



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

# Cultivating partnerships, harvesting results:

SDGP through the years





# Foreword

This e-magazine captures the essence of the Sustainable Development Goals Partnership (SDGP) facility. The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commissioned the programme, and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) implements it. Together, they support public-private partnerships that improve food security (SDG2), sustainable market development and encourage inclusive green growth (SDG8).

The programme uses the Dutch Diamond approach; government, business, knowledge institutions and civil society work together as equal partners. By combining their strengths, they create sustainable solutions in places that need them most. Across 34 projects in 23 countries, each partnership has its own context, challenges and goals. What unites them is a shared commitment to collaboration, innovation and impact.

These partnerships demonstrate that sustainable development is a dynamic process shaped by people, perseverance and learning. The stories in this magazine highlight tangible results and the journeys behind them: Obstacles, milestones and lessons learnt along the way. They reveal the richness and humanity that underpins lasting impact.

We are proud to share what these partnerships have achieved. They show the power of shared ambition to improve food security, develop entrepreneurial ecosystems, and advance sustainability in partner countries.

This publication aims to inspire, inform and connect stakeholders and interested parties. We thank all contributors, including Vice Versa Global and DDK. Above all, we express our special gratitude to the SDGP project partners, whose dedication made these stories possible.

Let us continue working together to initiate new partnerships, strengthen existing ones and actively contribute to lasting, inclusive impact in a sustainable development!

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# Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals Partnership Facility (SDGP) is an initiative of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). SDGP aims to support public-private partnerships (PPPs) that contribute to innovative solutions to food security and sustainable entrepreneurship in low and middle-income countries. The programme focuses on SDG 2 (ending hunger), SDG 8 (decent jobs and economic growth) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). It also addresses gender equality, circular economy and climate as cross-cutting themes.

SDGP has a budget of 65 million euros and supports 34 projects. Its themes include:

1. Sustainable value chains
2. Nutritional value
3. Sustainable and climate-resilient food production systems
4. Better work and higher income for people younger than 35 and women

Part of SDGP was the Impact Accelerator (IA), a flexible instrument that aims to increase impact, innovation, and joint learning from new and ongoing PPPs. The instrument supported activities such as enabling project add-ons and facilitating knowledge exchange through short studies, consultancies and similar activities.

The wealth of knowledge generated from the SDGP projects and the IA is what motivated the commission for this magazine. Each project has a unique journey, facing obstacles and celebrating milestones while adapting to change. The stories in this magazine provide valuable insights and inspiration for those working towards the SDGs. The experiences described reflect individual stories and may not represent the results of the entire project.





EAT:FRESH | Tanzania.  
Photo: © Makmende.



# Table of contents



## Buttons

-  Go to last page
-  Go to table of contents
-  Go to project overview
-  Go to next page

- Active in 23 countries
- Results



## Zero Hunger

- Fish farming in Burundi: Introducing a new diet and income alternative for highland communities
- From fields to food security: Farmers reconnecting crops, nutrition and markets
- Reinventing abaca: How a forgotten fibre is driving rural resilience
- Growing winners: Rwanda's potato mission uplifts smallholder farmers
- A promising cashew project cut short: Lessons from Cambodia
- Results



## Gender Equality

- From 'last resort' to multimillion-dollar enterprise
- Breaking confinement: Women leading the way



## Decent work and economic growth

- Fair labour in action
- Value over volume: Reshaping Indonesia's cocoa sector
- How the SDGP project rewired Uganda's potato value chain
- From uncertainty to income: Rwanda's maize turnaround
- Reviving the Mekong Delta: How the SUCCEEDS project is transforming citrus farming
- Growing rice and Artemisia: How TSARA is boosting farmer livelihoods
- Results

5  
6



## Responsible consumption & production

55

- How young entrepreneurs have built a circular economy at the Kenyan coast
- Brewing sustainability: Kenya's low-carbon coffee revolution
- From agricultural by-products to sustainable opportunity: Circular solutions in Peru and Côte d'Ivoire

7

8

10

17

19

20

22

23

24

28

33

34

39

40

46

51

53

54



## Climate action

69

- How saline-tolerant farming is transforming coastal Bangladesh
- Green gold: How Madagascar's cinchona project is turning forests into futures
- Lessons from protecting Rwanda's tea industry
- After the gold rush: Reclaiming land from illegal mining
- Results

70

76

78

79

83



## Peace, justice & strong institutions

84

- From conflict to crops: How banana farming is uniting Cotabato's tri-people
- The potato revolution: Cultivating Kurdistan's fields
- Rebuilding livelihoods after conflict
- Against the odds: How Niger's tiger nut project is transforming communities
- Resilience Limits in Niger's Peanut Sector

85

90

92

97

98

# Active in 23 countries



## Bangladesh

- COASTS – Coastal Opportunities and Agricultural Solutions to Tackle Salinity
- Smart farming, healthy food

## Burundi

- Fish farming value chain development project

## Cambodia

- CashYOU – sustainable organic cashew
- RiceTechCambodia: Adding value to the organic rice sector in Cambodia leading to inclusive growth

## Chad

- AgriJob Booster

## Colombia

- IntelqValue – Intelligent value chain management

## Côte d'Ivoire

- EcoCajou – Cashew processing
- CI:RCCLES - Reducing, reusing and recycling to contribute and lead in efficient sustainable waste management

## Ghana

- ASASE – Accessible Soils and Sustainable Environments

## India

- Good Farming Good Food – Sustainable food and nutrition security and transforming smallholders' livelihood in Madhya Pradesh

## Indonesia

- Sugar and steam – sustainable intensification of agroforestry production systems
- Transforming the cocoa sector through value addition for smallholders

## Iraq

- Value chain development for potato production and processing in Kurdistan Region Iraq
- Reviving potato farming in southern Iraq

## Kenya

- BOOST
- Developing a low-carbon coffee value chain

## Madagascar

- Future proofing agroforestry systems surrounding fragile natural parks
- Transformation des systèmes agricoles avec du riz et de l'artimisia (TSARA)

## Myanmar

- Sustainable and accessible fish for all
- MasterPeas – Myanmar pulses for agricultural growth, higher incomes and nutrition

## Niger

- Chain booster souchet
- Arachide chain booster

## Nigeria

- Transforming Nigeria's vegetable markets

## The Palestinian territories

- Innovating the value chain of Palestine Olives

## Peru

- Circular Coffee: creating value across the chain

## The Philippines

- Fibre for the future
- Going Bananas – restoring livelihoods of conflict affected farmers in Cotabato

## Rwanda

- Agroforestry interventions for uphill food and income security and downhill tea plantation protection
- Increased Maize Value Chain Efficiency
- Increased potato value chain efficiency in Great Lakes Region

## South Sudan

- Excelling in Excelsa – Providing jobs and livelihoods for youth and women through coffee

## Tanzania

- EAT:FRESH: a farmers' roadmap of expanding successful horticulture

## Uganda

- Building inclusive value chains for organic soybean, sesame and shea
- Innovating the Ugandan Potato Value Chain

## Vietnam

- Sustainable citrus chain empowering and developing smallholders in the Mekong Delta

# Results

Cumulative data as of 2025



**80,473**  
People with increased dietary diversity



**30**  
Dutch companies investing/trading/active in target country



**415,274**  
People trained



**529,253**  
People with increased food production



**9,971**  
Jobs created



**110,191**  
Hectares of farmland used more eco-friendly



**63**  
Local companies investing/trading/active in target country



**350,157**  
People with increased income and job conditions

## Projects per sector



**12** Fruits (banana, citrus) and vegetables (incl. beans)



**3** Potatoes



**5** Nuts: cashew, shea, groundnuts



**3** Animal proteins (dairy, aquaculture, poultry)



**2** Rice



**6** Commodities: coffee, cocoa, tea



**6** Other commodities: olive, coconut sugar, sesame seed, tree (teak, cinchona, palm, etc.)



**3** Other: refurbishing electronics, waste management (cocoa, coffee)

*Some projects work in more than one sector.*



## Sustainable Development Goal 2

# Zero Hunger

A primary focus of SDGP is SDG 2, working on ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture. SDGP projects worked on improving access and awareness to healthy, nutritious food. Projects also worked on increasing access to food by improving income and sustainable agricultural systems.

<b>Fish farming in Burundi: Introducing a new diet and income alternative for highland communities</b> <i>Burundi</i>	<b>08</b>
<b>From fields to food security: Farmers reconnecting crops, nutrition and markets</b> <i>India, Cambodia and Uganda</i>	<b>10</b>
<b>Reinventing abaca: How a forgotten fibre is driving rural resilience</b> <i>Philippines</i>	<b>17</b>
<b>Growing winners: Rwanda's potato mission uplifts smallholder farmers</b> <i>Rwanda</i>	<b>19</b>
<b>A promising cashew project cut short: Lessons from Cambodia</b> <i>Cambodia</i>	<b>20</b>



# Fish farming in Burundi: Introducing a new diet and income alternative for highland communities



Author:  
**Ritah Atuhaire**

**In Burundi's highlands, fish was rarely eaten. A new aquaculture initiative is changing diets and incomes. By linking community farms to markets, the project is building a local fish economy despite technical, social, and market challenges. A new fish farming initiative is reshaping both livelihoods and nutrition in these communities.**

## Building fish value chains

The Fish Farming Value Chain Development project combines business with social impact by introducing aquaculture through an innovative 'mother-daughter' model. Elaga manages the central 'mother' farm, producing fingerlings and handling large-scale processing. Meanwhile, 4 community 'daughter' farms enable local cooperatives to raise fish for consumption and income. Aad Kessler of Wageningen University & Research, which leads the project, says, "We aim to improve nutrition and create jobs for the community."

We also want to build a self-sustaining fish value chain that can operate independently once external advisors leave."

## Early technical challenges

According to Aad Kessler, the project faced several challenges at the outset. Fish farming proved to be technically demanding; suitable sites with running water were difficult to secure, and organising farmer communities to manage the farms required sustained effort. In response, Wageningen University & Research introduced the Participatory Integrated Planning (PIP) approach. It equips farmers with land management and cooperative governance skills to ensure long-term ownership and independence. The team also had to invest in community engagement and nutrition awareness, as fish were not traditionally part of local diets. Building a practical business case presented another hurdle. Once production began, the project struggled to secure reliable markets. Border closures with

## Burundi Fish farming value chain development project

**Subsidy:** €3,000,000

**Consortium:** Wageningen University & Research, AGAPE BURUNDI ASBL, Pisciculture France-Afrique, Elaga S.A., and ISABU.

*"Early results are promising: farms are operational, tilapia and catfish are reaching local markets, and cooperatives are gaining confidence."*



Fish pond visitation | Fish Farming Value Chain Development. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

the Democratic Republic of the Congo, driven by political instability, forced the team to pivot from its original export strategy to focus on domestic markets.

### Expanding impact locally

Today, early results are promising. Farms are operational, tilapia and catfish are reaching local markets, and cooperatives are gaining confidence. Aad says, "Fish farms are beginning to generate income for communities, which farmers are reinvesting in local development and small businesses. This is a great example of how investing in the fish value chain can promote local development.

We aim to support local schools by providing free fish to improve the students' diets." He adds, "We also offer training to local farmers on sustainable land management practices. Agriculture remains the main activity for smallholder households in our fish farm communities. Most notably, in regions where fish were once uncommon, it is now emerging as a new economic opportunity and source of better nutrition."

## Fish consumption in Burundi



In Burundi a project and an add-on is developed by Wageningen University and Research to support nutrition within the Fish Farming Value Chain Development.

This add-on focuses on activities to promote healthy diets among project beneficiaries through community engagement, for example, educational workshops, Fish Days and/or cooking demonstrations. It also focuses on developing and implementing a monitoring approach for the nutrition impact of the project.



Fish farming nursery pond. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).



## From fields to food security: Farmers reconnecting crops, nutrition and markets

In many rural communities, farmers often grow nutritious crops but rarely consume them. Limited knowledge, market pressures, and long-standing beliefs shape what reaches the table. In India, Cambodia and Uganda, a partnership is working to change this by linking agriculture, nutrition, and markets to improve diets, incomes and long-term resilience.



Author:  
**Moraa Obiria**

Examining a soybean | Good Farming, Good Food | India (top), Mr. Chhoun Navuth, a CDF, is facilitating an external audit by Control Union on organic rice production at Samaki Phoum Toul AC | RiceTechCambodia (middle) and demonstration of field ploughing | Building Inclusive Value Chains for Organic Soybean, Sesame and Shea | Uganda. (bottom). Photo: © Makmende (top), Development and Partnership in Action and Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) (bottom).

India  
**Good Farming Good Food - Sustainable food and nutrition security and transforming smallholders' livelihood in Madhya Pradesh**

**Subsidy:** €1,900,000

**Consortium:** Stichting Solidaridad Nederland, East West Seeds India, Vippy Industries Ltd, M.P. Rural Livelihood Mission, and Samarth Kisan.

In central India, a long-standing contradiction has existed for decades. The state of Madhya Pradesh produces more than half of India's soybeans and is often called the country's 'soya bowl.' Yet it also ranks among India's most malnourished regions. Farmers produced protein-rich crops in abundance, but their families rarely consumed them. For generations, soybeans moved from field to markets, not to kitchens. This was because farmers grew soy for animals and not for human consumption.

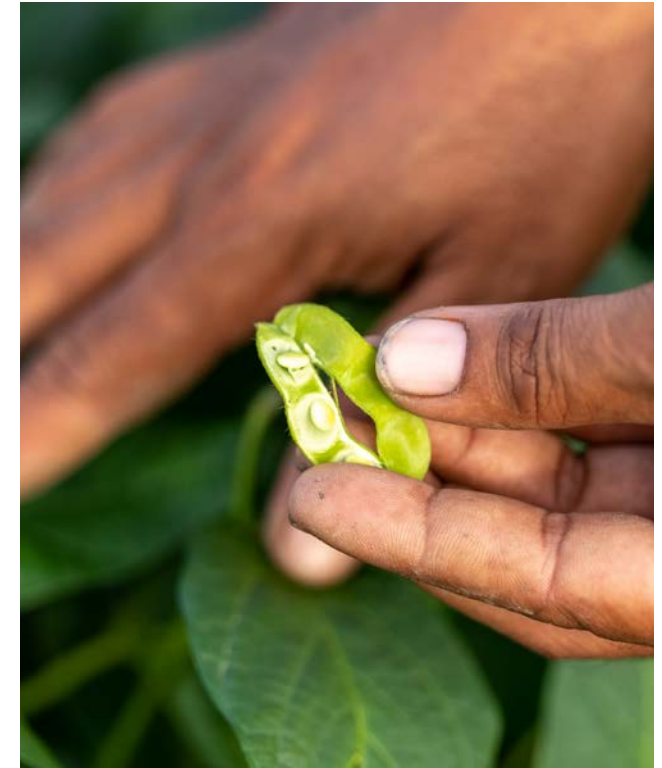
**A project of change**

That paradox became the starting point for the Good Farming, Good Food project. It was launched in 2019 across 5 districts with high malnutrition rates: Agar, Ujjain, Bhopal, Dewas, and Sehore. The initiative adopted a multistakeholder model from the onset, bringing together public agencies, private companies and farmer-owned institutions. They worked towards a shared goal: improving nutrition and health outcomes in rural communities.

**From food taboos to behaviour change**

In Mugaliyachhap village in Bhopal district, soybean farming stretches back decades. Jyoti Jatav's family has cultivated it since her grandfather's time. She says, "We have been growing soybeans for more than 30 years. It is our family's crop." However, soybeans had never been part of her household diet. She explains, "There was a misconception in the village. Because of its texture, people thought it was a non-vegetarian food. Some believed it should not be eaten for religious reasons." This belief was common across many communities. Farmers described similar taboos and uncertainties. Many did not know how to process soybeans properly. Others thought it was difficult to digest or not suitable for daily meals. As a result, there was a gap between production and consumption. Farmers mainly produced soybeans for animal feed.

When the Good Farming, Good Food team began intensive engagement in 2021, nutrition awareness became a central pillar of the programme. Community meetings introduced



Person holding a soybean. Photo: © Makmende.

*"There was a misconception in the village. Because of its texture, people thought it was a non-vegetarian food. Some believed it should not be eaten for religious reasons."*

the nutritional benefits of soybeans and vegetables. The programme encouraged households to include both in their daily diets. Partner East-West Seed supported farmers to diversify into soybeans and vegetables. Demonstrations showed how to process soy safely and use it in everyday meals. Women were trained to mix soybean flour with wheat flour at a 9:1 ratio. This improved protein intake without changing taste or texture.

Jyoti decided to try it herself first. She says, "I started consuming it on my own. Then I introduced it to my family." Over time, she noticed changes. "Earlier, we felt tired very easily. After eating soybeans regularly, our energy improved. My knee pain also reduced."



### Change in communities

In Dhankhedi village in Sehore district, Rajesh Bamaniya had also grown soybeans for decades. Like others, she sold them entirely. The Solidaridad team later introduced her to new diets and farming practices. She says, "They showed us how to eat soybeans and explained the health benefits. After that, I stopped using chemical fertilisers and started making vermicompost." Solidaridad trained farmers in practices that reduced chemical use and improved productivity. It also promoted organic methods such as vermicomposting and biopesticides.

*"By involving women in nutrition decisions, we improved both diets and their role in the household."*

Now Rajesh produces organic soybeans, mills them, and mixes them with wheat flour to prepare food for her family. She says, "Our children are falling sick less often. Earlier, they would get infections whenever the weather changed." These observations are based on feedback from farmers, not clinical data. However, similar experiences were reported across many communities.

### Results and (the limits of) data

Nidhi Karoliya is a nutrition expert at Solidaridad Network. She explains how the feedback was gathered. She says, "After families consumed soybeans and vegetables for 3 to 4 months, we asked about changes. Many said children were falling ill less often. Some older adults also reported reduced joint pain."

She clarifies that no measuring instruments were used to assess immunity levels. "We did not have machines to measure this. The information came from their lived experience and conversations." The emphasis, she notes, was on behavioural change and sustained consumption rather than short-term supplementation.

### Strengthening farmer systems and women's roles

Suresh Motwani is the General Manager for Solidaridad in India. He says Madhya Pradesh's high soybean production made it an important focus area. However, high malnutrition rates revealed a clear gap. He says, "We organised farmers into producer companies and set up procurement centres across the districts. These companies sell soybeans to Vippy Industries, and farmers receive a premium for high-quality produce."

Women carry out most farm work in India, contributing over 70% of activities. However, they often have little say in decisions. The project aimed to change this. It organised 50,000 farm families into groups and actively included women. He adds, "By involving women in nutrition decisions, we improved both diets and their role in the household." Partner East-West Seed also supports women through kitchen gardens to promote vegetable production.

### Links

- [RVO video: SDG17 in Action: Good Farming, Good Food in India](#)

Planting seedlings (top) and school meals and preparation of cost-effective and nutritious meals (bottom). Photos: © Makmende.

Cambodia  
**RiceTechCambodia:  
 Adding value to the organic rice  
 sector in Cambodia leading to  
 inclusive growth**

**Subsidy:** €2,791,250

**Consortium:** Sanorice Holding B.V., Oxfam in Cambodia, AMRU Rice (Cambodia) Co. Ltd., Provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery, and Development and Partnership in Action.



Mr. Chhoun Navuth, DPA and Community Development Facilitator is training on organic rice pre-post harvest management at Roya village, Roya commune. Photo: © Development and Partnership in Action.

Farmers miles away in Cambodia are experiencing similar transformations. In Mondulkiri, a remote north-eastern province of Cambodia, rice has long been both a lifeline and a limitation. Many villages remain underserved, with red-earth roads stretching towards the Vietnamese border.

**Farming challenges**

For years, farmers in Koh Nhaek district relied on traditional methods and saved seeds. Most are indigenous smallholders farming small plots in villages such as Kbal Koh, Ou Yes, Serey Roth, Kbal Chrouy, and Meanchey. At harvest, they faced the same challenges: unstable prices, limited bargaining power, and no proper drying or storage facilities.

Sambath Mam is the Executive Director of Development and Partnership in Action. He says, "When farmers harvested, their paddy was often wet, and they had to rely on sunlight to dry it. Prices usually dropped during harvest season, so farmers could not earn a good income." He continues, "We work closely with farmers, producer groups, and cooperatives. We train them on organic rice production, internal systems, and how to access markets. We also link them to private sector partners like AMRU Rice."

**Reaching farmers at scale**

Over the past 3 years, the project has reached 2,165 farmers in Mondulkiri. Of these, 1,022 are certified organic producers. Another 1,143 are transitioning to organic production.

For farmers, the change goes beyond new techniques. It has improved their bargaining power. He says, "Farmers can now sell their paddy to AMRU at better prices than before." Ramo Hud is an agronomist at DPA. He describes the private sector's role as transformative. "AMRU Rice is the main buyer. We work closely with farmers, and AMRU purchases their paddy after harvest."

*"This complete value chain helps farmers earn better and more stable incomes."*

**From Mondulkiri to Europe**

With support from the project, AMRU Rice installed essential infrastructure in Mondulkiri. This includes storage warehouses, drying machines, and a milling line. Before this, the lack of drying and storage forced farmers to sell quickly at low prices. Now, the supply chain extends beyond the province. Rice produced in Mondulkiri is processed and exported to the Netherlands, where it is used to make products such as rice cakes.

What begins as paddy in a remote field now reaches supermarket shelves in Europe. Hud says, "This is a complete value chain, from smallholder farmers to processing and export. It helps farmers earn better and more stable incomes."



Mr. Hud Ramo, DPA and Agronomist Specialist, is conducting a training session on organic rice standards for organic rice producers at Samaki Phoum Toul AC. Photo: © Development and Partnership in Action.

## 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.

*"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."*

### 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

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

*"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."*



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.





Carrying abaca fibre. Photo: © Michael Ocampo.

## Philippines Fibre for the future

**Subsidy:** €1,577,201

**Consortium:** Stichting Woord en Daad, Kennemer Foods International, Agronomika Finance Corporation, the Department of Agrarian Reform, and the Philippine Fibre Industry Development Authority (PhilFIDA).

# Reinventing abaca: How a forgotten fibre is driving rural resilience



Author:  
**Nylah Shah**

**For decades, abaca in the Philippines was seen as a backup crop, not the main one. Farmers harvested it from the wild when they needed income. But today, this story is changing. In Mindanao, farmers are starting to grow abaca in a more organised and planned way, so they can sell it on the market. The ‘Fibre for the Future – Farming of Abaca’ project is partly driving this shift. Project coordinator Arnel Astillero has witnessed the transformation himself.**

### Structuring the sector

He says, "For a long time, farmers did not really grow abaca. They would gather fibre from the mountains when they needed money." This informal system resulted in low productivity of approximately 700 kilogrammes per hectare each year. This is significantly below the crop's potential.

