

Women Economic Empowerment

Investing in women economic empowerment sets a direct path towards inclusive economic growth

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Experience paper



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1. Introduction

Youth and women involved in cassava production addressing food insecurity amongst cocoa growing households in Bundibugyo district

The Swisscontact intervention in the cocoa market system revealed that the majority of cocoa growing households in Bundibugyo district depend solely on cocoa for their livelihood. Food insecurity is a common challenge for these households, because food availability and access rely purely on income from cocoa sales, yet there are other competing financial needs of the household.

This situation greatly affects women and youth who do not have full control of the income earned at household level. To mitigate the risk of food insecurity and to promote women economic empowerment. This case study illustrates the intervention piloted in 2018 to address food insecurity in cocoa growing households in Bundibugyo district; to understand what has been done, and how useful this has been so far.

Bundibugyo district

Bundibugyo district is in Western Uganda, borders DR Congo to the west, Ntoroko district to the north and Kabarole district to the east and south-east. The district is relatively isolated from the rest of Uganda, as it is the only district that lies west of the Rwenzori Mountains. Its population is 223 055 people of which 56% are young people below 18 years of age. Agriculture is the major economic activity. Cocoa production is concentrated among smallholder farmers in the low land zone while the highland zone is characterised by subsistence production of food crops and livestock rearing. Over 70% of the households are engaged in cocoa production, which makes the district a leading producer of cocoa in Uganda.



2. A typical cocoa growing household

A typical cocoa growing household in Bundibugyo, prior to the food security project

A typical cocoa growing household in Bundibugyo has many mouths to feed, with an average household size of 13 people and most households polygamous. The average land size is 0,5 - 2.5 acres, yet the common scenario is that cocoa farmers concentrate on growing cocoa as a sole source of income and then use the proceeds from cocoa sales to buy food. The most common foodstuffs cocoa farmers buy from local markets are matooke, plantain, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, cassava flour, cassava tubers, cassava leaves and vegetables, among others. The food is supplied by local traders who ferry food from the neighboring districts of Kabarole, Kasese, Kibaale and Kamwegye, among others. The heavy reliance on income from cocoa sales results in intermittent food security, because the same income is used to meet the living expenses; such as school fees, paying medical bills, buying clothes and other social expenses of the household members.

In these households, the woman occupies a central position of ensuring food availability, mainly for the children and other household members. They have limited power to decide on the allocation of household income earned from cocoa sales. In most cases, the women find themselves in a dilemma, as they wait for their husband to provide money to buy food for the household. *“Getting money from my husband to buy food is a struggle; and we commonly describe this situation as mulilio-mulilio”* (translated as *“fire fire”*). As a result, women suffer the psychological and physical effects of food insecurity situation more than any other member of the household. To cope with the difficulties, women tend to put more pressure on the husband to provide money for food, which at times can lead to domestic violence and other related social challenges.



3. About the Project

About the Project

Swisscontact is implementing the Inclusive Markets Project “IMU Improving Markets for Cocoa and Beekeeping in Uganda”. The project started in 2017 and will end in 2020. The main goal of the project is to increase the incomes of 15 000 small-holder cocoa farmers (30% females) and 8 000 beekeepers (30% female and 10% youth) in 12 selected districts of central, south-western, mid-west, eastern and west Nile. The intervention in the cocoa market system is implemented in 6 districts including Bundibugyo. The project uses an inclusive markets system approach in which the private sector is the driver.

Stakeholder engagement

The IMU project established a partnership with National Agricultural Research Institute (NARO) to build the capacity of extension staff of the cocoa farmer organisation Semuliki Cooperative Union in cassava agronomy and to enable women and youth access to the recommended planting materials for cassava varieties NAROCASS 1 and NASE 14, which are known to be resistant to cassava mosaic virus disease. The project also collaborated with Bundibugyo district local government and Uganda broadcasting services Ltd. (UBC Radio) to disseminate information on food security. The staff of the district local government identification and verification of plots for women and youth, offering extension services related to cassava agronomy, post-harvest handling and continuous monitoring of the application of skills.

The project intervention

To mitigate the risk of food insecurity and to promote women economic empowerment of the cocoa growing households in Bundibugyo, the project promotes mixed livelihoods intervention, targeting the women and youth of cocoa growing of households to engage in cassava production. The intervention in cassava production was based on the findings of the feasibility study that confirmed cassava as the most preferred food crop to be promoted among cocoa growing households in Bundibugyo. Preference for cassava was based on the fact that it has multiple uses. Locally, Cassava leaves are eaten as a vegetable source, while Cassava tubers are a good source of energy (160 kcal per 100g raw cassava). The leaves are also a source of protein, vitamins, and minerals. As a food security crop, Cassava is drought-tolerant, its production is feasible within the limited land and can be harvested for long period of time. It is also less labor intensive and there is untapped potential for business by selling the cassava stems within the same community.

