

2006-03-15



Regional cooperation for Organic Standards and
certification capacity in East Africa –
“OSEA”

Project Summary

1. Rationale and background

1.1 The relevance of organic farming for poverty alleviation

The proposal is to support the development of regional organic standards and certification capacity in East Africa.

Organic Agriculture is a sustainable and environmentally friendly production method, which has particular advantages for small-scale farmers in Africa. It also provides interesting marketing opportunities. Practical experiences as well as a number of reports demonstrate the appropriateness of Organic Agriculture for small farmers in developing countries. This includes reports by the FAO¹ and IFAD².

- Organic production has the potential to produce sufficient food of a high quality.
- Organic agriculture contributes to poverty alleviation and food security by a combination of many features, most notably by:
 - Increasing yields in low-input areas
 - Conserving bio-diversity and nature resources on the farm and in the surrounding area.
 - Increasing income and/or reducing costs
 - Producing safe and varied food
 - Being sustainable in the long term

Organic agriculture is relevant both as a certified production aiming at a separate marketing, as well as non-certified production for consumption by the farmers themselves and the local communities. This proposal focuses the certified organic production.

Certified organic production uses the market and the trade as a tool for poverty alleviation. Recent evaluation of the EPOPA programme as well as the evaluations by IFAD shows that the income of participating farmers can increase substantially. Certified production gives access to a premium market, or simply just better market access. Most of the certified production is intended for the export market, but local and regional markets are slowly developing in many developing countries.

1.2 Obstacles for the development of certified organic production in East Africa

Problems in the area of standards and certification currently pose limitations to the further development of organic production in East Africa. For the certified (or certified to be) production, access to affordable certification service as well as adapted standards is a critical factor. For export purposes equivalence with systems in the importing countries is crucial for market access, and certification will often be carried out by foreign certifiers to the standards of the importing country, e.g. the EU. As those standards are not so well adapted to the local situation, it puts local producers at a disadvantage.

¹ Organic Agriculture, Environment and Food Security, FAO 2002

² IFAD has made 2 evaluations of organic agriculture in Latin America and Asia

There is a certain demand for organic products in the local market. In Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania there are already sales. One can also note that organic products are already imported to the supermarkets. For the development of the local and regional markets, the availability of local certification and the application of standards that are relevant in the conditions of the producers are of fundamental importance.

1.3 Development of regional standards and certification capacity

A survey for the feasibility of the development of regional organic certification and standards in southern and eastern Africa commissioned by Sida in 2002³ concluded that:

“The recommended strategy is to initiate a regional development programme, which is open for any of the countries in the selected area. The regional programme should have as its objective to build capacity and provide information both to the private sector and to the governments. The possibility to develop regional standards should be promoted.”

The report concluded that there are many advantages of regional cooperation around standards and conformity assessment (inspection and certification):

1. Resource use – to combine resources is more efficient than that each country does it by itself.
2. Foster cooperation between countries – this leads to better understanding, less conflicts and a better business climate.
3. Possibilities for regional trade – one common standard and similar or identical conformity assessment procedures limits the problems with technical barriers for trade.
4. Negotiations with other governments for equivalence/recognition. It is easier for a group of countries to join forces in negotiating with e.g. the EU than if each one does it by themselves. It is also easier to get acceptance for adaptations of the standards if argued by a group of countries.
5. Coordinating input into international for a, such as Codex Alimentarius and IFOAM. Similar to the point above, a group of countries are more likely to be successful in influencing international for a than single countries.

1.4 Status in East Africa

Ugandan and Tanzania have already developed private-sector national standards for organic, in a nation-wide and participatory process. In Kenya, the Kenya Organic Agriculture Network is now taking up standards development. The Kenya Bureau of Standards has also got engaged and produced a draft organic standard. In Tanzania the Bureau of standards has set up a technical committee. In both Uganda and Tanzania, the Bureau of standards participates in the private sector lead initiatives.

Within the Sida funded EPOPA⁴ Programme cooperation between organic bodies in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania has emerged with technical input from Grolink AB, A Swedish based consultancy. The activities so far have been:

- one big seminar in Arusha December 2003

³ Feasibility study for the establishment of certification bodies for organic agriculture in Eastern and Southern Africa, Grolink 2002

⁴ Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa

- several joint inspection trainings
- three regional meetings of a working group consisting of 2 reps from each country
- assistance in the standard development phase
- joint training in certification procedures of certification managers and other staff

The partners so far have been:

- Uganda: Ugocert (local certification organisation) and NOGAMU (National Organic Movement)
- Tanzania: Tancert (local certification organisation)
- Kenya: KOAN (National Organic Movement) and AfriCert (local certification organisation)

NB: in Tanzania a new national association for organic agriculture, TOAM (Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement) is about to be founded in which case it would also become a natural partner in this project.

