Exploring the High Youth Uptake of Agriculture Employment in West Nile region, Uganda

An Action Research Report

Youth Employability Through Enterprise and Skills Development (YES - Project)

Conducted For:
Netherlands Development Organization (SNV)
Agency For Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) and
Center for Governance and Economic Development (CEGED)

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AFARD The Quest for A Better Society

CEGED CENTRE FOR GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SNV

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The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessary represent those of the European Union.

APMEI takes full responsibility for any error herein this report.

Consultant: Peter Beine
September 9, 2016

Acronyms

AFARD	=	Agency For Accelerated Regional Development
BTVET	=	Business, Technical, Vocational, Technical Education and Training
CDO	=	District Community Development Officer
CEGED	=	Center for Governance and Economic Development
CSO	=	Civil Society Organization
DCO	=	District Commercial Officer
DPO	=	District Production Officer
FGD	=	Focus Group Discussions
KII	=	Key Informant Interviews
LG	=	Local Government
NSA	=	Non State Actors
SNV	=	Netherlands Development Organizations
UGX	=	Uganda Shillings
YES	=	Youth Employability through Enterprise and Skills Development
YMF	=	Young Model Farmer

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Executive summary

To address the high rate of unemployment in the West Nile region, SNV (Netherlands Development Organization), Centre for Governance and Economic Development (CEGED) and the Agency for Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) designed the YES – Project. With European Union funding the project is under implementation in Arua, Nebbi, Yumbe and Moyo districts. Its overall objective is, "Poverty reduction through improved incomes and sustainable employment prospects for youth in northern Uganda."

While (inter)nationally it is a known "gospel truth" that youth dislike agricultural employment pathways, SNV and its partners instead witnessed an abnormally high demand for agricultural component of the project. Both urban and rural youth preferred to be enrolled under the agribusiness component. To understand why such a conflicting youth employment aspirations, SNV and partners contracted Applied Monitoring and Evaluation Institute (APMEI) to carry out a study to explore "why many in- and out-of school youth preferred agriculture (farming) employment in the context of West Nile region in Northern Uganda. Thus, the central inquiry questions were:

- What are the key factors influencing/motivating the youth to embrace agriculture under the YES project?
- What can SNV and its partners learn from this approach?

To unravel these questions, the following research sub-questions were developed:

a. What were the common employment pathway that YES project beneficiary youth engaged in prior to the intervention? Why?
b. What innovations did YES project offer to trigger high demand for agriculture? and
c. What lessons can SNV and partners learn from these innovations for future youth policy and programming?

The action research was designed to apply a 'utilisation knowledge-focused' approach organized in 3-phases, namely; Phase I: Defining the study boundaries; Phase II: Field data collection; and Phase III: Analysis and Reporting. Data was primarily collected through Document Review; Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); Key Informant Interviews (KII); Participant Observations and photography; and Cases Studies. The different data generated were finally analysed and triangulated using qualitative method like content analysis method and quantitative data was analysed using SPSS.

The Key Findings

Pre-intervention youth employment status

The major pre-intervention employment sector for the youth was agriculture (63%) followed by petty trade (48%) and boda boda riding (30%). Such employment patterns were influenced by factors like, "family skills transfer," from parents and peers and existing inputs required for the jobs – land, water, and labour. Yet all the other jobs were preferred as alternative forms of employment because they do not require [high school education and] skills; large start-up capital; and are operated concurrently with agriculture that is their main form of employment.

Factors that facilitates a mix of on-farm and non-farm employment among youth

The youth noted that they are demotivated to have a full time employment in agriculture because of three broad clusters of inhibiting factors: (i) Geographical reasons like unfavourable climate; (ii) Personal/human resource factors such as lack of modern farming skills and (iii) Discriminatory policy-related factors that facilitate inaccessibility to improved agricultural inputs, skills training, funds and markets, as well as weak laws to curtail crop destruction by wild animals.

YES Project Innovations that Attracted Youth into Agriculture Employment

The following were pointed out as the best-baits YES project provided to youth to enter into and remain in agricultural employment:

- A transparent project initiation that mobilized and sensitized youth in ways that built confidence and trust among the youth that the project was for them.
- Working with Youth-based group approach that socially identified and formed cohesion and economic groups to promote collective marketing.
- Promotion of youth preferred enterprises – horticultural crops – that many youth had been looking for but could not afford given its costs.
- Access to improved agro-technologies (start-up inputs and skills) that transformed the image of farming from traditional to modern farming.
- Access to markets that guaranteed that youth produce will not rot into their houses.
- Building on experiential learning based on positive impacts as many youth after learning about the success of their peers turned into full time agriculture because it is a job with high income.

Lessons to Learn and Recommendations

This study explored the contradictions between the unsubstantiated facts that youth dislike agriculture employment pathways. Using the experiences from YES project it drew some vital lessons that can provide critical direction for SNV and its partners for future youth employment policy and programming, namely:

- Global perceptions are never always right: Every youth employment question should be addressed within its labour and macroeconomic context. It is also evident that the challenge for rural youth is not unemployment but under employment in non-rewarding agriculture.
- Diversification matters: Agriculture as an employment opportunity has too many risks that require ample risk mitigation strategies such as by enterprise diversification.
- Effective mobilization and youth-specific group approach builds trust: Doing so promotes the uptake of and retention in agricultural employment.
- Youth prefer smart agriculture: Youth do like agriculture but not like their forefathers and parents did. They do not like traditional technologies. Instead attracting youth into agriculture entails promoting "smart agriculture" that is, "practicing of modern farming with profitable crops, improved skills and tools, and targeted at the market."

- Building market linkages ensures a sustainable farming as a business model: Youth need support to start-up gainful agricultural employment. They prefer to self sustain their enterprises. This requires support that strengthen market linkages to various value chain actors – input dealers, extension service providers, insurance and financial markets, and business development services.

Conclusion

Although both state and non-state actors currently harbour an unsubstantiated notion that youth do not want to venture into agriculture, YES project has proven otherwise. The study has shown that majority of the youth in the rural areas are underemployed in agriculture with accumulated farming knowledge, skills and experience. They only venture into other alternative employment opportunities due to myriads of factors that do not make agriculture a decent job. By innovatively addressing these hindrances through a youth–focused group approach, access to the "right" improved agro-technologies, and building market linkages, YES has demonstrated that youth can embrace agriculture employment more so with improved livelihoods.

Introduction

1.1 The Context

Of the 35 million people in Uganda, more than 78% of the population are below the age of 30 and 18% are youth aged 18-30 years. Yet 11% of youth are unemployed (9% males and 14% females) and 26% youth are underemployed (28% males and 25% females). These youth unemployment question has been attributed to the narrow size of the formal employment sector and the limited engagement of youth in the agricultural sector that employs more than 85% of the rural population. This situation is worse for West Nile region with 2.7 million people (50% are youth) that suffered 27 years of prolonged conflict and insecurity, which among others led to significant population displacement, socio-economic losses, a breakdown in social infrastructure, severely weakened governance structures and service delivery, and community and household asset depletion.

