



WILMAT DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Willingness Matters

COMMUNITY INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUNG FEMALE FARMERS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS IN IBULANKU AND NAKALAMA SUB-COUNTIES.

2024



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FOREWORD



In the heartlands of Uganda where the soil whispers stories of resilience and promise, there exists a dynamic force shaping the future of agriculture, the young female farmers. Their hands, weathered by the toil of the land, carry within them the seeds of innovation, sustainability and inclusivity. They are the custodians of tradition and the architects of change, balancing tradition with transformation in the pursuit of a brighter tomorrow.

As we stand at the crossroads of agricultural development, it is imperative that we heed the voices of these young female farmers, for they hold the keys to unlocking the full potential of Uganda's agricultural sector. Their aspirations, dreams and challenges serve as signposts guiding us towards a future characterized by gender equality, economic empowerment and environmental stewardship.

In the following pages, you will embark on a journey of discovery, delving into the rich tapestry of experiences, visions, and aspirations of young female farmers in Ibulanku and Nakalama sub-counties. With support from The Hunger Project Uganda, we embarked on conducting informal conversations and open dialogues with a total of 60 young female farmers as their voices echo with determination, resilience and hope, offering profound insights into the realities of farming life and the pathways to sustainable agricultural development.

This document serves not only as a testament to the strength and spirit of young female farmers but also as a call to action for policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders across Uganda. It is a rallying cry for collective action, collaboration and solidarity in support of women's empowerment, youth engagement and inclusive growth in the agricultural sector.

Together, let us harness the potential of young female farmers as agents of change, innovation, and progress. Let us work hand in hand to cultivate a future where every woman, every farmer and every community has the opportunity to thrive and flourish. The journey ahead may be challenging, but with determination, dedication, and unity, we can sow the seeds of a brighter, more inclusive future for all.

Warm regards,

Matte Jockas
Executive Director

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS



Agriculture remains the backbone of Uganda's economy. UBOS estimates place between 68% of Uganda's working population in agricultural employment, with the sector contributing approximately 26.5% of GDP and 36% of export earnings in FY 2024/25, though earlier UBOS survey rounds put the employment share closer to 68.1% of the working population. Despite this scale, productivity remains constrained by fragmented smallholder production, limited use of fertilizer and quality seed, weak irrigation infrastructure and poor post-harvest handling, all of which leave output vulnerable to climatic shocks and pest pressure.

Women anchor much of this labor force yet remain structurally under-resourced. National survey data show 88% of female adults in farming households engaged in agriculture compared to 78% of their male counterparts, even as women make up more than half the agricultural workforce. This disparity in participation has not translated into control over productive assets: only 31% of women in agricultural households own or hold rights over the land they cultivate, compared to 49% of men. Without secure land rights, women struggle to use land as collateral for credit, to access extension services on equal terms or to make independent investment decisions on the plots they farm a gap the Economic Policy Research Centre identifies as a direct driver of persistent food insecurity and constrained household welfare.

Youth continue to face a related but distinct set of barriers. At the national level, overall unemployment stands at 12.4% while youth unemployment reached 16.1% in 2024 and the 2024 Census found 5.2 million youth aged 18–30 (42%) neither employed nor in education or training. The burden falls disproportionately on young women: female youth unemployment stood at 18.7% against 13.4% for males, and nearly half of unemployed youth in this bracket had been searching for work or trying to start a business for over a year. Of those who do find work, roughly 90% are absorbed into the informal sector and about a third work in agriculture, forestry or fishing, sectors many young people still perceive as low-return and low-status rather than viable enterprise. Research from the Youth Forward Initiative reinforces this: young women face compounding barriers in agribusiness rooted in discriminatory gender norms that restrict their access to land, labour, equipment and finance alongside unpaid care burdens and exclusion from leadership and decision-making spaces.

The Busoga Context

These national patterns are sharper in Busoga as the sub-region encompassing eleven districts including Jinja, Iganga, Bugweri, Kamuli, Mayuge, Bugiri and Namutumba with a 2024 census population of over 4.3 million is agriculturally rich but economically distressed. Recent UBOS wealth analysis places district-level poverty rates across Busoga between 29.2% and 42.1% well above the national average despite favourable rainfall, fertile soils and proximity to the Kampala market.

Youth unemployment in the sub-region has been recorded as high as 43.5%, a figure that has drawn sustained donor and government attention. Programmes such as Heifer International's Stimulating Agribusiness for Youth Employment (SAYE) initiative illustrate both the scale of need and the gendered targeting now considered necessary: the project aims to reach 250,000 disadvantaged youth aged 16–35 in Busoga, with women accounting for 70% of the intended beneficiaries and youth with disabilities for 3%, working across poultry, horticulture, oilseed, dairy and beef value chains. Parallel efforts including Swisscontact's Green and Decent Jobs for Youth project in Jinja's Namagere sub-county and the government-backed GROW initiative targeting women entrepreneurs, point to growing recognition that youth and women's agricultural engagement in Busoga is both a development priority and an underexploited opportunity.

Even so, these interventions remain partial in reach and geographic scope as much of Busoga's youth and female farming population particularly in less-visited sub-counties still farms largely for subsistence with limited access to organized markets, modern inputs, extension services or start-up finance. Existing farmer organization data for the sub-region shows a heavy concentration of general community-based and women's groups relative to youth-specific structures, suggesting young people and young women in particular, remain comparatively under-organized as a constituency within the sector.



It is against this backdrop that Wilmat Development Foundation (WDF) and Partners recognize the pivotal role young female farmers can play in building sustainable and inclusive local food systems. To ground this vision in evidence rather than assumption, it was proposed that baseline information be collected directly from young female farmers in Ibulanku and Nakalama sub-counties capturing their current productive constraints, access to land and finance, market linkages and aspirations for agricultural livelihoods. Findings from this assessment will inform the design of a program built on youth-led solutions, intended to translate the sub-region's agricultural potential into sustainable inclusive local food systems anchored in the leadership of its young women.



METHODOLOGY

Data collection and Target Participants:

Data was collected through the use of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), photography, Videography and voice recording with a total of 60 participants in the demographic of young female youth female farmers 18-24 years of age (15 participants) and older youth female farmers aged 25-30 years of age (15 participants) along with 2 extension service workers attached to each sub-county. In total, 60 young female farmers participated in the discussions who were selected in the sub-counties of Ibulanku (Bugweri District) and Nakalama (Iganga District) respectively. To guide the Focus Group Discussions, we utilized the strategic guiding questions to probe the discussions through participatory approaches to enable everyone's voice to be heard during the meetings.

DATA ANALYSIS

Upon completion of informal focus group discussions from the sub-counties of Nakalama and Ibulanku, the voices collected (recorded) were stored in a central place and later transcribed to enable analysis. Data collected was analysed through use of SPSS and Transcriber software which enabled the report writing.



GENERAL OBJECTIVES:

The main objective of this initiative aimed at guiding the development of a joint (Community inspired) project proposal towards building sustainable and inclusive local food systems driven by youth-led solutions.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

The conversations will aim at:

- 01 Understanding the priorities and challenges of young female farmers in the agricultural sector in Ibulanku and Nakalama sub-counties.
- 02 Identifying interventions that empower young female farmers to overcome challenges and contribute to sustainable food systems through youth-led solutions.

A person wearing a blue jacket, dark pants, and a red cap is standing in a field of tall grass. They are holding a large, rectangular yellow block above their head with both hands. In the background, there are trees and a clear sky. A yellow tarp is on the ground to the left, and a green tarp is to the right of the person.

PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT FINDINGS



The voices collected were analysed by the experienced Monitoring and Evaluation officer at Wilmot Development Foundation through voice transcribing and later to consolidation of the report findings in topics following the guiding questions format. This section contains various community voices of the young female farmers from the informal Focus Group Discussions that were conducted in Nakalama Sub-County and Ibulanku Sub-county to understand the needs and aspirations in line with sustainable agricultural practices and the involvement of youth female farmers.

a) COMMUNITY INSPIRATION TO SUSTAINABLE FARMING

During the informal focus group discussions that were conducted in Nakalama sub-county, Iganga district and Ibulanku Subcounty respectively expressed their inspirations to farming due to the overwhelming need to produce enough food for their families, sale the surplus from their harvests and better their lives.

“What inspired me to practise farming is to be able to provide food for my family. I don’t buy food but rather provide for myself and be able to sale some for some money for me to get basic needs while at home as a young mother.”

Mutesi Esther, Young Female Farmer, Bukona village, Iganga

*“My inspiration was about me getting what to feed my children, afford basic needs through selling some for money through agriculture.” - **Nangobi Fatuma, Young Female Farmer, Bukongoka village, Iganga***

*“I wanted to have enough food at home, sale some for money, practice goat rearing and also poultry to earn extra cash to pay school fees for my children and afford basic needs at home.” - **Betty N, Young Female Farmer, Bukona village***

*“Before I used not to practice farming, but when I started buying food from the shop say posho, I realized it was expensive as a kilo was being bought at UGX 3500 which pushed me to grow my own maize and add value to it. What also inspired me to start livestock farming say poultry, I am able to earn extra money to take care of my needs with ease.” - **Sarah Mutesi, Young Female Farmer, Bukongoka Village, Iganga***

*“What inspired me to farming is that food bought from shops does not feed the family forever hence the need to start growing my own food and be able to dodge hunger at home.” - **Esther Nangobi, Young Female Farmer, Nakalama Village, Iganga***

b) CURRENT LOCAL KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES TO SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE FARMING

In the quest for sustainable and inclusive local food systems, it is imperative to explore the adoption and potential barriers to sustainable farming practices among young female farmers in Uganda. Sustainable farming practices not only promote environmental conservation but also enhance productivity, resilience and long-term viability of agricultural enterprises. Despite of diverse application of numerous knowledge and ideas on improving farm productivity, farming communities of Uganda still continue to utilize the presence of local knowledge on ensuring constant supply of farm produce at the household level with less attention to market ventures.

Most young female farmers indicated that the availability and application of local knowledge in improving their farm productivity has sustained their aspirations towards sustainable food production and inclusive food supply to their households and the nearby markets. During the discussions, young female farmers also exhibited a keen interest in adopting sustainable farming practices as a means to improve agricultural productivity while preserving the environment.

During the group gatherings, many young female farmers expressed enthusiasm for Organic farming methods, including the use of organic fertilizers, composting and crop rotation. They recognized the benefits of organic practices in enhancing soil health, minimizing chemical inputs and producing healthier crops.

“I am an organic vegetable farmer mostly in cabbages, onions, eggplants, tomatoes and others. My challenge has been mostly on the pests that have reduced my earnings due to poor quality. However, my participation in vegetables growing has been useful to me as I earn from my farm and also provide food for my family.” - Fatuma Nangobi, farmer, Bukoona village, Nakalama

“I have been applying organic pesticides that are homemade especially urine from animals like rabbits and even humans that I collect in a jerrycan every morning, let it stay for some time before applying it to my crops.” - Kauma Susan, Farmer, Ibulanku Village

“When my tomatoes are attacked by pests, I apply ash from firewood and mix it with water to allow the plant absorb it well.” – Namukose Sumaya, Farmer, Bukoona village

“For me I collect the cow dug and urine of animals and that of humans, keep it for a while and also make sure the dug is well dried before applying them to my farm.” - Nangobi Fatuma, Youth Female Farmer, Bukoona Village, Nakalama

“I use ash and chicken droppings as manure which has made my farm healthy.” Babirye Slyvia, Farmer, Ibulanku village

Some participants shared their experiences with agroforestry, integrating trees and shrubs into their farming systems to improve soil fertility, provide shade and diversify income sources through the sale of timber and fruits.

“Most times I practice mixed crop growing especially beans, soya and maize within the same land since I have a small plot that also has trees like jackfruits” - Namusobya Farida, Farmer, Mulanga village

“In our family, we plan our crops like beans, maize, within the same farm alongside trees and even coffee to maximise space and also maintain soil facility” – Nakaima Joviah, Farmer, Kakongoka village

During the informal Focus Group Discussions, participants provided insights on the water conservation techniques that are being utilized such as rainwater harvesting, drip irrigation and mulching were as vital components of sustainable farming practices. Participants emphasized the importance of efficient water management, particularly in the face of climate variability and erratic rainfall patterns.

“I received training on water conservation of running water during rain season, this I dug a small hole, applied non-decaying polythen bag, put nails and draw a line to allow water pour into the pool which is use throughout the dry season in watering my crops.” - Nangobi Zaina, Farmer, Kakongoka village, Nakalama Sub-county

“For me I fetch water and pour in my small tank at home then irrigate my garden depending on the season” – Nangwe Nulu, Farmer, Mulanga village, Ibulanku Sub-county

Lastly, most participants also highlighted the adoption of Integrated Pest Management approaches, which involve the use of biological controls, crop rotation and companion planting to manage pests and diseases sustainably while minimizing reliance on chemical pesticides.

“I have been applying organic pesticides that are homemade especially urine from animals like rabbits and even humans that I collect in a jerrycan every morning, let it stay for some time before applying it to my crops.” - Kauma Susan, Farmer, Ibulanku Village

“When my tomatoes are attacked by pests, I apply ash from firewood and mix it with water to allow the plant absorb it well.” – Namukose Sumaya, Farmer, Bukoona village, Iganga



c) ACCESS TO TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN SUSTAINABLE CLIMATE FARMING PRACTICES

Training opportunities aligned to sustainable climate smart agriculture, socio-entrepreneurship and skills development are essential components for the success and sustainability of young female farmers' agricultural enterprises at the grassroots. Empowering young female farmers with Climate smart agricultural skills, entrepreneurial skills, technical knowledge and business acumen not only enhances their productivity and profitability but also strengthens their resilience and economic independence. Through informal discussions with young female farmers in Ibulanku and Nakalama sub-counties, insights into their experiences about their journey were gathered, illuminating both opportunities and challenges in building their capacity as agricultural entrepreneurs.

“I received a training from the One Acre Fund on how to reduce seed waste during the planting season which has truly helped me a lot.” – Nabirye Siirena, farmer, Mulanga village, Ibulanku

“As a farmer, I have benefited a lot as I was trained how we can grow our own vegetables, fertilizers and also market my own harvests to markets which has made me to earn a living and maintain my farm, pick some vegetables and prepare a delicious meal and also sale some for money.” - Nangobi Zaina, Young Female Farmer, Nakalama



*“I received training from Farmstew on how to grow vegetables say planting in humps, adding manure and be able to apply organic fertilizers.” – **Nango Lukia, farmer, Kakongoka village***

*“I used not to practice agriculture nor rear some animals like goats, cattle and poultry due to lack of knowledge and training. I used to buy everything but after receiving training from One Acre Fund and started growing my own food like maize, beans, rear some goats, I am now able to produce enough food and sale some for money. Though I am still challenged with poor markets, you may grow your maize and by the time you go to the market to sale your maize harvests, you will find low prices which demotivates me.” – **Esther Mutesi, Farmer, Nakalama***

*“For me I received training on growing maize in straight lines. When you grow using this method, you harvest a lot and earn some good money from your harvest.” – **Makube Farida, Farmer, Ibulanku***

*“I received training from BRAC in goat rearing, how to build its house, feeding them and also treat them. Now my challenge is capital to buy some good breads and rear them for commercial purposes.” – **Zabina Twenywa, Farmer, Nakalama***

*“From my small plot of land we use for agriculture, I have been able to afford basic needs like paying school fees for my children, buy other food supplements that I don’t have and also afford quality seeds and pesticides that I can manage in my own means.” – **Natongo Hanifa, Farmer, Busolera, Ibulanku***



During the conversions, participants also expressed their active participation in both crop production and livestock rearing especially in meat and eggs productions for commercial purposes as a result of numerous trainings that they once received from agricultural organizations that worked in their respective areas of residence.

“I received training in poultry keeping and after I started with one chicken, later I laid eggs, hatched and able to multiply. I also engaged in piggery with 2 which has been my full-time inspiration to scale up piggery farming and be able to earn from them when they produce more.” – Nakagolo Martha, Farmer, Kakongoka village

“For me I am both a crop farmer and livestock practitioner. I started with cassava growing on like 3 acres mostly growing beans, maize and soya and livestock especially piggery and poultry which has improved my lifestyle.” – Betty Akol, Farmer, Nakalama

c) ACCESS TO TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN SUSTAINABLE CLIMATE FARMING PRACTICES

In every social venture that is aimed at transforming livelihoods through profitable gains for the household, access to profitable markets for farm produce like perishable vegetables and opportunities for value addition are crucial for young female farmers to realize the full economic potential of their agricultural enterprises. Through informal discussions with young female farmers in Ibulanku and Nakalama sub-counties, insights into their experiences with market access, pre and post-harvest handling and value addition were gathered, highlighting both opportunities and constraints in the agricultural value chain.

“After harvesting my beans and maize from the garden, I normally move around asking for any recommendation of buyers or referrals for me to connect and sale my produce.” – Irene Nandase, farmer, Nakalama

“I am a promising youth farmer of food crops mostly cassava, maize and beans that I grow to provide food for my family and also be able to earn some money from the sale of surplus harvest at the nearby market.” – Nangwe Nulu, Farmer, Mulanga village



*“When I harvest my green vegetables especially Sukuma, capsicum and tomatoes, I always make sure they are cleaned well and pack them before I take them to the market for sale.” - **Kagoya Jovia, Farmer, Bukoona village***

*“I was introduced to an online marketing platform called Farm-Foods where I sale my farm produces especially groundnuts, beans and soya. My only challenge was internet and also the phone I use to connect with buyers.” – **Nakayima Jalia, Farmer, Kakongoka village***

With the need to attract better prices for the farm produce, most participants shared their local expertise on how they add value to their harvests especially cassava, tomatoes and also beans prior to delivering to the nearby markets for sale.

*“I sundry my cassava after harvesting it from the garden, peel it, wash and then cut it in small pieces to allow it dry well without rotting due to lack of proper storage. Later, I pack the dried cassava and take it for milling and later packed for sale at my shop with better prices compared to raw cassava.” – **Nangobi Sofia, Farmer, Ibulanku village***

*“When I harvest beans from the garden, I normally sort them, remove the dust and then pack them in bags before they are sold through the middlemen who come to our home.” – **Namusoke Sumaya, Farmer, Nakalama***

*“At home, we grow tomatoes that we harvest and make tomato sauce which we pack and sale to the nearby shops at a better price compared to just selling tomatoes directly from the garden.” – **Babirye Sylvia, Farmer, Mulanga village***

Many farmers continue to struggle with poor pre-and post-harvest handling technologies yet this is a very crucial step to ensure attraction and acceptance of farmer's produce in the market with ease. During the conversations with young female farmers, they shared their expertise and also their need for training to enhance their skills in pre and post-harvest handling to boost their incomes and agricultural enterprises.

“When I harvest my tomatoes, i always wash them to remove the chemicals that were sprayed on them during the season, pack them well and cover them with the dry grass to allow the air move through them freely and avoid them from getting spoiled before taking them to the market which sometimes is hard to get better prices due to many harvests of same crop by other framers who may sometimes have better quality tomatoes than mine.” – Nanjojo Norah, Farmer, Nakalama

“I have been sun-drying my coffee seeds, cassava and even maize directly on the ground without putting tapolin because I don't have money to buy any and when I take the dried cassava or maize for milling, when I prepare a meal, I always find soil while eating. This also has happened to my customers who buy the flour that I have made available for sale to them, hence end up selling at a small price.” – Kagoya Aisha, Farmer, Ibulanku village

“For me I don't know anything, even the tomatoes I grow, I just apply some pesticides to keep them fresh and sale them the way they are to the market.” – Farida Auma, Farmer, Mulanga village



e) CUSTOMS AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE:

Traditional gender roles assigned to women primary responsibilities for household basic work, caregiving roles, farming and preparing meals has limited their full participation agricultural activities and decision-making processes in terms of harvests, seasonal planning and marketing of their produce. During the informal conversations, young female farmers shared their experiences in line with the cultural norms and customs that deter them from full participation in agriculture despite of them being the highest contributors in the food production.

*“Some men think that when you join a group training like this one on agriculture, means that you don’t have what to do yet for us we want to learn and be able to improve our livelihoods through transferring the knowledge to our own farms.” – **Namukose Habibi, farmer, Mulanga village, Ibulanku***

*“I am always challenged as I am the one who spends much of the time in the garden but when we are harvesting, the man is the one who is in charge of all the sales and I don’t see the money at the end of the day yet I also have needs.” - **Nabirye, Mulanga***

*“At home for my case, we sit down and all of us agree on what to grow and who will take the lead to make the best of our sweat. But most times, I am the one that decides on what to grow per season.” - **Nakayima Jalia, Farmer, Kakongoka village, Nakalama***

*“Most men think women are supposed to be home, taking care of the children yet these men don’t provide everything at home, so it is why we end up finding ourselves in the garden digging every season.” - **Nafula Justine, Farmer, Nakalama***

*“Our cultural norms allow us as women alongside the men to go and build sustainable livelihoods jointly, so the culture is supportive for us to engage in agriculture.” – **Kagoya Brenda, Farmer, Nakalama***



Even though women are the biggest contributors to food production, the decision-making processes are still one sided especially on what to grow, harvests, sales and also expansion of income sources. During the gatherings, a number of young female farmers shared the experiences in line with decision making process at household level.

*“For us we sit down and discuss before we decide on what to grow and what size of land we shall cover say for growing crops like maize, beans, rice, we decide jointly and then go to the garden together until harvest. Even when it comes to what to sale, we still do it together. This has improved our trust and commitment to improve our household lifestyle.” – **Mwajuma Namwase, Farmer, Nakalama***

*“At home, I am the one who decides on vegetable growing but on food crop growing it is the man who decides most.” – **Kauma Susan, Farmer, Ibulanku Village***

*“For me my husband, with farming he doesnot decide, even when I have harvested say beans and I want to sale some, he is free to say no or say yes. But with livestock keeping say poultry, we do it jointly and make decisions together. If I sale without his knowledge, he gets annoyed.” – **Naigaga Shamim, farmer, Kakongoka village***

*“The man is the one who decides on everything at home including farming or what to sale. But if I am the one who grown alone, then am the one who decides.” – **Nabirye Jessica, Farmer, Nakalama***

Despite of these obstacles in the decision-making processes, still some participants expressed sole decision making with or without the man's approval for their sole participation in agricultural ventures for better livelihoods at household level.

*“With livestock, it is the man who decides as he is the man of the house and am just supposed to obey him, even on the sale of them, say goats, chicken, he is the one who knows.” – **Ndibakegi Justine, Farmer, Nakalama village***

*“It is me who decides if I am the one who invested in it say poultry farming, I am the one who decides when to sale without his knowledge because it is my money I invested in them.” – **Nalubanga Asamat, farmer, Mulanga village, Ibulanku***

*“At home it is me who decides on what to grow or what not to grow be it what to sale at home.” – **Justine Ndibakeka, farmer, Nakalama***

*“I am the one who makes decisions at home on what to grow and what to sell as am the one who has grown them and harvested.” – **Nangobi Zaina, farmer, Kakongoka***

*“I am the one who make decisions as a person, even after harvest I am the one who decides on what to sale or what to keep at home for food.” – **Atuwaki Jalice, farmer, Kakongoka***

*“I am the one who decides as I am a single mother. So, no one makes choices for me at all levels.” – **Kagoya Jovia, Farmer, Bukoona village***

*“It is me who go to the farm and when I have harvested, it is me who decides on what to grow and what to sale, even the sales, I am the one who decides whether to give him some money or not.” – **Mutesi Bakiya, farmer, Mulanga***



BARRIERS FACED BY YOUNG WOMEN



f) BARRIERS FACED BY YOUNG FEMALE FARMERS IN FULL PARTICIPATION TO SUSTAINABLE AND PRODUCTIVE FARMING:

According to the IFAD, women contribute to over 75% of the food production across the globe. These continue to encounter various challenges and barriers that hinder their full participation and success in agriculture.

Most importantly, the bias about the young female participations in the productive agricultural sector has been one-sided in favour of the male gender and the mature population yet their efforts towards sustainable food production and supply chains cannot be ignored.

During the conversations with young female farmers in Nakalama and Ibulanku sub-counties, we realized that these challenges are rooted in systemic inequalities and cultural norms, limit their access to resources, opportunities and decision-making processes towards productive and sustainable participation in agriculture.

Young female farmers openly expressed their views on a number of challenges they face in accessing resources crucial for agricultural production. The following were expressed: -

Access to Land for agriculture:

Uganda is blessed to have conducive fertile and productive soils throughout most seasons of the year that is good for all kinds of agricultural initiatives. However, when it comes to land ownership and usage, it is still impossible for most women to make decisions especially on farming practices because of the Traditional land tenure systems that favours male inheritance, leaving women with insecure land rights and restricted access to agricultural land.

During the informal conversations with Young Female Farmers in Nakalama and Ibulanku Sub-counties, participants expressed their views in line with the struggles to secure land for farming, hindering their ability to fully participate and invest in agricultural activities and adopt sustainable farming practices.

“The land I am using at home is for the man and not owned by me, so I just farm on it and leave it to the man to decide.” – Betty Akol, Farmer, Nakalama village, Nakalama sub-county

“The land I use for agriculture is mostly rented and not owned by me. Per season I rent it at UGX 80,000 per season for vegetable but if am to grow cassava on that land, the rental fees change to UGX 160,000 per season.” - Fatuma Nangobi, Farmer, Busolera Village, Ibulanku

“The land I use for agriculture is mostly rented that is why I most times end up renting a small space due to lack of money to rent a bigger space to grow vegetables on a larger scale which has made me harvest little and earn less from my farm.” – Kagoya Jovia, Farmer, Bukoona village, Nakalama

“For me I rent half acre to grow maize, cassava and beans all mixed together, then you realize that the land I am using sometimes has pests and no nutrients yet half an acre is being rented at UGX 100,000.” – Nalubanga Asamat, farmer, Mulanga village, Ibulanku.





Access to training opportunities:

Despite of the ever-increasing number of agricultural initiatives that aim at empowering farmers across the Ugandan regions, still young female farmers continue to be side-lined in these social ventures due to the organizer's perspective on their weak participation yet these are the future of agriculture if well empowered to take lead in such ventures. Limited access to education and training opportunities poses significant challenges for young female farmers, impeding their ability to acquire essential agricultural skills, technical knowledge and entrepreneurship capabilities. Educational disparities, compounded by early marriage and societal expectations, result in lower levels of literacy and numeracy among young women in rural areas.

During the informal group conversations, young farmers expressed their views on the impact of training opportunities on their journey to full participation in agriculture as a business.

"The extension workers do not come to our farms to train us on how to improve our farming practices and if they come, they only visit specific people who can afford to give them say transport yet we need them to advise us on what to do in order to benefit from our farmlands." – **Nakisige Shakirah, Farmer, Kakongoka village, Nakalama**

"I only received training once and that was the end of it. And there are limited visits from the extension workers, even after the trainings, they promise to come back but later don't come back to fulfil their promises." – **Kadondi Janat, Farmer, Busolera village, Ibulanku**

"Sometimes we learn in groups with the extension workers or even organizations, the challenge has been that these people promise to come and visit our individual farms to see how we are practicing sustainable agriculture but never bother to follow up on us." – **Mutesi Racheal, Farmer, Busolera village, Ibulanku**



Gender roles and Cultural norms:

In Uganda, gender roles and cultural norms significantly determine the participation of women in various income generating activities like engaging in productive and sustainable agriculture. Traditional beliefs often confine women to domestic duties, say taking care of the family, as patriarchal structures also continue to restrict women's decision-making power in agricultural activities.

Experiences were shared during the focus group discussions emerging from the young female farmers as some of them expressed that there is a supportive cultural environment and shared roles though still not sufficient to allow them participate fully in income generating social ventures.

*“At home, the man is the one who has the power and responsibility of providing for us anything we need, even what to farm he is the one who dictates and we just follow.” – **Nantono Fatinah, farmer, Busolera, Ibulanku***

*“It is very hard for me to sell off anything from our harvests say maize, beans or even a goat at home for money without the approval of the man.” – **Masitula Biryeri, farmer, Kakongoka village***

*“For my case, we sit down with the husband and decide together on what to grow and what to sell after harvest, but for vegetables, I am the one who decides most as it is me who spends most of the time at the farm.” – **Zayina Nangobi, Farmer, Kakongoka***



Access to quality and climate resilient seeds and farm inputs:

Productivity and supply of quality farm produce depends on the access to quality climate-resilient seeds and farm inputs that is crucial for sustainable and inclusive food production. During the informal conversations, young female farmers expressed their concerns as they often face significant challenges in obtaining these resources due to financial constraints, limited knowledge and networking opportunities.

*“For my Vegetables at home if you don’t buy pesticides at the shop, the pests will attack your garden and you end up making a loss.” – **Madinah, Farmer, Busolera village***

*“Now here, we do not have a dedicated agricultural dealer shop where we can buy up to date seeds, fertilizers or even pesticides, the ones around sell to us expired things that have made us to incur losses” – **Nakisige Shakira, Bukona village, Nakalama***

*“I once vaccinated my goat with a medicine I bought from the nearby agricultural shop but this decision I regretted it as my goat died thereafter the injection to prevent it from the worms.” – **Naigaga Shamim, farmer, Kakongoka A village.***

*“I ever bought pesticides that I sprayed on my tomatoes but later after a day, I found them drying up, when I tried to go back to the agricultural shop I bought it, the person told me I apply it badly so it is my problem which I could not understand at all.” – **Fatuma Nangobi, farmer, Busolera village***

*“The middlemen have supplied us with wrong seeds of maize, beans and even cabbages, when you plant them, they don’t even grow.” – **Kagoya Jovia, Farmer, Bukoona village***

*“With poultry, I have faced a challenge of being supplied counterfeit broilers and even if you complain, the person will just shout at you.” – **Namukavu Asanti, farmer, Ibulanku***



Access to Extension Services:

Enhancing agricultural productivity in Uganda requires direct and timely agricultural training services and information sharing on new breeds, varieties of seeds and market trends. However, many farmers continue to struggle to benefit from these services due to limited mobility, gender bias and lack of information. During the open conversations, participants expressed their concerns that most extension services providers often prioritize male farmers than females a gap that is limiting women's ability to adopt innovative practices and improve yields.

*“I have never seen any Extension Worker from the district. I wonder whether it is because am a small-scale farmer or they only look at those on big farms.” – **Kagoya Brenda, Farmer, Nakalama***

*“They don’t come even if you call them when you actually need them, so we decided to do what we can do within our own means.” – **Namulondo Esther, farmer, Nakalama***

*“In our group, we have only benefited from agricultural organizations that target farming communities like The Hunger Project.” – **Nangobi Fatuma, Farmer, Bukoona village***

*“Those Extension Workers want money for them to come to your farm, which we don’t have yet we need their services.” – **Nagaya Fatia, farmer, Mulanga village***



Access to Profitable Agricultural Market Opportunities:

Uganda being an Agricultural powered economy, access to profitable agricultural market opportunities is essential for farming communities to thrive. However, these farmers often face significant obstacles, including limited market information, inadequate financial services, poor quality harvest, post-harvest handling, licensing of produce, which restricts their ability to sell products at competitive prices and access larger markets. Others portrayed the absence of market infrastructure for agricultural produce which has demoralized most farmers.

*“For me I am a poultry farmer rearing mostly broilers, layers and I don’t vend my poultry. The only challenge I encounter is that, you may be given broilers and told that this type grows very faster yet during the process it stops growing hence you are investing heavily in them to earn say to sale them in like 5 weeks or 2 and a half month you are not seeing any changes. This sometimes forces us to sale at any price to save our small money.” – **Nanjojo Norah, Farmer, Nakalama***

*“You can grow your maize, but after harvest, when you take it to the market the price they offer is always lower than what you expected yet you invested a lot.” – **Akech Angella, farmer, Nakalama***

*“It has been always the lower prices offered for our harvests like rice, maize and beans which has reduced our participation on agriculture. This has always been due to overwhelming harvests that tend to reduce the prices at the market.” – **Kadondi Janat, farmer, Busolera village, Ibulanku***

*“When you send your goats to the market for sale, they normally charge us for licence to be able to sale in the open markets hence end up earning less.” – **Mwanija Hanifa, farmer, Mulanga village***

*“I have a friend who introduced me to online platform where I was to sale my beans, maize and even eggs from my farm, but I never got even a single customer.” – **Naigo Lukia, farmer, Kakongoka village***

*“My challenge is always when you take your vegetables like tomatoes and cabbages, people come to buy but want to bargain to the lowest say tomatoes for UGX 500, they want to give you UGX 300 not knowing the challenges you face to bring them to the market hence the person ends up buying on another farmer in the same market which lowers the value of your harvests.” – **Nakisige Shakirah, Kakongoka village, Nakalama***



Access to Financial resources:

Access to financial resources is crucial for youth farmers in Uganda to participate and fully invest in agricultural activities as a source of income. However, they often encounter challenges such as limited access to income generating ventures, access to credit, lack of collateral and discriminatory lending practices. These barriers hinder young people’s ability to purchase farm inputs, adopt new technologies and scale up their social venture operations.

“I don’t have enough capital, even the little I use I borrow it from our savings group which I am supposed to take back in instalments.” – Kagoya Jovia, Farmer, Bukoona village

“The Banks are very far and their requirements for me to get a Loan from them are too many which I cannot afford, hence end up with no money yet I need money to invest in my garden.” – Naigaga Fivia, farmer, Ibulanku

“Money Lenders have taken over our small plots of land as collateral, yet it is the same land we are using for agriculture.” – Akol Betty, farmer, Nakalama

“Those Banks only give to organized people, now for us who are in informal groups and have no security for their money, we end up with nothing.” – Nangwe Nulu, farmer, Mulanga village

Climate and Environmental Changes:

With favourable climatic conditions and environmental patterns in deriving agricultural productivity and livelihoods, Young farmers often bear the brunt of unpredictable weather patterns, such as droughts and floods due to heavy rains which have destroyed farmlands, crops and livestock. Additionally, environmental degradation, such as soil erosion and deforestation, further exacerbates farmer vulnerability.

“Changes in weather has always deceived us as we have no one to tell us the signs. You find yourself planting seeds in the ground because of some rains, then all of a sudden, the sun comes us to burn all the crops even before they grow.” – Nakisige Shakirah, farmer, Kakongoka

“As a rice grower, I have encountered losses due to heavy rains that floods our farm.” – Nangobi Joweria, farmer, Ibulanku

“Hailstorms have always hit my cabbages and even maize plantations, this has affected the quality of harvests and attract low prices yet I have invested a lot.” – Nangobi Fatuma, farmer, Bukoona village



Access to networking and Collaboration Opportunities

Having a sense of belonging and being part of a community group have always triggered community inclusive development agenda, training programs, share knowledge, access to markets and advocacy for their needs collectively. However, young farmers often face barriers such as social norms that limit their participation in formal networks and platforms. Additionally, young female farmer's lack of access to these opportunities hampers their ability to access information, resources, support from peers and stakeholders. According to the participants in the focus group conversations, current networking and collaboration opportunities have often targeted elderly and mature persons rather than being specific to inclusion of youth to foster collective action and drive positive change in Ugandan agriculture.

“I have never heard of them, neither been part of such gatherings.” – Naigaga Jamila, farmer, Ibulanku

“A few that I have been invited to attend, I am always the odd person attending because most of them are always old ones who have vast experiences than us the young people.” – Nafula Justine, farmer, Nakalama

“Those opportunities are purely for the selected few, now where can I find such when I am always not considered as important.” – Babirye Sylvia, farmer, Mulanga



Access to technology and digital platforms:

The penetration of internet and mobile telecommunications, youth adoptability to technology has been increasing over time in promoting youth innovative ventures. Access to technology and digital platforms is increasingly crucial for young farmers in Uganda to access information, market their products and improve agricultural practices. However, the young female farmers that participated in the informal focus group discussions indicated that they often encounter challenges such as access to unfriendly digital platforms for marketing, limited internet connectivity, low digital literacy and unequal access to smartphones and computers. These barriers hinder their ability to benefit from digital tools and platforms that could enhance productivity and resilience.

*“I once used an agricultural platform to order and pay for farm seeds, pesticides and inputs but its usability was a challenge to me as it was very costly to maintain.” – **Naiwombo Aminah, Farmer, Mulanga***

*“Those platforms are mostly seasonal and for town people.” – **Mutesi Zakiya, farmer, Nakalama***

*“I am not sure of which platform is better and in favour of youth farmers to market their farm harvests, access knowledge and also network with others apart from WhatsApp and Tiktok that we use for fun.” – **Namulondo Hellen, Farmer, Nakalama***

*“Having a smartphone is good, but internet data is very expensive and our network is not stable” – **Naigaga Jamila, farmer, Ibulanku***



RECOMMENDATIONS, WAY FORWARD & CONCLUSIONS



i) From the Focus Group Conversations:

During the focus group conversations, participants shared views on their aspirations to improve their participation and productivity of their farmlands as a way to increase their incomes. These were made by individual participants as below: -

- *“I hope improve my farming standards by getting a big place to grow various crops like rice, beans, soya, maize and also vegetables like Sukuma, tomatoes, egg plants and also access better market for my produce to earn better money.”* – **Sumaya Nangobi, Farmer, Nakalama**
- *“For me I wish to improve my skills in goat rearing and also improve my farm land to increase productivity in terms of the vegetables like onions, cabbages and food crops like maize, beans and soya.”* – **Nangobi Sofia, Farmer, Ibulanku**
- *“I also hope to be better off by joining groups to practice joint farming as those who work together can go far and earn better money after harvests of the crops like rice.”* – **Kagoya Joviah, Farmer, Bukoona**
- *“I would like to grow up to commercial level from subsistence level which is limiting my earnings as I am practicing on half an acre. I also aspire to advance to at least 2-4 acres of land where I can grow on largescale, have my own store and be able to add value on my harvests before taking them to the market.”* – **Nakisige Shakira, Farmer, Kakongoka**

- “I want to improve my farming yields through having access to quality seeds, farm tools and also land. I wish to be trained more in groups on better organic farming practices.” – **Nangobi Joweri, farmer, Busoolera**
- “My dream is to grow my own food on a largescale and be able to earn a living from my farmland, afford basic needs of life and add value to my harvests.” - **Nafula Justine, Farmer, Nakalama**
- “I want to grow more food say beans, maize, cassava, rice, on large scale to be able to earn and improve my lifestyle.” – **Mutesi Racheal, Farmer, Ibulanku**
- “I would like to be supported through groups so that we can be able to improve our farming practices.” – **Nangobi Alina, Farmer, Mulanga**
- “I wish we could go back to the setting of groups and start training in groups so that we can also access seeds, fertilizers and also market jointly rather than individual practices.” – **Fatuma Nangobi, Farmer, Bukoona**
- “I also aspire to start growing food crops on a largescale, get good quality seeds and tools to improve my yields.” – **Nangwe Nulu, Farmer, Mulanga**
- “I would like to see young female farmers and other youth being supported through joint farming capacity building programs and projects. These will help us to earn more money and be self-reliant.” – **Nabirye Jesca, Farmer, Nakalama**





ii) WAY FORWARD:

In order to serve the young farmers and ensure the inclusion of youth, the following proposals were vetted;

- *There is need to introduce bloc farming initiatives in favour of youth farmers who have been side-lined in various agricultural initiatives.*
- *There is need for the joint development of empowerment projects with experienced organizations for easy resource mobilization, allocation and monitoring of impact.*
- *There is need to outsource and link successful young farmers to mentorship opportunities and networks in the agricultural sector to boost their farm productivity.*
- *There is need to develop and scale-up youth focus digital platforms that are rich in content, enabler to access quality seeds, fertilizers and also market for their produce as a way to break the digital divide.*
- *There is need to strengthen and encourage the formation of youth farmer groups and their formalization as a way to trigger the establishment of joint projects and programs amongst themselves.*
- *There is need to facilitate access to finances, credit, insurance and other financial services tailored to the needs of youth farmers, including innovative financing mechanisms such as microfinance, savings groups and mobile banking, to support their investments in agriculture and income-generating activities.*



iii) CONCLUSION:

In general, the focus group discussion provided valuable insights into the experiences, challenges and aspirations of young female farmers in Nakalama and Ibulanku sub-counties, respectively. Many participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their perspectives and underscored the importance of continued collaboration and support through the joint proposal development process by The Hunger Project and the Wilmat Development Foundation in addressing the identified issues through the proposed interventions to AFAS for support.

The facilitators thanked the participants for their active participation and reiterated the commitment to working together to support women farmers in Uganda.





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