

## TAO PROJECT 2011-2013:

*“Improved livelihoods of women farmers in Northern Uganda through market-led development”*

### Summary of project & evaluations

This document summarises our two year project in Lira, Apac and Oyam Districts of Northern Uganda and the independent evaluations of the project. This was our first project to develop mechanisms by which smallholder farmers, mostly women, could negotiate and sell at strong market prices to commercial buyers. We are delighted that it has been so successful.

#### IMPROVED LIVES & LIVELIHOODS

*“The project is a rare and successful example of value chain market oriented development... hugely innovative”.*

*Coffey International Development*

- Return on Investment = **424%** (profit only) / **552%** (including produce consumed)
- **109%** of average Ugandan income generated (including produce consumed)
- **90%** of farmers **received income** from the sale of produce. [ACEDI survey, September 2013]
- **95.6%** satisfied the project met their needs and **alleviated their poverty**. [ACEDI]
- Developed a **savings** culture & generated income to improve **schooling, housing, health** and extend **agricultural** production still further.
- Improved **gender relations** and sharing of roles, reduced gender based violence and helped **give communities a voice**.

**Funders:** Department for International Development – DfID (c£227,000 over two years, through its Global Poverty Action Fund (GPAF)) combined with our own funding of tarpaulins.

**Delivery partner in Uganda:** Kulika Uganda

**Dates:** 1 August 2011 – 31 July 2013

**Project location:** Lira, Apac and Oyam Districts, Northern Uganda

**Independent evaluation:** Undertaken by Mr Grace William Maiso of Africa Community Empowerment and Development Initiatives (ACEDI - [www.acedi.org](http://www.acedi.org)), in accordance with the DfID evaluation criteria, designed to allow comparability across GPAF grantees.

The evaluation was undertaken September-October 2013. Being so soon after the project's last farming season, the evaluation recognised that the agricultural returns were under-recorded, as not all produce had yet been harvested and sold. We up-dated information about returns on project investment once the 2013 harvest data was available, however, this is not reflected in ACEDI's survey statistics, such as the percentage of farmers generating an income.

ACEDI's overall conclusion was: ***"The project has met its objectives as planned for and in accordance with the GPAF funding agreement, showing a clear indication of reducing poverty of the beneficiaries and leading to improved livelihoods of especially women farmers in consonance with MDG 1 and 3."*** [Millennium Development Goals: MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women]

**Additional independent evaluation:** This project was also selected to be one of the DfID GPAF projects reviewed by Coffey International Development as part of its mid-term evaluation of the overall relevance and effectiveness of the GPAF funding model. Although Coffey's evaluation was not primarily a review of our project's effectiveness, relevant findings and lessons have also been incorporated into this summary.

References to the evaluation and consultant refer to the ACEDI evaluation unless specified as Coffey's.

**Context:** Northern Uganda is still recovering from two decades of war with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The conflict led to many children being orphaned and women widowed, great community tensions, and loss of lands and agricultural knowledge, due to the long periods of in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Of respondents to the evaluation survey, ACEDI reports, *"83.7% (n=270) mentioned that they were in poverty by the time the project identified them as beneficiaries, and the major cause of this poverty was the LRA war [cited as the direct cause by 69%]. They also reported that their most important need at the start of the project was farm productivity that ranged from farm inputs to markets and post-harvest handling issues."*

As the project evaluation also noted, *"agriculture remains the major employer and backbone for the growth of the economy in Uganda as it employs almost 85% of the labour force and contributes 90% of the country's exports. Approximately 4.5 million smallholder farmers owning an average of 2 hectares are the key players in the sector in the country."*

### **Project background:**

We were able to conduct this project over two years rather than our normal three years, to provide minimal inputs to the farmers involved, and to involve 1,800 farmers rather than our normal 600, because:

- (i) we were building on a major project we had undertaken previously in Lira, Apac and Oyam Districts during 2008-11; and
- (ii) the primary purpose of the project was to develop mechanisms by which farmers could access commercial markets, rather than the key focus being on building agricultural skills.