The YES – Project was designed, with European Union funding for co-implementation by SNV (Netherlands Development Organization), Centre for Governance and Economic Development (CEGED) and the Agency for Accelerated Development (AFARD) primarily to enhance youth employment opportunities in Arua, Nebbi, Yumbe and Moyo districts. It focuses on formal and non-formal skills development and technical training, increasing the market relevance of agricultural sector, and employment linkage programmes of local BTVETs. Specifically, the overall objective of YES – Project is, "Poverty reduction through improved incomes and sustainable employment prospects for youth in northern Uganda." This goal is to be achieved through the following specific objectives:

- To support access to employment for 5,000 in- and out-of-school youth through formal and non-formal skills development and vocational training.
- To increase the market relevance of 20 public and private training institutions (formal) and 100 local enterprises (non-formal) and ensure the design and delivery of market-driven transferable skills development.
- To support the capacity development of non-state actors (NSAs) and local authorities (LAs) service delivery for youth skills development.

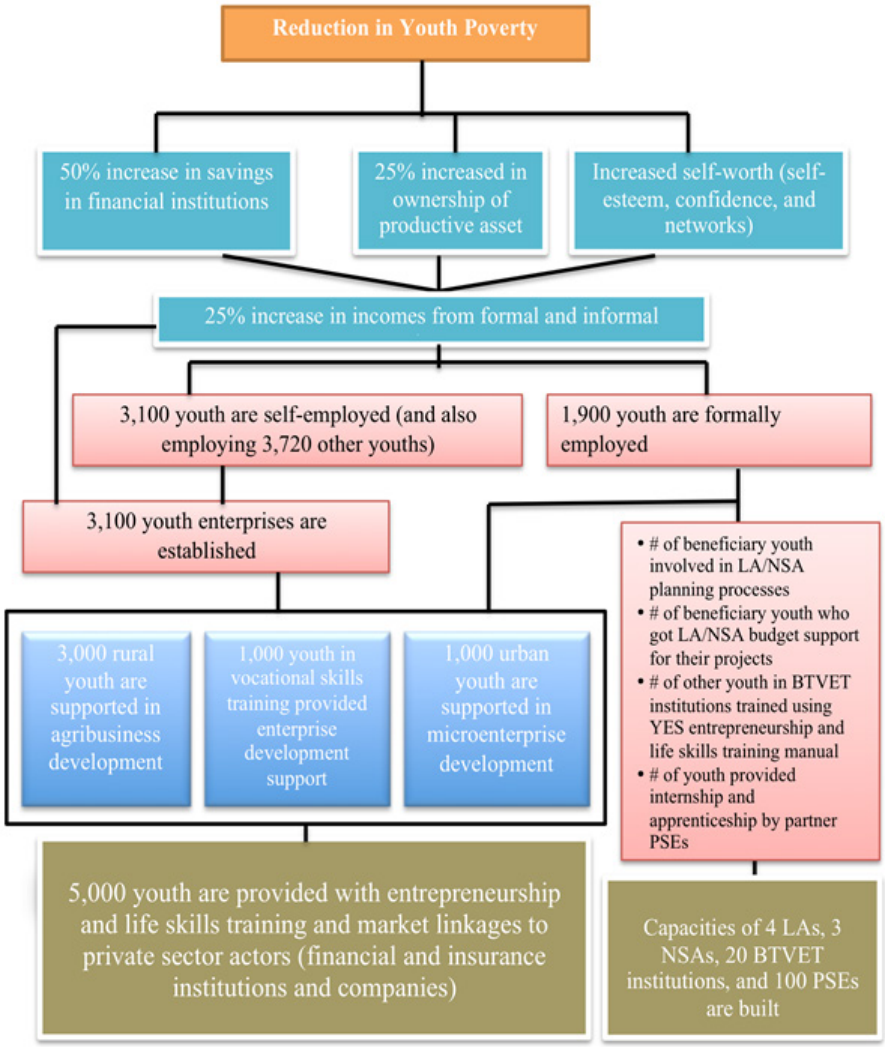
The key activities aimed to achieve the above goal and objectives include:

- The provision of transferable, technical and vocational, agribusiness, business and life skills development and training;
- Enterprise development and employment (labour market) linkages (including business incubation, mobile, online and social media platforms);
- Provision of start-up support (start-up kits, small grants, financial service linkages, youth business competitions) including business coaching and savings promotion;
- Training and capacity-building of business, technical and vocational training and education (BTVET), non-state actors NSA and LA in supporting youth skills development and enterprise development and employment;
- Formation/strengthening of partnerships/networks, policy dialogue platforms between actors in BTVETs and private sector to bridge links between training and labour markets in West Nile;

- Hosting annual youth business forums; and
- Research, documentation and advocacy on successful, scalable approaches to youth skills and enterprise development.

Figure 1 below shows the Theory of Change. The project aims to provide skills training, start-up kits and market linkages to financial institutions and private sector enterprises as well as to build the capacity of LA/NSAs, BTVET institutions and PSEs. Together, these supports will enable youth through 3 tracks: Agribusiness; Vocational skilling; and Micro enterprises to enter into formal employment (28%) and self-employment (72%). With job opportunities, the youth will improve on their productivity (in agri-business management practices and outputs) in order to be able to earn increased incomes with which they will be able to re-invest into expanding their enterprises (or diversifying into new enterprises), save in financial institutions, accumulate productive assets, and improve their self-worth. These changes will also improve their family and community gender relations. Together, poverty among the youth will be reduced.

Figure 1: YES Results Chain



Source: Draft Baseline report, August 2015

Objectives and Methodology

2.1 Why the Study

A recent report by Emma Asciutti, Arnaud Pont and James Sumberg (August 2016) on Young People and Agriculture in Africa explored the prevailing narrative that juxtapose young people in Africa as turning their backs on agriculture.[1] This study presents a contrary finding compared to YES Project that was implemented for one year and 6 months. While it reinforces that (inter)nationally held view as "the gospel truth now" that youth dislike agricultural employment pathways, SNV and its partners instead witnessed an abnormally high demand for agricultural component of the project. Both urban and rural youth preferred to be enrolled under the agribusiness component. Table 1 below presents the project outreach demand.

Table 1: YES Project planned employment pathways

Employment pathways	No. of applicants	No. targeted	Demand (%)
Agribusiness	5,000	3,000	167
Vocational training	1,222	1,000	122
Urban small businesses	1,200	1,000	120
TOTAL	**7,422**	**5,000**	**148**

SNV and partners therefore sought to understand why such a conflicting field findings with a view to promoting both operational and policy dialogues. To do so, SNV & partners contracted Applied Monitoring and Evaluation Institute (APMEI) to carry out a study to explore "why many in- and out-of school youth preferred agriculture (farming) employment in the context of West Nile region in Northern Uganda."