### Improving productivity, quality and access

To address these challenges, SDGP funded an initiative, launched in 2020, that works with around 5,000 smallholder farmers across Mindanao. Of these, 35% are women and 15% are youth. The project aims to improve productivity, fibre quality and market access.

The project highlights a fundamental challenge in the abaca sector. "Mixed productivity and income outcomes reflect deep-rooted structural constraints,"

Arnel notes. While some farmers have achieved substantial improvements, not all farmers have experienced the same results. Systemic production limitations and broader sectoral decline continue to hold back progress. As a result, meaningful recovery and growth will require sustained, long-term effort. Arnel says, "It will take a considerable amount of time to develop this sector."



Preparing abaca fibre. Photo: © Michael Ocampo.



Various steps of abaca processing including harvesting mature stalks (left), tuxing or stripping fibre from pulp (middle) and drying (right). Photo: © Michael Ocampo (left), Antonie Treuren (middle), Ruben Vlot (right) Woord en Daad.

*"There is a high demand for natural-based products and abaca fits right into that future. It's one of the strongest and longest natural fibres in the world."*

#### **Closing productivity gaps**

Stichting Woord en Daad leads the consortium that is implementing the project. Partners include Kennemer Foods International, Agronomika Finance Corporation, and the Department of Agrarian Reform. The Philippine Fibre Industry Development Authority (PhilFIDA) provides technical expertise.

Building on these partnerships, the project promotes improved planting materials and establishes nurseries. It also trains farmers in more scientific farming practices. These efforts are helping to close the productivity gap. Arnel explains, "We teach farmers to manage their farms more scientifically. Before, they would plant and only return at harvest."

#### **Results and opportunities**

Early results of these interventions are encouraging. An internal study found that 28% of participating farmers reported increased productivity. Another 27% reported higher incomes. These gains happened despite a broader decline in industry performance. Arnel notes, "This happened while industry-wide productivity was declining."

With production improving, attention is now turning to markets. He says, "To make the project sustainable, we must develop a stable market." People around the world are using abaca for many things, from tea bags to high-end textiles. He concludes, "It is one of the strongest and longest natural fibres in the world. There is a high demand for natural-based products; abaca fits right into that future."



Field of potato plants. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

## Rwanda Increased potato value chain efficiency in Great Lakes Region

**Subsidy:** €2,382,013.29

**Consortium:** Delphy B.V., Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, MoneyPhone B.V., SPF Joint Ventures Ltd., Stichting Agriterra, and in cooperation with Hollanda Fair Foods Ltd.

# Growing winners: Rwanda's potato mission uplifts smallholder farmers



Author:  
**Ritah Atuhaire**

**In northern Rwanda, a potato initiative is reshaping smallholder farming. Better seeds, training, and market access are boosting productivity. Yet climate shocks and financing gaps persist, offering lessons for building resilient and inclusive agricultural value chains.**

### Improving seed systems

In northern Rwanda, a potato value chain project is helping transform the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. Thijs Boer, founder of Hollanda Fair Foods Ltd, is one of the leaders. The project works through a consortium of partners and focuses on improving seed quality, farming practices, and market access. A crucial achievement was the establishment of a modern aeroponic seed potato production facility. This significantly increased the quality and availability of seed potatoes, previously a major constraint for farmers. The project reached over 2,000 farmers, offering training and introducing improved seed systems. It also encouraged farmers to see agriculture as a business and segmented them based on their capacity.

### Challenges in the field

Climate change disrupted yields and made production less predictable, while inconsistent quality remained a major concern for buyers. Training thousands of smallholder farmers also proved costly and time-consuming, limiting efficiency. In addition, many farmers faced difficulties accessing finance, restricting their ability to invest in better inputs.

### Key insights

From these challenges, clear lessons emerged. First, soil health is essential. Thijs underscores the need for sustainable land management and crop rotation. He says, "Taking care of your soil is more important than taking care of your potatoes." Farmers need sufficient plots to practice crop rotation within their own land. A 1-in-4 rotation allows farmers to grow potatoes yearly. They can shift production across different sections and stay active in the supply chain. If potatoes are grown only once every 4 years, farmers risk losing market connections and valuable knowledge.

Second, not all farmers can be supported in the same way. Focusing on farmers with slightly larger landholdings has proved more effective for building a reliable and scalable supply chain. Third, collaboration is vital. The consortium model allowed partners to combine expertise from seed development to farmer training. This created a more holistic and impactful intervention. Collaboration between partners was essential for addressing different parts of the value chain, from seed production to farmer training.

Looking ahead, the initiative is shifting toward high-quality, value-added potato production while continuing to support farmers. As Thijs emphasises, "The success of the business depends on the success of farmers." This demonstrates that in Rwanda's potato sector, growth is strongest when it is shared.



Sorting cashews. Photo: © Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries (CBI).

## Cambodia CashYOU - sustainable organic cashew

**Subsidy:** €960,660

**Consortium:** Ample Agro Product Co. Ltd, Cordaid, the Department of Industrial Crops (DIC) and NTFP.

# A promising cashew project cut short: Lessons from Cambodia



Author:  
**Ritah Atuhaire**

**A public-private push to build Cambodia's organic cashew sector showed early gains. Farmers embraced new practices and organised quickly. But partner withdrawals cut the project short, exposing the fragility of multi-partner development efforts.**

### **A multi-partner collaboration**

The partnership ended prematurely and exposed the fragility of multi-partner development projects. The project was implemented as a public-private partnership. It involved Ample Agro Product Co. Ltd, Cordaid, the Department of Industrial Crops, and NTFP. The consortium aimed to strengthen Cambodia's cashew sector.

The project sought to improve farmer livelihoods and enhance sector competitiveness. It also aimed to promote inclusive market participation. It targeted smallholder farmers in remote areas, including indigenous communities. Unfortunately, the initiative ended early when 2 partners withdrew for undisclosed reasons.

### **Market disruption**

Yet, despite its short lifespan, it achieved notable progress. Farmers adopted improved cashew varieties, began transitioning to organic practices, and organised into groups through a lead farmer model. The Project Manager, Dieneke de Groot (Cordaid), says, "Training efforts sparked enthusiasm, with communities showing readiness to scale

*"Because things do not always go as planned, moments of friction and failure are not setbacks to hide. They are critical learning opportunities."*

production and move toward certification." However, these gains were overshadowed by significant implementation challenges.

Dieneke explains, "The project faced a major setback when 2 key partners withdrew. They were responsible for processing and market access. This disrupted the business, especially access to European markets and forced the consortium to seek a replacement. Although a local Cambodian processor was identified, delays in formal approval and unclear communication created prolonged uncertainty."

*"When organisations from different backgrounds and working cultures collaborate, aligning expectations, communication styles, and ways of working becomes more complex."*

#### Early closure

She adds, "Ultimately, this led to the project's closure after just 1 year. The abrupt end left unmet expectations among farmers, local authorities, and partners. Many had already invested time and resources. Progress halted before key milestones, such as organic certification and full market integration, could be achieved."

Agricultural realities further complicated decisions. Partners moved ahead with limited activities to avoid missing planting seasons, creating a mismatch between field implementation and formal authorisation.

#### Lessons learnt

Projects rarely unfold as neatly as they do on paper, and nearly all partnerships encounter significant challenges along the way. When organisations from different backgrounds and working cultures collaborate, aligning expectations, communication styles, and ways of working becomes more complex. It also makes openness about challenges harder, yet more necessary.

Because things do not always go as planned, moments of friction and failure are not setbacks to hide. They are critical learning opportunities. Transparency about challenges and sharing honest insights strengthen partnerships. It builds trust and ultimately leads to more resilient and effective projects.



Cashew trees. Photo: © Getty Images.

## Combining rice, fish and vegetable farming for food security

2 ZERO HUNGER



In Cambodia, Development and Partnership in Action (DPA) has developed a project add-on to support nutrition within the rice value chain. DPA trains farmers to add fish to rice ponds and grow vegetables on the borders.

This vegetable-fish production model benefits both vegetable and fish yields. Farmers earn extra income by growing vegetables on pond embankments that are otherwise left unused. They use nutrient-rich pond mud as fertiliser for crops, saving on the cost of organic manure. They irrigate plants with manured pond water and feed vegetable residues to the fish.

In short, co-cultivating rice and fish, as well as vegetables and fish, is an effective way to reduce poverty. It also improves food security. This approach supports sustainable nutrition and long-term food security.



Fish cultivating. Photo: © Development and Partnership in Action (DPA).

# Results

## Nutritional Value



**88,821**

People directly reached

**82,704**

Females

**23,670**

Children (<5 yrs)



**80,473**

People with improved food intake

**40,514**

Females

**15,062**

Children (<5 yrs)



**80,473**

People with improved access to appropriate food

**50,181**

Females

**15,062**

Children (<5 yrs)

Cumulative data as of 2025 and 1 SDGP project reporting on Nutritional Value.

## Sustainable Value Chains



**529,253**

Small-scale food producers directly reached

**192,460**

Females

**227,923**

Youth (18-35 yrs)



**359,432**

Small-scale food producers with improved productivity

**126,010**

Females

**129,576**

Youth (18-35 yrs)



**350,157**

Small-scale food producers with increased income

**116,381**

Females

**121,958**

Youth (18-35 yrs)



**445,187**

Small-scale food producers with improved access to input or output markets

**126,644**

Females

**170,276**

Youth (18-35 yrs)



**233,114**

Small-scale food producers whose livelihood became more resilient to shocks

**75,123**

Females

**100,200**

Youth (18-35 yrs)

Cumulative data as of 2025 and max. 30 SDGP projects reporting Sustainable value chains.



Farmer Wajinem maintaining a ginger plantation.  
Photo: © Makmende.

## Sustainable Development Goal 5

# Gender Equality

As a cross-cutting theme, SDGP aligns with SDG 5 goals in achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The programme targets improving work, fostering economic empowerment and increasing income for youth and women. SDPG projects worked on improving the socioeconomic position of women by promoting equal access to opportunities, resources and services.

**From 'last resort' to multimillion-dollar enterprise**  
*Tanzania*

24

**Breaking confinement: Women leading the way**  
*Indonesia and Nigeria*

28



# From 'last resort' to multimillion-dollar enterprise

A young woman from southern Tanzania is reshaping how farming is perceived - from an occupation associated with poverty and old age into a multimillion-dollar enterprise. Hadija Jabiri is the Managing Director and founder of GBRI Business Solutions, which operates under the EAT:FRESH brand. She is part of a new generation of African agripreneurs redefining the sector.



Author:  
**Rita Atuhaire**

Hadija Jabiri Phedi in the GBRI warehouse, one of the 5 partners in the EAT:FRESH project. Hadija is the Managing Director of GBRI.  
Photo: © Eric Kampherbeek



## Tanzania EAT:FRESH: a farmers' roadmap of expanding successful horticulture

**Subsidy:** €1,326,850

**Consortium:** Stichting Agriterra, TechForce Projects B.V., GBRI Business Solutions Ltd, Guavay Company Limited, and National Economic Empowerment Council



Farmers at work among the avocado trees in Iringa, one of the areas in Tanzania where the EAT:FRESH project is being implemented. Photo: © Eric Kampherbeek.

With financial support from the Sustainable Development Goals Partnership (SDGP) programme by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), GBRI worked with partners including the National Economic Empowerment Council, Agriterra (an NGO working closely with local farmers), TechForce Netherlands (the gateway to the European market), and Guavay (an organic fertiliser company), to implement the EAT:FRESH project.

Together, they achieved results that once seemed impossible in the agricultural sector. Today, her work inspires hundreds of thousands of young people, proving that agriculture is a powerful pathway to prosperity.

**For years, farming in Africa was often seen as a last resort, often associated with poverty rather than opportunity. Many parents encouraged their children to pursue an education as a way out, not back into agriculture. Even middle-class families like Hadija's took loans to secure education, hoping for respectable white-collar careers.**

### **From finance to farming**

Growing up in Tunduru District, Hadija believed the same story. She felt pity for farmers who worked tirelessly yet earned so little. She studied hard, graduated as an accountant, and never imagined she would one day become a farmer herself. But Hadija had always had a business mind. She recalls, "In school, I sold anything I came across. I saw opportunity everywhere." After trying several ventures that failed, she turned to the one sector she had once overlooked: agriculture.

### **Against the odds in Iringa**

Determined to approach it differently, she relocated to Iringa, drawn by its fertile land and better climate. She envisioned an inclusive farming model that applied modern horticultural practices and connected smallholder farmers to quality markets.

French beans and snow peas grow well in Iringa, and global demand for these organic vegetables is high. She saw an opportunity and decided to produce them for export. Many discouraged her, saying they had never seen a wealthy farmer. Still, in 2015, with less than \$100, she rented 2 acres of land and began farming. She assumed banks would support her with a solid business plan. Instead, every door closed. With no collateral and agriculture labelled "too risky", no institution was willing to invest in her dream.

The journey was never easy, but giving up was not an option. She had doubters to prove wrong and farmers to keep promises to. Hadija did not give up. She continued working



A farmer studies an avocado tree in Iringa, one of the areas in Tanzania where the EAT:FRESH project is being implemented. Photo: © Eric Kampherbeek.

towards her goal and looking for funding until she discovered the SDGP programme of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

#### **When persistence paid off**

Together with partners who shared her vision, she applied for funding to support farmers to grow organic crops through EAT:FRESH. GBRI trained farmers on technical skills, while other partners supported areas such as farmer engagement, input supply, and access to international markets.

Once the SDGP funding was secured, GBRI moved quickly. Hadija began achieving milestones that had once seemed out of reach. She moved from renting space to building a 1,100-square-metre facility to run operations. She also acquired cold rooms and refrigerated trucks to store produce safely. The business expanded into value addition, provided practical training for farmers, and opened access to international markets. These developments made EAT:FRESH a global food supply brand. Financial institutions that had previously denied her loans began reaching out with offers for collaboration.

#### **Empowering women and youth**

Hadija did not rise alone. She rose with many other women, who now make up 90% of GBRI's workforce. This includes 54 permanent employees, 500 weekly casual workers, and 2,200 smallholder farmers. She says, "I grew up seeing how women were marginalised, and I always wanted to show what women are capable of."

This determination also pushed her to study hard. She earned a top grade in secondary school, proving that a girl could succeed even in a public school. That same determination continues to shape her work today. She encourages young people to consider a career in agriculture and to challenge the idea that it is only for the elderly and the poor. The sector offers many opportunities, including roles for marketers, IT professionals, and accountants.

#### **Adapting to a changing market**

When COVID-19 disrupted export markets, GBRI's main source of income was threatened. Hadija responded by supplying the local market to keep the business running. As air freight costs later increased, the company shifted to avocados, which have a longer shelf life. This allowed them to export 23 metric tonnes by sea in a 40-foot container. This is far more cost-effective than shipping smaller volumes of fresh vegetables by air. GBRI now sources from farmers in Rwanda, Burundi, and 7 regions of Tanzania: Iringa, Njombe, Kilimanjaro, Songwe, Kagera, Ruvuma, and Mbeya. These regions supply avocados for processing into oil. The company has also expanded by launching AGRIEDO HUB, an agricultural consultancy that empowers young farmers.

*"I grew up seeing how women were marginalised, and I always wanted to show what women are capable of."*

#### **Beyond the business**

As the firstborn in her family, Hadija says her mother always called her a "gate opener" for her siblings. This shaped her strong sense of responsibility to grow together with others. Today, that sense of responsibility is reflected in her work. She supports communities, increases farmers' incomes, and helps families educate their children. She also connects women and smallholder farmers to local and international funders, while expanding the EAT:FRESH brand into markets in Europe and Asia. Her work shows that locally owned African companies can grow beyond borders.

### Sharing lessons and looking ahead

From her journey, Hadija has drawn valuable lessons that she now shares with fellow farmers. She believes that transparency in all dealings is a powerful way to create new opportunities. She explains that these positive results strengthened her business and also earned her the trust of many financial institutions.

She also highlights the importance of using social media for business networking and promoting agricultural products. As she puts it, "We googled our way to the European market." She encourages young people to use social media wisely, not just to share their personal lives. She emphasises resilience, faith, and maintaining a global mindset as main principles for success in agriculture.

### Future ambitions

By 2030, Hadija envisions EAT:FRESH reaching \$100 million in revenue. She and her partners aim to expand into new markets, strengthen supply for smallholder farmers, and build more international partnerships. They also hope to inspire more young Africans to pursue agriculture and grow operations beyond Tanzania into Uganda and Rwanda.

### Links

- [RVO video: EAT:FRESH, a horticultural project in Tanzania](#)
- [RVO video: Women farmers grow organic vegetables in Tanzania](#)



Appie Sichimba from GBRI provides training to avocado farmers (top left), Hadija Jabiri Phedi in the GBRI warehouse (top right) and the GBRI warehouse in Iringa, where fresh products are stored, packed, and processed for export to the international market (bottom). Photos: © Eric Kampherbeek.



## Breaking confinement: Women leading the way

In many communities, women are expected to stay at home while men earn income. In some places, it is still taboo for women to farm or run a business. Those who do are often judged. Yet across regions, women are stepping into agriculture, building businesses and redefining their roles in society.



Author:  
**Ritah Atuhaire**

Farmer Saryani harvesting an orange (top) and farmers smiling and showcasing their harvested tomatoes (bottom). Photos: © Makmende (top) and East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer (bottom).

## Nigeria Transforming Nigeria's vegetable markets

**Subsidy:** €2,055,702

**Consortium:** Wageningen University and Research, East-West International B.V., Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry, and Solidaridad Network West Africa.

In Hausa land in northern Nigeria, many girls marry young. Education is often not considered part of a woman's path. Yet some women have challenged these norms. Dr Ruth Ardzard is one of them. Her journey was shaped by her mother's determination to educate and empower her. Today, she is the Knowledge Transfer Manager for Nigeria at the East-West Seed Knowledge Foundation.

### The strength of women

Dr Ruth has a PhD in horticulture. Her mother was one of the few educated women in her community and worked as a teacher. She ensured her children also went to school. As the firstborn, Dr Ruth helped on the family rice farm and saw her mother take on the responsibility of raising the family. These experiences sparked her interest in agriculture and showed her the strength of women.

She later encouraged women in her village to step out of 'Kule' (the Hausa word for indoors) and pursue new opportunities. Today, she is an accomplished agriculturalist and a role model. After losing her husband, she raised her 6 children on her own. Proudly showing how she uses her space for horticulture, she says, "My home is a museum of vegetables."

## Indonesia Sugar and steam - sustainable intensification of agroforestry production systems

**Subsidy:** €512,300

**Consortium:** Stichting AidEnvironment, Stichting Van Hall Larenstein, Aliet Green, and the Department of Forestry and Plantation of DIY.

Thousands of miles away in Indonesia, Lastiana Yulindari witnessed a similar pattern. Raised in a deeply patriarchal Javanese culture as the youngest of 5 children, she saw how unfairly women in her family were treated.

### Women-led social enterprise

She recalls, "We were expected to serve the men in the family. For example, my mother would not eat before my father did." Women had ideas, but they were rarely allowed to speak publicly. They were expected to follow their husbands without question.

In 2009, at age 23, Lastiana founded Aliet Green, a women-led social enterprise. It supports women to build skills in agriculture. She introduced organic coconut sugar production in her region, an industry previously dominated by men. Despite the social stigma surrounding women in agribusiness, many women joined her initiative, as though they had been waiting for someone brave enough to lead.



Farmer Saryani examining the plant's health. Photo: © Makhmende.

## Linking & Learning - regional learning events

To support learning between the SDGP projects, the programme organised regional learning events. Over a span of 2 to 3 days, SDGP project partners, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs partners came together to share insights and experiences to tackle the region's most pressing challenges.

Field sites were included for practical and real-world learning, alongside interactive discussions and workshops. For example, a workshop facilitated by Crosswise Works focused on exit strategies for partnerships.

The series kicked off with the first [Linking and Learning Kigali event](#) in [Rwanda](#) in 2023, followed by 2 regional events in Indonesia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Are you interested in learning what insights emerged from these events?



Women in a farm field. Photo: © Credits voor East West Seed Knowledge Transfer.

### Partnerships driving change in Nigeria and Indonesia

Both women are part of SDGP-supported projects in their regions. They lead training and empowerment initiatives in agriculture. In Nigeria, Dr Ruth trains women, men, and youth in horticulture. The project is a public-private partnership supported by SDGP. It includes partners such as East-West Seed Knowledge Foundation, Solidaridad, Kaduna State Ministry of Agriculture, Ahmadu Bello University and Wageningen University & Research in the Netherlands.

The project aims to improve productivity in the vegetable sector. It does this by sharing practical knowledge, introducing improved seeds, and promoting suitable technologies. It also supports farmers with training, access to finance, and market links. This helps make agriculture more reliable and profitable for both women and men.

In Indonesia, Lastiana leads similar work through the Sugar and Steam project. This is a public-private partnership

with Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences and AidEnvironment. The project began after a drought severely affected coconut farming in the area, creating an urgent need for climate-resilient solutions. It also continues to address the long-term impacts of climate change on farming systems. The initiative has improved the livelihoods of more than 2,000 smallholder farmers in the area. Across continents, these collaborations are proving that when women gain access to opportunity, agriculture becomes sustainable and transformative. When one woman steps forward, she opens the door for many more.

### Facing resistance

The resistance was real. She had to persuade reluctant husbands to allow their wives to attend training sessions, sometimes compensating them for the hours their wives were away from home.

Service providers were often reluctant to work with her. Securing electricity connections was difficult, as many refused to support a woman running a business. Suppliers also inflated prices, charging her up to twice as much as male buyers for the same equipment.

For both, empowering others required capital they did not have. Local financial institutions were unwilling to fund what was perceived as a socially rebellious vision. It was only when the SDGP became available that their proposals were taken seriously. For the first time, they were heard, understood, and believed in.

*"We were able to establish the pioneer organic coconut sugar factory in the world."*

#### Creating opportunities in Indonesia

Lastiana says, "When we received funding in 2019, we were able to establish the pioneer organic coconut sugar factory in the world. Aliet Green also holds a Fairtrade and organic food safety certification."

The project has improved results. Farmers' income increased by 40%, while coconut sugar production rose by 20%. Around 1,200 farms have improved their climate resilience. The initiative now employs over 100 women from disadvantaged backgrounds and works with more than 2,100 smallholder farmers, 60% of whom are women. It also supports farmers with disabilities, including those who are visually impaired, and promotes climate-smart practices such as growing coconut, vanilla, and ginger. Today, Aliet Green exports coconut sugar to international markets.

The company has received international recognition. It was named one of the UN's 50 Best Small Businesses for 'Good Food for All' in 2021. It also received the 2024 Local Adaptation Champion Award from the Global Center on Adaptation.

#### Building a stronger vegetable sector in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the PPP also aimed to achieve gender inclusion in Nigeria's vegetable value chain and address persistent challenges. These included pest and disease management, knowledge gaps in improved agronomic practices, limited market access, and seasonal production constraints. The funding enabled access to quality farm inputs and supported the establishment of demonstration farms for training women.

