

Joint Effort to Save the Environment

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contribution of farmer-managed seed systems on conservation of agricultural biodiversity, food security and food sovereignty of smallholder farming communities in Rwenzori Sub Region.

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Editor's Note



Our dear esteemed reader,

I bring you greetings from the Knowledge Management and Communication Department (KMC) of JESE. I hope you are in good health and you have been looking forward to receiving this November edition.

As we step into the last month of the year, we are thrilled to share the latest updates and stories from the heart of our vision – A community where people and nature flourish. The month of November has been a testament to the unwavering spirit of collaboration and the transformative power that lies within the hands of dedicated individuals.

Our commitment to Sustainable Development Goals continues to bear fruits as we witness the impact of our community projects. From empowering farmers to providing access to our experts in agriculture and enterprise development, natural resources management, WASH and skilling programs.

One noteworthy project is the Fill the Nutrition Gap (FNG) which aims at improving on nutrition levels and ensuring food security in Kyaka II refugee settlement in Kyegegwa district. Through this project, we've not only improved on the lives of community members where we operate but also fostered a sense of resilience and self-reliance.

Also, because we focus on mitigating climate change impacts, you will read a story on what we have done in Agago district to fight the problem of floods. This has seen farmers get bumper harvests, which never used to be the case before our intervention.

As we continue with our journey of transforming communities, we invite you to join us in amplifying the impact of our work. Follow us on social media, share our stories, and make our work visible in your community too.

Regards-,

Christopher Tusiime
Editor.

ABOUT JESE

JESE is an indigenous non-government, service-providing organization registered as a company by guarantee NO 47579 and the NGO BOARD 55914/1019. Since its establishment in 1993, JESE, through her work in improved Agriculture Production and Natural Resources Management and long term development, has greatly contributed to improved livelihoods of target beneficiaries and provided opportunities for a better life especially for the rural poor households and communities.

Vision

A community where people and nature flourish.

Mission

To facilitate people-centred innovative actions that foster equity, sustainable management of natural resources and livelihood improvement

Overall Goal

Empowered community equitably accessing and sustainably managing natural resources for improved livelihoods and well-being.

Our values

- Environmental Integrity
- Transparency
- Gender Equity
- Volunteerism
- Teamwork



Promoting Agro-ecology in Rwenzori Sub-region

On November 24th, Joint Effort to Save the Environment (JESE) under the Rwenzori Agroecology Platform (RAP) with support from Iles de Paix (IDP) and CARE organized an indigenous seed and food fair in Rwenzori Sub Region. The event took place at Reinah Hotel in Fort Portal Tourism City and was concluded with an exhibition of indigenous seeds and food.

The major objective of the activity was to showcase the actual and potential contribution of farmer-managed seed systems on conservation of agricultural biodiversity, food security and food sovereignty of smallholder farming communities in Rwenzori Sub Region.

It should be noted that JESE, IDP partners, CARE and other RAP actors have been working with communities to improve food security through agroecology and increasing resilience of rural communities for a long time.

Globally, we observe increasing and overlapping levels of malnutrition, including undernutrition and over nutrition, and related non communicable diseases. Worldwide, 795 million people are not able to meet their minimum dietary energy needs (FAO, 2015), 2 billion people lack essential minerals and vitamins (FAO, 2013) and over 2 billion people are overweight or obese (WHO, 2015).

Almost half our global citizens now experience food

shortages and food nutrition insecurity to the extent that they cannot be active and healthy lives. Increased scrutiny of global food resources and food security has brought attention to shrinking diversity in major food crops in national diets.

According to the findings of continental Accountability scorecard launched by the African Union and the African leaders for Nutrition (ALN) in 2019, data shows that in African continent, 8 million children under 5 years are stunted, 58.4 million of these stunted are in Africa.

Malnutrition is not only one of the worst killers of children under five years of age but prevents children and adolescents from reaching their full potential and traps entire populations in vulnerability.

Through its negative effects on the development of human capital and its productivity, malnutrition contributes to the delay in African countries 'economic and social development, with unacceptable human consequences on African individuals, communities' and nations.