The overarching theme of the research was to explore/or investigate the key factors influencing/or motivating the youth to embrace productive agriculture under the YES project. Thus, the central inquiry questions were:

a. What are the key factors influencing/motivating the youth to embrace agriculture under the YES project?
b. What can SNV and its partners learn from this approach?

To unravel these questions, the following research sub-questions were developed:

- What were the common employment pathway that YES project beneficiary youth engaged in prior to the intervention? Why?
- What innovations did YES project offer to trigger high demand for agriculture?
- What lessons can SNV and partners learn from these innovations for future youth policy and programming?

1 Asciutti, E., Pont, A. and Sumberg, J (August 2016) *Young People and Agriculture in Africa: A Review of Research Evidence and EU Documentation*. Research Report 82. Sussex: Alliance 2015 and IDS.

This action research therefore sought to promote internal learning and accountability in youth skilling service delivery not only in West Nile region but also in the entire country through a rapid and participatory profiling of best practices for youth inclusion in agricultural employment opportunities. The below were the envisaged users, namely:

a. Non-state actors: SNV, its partners and other CSOs involved in youth and agriculture interventions for effective programming and policy advocacy;
b. Beneficiary youth to better organize and take up employment opportunities in agricultural sector instead of waiting for the unforthcoming formal employment; and
c. Government for youth employment policy formulation and programme-design particularly with regard to 'what works' to increase sustainable youth employability.

2.2: The Study Approach

The action research was designed to apply a 'utilisation knowledge-focused' approach organized in 3-phases, namely;

Phase I: Defining the study boundaries

This included reviewing the project documents as well as the documented evidence of agricultural sector performance in West Nile region with emphasis on the youth. It also included developing, reviewing study instruments together with SNV project team.

Phase II: Field data collection.

This phase was dedicated to data collection in West Nile primarily to collect data from youth, youth groups, and other project stakeholders. For eight days (between July 10th -21st 2016) the consultant worked with a team of Research Assistants to collect data from youth farmers and other project stakeholders.

Training of Research Assistants

It kicked off with a 1-day training of Research Assistants (RAs) in Arua. The four RAs were drawn from the different project districts to ensure local dialect was used with especially the beneficiary youth that are not mainly literate. They were all able to speak Alur, Madi, Aringa, and Lubgara.

Mock Sessions by Research Assistants

The RAs were equipped with the skills to administer the questionnaires, manage interviews, and document case studies. During the training, tasks and timelines for concluding the field data collection were

agreed upon. This training involved mock sessions aimed at pre-testing and refining of tools in a nearby YES sub county of Ajia, in Arua. Through this exercise, the RAs ably closed all the gaps in the tools and attained the requisite competence to administer the questionnaires within the allocated time.

Phase III: Analysis and Reporting.

This phase included data collation, analysis, draft report writing. A draft report was presented to SNV and partners for review before submitting this final study report.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

To elicit reliable data and to effectively triangulate field findings, the following methods were used in data collection:

- **Document Review:**
  The consultant reviewed the following documents – the project proposal, results framework, Baseline report, Mid-Term Evaluation report, annual reports and case studies.

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**
  FGDs, consisting of young men and women, were conducted in each study district. A few in-depth sessions were completed within these discussions using participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) tools such as proportional piling and pair-wise ranking (e.g. for the Most Significant on inhibiting and drivers of agricultural employment uptake).

- **Key Informant Interviews (KII):**
  These were conducted using a standard interview guide to provide a basis for effective comparison of insider and outsider perception of drivers for the high uptake of agricultural employment. The main respondents were Young Model farmers (YMFs), district and sub county local government officials (Community Development Officers, Commercial Officers, District Production Officers, and Sub county chiefs), and project staff.

- **Participant Observations and photography:**
  The team also observed and photographed the different targeted project areas in order to confirm existing farming differences and behaviour of youth. Observations enabled the team to ascertain and document successes that can be replicated.

- **Cases Studies:**
  In the process of conducting participatory discussions, case studies were documented to depict what has worked well in motivating uptakes and scale-ups in future using practical examples.

  Annex 1 shows the list of persons interviewed and annex 2 presents the case studies.

Finally, the different data generated by the different data collection methods were analysed in ways that enabled triangulation. Qualitative data were transcribed using MS Office and a content analysis method was used to triangulate it with quantitative data that was analysed using SPSS.

2.4 Distribution of respondents

Overall, data was collected from all the four project districts of Nebbi (in Nebbi and Erussi LLGs), Arua (Ajia and Ayivuni LLGs), Yumbe (Apo and Lamogi LLGs), and Moyo (Metu and Laropi LLGs). Below is a summary of the respondents.

Table 2: Study respondents

Methods	No. of sessions	No. of respondents
Youth Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	12	125 (35% females)
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Young Model Farmers	40	40
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with LG officials	11	11
TOTAL	**62**	**176**

2.5 The Report structure

This report is divided into 4 parts as follows: Part 1 deals with introduction to the project. Part 2 presents the objectives and methodology of the study. Part 3 presents the key findings of the study and Part 4 presents the key lessons to learn and recommendations.

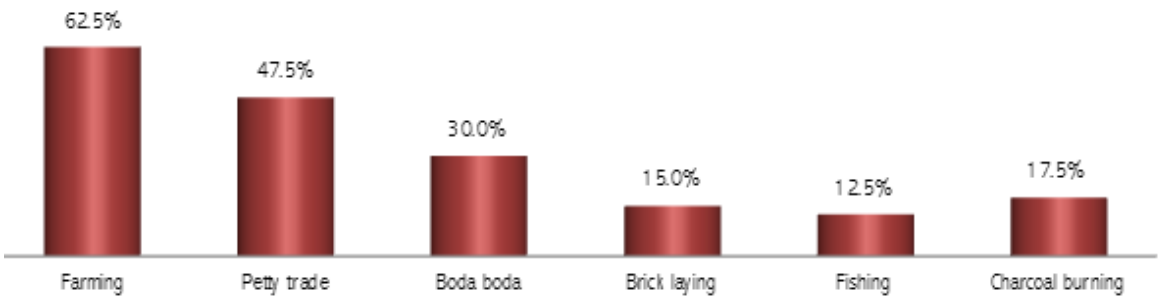
Key Findings

To understand "why the upsurge in youth uptake of agriculture?" this section presents the key findings aligned to the critical research questions on former employment status and what innovations YES project presented for the youth.

3.1 Pre-intervention youth employment status

One of the aims of this study was to understand the common employment pathways in which the YES project beneficiary youth were engaged prior to the project intervention. This was necessary to provide a benchmark for understanding the resultant changes arising out of the project interventions. The individual youth survey revealed that all the rural youth were employed as figure 2 below shows.