It also promoted crop diversification and created jobs for youth and women. Women in Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLA), assisted by Solidaridad, were empowered and could move from home gardening to commercial farming.

#### Challenges in implementation

The major lesson and challenge in project implementation was the gap between planning assumptions and field reality. Dr Ruth says, "Many women lacked education and collateral, which limited their access to finance. They were also marginalised in the value chain and needed more support than expected. Relying on government extension agents was not realistic. They faced logistical challenges and heavy workloads, with 1 agent serving about 10,000 farmers."

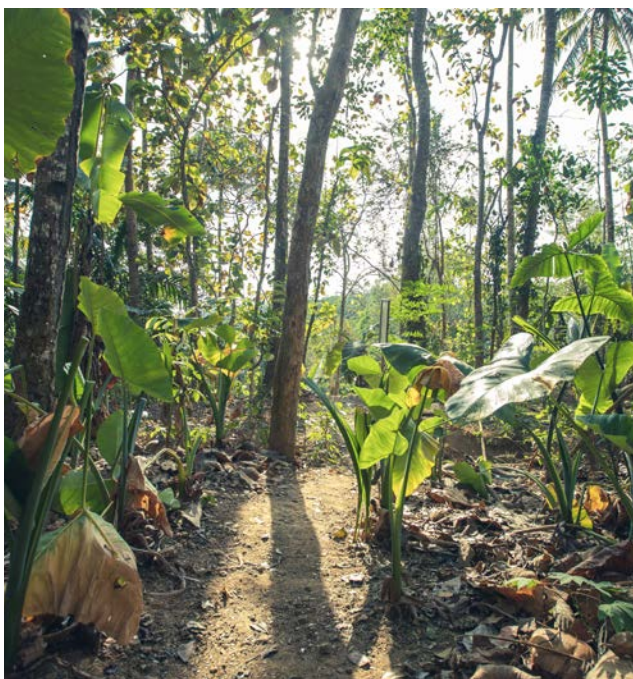


Irene Purman Cahvani (Aidenvironment) talking to farmers. Photo: © Makmende.

### Learning from each other

Both women draw inspiration from each other. Dr Ruth admires Lastiana's work with farmers with disabilities and her courage in challenging gender norms at a young age. Lastiana says, "From Dr Ruth Ardzard's story, I have learnt that strong leadership comes from commitment to people and purpose. Her work combines academic knowledge with practical training and a strong focus on women and youth. Different paths can lead to the same impact: building farmers' resilience through trust, learning, and community action."

These efforts to empower women are reflected in the real changes seen in their lives. Widows, single mothers, and housewives are becoming confident agribusiness owners



Intercropping palm trees and taro, a herbaceous plant. Both cash crops and food crops are grown. Photo: @ Makmende.

and inspiring others through their success. Dr Ruth shares the story of Talatu Iddi, a widow with 5 children who faced criticism when she began seedling production. Through persistence, she secured her place in the market. She now employs and trains other women, who share the knowledge within their groups.

As Lastiana says, training 1 woman is like training 10 more. She shares the story of Sefiningsih, a former migrant worker and single mother who returned from Malaysia after facing exploitation. She joined Aliet Green and is now one of the longest-serving staff members at the production facility. Her journey encourages other single mothers to choose agribusiness over uncertain work abroad.

### Carving out a place in the market

Although some conservative voices still resist, the women continue to move forward. They aim to expand production, reach new markets, involve more young people and women on fair terms, and strengthen farmers' business skills.

Dr Ruth explains, "One of our strategies is to train women in roles that support, rather than compete with, men. These include seedling production and neem oil processing as a natural alternative to pesticides. This approach has helped women gain acceptance in the market, with male farmers becoming key customers."

### Links

- [RVO video: From Harvest to Impact: Sustainable Agriculture in Indonesia](#)
- [RVO video: Empowering female farmers in Indonesia](#)
- [RVO video: Regenerative practices are transforming agriculture in Indonesia](#)
- [RVO video: Improving food security and climate-resilient agroforestry in Indonesia](#)

## Nutrifoods Nigeria

2  
ZERO  
HUNGER



In this project, BoPinc, Wageningen University and Research (WUR) and Graceco work together to revolutionise Nigeria's Ogi market with a nutritious, accessible, and sustainable new product that benefits consumers and farmers alike.

WUR will develop a new Ogi flour by streamlining the production, enhancing the nutritional value, and integrating sorghum, millet, and legumes. Bopinc will develop a marketing and distribution strategy for the nutritious Ogi porridge.

A behaviour change campaign targeting lactating women and children will promote the acceptance of sorghum- or millet-based Ogi. GraceCo will pilot and scale the product and market development interventions.



Ogi flour in stores. Photo: @ Bopinc Nigeria.

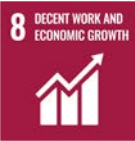


## Sustainable Development Goal 8

# Decent work and economic growth

A primary focus of SDGP is SDG 8. It focuses on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, productive employment and decent work for all. The SDGP projects worked on enhancing income and productivity, as well as strengthening local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and sustainable supply chains.

<b>Fair labour in action</b> <i>Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire and Chad</i>	<b>34</b>
<b>Value over volume: Reshaping Indonesia's cocoa sector</b> <i>Indonesia</i>	<b>39</b>
<b>How the SDGP project rewired Uganda's potato value chain</b> <i>Uganda</i>	<b>40</b>
<b>From uncertainty to income: Rwanda's maize turnaround</b> <i>Rwanda</i>	<b>46</b>
<b>Reviving the Mekong Delta: How the SUCCEEDS project is transforming citrus farming</b> <i>Vietnam</i>	<b>51</b>
<b>Growing rice and Artemisia: How TSARA is boosting farmer livelihoods</b> <i>Madagascar</i>	<b>53</b>



# Fair labour in action

Global agriculture depends on people: farmers whose work connects regions and economies worldwide. As they move crops across borders, expanding markets are linking these producers to buyers in distant places. But behind these systems, working conditions are not always fair. Across Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Chad, new initiatives are working to improve labour conditions while strengthening agricultural value chains.



Author:  
**Peter Aowa**

Harvesting palm oil | Intel4Value | Colombia (top), Interview farmer about farming in the future, part of the EcoCajou SDGP project | Côte d'Ivoire (middle) and Farmers working in the field | AgriJob Booster | Chad (bottom). Photos: © Rafael Delafiut (top), Away4Africa B.V. (middle) and Makmende (bottom).

In northern Colombia, oil palm plantations stretch across flat, humid land where work continues as usual. But fewer people are willing to do it. Younger generations are leaving rural areas, choosing education and urban life over farming. This is creating a growing labour gap in agriculture.

This trend is not unique to Colombia. Across Africa and Latin America, agricultural labour is under pressure. Work is available, but the income farmers generate from it is not always stable. The wages farmers earn may not always cover their livelihoods. While global markets depend on agricultural production, the people who sustain these systems often work under uncertain conditions. Fair labour is no longer just an idea. It is a practical concern. It raises simple questions: are workers paid fairly? Are they safe? Do they have long-term opportunities within the systems they support?

In this context, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) supports initiatives to improve labour conditions in agriculture. Through the Sustainable Development Goals Partnership (SDGP) programme, these initiatives also aim to strengthen agricultural value chains. Working with local partners, projects in Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Chad are tackling labour challenges such as market access, transparency and job creation.

## Colombia Intel4Value - Intelligent value chain management

**Subsidy:** €1,071,000

**Consortium:** Stichting Solidaridad Nederland, Cargill Incorporated, CORPONOR, Fundacion Solidaridad LatinoAmericana (FSLA), and Oleoflores.

In Colombia's oil palm sector, supported under the Intel4Value project of the SDGP programme, labour challenges are increasingly linked to demographic change. Jose Pardo, Manager at Oleoflores, reveals that the sector is facing a growing shortage of workers. He notes that younger people are moving away from rural areas, leaving behind an ageing workforce. He adds that many young people who gain access to education no longer return to farming.

### Farmers as long-term partners

Through Intel4Value, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) and its partners are working to strengthen the oil palm value chain. They focus on improving coordination, transparency and long-term sustainability. Within this framework, Oleoflores has focused on restructuring its relationship with farmers. The company now treats farmers as long-term partners, not just suppliers. It guarantees market access for their produce, reducing uncertainty and providing a more stable income. He explains that when farmers can sell their produce reliably and under fair conditions, they can cover their costs. This also helps them support their families.



Worker gardening (top), collection of palm oil bunches (bottom).  
Photos: © Rafael Delafiat.

Within operations, fair labour goes beyond compliance. It includes international standards, formal employment conditions, and internal human rights policies. Most workers, including those in unskilled roles, are employed under structured arrangements that meet legal requirements.

### Attracting new generations

Despite these efforts, attracting younger workers remains a challenge. While stability and formalisation improve working conditions, they do not always make agricultural work appealing to younger generations. At the same time, global market pressures continue to influence decisions, creating a constant search for balance between cost and fairness.

## Côte d'Ivoire EcoCajou - Cashew processing in Northern Côte d'Ivoire

**Subsidy:** €2,259,140

**Consortium:** Away4Africa B.V., EcoCajou SA, DIBCoop and Conseil Régional du Kabadougou.

**In Côte d'Ivoire, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) supports the EcoCajou project under the SDGP programme. The project focuses on improving the cashew value chain. Here, labour challenges are closely linked to transparency and income distribution.**

### Making the cashew chain more transparent

Wim Simonse works on the project through Away4Africa. He explains that one key gap has been the lack of clear traceability between farmers and cooperatives. He says, "Without clear data, it is difficult to understand how value is shared across the chain." This lack of visibility affects both income and working conditions.

The project introduced FarmerLink to improve traceability from the cashew farm to the factory. He explains that FactoryLink tracks the nuts through the factory to export. It traces the origin, quantity and quality. This data helps cooperatives analyse production patterns across gender, age and location. It also supports better decision-making based on evidence. He adds, "It creates ownership at the cooperative level, because the data stays with farmers and their organisations."

The impact is already visible. Improved traceability has supported organic certification and access to European markets. This has led to additional payments for cooperatives and higher incomes for farmers.

### Challenges in wages and working conditions

However, Wim highlights ongoing challenges. He says global price changes in raw cashew nuts continue to affect wages and income stability. He explains, "Price fluctuations have a significant impact. They reduce income for both farmers and workers."

The project also addresses labour standards through frameworks such as ISO 26000 and SMETA audits. These aim to ensure fair working conditions. Market requirements and government enforcement in Côte d'Ivoire both support these. To achieve consistent improvement, more actors across the value chain must adopt these efforts.

### Expanding local processing and employment

A second focus of the EcoCajou project is increasing local value through cashew processing. This marks a shift in how the sector operates. In the past, Côte d'Ivoire mainly exported raw cashew nuts. Most of the value and jobs were created outside the country.

*"By investing in processing, we are keeping added value in the country."*

The project aims to change this by investing in local processing facilities. These can handle large volumes of raw cashew nuts. Simonse says, "By investing in processing, we are keeping added value in the country."

This approach supports job creation and economic activity in producing regions. For workers, it offers more stable employment than informal farm work. Processing facilities provide structured roles, steady income, and clearer working conditions.

### Local impact and remaining gaps

The impact is visible at the community level. Household incomes are improving, and local economies are growing. Access to education, transport, and small businesses is also improving. However, fundamental labour challenges remain. Wim explains that wages often do not yet reach living wage levels, and workplace safety still needs attention.

The project also promotes gender inclusion. Through Village Savings and Loan Associations, women gain access to finance, training and market opportunities. In processing facilities, job creation and on-the-job training further increase participation.

At the same time, global market conditions continue to influence outcomes. Changes in international prices affect the ability to maintain stable wages and employment. This highlights the need for more resilient systems.



Registration of plots in FarmerLink. Photo: © Away4Africa B.V.

## Chad AgriJob Booster

Subsidy: €500,000

**Consortium:** Stichting Woord en Daad, Job Booster Chad Enterprise, National Agency for Rural Development Support (ANADER), and Center for Research, Innovation, and Technological Production (CRIPT).

In Chad, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) supports the AgriJob Booster project under the SDGP programme. It focuses on a different aspect of fair labour: creating jobs. In many rural areas, stable employment is limited, especially for young people. The project supports job creation in agricultural value chains and builds skills.

### Building practical skills

Hal Souakar Ambera is the Executive Director of Job Booster Chad. He says, "In Chad, entrepreneurship is rarely a choice. It is a necessity. Many young people must earn early to support their families. We help turn that necessity into opportunity by providing skills, access and networks."

Through training, participants gain practical skills such as crop production, irrigation, post-harvest handling, and small-scale processing. The project also supports access to seeds and tools, links participants to markets, and helps establish Village Savings and Loan Associations. It also provides mentorship to support long-term livelihoods.

### Fair labour through inclusion and resilience

Fair labour here begins with inclusion. The project targets women and youth who are often excluded from formal employment. Partners such as Woord en Daad and Job Booster Chad provide hands-on support. They help address infrastructure gaps, market instability and climate challenges.

He says, "Success comes in small steps. It comes from staying active, learning from setbacks, and building resilience over time." He adds that while not every business grows quickly, participants gain skills, confidence and new opportunities.

Many participants report higher household income, improved food security, and the ability to invest in small businesses. Mentorship networks are growing, and more families now see agriculture as a viable livelihood. This is reducing the pressure to migrate.



Ploughing of irrigation ditches (top), local vegetable market (middle) and farmers attending AgriJob Booster training session (bottom). Photos: © Makmende.

*"In Chad, entrepreneurship is rarely a choice. It is a necessity. Many young people must earn early to support their families. We help turn that necessity into opportunity."*



Solar panel for water pumps (left), farmer using water taps (top right) and poultry feeding (bottom right). Photo: © Makmende.

### Fair labour across 3 countries

Across the 3 countries, SDGP projects supported by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) show that fair labour is not a single solution. It is a process shaped by local context. In Colombia, this means making agricultural work more stable and attractive because of demographic change. In Côte d'Ivoire, the focus is on improving transparency and ensuring more value stays within the country. In Chad, it begins with creating job opportunities where they are limited.

What connects these efforts is a shift in perspective. Labour is no longer seen only as a factor of production, but as an essential part of sustainable development.

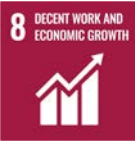
Progress is gradual and often affected by external pressures, especially changes in global markets.

Improving agricultural value chains is not only about increasing production. It also means making sure that people can work in conditions that are stable, safe, and provide a reliable income. In this sense, fair labour is not a final result, but a continuous effort to align economic systems with people's everyday realities.

### Links

- [RVO video: AgriJob Booster Chad](#)

*" Success comes in small steps. It comes from staying active, learning from setbacks, and building resilience over time."*



TRACTIONS | Indonesia. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

## Indonesia Transforming the cocoa sector through value addition for smallholders

**Subsidy:** €1,994,700

**Consortium:** Stichting Rainforest Alliance, Rikolto, PT Valrhona Bali Chocolate Park (Valrhona SAS/Savencia Group), Yayasan Kalimajari, Progreso Foundation and District Government of Jembrana (Pemerintah Kabupaten Jembrana).

# Value over volume: Reshaping Indonesia's cocoa sector



Author:  
**Ritah Atuhaire**

**Indonesia produces vast amounts of cocoa, yet many farmers earn little. The TRATIONS project is changing this by promoting fermentation and value addition. Despite market pressures and shocks, it shows how smallholders can capture greater value.**

### The race for raw cocoa

The Transforming the Cocoa Sector in Indonesia through Value Addition for Smallholders (TRACTIONS) is a public-private partnership. It aims to help farmers shift from selling raw cocoa to producing high-quality fermented beans. These beans can be sold to premium chocolate producers who pay more. But, one of the most persistent obstacles faced by the project has been what the project leaders describe as the 'race for raw material.' When cocoa prices increase significantly, farmers frequently opt to sell their fresh beans immediately for quick cash.

### Building capacity and resilience

While fermentation enhances the quality of cocoa, this process is time-consuming and often conflicts with the need for immediate financial relief. Convincing farmers to prioritise long-term value over short-term income has required trust, co-operative organisation and reliable premium buyers. The Rainforest Alliance led the partnership, with main partners Rikolto and Yayasan Kalimajari focusing on training and capacity building. French chocolatier Valrhona contributed as a processor.

Together, they set out to tackle a long-standing paradox. Indonesia produces large volumes of cocoa, yet many farmers earn little because most beans are sold unfermented and unprocessed. Through training, co-operative strengthening, and climate-smart agriculture, over 3,400 farmers have enhanced their farm management and post-harvest practices. Also, community nurseries have successfully distributed tens of thousands of resilient cocoa seedlings.

### Shocks and disruptions

Lukmansyah, the Rainforest Alliance Cocoa Manager, explains that external shocks have also tested the project's resilience. Communities faced disruptions ranging from natural disasters to economic instability. These disruptions included eruptions of Mount Lewotobi and the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet the experiences from the project delivered powerful lessons. Local value addition is enhanced by fermenting on a cooperative level rather than selling raw beans. Also, it is promoted through agroforestry and new varieties for more climate-resilient and eco-friendly production. By focusing on quality, strong cooperatives, and the inclusion of women and youth, the TRATIONS partnership supports farmers to secure more stable incomes. It also strengthens the sustainability of Indonesia's cocoa landscapes.

# How the SDGP project rewired Uganda's potato value chain

When the 'Innovating the Uganda Potato Value Chain' SDGP programme set out to intervene in Uganda's potato sector, the ambition went far beyond increasing yields. At its core was a more difficult question: what would it take to turn a crop long associated with subsistence and uncertainty into a reliable source of income, dignity, and resilience?



Author:  
**Pinkleen Oinokwesiga**

Portrait of farmer | Innovating the Ugandan Potato Value Chain | Uganda.  
Photo: © Makmende.



## Uganda Innovating the Ugandan Potato Value Chain

**Subsidy:** €2,295,136

**Consortium:** Delphy B.V., Stichting Agriterra, Psalms Food Industries, Uganda National Seed Potato Producers' Association (UNSPPA), and National Agricultural Research Center (NARO).

*"Disease pressure was high, knowledge gaps were wide, and the market offered little incentive to invest in quality."*

**Sitting at Silverback Hotel in Mbarara City, in Uganda's Western region, the atmosphere was calm and unhurried. I was meeting Nowamukama Timoni, an Agriculture Officer and Project Manager with Delphy, to understand Uganda's potato value chain.**

### Rethinking the potato sector

Between 2022 and September 2025, the potato system was quietly reshaped across Uganda's highland regions. The government of the Netherlands funded the project under the SDGP programme. Its goal was to re-engineer a value chain long constrained by poor seed, weak farmer organisations, unreliable markets, and limited technical knowledge.

What struck me most was the project's deliberate refusal to take shortcuts. Science is reconnected to soil. Farmers are reintroduced to markets not as price-takers, but as partners. Cooperatives are treated not as administrative boxes to tick, but as businesses requiring governance and discipline. Processors, often distant and distrusted, are drawn closer into the system. Slowly, a sector that has long operated in fragments began to behave like one.

### From fragment to system

Uganda's relationship with potatoes has long been paradoxical. The country has ideal agroecological conditions, particularly in its highlands, yet yields have remained stubbornly low. The contrast with the Netherlands, where yields exceeded 50 tonnes per hectare, is impossible to ignore.

This gap is not merely statistical; it is structural. And it is the question that sparked the SDGP intervention. Delphy, a Netherlands-based agricultural knowledge company, led the consortium implementing the 'Innovating the Ugandan Potato Value Chain' project. According to Timoni, the problem was never land or climate, but systems. "Farmers were recycling seeds that had been planted for over 20 years, with no traceability," he notes. "Disease pressure was high, knowledge gaps were wide, and the market offered little incentive to invest in quality."



Farmers and Delphy agronomists.  
Photo: © Makmende.



### Understanding the gaps

A baseline study supported by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) confirmed what farmers already knew. Poor-quality seed, high post-harvest losses, weak cooperative governance, unreliable off-takers, and weak links between research and the field were reinforcing one another. Fixing any single constraint in isolation would have changed little: it required alignment across the entire value chain.

Under SDGP, Delphy assembled a consortium built for systems change. Agriterra strengthened farmer organisations. The National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), particularly its Kachwekano Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institute (KaZARDI) in Kabale, was responsible for seed research and regulation.

*"If seed was the biological foundation of the potato transformation, cooperatives are its institutional backbone."*

The Uganda National Seed Potato Producers Association (UNSPPA) represented seed multipliers, while cooperatives drove production at the farm level. Psalms Food Industries Limited anchored the system through market demand. What stood out was not the number of partners, but how deliberately their roles were linked. Agronomic training responded to market demand. Cooperative governance was tied to business planning. Seed research was connected directly to processing quality. Farmers were no longer working alone.

### Fixing the seed system

At the centre of it all were seed. For decades, farmers reused seeds of unknown origin, inviting bacterial wilt, late blight, and ultimately collapsing yields into their fields. Through NARO, the project prioritised improved local varieties and introduced Dutch varieties such as Markies, Sagitta, and Taurus. Taurus quickly stood out for its high dry matter content, making it attractive to processors and more profitable for farmers.

Demand, however, exposed another weakness. Early-generation seed was expensive and scarce. To address this, the project supported aeroponic seed production, enabling rapid multiplication of clean seed. Delphy established demonstration plots that allowed farmers to compare traditional practice directly with best practice. "The difference spoke for itself," Timoni said. Yields tripled, scepticism softened, and adoption followed. Climate-smart practices such as mulching, soil and water conservation, crop rotation, and biodiversity were integrated throughout. Farmers reduced pesticide use, preserved soil moisture, and improved resilience.

However, visible results alone were not enough. For these gains to last, they needed structures that could organise farmers and connect improved production to reliable markets.

### The institutional backbone

When I met Peter Niwagaba, a business consultant at Agriterra, the role of cooperatives finally began to make sense to me; not as institutions on paper, but as anchors in a fragile system. "If seed were the biological foundation of the potato transformation, cooperatives are its institutional backbone," Peter said. Without them, he was clear, nothing else would hold.

Agriterra's work under the SDGP project was grounded in a hard truth, Peter explained, "Without strong farmer

Information Training Center (top), portrait of farmer with potato harvest (middle) and farmers harvesting potatoes (bottom). Photos: © Makmende.

organisations, gains would not last." Peter led interventions focused on 2 valuable organisations in the Kigezi region: The Kisoro Potato Growers Cooperative Union and the UNSPPA.

Not every group received support. Agriterra began with profiling, followed by scoping, then institutional assessment. "Profiling helps us know who exists," he explained. "Scoping helps us decide whether it is a go or no-go. Assessment shows governance, finances, operations, and business potential." Support only continues after passing this threshold.

Agriterra supported the development of business plans and strategic plans for both organisations – critical tools for guiding growth and ensuring long-term viability. Leaders were trained in governance and financial management. Farmers received practical training in record keeping, sustainable services, and on-farm business development. Training was deliberately small and needs-based. On-farm advisory visits bridged the gap between theory and practice, while exchange visits allowed farmers to learn from one another.