Nutrition and Resilience concepts are strongly inter-linked: nutrition is both an input to and an outcome of strengthened resilience. Reducing malnutrition is crucial to strengthening resilience because well nourished individuals are healthier, can work harder and have greater

physical reserves; households that are nutrition secure are thus better able to with stand, endure more longer and recover more quickly from external shocks.

Conversely, households that are least resilient are more affected by shocks and therefore face the greatest risk of malnutrition; thus strengthening resilience is essential in efforts to reduce malnutrition.

The food and agriculture sector is essential to human nutrition and to communities 'resilience, but approaches designed to increase house holds' resilience to shocks do not always contribute to positive and sometimes even have negative nutrition outcomes. Specific attention is required to make resilience –building interventions “nutrition- sensitive.”

Indigenous and traditional food systems have served as a major source of healthy diet that ensures food and nutrition security. Access to secure, nutritious, and healthy food is one of the aspects offering greater human security and societal stability. Indigenous and traditional food systems have served as a major source of healthy diet amongst the local communities. Indigenous peoples are the world are stewards of nature and holders of vast local knowledge and traditions, handed down from generation to generation, that guide them in living interdependently with the environment.

Indigenous and traditional food systems represent a treasure of trove of knowledge that contributes to wellbeing and health, benefiting communities preserving a rich biodiversity, and providing nutritious food. Indigenous and traditional territories are home to 80 per cent of the planet's biodiversity and often play a wider role in environmental conservation.

At the Indigenous Seeds and Food Fair, farmers showcased different agroecological practices, indigenous and traditional foods and seeds in Rwenzori Sub Region, and how these are preserved, prepared and consumed.

The event also created awareness on the value of indigenous/ traditional food systems, agroecology and their contribution in strengthening the resilience capacity of smallholder farming communities to climate change related stresses. Also, it provided a platform for experience sharing and dialogue on creating an enabling policy environment for scaling up agroecology as a driver for enhancing ecosystem health and transformation of food systems towards resilience, equity and sustainability.

This was achieved through discussions and speeches by selected key guests on indigenous seeds and foods, nutrition and other components and exhibition of indigenous seeds and foods, value added products, indigenous products display, herbs and herbal products displays that took place at the Green Belt along Balya Road in Fort Portal Tourism City.

The Fair was attended by Rwenzori Sub region community, Civil Society organisations, Private Sector, Local government leaders, Cultural leaders, media and Key farmers in the districts of Rwenzori Sub Region.



Julius Bigabwa of Biglad displaying roasted organic macadamia nuts at the Indigenous Seeds and Food Fair in Fort Portal Tourism City on November 24th, 2023.



Felix Kiiza, the Mpanga Super Farmers Program Officer, speaking at the Fair.



Participants of the discussions on Indigenous Seeds and Food Fair at Reinah Hotel, Fort Portal Tourism City.



A display of some indigenous foods like bananas, cassava and vegetables that farmers exhibited at the Indigenous Seeds and Fair in Fort Portal.



FNG Project Achieves impact in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement

For close to a year now, JESE with support from CARE, has been implementing the Fill the Nutrition Gap (FNG) Project in Kyaka II refugee settlement in Kyegegwa district. The project was as a result of the fact that most of the development partners were paying attention to other issues and living out the component of livelihood. This left many persons of concern struggling to access food and most of the children got malnourished.

To reverse the situation, the FNG project was brought on board. This project has a number of components including Gender, nutrition, Agriculture and production and marketing among others.

Denis Mwesigwa, the project coordinator, says that before the implementation of the project, most of the families were surviving on insufficient food rations from the government and development partners.

The project is working with 1,000 households and these have been trained in different areas like moulding energy-saving cook stoves to reduce on the rampant cutting down of trees for firewood.

To start with, target beneficiaries were organised into groups and trainings in vegetable growing stated. Demonstration gardens were established in selected areas where association members would meet, learn and work together. The idea was to replicate the same knowledge in their own homes.

