



Farming communities in West Nile have been helped to set smart financial goals and work towards achieving them. PHOTO/COURTESY

# How collaborations in W. Nile have transformed livelihoods

Since the inception of the project, a total of 1,388 farmers have been recruited across the six micro-stations, comprising 723 men and 665 women, reflecting strong participation and notable inclusion of women in a traditionally male-dominated sector.

BY DAPHINE NAKABIRI.

**A**cross the coffee-growing districts of West Nile - Nebbi, Arua and Zombo - the once scattered groups of smallholder farmers struggling to market low-value coffee have steadily grown into a community of organized producers, with women taking up leadership roles and households beginning to earn more from their labour.

According to Mudi Oyikuru, a project officer at the Agency for Community Empowerment (AFCE), under the Power of Voices project supported by Oxfam, farmers have come together to contribute local materials such as poles, timber, stones, and labour.

This collective effort allows them to access services that would otherwise be unaffordable, including agricultural extension, post-harvest handling facilities, and better market opportunities.

As a result, six micro-stations have been constructed across the region, improving coffee processing quality, strengthening farmer groups, and attracting buyers willing to pay premium prices for their produce.

He says: "At the micro-stations, we have registered an improvement in the quality of coffee as the farmers are producing specialty coffee that attracts buyers that are able to offer good prices for farmers with each kilogramme costing Shs2,400. This has in turn boosted

production and improved their livelihoods."

At the micro-stations, farmers follow a careful process to ensure quality.

As seen at Gonyobendo, Deogracious Mongrek, a community-based consultant explains, "Farmers bring fully ripe red cherries from their farms, which we first inspect for quality. Anything that does not meet our standard is returned for unsorting. Once sorted, the cherries are weighed and processed through the pulper into fresh parchment, which is then left to ferment for two nights in our pits and drums."

Similarly, during the post-processing, women play a crucial role as after fermentation, the coffee is washed and carefully hand-sorted by women to remove damaged beans and foreign materials. Their attention to detail ensures uniform drying in the sheds, preventing cracks and preserving quality. This meticulous process has enabled farmers to consistently produce specialty coffee that fetches higher prices in the market.

## Capacity building

Beyond improving coffee processing, the project has invested heavily in building the skills and knowledge of farmers across West Nile.

The trainings have covered a range of areas, such as agronomic practices, and financial management, ensuring that farmers not only produce quality coffee but also manage their resources ef-

fectively.

Oyikuru explains, "We trained farmers on nursery management, pruning, and proper harvesting techniques. We also introduced savings groups and provided each group with saving kits. This has enabled them to manage their finances better, invest in their farms, and plan for the future."

As part of a core initiative that fosters an inclusive and equitable community, Sophie Nampewo Njuba, the Financing for Development Coordinator at Oxfam and coordinator of the Fair4All/Power of Voices project, highlighted that through partnership with Third World Network, these promote Fair4All value chains where the rights of women and youth in the coffee value chain are recognized and protected.

"Our goal has been to empower smallholder farmers, especially women, to fully participate in and own their coffee value chains. Through these trainings, they gain both the technical and business skills they need to turn ideas into sustainable livelihoods," she says.

Similarly, the capacity-building initiatives have been particularly transformative for women.

Through the Gender Action Learning System and Girls' Methodology, women have learned to participate fully in decision-making at both household and group levels. They now take active roles in leadership committees, manage savings groups, and contribute to planning for collective marketing and invest-

ment.

Oyikuru adds, "The trainings gave women confidence and practical skills, as they can not only manage coffee processing, but also run small businesses, make decisions about household income, and influence community priorities."

In a patriarchal society, where enterprises that involve money like coffee sector, are dominated by the men, the skills and knowledge attained have also been used to help the minority groups to also own their land through registration.

"Through maximizing land ownership as a form of main cash crop, this has not only improved people's livelihoods, but also increased agribusiness as land ownership encourages producing for the ready market rather than for consumption," Ms Nampewo says.

One of the notable achievements from the trainings has been in horticulture. Farmers were provided with onion seeds and, equipped with skills acquired from nursery bed management to harvesting.

The introduction of horticulture, such as onions, has provided an additional income stream, diversifying household earnings and reducing dependency on a single crop.

Since the inception of the project, a total of 1,388 farmers have been recruited across the six micro-stations, comprising 723 men and 665 women, reflecting strong participation and notable inclusion of women in a traditionally male-dominated sector.

Despite these successes, the project faced initial challenges, including small landholdings, a male-dominated coffee sector, and limited access to agricultural extension services. Overcoming these barriers required persistent training, community engagement, and strong collaboration among partners.

## Looking ahead

The success of the project has been built on the complementary expertise of several partners.

AFCE focused on mobilizing farmers, facilitating trainings, and constructing micro-stations, Oxfam coordinating the project and emphasized inclusive, women- and youth-centered value chains, Third World Network ensuring farmers' rights were protected along the coffee value chain, the Uganda Agribusiness Alliance supported alternative business practices favoring women and minorities, while SFU Uganda helped strengthen land governance and legal ownership and CIATINI provided guidance for compliance with EU market regulations. Together, these partnerships have created a structure where farmers are empowered technically, financially, and socially.

As the project approaches its final year, the focus is shifting towards sustainability and turning ideas into enduring business models.

Ms Nampewo says "What we want to emphasize now is how to transform everything that has been tested and utilized into a viable business model."

She adds, "While we have supported farmers with inputs so far, their current skills and experience mean they are well-equipped to continue producing for the market and earn a living independently."

This approach thus ensures that the achievements in coffee production, women's empowerment, and alternative livelihoods will continue to benefit communities in West Nile long after the formal support from the project ends.



## IDEAS

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**Sophie Nampewo Njuba - Financing for Development Coordinator, Oxfam**