#### When structure pays

Beyond capacity building, Kisoro Union received investment in digital systems, farmer databases, extension services, and agronomic training. The impact was measurable. Production of Dutch potato varieties increased from 70 metric tonnes to nearly 210 metric tonnes. More importantly, the cooperative shifted from loose aggregation to structured trading, gaining reliable access to factory buyers and predictable markets.

"UNSPPA's journey was more complicated," Peter admitted. Initially registered as an association, it lacked the legal standing to operate as a profit-oriented business. With SDGP support, it developed business plans and established 2 aeroponic seed facilities and collection centres.



Processing facility at Psalms Food Industries Limited. Photo: © Makmende.

It ultimately transitioned into the Kigezi Potato Progressive Cooperative. That shift unlocked bankability and positioned it for long-term support under Agriterra's follow-up Farmers Organisation for Rural Transformation (FORT) project. "Projects end," he said, "but development should not." What stayed with me long after that conversation was the shift in mindset he described. Farmers were no longer producing potatoes as a subsistence activity, but as an enterprise. Record-keeping became routine, and savings grew. Farming became intentional. Cooperatives were no longer an abstract development idea; they were the difference between surviving one season at a time and planning for the next 5 years.

#### Turning point

That shift was most visible on individual farms. When Nyebirweki Pius from UNSPPA and I set off to meet one of the farmers involved, the rain had begun to fall steadily. Karere Godfrey met us with an easy smile. When he speaks

about potatoes, he does not speak as someone who stumbled into farming by chance. Born in 1955 and living in Rusikizi Zone, Bubare Sub-county, Rubanda District, the 70-year-old speaks with the calm confidence of a man who has witnessed farming evolve from survival to strategy.

*"Projects end, but development should not."*

Listening to him, it was clear that what 'farmer' means to him now is very different from what it meant for most of his life. For years, he practised subsistence farming, growing mainly to feed his household, and selling small surpluses when he could. Like others around him, he relied on inherited knowledge and traditional methods.

### Learning to farm differently

That changed when the UNSPPA entered his village. "They came with demonstration gardens and trained us. "He describes those trainings as moments of discovery. They were introduced to improved potato production, particularly the Taurus variety. "They taught planting techniques, spacing, fertilisation, and manure use. More importantly, they reframed potato farming as a business," he said.

What convinced him was not theory; it was what he saw. On demonstration plots, traditional varieties were planted alongside Taurus. The difference in yield was unmistakable. "The increase was very significant," he said. Through UNSPPA, Karere gained access to quality seed potatoes and learnt how to produce his own. This knowledge transformed him from dependence to self-reliance.

*"Farmers should be paid before the produce is taken."*

### Under pressure

As he spoke, the challenges surfaced quickly. Late blight spreads quickly during wet seasons. Bacterial wilt can wipe out entire plots, often leaving land unusable for years. Land scarcity adds pressure, as most acreage is rented at high cost. Theft, too, is a reality. And yet, despite all this, the gains have been undeniable. "When I plant 1 sack of seed potatoes, about 100 kilograms," he explained, "I harvest about 10 bags."

Post-harvest handling has improved as well. After harvest, he stores his potatoes in a dedicated structure. 2 or 3 days later,

he grades them, separating damaged tubers, market-ready potatoes, and smaller ones suitable for seed. He sells the larger tubers as ware, reserves small-sized ones for seed, and uses the smallest as animal feed. Experience has sharpened his eye. He knows what to sell and what to save.

### Treating farmers as entrepreneurs

Through potato farming, he has built a residential home and acquired other properties. Farmers come to him for seed, advice, and guidance on joining UNSPPA, and he trains others himself. Despite that, Karere believes the system can improve. "Farmers should be paid before the produce is taken," he said. "It would reduce pressure and improve relationships." Looking ahead, he searches for virgin land that offers higher yields and lower disease risk. Even if rent reaches 1 million shillings per acre, he remains confident. "I know I can make a profit of 8 million," he said calmly.

Karere's story is not just about potatoes; it reflects what happens when farmers are treated as entrepreneurs. But even the most disciplined farmers cannot sustain those gains without markets that recognise quality and reward patience.

This is where the final anchor of the value chain comes into focus. I was scheduled to meet Atuhair Emmanuel, the company's Finance Manager, and I came prepared with questions. But beneath them was a suspicion I wanted to test: "Psalms must work with particular suppliers, not just anyone."

### Quality starts upstream

For Psalms Food Industries Limited, the SDGP project arrived at a critical moment. Demand was strong, but supply was unreliable. "The problem was never the market. It was quality," Emmanuel states. Farmers routinely delivered potatoes that were prematurely harvested, poorly stored, or infected. The result was costly. The high sugar content in immature potatoes meant that nearly 40 per cent of what entered the factory turned brown or burned during frying.

Rejection was routine, and losses were shared painfully between farmers and the processor.

Joining the SDGP project redefined the company's role. No longer just an off-taker, Psalms became an anchor in the system. Its agronomists worked alongside specialists from Delphy and Agriterra, focusing on soil testing, planting schedules, harvest timing, and post-harvest handling.

### Better harvests start to pay off

When the first improved harvests reached the factory, everything changed. As quality improved, waste declined, and trust began to rebuild.

Psalms introduced differentiated pricing based on processing yield, rewarding maturity and quality. Farmers began selling by the kilogram rather than by sack, a subtle shift that placed value on precision and professionalism.



Potato field and landscape in Kabale, Uganda. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

## Partnership brokering

The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) asked the [Partnerships Brokering Association \(PBA\)](#) to conduct partnering workshops with the SDGP portfolio. PBA organised 8 online sessions, providing partnering expertise and space for partners to share challenges. PBA delved into topics such as moving on after a project ends, navigating challenges in a partnership and power dynamics.

They also facilitated a write shop for SDGP project partners, reflecting on the complexity of the partnership process and all its dynamics. Reflective stories captured the experiences of several partners, as you can read in [Stories from the frontline of public-private](#). It shares their personal experiences and offers invaluable lessons crucial to our understanding of public-private partnerships!



Illustration from 'Stories from the frontline'. Illustration: © Caroline Kloppert.

### The quiet transformation

Speaking with farmers, cooperatives, and processors, it became clear that the real change was not in the numbers, but in behaviour. Farmers began harvesting for quality, not urgency. Cooperatives started operating as businesses. Off-takers shifted from blame to problem-solving.

Partnerships worked because responsibility was shared. Each actor had a role, and none worked alone. Challenges remain: limited quality seed, climate shocks, and costly land. But the system no longer collapses under pressure.

As the SDGP funding cycle closed, one lesson stood out: this was never just a potato project. It showed how development works when it is patient, coordinated, and aligned around incentives. Potatoes moved from subsistence to business. Farmers planned. Companies became accountable. From seed to shelf, Uganda's potato value chain no longer works in fragments. It works because people choose to work together.

### Links

- [RVO video: Innovating the Ugandan Potato Value Chain](#)

*"Without the project, the company would have remained small, farmers would still be absorbing losses, and opportunities would have been missed."*

With project support, Psalms expanded processing capacity from 5 to 13 tonnes per shift, installed modern packaging lines, adopted biomass briquettes as an energy source, and built a wastewater treatment plant. Its workforce grew from 150 to over 400 direct employees, supporting more than 3,000 livelihoods across farming, transport, and distribution.

### Financial pressure

The journey was not without strain. Delays in funds disbursement and underestimated construction and laboratory costs forced the company to secure a bank loan. When I asked Emmanuel whether it was a good decision, he did not hesitate. "It was worth it. Without the project, the company would have remained small, farmers would still be absorbing losses, and opportunities would have been missed."

Even after the project closed, Psalms retained its agronomists and formalised its systems. Today, it works with 7 cooperatives under memoranda of understanding, creating predictability in a sector often defined by uncertainty. Psalms demonstrated that when off-takers choose to act as anchors rather than extractors, value chains stabilise.



Processing facility at Psalms Food Industries Limited. Photo: © Makmende.

# From uncertainty to income: Rwanda's maize turnaround

In Rwanda's Eastern Province, maize farming was once a risky venture. Many farmers lost their crops because of poor handling and low quality. Today, this is changing. With better training and support, farmers like Leonidas can grow quality maize, sell it easily, and improve their lives.



Author:  
**INEZA Leontine**

Maize drying | Innovating Maize  
Value Chain Efficiency | SDGP.  
Photo: © Makmende.



## Rwanda Increased maize value chain efficiency

**Subsidy:** €2,992,683

**Consortium:** Stichting Agriterra, Africa Improved Foods (Holding) B.V., Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, and Sight and Life Foundation



**Twagirungu Leonidas crouches beside a large sack of maize, carefully tying it closed. He is waiting for Africa Improved Foods (AIF) to collect the harvest at Kaboku Cooperative in Nyagatare District, in Rwanda's Eastern Province. The golden cobs peek out from the top, ready for transport, a sharp contrast to the painful memories of his past losses. Leonidas recalls quietly, "I once had to feed 4 tonnes of maize to my cows because no one would buy them. The quality was so poor. It was heartbreaking, but it also taught me that things had to change."**

### **When maize became a risk**

This story is part of a maize project in Rwanda supported through the Sustainable Development Goals Partnership (SDGP) programme of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). In Rwanda, the partnership brings together key actors, including Agriterra (cooperative capacity building), Africa Improved Foods (AIF) (structured market off-take and processing), and a local government partner. Together with national stakeholders, they work to improve maize quality, reduce aflatoxin risk, and strengthen market linkages for farmer cooperatives.

For many farmers in Nyagatare District, maize once represented risk rather than opportunity. Harvested maize was often spread on bare soil or dried slowly along roadsides or inside homes. Without proper drying, maize often develops mould and aflatoxin, a harmful toxin that makes it unsafe to eat. Buyers rejected large volumes of grain, and farmers who managed to sell often received very low prices.

Across Rwanda, poor handling after harvest meant much of the maize did not meet safety standards. Each year, an estimated 40,000 metric tonnes were rejected due to aflatoxin risks, costing farmers millions in lost revenue.

As a result, processors and large buyers had to import maize from countries like Zambia and the United States. Leonidas says, "We had fertile land, but our maize was not market-ready. Sometimes we even saw maize being imported while ours could not be sold. That was painful."

### **From struggle to structure**

Before the SDGP programme, Leonidas would harvest about 2.5 tonnes per hectare, and even that was difficult to sell. "I felt powerless. You work hard all season, only to have the maize spoil or buyers delay payment. Sometimes traders cheated us because we needed cash urgently." The project trained farmers on cooperative management, compost making, post-harvest handling, and aflatoxin prevention. Ngabirano Wilberforce, president of Kaboku Cooperative in Nyagatare District, says the shift began with discipline and improved management.

*"I felt powerless.  
You work hard all season,  
only to have the maize spoil  
or buyers delay payment.  
Sometimes traders cheated  
us because we needed  
cash urgently."*

Portrait of farmer | SDGP | Increased Maize Value Chain Efficiency.  
Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

"Before the project, yields were low, and quality was poor. Now every farmer has a compost pit near the field. We were trained in careful harvesting, proper handling, and aflatoxin prevention. We also have full-time agronomists guiding planting time, fertiliser use, and harvest supervision."

The cooperative now counts 1,087 members (721 men and 336 women) cultivating about 900 hectares, with additional land under cooperative infrastructure projects.

*"I could not believe it. I laughed and cried in the field. For the first time, I saw what my land could really produce."*



Drying facility (bottom right) and husking of maize | SDGP | Increased maize value chain efficiency. Photos: © Makmende.

#### Harvest changed, starting from the ground

Simple changes in field practices made a significant difference. Leonidas explains, "During harvest, Agriterra helped us with tents so maize would not lie on bare soil. Before, we used to harvest directly on the ground. That alone affected quality." With better seeds and improved farming practices, these changes dramatically increased yields. Leonidas's production rose from 2.5 tonnes to about 10 tonnes per hectare. "I could not believe it. I laughed and cried in the field. For the first time, I saw what my land could really produce."

#### The cob model: from harvest to cash in days

The biggest shift came with the introduction of the cob model by AIF under the SDGP programme. AIF is a

Rwanda-based company that produces fortified foods and buys maize locally, making sure it meets quality and safety standards. Under the programme, the company introduced this model. Under this system, AIF buys maize directly from cooperatives. Farmers sell maize on the cob immediately after harvest. Instead of drying grain at home or along roadsides, the cobs are transported to drying sheds where mechanical shellers, dryers, silos and warehouses handle processing.

The maize is then processed into ingredients for fortified foods. These are supplied through relief programmes and sold in commercial markets. This creates a stable premium market for farmers who meet quality specifications. Payment also arrives much faster, often within a matter

of days. For farmers like Leonidas, the difference was immediate. "After harvest, AIF immediately came to buy our maize on the cob. Before, we had to dry and shell it ourselves. It took a long time. Now, within 5 days, we receive our money."

He adds that prices have also improved. "Previously, traders offered very low prices. Now, the price is higher, about 120 Rwandan francs more per kilo than the general market. And all our maize is accepted. I even know how to test for aflatoxin myself." Wilberforce, the president of the cooperative, describes the cob model as transformative. "It brings maize to market quickly, with minimal expense, and protects it from aflatoxin. This model is now deeply rooted and hard to replace."



Portrait of farmers husking maize | Increase Maize Value Chain Efficiency. Photo: © Makmende.

### Infrastructure unlocked the bottleneck

Rajesh Singh is the Procurement and Sustainability Director at Africa Improved Foods. In this role, he oversees the systems that ensure AIF can source quality raw materials, such as maize, reliably and responsibly. He also ensures that the company meets safety and sustainability standards across its supply chain. He says infrastructure was the missing link. "The biggest positive outcome of this project was the introduction of the cob model, together with shellers, dryers, silos, and warehouses. Earlier, buying capacity was only about 40,000 to 45,000 metric tonnes per month, while harvest volumes came in large waves. There was no proper drying and storage infrastructure."

Previously, the journey from harvest to sale could take 30 to 35 days. Maize often stayed in villages in plastic bags or

houses, absorbing moisture and developing mould. "Now, farmers dry cobs for 3 or 4 days, sell, and receive payment within 3 to 7 days. The full harvest-to-cash cycle typically takes about 10 days, and in some cases, as little as 6 days. That removed the main bottleneck." The country also increased its drying, shelling, and storage capacity from roughly 15,000 to 20,000 metric tonnes per month to about 60,000 to 80,000 during peak season.

### Quality, safety, and local sourcing

Before the intervention, processors frequently rejected local maize due to aflatoxin contamination, a serious food safety hazard. Now, cooperative systems, agronomist support, drying sheds, and testing help maize meet strict standards. They also ensure aflatoxin levels remain low and safe. This has reduced import dependence, lowered costs, and

*"This season's harvest helped me acquire 2 more hectares of land."*

improved food safety for fortified products such as child and maternal nutrition foods. Supply chain time dropped from 6 to 10 weeks to under a week, while post-harvest losses fell by 15 to 22%.

### A different life at home

For Leonidas, the impact is visible far beyond the warehouse. "I have progressed a lot. I did not have a proper house before, but now I have built a good one. This season's harvest helped me acquire 2 more hectares of land." His family's well-being improved, too. "My children used to suffer from poor nutrition; now they are healthy. I bought a cow, my children are in school, and my wife is well. I feel respected in my household."

Cooperative members report similar progress, including improved housing, livestock, diets, and stable school attendance for their children. Membership continues to grow as neighbours see results. Leonidas says with a smile, "We no longer search for buyers; they come to us."

*"We no longer search for buyers; they come to us."*

#### From uncertainty to resilience

What changed is not only how maize is handled, but also farmers' confidence and trust in the market. With structured cooperatives, technical training, drying infrastructure, and reliable buyers, risk has dropped, and motivation has risen. Leonidas states, "The SDGP programme truly changed our lives. They help us grow quality maize, and it is bought promptly. Before, maize sometimes rotted in piles. Now everything runs smoothly."

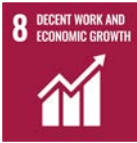
Rwanda's maize story is no longer about missed markets and rejected harvests. It is about systems that work and farmers like Leonidas who now harvest with certainty instead of fear.

#### Links

- [RVO video: The results of a maize project in Rwanda](#)
- [RVO video: The Cob-Model: Innovation in Rwanda's Maize Sector](#)
- [RVO video: Do you have enough income as a farmer in Rwanda?](#)
- [RVO video: How Africa can feed Africa](#)



Drying of maize. Photos: © Makmende.



Examining citrus plant health. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

## Vietnam Sustainable citrus chain empowering and developing smallholders in the Mekong Delta

**Subsidy:** €1,994,007

**Consortium:** Kloosterboer Investments B.V., The Fruit Republic (TFR), Rabo Foundation, Can Tho University and the Department of Agriculture and Environment (DAE) of Tay Ninh province.

# Reviving the Mekong Delta: How the SUCCEEDS project is transforming citrus farming



Author:  
**Nylah Shah**

**Citrus farming in Vietnam's Mekong Delta faced declining yields and climate pressures. The SUCCEEDS project is reversing this trend by using disease-free seedlings and climate-smart irrigation. It helps smallholder farmers rebuild productivity and compete in global markets.**

### Thrive in global fruit markets

In the lush heart of the Mekong Delta, a quiet transformation is happening. For years, citrus farmers lived under time pressure. Trees often succumbed to disease and saltwater just as they reached peak profitability.

Enter the SUCCEEDS project, which evolved from the Sustainable Citrus Chain (SCS) initiative. Kloosterboer b.v and The Fruit Republic (TFR) led this project in Vietnam. Partners include the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), Rabo Foundation, Can Tho University and local Vietnamese authorities. Together, they help smallholder farmers thrive in global fruit markets.

### Fixing the root problem

TFR Managing Director Siebe van Wijk explains, "Our aim is to change the 7-year economic lifespan of citrus fruit farms into a 14-year legacy." The main ingredient starts at the farm. SUCCEEDS replaces diseased seedlings with 8 million high-quality, disease-free ones. This ensures orchards thrive for decades, not just a few seasons.

But it is more than better seedlings. To fight climate-driven salinisation, farmers build small water reservoirs by removing a portion of their trees to create space. Rainwater is then collected during the wet season and distributed through solar-powered drip irrigation. This ensures 4 months of clean water in dry periods. Farmers also receive tailored fertiliser recommendations and integrated pest management support. They are assisted with labour-intensive certification processes such as GlobalGAP, GRASP and LEAF.

*"We are turning a 7-year struggle into a 14-year legacy."*

The results are striking: A projected 50% boost in farmer income and extended orchard lifespans. Even the smallest pilot project in Tra Vinh, 5 farmers on 3 hectares, has grown into a 115-member cooperative covering 240 hectares, with plans for further expansion.

Siebe notes, "Our farmers focus on growing the fruit; we ensure they have a reliable market and handle the global



Citrus trees (left), handling and sorting of citrus (middle), peeling of grapefruits (right). Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

market requirements. This allows them to concentrate on the craft while still meeting international standards."

#### Climate-smart irrigation

The soils, and especially the water system, of the Mekong Delta make it difficult to grow citrus. Despite these challenges, citrus farming remains the most profitable income option for many farmers.

*"Our farmers focus on growing the fruit; we handle the global market requirements."*

Siebe says, "Under these conditions, farmers have developed a system that works. It generates significantly higher income than other crops. We used a process called participatory technology development. The project brought together the knowledge of farmers, our extension staff, South African citrus growers and a local university. This has allowed us to further strengthen and improve the existing farming system."

According to Siebe, fruit trees take time to respond to new practices. Farmers also need time to see and trust the results. For this reason, it is important to allow enough time for the process. He adds, "We are grateful for the patience and commitment of all project partners in supporting this ongoing innovation. We also appreciate the support from the Vietnamese provincial government and the Vietnamese Cooperative Alliance. They backed one of the farmer cooperatives developed through the SUCCEEDS project. Once they saw that the value chain was working, they actively supported scaling it up. It is a fantastic example of a true public-private partnership."

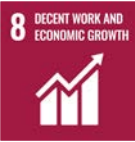
#### The next phase

By 2027, SUCCEEDS aims to support 500 certified farmers and reach 150,000 smallholder farmers through digital campaigns, demonstration farms and national TV. A major event is planned for 2027, which will give local leaders and farmers a platform to share their success stories. The event will highlight professionalised nurseries, climate-smart techniques and cooperative scaling. These approaches demonstrate how the citrus sector can transform sustainably.

Through SUCCEEDS, the Mekong Delta is not just surviving; it is becoming more resilient, productive and profitable. This helps smallholder farmers remain competitive in the global fruit markets for decades to come.

#### Links

- [RVO video: Public-private partnership SUCCEEDS in Vietnam](#)



People planting rice. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

## Madagascar Transformation des systèmes agricoles avec du riz et de l'artimisia (TSARA)

**Subsidy:** € 2,360,861

**Consortium:** Wageningen University & Research, Société Industrielle et Commerciale D'Isandra (SICI), Bionexx S.A., and Haute Matsiatra regional government.

# Growing rice and Artemisia: How TSARA is boosting farmer livelihoods



Author:  
**Nylah Shah**

**Sarra Khouk, a researcher and Project Manager at Wageningen University, says, "Farmers are earning an income at 2 moments in the year. This is improving their livelihoods." For her, this reflects the core of the Transformation des systèmes agricoles avec du riz et de l'artimisia (TSARA) project. It focuses on making farming systems both productive and resilient.**

### Seasonal farming systems

In the Haute Matsiatra region of Madagascar, TSARA collaborates with approximately 2,880 farmers, mostly women and youth. The project focuses on growing different crops each season, with rice being cultivated during the rainy season. During the dry season, farmers grow *Artemisia annua*, a medicinal plant used in anti-malarial treatments. By combining food and cash crops across seasons, the system reduces farmers' exposure to climate and market risks. It also makes better use of the available land. Luuk Fleskens, Associate Professor at Wageningen University & Research and project leader, says, "It is about designing a system where agronomic, economic and seasonal dynamics work together."

A public-private partnership implements TSARA involving 4 partners: Bionexx S.A. (*Artemisia* value chain), Société Industrielle et Commerciale d'Isandra (SICI); rice value chain), producing quality rice; Wageningen University (research and technical guidance); and the Haute

Matsiatra regional government (focusing on restoration of degraded areas). Implementation is supported by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) under the SDGP programme.

### Knowledge drives adoption

Knowledge-sharing is central to the project. Sarra says, "Bionexx has strong experience in turning technical knowledge into practical training." She explains that training is delivered in Malagasy and focuses on low-cost, locally adapted practices. These include organic fertilisation methods using local vegetation. Farmers can adopt these easily. Market pressure has also driven innovation. Luuk notes, "The competition is fierce, and the margins on *Artemisia* have been dropping. This has prompted Bionexx to venture into exploring alternative value chains."