Figure 2: Pre-intervention youth employment pathways (n=40)



Note: Total does not sum to 100% because many youth had more than one job

It is evident that farming was the major pre-intervention employment sector for the youth (63%) followed by petty trade (48%) and boda boda riding (30%). Although fishing was the least employment sector, it is important to note that within YES project sub counties this sector is only functional in Moyo district (Laropi sub county). This finding is not different from the baseline study finding, which indicated that majority of the youth were in self-employment (88%) primarily in agriculture (43%) because many youth rely on own savings in order to either start-up or operate and grow their enterprises (77% start-up capital and 81% working capitals). However the farming practices were characterised by: Small land sizes (0.13 acres); very low use of recommended agronomic practices; low yields (beans 250 Kgs); and reliance majorly (98.9%) on individually selling of produce in local markets (83.7%) within their sub counties.

The FDGs with the youth, both males and females revealed that more youth were employed in farming and fishing due to, "family skills transfer." Many youth intimated that, as they grow up, their parents and peers taught them the knowledge and skills to farm and fish. As such, from as young as 10 years a youth already has either own garden or is accepted to go fishing. As a result, this first time skilled-in job makes farming and fishing their first line of employment. Such assertion was found to apply for both male and female youth as well as for young youth (under 20 years) and the old youth (30 years).

In addition, the youth also pointed out that the key inputs required for such employment were readily available in their communities. The YMF in Nebbi pointed out that,

> *Our land is vast and readily available and my labour is here with me. I do not need to go elsewhere to seek for inputs to start with farming. All I need is my own motivation and aspiration to use farming as a means t achieving my goal.*

Similarly, a youth in Laropi argued that,

> *The water is right there [pointing at the R. Nile] and what would prevent me from going into fishing? Nothing! Unlike a formal job where I have to migrate to Moyo town or other cities and start searching for an opportunity to find a vacancy, in this river, there is vacancy for everyone.*

With respect to petty trade, the youth indicated that the shops, kiosks; salons, etc. were their preferred alternative forms of employment because:

1. It does not require much skill as is with formal jobs. This suits many youth given that majority of them do not have formal and higher education. A youth in Arua pointed out that,

   > *I did not go to school to get any formal education. Automatically that means I cannot apply for any formal employment where they always want diploma or degree education. All the skills my job wants in effective marketing skills. I am not sure that this requires going to school to learn.*

2. It does not demand a huge capital to operate. A youth in Nebbi pointed out that,

   > *"I started my stall with UGX 30,000 and now it has grown into some hundred of thousands. If I wanted to start big I wouldn't have owned this business."*

3. It can be operated concurrently with agriculture that is their main form of employment. To many youth, it was clear that agriculture alone gives them too much time to remain idle and disorderly as they pointed,

   > *When we wake up early in the morning and go to the garden, by 11 am one is already back home. During peak season, one can go back to the garden again by 5 pm. Now what does one do in between all these time when you are not on the farm? It is for this reason of unproductive use of time that many leaders [referring to government officials] call us names like idle and disorderly and lazy. Thus for a few who have the capital, petty trade is an opportunity to utilize their time out of the farm productively (FGD in Moyo).*

3.2 Factors facilitating a mix of on-farm and non-farm employment among youth

To dig deep into exploring why many youth whose primary jobs were agriculture also ventured into other employment sectors the study asked specific question

on the hindrances youth faced with agriculture employment before YES project intervention. This is summarized in figure 3 below. The findings revealed three broad clusters of inhibiting factors: (i) Geographical; (ii) Personal/human resource; and (iii) Policy-related factors.

i. **Geographical factor:** This include primarily unfavourable climate. Both the FGDs and KIIs revealed that West Nile has for the last 15 years experienced devastating weather changes. The DPO of Nebbi graphically pointed out that,

> *In the last 15 years, weather changes have been very marked in West Nile region. While the region used to experience two reliable rainy seasons, this is no more. There is only one reliable season – the second season. Weather is characterised by long dry spells and too short rain showers in the first season. In the second season, either rain comes too early before farmers have prepared their land, or too late when the land already prepared have grown bushy again. This unpredictable weather affects household labour allocation and planting. Planting too early may mean drying out of germinating plants. Yet planting too late has effects in delayed maturity and effective plant growth. More so, often the rains come back with a vengeance. Floods with destructive effects are common occurrence in the region. In the end, annual production levels have consistency dropped. Farmers have inadequate food to meet the needs between two farming seasons as was before. Likewise, with limited surplus to sell, household incomes have dropped drastically. So, agriculture alone cannot meet the food and income needs of many smallholder-farming households.*

With the above unreliable and unpredictable weather and low yields, many youth feared to rely fully on agriculture. They note that, "putting all your eggs in one basket" is a recipe for disaster. Given that youth have needs – urgent and pressing needs often driven in part by peer pressure as well as family responsibility, they hop between one forms of employment to another.

ii. **Human resource factors:** Youth noted that they lacked skills required for good agricultural practice. This gap trapped many youth into "traditional farming which cannot lift any person out of poverty, "as they noted that, "our parents have been farming similar crops and rearing same animals without any tangible results apart from food." The YMF in Arua pointed out that,

> *My parents were born, got married, raised us up, and are now too old as farmers. Their farming did not lift them out of poverty. Instead, traditional farming sunk them deeper into poverty. As a youth, my interest is to engage in a different form of farming. While they grew beans and cassava, I prefer to grow high impact crops that can raise for me more money. But such crops need "high skills" that someone like me and many other youth who unfortunately did*

not go to school do not have. As a result, it is better to do little of traditional agriculture and another little of other jobs so that from the "different small jobs, I can pool some income.

The lack of agricultural skills among many rural youth was also echoed by the DPO Yumbe when he noted that, "many government programmes target old people as their primary beneficiaries. Partly this is due to ownership of land that is a preserve of elders as well as political misinformation to the fact that youth dislike farming. The CDO Nebbi also pointed out that, "take a look at the Youth Livelihoods Programme that target youth. It has no agricultural skilling support necessary to make good use of the funds meant for agribusiness inputs. Finally, the DPO Moyo also noted that, "West Nile has very few NGOs to complement the underfunded local government programmes and so many enthusiastic youth do not have good agronomic skills, which in turn negatively impacts on their up take of farming as a business." This argument was well tied by the DCO Nebbi who pointed out that,

Youth are not a social group well aligned to business practices of perfection, leaning by continuous trying out until you succeed. Once a youth tries an enterprise and she or he failed that will mark the end of that enterprise. Youth are therefore less resilient to business eventualities. Having no or limited skills therefore demotivates them from venturing even in high impact agro-enterprises.

