



The 1978-79 war and subsequent political turmoil in Uganda led to a failure of agricultural extension services, leaving peasants to farm with archaic methods. This led to soil impoverishment, failing crop production and severe environmental degradation. A growing population and traditional inheritance practices led to land fragmentation and further soil impoverishment. During the 1980s and 1990s the country was ravaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, further reducing the capacity of families to farm. During this period coffee failed due to severe wilt and prices on the international markets collapsed. The effect of these events was to exacerbate poverty, food insecurity and environmental degradation. The most vulnerable groups, women, widows and orphans were the most affected by the situation.

St. Jude Family Project is a Community Based Organization (CBO) in Masaka, Uganda that began as a small organic farm on 3 acres owned by John and Josephine Kizza since the 1980s. Its purpose is to improve household income, crop yields, household food security and diet. St. Jude teaches the most vulnerable groups in the society ways of improving family subsistence farming and diet. The training techniques use locally available materials and the methods used are environmentally sustainable. St. Jude works mainly with rural families, many of who are supporting orphans, and youth groups. St. Jude targets groups in areas where farming techniques are poor and soils are depleted, especially in its immediate vicinity. St. Jude trains many groups of local farmers who then become part of the St. Jude Farmers Association. Support from overseas donors has enabled St. Jude to provide training and support to very poor local farmers who cannot afford training fees.

At the St. Jude farm, rural farmers experience modern scientific integrated organic agriculture and low-cost, environmentally sustainable innovations that increase productivity. A wide range of subsistence and income generating farming projects are located at the farm, and many useful sustainable organic farming techniques can be demonstrated and seen in action. The integrated farming ensures that all farm products are used including run-off water for irrigation and home use, manure for biogas and compost, animal urine for pest control and manure, and weeds and kitchen waste for compost making. Integrated organic farming is based on an integrated cycle, which requires few additional inputs.

The appropriate technology demonstrated at St. Jude includes soil and water conservation, water-harvesting techniques including water storage, fuel conserving stoves, portable solar driers for home use, and a biogas digester for cooking with methane. The introduction of large-scale solar drying facilities for organically grown fruits has enabled organic farmers to be certified and find a market for their produce.

Training courses that are appropriate for adult learning have been developed with a combination of theory and practical work. The practical training enables adult groups with low literacy to make improvements in their lives. The training involves improved management and labor saving techniques.

The introduction of improved animals breeds at St. Jude by crossing local with imported breeds has enabled many farmers to increase production of meat and milk. St. Jude has pioneered the improvement of local poultry by crossbreeding, increasing the egg and meat production of the birds. St. Jude has also introduced local farmers to new cash crops such as vanilla and improved coffee varieties.

In the early days of the St. Jude project the main form of training was farm tours. St. Jude has since evolved into a training center. In a typical year, the St. Jude Training Center trains over 20,000 farmers. The training seeks to reduce the burden on women, who do most of the work in the home and farms. Fuel conserving stoves made by St. Jude from bricks and clay reduce by more than 50% the firewood required. Water is another burden for women that St. Jude seeks to reduce. St. Jude has developed a safe, low-cost water storage system that uses a pit, black polythene bags as the liner, and a small lockable trap door to ensure the safety of the supply.

St. Jude trains farmers in a variety of methods of fruit drying and food processing. As a result, 147 farmers have been certified as organic growers by KRAV, a certifying company in Sweden. The need for solar drying is an indicator of the effectiveness of training in organic farming. Local groups are now producing a surplus of food crops, but the local markets are insufficient and the over-supply has caused prices to fall. To improve family nutrition and income, St. Jude developed ways of preserving fruits for the home and for access to better markets. Because ripe fruit spoils easily and transportation on poor roads is difficult, St. Jude developed a simple portable solar drier for home use - a box on four legs with a plastic cover, and a tray for the fruit or vegetable inside. These simple portable driers can dry a wide range of produce to add value for sale. The materials used for the portable driers are affordable and locally available. The plastic covers are in many shops, and the wooden box is simple to assemble. The solar drier has proved popular with groups and individual rural farmers.

At present, there is little knowledge of modern ways of improving a farm among many rural populations in Uganda. The staple food, matoke (bananas), is often managed poorly resulting in very low yields. There is a tendency to think that change is only possible with donors or loans. St. Jude enables farmers to make an impact on their income, nutrition and health soon after they complete training. The center has trained 800 farmers to date.

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St. Jude Empowers 180,000 Farmers With Organic Skills

New Vision (Kampala)

NEWS

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By John Kasozi And Jennifer Austin
Kampala

ST. JUDE Family Projects is training farmers in modern Integrated Organic Farming (IOF). For the past 12 years, the project has equipped more than 180,000 farmers with skills in IOF.

Integrated Organic Farming is a process of harmonious co-existence between the various components on a farm - plants, animals, water and soils. Each component contributes directly or indirectly to the other.

The centre, located at Busense, Kabonera sub-county in Bukoto Central, Masaka district, has become a 'presidential model' for small-scale farmers in the country.

The IOF training programme offers 75% practical skills and 25% theory. Practicals are offered in the 17 projects at the centre. These include poultry, fish-farming, bee-keeping, mushroom and vegetable growing, biogas and storm water harvesting.

"The programme emphasises practical participation so that the trainees can successfully implement what they learn. The training can be short-term residential or non-residential," says Josephine Kizza, the executive director St. Jude.

Trainees come from all districts of Uganda. At the time The New Vision visited the centre, 60 people from Nebbi, Hoima and Arua districts were attending a residential training. At times, individuals go to the centre for long-term apprenticeship.

A substantial number of women, children and vulnerable people like school drop-outs have been trained. Eighty percent of the trainees have been women, who make up the bulk of farmers in the country.

Since 1993, the centre has empowered over 180,000 small-scale farmers in Africa and Europe with IOF knowledge. They have also trained farmers from Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Rwanda.

After training, the participants who have put what they learnt into practice are issued a Certificate of Adoption.

"Our training staff provide effective support and later follow up the trained farmers in their respective communities," says Kizza.

In the past, the training was free, but as the number increased, St.Jude began charging a nominal fee of sh500 for every non-member.

Kizza says plans are underway to expand the training project. "We shall soon put up a hostel with single rooms to accommodate those who want total privacy."

Every year, the project trains about 800 farmers, who are its members.

Today, some trained organic farmers supply organic fruits to St. Jude and other exporting firms. The centre has 87 certified organic out-growers. In January 2006, the 15 out-growers who are still under conversion will be certified.

Once a year, organic certifiers from the Swedish firm, KRAV, visit the out-growers to ensure that they conform to the organic farming regulations.

Kizza has a degree in organic farming from Denmark and together with her late husband, Kizza Aliddeki, they set up the farmers' training centre. Many farmers have embraced the programme.

They grow fruits like pineapples, pawpaws, jackfruit and mangoes, which are processed at the centre.

In 1998, DANIDA helped St. Jude set up their first tunnel solar fruit drying plant. The first consignment was exported to Denmark. The fruits are also dried using two hybrid dryers powered by hydropower, a standby generator or solar energy donated by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation.

"Each hybrid dryer chamber can shelve up to 72 trays of sliced fruit. The tunnel dryer takes only 25 trays. It uses hot air to dry the fruits," says Regina Nalubega, the factory manager of Masaka Organic Producers, which is under St. Jude Projects.