TSARA supports diversification. Farmers are gradually integrating crops such as *spilanthes* for cosmetics and chilli peppers. This reduces dependence on a single cash crop and strengthens the resilience of farming systems. TSARA is demonstrating how public-private partnerships can align production, markets, and knowledge to drive meaningful change. This contributes to more stable incomes, better resource use, and stronger livelihoods. Underscoring the project's collaborative strength, Sarra says, "We owe a lot to this partnership."

# Results

## Private Sector Development



**30**

Dutch companies with a supported plan to invest, trade or provide services



**63**

Local companies with a supported plan to invest, trade or provide services



**9,971 fte**

Direct jobs supported

**4,346 fte**

Females

**4,304 fte**

Youth (18-35 yrs)



**415,274**

People trained or skills developed

**147,912**

Females

**125,698**

Children (<5 yrs)

Cumulative data as of 2025.

## Better work and higher incomes for young people and women



**4,580**

Land and production workers with improved labour conditions in accordance with international agreements

**2,783**

Females

**2,598**

Youth (18-35 yrs)



**2,075**

Land and production workers with improved labour productivity

**910**

Females

**1,679**

Youth (18-35 yrs)



**343**

Land and production workers with increased income

**158**

Females

**226**

Youth (18-35 yrs)



**5,679**

People assisted to develop economic income-generating activities

**2,743**

Females

**1,669**

Youth (18-35 yrs)

Cumulative data as of 2025 and max. 7 SDGP projects reporting on Better work and higher incomes.



An employee shows the freshly harvested coffee cherries on the coffee plantation in Kericho. Photo: © Makmende.

## Sustainable Development Goal 12

# Responsible consumption & production

As a cross-cutting theme, SDGP aligns with SDG 12 goals in ensuring sustainable production and increasing resource efficiency. SDGP projects worked on promoting circularity by improving the efficiency of production, processing and consumption to reuse raw materials. This included turning agricultural waste into new products, reducing waste or creating new supply chains from waste.

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| How young entrepreneurs have built a circular economy at the Kenyan coast<br><i>Kenya</i>   | 56 |
| Brewing sustainability: Kenya's low-carbon coffee revolution<br><i>Kenya</i>  | 61 |
| From agricultural by-products to sustainable opportunity: Circular solutions in Peru and Côte d'Ivoire<br><i>Côte d'Ivoire and Peru</i> | 64 |



# How young entrepreneurs have built a circular economy at the Kenyan coast

Young entrepreneurs are finding new ways to build businesses using what is already available at the Kenyan coast. They repair devices, reuse materials, and reduce waste. While this is often called a ‘circular economy’, for many, it is simply a way to survive and grow. With the right support, these everyday practices are now becoming stronger businesses.



Author:  
**Peter Aowa**

Portrait of person wearing a Ricky bag.  
Photo: © Makmende.



## Kenya BOOST

**Subsidy:** €1,499,372

**Consortium:** MDF Training en Consultancy B.V., Stichting Crosswise Works, Close the Gap International, GoodUp B.V., and National Industrial Training Authority (NITA)



Portrait of person refurbishing electronics. Photo: © Makmende.

**Along the backstreets of Mombasa, the work begins quietly. A young entrepreneur opens her laptop on a wooden table. Its screen is cracked, and its screws are placed aside so that nothing is lost. Nearby, an artisan cleans, measures, and stitches strips of used PVC banners into bags built to last longer than their first life. There are no signs announcing sustainability or innovation. What exists instead is hands-on practice, shaped by repetition, constraints, and necessity. For many young entrepreneurs at the Kenyan coast, circular practices are a response to scarcity rather than policy. Replacement is expensive, imports are unreliable, and waste accumulates faster than it can be removed. Devices are repaired, materials reused, and skills developed through trial and error.**

### Supporting entrepreneurs

BOOST Your Business is an incubation project designed to support these entrepreneurs and help them grow in sustainable and resource-efficient ways. Crosswise Works implemented it in collaboration with MDF (lead), Close the Gap, and the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA). The project is built around 3 pillars: incubation support through BOOST Your Business, the Refurbished Factory under BOOST Your Tech, and a skills-development hub through BOOST Your Learning.

### Putting a name to it

Daylene Bichanga's story focuses on incubation through BOOST Your Business, which provides mentorship, resources, and guidance to turn waste into business opportunities. The other pillars, implemented with partners MDF, Close the Gap, Crosswise Works, and NITA, support practical skills and access to affordable technology. In an interview at the Close the Gap Hub in Nyali, Daylene recalls how technical language did not always match real-life experience. She says, "We were talking about the circular economy as a model. Yet, in practice, people were already doing the work. They just did not call it that."

### Interest and misunderstandings

Between 2019 and 2022, Daylene worked with Crosswise Works as a lead trainer, facilitating circular-economy models for entrepreneurs. Many of them are young and are already operating informally. Her role was to help entrepreneurs understand practices they were already using. It was not about introducing something completely new. In theory, the programme's logic was sound. In practice, it demanded far more patience than anticipated. The first call for applications revealed interest and misunderstanding. More than 1,000 entrepreneurs applied for a programme that could accommodate only 35 participants per cohort. The criteria seemed straightforward: businesses had to be operational, based in Mombasa, and demonstrate some component of circularity.

In reality, those conditions meant very different things to different people. Some applicants were curious about the language but did not fully understand it. Others were already repairing, reusing, or repurposing materials. However, they did not recognise these actions as part of a broader economic system. Daylene states, "What we underestimated was how unfamiliar the concept would feel, even to people who were already practising it." At first, the idea of a circular economy sounded technical, expensive, and unfamiliar. For entrepreneurs focused on daily survival, it felt far removed from their realities.

*"Repair instead of replacement and reuse instead of disposal were driven by necessity, not ideology."*

### Adapting the programme

Participants dropped out. According to Daylene, each cohort began with enthusiasm and high attendance, but attendance thinned as the weeks passed. Some entrepreneurs said that 3 months was too long to step away from their businesses. Others believed the concept would be costly to implement. Some found other opportunities or relocated. The reasons were practical, not ideological. Rather than treating dropouts as a failure of commitment, the programme treated them as feedback.

*"Once people saw themselves in the concept, everything changed."*

Surveys were sent out, followed by conversations, and it appeared that the structure needed to change. The programme was shortened from 3 months to 6 weeks. Greater emphasis was placed on mentorship and coaching beyond classroom sessions. Trainers began visiting businesses at their own workspaces. They walked through value chains with entrepreneurs and identified where circular practices could be applied.

### A conceptual shift

The most important shift was conceptual. The circular economy was no longer taught as something new but recognised as something already in practice. Entrepreneurs were asked to describe their own processes. This included where materials came from, what happened when equipment failed, and how they made decisions when cash was limited. Patterns emerged quickly: repair instead of replacement and reuse instead of disposal. These actions

were driven by necessity, not ideology. Daylene says, "Once people saw themselves in the concept, everything changed," adding that it stopped feeling foreign.

### Managing expectations

Even with these changes, pressure remained. Circular economy was still a new focus area for funders, and expectations for visible results were high. Reporting timelines were short, and success stories were expected quickly. She admits, "There is pressure to demonstrate success even when you know that meaningful change takes longer than a year."

Success had to be redefined. Instead of expecting transformation across entire cohorts, the programme focused on entrepreneurs who were already close to circular practices. It supported them to better understand and strengthen what they were already doing. 5 to 10 businesses stood out in each cycle. Not because they were perfect, but because the concept matched their context more easily. Their progress provided clear examples of what was possible when language, support, and reality came together.



Participants of a training facilitating circular-economy models for entrepreneurs. Photo: © Makmende.



Cataloguing of electronics at the refurbishment factory CTG Circular. Photo: © Makmende.

*"We were surrounded by waste, but it did not make sense to treat it as useless."*

### Turning waste into business

One of those businesses was Ricky Bags, Africa. For Robert Mrima, founder and CEO of Ricky Bags Africa, the idea did not begin with sustainability language. In Mombasa, discarded billboards, PVC banners, and textile waste accumulated rapidly, often ending up in the ocean or landfills. The materials were strong, weather-resistant, and abundant. Robert says, "We were surrounded by waste, but it did not make sense to treat it as useless."

Before any structured support, Ricky Bags existed in fragments. Production happened wherever space was available. There were no machines, no dedicated workshop, and no predictable income. The idea was clear, but the system was fragile.

### Learning through mentorship

Exposure to structured mentorship changed how Robert approached the work. Conversations about pricing, quality, and scale forced him to confront gaps he had previously overlooked. A small crowdfunding effort raised about 80,000 Kenyan shillings (\$615), enough to buy the first machines. The amount was modest, but the shift it enabled was significant. Production became more consistent. Processes had to be learnt properly.

Coming from an economics background, Robert spent months understanding manufacturing from the ground up so that pricing reflected real costs and workers could be paid fairly. Early mistakes were costly. Hiring too quickly strained cash flow, implementing ideas without involving the team

created tension, and over time, these missteps reshaped his definition of success.

He explains, "Before, success was about growth. Now it is about stability. Systems. Quality. A team that stays." For Robert, lean production became a necessity rather than a philosophy. Offcuts were reused because waste reduced margins. Circular thinking was not added to the business; it was embedded in how the business survived.

### Digital systems for growth

A different pathway emerged through Intuit Tech Innovation, also known as Infinitech. When Shamel Karani and her colleagues of Infinitech first engaged with the ecosystem, they were university students running a women-in-tech

community. Their technical skills were strong, but their business structure was unclear. Shamayel recalls, "We could build systems but did not know how to run a company."

Working closely with small-scale manufacturers and community businesses, Infinitech identified digital and operational gaps that limited efficiency. Many of these businesses were engaged in circular practices, reusing materials, minimising waste, and turning by-products into new products. However, they lacked the systems to scale. Infinitech helped fill that gap by building digital infrastructure, streamlining workflows, and strengthening management practices. This enabled these businesses to grow more sustainably.

*"Before, success was about growth. Now it is about stability, systems, quality, a team that stays."*

Early revenue made a difference. It allowed the business to brand itself, stabilise operations, and think beyond survival. A critical decision was to narrow the focus rather than expand indiscriminately. Shamayel notes, "Niching down changed everything; it clarified our message and made income predictable."

Over time, Infinitech developed an ERP SaaS platform. This is an online system that helps manufacturing businesses manage operations, from sourcing to sales. Partnerships

were not without tension. According to Shamayel, some collaborators expected recognition without contribution. To address this gap, they learnt that relationships need structure and clarity to protect the stakeholders.

Beyond the founders, the impact rippled outward. Young women trained through the community started their own agencies, trained others, and collaborated on local solutions. These networks persisted beyond any single programme, shaped more by shared experience than formal timelines.

#### Where theory meets reality

For Daylene, these stories captured both the promise and the limits of structured interventions. Not everyone benefited equally. Very early-stage businesses struggled to engage fully. Entrepreneurs operating on extremely thin margins found it difficult to invest time and resources into long-term change. Circular economy approaches promised resilience, but survival often came first.

Power dynamics between partners also shaped outcomes. Funders often set targets in advance, while implementers have to adjust to local realities. Entrepreneurs carried much of the risk, balancing these expectations with limited resources. Negotiation was constant. Daylene recalls, "There was always back and forth between what made sense on paper and what made sense in practice."

#### Lasting impact

Today, the Refurbished Factory repairs laptops and reuses materials. Young people build livelihoods through skills gained both informally and through training at the Close the Gap Hub. What was once invisible is now recognised as part of a growing circular economy at the coast. Even after the project ended, these practices continue. Businesses continue to experiment, learn, and discover better ways to utilise their resources.



Business owner Sara Nekesa with child. Photo: © Makmende.

#### Links

- [RVO video: 3 pillars to boost the public-private partnership in Kenya](#)



Farmer holding coffee harvest. Photo: © Makmende.

## Kenya Developing a low-carbon coffee value chain

**Subsidy:** €790,210

**Consortium:** Stichting Agriterra, Moyee Nederland B.V., Stichting FairChain, Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research Organization, Kipkelion District Cooperative Union (KDCU) and KALRO-Coffee Research Institute.

# Brewing sustainability: Kenya's low-carbon coffee revolution



Author:  
**Nylah Shah**

In the misty highlands of Kericho County, a quiet revolution is reshaping coffee farming. At its heart is Henry BK Sang, a cooperative advisor with Agriterra Kenya. He has spent the past 4 years guiding farmers toward climate-resilient, low-carbon production. The shift demonstrates that sustainable production depends not only on technology, but on trust, knowledge and viable economic incentives.

### Overcoming farmer scepticism

When the initiative began in 2019, targeting 8,000 farmers across 7 cooperatives, scepticism ran high. Many feared that abandoning synthetic fertilisers and chemicals would reduce yields. Henry recalls, "Initially, we faced a lot of resistance because it was new. It was only after the early adopters saw results that others began to join." A central takeaway from the project, as Henry emphasises, is that transitioning to organic coffee production goes far beyond technical adjustments.

It requires a fundamental cultural shift. Work with cooperatives in Kericho demonstrated a crucial lesson: lasting success depends on building farmer confidence and strengthening local knowledge systems. It also requires aligning sustainability efforts with economic realities.

*"Initially, we faced a lot of resistance because it was new. It was only after the early adopters saw results that others began to join."*



Farmer plucking ripe coffee. Photo: © Makmende.

### Supporting smallholder farmers

The 'Developing a low-carbon coffee value chain in Kenya' project is a consortium initiative. It brings together FairChain Foundation, the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation, Moyee Nederland BV and Stichting Agriterrra.

Initially, the Kipkelion District Cooperative Union participated in the project, but 7 primary cooperatives later replaced it. The project, based in Kericho, Kenya, supports smallholder farmers in transitioning to sustainable, low-carbon coffee production. This shift moves farmers away from monoculture systems that rely on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides.

### Key components for a sustainable system

The project has 4 main components. First, it establishes bio-solutions production facilities using local waste. These produce affordable bio-compost, bio-fertilisers, and bio-pesticides. The project team first planned the facilities at KDCU and later implemented them across 7 primary cooperatives: Kimologit, Torochmwai, Chepnorio, Kabngetuny, Tuiyabei, and Koilsir.

Second, the project implements a model farm which demonstrates a regenerative, low-carbon coffee production approach developed by Renature. Third, it develops a blockchain platform to ensure transparency in coffee transactions and verify low-carbon practices.

Fourth, the project establishes a coffee roasting facility in Nairobi, creating local employment and adding value at the origin. The initiative also promotes reduced use of synthetic inputs, strengthens cooperative governance and supports intercropping strategies. It employs youth extension officers, provides premium payments to farmers, and actively includes women and youth across all activities.



Farmer standing in coffee field (top), workers processing coffee into roaster (middle left), aerial view and farmer holding coffee (bottom left) and workers making bio-compost (bottom right). Photos: © Makmende.



Individual holding coffee (left) and worker measuring and packaging Moyee coffee (right). Photo: © Makmende.

### Income and yield gains

The project runs from July 2020 to November 2025 under the SDG Partnership facility (SDGP) programme. It aims to enhance farmer income, food security, and climate resilience. By enabling cooperatives to produce their own compost and bio-solutions, the project created new income streams. It also generated jobs, particularly for women and youth.

Organically produced speciality coffee commanded higher prices. Yields also increased significantly. One cooperative raised cherry production from 176,000 to 800,000 kilogrammes in a single year.

Farmers have also diversified and are applying bio-solutions to vegetables and poultry. Harvesting now takes place throughout the year. Henry sees even greater potential. Research suggests each coffee bush could produce up to 20 kilogrammes if managed optimally and model farms have already reached 8 kilogrammes per tree.

With continued support, Kericho could become a hub of sustainable, high-quality coffee production. Through it all, Henry's mission remains steadfast: to guard the future of Kenyan agriculture.

### Links

- [RVO video: From Bean to Cup: Kenya's Path to Sustainable Coffee](#)
- [RVO video: Living income in the low-carbon coffee production in Kenya](#)
- [RVO video: Bio Solutions - Developing a Low-Carbon Coffee Value-Chain in Kericho in Kenya](#)

## Bio-slurry's contribution to food security: integrating biodigester impacts into the voluntary gold standard's SDG 2 framework



This research explores the role of bio-slurry. Bio-slurry is an important by-product of anaerobic digestion in biodigesters; it serves as a valuable organic fertiliser. The study examines the complex relationship between bio-slurry, agriculture, and food security. Findings reveal that bio-slurry can be used in liquid or composted form. It improves soil health, increases crop yields and it also reduces reliance on chemical fertilisers.

The study proposes adapting an existing food security SDG 2 indicator, currently used for agriculture projects under the Voluntary Gold Standard (VGS), for use with community service activities (CSA) biodigester projects. This indicator would allow biodigester projects clearly demonstrate their contributions to SDG 2. It could potentially increase access to higher-valued carbon credits, thereby to further motivating efforts to combat food insecurity.



# From agricultural by-products to sustainable opportunity: Circular solutions in Peru and Côte d'Ivoire

Across farming communities, agricultural waste is often discarded or overlooked. Yet these by-products hold untapped potential. In Peru and Côte d'Ivoire, farmers and partners are turning coffee husks and cocoa waste into fuel, fertiliser, and new income streams. These efforts show how circular solutions can strengthen livelihoods while reducing environmental pressure.



Author:  
**Peter Aowa**

Compost storage part in Côte d'Ivoire (top), farmer checking coffee plant health in Peru (bottom). Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) (top), San Martin (bottom).

In the highlands of San Martín in northern Peru, smallholder farmers dry coffee beans in the sun for international markets. Nearby, piles of dry husks accumulate, by-products long treated as waste. For generations, farmers have burnt small amounts to aid drying, sold them cheaply, or discarded them altogether. Most see little economic value in these materials.

Across the Atlantic, in western Côte d'Ivoire, a similar pattern appears in cocoa production. After pods are split and beans removed, shells and pulp are left in thick heaps. These heaps often decompose unevenly and remain unmanaged. At the same time, farmers rely on chemical fertilisers, whose prices fluctuate with global markets. Materials that could improve soil and reduce costs remain largely unused.

This approach comes from a linear system farmers have followed for years: grow, harvest, process, sell, and discard the rest. But this is beginning to change.



Farmer holding coffee harvest. Photo: © San Martín.

## Peru Circular Coffee from Peru: creating value across the chain

**Subsidy:** €1,462,291

**Consortium:** Stichting Solidaridad Nederland, Solidaridad Peru, Cuencas del Huallaga Asociación de Productores Agropecuarios, Koninklijke Douwe Egberts B.V. and Olam Agro Peru S.A.C.

In Peru, the Circular Coffee project is implemented through a multi-partner consortium. It is not led by a single cooperative. Cuencas del Huallaga Asociación de Productores Agropecuarios works with NGOs and private sector partners. Together, they support smallholder farmers across San Martín, Ucayali, and Junín. The cooperative represents hundreds of farmers producing organic coffee and cocoa. It invests in traceability, geolocation tools, and certification. This helps farmers meet Fairtrade standards and access international markets. However, the challenge of coffee husks remained.

### Turning waste into fuel

Vallés says, "We realised we were sitting on a resource that had been available for decades but treated as waste." The solution was to turn husks into pellets for cooking fuel.

When used with improved cookstoves, these pellets reduce indoor air pollution and fuel use. They also create a new source of income.

Turning this idea into practice was not easy. Moisture levels varied, and early batches burned unevenly. There was limited local expertise, and stove certification standards had to be met. Without structured support, the cooperative could not scale the solution.

### Working with partners

The project was implemented through a partnership of multiple actors. This included Cuencas del Huallaga Asociación de Productores Agropecuarios, Solidaridad Peru, and Stichting Solidaridad Nederland. Private sector partners, Koninklijke Douwe Egberts B.V. and Olam Agro Peru S.A.C.,



*"We realised we were sitting on a resource that had been available for decades but treated as waste."*

also supported activities on the ground. Together, they addressed both technical and social challenges, tested new approaches, and built systems without placing extra pressure on farmers.

Private partners supported technical development. Olam Food Ingredients supplied husks for testing, helping assess combustion quality. Engineers and local technicians worked with the cooperative to improve the compression process, manage moisture levels, and calibrate machinery.

#### **Putting the system into practice**

A small pilot production line, imported from Spain, was installed locally. This gave the cooperative more control and improved pellet quality. The project also introduced improved cookstoves that use coffee husk pellets instead of firewood. These stoves reduce indoor smoke and reliance on traditional fuels. Pellet production uses husks from coffee processing, turning waste into fuel. The project also showed that reliable supply, fair pricing, and system continuity are key for long-term adoption.

Family standing with seedlings (top left), holding harvests (top right) and walking through the forest (bottom). Photo: © Makmende.

## Côte d'Ivoire CI:RCCLES - Reducing, reusing and recycling to contribute and lead in efficient sustainable waste management

**Subsidy:** €1,111,701

**Consortium:** TechForce Projects B.V., Cocoanect B.V., LONO, Autonomous District of Yamoussoukro, ETG commodities B.V., and Institut National Polytechnique Houphouet Boigny.



Collection of cocoa husks (left) and bio-compost product made from the cocoa husks (right). Photo: © Vice Versa Global (left), Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) (right).

**In Côte d'Ivoire, Noël Kombo N'guessan addressed similar challenges with organic waste. Trained in chemical and environmental engineering, he co-founded LONO, a company that turns agricultural residues into new inputs for agriculture, industry and animal farming.**

### Turning waste into fertiliser

Cocoa husks and pulp are abundant after harvesting, up to 10 times the weight of the sold dried beans, but are often left unmanaged. This leads to value loss and can also lead to greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, farmers rely on fertilisers, which are costly. This included waste from farms, households, and food businesses. A project company was created in a public-private partnership with the local government to operate a compost facility called BIOYAM, to collect and process this waste into a safe and effective agricultural input. The compost is sold to cocoa farmers and used in horticulture and grain production. The project also tested other solutions, including biochar production and treating water hyacinth through bio-digestion in order to have maximum value from this organic waste material.

To increase benefits for the farmers, the approach was extended to also include decentralised composting and biochar. This allows cooperatives and farmers to directly exchange their organic waste for compost closer to where the waste is generated. This strengthened local ownership and made it easier to integrate into farming practices.

### Implementation and challenges

At first, farmers were cautious. Many had seen new organic inputs give unsatisfactory results or other waste management projects fail or not scale in the past. The project approach focused on practical training, demonstrations that made results visible within existing farming systems to build trust. Just like in Peru, support from the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) through the SDGP programme enabled structured implementation.

Partnerships between cooperatives, agencies, and private actors supported training, monitoring, and knowledge-sharing. This helped ensure consistent compost quality and build farmer trust. The project has led to higher fertiliser

use, improved soil and tree health, and increased cocoa yields. It has also created early job opportunities in biomass collection, processing, and fertiliser distribution.

However, challenges remain. These include first-mile logistics to bring the biomass from the farms to the distributed recycling sites, working capital to scale, and attracting industrial partners for larger offtakes. The project is addressing these by improving collection systems, expanding market links, and starting carbon removal certification and registration of biochar produced using cocoa and maize waste.