Our previous project had assisted people returning from IDP camps to resettle by addressing land rights issues and training them in agricultural production techniques. Through this project we had established relationships with the communities, meaning that our new project could get up and running quickly; and previous agricultural training in the communities had been shared with all such that the beneficiaries were able to afford to purchase their own seeds.

Crucially, our previous work in the Districts also gave us understanding of the operation of the commercial market in the area, which formed the basis for the development of this project.

## Project aims:

Building on our previous project, this project supported orphans, other vulnerable children, women and other victims of the war and internal displacement, by:

1. Enabling the smallholder farmers and wider community to **access commercial markets**, particularly by creating farmer groups and cooperatives able to negotiate with commercial buyers.
2. Training smallholder farmers to improve their **farming productivity**, both to increase and improve the households' consumption and, particularly, to produce surplus for commercial sale and income generation.

## Project innovation:

In improving farming productivity (Aim 2) we applied our 20 years' experience of such projects.

In achieving Aim 1, however, we were developing new approaches, and so have refined the process and learnt much during the project; lessons which we are applying other projects.

The project was intended to be sustainable after our direct intervention ended by creating farmer groups with the agricultural skills, financial and marketing skills, and saving mechanisms to be able both to continue to generate agricultural surpluses themselves and to share their knowledge and structures with their wider community.

The Coffey evaluation reported that ***“the key pillars of success observed by the Evaluation Team include the innovative approach to linking women to a market with high demand and successful community mobilisation.”***

## Summary of project activities:

**Trained 1,800 smallholder farmers.** Of these, **1,374** (76%) were headed by a **woman** and between them they supported **6,340 children**. The farmers purchased their own seeds, including hybrid seeds that were more productive. We provided them with tarpaulins, after we identified the need to dry produce in a manner that meets the high quality expected by commercial purchasers, thereby generating much better prices for the farmers.

In addition to farmers supported directly, much of the training was open to other interested farmers.

Participants were trained in aspects such as:

- Farming methods, including ways to improve soil fertility and so increase yields; understanding of a diverse range of crops, livestock, beekeeping and trees that are beneficial to the environment; and appreciation of the crops well suited to improve household nutrition and food security, and those best for income generation.
- The financial implications of decisions regarding choice of crop, including the cost of different qualities of seed, the likely price received for produce, the different time it takes different crops to mature, and the different input they need to make.
- The importance of setting aside some of their profits to buy seed for the next season (as hybrids are non-fertile).
- The opportunities of using profits to further improve their agricultural productivity (e.g. purchasing goats for milk and to create fertilizer).

**Secured land and built a store** for the farmers' produce; one in each of the three districts. This is particularly useful because immediately after the harvest the prices are at their lowest, so the ability to store produce increases the chance of higher prices, including by reducing the 'temptation' for farmers to sell their produce immediately, at low local prices. The stores also reduce theft and can be used as local information centres.

**Created market access** by:

- Supporting the farmers to organise into 60 farmer groups;
- Training each group in commercial, marketing and financial matters – including through the creation of a 'marketing committee' in each group and the building of contacts with all the commercial buyers in the area.
- Helping these groups to set up Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) to pool and lend funds to each other.
- Supporting the groups in each of the three districts to organise into registered Farmers' Cooperative Societies, large enough to have real negotiating power with companies. This approach is in line with government policies of encouraging Cooperatives to ensure collective buying and marketing of produce.

**Establishing strong partnerships** with local government, particularly with the commercial and production departments at District and Sub-county levels, thereby ensuring coordination with government policy and ongoing support from local government.

**Promoted** to the wider community the productive farming techniques and the value of organising into farmer groups to improve access to commercial markets.

