

Imke in Uganda: Agriculture as a motor of progress

On behalf of Wilde Ganzen, Project Advisor Imke Straaten participates in the [Young Expert Programmes](#) (YEP). For one year she lives and works in Uganda and enters dialogue with our partner organisations: How do they involve the community? What do they need as an organisation to mobilise communities? And, how could Wilde Ganzen support them in this? Through this blog series she shares her stories, experiences and findings from Uganda.



As soon as you leave the city, you are overwhelmed by the greenness of the hills of Uganda. Fruit, vegetables and crops grow wherever you turn alongside bananas, pineapples and mangoes. But also, beans, maize, tomatoes, potatoes, avocados and coffee plants - Uganda's most important export product.



My first impression? Uganda is one big food forest: You can eat everything you see, and everything grows together here.

But practice also reveals a dark side.

Farming is challenging

Although Uganda's climate - with an average of 26 degrees and two seasons - provides fertile ground for agriculture, farming is challenging: 80% of the Ugandan population depends on agriculture for their income, but cannot make a living from it.

Where does it go wrong?

Good soil is indispensable for a good harvest. But, deforestation, unreliable rainfall and the use of chemical pesticides - which, by the way, are provided for free by the Ugandan government - are causing soil degradation.

In addition, the farmer as a producer lives at the bottom of the value chain and often receives an insufficient price for their harvest. The result? They farm at a loss and use the next harvest as collateral for a loan, or to pay for school fees.



So, the profit is – logically – spent, before it is even earned.

The low yield - in the form of harvest on the one hand, and in the form of income on the other – ensures that the farmer always pays the highest price and cannot make the – often desired – transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture.

Agriculture as a motor of progress

Food security is at the heart of sustainable poverty reduction. Agriculture can be a powerful tool to put a healthy, varied and affordable meal on the table every day. As a source of income, it can also trigger economic development.

How? That is what the partner organisations will show you step by step!

Step 1 - The kitchen garden



The organisation [Abanya-Rwenzori Mountaineering Association](#) (AMA) supports farming communities in the Rwenzori Mountains, in Western Uganda. By starting a kitchen garden next to their homes, farmers can save money: After all, you don't need to buy everything you grow yourself. The savings are then used to pay for school fees, build a house or invest in the field (e.g. to buy quality seeds or tools).

"We do not want farmers to **waste money**"
— Mr. Azoli Bahati (AMA)



So, practice shows that the vegetable garden is more than a place to grow fruit and vegetables. It is a piggy bank.

But how do you make the field profitable?

Do you want to know more about vegetable gardens?

How do vegetable gardens contribute to ensuring healthy, varied and affordable food? What makes a vegetable garden sustainable? And, how do you get the local community involved?

In this 2-part webinar ([Part 1](#)) and ([Part 2](#)) together with partners from Bolivia, Nepal, Mali and Uganda, we looked at the theme of vegetable gardens based on three key elements: Local ownership, sustainability and food security.

Step 2 - Crop rotation

On a small scale, farmers in Uganda frequently use the agricultural method of intercropping. This means that cash crops (such as coffee, vanilla and cocoa) and food crops (such as banana, cassava and maize) grow interchangeably. Each crop grows at its own pace and has its own season. Ultimately, it is the market price that determines whether a crop is sold or used for own consumption.

"While waiting for coffee, you can **catch a banana**"
— Mr. Azoli Bahati (AMA)

By combining the right crops in the field and planning them well, the farmer can harvest the whole year round and thus - literally and figuratively - have bread on the table.

Step 3 - The (fruit) tree

Deforestation is a big problem in Uganda: a lot of forest is cut down for everyday use (such as for firewood, furniture and in the construction industry), but also because of the conviction that crops need space to grow - and so the tree has to make way.



The organisation [Masanfu Child and Family Support](#) wants to show farmers with their own eyes and experience that deforestation is not necessary: in addition to protecting crops from sun, rain and wind, the leaves of the Mtuba tree provide fertile soil cover.



And the fruit tree?

On the one hand as a nutritious supplement to an often one-sided diet, but above all as an additional source of income for the farmer. Thus, in line with crop rotation, agroforestry is also a common farming method in Uganda.

Step 4 - Livestock

Chemical pesticides are expensive and make the soil infertile in the long run.

The demonstration farm of the [Bukomansimbi Organic Tree Farmers Association](#) (BOTFA) combines livestock farming - rabbits, chickens, goats and pigs - with the cultivation of crops that are nutritious for both people and animals. The manure and crops are mixed to create natural pesticides, which visibly improve the soil quality and thus ensure a better harvest (for free!). Both in quantity and quality. Not just this year, but explicitly in the years to come.

"You can **use everything** without spending money"
— Mr. Stephen Kamyé (BOTFA)



Organic agriculture

Do you want to know more about organic farming? Then your organization could join the (international) network organisation [PELUM](#). Ugandan organizations could also contact [Kulika Uganda](#), who run an Agricultural Training Center specialised in ecological organic agriculture.

Saving money instead of large investments

The visits to the partner organisations show that farming in Uganda is not about large-scale investments, but about saving money by using the available means and materials. Starting from the vegetable garden next to the house and using farming methods such as crop rotation, agroforestry and organic fertilisation, agriculture forms a fertile basis for a healthy, varied meal and a diversified income for the farmer and his family, all year round.



Then, the farmer family finally gets what they deserve, and it tastes like more!