### Lessons from the circular systems

The use of compost with added biostimulants shows quick positive results. Crop performance improves within a shorter time, rather than waiting many months or a year. Key challenges include logistics, finance and scale, market development, and household organic waste collection, which is naturally a public sector responsibility. However, the capacity to distribute organic fertiliser to farmers has

made the project company BIOYAM, a partner for the waste management agency, showing that the circular systems are attracting positive attention from the public sector.

### Results and benefits

In both Peru and Côte d'Ivoire, success depended on daily practices. In Peru, households changed cooking routines and tracked fuel savings. This helped build trust in the pellet system. In Côte d'Ivoire, farmers adjusted planting methods and applied compost in stages. They saw better crop yields on demonstration plots. Change happened step by step, shaped by local realities.

Both projects have strong economic benefits. In Peru, pellet production and stove distribution created local jobs. They also opened business opportunities and added income for farmers. In Côte d'Ivoire, composting created new roles within cooperatives. It also reduced costs for fertiliser and energy. Both projects show that circular models can add value without disrupting production.

### The role of partnerships

Technical, social, and economic challenges often overlap. In Peru, supply chains, pricing, and fuel storage required careful planning. In Côte d'Ivoire, compost quality and safety needed constant monitoring. In both projects, partnerships played a key role. Local cooperatives, private companies, and technical experts helped reduce early risks. Support from the SDGP facility enabled testing at scale. It also lowered the risk for farmers and partners.

These partnerships allowed for step-by-step learning and improvement. Knowledge transfer ensured that local actors kept ownership. It also helped embed circular practices within the agricultural system. From a sustainability perspective, these initiatives show that circular approaches must combine environmental, economic, and social goals. Coffee husks and cocoa shells are no longer waste.

They are now used as resources that support livelihoods, strengthen cooperatives, and reduce environmental harm.

### A shift in how waste is viewed

Communities have seen small but meaningful changes. In Peru, reduced smoke improves health, and efficient stoves lower fuel costs. Pellet production also creates local jobs. In Côte d'Ivoire, better soil fertility and increased biogas reduce reliance on external inputs. Farmers also report higher yields and stronger cooperation within groups.

Ultimately, what connects both projects is a shift in how waste is viewed. Materials once discarded are now seen as useful inputs. This circular model is practical and centred on people. Its impact is seen in fuel savings, healthier soils, lower emissions, more income options, and stronger cooperatives.

### The bigger picture

The experiences of Cuencas del Huallaga and LONO show the value of local leadership. They also show the importance of strong international partnerships. Together, they support solutions that are sustainable, scalable, and grounded in real conditions.

In these projects, agricultural by-products are no longer leftovers. They are fuel, fertiliser, energy, and opportunity. They add value beyond the farm and reduce pressure on the environment. What was once discarded is now part of daily life. In homes, farms, and cooperatives, these materials are creating new opportunities. The government now has the mandate and proof to scale these practices further."



Cocoa fruits growing on tree (top), piles of bio-compost made out of cocoa husks (bottom). Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).



## Sustainable Development Goal 13

# Climate action

As a cross-cutting theme, SDGP aligns with SDG 13 goals in enhancing climate resilience and adaptation. The programme facilitated efforts that integrate climate adaptation, climate change mitigation and biodiversity protection into sustainable supply chains. SDGP projects worked on promoting agroecological and climate-smart practices and investing in nature-based solutions. It also worked on making agricultural value chains more resilient, such as by using drought-tolerant crop varieties.

How saline-tolerant farming is transforming coastal Bangladesh <i>Bangladesh</i>	70
Green gold: How Madagascar's cinchona project is turning forests into futures <i>Madagascar</i>	76
Lessons from protecting Rwanda's tea industry <i>Rwanda</i>	78
After the gold rush: Reclaiming land from illegal mining <i>Ghana</i>	79

Farmer watering plants in Bangladesh.  
Photo: © Makmende.



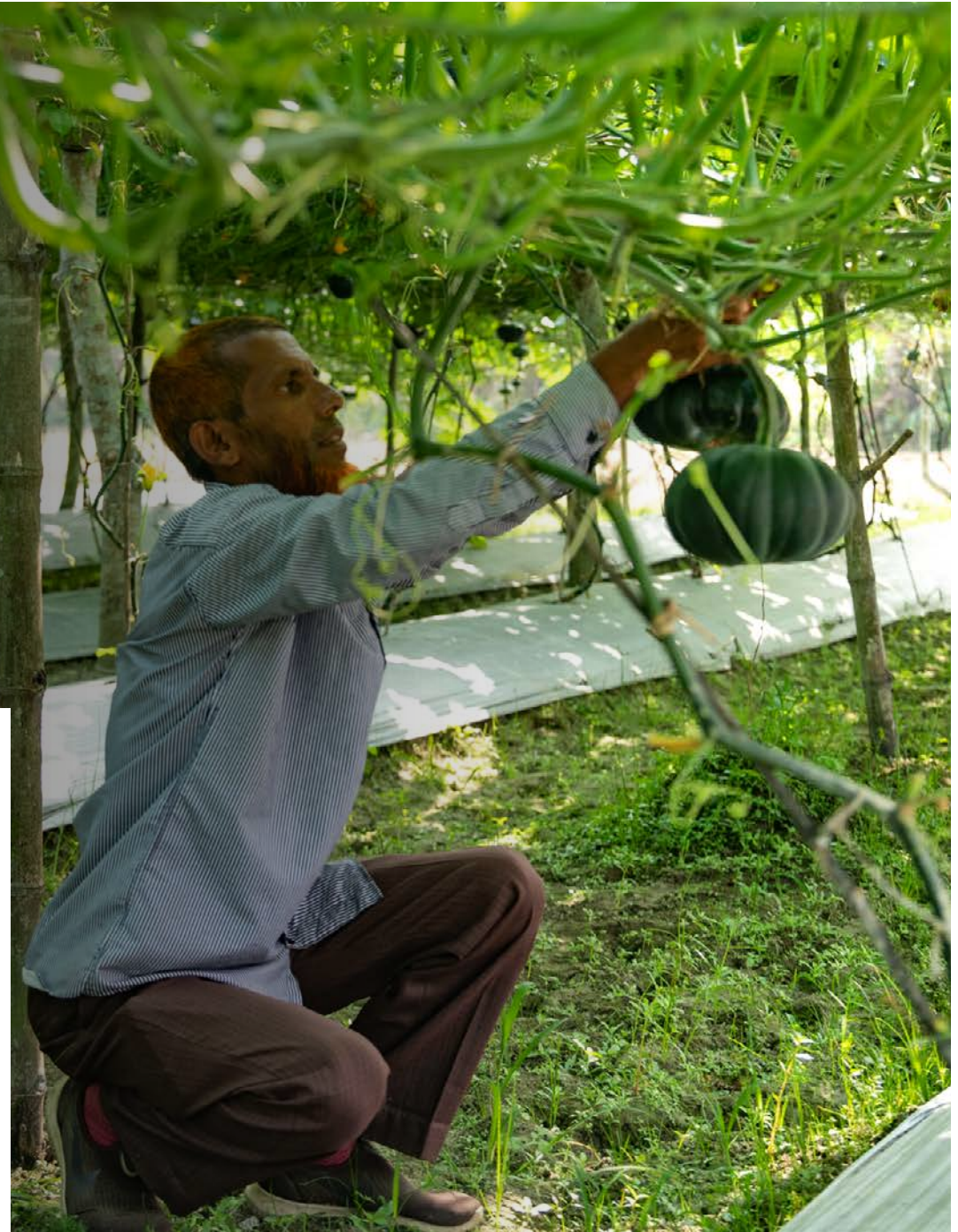
# How saline-tolerant farming is transforming coastal Bangladesh

In coastal Bangladesh, farming once felt impossible. Salt in the soil made it hard to grow crops and many families gave up farming. Today, that is changing. With new seeds, simple techniques and strong partnerships, farmers are bringing land back to life and building livelihoods where agriculture was once only a dream.



Author:  
**Nylah Shah**

Farmer harvesting pumpkin | COASTS.  
Photo: © East-West Seed  
Knowledge Transfer.



## Bangladesh COASTS - Coastal Opportunities and Agricultural Solutions to Tackle Salinity

**Subsidy:** €1,079,048

**Consortium:** Cordaid, Lal Teer Seed Limited, Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI), and Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU).

*"When I first moved here,  
no crops grew in our yard.  
Agriculture was like  
a dream."*

When Uma Ray arrived in the remote Basher Tola village after her marriage, the stillness of the soil unsettled her. Uma is an honours graduate from Bagerhat PC College. She grew up in Batiaghata, Khulna, where water was fresh, and her father's yard rippled with 'waves of green.' Her father, a teacher and farmer, brought home fish while her mother picked vegetables. Now, living in this saline belt of Bagerhat, those memories feel distant. She recalls, "When I first moved here, no crops grew in our yard. Agriculture was like a dream." She worried she might never grow food in the salty soil.

**For Uma and many women there, the absence of greenery is not just agricultural; it is cultural, emotional, and deeply personal.**

### Supporting farmers in saline areas

In coastal Bangladesh, 2 major initiatives are helping farmers improve agricultural productivity. They do this through research, technology, and market-oriented approaches.

The Sustainable Development Goals Partnership (SDGP) programme supports The Coastal Opportunities and Agricultural Solutions to Tackle Salinity (COASTS) project. Cordaid Bangladesh leads the project in collaboration with Lal Teer Seed Limited, Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) and the Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI). The project promotes salt-tolerant crops while training farmers, especially women, to manage salinity and connect with markets.

Meanwhile, the Smart Farming, Healthy Food project focuses on climate-smart vegetable production. It helps farmers use improved seed varieties from East-West Seed and apply climate-smart agricultural practices.

### Farming on difficult soil

In Bagerhat's Rampal, the air carries a faint taste of salt. Villages near mangroves, such as Sundari, Keora, Golpata, and Gewa, are rooted in saline soil. At times, the landscape



Farmer showing harvest of red beets. Photo: © Cordaid.

feels like the edge of the Sundarbans. Life here is shaped by salinity. Water from tubewells is salty, and the heavy air corrodes metal and tin roofs. Over time, rising salinity and climate change have made traditional farming increasingly difficult.

However, collaborative agricultural initiatives have begun to turn this saline-affected land back into a verdant landscape. The COASTS project is visible in homestead gardens across the region. Farmers point to its banners, proudly saying they are part of the project. It was carried out in 8 regions across 4 coastal districts: Khulna, Bagerhat, Barguna and Patuakhali. The project worked to turn unused land into productive farmland. It promoted salt-tolerant seeds, trained farmers in resilient practices, and helped them access markets to grow and sell their produce.



Farmer holding an insect trap (left), women inspecting plant health (middle) and farmers attending a training session (right) part of the COASTS project. Photos: © Cordaid.

### Impact on farmers

About 5,000 hectares of farmland are now more climate-resilient. Nearly 10,000 farmers, half of them women, have improved their yields and incomes. Beyond fields and harvests, farmers and project partners say COASTS has strengthened saline agriculture. The project works closely with research and government institutions and also supports policy and curriculum development. This helps build long-term solutions for vulnerable coastal communities.

The real impact, however, is best understood through the farmers themselves. Conversations with women farmers who have led this shift reveal a story of resilience and innovation.

### The lead farmer model

The COASTS project operates through a structured system. Lal Teer works with validation farmers, providing seeds, fertiliser, nets and labour. Cordaid organises farmers into groups of 40 each with defined roles. Lead farmers coordinate activities, commercial farmers focus on sales, and others receive guidance and training.

At 58, Nibha Mridha of Joynagar village never imagined crops could grow in salt. She lives in a modest tin shed with

her husband, who has been unemployed for years due to physical disabilities. She recalls that when project staff first suggested farming, she laughed and asked, "How is that even possible?" Since 2023, she and her sister-in-law Jhutika have grown snake gourd, tomatoes and spinach. A single harvest of snake gourd earned her Tk5,000 (\$40), though sudden rain once wiped out her okra crop. She says, "I have learnt the system now."

Nearby, lead farmer Uma transformed her larger yard, earning up to Tk40,000 (\$350) in a season. "As a homemaker, I had no other income. Now I can invest my earnings in my own business." These women were guided by Khairul Alam of Lal Teer Seed, who oversees groups across various coastal districts. He reveals, "The biggest challenge was the mindset."

### What changed for farmers

According to Khairul, people in coastal areas spent many years convinced that vegetables could not be grown at home or in crop fields. Demonstrating the seeds and simple planting methods helped change these perceptions. Gradually, more farmers adopted the approach, and entire communities shifted from fish-only systems to mixed farming. Using saline-resistant seeds and simple techniques,

such as raised-bed farming and mulching, farmers began to see new possibilities.

*"It was as much about human psychology as agriculture."*

In Pipulbunia village, Tapan Kumar Ray and his wife, Mridula, who once relied on their *gher* (ponds used for prawn and fish farming), now earn Tk30,000 (\$250) per season. Their son Tarun volunteers, training others in bed preparation, seedling care, and salinity management. Once barren yards are now full of crops. Change spread row by row, harvest by harvest across Bangladesh's salt-affected coast.

### The science of resilience

At Lal Teer Seed's Dhaka office, General Manager Mahmudun Nabi explains the science behind these changes. He points out, "It was as much about human psychology as agriculture." When he joined the project in 2023, it had

already been underway for 3 years. His task was to stabilise the team and align partners, including Cordaid, the SRDI and the BAU, toward a single goal: making Bangladesh's saline belts productive again.

The coastal soil, dry and salt-laden for half the year, had long been considered dead, he says. He explains, "At Lal Teer, we are a business and naturally want to increase vegetable production to drive seed sales. But the project goal was more profound: we needed to prove life could thrive in these saline conditions."

The initiative focused on homestead gardens primarily managed by women who had received training tailored to their needs. A network of women Farmer Business Advisors (FBAs) emerged, enabling women to test soil salinity, recommend crops, and connect farmers to markets and government services. Nabi states, "These women are matchmakers. They turn invisible labour into income and help farmers trust their land again."

### The Salt Solution

According to Razibul Kader, Cordaid's coordinator for Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (PMEL), the COASTS project marks a shift. It moves from academic research to a more market-driven approach to tackling salinity in coastal agriculture.

It evolved from an earlier 4-year programme called 'The Salt Solution'. The National Postcode Lottery in the Netherlands funded this programme and a consortium led by ICCO, now part of Cordaid, implemented it. That project focused on identifying crops that could survive in saline soil. COASTS, launched in 2020, aimed to bridge the gap between laboratory findings and practical farming.

### Scaling what works

The project was organised so that each partner had a clear role. Cordaid led planning, SRDI provided technical support, and BAU supported research. Lal Teer Seed focused on commercialisation. 14 salt-tolerant crops were tested, and 10 were later expanded for wider use. Dutch vegetables such as red beet, cabbage, kohlrabi and cauliflower were introduced. At the grassroots level, trained Farmer Business Advisors, mostly young women, provide salinity testing for Tk50 (\$0.40), earning Tk5,000 (\$40) per month.

Razibul observed that farmers are transitioning from single-season to 2 or 3 cropping cycles each year, boosting both food security and income.

*"These women are matchmakers. They turn invisible labour into income and help farmers trust their land again."*



Selina Begum holding bitter gourds in demo plot | Smart Farming Healthy Food (top), farmer cleaning various vegetables (bottom) part of COASTS project. Photos: © Md Erfanul Haq, EWS KT (top), Cordaid (bottom).

## Bangladesh Smart farming, healthy food

**Subsidy:** €1,959,813

**Consortium:** East-West International B.V., Stichting Solidaridad Nederland, AgroTech Distribution Limited, and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).



Farmer checking plant health of bitter gourds.  
Photo: © East West Seed Knowledge Transfer.

Besides the COASTS project, there have been others with the same aim and purpose, supporting agriculture in more practical and efficient ways. In the saline-swept coastal districts of Bhola, Patuakhali and Noakhali, another quiet agricultural transformation is underway. At its centre is Stuart Morris, Director of East-West Seed Foundation Knowledge Transfer. He believes better seeds alone cannot change farmers' fortunes. That conviction shapes the Smart Farming, Healthy Food project. It is a 5-year public-private partnership implemented by Solidaridad and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), an organisation under the Ministry of Agriculture in Bangladesh.

### The idea behind smart farming

For Morris, smart farming starts with economics. He says, "Start with a business plan, not a planting schedule." But it is in partnerships that Morris is most emphatic. Public-private collaboration is essential to unlock difficult markets. He argues, "public-private partnerships de-risk investments for the private sector. They allow companies to enter places they might otherwise avoid." However, he is critical of short-term development cycles.

In Bangladesh, the aim is to develop skills that enable farmers to gain independence even after the project concludes. Morris notes, "Too often, project leaders pack their bags and go home when the grant ends. If people keep giving handouts to farmers, such initiatives will never continue."

The private sector's role, he insists, is long-term market presence. He says, "Development money should be a catalyst. It must build skills and systems that remain after the funding stops." Unlike temporary aid, a company embedded in the market has an incentive to stay, adapt and grow alongside farmers.

*"Development money should be a catalyst. It must build skills and systems that remain after the funding stops."*



Inspecting plant health and set-up of bitter gourds (top), farmers participating in demonstration training (bottom). Photo: © East West Seed Knowledge Transfer.



Farmers checking on crops. Photo: © East West Seed Knowledge Transfer.

Through field-based demonstrations and peer learning, the company equips farmers not as beneficiaries, but as entrepreneurs. In coastal Bangladesh, Morris's message is clear: resilience becomes sustainable only when it is profitable and when partnerships are designed to last.

*"The true legacy of the training is not aid, but independence."*

#### The legacy left behind

To get a glimpse of what the aftermath of such collaborative projects looks like, Rita Basar offers a hospitable view. When guests arrive at her home in Basher Tola village, she greets them with a bowl of freshly picked boroi and sapota from the trees she planted herself, a literal fruit of her labour.

Her once barren yard is now filled with vegetables grown in neat raised beds. She trained to become a lead farmer, and the training took root. Today, she cultivates bottle gourd, pumpkin, eggplant, tomato, yardlong bean, okra, bitter gourd, cauliflower, carrots, onions, muskmelon and cumin.

Though the project has ended, Rita continues on her own. She is preparing her beds again for the coming season. She says, "I will plant everything I can." This shows that the true legacy of the training is not aid, but independence.

## Water management to address salinity in agriculture in Bangladesh



Bangladesh is among the most vulnerable countries due to climate change. Climate change, together with coastal salinisation, adds to the complexity of ensuring food security.

Wageningen Environmental Research conducted a study on the Coastal Opportunities and Agriculture Solutions to Tackle Salinity in Bangladesh (COASTS) approach. The institute offers insights into addressing water management for salinity in agriculture, using spatial scale (field to regional) and temporal scale (now to future) to map innovations.





People in the farm. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

## Madagascar Future proofing agroforestry systems surrounding fragile natural parcs

**Subsidy:** €1,100,000

**Consortium:** Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Malagasy Ministry of Environment, DREDD, Qimpexx Agri SARL, and Qimpexx Netherlands B.V.

# Green gold: How Madagascar's cinchona project is turning forests into futures



Author:  
**Nylah Shah**

**In Madagascar's highlands, a quiet shift is underway. Cinchona is turning degraded landscapes into productive agroforestry systems. By linking farmers to stable markets, the project highlights the power of long-term incentives. These incentives can unlock environmental restoration and support sustainable rural incomes. Ivan Semjen is the Managing Director of Qimpexx Agri SARL. He leads the 6-year project Future-proofing Agroforestry Systems Surrounding Fragile Natural Parks (2020–2026).**

### Public-private partnership

The project is funded through a public-private partnership supported by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). It brings together partners including Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Malagasy Ministry of Environment, DREDD, Qimpexx Agri SARL, and Qimpexx Netherlands B.V.

### Farming with long-term crops

At the centre of this work is the Cinchona tree. Its bark produces quinine, which is used in anti-malarial medicine. However, harvesting takes patience. These trees take 8 to 10 years to mature. Ivan says, "We support farmers with intermediate crops, giving them an income while their Cinchona trees grow."

Over 3,000 smallholders, particularly women and young people under 30, have been trained in agroforestry techniques. These practices help balance income generation with environmental protection.

### Market incentives drive adoption

While farmers were open-minded to innovation, one factor proved decisive. As Ivan explains, "A long-term purchase contract with a fixed price for bark encouraged the adoption of cinchona."

*"We support farmers with intermediate crops, giving them an income while their Cinchona trees grow."*

Unlike major cash crops such as coffee, cloves, or vanilla, this arrangement shielded farmers from global market volatility. It gave farmers the security needed to invest in cinchona plantations. He says, "The project demonstrates that securing stable markets through long-term engagement is essential for building sustainable value chains."

*"The willingness of farmers to embrace innovation has been our greatest reward."*

#### Scaling impact

The numbers speak for themselves: 1.5 million cinchona trees planted, alongside cloves, cinnamon, ginger, and food crops. Together, they create 'green corridors' that protect biodiversity, improve water retention and enrich soils. Harvested bark is processed locally in Fianarantsoa before being exported.

This allows Madagascar to retain a larger share of the economic benefits. Challenges such as long maturation periods and adopting new farming methods do not hinder progress. Ivan says, "The willingness of farmers to embrace innovation has been our greatest reward."

By blending ecological stewardship with tangible economic benefits, the project shows that even fragile landscapes can thrive. In Madagascar's highlands, cinchona is not just a tree, but a pathway to resilient communities and forests that flourish together.



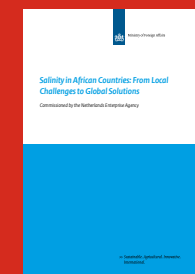
Nursery of cinchona trees (top), nursery of cinchona trees (middle), drying of various crops (bottom). Photos: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

## Salinity in African countries: from local challenges to global solutions



Salinisation of soil and groundwater is a major challenge for agriculture and a pervasive problem. Worsened by climate change, salinisation has profound impacts on the region's environment, economy and people. The report [Salinity in African countries](#) summarises the current state of scientific knowledge on groundwater and soil salinisation in sub-Saharan Africa. Further, a policy brief [Beyond borders: addressing African salinisation](#) responds to the 5 following, critical questions:

1. What have recent studies shown on salinisation of groundwater and soils in sub-Saharan countries?
2. Which regions are the most affected?
3. What are the current and future impacts of salinisation in the affected regions?
4. How do international cooperative initiatives address salinisation issues?
5. How are the rules and decision-making about salinity structured in this region?





Tea fields in Rwanda's highlands. Photo: © DIBcoop.