Another human factor of importance is the attitude that agriculture has a very long gestation period before it can generate any income. It was pointed out that youth prefer "quick cash." Many youth, as the DCO Nebbi puts is, "desire easy money. They are impatient with economic activities, especially agriculture, which does not generate income now." This "quick bucks mind set" is also attributed to the "lack of personal goals and aspirations. "Without goals, many youth are unable to distinguish between now and tomorrow. Instead they are driven by the urge for current consumption.

iii. **Policy related factors:** Apart from the factors noted above, all the other constrains reported as inhibiting a serious youth engagement in agriculture are related to discriminatory and ineffective (national and local government) policies. It was acknowledged by local government officials that NAADs that is the major distributors of agricultural inputs hardly target youth and the proportion of youth who benefit from this programme is low. The District Commercial Officer Yumbe noted that, "the Youth Venture Capital Fund is inaccessible to rural youth because banks do not prefer to lend to youth and agriculture."

In addition, the youth noted that farms are invaded by either wild animals from forest reserve or stray domestic animals from irresponsible community members and government has failed to control the huge losses incurred by the affected farmers. For instance, the youth in Metu and Laropi in Moyo reported destruction by baboons and monkeys from the forest reserve and hippopotamus from River Nile. A youth in Metu noted, "one morning I

found a group of baboons in my cassava garden and everything was gone." Meanwhile in Yumbe and Arua districts, the youth said cows and goats destroy their crop fields as a youth in Apo Sub county said,

> *In my area, there are many goat farmers who do not care about their animals. These livestock destroyed my cassava garden. When the Sub county officials did not respond to my reported case of crop destruction I had to abandon this garden and farming altogether.*

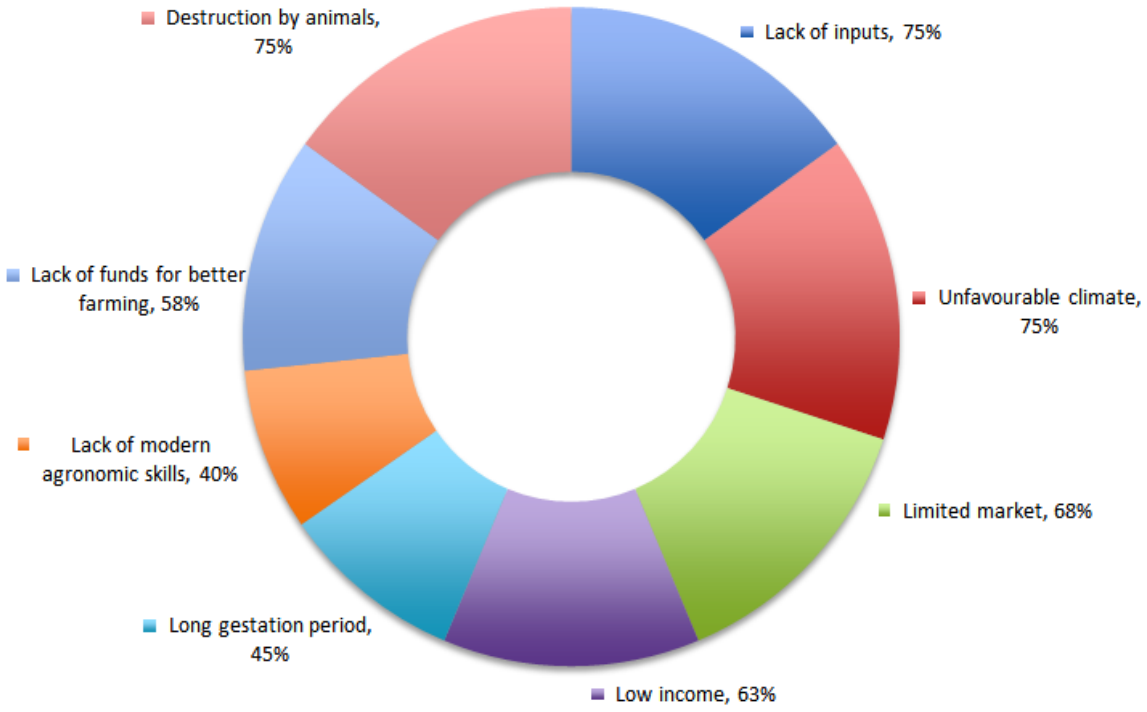


Figure 3: Factors that demotivate youth uptake of agriculture employment (n=40)
Note: Multiple responses were recorded.

3.3 YES Project Innovations that Attracted Youth into Agriculture Employment

To elicit in-depth explanations for the surge among rural youth into agricultural employment right from the on-set to current implementation of YES project, youth were asked to both rank and explain what factors in their views triggered such a demand and persistence contrary to held belief that youth dislike agriculture.

While figure 4 below presents the most motivating issues that attracted youth to agriculture, discussions with youth, young model farmers and LG officials revealed that the key factors that attracted many youth back into agriculture were as below. From the onset it is important to point out that the high motivation and now persistence of youth in agricultural employment can be deduced from the remarks by Mrs.Badaru Gertrude, the DAO Arua district who noted that,

> *YES project addressed the right needs of youth to enter and stay in agricultural employment sector unlike most government programmes that simply make funds available without preparation of the youth beneficiaries. With government programme any enterprise simply sells. When you move in the villages looking for*

the cows and goats that were given to youth by NUSAF II you can hardly see any. Yet the youth under YES project has in a short time and with little support like seeds and skills training can buy their own seed after one crop season. This is not just the right intervention. It is also the right strategy that unlocked what many youth supporters have failed to offer in years.

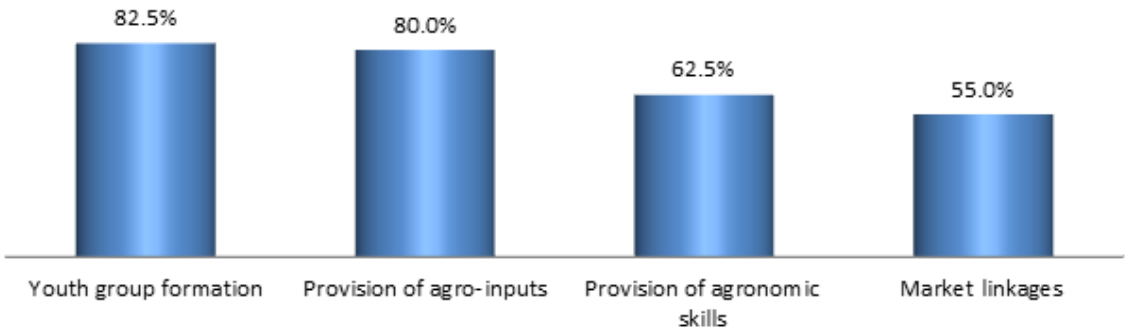


Figure 4: Highly motivating packages of YES project (n=40)
Note: Total does not sum to 100% because many youth had more than 1 job

- Project initiation: The initiation of YES project at community level started with a participatory mobilization and sensitization of youth at village level. Youth representatives and LC 1 leaders were actively involved side by project officers to ensure that both male and female youth participate. By so doing, many youth reported that they gained the confidence that "the project and its deliverables were meant for us" and this in turn increased their attendance and enrolment into the project. The LG leaders noted that this YES approach is much better than what many government programmes do in a rush to deliver results i.e.,

  Youth are selected in a hurry without much sensitization about their roles and responsibilities and the expected benefits from a programme. Because many youth are ill prepares, aware and at time without consent, many enter into the projects, receive inputs and simply squander them.