Zawadi Claudine is one of the beneficiaries. She says that before the project, they only used to grow maize and beans and had no idea about vegetable growing and her children had become anaemic.

“We were living in a terrible situation but when JESE and CARE came, we were taught how to grow vegetables like spinach, dodo, onions, carrots, egg plants and many others. We now see change in our homes. We eat well and our children look healthy,” Zawadi says.

Jean Hatimana is another beneficiary of the FNG project. He says that the training from CARE and JESE is transforming their lives. He notes that under their group they have established a big group garden where they harvest vegetables for home consumption and for sale.

“Going forward, our plan it to buy a motorcycle and start a salon as our alternative sources of income,” Hatimana says.

Francine Deborah is a Community Based Trainer (CBT) for Vijana Group notes that on top of vegetable growing, the project added the component of saving.

“Right now, every member of the group has a kitchen garden. We started selling some of the vegetables in July and saved some of the money. From July to November, we have sold vegetables worth 1.2 million shillings,” Deborah says.

In addition to vegetable growing, farmers were also given rabbits for sale and consumption. These have also added to the boosting of nutrition and ensuring food security among the beneficiaries.

VHT Component

Tackling the high prevalence of malnutrition needed a multi thronged approach. Having vegetables alone would not solve the issue entirely, and this is the reason why Village Health Teams were involved.

Lamonde Emmanuel is one of the many VHTs that worked on the project. He says that his efforts to fight malnutrition and anaemia were even hampered by some cultural beliefs of the mothers in the settlement.

“You would go to assess the health of the child and the mother would say you want to bewitch the child. But we would always say no: we only want to check the health condition of the baby,” Emmanuel says.

He, however, adds that the situation has since changed. Mothers were taught how to take care of their children, feed them well on energy giving and body building foods, and this has drastically reduced on the malnutrition cases in the settlement areas where the project is being implemented.

“We even gave a mark tape to every household. Mothers can now take measurement of their own children. We thank JESE and CARE so much for this intervention,” he says.



Some of the project beneficiaries showing off the rabbits they received.

River Mpanga Buffer zone protection: So far so good!

For decades, the issue of protecting River Mpanga and its buffer zone has been key on the agenda for not just the government but also the development partners.

Communities along the transboundary water resource degrade the buffer zone for a number of activities including crop growing, animal grazing, charcoal burning while others plant there trees that consume so much water. Efforts to restore and conserve the river banks have in a way seemed to yield on the side of the local farmers. But there has been a major challenge: a government entity, Kiburara Prisons Farm, has been among the leading encroachers. This issue had been raised at different platforms including community engagements and on radios but there had been no success.

At some point, community members would say that they are doing their best to vacate the buffer zone but the fact that the prison authorities were proceeding with planting maize in the buffer zone was demoralising and setting a bad example.

But all this is becoming history now! Thanks to the current Officer in Charge of the Prison. He has been so instrumental in ensuring restoration. With our partner, Join For Water, we have held a number of engagement meetings with key stakeholders on the issue. These have been attended by the LCV chairpersons of Kamwenge, Ibanda and Kitagweda, CAOs, RDCs, Albert Water Management Zone (AWMZ) for Ministry of Water and Environment, Sub County chairpersons, District Natural Resources Officers among others.

From these meetings, the stakeholders have made commitments. For instance, Ibanda district local government

has offered to provide the concrete pillars that will be used for the demarcation of the buffer zone. The prison authorities committed to work with all the stakeholders to ensure that the process of demarcation goes on smoothly and also provide the necessary man power.

Development partners have committed to provide trees and resources for the same cause. So far, the prison authorities have vacated the biggest part of the buffer zone and did not plant the maize during this season. This is a huge milestone for us.

With a costed action plan in place now, the actual demarcation of the 5Km long buffer zone is going to start and we are confident that this will lead to total restoration of River Mpanga buffer zone in Kiburara.



Part of the River Mpanga buffer zone that has been vacated by Kiburara Prisons Farm

New WHH Country Director Visits JESE



JESE and WHH staff pose for a group photo with Ms Jeannette Wynants (Third from the left) at JESE head offices in Kitumba, Central Division, Fort Portal Tourism City .