# Lessons from protecting Rwanda's tea industry



Author:  
**Ritah Atuhaire**

**Floods and droughts once threatened Rwanda's tea sector. An agroforestry initiative helped stabilise production and protect livelihoods. Despite disruptions, the project delivered strong results and offers lessons on resilience, targeting, and aligning environmental and economic incentives.**

### Farming under climate stress

In Rwanda's lush tea-growing highlands, an environmental crisis once threatened the backbone of a key agricultural value chain. Frequent floods and droughts were devastating tea plantations, with as little as 3 days of flooding causing irreversible crop die-back. Recovery was both slow and costly. Ard Lengkeek is the Director of the Dutch International Business Development Cooperative (DIBcoop) and an ecological business developer. He explains, "New tea plants take up to 8 years to reach full production. This places farmers and processors under immense strain."

### Agroforestry meets markets

To address this, a consortium of partners – DIBcoop, ARCOS Network, Cooperative ASSOPTHE, the National Agricultural Exports Development Board (NAEB), and Sorwathe Ltd – introduced an agroforestry-based solution. It links upstream land management with downstream tea production. By planting trees in erosion-prone areas, the project aims to

regulate water flow, reduce soil loss, and stabilise growing conditions. A 'payment for environmental services' model incentivised smallholder farmers to plant trees. Tea factories financed the effort to protect their supply chains. However, implementation brought significant challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted early progress, halting field activities and weakening coordination among partners. Rebuilding collaboration required time, trust, and sustained communication. Another major hurdle was targeting. Ard Lengkeek says, "Ensuring that tree planting focused on the most vulnerable landscapes, rather than being evenly, but less effectively, distributed, required close supervision."

### Lessons for implementation

These challenges revealed critical lessons. First, strong and continuous communication across diverse stakeholders, government agencies, private companies, and NGOs, is crucial to maintain alignment and momentum. Second, flexibility in project design is important. The ability to adapt to disruptions and refine targeting strategies can significantly shape outcomes. Third, aligning economic incentives with environmental goals proved vital in securing local participation and long-term sustainability.

Despite these obstacles, the project exceeded expectations. Ard Lengkeek states, "We planted over 1.5 million trees in just 2 years." It also created new income streams, particularly for women-led cooperatives managing nurseries. Ultimately, the initiative demonstrated that climate resilience is not just a technical solution, but a collaborative process. It depends on adaptability, shared incentives, and sustained partnerships. It also showed that public-private collaboration can deliver lasting environmental and economic impact. Today, efforts are underway to sustain the initiative through carbon credit financing, signalling a future where conservation continues to be financially rewarding.

### Links

- [RVO video: 4 Years of Agroforestry Impact](#)

## Rwanda Agroforestry interventions for uphill food and income security and downhill tea plantation protection

**Subsidy:** €942,000

**Consortium:** DIBcoop, ASSOPTHE, ARCOS Network, National Agricultural Export Development Board, and Sorwathe Ltd.



# After the gold rush: Reclaiming land from illegal mining

Illegal mining has left deep scars across parts of Ghana, destroying farmland and threatening rural livelihoods. In Dinkyeia, farmers saw their land become unsafe and unproductive. In response, a joint effort under SDGP is working to restore degraded land and help communities rebuild their lives.



Author:  
**Elizabeth Bonney**

Aerial view of the visited Galamsey site.  
Photo: ©Vice Versa Global.



## Ghana ASASE – Accessible Soils and Sustainable Environments

**Subsidy:** €1,170,000

**Consortium:** ETG Commodities B.V., Landmapp B.V., the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, and Tropenbos Ghana.

In Dinkyeia, a rural community in Ghana's Ashanti Region, illegal mining destroyed over 200 hectares of land. Deep pits scarred the ground, clearing forests. Biodiversity was lost, and the land could no longer support farming. As a result, fertile land was abandoned, leaving the community exposed to harmful chemicals from illegal mining.

### The impact of illegal mining

These are the realities faced by indigenous people in the region. Their main source of livelihood has declined due to illegal mining, known locally as galamsey. Many other communities across Ghana face the same challenge. For a country where cocoa supports over 800,000 households, the implications were quite severe. Recognising the need for action, SDGP in collaboration with Beyond Beans and its partners, launched the Accessible Soils and Sustainable Environments (ASASE) project. The project focuses on restoring degraded land and supporting farmers to rebuild their livelihoods.

### Threats and difficulties

Galamsey has become a major issue in Ghana. It is driven by poverty, unemployment, and limited awareness of its impact. The partners, recognising the complexity of this challenge, used a landscape approach through the ASASE project. It focused on improving the cocoa supply chain to improve sustainability and protect the environment. Kwadwo Mensah is the Agroforestry and Environment Project Manager. He says, "We train farmers in good agronomic practices and provide access to finance by establishing Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). These groups also serve as learning platforms on women's empowerment, gender mainstreaming, and child labour issues. In addition, we partner with Meridia, a Dutch company, to support land documentation for farmers to feel more secure on their land."

However, a critical threat to the intervention's viability persisted throughout implementation: the continued presence of illegal mining. It not only undermined the stability of farmers' livelihoods but also eroded the very foundation of the reorientation model. It became difficult to retrain farmers when the land could no longer support crops.

*"We could no longer farm to earn a living. It was a very difficult time."*



Kwabena Baah, the project supervisor on the left, Hannah Awuni field officer next to him, Elizabeth Bonney VVG journalist next to her, Richard Aidoo, reforestation participants at the far right. Photo: © Vice Versa Global.

### Life around mining sites

Kwadwo Mensah describes what the mining sites looked like when his team first assessed them, and how this affected farmers. He says, "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very bad, it was 11. The land had been dug into pits as deep as 6 meters, and some as wide as a football pitch. Streams were muddy, redirected, or blocked. The soil had been turned over, removing the fertile top layer and exposing hard layers that cannot support crops. In these conditions, it was not realistic to rely only on programmes that retrain farmers." He adds, "Some farmers choose to give their land for illegal mining. But for many others, it is not a real choice. There have been cases where farmers resist, only to wake up and find their farms destroyed. In such situations, they are forced to accept whatever small payment the miners offer. These miners can be dangerous, so farmers are often powerless to resist them."

Nana Opoku Kuma is the chief of Dinkyeia in the Adansi North District. He describes the situation in stark terms, "There were large pits on the land. As community leaders, we feared that children could fall into them. Our community also faced the threat of hunger because our farmlands had turned into mining sites. We could no longer farm to earn a living. It was a very difficult time, especially since cocoa farming is our main source of income."

Farmers who could still access their land faced high labour costs. Farmer Mohammed Hotor shares his experience, "I used to earn about \$1,450 from my harvest, and I spent less than \$360 to maintain my farm. However, since galamsey began, my costs have increased. I now spend more than half of my income, about \$900, on labour. The usual route to my farm has been destroyed, so workers charge higher fees, and I have no choice but to pay. Now I depend on the little money left. I also grow cassava near my home to support my family."



Samson Tofah, a cocoa farmer, on the right, with the field officer on the left. Photo: © Vice Versa Global.

### Restoring the land

The community faced serious challenges, including economic decline and weak local systems. In response, the project team developed a more complete approach. They began by restoring 16 hectares of land affected by illegal mining and introduced cover crops to improve soil nutrients. They also planted native timber trees and continued training programmes for farmers. Kwadwo explains, "During the rainy season, the site was very difficult to access, and it took us a week to move heavy equipment just half a kilometre. We had to fill the pits, create proper drainage, and stabilise the land. We planted cover crops and allowed them to grow for a year to help the soil recover and better support farming. We also found that galamsey had made the soil more vulnerable to heavy metals and harmful chemicals. So, we carefully selected timber and cover crops to help rehabilitate the land and gradually reduce the impact of heavy metals contamination over time, before returning the land to farming."

### Building community support

Initially, many farmers were unsure about the ASASE project. However, after several months of engagement, they began to understand and support the intervention. Kwabena Baah, the Agroforestry & Environment Project Supervisor at Beyond Beans, says, "We spent about 18 months speaking with community leaders and members. We explained why it was urgent to restore the damaged land. Many people did not understand why a cocoa trader would invest in land without owning it. So, we had to keep explaining and reassuring them about the long-term benefits of the project."

Once the community agreed, the technical team began planting trees on the restored land. They planted more than 1,100 trees per hectare, reaching a total of 17,000 trees across the community. One significant outcome of the ASASE project is the shift in how the community assumes responsibility. Kwabena explains that community members now serve as custodians of the restored land. They protect

it from illegal mining, regularly monitor the growth of the trees, and respond swiftly to fire outbreaks. Nana Opoku Kuma, the traditional chief, also confirmed that local leaders are collaborating with the police to ensure the safety of the restored areas. This shift, from doubt to active protection, shows how the community now sees the project: not as something imposed from outside, but as a necessary investment in their future and livelihoods.

### What changed for farmers

Reforestation is a major part of the project. ASASE also recognises that restoring the environment must go hand in hand with improving people's incomes. To support this, Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) were introduced. Through these groups, farmers and traders can save money and access low-interest loans to manage their finances better.

Mariamatu Ibrahim, a petty trader and beneficiary of the VSLA programme, says, "Before joining the VSLA, I did not manage my money well. Now, when I spend 1 cedi, I save 1.

*"Before joining the VSLA, I did not manage my money well. Now, when I spend one cedi, I save one. I have even started building my own house without depending on anyone."*

I have even started building my own house without depending on anyone." Lydia Anane also says that the VSLA programme has helped her become more financially independent. By managing her spending better, she is now able to save regularly and reinvest in her farm.

At the farm level, technical training has also brought strong results. Samson Tofah, a cocoa farmer with 26 years of experience, shared how his yields improved within 2 years of applying better farming practices. He says, "I used to harvest about 15 bags each year on 2.6,1 hectare of land. However, through Beyond Beans savings groups and personalised farm coaching, my productivity has improved. After pruning, using homemade organic fertiliser, and following good farming practices, I now harvest between 30 and 40 bags." Daniel Lavoe has also used support from the VSLA to grow his farm from 6 to 10 acres. This approach puts farmers at the centre of the system, helping to improve both the environment and their income.

### A model for the future

The ASASE project is not a complete solution to galamsey. Nonetheless, it offers a model that can be used in other areas to restore land damaged by illegal mining. If Ghana's cocoa sector is to thrive, models must transition from small projects to broader policies quickly. This is a call for individuals, partners, and organisations to support and expand this work across cocoa-growing communities, to protect the country's main cash crop and reduce illegal mining.

## Green Support to SDGP projects



IUCN and ReNature carried out the 'Green Support to SDGP projects' assignment. The assignment aimed to increase knowledge and identify opportunities within the SDGP portfolio to enhance its impact on climate and biodiversity.

Over a 2-year period, the assignment organised 6 webinars with action-oriented perspectives on climate change, biodiversity and nature-based solutions, highlighting specific examples from SDGP projects ([Reflections on webinar lessons learnt](#)). Furthermore, the assignment implemented 12 project add-ons.

These add-ons conducted short pilot studies, such as:

- observing the effects of upscaling agroforestry (India);
- analysing climate-smart techniques (mulching and flower strips) in potato demonstration sites (Uganda);
- implementing live hedges (Chad);
- implementing participatory reforestation strategies (Colombia);
- integrating medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) into agroforestry systems in model farms (India);
- accelerating agroforestry practices through a smallholder farmers model farm (the Philippines).

# Results

Sustainable and climate-resilient food production systems



**276,053 ha**

Farmland directly reached



**110,191 ha**

Farmland used more eco-friendly



**90,284 ha**

Farmland that agroecologically became more resilient to possible stresses and/or shocks

Cumulative data as of 2025 and max. 13 SDGP projects reporting on sustainable and climate-resilient food production systems.



Farmer inspecting crops in Bangladesh.  
Photo: © East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer.



## Sustainable Development Goal 16

# Peace, justice & strong institutions

SDG 16 works on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The SDGP programme worked in complex regions. Several projects operated in conflict areas or high-risk environments to improve food security and private sector development.

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>From conflict to crops: How banana farming is uniting Cotabato's tri-people</b><br><i>Philippines</i> | <b>85</b> |
| <b>The potato revolution: Cultivating Kurdistan's fields</b><br><i>Iraq</i>                              | <b>90</b> |
| <b>Rebuilding livelihoods after conflict</b><br><i>Iraq and South Sudan</i>                              | <b>92</b> |
| <b>Against the odds: How Niger's tiger nut project is transforming communities</b><br><i>Niger</i>       | <b>97</b> |
| <b>Resilience Limits in Niger's Peanut Sector</b><br><i>Niger</i>  | <b>98</b> |



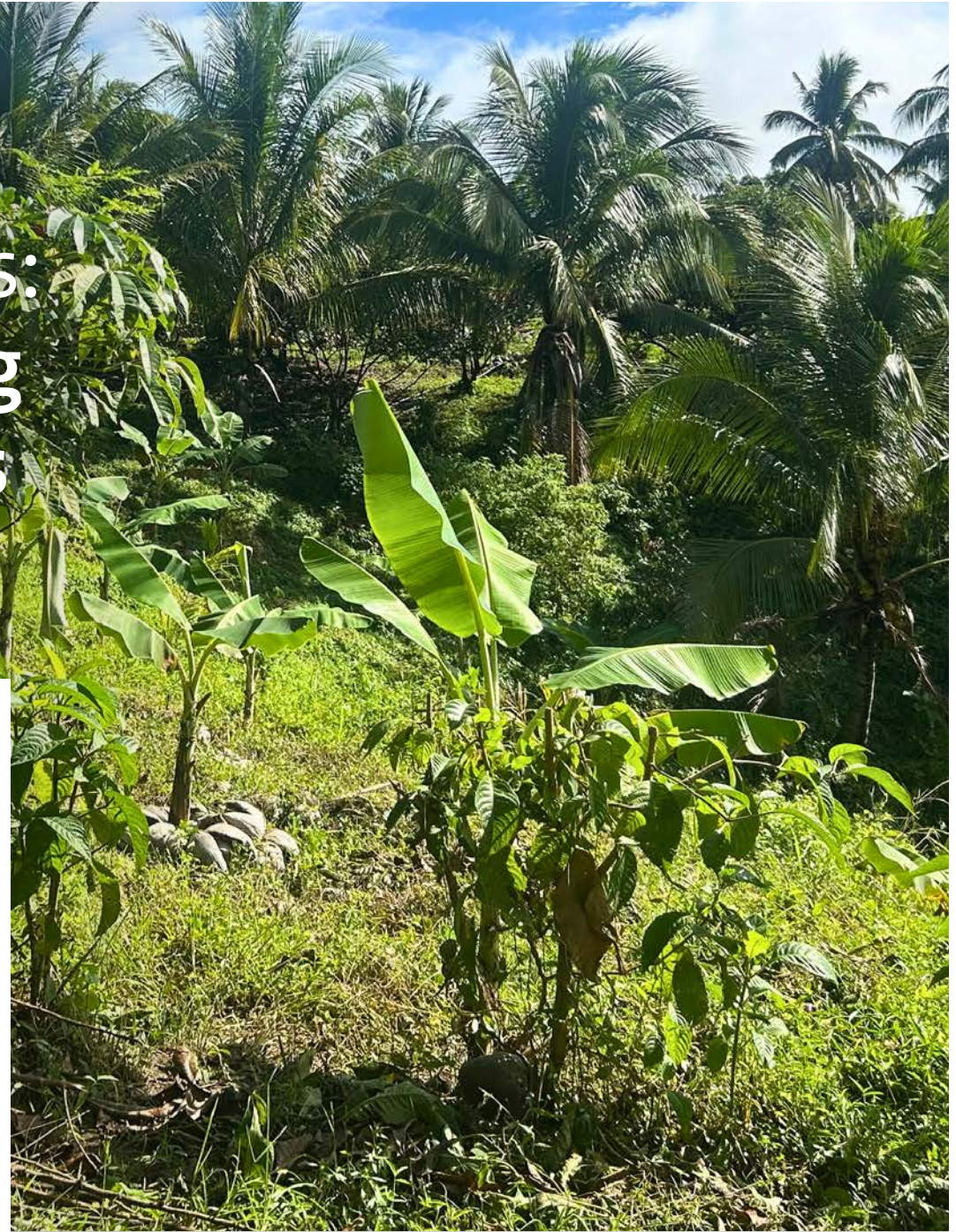
# From conflict to crops: How banana farming is uniting Cotabato's tri-people

In Cotabato, years of conflict once kept communities apart. Today, farmers from different backgrounds are working together. Through banana farming and shared practices, they are restoring their land, improving incomes, and rebuilding trust. What began as a livelihood project is now bringing the region's tri-people closer together.



Author:  
**Mariejo Ramos**

Model banana farm in Malapag,  
Carmen, North Cotabato,  
which serves as a learning hub  
for smallholder farmers.  
Photo: © Mariejo Ramos.



## Philippines Going Bananas - restoring livelihoods of conflict affected farmers in Cotabato

**Subsidy:** €765,825

**Consortium:** Stichting AidEnvironment, Treelife Organic, Advance Consulting, University of Southern Mindanao and municipal government of Carmen.

*"Because of COSFA, we, the tri-people of Carmen, have now bonded."*

On a vibrant hillside in the agricultural town of Carmen in North Cotabato, a modest bungalow stands under palm trees and banana leaves. Each month, smallholder farmers like Marlon Mangelin gather there. They form the Carmen Organic Slope Farmers Association (COSFA). It has more than 200 members, including Indigenous peoples (IPs), Moro Muslims, and Christian settlers. They work together to improve farming practices and protect their land and income.

### A community shaped by conflict

Marlon Mangelin, 43, is the president of the association. He is also a former Moro combatant and once believed this kind of cooperation was not possible. Before the group was formed, he says, members of the tri-people in his community avoided one another. "I was not used to interacting with Christians and IPs. I could not reach areas outside my home, especially areas affected by conflict. But because of COSFA, we, the tri-people of Carmen, have now bonded." Carmen has faced climate challenges and a long history of conflict. Today, farmers are turning to organic farming and working together, centred on bananas. Cotabato has fertile land fed by the Rio Grande de Mindanao, the second-largest river system in the Philippines. The province produces rice, coconuts, and corn, but it has also faced long-standing conflicts over land and self-determination.

In 1977, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was established to advocate for an autonomous Bangsamoro region separate from the central government. After decades of conflict, the group agreed to disarm, following a 2018 law that granted greater autonomy. Mangelin was decommissioned from the rebel group in 2020 and turned to planting corn, long considered a 'cash crop' in North Cotabato. But income from corn farming had dwindled as the soil in his small parcel of land dried up, which pushed him into debt.

### The organic banana project

He was later invited to a training on banana farming. This was part of a Netherlands-funded project called 'Going Bananas, restoring livelihoods of conflict-affected farmers in Cotabato.' The project brings together NGOs, businesses, and local institutions. These include AidEnvironment, TreeLife, the University of Southern Mindanao, and the municipal government of Carmen. The goal is to help farmers shift to organic bananas, increase income, and adopt climate-resilient practices. Mangelin says, "Farmers in our area were not organised then. But that is where it started. Until now, we are still committed to planting bananas."



Demo plot. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).



*"It was only then that they realised their practices were degrading the quality of their soil."*

#### **New methods for a stable income**

Since 2020, nearly 1,000 farmers in Carmen have learnt new farming methods, including proper planting, composting, and soil protection. Organic banana farming requires more labour than corn farming, but farmers say the results are better. Bananas can be harvested monthly, while corn takes about 4 months to mature.

But the benefits go beyond bananas. Without chemicals, the soil has improved. Farmers can now cultivate additional crops, such as coconuts and coffee, providing them with a more stable income. Mangelin adds, "Aside from earning more income now from bananas and other crops instead of just corn, we have also become closer. I am no longer ashamed to show myself in the community."

#### **Breaking old habits**

But it was not an easy road for the programme officers. Judilyn Española is a municipal agriculturist who trained farmers in the basics of banana planting. She said they had to correct long-held beliefs about farming and address harmful practices. "The farmers said it was only then that they realised their approaches in agriculture were wrong. The practices were degrading the quality of their soil." For example, she says farmers in Carmen were using herbicides and chemical fertilisers. These contributed to soil erosion and reduced the productivity of their farms.

Española, an expert in animal agriculture, mentioned she also had to learn why farmers became vulnerable to these harmful practices. They were often encouraged by promises of higher profits. Before teaching new methods, she had to enter post-conflict areas guarded by armed groups and gain their trust. She admits, "It was scary at first, but we made them understand we were only here to help them."

When Mangelin joined the project, he knew he had to show others how it could work. In 3 months, he designed his banana farm and planted new seedlings from the municipal agriculture department. It takes an average of 12 to 18 months for cardava banana plants to produce fruit suitable for harvest.

#### **The A-frame concept**

At first, Melbert Buenaflor, 56, a member of the Arumanen Manobo tribe, thought there was nothing special about planting bananas. He said he was used to transferring from farm to farm for sustenance and had used synthetic fertilisers to grow traditional crops. He says, "Before, my philosophy was that planting bananas is too simple. However, I learnt there must be a proper plan and design for the soil." He says he learnt the 'A-frame' concept in farming, a simple way to mark contour lines so crops are planted across slopes instead of up and down.

This method enhances productivity on upland banana farms, essential for impoverished farmers like Buenaflor, who cultivates around a hectare of land. He adds, "Now, while waiting for my bananas to grow, I can also invest in mid-term to long-term crops, like cocoa, to boost my income."

#### **New sources of income**

Farmers like Buenaflor earn between 1,500 and 3,500 pesos (\$25 to \$60) each month from bananas. Even their wives and other women farmers in Carmen play crucial roles within the association. Jocelyn Fordan, 52, also a COSFA member, processes bananas into chips, wine, and polvoron, which

Checking on seedlings. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO)

they sell or use at home. She says, "Even those who cannot plant bananas can still earn income through processing, which is also an added skill for us, women." The association hopes to establish a processing centre to expand beyond local markets.

When foreign funding for Going Bananas ended, the municipal government decided to support its next phase, which involves promoting banana processing. Ma Lourdes Salac is the municipal agriculturist of Carmen. She says, "Farmers from different *barangays* (villages) can sell their bananas to afford rice or support their children's schooling. Bananas can also be a healthy food option for them."

Moises Arendain is the municipal administrator of Carmen. He was the mayor when the Going Bananas project started. He says the project was very suitable for the town, which produces rice and has upland areas for other crops. He explains, "It is now a valuable crop for our farmers. Compared to other crops, bananas are always there, and even small families can plant anywhere fit for growing bananas."

#### Healthier land, healthier lives

Barefoot and excited, Lucia Manpandig Tumbaga leads visitors to her banana farm in Sitio Ipil-ipil, Carmen. A member of the Arumanen Manobo tribe, she says with a smile, "I have a surprise to show you." Since joining the project, she has replaced chemical fertilisers with organic compost. This supports her banana trees, along with avocados and other crops. Pointing at the soil where her banana trees stand, she says proudly, "These are all organic, without chemicals that can harm our crops and our health."

