

COUNTRY VIEW



Edited by Danusia Osiowy
01772 799 413
danusia.osiowy@ubm.com

Uganda's organic farming: the next green revolution?

William Surman spent three weeks visiting rural communities across Uganda. Now back on home turf, he reflects on one of the highlights.

In May, armed with my notebook, some anti-malarial pills, a spare pair of shorts and a toothbrush, I set off to explore Uganda.

For three weeks I rattled along hundreds of kilometres of dusty tracks and travelled deep into some of the most inaccessible farming communities.

It is difficult to pick out a highlight, but certainly one of the most fascinating days came towards the end of my trip when I met Reverend Samuel Ebukalin.

A typical genial Ugandan, Sam needed little encouragement to show me around his superb organic farm in Bokkede, eastern Uganda.

Formidable Sam, as I like to call him, along with his equally formidable wife Norah, have developed a model of organic farming to give rural people in Uganda economic, environmental and social stability.

There are now hundreds of surrounding subsistence farmers who have copied his farming methods and are part of his ever-increasing virtuous gang.

Terror reign

Presidents Milton Obote and Idi Amin reigned terror and destruction across Uganda for decades on end. Internal strife led to the death of thousands of men, in particular, but also many women and children. Families were split in two and farmsteads were robbed of livestock, land and labour.

In the midst of such turmoil were Sam and Norah. In 1993, personal tragedy struck when some friends' husbands were kidnapped and killed.

Stripped of their land, the friends went to stay with Sam and Norah, and together, in the face of great adversity, they decided to rebuild their lives and their community, and formed the Popular Kumi Women's Initiative (PKWI).

1,600

The number of families now involved in the PWKI scheme, up from just five in 1993.

Five families form a PKWI group and each group is encouraged to follow three basic principles.

- To generate a daily income to pay for daily items (for example, buying some chickens and selling the eggs).

- To generate a seasonal income to pay for seasonal bills like school fees (such as growing cassava, maize, sunflower and vegetables).

- To grow a long-term crop to form your pension – examples of which include planting citrus, mango and guava trees.

Knowledge

Sam says these principles were useless without knowledge, so he developed extensive links with top research universities to develop the best seeds, livestock and training for the job.

As PKWI farmers' productivity grew, he decided it was necessary to add value to their product.

Sam asked each PKWI group to produce 0.4 hectares (one acre) of sunflowers to supply a mill (bought with the Food and Agriculture Organisation funds) to make oil to be bottled, labelled and sold on the open market. All profits are ploughed back into PKWI to pay for further education of its members and develop access to the most lucrative markets.

The scheme is also entirely holistic. The cake from the sunflower mill is used to feed



Reverend Samuel Ebukalin with a citrus sapling in his budding fruit orchard.

the chickens and livestock. Dung from the livestock is used to feed the earth. Anything that grows in the earth generates income to pay for everyday needs.

Members are also encouraged to add value to other things – like making jam and juice from fruit, peanut butter from ground-nuts and honey from the hives dotted around their fruit orchards – all to be sold under the PKWI organic label.

PKWI started with five fami-

lies in 1993. There are now more than 1,600 and it continues to grow. All of this has been developed with little investment and large commitment.

The model has been so successful that Sam and Norah now travel the world to present their ideas.

This month, Sam is meeting the World Bank in Korea and he hopes together they can spread their simple ideas of organic growth throughout the developing world. Could this be the next green revolution?

READ MY BLOG TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT MY TIME IN UGANDA
www.farmersguardian.com/william_surmans_blog/



Farmers in Northern Uganda open up new land with two oxen donated by Farmers Overseas Action Group.



Some of the children whose lives have improved since PKWI improved the income of local families.

Farmers Overseas Action Group

A LACK of traction to plough the land is one of the most limiting factors to production in Uganda.

More than 80 per cent of the population are subsistence farmers and most rely on sheer brute force to farm.

It is all very well having access to four hectares (10 acres), but if your only method of ploughing, planting and weeding is with your hand-held hoe, then one hectare (two acres) is about your limit.

Give farmers access to traction, however, and more land can be brought into production.

For one week in Uganda, I was lucky enough to link up with an English charity Farmers Overseas Action Group, set up by a group of Worcestershire farmers in 1981.

It is an independent charity whose mission is to aid social and economic development in Uganda's rural communities, with the goal of alleviating poverty.

A major part of FOAG's work is to provide oxen and ploughs to farm communities to open up their land and I visited many of the villages that had benefited.

Chris Basoga, a peasant farmer just off the northern shores of Lake Victoria, told me his farm had doubled in size – from one to two hectares (two to four acres) – after FOAG had donated two oxen and a plough to his village.

"I can now produce enough food to feed my family and some

surplus to sell to the market, giving me money for education and basic healthcare," he said.

I met many more farmers like Chris who had managed to lift their standard of living through access to traction.

The FOAG management team has experienced and committed volunteers and very low administration costs (8 per cent) compared with a sector average of around 30 per cent. More of donors' contributions to go directly to the people they are trying to help.

- If you would like to get involved with FOAG, learn more about its activities or donate money, contact 01905 831 276 or visit www.foag.co.uk