- Youth-based group approach: Both the youth and LG officials concurred that the bringing together of youth into youth-specific groups (30 members per group) under the leadership of a young model farmer, made many youth to feel secure to be part of their peers and to commit to experiment and learn together no matter what the enterprise would be. To the youth being in groups had both social and economic benefits. Socially youth within the same area felt united to work for their own identify and to share whatever knowledge, skills and experiences they had. Meanwhile economically being in a group enabled them to jointly overcome transaction constraints they faced in farming before especially in accessing markets for their produce. Mr Sunday a YMF in Ajia sub county pointed out that,

  "before YES project it was difficult to market our produce because the youth were not united. With YES we now bulk our produce together and sell to a big buyer and at good prices."

- Promotion of youth preferred enterprises: Many youth pointed out that they joined YES project because the enterprises that the project was promoting – onions, cabbages, tomato, and Irish potato were what they had been looking for but could not afford. The YMF in Yumbe joked that,

  Unlike beans and cassava, horticultural crops are profitable but expensive to start. Cassava cuttings can be borrowed from family members. Beans seeds too can be borrowed from ones relatives. However, for onions and cabbages, you need hard cash in order to buy the seeds from an input shop.

  The Project Officers narrated that the Project Steering Committee was informed by a participatory market scan study to select and prioritize horticultural enterprises. As is evident from the inhibiting factors, many youth did like to farm but not like their parents. So, having new agro-enterprises was attractive for the youth to engage in agriculture.

- Access to improved agro-technologies: While many youth did not fully engage in agriculture because of traditional farming practices, YES project provided youth with improved seeds, spray pumps, watering cans, and chemical as part of the start-up kit. These inputs were accompanied with skills training under the supervision of both the YMFs and Project Officers. In so doing, a youth said, "I felt elevated into modern farming contrary to what my forefathers and parents practiced. These modern farming opportunity motivated me to focus on agriculture." To majority of the youth, the seeds supplied by YES project were drought resistant and high yielding compared to the traditional ones some had attempted to grow before. In addition, a youth in Laropi sub county noted that,

  I tried to grow cabbages one time but I failed because they all got rotten. I was unable to do anything to control the rotting. Now with the training provided by YES project I am able to detect and control all these cabbage pest and diseases. Now my cabbages are the best in this community and I make good money.

Figure 5: A comparative photo of non-YES and YES beneficiary gardens

A non-YES beneficiary youth cabbage garden in Moyo town council

A YES project youth cabbage garden in Metu Sub county Moyo district

A non-YES beneficiary youth tomato garden in Ajia Sub county

A YES beneficiary youth tomato garden in Ayivuni sub county

- Access to markets: For agriculture to have meanings in the lives of youth, it has to earn them adequate income. This is possible when there is access to [premium] markets. Indeed YES project provide market linkages for youth groups with reliable buyers. This was confirmed by the youth who noted that they make direct contacts with the buyers in Arua town and S. Sudan. A YMF in Ayivuni responded that, "Madam Lillian introduce us to a buyer in Arua market. During our first contact we sold 17 basins of tomatoes. We even have her telephone number." In AFARD, the Project Officer noted that, "we have a designated marketing officer [who is a non-project staff] whose primary job is to look for better paying markets for all farmers working with us. Through that office, we are always updated on market dynamics and are able to secure better and big buyers for our youth produce. It is this assured and better paying market that has attracted youth to agriculture.

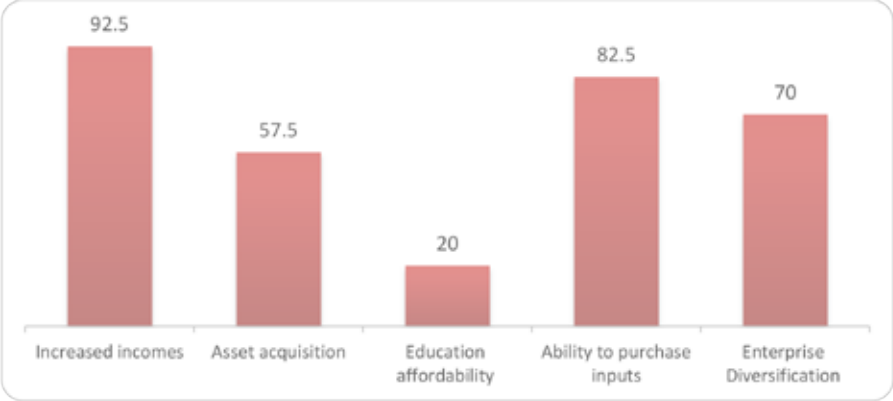
Many FGDs also emphasized that,

> *With ready and bigger market, we no longer have to wait like cotton and tobacco farmers who rely on one buyer at whose will they sell. We are able to contact traders in Arua, Koboko, Nebbi, and even S. Sudan. As a result, we grow what the market wants, negotiate for better prices, and are sure that our produce will not rot in the garden.*

- Experiential learning of positive impacts: Although agriculture has a very negative image to and negative attitudes among youth, YES project has encouraged the youth to learn by doing. Within 8 months of implementation many youth witnessed positive changes that motivated them to continue with farming as well as their neighbours to join in. It is such learning that triggered a huge turn up in cohort two enrolments in all the districts as many youth realized that their perception and attitude towards agriculture was biased. YES project provided the evidence that "smart agriculture" is a source of good income. Figure 5, the narration below and annex 2 on some stories of most significant changes shows that many youth were able to increase their incomes, purchase inputs on their own, and buy livestock (cows and goats) that provided improved them social status. For instance, Mr Ouma Francis in Ajia sub county proudly pointed out that,

> *I grew a half-acre of tomato garden and got a net profit of UGX 1,230,000. First, this sum of money I had never got all my life before. Second, with the money I was able to buy a mattress and a new bicycle for my family and business use. In addition, I was able to secure seeds and chemicals for the next season. In my life I had never known of any other project that had made such a huge change in a beneficiary's life within just one season. This positive benefit of YES confirmed to me and peers in our village that YES project and agriculture works. It also invited many more youth to join when opportunity to enrol came in year 2. Now I believe that we were wrong before to think that farming is only for poor people. With the "right farming," I have learnt that even farmers can be as rich as those educated people who work in offices.*

Figure 6: The benefits reported from engaging in YES project supported agriculture (%)



Lessons To Learn and Recommendations

This study explored the contradictions between the unsubstantiated facts that youth generally dislike agriculture employment pathways. Its focus, using the YES project that is being jointly implemented by SNV, AFARD, and CEGED in West Nile region, was primarily to identify how youth were attracted into agricultural employment as compared to other employment opportunities.