**Changes and issues arising:**

- It was originally intended that this project involve only women farmers. However, our delivery partner, Kulika, realised quickly that this created resentment among male smallholder farmers who were also supporting orphans. We therefore altered the recruitment to approximately 75:25 women:men. This change resulted in improved gender relations, better transparency and dialogue between women and men in the communities, and a greater involvement of women in decision-making and of men in family activities. It did, however, reduce the number of women-headed households supported by the project.
- Initial difficulties in establishing relationships and arrangements with the commercial buyers (who were originally going to provide transportation for the produce), combined with the initial lack of storage facilities, resulted in some of the first year's produce being sold locally at low prices.
- Poor rains impacted on the harvest in the last season. In the first year, heavy rains made roads impassable for a period, impacting on the ability to sell produce. Although the impact of weather is expected, it had a considerable impact on the results of a two year project.

## Achievements:

Percentages refer to percentage of respondents to the independently-conducted survey of 270 farmers involved directly in the project. Other findings were identified by the ACEDI consultant through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions.

- **95.6%** were satisfied with the adequacy of the project in meeting their needs and **alleviating the poverty** situation. Asked what would have happened to them or the family had the project not been in place, 79.7% reported that the situation would have been worse off while 18.9% reported that the situation would not have changed. The consultant concluded **“The project shows a good trend of permanently changing the overall livelihoods of the communities.”**
  - **90.2%** were satisfied with the **project overall**.
  - **97.2%** felt the process of selecting beneficiaries was **fair and transparent**.
  - **83%** were satisfied with their **participation in the planning**, design and execution of the project.
- By September 2013, **6,131 acres of land** were under cultivation with commercial crops (soya bean, simsim and sunflower), compared with 360 acres at the project’s start (**1703% increase**).
- **90%** of the farmers involved had **received income** from the sale of produce, compared with only 15% at the start of the project. Respondents said that **80%** of their seed was being **sold** to commercial companies (Mukwano and Mount Meru). In discussions, the farmers reported spending their increased income in the following ways:
  - sending children to better schools – and specifically more girls being sent to school. [The Coffey evaluation team also received the feedback that more children were going to school, in response to their concerns that children might be kept at home to work on the farms.]
  - buying medicines
  - building permanent houses for their family members
  - purchasing oxen to cultivate more land
  - buying more land for cultivation and increased agricultural productivity
  - acquisition of more livestock like cattle and goats
  - shifting from bicycle to motorcycles
  - some got married thanks to the increased sales.
- The evaluation states that **“Multiplier effects** of the project are evident as communities want to start similar groups”. Similarly, the Coffey report says “new people wanted to join the group and have subsequently established parallel groups.”
- The evaluation concluded that the project had **improved savings** levels and had nurtured a savings culture. Each of the 60 farmer groups having created some form of group savings, resulting in *“a marked realization in savings, as a result of the project training them and also providing saving kits... The beneficiaries also reported that they now realised the importance of recording their incomes and expenditure to ensure they have adequately managed their finances.”*
- **1,640 farms (91%)** already using appropriate technologies, compared with 0.5% at the project start. The **new farming techniques** they are applying include:
  - cutting grass (rather than burning it), allowing it to rot, then using it as fertilizer
  - using local pesticides, such as red pepper, lantana kamara leaves and the neem tree, to avoid pests destroying their grains
  - improving storage of groundnuts for sowing the following season by shelling them, mixing them with dry sand and keeping them in an air-tight container
  - improving harvesting by planting seeds in lines, rather than scattering them
  - improving their harvest handling.

- The project established **strong partnerships** with the local government officials, especially with District and Sub-country commercial and production departments. These officials noted that they had incorporated some of the activities of the project within the local government plans.

### Value for money and return on investment:

The following results have been calculated using our Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) system.

Value for money analysis of project: Profit, value and Return On Investment (ROI)		
	Total over 2 years	Per annum
Ave profit (sales less planting cost) / beneficiary (1,800)	£534	£267
Ave cash equivalent / beneficiary of own produce consumed	£161	£80
Total value per beneficiary	£695	£347
Average income per person in Uganda		£318 <sup>1</sup>
Percentage of an average income achieved by the project		109%
Cost of project per beneficiary (£227k / 1,800 beneficiaries)	£126	
Return on investment – profit / beneficiary	4.24	
Return on investment – total value / beneficiary	5.52	

The Coffey report noted that the cost of the project per beneficiary was not unreasonably high given the costs of the start-up and non-recurrent social engineering activities.

