

QUALITY SEED GROWING, A CATALYST FOR CHANGE IN BUSOGA

By Geoffrey Mutegeki

Charles Baligeya was once a struggling sugarcane farmer in Buyende district, where the local economy is dependent on cane plantations.

Over the last three years, Baligeya has been struggling to sell his sugarcane since factories in Busoga are unable to buy all the cane from farmers.

For some who are lucky to sell, the factories offer very low prices that have left many farmers in Busoga stuck with their sugarcane. This has forced some farmers to burn their sugarcane plantations and try other crops.

BALIGEYA DUMPS CANE FOR LSB

A year ago, Baligeya joined the Local Seed Business (LSB) group, where members are trained to produce quality seed and good agronomic practices, such as field management and post-harvest handling, among others.

Consequently, Baligeya, who is the chairperson of Akulabula Abamwino farmers' LSB group, switched from sugarcane growing to groundnuts and beans.

"I can now smile after joining this business. My income has increased since. Every season (four months), I make about sh6m to sh9m, which was not possible with sugarcane," Baligeya says.

ISSD, WCDI, NARO SUPPORT FARMERS

With funding from the Embassy of the kingdom of Netherlands, the Integrated Seed Sector Development (ISSD), which is implemented by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI), in partnership with NARO, started supporting and training farmers' groups in the area to become seed producers and entrepreneurs.

The groups are then linked to active research organisations for a two-way interaction, preferably for several crops.

IMPROVING LIVELIHOOD, EXPOSURE

Many farmers in Busoga are dependent on sugarcane growing, yet they can also make a living from growing other crops if they are exposed to the idea.

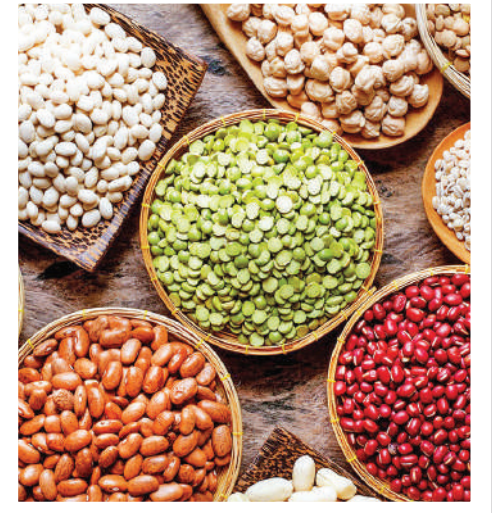
Today, Baligeya, a father of seven, can send his children to school and has enough income to buy food for his family and also save some.

Before venturing into seed production, Baligeya would earn sh5m in 18 months from his three-acre sugarcane plantation.

"They give you sh50,000 for a truck of sugarcane. I cannot continue suffering with sugarcane yet there is money in food crops," Baligeya says.

He adds that local farmers need to be supported with better technologies if change is to be realised in the region.

"I can now ably feed my household



QUALITY SEED...

Paul Muteme, a seed farmer from Buyende district, enjoying his harvest. Many farmers in Busoga are stuck in sugarcane growing, though they can eke a living from growing other crops, such as beans and groundnuts



Quality seeds and other improved technologies is the way to go for Busoga region to escape poverty.

using money got from growing other crops. I would like to expand my groundnuts and beans gardens," Baligeya says.