The findings show that contrary to held policy perception that youth dislike agriculture, many West Nile region youth have and prefer agriculture as their primary source of employment. Other alternative forms of employment like petty trade and boda boda are ventured into because of a number of disincentives that curtail the full realization of "returns to labour" from agriculture. Climate change, lack of skills, available free time, and discriminatory policies are some of these factors that propel youth into other employment opportunities. More so, even when youth engage in these other employment opportunities, they do not fully exit from agriculture.

The following lessons are critical for future youth employment policy and programming:

Global perceptions are never always right: While the global trend is that youth dislike agriculture, locally SNV and its partners found out that for such a poor and rural region like West Nile, there are more youth in agriculture and many still desire to improve their livelihoods through farming. It is therefore crucial to advocate and promote the youth in agriculture employment discourse with such evidence. YES project has demonstrated that youth already have in-built agricultural knowledge, skills and experiences and improving these assets adds value to their agricultural employment uptake and livelihoods.

Diversification matters: Agriculture as an employment opportunity has risks that many youth have neither the experience nor the strategies to mitigate. Such risks cause great looses to their efforts and aspiration hence scares them to fully commit to agricultural employment. Indeed, evidences show that many adult farmers respond to such risks by enterprise diversification (growing many crops at once; operating a mix of crop and livestock enterprises, or even setting up non-farm enterprises). Thus, for agricultural employment to meaningfully

engage them, youth need a diverse risk mitigation measures such as access to insurance services and support to operate more than one enterprise.

Effective mobilization and youth-specific group approach builds trust: Experience in Uganda shows that farmer group development has for long ignored youth as a distinct social group. Often either youth benefit through mainstreaming in groups controlled by adults or they are excluded out rightly. In addition, a number of youth programmes especially those run by government are politicized in beneficiary selection and targeting. Youth needs to be involved in any project implementation right from the initiation phase. They need to be involved in member mobilization. They need comprehensive information on what the project will do or not and their roles and responsibilities therein. They also need to self-select who their group members will be in order to ensure cohesion. More so, youth need to learn in an incremental method within their groups on how best to farm, market, save and invest.

Youth prefer smart agriculture: The evidences herein show that youth do like agriculture but they do not want to farm like their forefathers and parents did. They do not like traditional crops. They even do not want to farm for subsistence. The youth preferred market-targeted enterprises. They also fear adopting modern farming because all they have is indigenous knowledge. Attracting youth into agriculture entails giving attention to "smart agriculture" that a few educated youth referred to as "practicing of modern farming with profitable crops, improved skills and tools, and targeted at the market." Youth need strategic agro-enterprises that fetch them high income. Such enterprises require access to improved start-up inputs (seeds/breeds) accompanied with skills training (for enhanced production). Access to improved inputs alone without skills training has been shown to lead to no positive impact. More so, in the provision of this inputs cash payment was found to be less beneficial compared to in-kind support. Funds for Youth Livelihood Programmes were reported not well used compared to the start-up kits that YES project provided that were all put to good use and with positive impacts.

Market linkages are crucial for building a sustainable farming as a business model: Many youth exhibited the attitude that they only needed to be supported to start-up gainful agricultural employment. They did not want to remain fully dependant on external support as some FGDs pointed out that, "the longer we wait for hand-out, the lesser we can make our own production decisions." Aligned to the principles of farming as a business, meaningful engagement of youth in agriculture will require linkages to various value chain actors – input dealers, extension service providers, insurance and financial markets, and business development services so that they can sustain their farms in a competitive and profitable manner.

Conclusion

Although both state and non-state actors currently harbour an unsubstantiated notion that youth do not want to venture into agriculture, YES project has proven otherwise. The study has shown that majority of the youth in the rural areas are underemployed in agriculture with accumulated farming knowledge, skills ad experience. They only venture into other alternative employment opportunities due to myriads of factors that do not make agriculture a decent

job. By innovatively addressing these hindrances through a youth–focused group approach, access to the "right" improved agro-technologies, and building market linkages, YES has demonstrated that youth can embrace agriculture employment more so with improved livelihoods. It is also important to reflect on the fact that was raised by Dr. Lakwo Alfred of AFARD that the notion of "youth dislike agriculture" is in part being promoted to reinforce "vocational skilling agenda" in favour of manufacturing and services employment sectors; sectors that fit the political drive for urbanization and industrialization.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of respondents interviewed

Table 1: Youth groups interviewed in FGDs in the 4 districts

Name of youth Groups	Contact of the youth Leader	Sub county	District
Kondo young farmers	0785 041377	Erussi	Nebbi
Jupuyik Young farmers	0787 849740	Nebbi Municipal	Nebbi
Ovunyaku young farmers	0785 976155	Ajia	Arua
Aliondrranyosi farmers	0793 305385	Ayivuni	Arua
Lunjua A farmers	0779 109974	Apo	Yumbe
Ngonga onion growers	0775 803360	Apo	Yumbe
GbalalaW Onion farmers	0777 451054	Laropi	Moyo
Paleure young farmers	0777 633691	Metu	Moyo

Table 2: Parents/Guardians of Young farmers

Name of parents FGD	Contact of the FGD leader	Sub county	District
Kondo young farmers	0785041377	Erussi	Nebbi
Jupuyik Young farmers	0787849740	Nebbi Municipal	Nebbi
Lanjua youth group		Apo	Yumbe

Table 3: Young model farmers interviewed as KIIs

Name of YMF	Contact of the YMF	Sub county	District
Wanok Alfred	0785 041377	Erussi	Nebbi
Wokorach Moses	0787 849740	Nebbi Municipal	Nebbi
Adriko Godfrey	0781 535668	Ayivuni	Arua
Laban Chabinyakure	0783 791808	Ayivuni	Arua
Drama Opio Dan	0783 432113	Ayivuni	Arua
Onzima Moses	0773 056215	Ayivuni	Arua
Ecima Sunday		Ajia	Arua
Pierre Ezagu	0774 813542	Ajia	Arua
Eriku David	0794 471160	Ajia	Arua
Drajibo Ronald	0777 448432	Ajia	Arua
Alichi Alli	0775803360	Apo	Yumbe
MatafuraZubair Sebbi	0779 109974	Apo	Yumbe
Agu Baguzi	0791 386825	Apo	Yumbe
Abuhuraira Bran	0786 736288	Apo	Yumbe
Taban Zubair	0791 105452	Ramogi	Yumbe
Juruga Mansuru	0788 283545	Ramogi	Yumbe