On November 29th, we were delighted to host the Country Director of Welthungerhilfe (WHH), Ms Jeannette Wynants, who came to visit the region and interact with the different partners and ascertain what the organisation is doing in the region.

The visit started with a meeting with the Senior Management Team and staff in the JESE Board Room. Here, the Country Director was updated about the two projects, Skill Up and Green Colleges Expansion, that WHH and JESE are implementing.

From the meeting, Wynants visited some Skill Up! graduates in tailoring and hairdressing who are operating from Fort Portal Tourism City. She was interested in how the project has impacted on their lives and their future plans. The youth had indeed put the skills they had acquired to use, were belonging to savings groups and were optimistic about their future.

In Bunyangabu, she visited Bunyangabu Beekeepers Cooperative (BBC), which is a JESE partner on the Green Colleges Expansion project. There, she interacted with the

management and the staff and other members of the Green Colleges network.

While in the same district, she was particularly pleased by the progress of David Mwesige, from Lyamabwa in Kisoro Sub County, who was trained in beekeeping under the Green Colleges project. Mwesige recently harvested 240 kilograms of honey and sold each at Shs 10,000. He also has 74 bee hives.

Important to note is that JESE and WHH have been partners for over 5 years and, together, they have implemented skilling programmes that are aimed at increasing income levels of the youth in Rwenzori Sub Region.

The two have in total trained 1,094 youths and more 1,000 will be trained in the next four years under the Green Colleges Expansion that is being implemented in Bunyangabu, Kasese, Kabarole and Fort Portal. Some of the trades include bee keeping, juice processing, tour guiding, solar installation and repair, fish farming, vegetable growing, motor vehicle and motor cycle mechanics, hairdressing, tailoring, welding, etc.

Farmers Field Day Provides Ground for learning, sharing experiences



Every year in November, JESE in partnership with Ilex De Paix (IDP) under the Mpanga Super Farmers Programme, organises a Farmer Field Day. This year, it was in Kabambiro Sub County in Kamwenge district and Kicwamba Sub County in Kabarole district.

The intention is to provide a platform for experience sharing between farmers and also interactions with technical and political leaders. In addition, the same day enables farmers to showcase their knowledge on the different aspects like Integrated Farm Planning (IFP), soil and water conservation and many others.

Farmers also exhibit their produce like bananas, sweet potatoes, hens, fruits and sell the others to earn an income.

“The Farmer Field Day also enables farmers who are not directly targeted by the project to attend and learn,” says William Amany, the Head of Agriculture and Enterprise Development Department at JESE.

This year, in Kicwamba Sub County, farmers were grateful that their area is still benefiting from the programme that has seen their farm produce doubling and their income levels going up.

Beswezi, one of the beneficiaries, said that he was grateful to meet other farmers and see how they are handling their post harvesting and the soil and water conservation.

“It is an interesting day because you are able to learn interact with farmers and gain new knowledge. You go to someone and see completely new things that

you didn't know about,” he said.

In Kabambiro, the farmers, through their representative, Alex Byamugisha, asked JESE and IDP to extend the duration of the project that is ending next year, saying it has greatly impacted on their lives.

For instance, he stated that with support from JESE and IDP, they have been able to start a Marketing Association through which they have established a maize milling factory. The factory is now adding value to their maize which they pack and sell in the branded sacks, thereby improving on their household incomes.

On their part, the Kamwenge district leaders requested JESE to look at expanding the areas of operation to include other sub counties due to the overwhelming need for the services that are currently being provided under the programme.

The Mpanga Super Farmers Programme has a number of result areas. These include; production improvement, postharvest handling, lobbying and advocacy, stakeholder mobilisation and engagement on food safety and gender inclusion.

Currently, the programme is working with 750 farmers and 35 youth who are being trained in Urban Farming. There are also five primary schools namely; Buhinga, Kagote, Nyakagongo, Sts Peter and Paul and Kahinju where nutrition awareness creation is being done.