In appreciating these ROI statistics, it should also be noted that the 1,800 beneficiaries supported 6,340 children and that these figures do not include:

- Returns on investment that are expected to continue to be generated by these new agri-businesses after the end of the project.
- Increased income and food production by other households that benefitted from the training and creation of Farmer Cooperatives.
- Any value attributed to intangible benefits, such as well-being and improved community and gender relations.
- Any multiplier effects generated by the increased household income, such as that arising from children's education or ability to buy more land.

### Unexpected benefits:

ACEDI noted that that the following benefits were achieved, although not specifically incorporated into the design of the project. As these benefits were not necessarily planned, the evaluation could not be sure whether the changes will be permanent and lead to the reduction of poverty.

### Improved gender relations, including **reduced Gender Based Violence** (GBV)

- Male participants told the researchers that women used to rely on men, but are now able to contribute to family upkeep, thereby improving the standard of living and encouraging men and women to discuss and draw up family budgets together – which resulted in reduced domestic violence (previously a considerable problem).

<sup>1</sup> WDR 2012

- Improved transparency, dialogue and gender attitudes have been achieved thanks to the high level of socialising between women and men during meetings.
- Analysis of the survey results shows improvements in outcomes such as: sending daughters to school; family planning; selling and buying properties; and children's marriage.

The Coffey report also stated that the project *“has allowed women to take on leadership roles, and to become involved in decision making. The elected chairperson of [one of the three] cooperatives is a woman. Marketing (which was previously the province of men) is now done by women. The women are strongly determined that this should be a women-run initiative. The project is transforming gender relations.”*

### Greater community cohesion, skills, support and friendship

In addition to the positive impact on gender relations, increased socialisation and networking between the farmers and other people at the district and sub-county level had the benefits of:

- Helping communities establish a common voice and increased negotiation power and interface with local government, thanks to organising the bulk buying system.
- Improving organisational skills generally.
- Providing women with sources of advice during difficult times.

Similarly, the Coffey report says *“perhaps the most dramatic unintended outcome is the impact on group solidarity and friendship. Several people made the observation that group members were happier and livelier as a result of the groups. Most dramatic was the change in elderly women who might have been expected to be on the brink of death. From our own observation meetings with farmers in two locations, we believe the observation to be true.”*

### ACEDI overall evaluation:

The following summary table was provided by the evaluation consultant.

Evaluation Criteria	Performance remarks	Score
Results	The project has been a great success and was critical for the women farmer groups. It has had a direct bearing on the realization of MDG 3 in Uganda.	High
Relevance	In a post conflict situation, small holder women farmers are very vulnerable given low agriculture productivity and limited markets. The project was critical for the women farmers and all evidence from the survey and FGDs points to the project being important in meeting the country's PRDP and NDP targets for post conflict reconstruction.  The project closely met the needs of the women farmers, although a few needs remained unmet that were largely out of the scope of the project.	High
Effectiveness	Kulika Uganda's implementation of the project was commendable with more than 80% of project beneficiaries satisfied with participation in the project and its outcome. In addition learning has been an important part of the project with Kulika Uganda taking seriously the feedback from DFID and making the necessary changes in project execution and log frame.  However, it did not appear that learning from the project was being applied across the whole of Kulika.	High