Awuga Kassim	0793 869466	Ramogi	Yumbe
Kujo Mansuru	0781 126665	Ramogi	Yumbe
Amandeku Sam	0777 633691	Metu	Moyo
Akuku Patrick	0779 228833	Metu	Moyo
Kanderuku Sunday	0775 987079	Metu	Moyo
Mesenzu Lwa	0788 067682	Metu	Moyo
IramaEzakiel	0777 451054	Laropi	Moyo
Ezakiel Dominic	0775 159131	Laropi	Moyo
Driza Moses	0771 092500	Laropi	Moyo
Amajuru Martin	0785 632909	Laropu	Moyo

Table 4: Sub county and District Staff interviewed as KIIs

Name of SDS	Contact of the SDS	Position of SDS	District
Ms.Acan Comfort	0776 602211	Sub county CDO	Nebbi
Mr.Ucibre Walter		Youth chairperson	Nebbi Municipal
Mr.Agenonga Emmanuel		Youth Chairperson	Erussi Sub county
Dr. Okwir Anthony	0772 635397	DPO	Nebbi
Mr.Ovona Hannington		CDO Nebbi Municipal	Nebbi
Mr.Muswa David	0758 861597	DCO	Nebbi
Mr.Ogwang Thomas		CDO Erussi Sub county	Nebbi
Mr.Obia Richard		CDO	Arua
Ms.Badaru Gertrude		DAO	Arua
Ms.Lataru Comfort		CDO Ayivuni	Arua
Ms SitarayaJina		CDO Ajia	Arua
Mr.Ezaapangu Jean P		Youth chairperson Ayivuni	Arua
Mr.AdrugaSiraji	0783 570814	Ag CDO Apo sub county	Yumbe
Mr.AtamaMudasiri		Youth c/person Apo	Yumbe
Mr.Bakole Stephen		DAO	Yumbe
Mr.Bakole R Tahir	0782 934489	Asst CDO	Yumbe
Mr.DaliliSebi	0782 837192	DCO	Yumbe
Mr.Nyango Ernest		Ag DCDO	Moyo
Mr.Atiku Jamal		Youth Chairperson-Metu	Moyo
Mr.Dratele Christopher		DPO	Moyo
Mr.Amegovu Dominic		Asst DCO	Moyo

Table 5: Project staff interviewed as KIIs

Name of project Staff	Contact of the staff	Sub counties of Operation	District
Ms.Apio Irene	0779 874629	Erussi and Nebbi	Nebbi
Ms.Babirye Victoria	0701 268944	Ajia and Ayivuni	Arua
Ms. Flavia Vuni	0775 923768	Apo and Drajini	Yumbe
Mr Juma Bangladesh	0774 031608	Metu and Laropi	Moyo

Annex 2: Most Significant changes' Case study

Case study 1 : Mr Olima Francis of Ovunyaku Youth Group, Olevu Parish, Ajia Sub couty, Arua District

Before the SNV Yes project intervention, Mr Olima Francis was already growing crops like cassava and beans. He was faced with a lot of challenges like lack of skills in good farming practices, poor yields, low market prices, destruction of crops by animals, competition from similar products and lack of means of transport. He also tried small scale business of selling beans but the proceeds from these activities were not able to make him raise enough income to acquire assets and increase the size of his gardens.

With the YES project intervention, Olima noted that he received training and start up kit for farming. This included improved tomatoes seed variety, watering can, and herbicides. Tomato growing, a high income generating enterprise, has made Olima realize increased income, which he was initially unable to raise.

From earning less than UGX 100,000 in a season, he is now able to earn more than UGX 1,000,000. Right from the first year, Mr Olima started to invest in productive assets. He has to date bought a solar panel for lighting his house and charging his mobile phone. He has also acquired a used motorcycle and some goats. Mr Olima echoes that he has been able to pay school fees for his children. With the goats he is targeting to acquire a cow once they multiply. He sees a bright future in farming and hopes to build a Mabati house from tomato growing.

A fruiting tomato garden of Mr Ouma Francis

Ouma with a Solar panel and one of the goats he procured using income earned from farming

Case study 2 : Mr Matata Jamal of Lanjua Village, Apo Sub-County, Yumbe District.

Mr Matata Jamal, aged 22, dropped out of school in 2011 because his parents could not afford school fees. To earn a living, he ventured into tomato growing on a small-scale farm, but could not make a head way since he was doing traditional farming.

In 2014 however, the youth of Lanjua village were invited to attend a YES project mobilization meeting. According to Matata, this was his turning point in life as he noted, "From the ideas discussed in the meeting I was encouraged to take up agriculture as a business to end the poverty which was a reality in my life."

After registration, Matata noted he was introduced to better ways of farming such as timely land opening, planting, and weeding, correct plant spacing and the use of right chemicals to control pests and diseases in the fields. Agri-business trainings that emphasized farming as business coupled with routine guidance from the group's Young Model Farmers and peers involved in onion farming and Project Officer gave him a lot of confidence in what he was doing.

Matata reported that at the end of the first season he was able to harvest 12 basins of onion from less than ¼ of an acre. This produce raised him UGX 480,000. Out of this money he was able to by a cow and a goat at UGX 320,000 and UGX 60,000 respectively. "These are my lifetime greatest achievements" he narrated because "I had never dreamt of being able at any one point in time to own even a hen." His cow now has a calf and the goat has kidded. Matata's view on farming is that, "for me to quit onion growing, you need to kill me first." Currently Matata works with one other youth who assists him in the garden. He reiterates that from farming that many youth dislike,

> *I am now economically empowered. I now own two cows and two goats from my own sweat. When I look at these significant achievements, I am even encouraged to work harder. I now know for sure that sooner than later, with onion farming my poverty will be history.*

Matata taking care of his cow and calf. Photo credit: Munduga Joshua.

Case study 3 : Mr Udubi Benson Jupuyik village, Jupangira Parish Apo Sub-County, Nebbi Sub County, in Nebbi District

Benson is 30 years of age and married with 2 children. He and his family live in Jupuyik village, Jupangira Parish, Nebbi Sub County, Nebbi district. Benson had low interest in agriculture just like many other youth in his area. But with the coming of the YES project he can changed his mind as he noted with a smile how he has benefited from agriculture. Inspired to try his lack with onion production as opposed to beans and cassava that he had already despised, his first season sale of Onion harvest enabled him to buy two goats. "The amazing income" he noted, "compelled me to develop a new goal this year to construct a permanent house. " Without formal education and job, I had no hope of acquiring anything in life," he reiterated. "Farming did not provide me with any hope because I have not seen anyone live a good life with farming. Everyone in my village is struggling to survive. But the YES project has done a miracle by just changing the crop and here we have money, plans, and hope for a better future. Agriculture is now my priority employment." he concluded.

Mr. Benson tendering to his two she goats.

A newly planted Onion Garden of Mr Benson on an expanded garden

A youth who has taken on Onion growing after getting inspired by the success of Benson

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Plot 36 Luthuli Rise Bugolobi
P.O. Box 8339, Kampala, Uganda
Tel.: +256 (0) 414 563 200
Email: uganda@snv.org