The participating organisations asked in their meeting September 2004 Grolink to develop a project proposal and for continued support for the activities.

IFOAM has recently opened an Africa Office which makes it natural for IFOAM to play a coordinating role for these activities. The development of local organic certification and regional standards fits into the strategic plan of IFOAM, developed by African stakeholders during 2005. Most of the partner organisations are also IFOAM members.

UNCTAD, UNEP and IFOAM have a project in progress for policy development for East Africa. The project also contains a smaller component about regional standards. However it has a lower priority in that project and its future funding is not clear.

The time is absolutely right to make progress in the development of a regional standard. To make that happen there is a need for resources to cover both costs for meetings and technical expertise to move the standards forward.

2. The project proposal

2.1 Overall objective

To improve income and livelihood of rural communities in East Africa

2.2 Project Purpose

To improve income and livelihood of rural communities in East Africa through facilitation of trade in organic products by means of a regional standard and regional certification cooperation.

2.3 Project results

1. A draft standard is developed through stakeholder consultations and by field testing by the end of 2006
2. Joint protocols for the verification of compliance with standards are developed.

3. A governance structure for the East Africa Organic Standards is established.
4. An East Africa Organic Standard is adopted by early 2007
5. The East African Organic Standard has been approved by IFOAM.
6. Consumers in the East African Countries have been informed about the standards and increased their understanding of organic agriculture.

2.4 Stakeholders and target group

The ultimate target group for the whole intervention is organic farmers and processors that will benefit from rationalised standards and better market access. **The direct stakeholders in the project are the organic sector organisations, certification organisations and relevant government agencies in East Africa. Leading local organisation will be NOGAMU, TOAM and KOAN.** Also supporting institutions such as extensions service, schools, business associations will be engaged as well as consumer and environmental organisations.

2.5 Assumptions and risks

One main pre-condition is that there is a possibility to unify stakeholders, not only within the country, but also in the region at large. This is of course influenced by the general cooperation environment in East Africa. Therefore one assumption is that the general cooperation environment in East Africa remains reasonable and that there are no serious tensions or conflicts between the countries.

Main internal risks in the project are:

- Lack of ability to reach consensus. This will mainly be mitigated by thorough stakeholder consultation, participatory methods for consensus development and through technical assistance finding solutions acceptable for all parties.
- Lack of priority by the local stakeholders for the process. As the time spent by local stakeholders are not remunerated there is a substantial commitment needed to drive the process, and to assure that it is not driven by external parties or consultants. The long preparation and maturing phase through the Sida funded feasibility study process and the regional cooperation initiated by EPOPA provides a good platform for this, and has proven that there is a sustained interest by the stakeholders.

2.6 Contribution to development objective and relevance

The proposal fits into Sida's strategy for trade and development as outlined in "Making markets work for the poor" and contributes to poverty alleviation. Further it coincides with other initiatives from Sida in support of a proper global infrastructure and regulatory framework for organic agriculture⁵. Organic agriculture is an environmentally friendly production method, well adapted to African small-scale farmers. By functional regional institutions their access to regional and international market will be facilitated, contributing to poverty reduction.

⁵ In particular the activities of the International Task Force on Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Farming, a joint FAO, UNCTAD and IFOAM initiative, More information about the FAO, UNCTAD and IFOAM ITF at http://r0.unctad.org/trade_env/itf-organic.htm

Ownership

One of the outputs of the project is to ensure that the **ownership** of the regional standard is clear and sustainable. Currently the Bureaus of standards of Tanzania and Kenya have showed interest in setting organic standards. Once the stakeholders have agreed, the standard will be presented to the East African Community for adoption as an official standard. Failing that, other options will be explored such as a regional private sector platform, e.g. an IFOAM East Africa group or other regional cooperation outside of IFOAM. It is critical that the stakeholders are in control of the standards, and therefore shall the final ownership issue be solved during the course of the project rather than prescribed beforehand.

Relevance

The starting point is that it should be possible to develop regional standards for East Africa. By having a number of countries subscribing to the same standards there are a number of advantages:

- Savings on resources for standards' development
- Bigger potential influence on international standards, through joint positions
- Avoiding obstacles for an emerging regional trade in organic products
- Easier use of inspectors across the border

In this way a regional organic standard can facilitate the further spread of organic agriculture, and increase the participation of rural communities in the market economy.

Sustainability

There are all reasons to believe that, as long as the ownership of the standards is clear and based on sufficient stakeholder participation, that sustainability will be assured.

Cross-cutting issues

The project will be implemented with a clear ambition to include women in the process as much as possible as well as an assessment of the standards from a gender perspective. An assessment of the standards from an HIV/Aids perspective will also be made, e.g. to ensure that not unnecessarily laborious methods are prescribed, as they will strongly discriminate against Aids victims as well as against single-parent or child led households.

3. Implementation

The work plan is presented separately.