

Organic Agriculture a Worthwhile Venture for Women: The northern Uganda Shea Project experience

Kunihira, E.,¹ Taylor, A,² & Odeke, M.³

Keywords: organic, 'northern Uganda Shea Project', women, 'shea nuts'

Abstract

The term 'Feminization of agriculture' is quickly becoming a cliché to refer to the significance of the role women play in the agricultural sector. Despite the fact that women participate more than men in agriculture in the developing world, they remain more malnourished and less economically empowered because in the past, generally, development assistance failed to reach women in rural areas, both in absolute and relative terms compared to men. Today, mainstreaming of gender at all levels in the agricultural sector is actively being done in order to address the issue of gender disparities. Sub-Saharan Africa is perpetually witnessing and recording tremendous successes from programs that target female farmers and formulate gender specific approaches that suit women.

In Uganda, the Northern Uganda Organic Shea Project (NUSP) is at the forefront of economically empowering marginalized women in the previously war torn region of the country. The project was formulated to target only women as producers with the objective of improving the livelihoods of the women and their families. This is because the priority of the women is to care for the family — food, health and education — and NUSP has encouraged the ladies to make such decisions with the family, so that all feel included in the benefits being gained from Organic Shea Nut marketing.

In order to understand the impacts of this gender specific project on the livelihoods of the women, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held with women who are members of the project and those who are non-members. The focus group interviews sought to collect qualitative information on issues like benefits accruing to the women in the project, challenges faced, and demographic information like marital status and other income sources. Farmer qualitative rankings were done to assess the priority levels for each of the issues mentioned above.

Results from these discussions indicate that contracted women have benefited from the project in many ways. Ranking of benefits derived from the project indicate that the top most three (3) include; being able to provide children's school fees and healthcare, provision of household needs and improved decision-making. The results from these discussions also revealed that low prices and few buyers were the top most constraints faced by non-project women. These results clearly indicate that contract farming is an appropriate way of improving livelihoods of female farmers while effectively addressing issues related to gender imbalances in the agricultural sector.

¹ Agro Eco Uganda, Kampala, Uganda, e-mail edith@agroeco.ug, Internet www.agroeco.nl

² Agro Eco Uganda, Kampala, Uganda, e-mail taylor@agroeco.ug, Internet www.agroeco.nl

³ Research and Development Alternatives (RADA); Kampala, Uganda, modeug2002@yahoo.com