported programmes specifically Parish Development Model (PDM) for the soft loans. Through PDM Saving and Credit Cooperative, the government gives soft loan of up to USD 270 to each farmer which is payable after three (3) years at an interest rate of 6 per cent per annum.

The Water challenge: During the consultation with local government in the plan and strategy development, the officials at local government indicated that there is an irrigation support scheme. The local government gives only farmers organized and who can contribute 50%. CEFROHT has set out to work with local governments to link the farmers to government's irrigation support system which requires a 50% contribution from farmers for continuous provision of water supportive of production processes to guard against prolonged dry spells. A basic household irrigation is estimated to cost between USD 2,000 to USD 2,500 depending on findings from the hydrological survey.

- ✓ **The Land challenge:** Land was discussed, and its challenges came out in two dimensions. The first is illegal evictions and another is lack of access. For the illegal evictions, CEFROHT will be giving the women pro bono (free) legal services. Then for

lack of where to farm, women asked CEFROHT to assist in identifying entities and individuals having big land which they can get on license on favorable terms. CEFROHT is already in talks with the catholic church and has identified five acres where women can jointly farm on favorable terms.

- ✓ **Indigenous and scientific knowledge exchange.** Women discussed the issue of indigenous knowledge, and although they keep sharing amongst themselves, there was need to have more exchange learning and visits for continuous reflection and observation from other agroecology farmers in the country.
- ✓ **Capacity building.** Women specifically asked CEFROHT to support their capacity building activities. To bring for them scientific agriculturalists to continue in learning new agroecological agronomy of the four identified vegetables to ensure sustainable production and continuous supply.

6. KEY PARTICULAR ACTIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

| Key issues/to do | Action/how |
|---|---|
| 1. Keep Records | Going forward women were advised and a consensus was built to have all the records on all production and sales. CEFROHT is tasked to develop a template to capture quantitative data from the market and from the women and youths farms on a monthly basis. This will help to track progress and sustainable supply and prevent any hinderances. |
| 2. Know your clients | There should be a keep of all the clients' records (those who will have accepted to join our clients' database) |
| 3. Keep in consultations and in touch with other agroecology women farmers in Uganda and East Africa. | For the production to be sustainable, there is need for continuous learning. The plan is now to have continuous exchange learning visits and interactions. |
| 4. Monthly meetings | The farmers agreed to have monthly meetings and asked the collaborative and CEFROHT to attend. These meetings will aim to make assessments on continous supply and any foreseeable constraints and challenges. |
| 5. Local government constant engagements | Because local governments (by law) manage the markets, the plan is to involve the local governments in the activities and their plans such |

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| | that in case of any support and or integration, then the local leaders must be on board. |
| 6. Track improvements | Women will (going forward) track progress in the monthly meetings to capture progress and inform CEFROHT in case of any backsliding. CEFROHT keep in constant participation with the women and youths farmers in relation to market and cause a quarterly monitoring and evaluation report. |
| 7. Continuous Monitoring | The women and youths tasked CEFROHT and the collaborative to continue monitoring them to ensure that farmers continue to practice agroecological practices and get the time-sensitive information and knowledge. |
| 8. Capacity building and Awareness raising | The women asked for continuous training workshops. It was agreed to have quarterly technical training in agroecology methods and practises. Yet, there will be monthly meetings for the women and youths farmers to share experiences and acquired knowledge for the benefit of other members. In these meetings, challenges and action points will be analysed and prioritized. |
| 9. Budgeting and Resource Mobilization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish coordination mechanisms, such as multi-stakeholder platforms or working groups, to facilitate collaboration and decision-making among stakeholders. • Define roles, responsibilities, and communication channels to ensure effective coordination throughout the sustainability planning process. |
| 10. Harsh climate and hot dry spells | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to water laon scheme that will be pursued from the Local Government, each farmer will plant 100 trees. CEFROHT will work with the women to ensure access and good breeds. Fruit, medicinal and fertiliser trees will be prioritised. • CEFROHT was tasked to support women with technical training sessions of on-farm water haverst and or retention techniques and apparatuses. |