Evaluation Criteria	Performance remarks	Score
Efficiency	The right mix of project personnel was employed and overall project systems – financial, human and management – were satisfactory for the implementation of the project to realise its objectives.	High
Value for Money	There have been fewer inputs from other stakeholders into the project although Kulika has been overly strategic in the use of project funds. The high indirect costs of the project have reduced the overall per capita investment for the women farmer and thus reducing the opportunities to reach more women or provide more services or increase depth of intervention, despite the success of the project.	Medium
Impact	Women farmers have experienced improved market access for their farm produce and the majority [of farmers] have increased incomes from the project. Many of the farmers have reported new lifestyles and investments, clearly pointing to the success of the project in reducing poverty among small scale women farmers in the post conflict northern Uganda as aimed in the GPAF application.	High
Sustainability	The project has established farmer groups that have been registered and also formed cooperatives. In addition, local government involvement has been successful. The project required little external input after start and is market driven, a design that is self-propelling and sustainable.	High
Cross-cutting issues*	Though groups reported being taught about environment and HIV/AIDS there was limited evidence to show mainstreaming of these issues into the project. Climate change issues and HIV/AIDs are serious risks to the success of the project in the long run where not adequately addressed. Evidence shows that much of the gains of the project could be washed away because of HIV/AIDs.	Low

**\* Cross-cutting issues: Our response**

TAO is well aware of the importance of enabling farmers to handle the consequences of climate change. These are being addressed in our current project in Pader District and wherever we can secure appropriate funding we will incorporate such projects. We will also investigate providing further support through partnerships with other organisations.

In the case of HIV/AIDS we have always made training participants aware of:

- The availability of government-run testing and treatment facilities, that are free for all Ugandans; and
- The important of good nutrition, especially for those who are HIV+.

We recognise, however, that there is a need to address the stigma that continues to be attached to HIV/AIDS and that often prevents people from being tested. The groups set up for our training offer a good opportunity for HIV/AIDS-focused NGOs to work with the communities to address this stigma. This is especially the case as the project evaluation has demonstrated how successful these groups have been at providing support networks and improving dialogue and cohesion. We will therefore seek to form suitable HIV/AIDS partnerships for future projects.



## Lessons for future projects:

The evaluation confirmed many aspects of the project that were successful and that we will certainly retain in future projects; this included some aspects that we refined during the project, such as our involvement of more commercial buyers than planned originally.

As this was TAO's first market-access project, we expected to learn lessons and we greatly welcome the evaluation consultants' recommendations. The following table sets out a summary of the key lessons and advice provided in the two reports and our planned response to each. In addition, the ACEDI made some recommendations regarding financial management. These have not been listed here as the issues arose as a result of initial delays in starting the project due to significant management and board changes at Kulika, which have now been completed.

Ref:	Lessons / independent recommendations	Our planned response
<b>A. PROJECT DESIGN</b>		
A1	<p>The involvement of <b>local government</b> was a key success factor and the Technical and Advisory Committee model was judged to be good for project implementation.</p> <p>However, to ensure the sustainability of the outcomes following TAO's exit, farmers need to have built strong ongoing relationships in which the local government's role has shifted from supervision to community support.</p> <p>Project planning and interaction with government could also take more advantage of Uganda's national <b>Government policies</b> impacting on smallholder farmers as part of its aim to transform Uganda "from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years", especially the funding mechanisms.</p> <p>TAO should also seek to incorporate lessons from the project into government policies and implementation.</p>	<p>In working with local government during future projects we will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1: Ensure that the relationships built between farmer groups / cooperatives and local government move from monitoring towards cooperation and community support.</li> <li>2: Work with officials to encourage their take up of successful approaches, so as to reach wider communities.</li> </ol> <p>We will investigate the funding mechanisms and other opportunities to take greater advantage of Government activities in northern Uganda and incorporate such opportunities into our planning of future projects.</p>
A2	<p>The project was based on the assumption that an increase in incomes would necessarily improve the conditions and welfare of the beneficiaries, which is not always the case. TAO should measure <b>indicators of wellbeing</b> and consider whether its projects can do more to ensure a reduction in poverty levels.</p> <p>Similarly, TAO could develop a more proactive approach to the <b>unexpected benefits</b> to ensure that they do translate into long-term benefits – for example, by mainstreaming gender equality into project design and delivery.</p>	<p>Having learnt the lessons from this first such project, we will ensure that future projects are planned to achieve and sustain the benefits, such as improved gender equality, including by taking advantage of the availability of suitable tools.</p> <p>We will review the available tools to seek other suitable ways to incorporate wider indicators of wellbeing into our future projects.</p>

