

FARMERS PRODUCING QUALITY DECLARED SEED (QDS) FOR IMPROVED LIVELIHOODS

A coalition of rural farmers group advocating for seed production food security and fair trade have initiated a campaign to access market for small-scale farmers within their communities countrywide. The campaign under the auspices of Kitembe Farmers Group Local Seed Business (LSB) to earn a decent living

Many smallholder farmers are producing sufficient quantities of produce but many are unable to make a reasonable profit from their produce, said Julius Barugahare, Chairperson of Kitembe Farmers Group

Having started in 2015, Kitembe Farmers Group Local Seed Business (LSB) is located in Kitembe village, Rweikiniro sub-county in Ntungamo district. The group started with six members and the major aim was to improve their livelihoods through producing Seed under the Quality Declared Seed (QDS).

However, because of the poor quality seeds in the area, the group's livelihood remained static. The group would depend on home saved seed which was caused by insufficient availability of affordable high-quality seed and lack of trust in the certified seed available on the market.

According to Barugahare, the group faced challenges of limited access to vital information and knowledge about where to access the quality seed. These challenges limited the group from accessing quality seed, hence their status-quo remaining low.

Barugahare says that the lack of quality seeds forced the group in 2016, to start producing their own quality seed. They were privileged to received training from Chain Uganda which is an out scaling partner for Integrated Seed Sector Development programme in Uganda (ISSD) and after they were given foundation seed to start with and after producing the seeds, chain would again purchase it from them.

ISSD Uganda aims at supporting the development of a vibrant, pluralistic and market-oriented seed sector, providing smallholder farmers access to affordable quality seed of superior varieties. This contributes to increased income for small-scale farmers and an increased number of rural households that are seed and food secure.

The project is implemented by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI) in partnership with NARO and is funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda.

Today, the group that started with one acre of beans under production is now producing up to 31 acres of seeds per season.

Like Kitembe, in 2002, Rwabaceneka Organic Farmers group located in Kashenyi Village, Rwentobo Town Council in Ntungamo District started but was also faced with challenges of poor quality seeds.

This kept the group in poverty, in 2017, when they started working with ISSD as a Local Seed Business (LSB). The group which comprises of 65 farmers used to produce seed on small scale. After registering with ISSD today the production has increased.

Currently, 68% of Uganda's farming households are engaged in subsistence rain-fed agriculture that rely largely on home-saved seed of low quality which results in low productivity and production.

This is due to the inability of seed companies to supply the required quantities of certified seed and the limited capacity in the regulatory system. An estimation of 30-40% of seed traded in the market is counterfeit.

Also due to limited use of improved seed, the current farm-level crop yields are far below potential. For instance, yields of beans a major food crop ranges between 300-500kg per acre per season compared to a potential of up to 900kg per acre per season.

Maize yields are below 2,000kg per hectare compared to 7,000kg per hectare per season for hybrid maize. Rice is currently at an average yield level of less than 1,000kg per hectare compared to an expected potential of 3,000-4,000kg per hectare per season.

In an effort to increase and improve access to quality seeds for farmers, the Integrated Seed Sector Development (ISSD) Uganda project aims at contributing to the development of vibrant, pluralistic and market-oriented seeds to the farmers.

According to Patrick Oyee, the Chief of Party ISSD, the aim was to support over 300,000 smallholder farmers access affordable quality seed of superior varieties and strengthen seed sector institutions and environment.

Oyee explains that the project also aims at helping the farmers develop into commercially sustainable local businesses, and contribute to increasing the effectiveness of respective public institutions in specific supportive tasks in relation to seed production and marketing.

“Today the programme is working with over 30 Local Seed Businesses (LSBs) to produce quality seed of locally adapted crops and varieties for local markets,” said Oyee.

While touring local farmers producing quality seeds, in South Western Uganda, Anno Galema, the First Secretary Food Security and Private Sector Development at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN), said the only way agriculture can develop is by using innovative technology for seed production and also organising farmers into productive groups such as Local Seed Businesses.

He explained that besides technology, seed is a key starting point in agriculture. If the seed is of poor quality then harvest will also be poor and when seeds are of high quality, the harvest will also be high.

However, Anno said that in Uganda many farmers are grappling with how to get the quality seeds something that has kept many in poverty.

“That is why the Kingdom of the Netherlands started supporting farmers to produce quality seeds. It is pleasing to understand that farmers have already started producing quality seeds and are earning income for their households. Our pledge is to continue supporting even more farmers to produce seed,” he said.

Esther Atwine, the District Agricultural Officer for Ntungamo District in South Western Uganda, said that quality seed businesses have improved in many parts of South Western Uganda yet the Ministry of Agriculture does not consider them as certified seed producers.

According to Joseph Omulama, Seed Expert at ISSD, besides seed production, the farmers are trained in Good Agronomic Practices such as use of fertilizers, pesticides, planting in lines, marketing and post-harvest handling among others to ensure high production and productivity, which in turn ensures food security for communities and Uganda at large.

Omulama explained that ISSD Plus Vegetable Seed component aims to support the development of commercial vegetable production by facilitating training, demonstration and a knowledge backbone for sector professionals active in the vegetable sector and for vegetable farmers directly.

“Our major focus is on creating commercially viable Local Seed Businesses, by supporting farmer groups toward quality seed production and marketing of locally viable varieties.” said Omukama.

Notes from the Editor

About ISSD: The Integrated Seed Sector Development programme in Uganda (ISSD Uganda) aims to support the development of a vibrant, pluralistic and market-oriented seed sector, providing smallholder farmers access to affordable quality seed of superior varieties. This will contribute to increased income for small-scale farmers and an increased number of rural households that are seed and food secure.

Developing Local Seed Businesses: The ISSD Uganda programme is working with 30 local seed businesses (LSBs) to produce quality seed of locally adapted crops and varieties for local markets. The purpose is to develop them into commercially sustainable local businesses. At the end of the programme these LSBs are well organized and technically equipped for quality seed production. They have improved their access to research (for varieties and technologies), extension (for advisory services), markets (to sell their produce), quality assurance (to guarantee seed quality) and finance and credit (to support their local business operations). They are commercially oriented with a marketing plan, financial system, saving, cash flow projections and demand projections. LSB model will be out scaled to reach additional 100 LSBs in year 3 and 4 of the project.

LSBs are located in three geographical areas where ISSD is currently working in West Nile, Northern and South Western.

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