



Promoting Organic Agriculture in Uganda

¹Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF) Uganda

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Introduction

Partners in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), are implementing the EOA-SDC Phase II project titled: *"Mainstreaming Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) into National Policies, Strategies and Programs in Africa"*. The EOA Initiative is a continental undertaking implemented under the guidance and oversight of the African Union (AU) chaired by the Continental Steering Committee. The project is designed to establish an African organic platform, based on available best practices and to develop sustainable organic farming systems. The initiative embraces holistic production systems that sustain the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions rather than on use of external inputs with adverse effects on people's total health (human, animal, plant and environment).

According to Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), organic agriculture is a holistic production management system which promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It emphasises the use of management practices in preference to the use of off-farm inputs, taking into account that regional conditions require locally adapted systems. This is accomplished by using, where possible, agronomic, biological, and mechanical methods, as opposed to using synthetic materials, to fulfil any specific function within the system. Furthermore, organic farming respects the environment. Anything destructive, like chemical pesticides and fertilisers, is not encouraged, so the soil remains sustainable for generations. Soil is important because it is the foundation of any farming system.

In Uganda, agriculture involves more than 65 percent of the households and is the basis for the livelihood of more than 33 million small-scale farmers. In spite of generally

favourable agriculture conditions, agricultural productivity remains low and poverty afflicts more of the national population. Uganda introduced the organic certification in Uganda in 1993 and the number of certified organic farmers has now grown to more than 39,000. Despite the many challenges organic agriculture is facing like inadequate education and training at all levels to build capacity, infrastructure and networks, inadequacies in regulatory and marketing structures, inadequate research, excessive consumer prices and inconsistent quality and availability, establishing and maintaining credibility and professionalism among others. Many factors like adequate land and water for agricultural production, high potential for increasing production and productivity, and high export potential for organic products to regional and international markets favour organic farming in Uganda. In 2004, Uganda adopted the Uganda Organic Standard while in 2007; Uganda adopted the East African Organic Products Standards. Of recent, the government of Uganda passed the National Organic Agriculture Policy that would drive the promotion of organic agriculture by government of Uganda. Organic agriculture, if implemented in a truly sustainable manner, offers viable solutions to many of the problems the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

ESAFF Uganda is implementing pillar II of the EOA-SDC Phase II project which focuses on communication and extension services on organic agriculture. This paper presents some of the key propositions by small-scale farmers practicing organic agriculture collected from the different engagements with small-scale farmers since the beginning of the project. ESAFF Uganda has engaged with small-scale farmers from Masaka, Mukono, Luwero and Wakiso district in the central region of the Country.



Mainstreaming Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) into National Policies, Strategies and Programs in Africa



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In a bid to promote Organic Agriculture in Uganda

ESAFF Uganda and small scale farmers in Kasese, Amuria, Amuru and Gulu innovated Agroecology clubs in schools that their children go to. These Agroecology Clubs give youth an opportunity to learn a lot about different organic farming practices as well as its benefits to their health given the current curriculum that highly promotes modern agriculture.

ESAFF Uganda has documented different Organic Agriculture practices carried out by farmers in Mukono and Masaka in form of videos. These videos teach small scale farmers on the benefits and challenges in using a particular organic practice. The videos can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/2TaWEg7>

Each year ESAFF Uganda and partners celebrate the National Organic Week (NOW) in different districts. NOW involves events like press conferences, radio talk shows, Women Community Dialogues on Organic Agriculture, National Dialogue on Organic Agriculture and Organic Food Fair, School Quizzes and Public Awareness on Organic Farming practices. The week celebrates and popularizes organic foods, products and services as well as creating a platform where small scale farmers can dialogue on the challenges impacting organic farming for a multi-stakeholder responsiveness for scaling up organic agriculture.

ESAFF Uganda has developed the KilimoMart application. This is an online organic market application that gives platform for small scale farmers in East Africa to access market and information for their agriculture products and services. This online market can be accessed on website www.kilimomart.com and Google play store.

ESAFF Uganda together with partners like La Via Campesina has built capacity of small scale farmers through workshops on organic farming. Small scale farmers have also had a chance to visit organic small scale farmers and have been able to acquire knowledge on how to do certain practices.

What Small-scale farmers are saying;

- 1. There is need for profiling of organic farmers and the different crops they grow. This will help other small scale farmers in knowing who they can go to when they need knowledge about Organic Agriculture.**
- 2. We call for the development of demonstration gardens on organic farming at village level.**
- 3. We encourage farmer to farmer learning in order to get clear and instant information. We learn better and faster when learning from our fellow farmers.**
- 4. Research should be done on more techniques of applying organic fertilizers including research on the soil capability and suitability so that we do not get discouraged to practice organic farming.**
- 5. There is a need to help small-scale farmers to identify those input dealers who sale organic pesticides and fertilizers in the different districts.**
- 6. Promote indigenous seeds that are able to withstand climate change.**
- 7. The number of extension workers with skills on organic agriculture should be increased or the ones already there should be trained and equipped in training on organic agriculture**
- 8. We should be involved in media engagements like talk-shows about agriculture in order to spread the news and benefits of organic agriculture. We request for free airtime on local radios in the district.**

Conclusion

The Ugandan government has taken several important steps in transforming conventional agricultural production into an organic farming system. Human activities such as modern agriculture and grazing can be a serious threat to ecosystems. Small-scale farmers are the main users and managers of the earth's natural resources. Organic agriculture has demonstrated its ability to not only produce commodities but also to protect the biodiversity. This is mostly because organic agriculture enhances small-scale farmers' ability to live in harmony with nature and to derive economic benefit from their land. Small-scale farmers are challenging the policy makers and different actors to implement the proposals/recommendations suggested in this paper.

About ESAFF Uganda

Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF) Uganda is a small scale farmer initiated and farmer-led movement formed to facilitate processes through which small-scale farmers' development concerns can be solicited, articulated and ultimately addressed through local, national, regional and international policies and programmes.

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