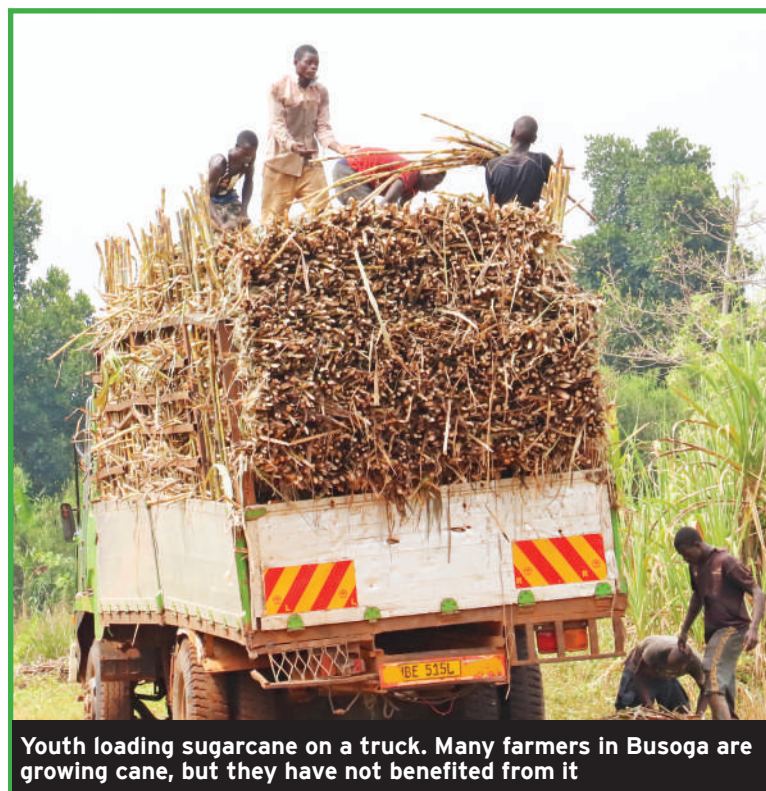
BUSOGA IN POVERTY

Moses Pangole, the Busoga North LSB cluster co-ordinator, explains that easing access to quality seeds that are high-yielding and fast-maturing is key to fighting poverty in Busoga.

"Our people believe by seeing. We want to support them to embrace growing of crops such as beans and groundnuts," Pangole says.

Pangole, the LC5 councillor-elect for Gumpi sub-county, notes that it is high time the Government helped farmers to diversify.

"People have grown sugarcane all their lives, but if you look around, it is the factory owners who are benefitting. Farmers cannot even



Youth loading sugarcane on a truck. Many farmers in Busoga are growing cane, but they have not benefited from it

afford to buy sugar yet they are sleeping in sugarcane shambas," Pangole says.

Upon taking over office as councillor, Pangole says he will encourage area leaders to sensitise farmers on the importance of growing other crops.

He adds that he had 13 acres of sugarcane, but has since cut down eight of them to plant food crops.

"I used to live in a hut, but I have now built a permanent house. The cane was holding me in poverty,"

Pangole says.

Paul Mutume, a farmer from Kimbaya village, says he does not regret switching from growing sugarcane to food crops.

"There is market for food, especially here in Busoga, because majority of the people are engaged in sugarcane growing," Mutume says.

"I used to live in a grass-thatched house but now I have a permanent house one, which I built in just two years using my earnings," Mutume

adds.

He asks government to expand extension services in Busoga and also introduce initiatives that can help fight poverty.

"Improved agriculture is one of the ways we can fight poverty in Busoga. Sugar factories have grown their own cane, they no longer need ours. The best way is to try other crops," Mutume says.

SUPPORT TO FARMERS

According to Andrew Masinde, the ISSD senior communications officer, local seed businesses can fill the gap in quality seed production, which many seed companies cannot.

"They are technically equipped, professionally organised, market-oriented and strategically linked to achieve commercial sustainability," Masinde says.

Stephen Ibanda Mwase, the Buyende district agriculture officer, says the district is ready to support farmers who venture into growing of food crops.

"Our extension workers are ready to support them. We have field days dedicated to the farmers, where we sensitise them about quality seeds and the importance of growing food crops," Mwase says.

According to Mwase, quality seed production and use of improved technologies are some of the means to fight poverty in Busoga region.

"Farmers dealing in seeds are assured of food and have stable incomes compared to those growing sugarcane," Mwase says.

He, however, says there some challenges, such as access to markets, poor road network, post-harvest handling and good prices.