



# Commercializing Smallholder Farming

## Effect of Covid-19 on Smallholder Farmers

In March, 2020 Uganda announced its first nationwide lockdown. This followed a World Health Organization (WHO) declaration in January, 2020 of an outbreak of a new coronavirus disease in Hubei Province, China to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

The country is now in its second national lockdown aimed at reducing the risk of the second wave of the 2019 coronavirus disease from spreading to other people in the country.

However, long term success cannot be taken for granted without mentioning the sacrifices all the sections of our society have made, including smallholder farmers.

ers.

About 75% of Uganda's population is in agriculture and close to 70% are smallholder farmers who derive their livelihood from agriculture. These cultivate less than five hectares of land.

Mr. Vincent Nsale is a smallholder farmer in Nsujjimpolwe village in Wakiso district. He has a family of eight children to look after, of which three of them are orphans.

He works on the farm with his wife and his children. They hire the services of one casual laborer.

He has specialized in pig-

gery, local chicken rearing and banana growing.

When asked about the effect of the lockdown measures on his work, he looks down with a pensive face before he answers: *"the guidelines that were given to us have worsened our situation. We have failed to get access to both our scattered pieces land and good markets to sell our products or buy seeds and other essential farm inputs".*



Mr. Nsale in his banana plantation

## Threats to household income & the vulnerable

Farming as a business and its entire supply chain has been disrupted by the pandemic. Smallholder farmers are finding it more difficult to earn a living and feed their families.

*"The elderly farmers, especially women are more likely to lose all*

*their income or go to bed hungry than we men".* Said Mr. Nsale.

Farmers are paying higher prices for food and inputs, while receiving less for their produce. Many farmers are facing issues with input quality and farm productivity.

Smallholder farmers

are spending less on their farms, this under investment will lead to lower production and quality in future harvests, impacting food supply chains.

The longer this disruption will take, the deeper and more negative consequences for farmers will be.

### Inside this issue:

Farming & its vulnerability	2
How food consumers are coping	2
Food & nutrition security in the community	2
Boosting smallholder farmers	3
Add value to farmers and their products	3
Slow production and its consequences	3
Who do we work with	4

### Special points of interest:

- *Effect of the Corona virus on smallholder farmers.*
- *Its threats to household income.*
- *An emerging food & nutrition crisis.*
- *Immediate effects and its lasting consequences on smallholder farmers.*
- *How to support the food supply chains.*



## Farming and its vulnerability

Nsujjampolwe's agriculture is largely dominated by smallholder farmers, a class that comprises nearly 90% of Uganda's farming population. This group is more vulnerable, making it important to understand the implications of Covid-19 and its related lockdown on their socioeconomic well-being.

The economy – particularly the owners of animal feed stores, retailers of animal drugs and agricultural extension service sectors, who provide direct support to farmers – have been adversely affected by this pandemic.

On the other side, farming which is relatively at macro-level has been less affected. This is the



*Apple banana that is commonly eaten as food during the lockdown.*

group that Mr. Nsale and his group members are competing with on the market.

Within the group family gardens, perishable products and livestock have incurred severe losses as compared to non-perishables. And these are the ones farmers leaned on to earn quick income to feed their fami-

lies and operate the farm business.

Like in most villages in the country, farming is both a source of resilience as well as in some ways more vulnerable as a few farmers, especially the youth had to rapidly adapt to different supply chain mechanisms such as online transactions and home deliveries.

Fortunately, food comes as an ambit of essential commodities and in principle, was exempt from movement restrictions.

But, with the nationwide lockdown due to the pandemic, the country's crucial food markets have been affected severely due to demand and supply shocks.

## How food consumers are coping

Food consumers' buying behavior has changed, with greater online transactions and home-delivery services displacing in-person purchases and restaurant meals, that smallholder farmers used to target.

Producers and distributors are being forced to shift supplies from food service outlets to retail channels. It is now a common

practice to meet food and livestock distribution trucks that used to supply markets retailing in residential areas.

On the supply side, across the value chain, there are labor and logistical constraints. These factors have implications for the quantities of

*It is now a common practice to meet food and livestock distribution trucks that used to supply markets retailing in residential areas.*

food that arrive on the wholesale food trucks destined to the markets – that feed retail outlets – and consequently determine the prices at which trade occurs.

## Food & Nutrition Security within the Community

The effects of this pandemic have been so intense that families have drastically changed their eating habits.

