

Uganda Building inclusive value chains for organic soybean, sesame and shea

Subsidy: €2,231,000

Consortium: Do It B.V., Gulu Agricultural Development Company (GADC), EyeOpener Initiative, Nwoya District Government, and Lamwo District Government.



Shea seedling. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

In northern Uganda, communities are rebuilding after years of conflict and displacement. Agriculture is becoming a fundamental pathway to recovery. In the plains of Lamwo and Nwoya districts, sesame fields now reflect this shift. They tell a story of recovery shaped by agriculture and market access.

Connecting farmers to markets

At the centre of this effort is a public-private partnership led by DO IT from the Netherlands. It works with Gulu Agricultural Development Company (GADC), Eye Opener Initiative, and local district governments. The project connects farmers to European markets for organic sesame and shea butter. It also supports standards such as quality control, food safety, and certification. On the Ugandan side, GADC manages field implementation. The agribusiness exports sesame to Europe and also supports soybean production for local markets.

Rebuilding livelihoods

Amooti Bruce is GADC's Sesame Operations Manager. He says the 5-year project has helped displaced people and refugees rebuild their livelihoods. Through area coordinators, about 190 field officers and lead farmers, GADC reaches 25,000 households. Each field officer works with 10 lead farmers, and each lead farmer works with a group of 20 to 25 farmers. They support training, inspections, and contract management. The project first focused on cotton, sesame, and shea. After farmers requested a change, cotton was



Gender and nutrition awareness training. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

replaced with soybeans. Bruce says, "Farmers wanted to plant soybeans because they can sell them easily here. There is already a market for it, and cotton is very unpredictable from one year to the next." While refugee inclusion formed part of the broader objective, much of the project's transformative work has centred on gender inclusion. Recruitment deliberately targeted individual farmers rather than men-headed households.

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Training, skills and awareness

GADC organised farmers into Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA). Farmers received training in climate-smart agriculture and post-harvest practices to improve yields. They also received financial literacy and gender inclusion training. He adds, "We are seeing more men and women making decisions together on household finances. Before, men made most financial decisions. Now, joint decision-making is increasing. It is slow, but it is happening."

The project also used interactive games to raise awareness on gender equality and nutrition. In these sessions, participants discuss everyday situations, such as who eats first in a household. The games help open conversations

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while keeping participants engaged. GADC exports mainly to the Netherlands and Germany. Bruce explains, "In Europe, certified organic sesame sells for about \$2,000 to \$2,200 per tonne. By contrast, conventional sesame fetches around \$1,000 per tonne, a price that does not cover export costs from landlocked Uganda. Certification is therefore critical to making the business viable."

EyeOpenerWorks, a creative agency with offices in the Netherlands and Kampala, has been supporting the project from the start. Martijn Harlaar is the co-founder and director. He says, "We developed practical learning tools to support farmers and project partners."

Improving yields

Allen Kwagonza is a monitoring and evaluation specialist at EyeOpenerWorks. He says the organisation led learning and accountability work, including baseline, mid-term, and end-term studies. He adds that GADC's systems were strengthened through digital tools. Field officers and village collectors were trained to collect and submit data digitally. At baseline, Kwagonza says, farmers largely operated on their own. Others were involved in informal savings arrangements.

When implementation began in 2020, many farmers relied on traditional practices. She recalls, "Farmers used to throw their seeds randomly." Through training in proper land



Processing facility at GADC (right), field ploughing in the field (bottom left), nutrition awareness training (top left) and sorted sesame (middle).
Photos: Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).



Farmland in Gulu, Northern Uganda. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

selection, line planting, spacing and post-harvest handling, yields have improved significantly. For sesame, farmers at baseline produced an average of 423 kilogrammes from 2.4 acres. At mid-term in 2024, from roughly 2.7 acres, they reported 496 kilogrammes. For soybeans, farmers produced 646 kilogrammes from 2.1 acres at baseline and 612 kilogrammes at mid-term. Kwagonza partly attributes this slight decline to drier-than-usual conditions and delayed rains.

Disruptive European organic certification rules

For DO IT Organic, the project in northern Uganda was both a business decision and a mission-driven commitment. A representative explains, "We provide market access for companies like GADC. They handle sourcing and processing, then sell to us at the port. We ship the products to Europe."

However, changes in European organic certification rules created new challenges. Previously, many farmers could be grouped under one certificate. New rules reduced the number allowed per group. He says, "GADC suddenly had to obtain many more certificates instead of just a few.

Certification organisations were overwhelmed, which caused delays. As a result, some products could not be exported as organic. They had to be sold as conventional products, which reduced income."

More than recovery

Despite these challenges, the project shows what is possible when farmers are connected to markets, skills, and support systems. Agriculture is not only restoring incomes but also rebuilding confidence in communities recovering from conflict. In northern Uganda, fields once marked by disruption are now driving renewal. Farmers are organising, investing, and rebuilding their livelihoods with greater certainty. This is more than recovery. It is a transition towards resilience, where agriculture becomes the foundation for long-term stability and growth.

Links

- [Vimeo video: Building inclusive value chains - SDGP Midterm video](#)
- [RVO video: DO IT ORGANIC - Soy, sesame and shea from Uganda](#)

Nutrition sensitivity of agriculture value chain projects



The study "[Nutrition sensitivity of agriculture value-chain projects under RVO's SGD Partnership facility](#)" by Wageningen University and Research assessed the nutrition sensitivity of the SDGP projects, using a nutrition programme integration approach.

This approach examines the extent to which explicit nutrition goals and actions are integrated across different stages of the agricultural value chains within the projects. The core idea is that stronger integration across these stages of the value chain can potentially lead to better nutrition outcomes.

This study found that the level of nutrition sensitivity in value chain projects is limited, due to challenges along the whole project cycle, which finds its origin already in the design of the call for proposals, where nutrition sensitivity is not prioritised.

