

EDITOR'S NOTE

Improve value addition now

One of the highlights from the 2022 Harvest Money Expo was the number of farmers and other players who exhibited locally value added products. Value addition improves a farmer's earnings by over 50%. Almost every food produced in Uganda can be processed into several other products. This is right from the cash crops and all food crops.

For example, if a farmer sells a raw bunch of banana, he earns between sh5,000 and sh10,000 on the farm. However, if the same bunch of banana is processed into juice or wine, it can fetch as much as sh20,000 or even more.

One of the biggest challenges to value addition in Uganda is lack of knowledge and exposure.

Most of the value adding exhibitors talked of a big struggle to reach where they are today. For example, a lack of funding, long and tedious registration process of their products. This process should be eased. We must invest heavily in the upper value chain if we are to improve value addition in the country.

The many industrial parks that are coming up in different regions must be made to work for the benefit of the areas where they are located and the country at large.



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CHILLI FARMERS REAPING

aBi-development has supported many farmers countrywide achieve better yields and earnings. aBi's focus is to increase agricultural production and value addition by extending matching grants and business development services to agribusinesses, farmer organisations and intermediaries to enhance planning and management. They also support production and business infrastructure, as well as upstream and downstream market linkages of producers and agribusinesses. In an eight-part series, *Harvest Money* shall carry stories focusing on the success of aBi activities countrywide. In the first story, Andrew Masinde casts the spotlight on aBi's interventions in chilli growing in northern Uganda.

Experts have identified horticulture as an enterprise that can enhance national productivity, competitiveness and incomes. It has the economic potential on both local and international markets.

One such crop is African bird's eye chillies.

BIG DEMAND

African bird's eye chillies are on high demand in the export market, particularly Asia for their taste. Current export demand stands at approximately 850 metric tonnes against a supply of only 500 metric tonnes of dried chillies.

The shortfall can be attributed to a lack of certified seeds, according to Farm Africa's Market Demand Report (2020, not published). Most of the seeds supplied are processed using rudimentary methods, are below standard and have impurities. Most locally produced seed contains mixed varieties that include habanero, scotch bonnets and Thai hot.

The report indicates that farmers cannot easily access certified seed because a few companies produce it. Thus farmers rely on chilli seeds saved from the previous season's harvest, which often have a low viability due to deterioration during storage and are highly susceptible to diseases such as cercospora leaf spot, bacterial leaf spot and alternaria leaf spot.

This results in poor harvests that do not meet market quality specifications. Also, farmers were growing varieties that are hard to harvest with large volumes damaged during harvesting, high post-harvest losses and have high levels of aflatoxins.

Farmers also lack the knowledge and financial resources to improve their production and agronomic practices to increase returns from the crop, according to Hellen Ketty Achan, the executive director of North East Chilli Producers Association.

North East Chilli Producers Association is a Ugandan company with 20 years' experience in promoting the production and marketing of high-value and non-traditional crops, including African bird's eye chillies, in northern and eastern Uganda.

Achan added that farmers were also getting poor profits due to low yields, low prices,



Employees of North East Chillies Produce Association sorting chillies as part of the production phase in Lira

FARMERS' PLIGHT

Anna Auma, a resident of Teyao village, Barr sub-county in Lira district, has been growing chillies for many years.

She was growing the crop on quarter an acre and would harvest only 10kg per season, and she would sell each at sh2,000 to community members.

"I would spend my earnings on solving a few basic needs at home and not make any saving," she says.

Jane Achola, also a resident of Teyao village, is another chilli farmer who has grown the crop for years.

"I would harvest 10-12kg of chilli depending on the season and sell it in the local market, that is a 500ml cup at sh2,000," she said.

Just like Auma, Achola never earned a profit from the enterprise.

limited access to quality seed, poor post-harvest handling, and a poor understanding of market standards.

"There was also lack of extension workers knowledgeable in chillies, which limited the availability of technical expertise to member farmers," Achan said.

IMPROVED EXTENSION, BETTER PRODUCTION

Julius Esanyu, the project co-ordinator of Farm Africa Uganda, says poor chilli production and subsequent low income was a challenge that needed a solution.

Farm Africa thus set out to address this challenge. With over 30 years' experience supporting rural communities across East Africa (Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania), Farm Africa is a non-governmental

organisation specialising in helping farmers grow their yields and profits while protecting the environment.

In northern Uganda, Farm Africa is spicing up the chilli sector.

Esanyu explains that many small scale farmers living in Lira and other districts in northern Uganda were growing chillies, however, they lacked capital, quality equipment and seed, which was preventing chilli producers and agribusinesses from accessing high-end markets.

Working with North East Chilli Producers Association, Farm Africa came in to support small scale chilli farmers to capitalise on the unmet demand for the commodity.

Esanyu says huge demand for African bird's eye chillies presents an incredible opportunity for small scale chilli farmers to improve their fortunes.

"That is why Farm Africa came in to help North East Chilli Producers Association adopt a more market-orientated business model, which would open up new export opportunities for chilli farmers," he revealed.

Today, North East Chilli Producers Association is helping chilli growers gain access to quality seed and equipment, increase their yields and meet international market standards.

Achan says they have been in the chilli business since 2000 and have had ups and

There was also lack of extension workers.



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