Supporting Coffee Farmers on Value Addition

For decades, JESE has been promoting coffee growing in Kyenjojo district and thousands of coffee seedlings have since been distributed in different parts. But this has only solved the production issue. The increase in coffee production has necessitated the need for value addition to ensure that farmers maximally benefit from the cash crop.

With this in mind, JESE has been supporting farmers to form cooperatives so that issues of postharvest handling and value addition can be easily dealt with. After this, the next step has been establishing a coffee factory to handle the challenge of value addition.

JESE bought land in Kusakara village, Kihura Parish in Kihura Sub County and has now partnered with the Production Department of Kyenjojo District and Ministry of Agriculture to establish a coffee factory under the Rwenzori Agri-Led programme.

So far, the factory house has been established and the machines to haul, sort and grade the coffee have been delivered and are currently being installed.

The factory will be owned by a union of farmers' cooperatives and JESE is targeting about 1500 coffee farmers from Kihura Sub County, Butuntuzi Town Council and Sub County, and from areas of Kigoyera and Kyembogo. Farmers are expected to produce between 200 to 300 metric tons of coffee per season to feed the factory.

In the future, JESE anticipates to work with the farmers' union to add the component of producing consumables from coffee, which will be another level of value addition and a source of income for the farmers.



Farmers are expected to produce between 200 to 300 metric tons of coffee per season.



Promoting menstrual health management in women, Out-of-school girls in Agago

On November 22nd and 23rd, JESE conducted a training of key stakeholders from Agago District Local Government on using the Menstrual Health Management (MHM++) manual.

The manual targets women and out-of-school girls and was developed by MHM master trainers along with Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) with support from Nuffic and funded by Orange Knowledge Programme.

In conjunction with Geregere Sub County Community Development office, key stakeholders were mobilized and these included; District officials (Gender officer, District Health Inspector), technical and political leaders, sub county personnel, Parish chiefs, health centres' in charges, health assistants, schools' management committees, parents' teachers' association representatives, Village Health Teams (VHT's) and wetland community management committees.

A total of 65 people (Males= 27, Females= 38) participated in this training.

The MHM master trainers from JESE and HEWASA Caritas conducted the training in an intensified manner, covering all the 04 modules; Puberty, Myths and misconceptions; Sex and Gender, Understanding the menstrual cycle and its challenges; Knowledge on menstrual health management, and Communication of information around Menstrual Health.

65

The number of people who were trained.

This was crowned by categorical action planning for District/ Sub County officials, health centres/ schools representatives and community based structures cadres (VHT's and wetland management structures).

Participants were actively involved both in experience sharing and functional drawing such as body parts with much preference on men with majority of the participants who ably identified the gaps in terms of their involvement on MHM issues. All participants promised to disseminate MHM information with immediate effect.



Farmers shelling maize in Geregere Sub County, Agago district. This bumper harvest is due to the flood control trenches that have been established in the area thereby favouring crop growing.

Using flood control trenches to mitigate climate change impacts in Agago district

In 2018, JESE partnered with Wash Alliance International (WAI)/ WASH SDG to implement WASH SDG in Agago Sub Catchment aimed at contributing to sustainable and equitable access to and use of inclusive WASH services by communities through the adoption and scale up of improved WASH behavioural services.

This project is being implemented in the in 15 Sub

Counties and three town councils. These had very low sanitation levels.

Before the intervention, these areas had issues of shortage of safe and clean water and low latrine coverage which was resulting into open defecation and the related water borne illnesses.

But that was not all. There was also a challenge of flush floods, which were destroying food crops and leading to the sinking of latrines.

To reverse the situation, JESE with the Agago district leadership, facilitated community members to create a 1.5 Km flood control trench. This has controlled the floods since the running water that would affect the gardens now gets collected into the trench.

Currently, numerous results have been registered including high crop productivity in Kamonojwii, Geregere Sub County.

Also, sanitation levels have been boosted from 12.5% to 70 % and 06 flood prone latrines were established with due consideration to the vulnerable households (PWDs and elderly).