Ref:	Lessons / independent recommendations	Our planned response
A3	<p>The project could have addressed beneficiaries' needs better if it had incorporated <b>partnerships</b> with other organisations to increase the scope and level of support for the communications. These partnerships could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the provision of agricultural inputs (e.g. bees, livestock, oxen)</li> <li>• Help improve communities' resilience to climate change</li> <li>• Provide micro-finance and business-start up advice</li> <li>• Incorporate ways to address the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, with the aim of encouraging the take up of testing and treatment services</li> </ul>	<p>We recognise that such partnerships could leverage considerable value from our projects and will seek to include them in future projects.</p>
A4	<p>Ensure that there is a sustainable <b>funding plan for the Cooperatives</b> – project beneficiaries were found to have shown a high degree of commitment to cost sharing and making contributions to the project, however the consultant was unable to determine the likely running and maintenance costs of the Cooperatives and whether the farmers were willing and able to these costs.</p>	<p>TAO will determine these costs and ensure future projects create a sustainable funding mechanism.</p>
A5	<p>Develop a clearer <b>exit strategy</b> to avoid a potential relapse of project benefits.</p>	<p>TAO will apply the lessons learnt from this project in planning the exits from future projects.</p>
<b>B. PROJECT MANAGEMENT</b>		
B1	<p>Ensure delivery partners such as Kulika Uganda understand the <b>concept of VfM</b> (Value for Money) in terms of the 4Es.</p> <p><i>[Effectiveness: whether the right activities are being undertaken, at the right time. Economy: whether the procurement of goods and services is at the right price. Efficiency: whether activities are being undertaken at, comparatively, the right cost. Equity: whether the right activities are being undertaken for the right people.]</i></p>	<p>As the evaluations state, Kulika did apply the principles of VfM, although the concept wasn't known in formalized terms.</p> <p>However, TAO will ensure that our partners are aware of the 4Es as this is a good discipline for ensuring consistent achievement of VfM.</p>
B2	<p><b>Lessons</b> from Kulika's other work with smallholder farmers could have been incorporated into this project. In addition, Kulika staff not directly involved in the project could have contributed. Such <b>input</b> may have enabled better VfM to have been achieved.</p> <p>Similarly, lessons from this project could be incorporated into Kulika's other projects. Coffey also notes that Kulika learnt and adapted, but wasn't recording the learnings.</p> <p>There was no evidence of <b>capacity building</b> of Kulika's staff.</p>	<p>In future projects with Kulika and other similar partners, we will work with the senior management to ensure better integration of our project with their wider work and to ensure that the projects are used to build the capacity of their staff. This is already happening with TAO-Uganda.</p>

Ref:	Lessons / independent recommendations	Our planned response
B3	<p>The <b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b> (M&amp;E) system needs improvement. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The system did not appear to have been designed to measure the key indicators of the project. In particular, it needs to capture information at the level of individual farmers if it is to be able to measure changes in poverty.</li> <li>• As the management and maintenance of the M&amp;E system was managed by TAOU, Kulika had to be sent to what is effectively a competitor to be input to the system.</li> </ul>	<p>Our M&amp;E system was being developed during this project. The data was collected and entered to the system at the level of individual farmers, but the system was not initially able to generate reports at this level. This is now possible.</p> <p>We continue to improve the M&amp;E system in several other ways, by simplifying the system to improve its usability and training both Kulika and TAO-Uganda staff to make the most of the data analysis possible, including ensuring they get information to the field that enables the extension workers to focus their support on the farmers with the least positive performances.</p>

The full evaluation reports are available on request from our office.  
Please note that the ACEDI report is 57 pages long and  
the Coffey International Development report is 21 pages.

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