To pilot cassava production, 252 women and youths were selected by Swisscontact from two cocoa primary cooperatives (Tokwe and Mpei) that are members of Semuliki Cooperative Union. The selected women and youths were from cocoa growing households that met certain criteria.

- 1. Each has a minimum of 0.25-acre land;**
- 2. Each is a member of a cocoa group that actively participate in cooperative activities (farmer field schools and collective marketing and saving activities); and**
- 3. Each is able to invest in quality planting materials, training etc.**



4. Key results of the intervention

Beneficiary of the Cassava pilot intervention

Tibakulilyo Lavina is a 37 year old woman with 9 children living in Buhanda village, Tokwe Sub County in Bundibugyo district. She dropped out of school at the age of 14 while in primary Seven and later got married to a cocoa farmer. Like other women from cocoa farming households, her routine work is to support her husband in taking care of cocoa gardens, harvesting, drying of cocoa beans prior to marketing. As a woman, she shoulders the responsibility of ensuring that there is food on the table for the household. However, she has no power to decide on the amount of money to be used for buying food for the household.

“I really struggle to convince my husband to give me the money required to buy enough food for the household because there are always other family problems to be solved. As a result, the family always eats one meal a day or two meals, but with insufficient quantities of food sometimes. My children need more and I cannot provide enough. This problem is even worse from May to July when cocoa harvests and sales are very low.”

Initially Lavino tried to produce cassava in the backyard and within free spaces in the cocoa plantation, but she was disappointed by the low yield due to poor variety and infestation of cassava mosaic disease. As such, she lost hope that production of cassava could still be a solution to address her household food problem.

Lavina’s husband is a member of Mpei cooperative Society. In March 2018, she had an opportunity to attend a sensitisation meeting organised by Swiss-contact in partnership with Semuliki Cooperative Union and National Agricultural Research Organisation about food security and about mixed livelihood activities involving Cassava production.

“I re-gained hope in Cassava production when I got the information that there are early maturing, disease resistant and high yielding cassava varieties being promoted among cocoa farmers.”

Through the meeting, Lavina understood the selection criteria to be met by women who will be considered for the pilot and she decided to prepare her 1-acre garden in advance, ready to receive the training on cassava agronomy and planting material. She later participated in the practical training on cassava agronomy provided by technical staff from National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) and Semuliki Cooperative Union. She also received eight bags of cassava planting material for NAROCAS1 variety from NARO and planted one acre of cassava.

“I was able to apply the knowledge I acquired from the training to my own garden.”

From her one acre, she has been harvesting tubers and cassava leaves for daily consumption for the last six months. She also expects to harvest 8 000kg of fresh cassava tubers and 60 bags of cassava planting materials and plans to hire land to plant three new acres of cassava in 2019 using the planting materials from her garden for sales. She also intends to integrate other food crops such as eggplants and other leafy vegetables in the backyard to provide a year-round food supply for the household.

“I am now confident to continuously fight food insecurity in my household and support my fellow women to do the same.”

Increasing influence from women to make decisions regarding utilisation of family land or hire of land to grow more food crops, in order to harvest more food for consumption and sales. There is a shift towards a mindset change amongst cocoa growing household in ensuring food availability in their homes.

This issue of hunger was a main issue for **Everina Mbonia**:

“There is now peace of mind, knowing that even if cocoa has reduced this season, you are not anxious about feeding your family, because cocoa is no longer the alpha and omega to get food. Before this cassava, women were preoccupied thinking about what to eat, about food for the next meal, and its source. Now, there no more anxiety over food.

Over the years, NGOs and experts have tried to convince cocoa farmers to integrate food production into our cocoa farming system, but somehow the idea was not bought. Now that we can access early maturing, high yielding cassava varieties, we will continue to produce more cassava for sale to our fellow cocoa farmers.”

There is the prospect to increase access to good quality cassava planting material from the estimated 4200kg bag of cassava planting material that will be gathered from the 70 acres planted in 2018. Based on the result of the pilot, women now see business opportunities in engaging in cassava production for commercial purpose.

“Before engaging in cassava production, my family virtually purchased all food items from the local market with in my village. But for the last 5 months, I have been able to harvest cassava leaves and tubers for home consumption instead of buying them from the market.”

Lavina Tibakuliliya



Lessons to be learned from the implementation regarding its scalability and sustainability

- Addressing food insecurity in cocoa growing households requires the involvement of all household members. This pilot showed that men provided support to women in carrying out cassava production activities such as digging holes and planting.
- There is growing interest to increase cassava production due to availability of high yielding cassava planting materials within the district. Many women that were engaged in cassava production are motivated to hire additional land in the highland areas of the district and grow more cassava for commercial purposes.



We create opportunities

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