Mr. Nsale and his wife are increasingly opting for cheaper and less food quantities, and less nutrient-rich food items due to a reduction in their income. This has consequently led to increased disease vulnerability of their children and elderly par-

ents.

The closure of schools has also negatively impacted on the nutrition of pupils especially those from vulnerable households in the community.

According to a study by BRAC, children especially those below the



*A pumpkin is a good source of zinc a very vital element for a healthy body.*

age of five have been severely affected by malnutrition and nutrition-related mortality. This is due to a decline in consumption levels and the rising disease burden.

The market vendors whom Mr. Nsale was supplying, of which 80% were women, have seen all their capital drying up.



## Boosting smallholder farmers to respond to the COVID-19 crisis

The impact of the coronavirus has been felt in all areas of development, a global health crisis has now become a local economic crisis. Since food is the mainstay of any family, it has now become imperative to look into the impact of the virus on the food supply system at the household level and; especially, on smallholder farmers.

To respond to this huge challenge among smallholder farmers, three areas of action need to be prioritized:

Assisting producer organizations, input suppliers, food processors and other key actors in the supply chains. This will ensure that the products

on sale to smallholder farmers are not adulterated or replaced with fake inputs.

Developing market-based solutions for pricing and financing to address smallholder farmers' immediate need for cash to buy

quality inputs.

Tailoring farmer support to address the most pressing needs, and harnessing digital tools like WhatsApp and SMS to deliver support remotely is something new that needs to be looked into.



*A support staff feeding pigs on Mr. Nsale's farm*

## Add value to farmers and their products

Modernizing and adding value at the farm level could help change this narrative by boosting the national economy, raising incomes in the agricultural sector and creating employment.

Mr. Nsale and his fellow group members are starting to see the benefits of supplying finished goods to the market. It brings in more income and significantly

reduces waste of food.

Another avenue that the pandemic has taught the group is to invest in women within the group to produce soap and protective face masks for the entire community.

*Mr. Nsale and his group members are starting to see the benefits of supplying finished goods to the market.*

This investment will support the health and safety of their members and helps diversify their household income.

Existing production partnerships within the group membership and new alliances outside the village community can also help smallholder farmers tackle challenges and grow.

## Slow production on the farms means less cash flow and investment

With agricultural businesses and local government service delivery operations to farmers slowing down, and funds reallocated to emergency budget lines, smallholder farmers will be hard-pressed to be paid on time and to secure adequate financing and cash flows for production, pre-harvest and post-harvest activities.

In other words, the pressure on

farmers will intensify in the coming months, if the crisis continues.

To alleviate the pressure, farmers will need more financial support and a rethink of lending and repayment from buyers and financial institutions.

There is little evidence of this happening soon, however.

*Agro tourism by a farmer*







## P & V COMMODITY SUPPLIES

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### ***COSTING INITIATIVES***

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*The People & Views Commodity Supplies is found in Uganda. It was registered by the registrar of companies under the number 140974. The purpose of starting it was to enable people within their respective institutions and or communities realize that their views or ideas are a resource that can be turned into a commodity of trade. It therefore, supports them to overcome gaps in knowledge and skills to enable them live dignified, secure, productive and healthy lives through the promotion of their initiatives. The corona virus pandemic hasn't been kind to us either, we moved our offices closer to the communities in the countryside. We are located at Bulamu, on Mityana road in Mpigi district.*

*We have two full-time volunteer staff and a support team on retention who are available for short-term and long-term consultation. The support team earns a stipend that enables them continue to serve those that are in need of our services. Majority of these are members of farming groups.*

## Who do we work with ?.

We work with clients whom we refer to as partners. Our partners are institutions that are autonomous and independent. Each of them implements unique programs that aim at improving the quality of life of its members, clients and the livelihoods of people in their catchment area.

Our partners are serving the marginalized, poor and vulnerable in the communities:

They share skills and knowledge in ecological agriculture and organizational development which has helped improve profitability and quality of life in communities.

This has been achieved through continuous trainings, on-farm research, seed input distribution, and exchange visits which have

prioritized human dignity and the expression of human values within the communities.

They uphold their culture & identity of universality by being effective, efficient, and available, regardless of their individual physi-

cal, mental and social differences.

Therefore, our work revolves around four main core areas of interest, which are rooted in the improvement of people's livelihoods. These include:

- a-Education & Training;
- b-Provide options that revamp collapsing institutions or organizations;
- c-Research on Policies, Advocacy & Enhance knowledge sharing;
- d-Humanitarian Support.



*With members of the Advocacy Coalition for Sustainable Agriculture on a partnership visit to Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi*