



Investing in agronomic skills training, soft skills training and information provision enhances agribusiness enterprises among women and youths

Uganda is endowed with numerous agribusiness opportunities, which if well exploited, vulnerable communities especially in rural areas can experience enhanced livelihood. However, due to individual, community or institutional weaknesses, Uganda's agribusiness potential has not been fully realised. As such, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), funded a project to establish constraints that impede women and youths to engage or benefit from agribusiness and also provide training and hands-on skills in developing profitable and sustainable agribusiness enterprises. Findings reveal that providing trainings in improved agronomic and soft skills increases: 1) engagement in agribusiness enterprises; and 2) earnings from farm produce. The study further reveals that providing of simple information about specific crops that can provide agribusiness opportunities in a given geographical location, also increases their participation in the growing of such crops.

KEY MESSAGES

Unlocking of Uganda's agribusiness potential requires:

- Increasing sensitization among farmers about the potential of agriculture beyond farming.
- Increasing investment towards agronomic skills training so as to boost agribusiness oriented farm production.
- Increasing investment in soft skills training such as communication skills, book keeping, negotiation and marketing skills.
- Increasing investment in value addition practices as this will help to increase on the farmers' turnover.
- Persistent guidance to farmers about the changing agribusiness opportunities.

1.0 Introduction

With many developing countries being strained by poverty, women deprivation, youth unemployment and increasing dislike of agriculture by the youths, enhancing agribusiness activities becomes a prerequisite in the policy arena. This will not only empower vulnerable groups but, can also help in redefining agriculture for which many youth seem to be observing as mere farming. Because agribusiness is broader than agriculture (also covers the service sector and manufacturing — through agro-processing), it has the potential of contributing significantly to productive youth employment. This policy belief is drawn from a study entitled “Enhancing Agribusiness Economic Opportunities of Women and Youth in Rural Uganda: The Impact of Agronomic and Soft Skills Training” which is part of a broader project that was funded by International Development Research Centre (IDRC), purposely to establish the constraints that impede women and youths to engage or benefit from agribusiness and also provide training and hands-on skills in developing profitable and sustainable agribusiness enterprises.

2.0 Data and methods

Data used to test whether agronomic skills training, soft skills training and information provision have a potential of influencing women and youths to participate in agribusiness enterprises was collected from Soroti and Serere districts in Eastern Uganda. In conjunction with Awoja Riverside farm (AR) and KIBO foundation (KF) which are Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) operating in both districts, a Randomized Control Trail (RCT) was conducted in which 532 women and youths from self-selected groups were allocated to a treatment arm and 411 to a control arm.

All subjects in the treatment arm received training in soft skills and information about specific activities and crops that can provide a potential for agribusiness in the area. But, for agronomic skills training, some subjects in the treatment arm chose to participate in horticulture training (206 trainees), others in poultry (321 trainees) while 32 members received specialised training in piggery farming ¹²³

3.0 Findings

3.1 Agronomic skills training increased agribusiness uptake among women and youths

First, we report how training in horticulture influenced women and youths to participate in the growing watermelon, onions and green pepper — these are the three crops for which detailed/specialised training in horticulture was provided.

The results reveal that after equipping women and youths with improved skills in growing watermelon, onions and green pepper, there was increased participation of trained subjects in growing watermelon and onions. Specifically, 9.2 percent and 12.6 percent of those who trained in horticulture grow watermelon and onions respectively compared to only 0.7 percent and 1.2 percent from the untrained group. Moreover, trained women and youths earned UGX. 40,910.87 and UGX. 43,002.60 from the sale of watermelon and onions respectively above the earnings reported by the untrained subjects (UGX. 108.55, UGX. 1492.55).

With regard to participation in poultry keeping, production of poultry products as well as poultry farmers’ turnover after exposing women and youths to a specialised training in poultry, the results show 10.9 percent and 11.5 percent of the trained women and youths reported increased production of poultry meat and eggs respectively compared to only 4.5 percent of those who did not receive the training that reported increased production of poultry meat and eggs (see table 2).

Crops	Trained in horticulture	Non-Trained	Differences	P-values
Watermelon	0.092	0.007	-0.085	0.000
Onions	0.126	0.012	-0.114	0.000
Green pepper	0.019	0.009	-0.01	0.242

Notes:
* No. of trained in horticulture=206
** No. of non-trained in horticulture=737

1 The training content was determined basing on information collected at baseline survey.

2 We admit that 27 members crossed their specialized training groups and also received training in other fields.

3 The training content for horticulture focused on equipping trainees with skills and knowledge about: crop specific site selection criteria; nursery bed preparation for specific crops; crop spacing in the main garden; crop watering (frequency and watering gadget); manure production, management and application; weed and pest management and harvesting and post-harvest handling. With regard to poultry, the training content included: reasons for engaging in poultry keeping as an agribusiness venture; housing structure and poultry hygiene; poultry feed mixture (by age) and frequency of feeding and disease identification, control and management. Finally, training in piggery focused on: reasons for engaging in piggery (why piggery?); housing structure and hygiene for pigs; food mixture and feeding; and disease identification, control and management. The trainings were conducted between June and July, 2019.

In relation to poultry farmers' turn over, more women and youths who received specialised poultry training reported to have registered significant changes in their turnover from poultry meat (see table 3). This was reported by 21.2 percent of the trained women and youths compared to only 9.2 percent from the untrained group (P-value of the difference between the trained and untrained group is 0.005). The farmers' turnover from eggs also rose for the trained women and youths. This was reported by 20.2 percent of the trained women and youths compared to 8.8 percent of the untrained members (P-value of the difference between the trained and untrained groups is 0.006).

Looking at the impact of piggery training on participation in piggery farming, pork production and piggery farmers' turnover, the results indicate increased production of pork and increased turnover from piggery farming. Specifically, the results reveal that 18.8 percent and 31.3 percent of women and youths who received specialised training in piggery reported increased pork production and increased turnover from piggery products (see table 4).

Table 2: Production of poultry products by women and youths who received detailed poultry training				
Poultry products	Trained in horticulture	Non-Trained	Differences	P-values
Poultry meat production	0.109	0.045	-0.064	0.000
Eggs production	0.115	0.045	-0.070	0.000

Table 3: Change in women and youths' turnover from poultry products following a training in poultry				
Poultry products	Trained in horticulture	Non-Trained	Differences	P-values
Poultry meat production	0.212	0.092	-0.12	0.005
Eggs production	0.202	0.088	-0.114	0.006
Notes: * No. of trained youths and women= 321 ** No. of non-trained youths and women= 622				

Table 4: Production and change in women and youths' turnover following a training in piggery				
Piggery	Trained in horticulture	Non-Trained	Differences	P-values
Piggery (pork) production	0.188	0.033	-0.155	0.000
Turnover from piggery	0.313	0.079	-0.233	0.012
Notes: * No. of trained youths and women= 32 ** No. of non-trained youths and women= 911				

3.2 Training in soft skills among women and youths the practice of value addition

It was revealed from the study that 38.9 percent of the trained women and youths added value to some of their produce compared to 32.8 percent of the untrained. The main value addition method used is drying of their produce. On a positive note, there is increased use of carpets or tarpaulins. Though, data also revealed that drying is still done on bare grounds.

3.3 Information provision on crop varieties increased the participation of women and youths in growing of such crops and also boosted their earnings from the sale of those crop varieties.

Through providing simple information about the various crop varieties that can provide agribusiness opportunities to trainees, more women and youths from the trained group increased their participation in growing of millet, sweet potatoes, cassava, cow peas, beans, ground nuts, choroko (green grams), tomatoes and citrus. Moreover, farmer earnings from the sale of the aforementioned crops positively and significantly differed from what women and youths from the untrained group earned. Such results demonstrate constrained information on the farmers' side about soil types and market availability among others that favour specific crops in specific areas.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Results in this policy brief provide a justification for providing education and/or training to people if they are to engage in agribusiness enterprises. They also suggest that providing trainings in improved farming practices increases farmer earnings and thus, agribusiness can act as an engine of economic growth and livelihood enhancement especially in rural areas. Moreover, training farmers in agribusiness opportunities should not only focus on equipping them with improved farming practices but also providing them with simple information relating to crops that are suitable in a specific location.

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