She says she was convinced that organic banana farming could be her little contribution to reversing soil damage in her community. "I want my neighbours to see my farm as an example and try it themselves so we can avoid flooding and damage to our environment." Now 65, she said she wants

her grandchildren to inherit a healthy land. She says the earthworms and butterflies that have recently returned to her farm are an indication that her soil is slowly recovering.

The rise of corn farming as a cash crop increased demand for more land. The municipal agriculture office stated that this resulted in the cutting down of trees and the flattening of hills. This practice depleted the soil's nutrients, forcing farmers to use chemical fertilisers that dry up their lands. Climate change has led to more frequent droughts and stronger typhoons, both of which contribute to increased soil erosion.

*"Even those who cannot plant bananas can still earn income through processing."*



Farmers tend to young banana plants on a sloping organic farm in Carmen, North Cotabato, where members of a local farmers' association use coconut husks to retain soil moisture and prevent erosion. Photo: © Mariejo Ramos.



*"I want my neighbours to see my farm as an example and try it themselves so we can avoid flooding and damage to our environment."*



### Improving soil management

Rezin Cabantug is a researcher at the University of Southern Mindanao. He says most smallholder farmers in Carmen have less than 2 hectares of land. This is often their main source of income. They are more familiar with monocropping. Cabantug's 5-year research with USM found that Carmen experiences soil loss of at least 90 tonnes per hectare per year. He says, "That soil loss is long-term. Their soil also becomes rocky." They also found that farmers tend to plant crops that seem valuable at the time. However, these crops may be less profitable in the future, especially when they attract diseases.

The project also promotes simple farming techniques to protect the land. These include planting trees for shade, growing crops year-round, and using contour lines to prevent soil erosion. Cabantug answers the following question: "Why organic agriculture? Because we wanted to improve the soil quality." Española says many people think organic farming is very difficult. She says, "That is a misconception." She explains that organic farming enhances soil health, promotes biodiversity, and benefits both the land and its people.

### A sustainable future

Farmers like Mangelin are promoting a different kind of change in Cotabato. He teaches his 3 children how to farm and hopes to support their education with income from bananas. He says, "5 to 10 years from now, I want the tri-people of Carmen to stay united and grow our association into a full business, both locally and abroad. We may not be rich by then, but we can support our families and live sustainably."

Model banana farm in Malapag, Carmen, North Cotabato (top), Marlon Mangelin, president of the Carmen Organic Slope Farmers Association, works with other Moro, indigenous Lumad, and Christian farmers in his community (bottom left) and harvested bananas (bottom right). Photo: © Mariejo Ramos (top and bottom left), Netherlands Enterprise Agency (bottom right).



Crop inspection. Photo: © CABI.

# The potato revolution: Cultivating Kurdistan's fields



Author:  
**Nylah Shah**

**In Iraq's Kurdistan region, potato farming was once fragmented and low-value. Just over a decade ago, yearly production was only 10,000 tonnes. Professor Rafail Toma, a plant tissue culture specialist at the University of Duhok, saw an opportunity to change that. By linking farmers to seeds, storage, and processing, the project shows how agriculture can drive industrial growth.**

**Value chain transformation**

In 2019, Rafail proposed a systematic, value chain-based approach to modernise the sector. He says, "Value chain is the best way to solve the problems of potato production in the Kurdistan region. Through it, you can meet all actors together and make everything possible." His vision became the Value Chain Development for Potato Production and Processing project.

The initiative has worked with over 8,000 farmers. It provides training in modern cultivation and improved post-harvest management. Farmers also access high-quality Dutch seed varieties from HZPC Holland B.V. Cold storage

facilities and a French fries factory, developed by Kurdistan Holland, now ensure reliable markets and help reduce post-harvest losses. Rafail adds, "Some potatoes are now exported to Gulf countries. This is the first time the Kurdistan region has exported potatoes abroad."

**Jobs and inclusion**

The project also delivers social benefits as it creates jobs for young agricultural engineers and empowers women in sorting and farm management. It also promotes sustainable practices through integrated pest management and climate-adaptive planting. The University of Duhok connected research and practice through 11 workshops, engaging a total of 725 participants.

From a development perspective, the project offers a crucial lesson. As Rafail explains, collaboration can be highly effective. This is especially true when academic institutions, development partners and private sector actors work together.

**Iraq**  
**Value chain development**

**Subsidy:** €2,931,450

**Consortium:** Stichting CABI Bioscience Nederland, CAB International (CABI), HZPC Holland B.V., Kurdistan Holland, General Directorate of Agricultural Duhok, and the University of Duhok.

*"Kurdistan's potato sector is no longer just growing crops, it is growing an economy."*

*"The project showed the importance of adapting technologies to local conditions through continuous learning and exchange."*

#### Power of collaboration

He explains, "Through our partnership, we learnt that strengthening the potato value chain requires more than research. It also requires practical engagement with farmers, seed producers and markets. The project showed the importance of adapting technologies to local conditions through continuous learning and exchange."

Overall, it was a valuable experience, Rafail adds. It strengthened farmers' ability to work in collaborative, impact-focused agricultural development initiatives in their country.

#### Scaling future potential

The project is being carried out by a consortium of multiple partners. They include Stichting CABI Bioscience Nederland, CAB International, HZPC Holland B.V., and Kurdistan Holland. Other partners include the General Directorate of Agriculture Duhok and the University of Duhok. The project represents a new model for agricultural modernisation.

Looking ahead, Rafail hopes to expand the value chain approach to other crops such as wheat and apples. With systematic farming, modern processing and global exports, Kurdistan's potato sector is no longer just growing crops, it is growing an economy.



Visit at potato farm and inspection (top) and participation in training session (bottom left). Photo: © CABI.



# Rebuilding livelihoods after conflict

In conflict-affected regions, rebuilding livelihoods is often the first step towards stability. When communities return home, access to income, land, and markets helps reduce poverty and prevent renewed conflict.

Projects in Iraq and South Sudan show how partnerships can support recovery. Both initiatives aim to restore livelihoods and market access. One focuses on potato farming, while the other supports coffee production.



Author:  
**Moraa Obiria**

Potato field visitation | Iraq (top), farmers sorting coffee | South Sudan (bottom).  
Photo: © Cordaid, Equatorial Teak Company (ETC).

## Iraq Reviving potato farming in southern Iraq

**Subsidy:** €1,000,000

**Consortium:** Stichting ZOA, Stichting Cordaid, Ataa Al Khaleej, Interseed and Al Khiamiat.

**In the aftermath of conflict, communities in southern Iraq have faced enormous challenges in rebuilding their lives and livelihoods. ZOA International, an organisation focused on relief and recovery, implemented the Advanced Agriculture for Sustainable Potato Cropping project.**

### Improving livelihoods

The project aimed to revitalise industrial potato farming and support 400 smallholder farmers to achieve economic stability. John Panga implemented the project in Iraq before the organisation exited the country. He explains, "The focus was not trade, but improving livelihoods." Industrial potato farming offered a quick path to income. This was important for farmers returning after the conflict.

The project officially began in January 2021 and concluded in July 2023. It trained farmers in climate-smart, profitable potato production techniques, combining practical field training with market linkage strategies. Farmers were engaged through a discussion group model, allowing best practices to spread throughout local communities. Contract farming arrangements ensured that farmers had reliable buyers for their produce, creating a secure economic environment.

Dr Panga says, "The methodology for selecting farmers was rigorous and based on socio-economic vulnerability. Our monitoring and evaluation team conducted an assessment, identifying farmers with limited access to quality agricultural inputs, vulnerability to market shocks, and willingness to participate in farmer groups and training. Genuine interest in sustainable agricultural practices was an essential criterion for inclusion."

The project emphasised hands-on training and the provision of resources, including seed potatoes, manure, soil conditioners, and modern irrigation systems. Farmers used to rely on flood irrigation, resulting in water wastage. The project introduced drip irrigation, which improved efficiency and yields. Farmers were linked to a local factory that bought their produce. Input costs were deducted after harvest.

### Empowering model

"This model was highly empowering because farmers had a guaranteed market before planting. It reduced risks and encouraged them to adopt new methods." Among the 400 farmers, 225 were identified as model farmers who demonstrated the technology and mentored others. Their potato yields doubled compared to previous productions. This led to higher household incomes and indirectly improved women's well-being at home.

Cultural norms shaped considerations of gender equality. Although women did not serve as primary farmers, some young women gained temporary employment on demonstration farms. They engaged in activities such as weeding and intercultural operations. Dr Panga stresses that in southern Iraq, farming is male-dominated due to logistical constraints and cultural practices. However, the project ensured women could access income-generating roles on the farms, indirectly improving household welfare.

### Challenges and changes

The project also faced several challenges. COVID-19 disruptions affected implementation, while global trade interruptions delayed plans for international market linkages. This forced ZOA to pivot towards local partnerships. Input prices also increased significantly, and legal restrictions complicated the registration of seed varieties. Additionally, market instability also posed risks to farmers' income. Dr Panga explains, "Despite these challenges, the project adapted effectively. We identified local partners who could supply high-quality seeds and buy back the production."

*"The focus was not trade, but improving livelihoods."*

Beyond economic gains, the initiative also fostered mindset changes among farmers, encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices such as biofertilisers and biopesticides. He continues, "Some farmers initially doubted that crops could thrive without flood irrigation, but practical field demonstrations convinced them. Extension services and hands-on learning proved critical for the adoption of modern methods." On sustainability, Dr Panga notes that NGOs do not remain in countries indefinitely. "Our role is to inspire, enable and empower communities. By training model farmers and demonstrating successful techniques, we created a replicable model for Iraqi agriculture. The government now has the mandate and proof to scale these practices further."

## South Sudan Excelling in Excelsa Providing jobs and livelihoods for youth and women through coffee

**Subsidy:** €1,501,099

**Consortium:** Stichting Cordaid, Equatoria Teak Company Ltd. (ETC), Hummingbird Action for Peace and Development (HAPD) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).



Farmer checking coffee plant health. Photo: © Equatoria Teak Company (ETC).

In South Sudan, another SDGP-supported project is helping smallholder farmers rebuild their livelihoods through coffee cultivation. The Excelling in Excelsa initiative is implemented in partnership with the local private Equatorial Teak Company (ETC), the NGO Hummingbird Action for Peace and Development, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, and the international NGO Cordaid. Through this initiative, more than 1,000 farmers in Nzara and Yambio counties have been connected to international coffee markets.

### Supporting farmers to grow coffee

Coffee production had historically been common in the region, but years of conflict left the sector largely dormant. Ian Paterson, Managing Director at ETC, says the project was designed to stabilise communities and improve livelihoods. He says, "We are focusing on enabling farmers to earn a stable income. This will help reduce the risk of conflict and ensure children can attend school and families can feed themselves."

The project followed extensive coffee trials that began in 2018, testing Arabica, R11, Robusta and Excelsa varieties. This was to determine which best suited the climate, local farming conditions, and international market demand. Paterson says, "Excelsa, a variety not widely known in South Sudan, proved to be an origin coffee with unique qualities."

According to Jackson Mateng'e, a coffee expert at ETC, participation exceeded expectations. By mid-project, more than 1,700, with a gender composition of 40% women and 60% men, were involved. Mateng'e explains that many women acquired land through local chiefs, with several women's groups directly engaging in coffee cultivation.

### Coffee as a peacebuilding tool

By 2022, coffee trees planted in 2020 had begun to mature, offering the first economic gains for farmers. Full production is expected around 2027. Mateng'e adds

*"We are focusing on enabling farmers to earn a stable income. This will help reduce the risk of conflict and ensure children can attend school and families can feed themselves."*

that the project deliberately positioned coffee not just as an economic activity but as a peacebuilding tool. He says, "The project desired to improve the livelihood and income of the communities in the 2 counties of South Sudan. Several rural development projects existed, but they focused on aid. This initiative focused on building a sustainable coffee business for smallholders, emphasising support for women and youth."

He notes that an important lesson from public-private partnerships is that trust is built through long-term engagement. He says, "ETC has been treating the project as a peacebuilding tool, not merely a commercial endeavour. Peace, stability and development will only prevail if people are engaged in income-generating projects such as sustainable agriculture. There will be fewer conflicts because initiatives that stabilise the rural economy are directly linked to peace." The King of Azande, His Royal

Majesty Atoroba Peni Rikito, made a notable remark to the leadership of ETC: "ETC planted peace, not just coffee." This reflects how the project is fostering stability alongside livelihoods.

*"ETC planted peace,  
not just coffee."*

### Longer partnerships

On project timelines, Mateng'e notes that a longer-term project would have been better for meaningful impact in coffee farming. He says, "Coffee projects need long-term funding and monitoring to succeed. It takes at least 5 years before farmers earn a stable income. A longer project period would help set up processing, marketing, and clear agreements between farmers and buyers on price and quality."

On partnerships, he highlights that successful public-private partnerships depend on clearly defined roles among actors. He says, "ETC worked with Cordaid as the lead partner. Hummingbird supported community mobilisation, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation helped identify farmer groups." Mateng'e explains how the project exceeded its initial target of 1,000 farmers. "We reached our target in the first year of planting in 2022 due to strong preparation and high farmer interest. Extension workers supported mobilisation, and seedlings were available at the ETC nursery."

### Women owning land

On land ownership, he explains that customary and formal systems support women's access. He says, "Women in Nzara and Yambio counties can inherit, own, or access land through family, spouses, or community land managed by chiefs."



Processing of coffee (top), sorting of coffee harvest (bottom left) and coffee seedling nursery (bottom right). Photo: © Equatorial Teak Company (ETC).

Once land is allocated, it is not easily taken back and can be passed on to family members. Chiefs issue certificates that can later become title deeds."

Dieneke de Groot is the monitoring and evaluation officer at Cordaid. She highlights the project's social impact. She adds, "Women owning land and taking part in the coffee value chain is unique in this part of South Sudan. We have 1,564 smallholder farmers, including 666 women and 898 men. Some women now hold land certificates for their coffee farms."

### Scaling coffee production

Alex Kubasu is the Chief Finance Officer at ETC. He says, "Coffee takes about 5 years to reach full production. For now, farmers harvest small amounts because trees start producing after about 3 years. Most farmers are expected to have larger harvests by 2027. That is when the full economic benefits will become clear."

"Full production is expected to reach 500 tonnes once all outgrower plots mature", he says. Current production is estimated at around 400 tonnes, supported by ETC's

mature farms. Seedling distribution and land preparation continue to support growth. He notes that introducing coffee as a cash crop enabled farmers to earn income while still ensuring food production. Extension workers trained farmers on land preparation, planting, and post-harvest handling. Farmers also learnt basic accounting to manage their income, without compromising household food security.

A key element of the project was the use of outgrower contracts, which helped structure relationships between farmers and ETC. These agreements clarified roles and responsibilities, defined coffee quality standards, and established price-setting mechanisms, contributing to greater transparency in farmer-firm relationships. Contracts were signed by the direct beneficiary, a family witness, and the local chief, helping to safeguard land-use claims, particularly for women and youth.

#### Shared lessons from fragile contexts

Despite their differences, the projects in Iraq and South Sudan share several lessons about rebuilding livelihoods in fragile environments. Both rely on public-private partnerships, linking farmers to reliable markets while providing training and technical support. They also emphasise local ownership, ensuring farmers gain the skills and networks needed to sustain the initiatives long after external partners exit.

An important cross-cutting lesson, reinforced by Mateng'e's experience, is that in conflict-sensitive environments, economic interventions must double as peacebuilding strategies, with trust built gradually through inclusive



Farmer watering coffee seedlings. Photo: © Equatorial Teak Company (ETC).

participation, transparency and long-term commitment. At the same time, each project reflects its unique context. In Iraq, rapid-cycle potato farming offered immediate income for returning farmers. In South Sudan, reviving coffee production is a longer-term investment aimed at rebuilding an entire industry.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate how targeted agricultural investments can help conflict-affected communities move beyond recovery towards sustainable economic growth.

*"Women owning land and taking part in the coffee value chain is unique in this part of South Sudan."*

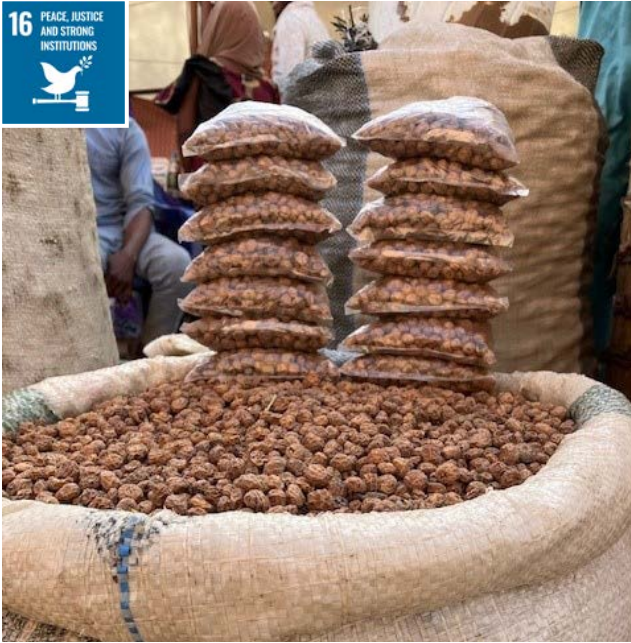
## Capacity development in PPPs



Capacity development: "The process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time". How is this integrated in PPPs?

The report provides insight into capacity development as practised by PPPs with the objective of identifying inspiring examples, and ways to improve. In the review, 3 levels were identified: individual, organisational and institutional.

Most projects prioritised individual-level training for farmers and the development of farmer trainers, while efforts to strengthen producer organisations received moderate support. Support for other supply chain organisations was minimal, and institutional-level initiatives, such as policy lobbying and the creation of multi-stakeholder associations, received the least expenditure.



Bag of tiger nuts. Photo: © Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

# Against the odds: How Niger’s tiger nut project is transforming communities



Author:  
**Ritah Atuhaire**

**In Niger, a tiger nut project faced delays caused by political instability. Yet it continued to evolve. By combining local knowledge with added value, it demonstrates how community-driven approaches can maintain progress under difficult conditions.**

### Adapting to disruption

The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), under the SDG Partnership facility, funded the Chain Booster Niger project. During its implementation, political instability created serious challenges. Trade routes were disrupted, slowing the movement of goods and services.

Machinery ordered from Spain, expected within 3 months, took more than a year to arrive. The delay increased costs and slowed construction, forcing the partnership to revise timelines and adapt. The experience highlighted an important lesson: development projects must be designed with flexibility to withstand unexpected shocks.

### Building local value chains

The project aimed to train 2,000 producers, empower women and youth, improve production quality, and establish Niger’s first tiger nut milk factory. By processing tiger nuts locally instead of exporting them raw, it sought to create jobs. It was also to boost farmer incomes, reduce dependence on imported milk, and provide a lactose-free alternative rich in fibre and essential minerals.

To achieve this, the initiative brought together essential partners: Partners for Innovation Niger, Agri Focus Niger for farmers’ training, Triple Trade to support factory development, and Enitrap, a long-time exporter with extensive experience in the tiger nut trade. Together, they began reshaping the value chain from farm to factory.

### Value local expertise

Makia Aouami Gazibo, Director of Partners for Innovation Niger and lead of this Public-Private Partnership, highlights another essential lesson from implementation. The project team realised that producers already possessed deep knowledge of tiger nut cultivation, seed selection, and processing skills refined over generations. Rather than replacing this expertise, the project chose to build on it. That shift became one of the most powerful lessons from the project: innovation works best when it respects and strengthens local knowledge. This approach also shaped practical changes in practice, including training through demonstration fields on the benefits of compost and reduced reliance on chemical fertilisers.

Today, tiger nuts, once overlooked, are receiving national attention in Niger. This development illustrates how global partnerships, grounded in community wisdom, can drive transformation from the grassroots level.

## Niger Chain booster souchet

**Subsidy:** €1,475,177

**Consortium:** Triple-Trade, Partners for Innovation, Niger sarl, ENITRAP Unité Transformation Lait Souchet and AgriFocus Niger.



Peanuts. Photo: © Getty Images.

## Niger Arachide chain booster

**Subsidy:** €1,500,000

**Consortium:** Triple Trade, a consultancy firm in agri-business, served as the lead partner. AINOMA acted as the local seed producer. STA acted as the food processor, producing nutrient-rich peanut paste for humanitarian agencies. INRAN, a government research institute, contributed to improved seed varieties. APGR led farmer training efforts.

# Resilience Limits in Niger's Peanut Sector



Author:  
**Ritah Atuhaire**

**In Niger, a military coup interrupted a promising effort to transform the peanut value chain. The sudden political upheaval triggered economic isolation, disrupted financial systems and forced international donors to withdraw. This unravelled the foundations on which the project depended.**

### Project aims and approach

Before the crisis, an SDGP initiative led by Triple Trade had set out to tackle a long-standing challenge in the sector: Aflatoxin, a toxic fungus that contaminates poorly handled peanuts and blocks access to lucrative export markets. With a strong public-private partnership and multi-stakeholder cooperation in the peanut value chain, the project aimed to improve crop quality, strengthen market links, train farmers and boost their incomes.

### Achievements before the crisis

The project showed promise, exceeding training targets: the project team trained over 10,000 farmers in proper ways to reduce aflatoxin, improve quality harvests, and use drying and storage techniques to prevent contamination. The project also established decentralised collection and selling centres, processing peanuts under controlled conditions. "Although we planned 5 centres, we only completed 3 due to funding constraints," explains Kees van Til, project coordinator and head of Triple Trade, the project lead. At the same time, we tried to connect farmers to buyers who were willing to pay higher prices for aflatoxin-free peanuts.

### Impact of the coup and setbacks

But beyond these achievements, a harsher reality set in. A military coup disrupted the project's momentum. Financial systems tightened and banks were hesitant to issue loans. The CCDs, which were critical to the model, struggled to operate without working capital to buy farmers' produce. "The entire economic environment changed," Kees explained. "We delivered on our activities, but external conditions limited the impact."

### Adapting to new realities

Partners also felt the pressure. With limited market activity, their motivation dropped. Even STA, a major processor, faced production problems due to export restrictions and had to stop its activities. In response, the project changed direction. Instead of relying on large-scale buyers, it began looking for smaller local buyers of shelled peanuts, such as peanut oil producers. This flexible strategy is an attempt to keep the value chain alive within Niger's difficult economy.

### Lessons learnt and recommendations

Despite the setbacks, the project offers important lessons. The team learnt that flexibility is essential in changing situations, but also that resilience depends greatly on the strength of private sector partners. Ideally, private partners should be able to withstand economic setbacks or crises. Yet, such companies are rare in fragile situations.

In this project, the 2 private partners seemed too reliant on external funding and development programmes, which limited their ability to continue when conditions worsened. The need for flexible funding partners who understand changing practical realities, therefore, remains crucial. Kees also points out the importance of working with a development-driven community. "Even with government representatives, you need to ensure they are involved for the right reasons," he concludes.

## Colofon

This is a publication by  
The Netherlands Enterprise Agency  
on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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