



*Local  
Skills Development  
for Youth  
(LSDY)*

Young women involved in commercial farming; coping with the agribusiness dynamics alongside their social roles

*Experience paper*



*Participants in this case study, who had been part of the LSDY Project interventions for a year, show positive signs of change – more young adults (particularly women) are empowered to take independent decisions and are income-generating members of households.*

*Furthermore, communities where these programmes operate are also beginning to show early evidence of change, by engaging with young female farmers and community workers. We tell the stories of two female youths below. These stories were selected as the most representative of the young adult participants under LSDY interventions.*

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Case Study and Impact Stories from Uganda.

**Local Skills Development for Youth (LSDY)**

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# *1.* Introduction

From previous projects, Swisscontact has learned that one of the key constraints of young women between the age of 18 and 30 years is them willingly or unwillingly dropping out of school and then either being married off by their parents or falling pregnant. In either case, they find themselves dependant and unable to change their conditions. The dependency persists as low levels of education, limited confidence and poor self-esteem lead to poor decision-making and eventually a vicious cycle of poverty. The LSDY Project aims to assist the youth — including these young women — to overcome their constraints through targeted project interventions.

The LSDY Project activities are implemented in 11 districts of eastern Uganda. This assignment studies the project interventions in Mayuge district, which is considered one of the poorest districts in Uganda with the highest distress among young women<sup>1</sup>. In this case study, we take a deeper look at the lives of participating young women and how project interventions have impacted their lives and decision-making regarding themselves and their families' futures. We look at how the young women balance their economic and social responsibilities and become contributors in their communities as peer educators, social workers, community youth leaders and counsellors.

**Overall, the youths who studied through this exercise reported that the project plan enabled them to avail economic opportunity but also increased their self-esteem, empowered them to become influencers in their communities, improved the quality of lives for their families and created hope for a better future.**

**Economically, we find that the guaranteed access to market coupled with agronomic and financial literacy training provides youths with the support needed to accelerate income-generation activities.**

**Regarding their social development, we find overcoming time poverty through life skills training for better decision-making on family planning significantly improves their morale and ability to prosper.**

Lastly, through the stories of young women we highlight the change in the roles of young women in their communities because of success in their agribusinesses. We particularly focus on where the activities have resulted in their influence on behavioural change in their communities.

<sup>1</sup> Mayuge district local government five-year development plan – Government of Uganda



## 2. LSDY Project and Methodology

# About Mayuge

Mayuge is located about 120km from the capital city of Kampala and 40km from the closest large city of Jinja. Mayuge historically has reported a female population of about 51.2% with a total population of approximately 457,000, growing at a rate of 3.5% per annum<sup>2</sup>.

The poor of Mayuge are categorised by the government as those that lack basic needs and services such as food and shelter, and lack economic opportunities due to their disconnected locations. According to the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process (UPPAP) II, whilst the lack of economic resources is a critical barrier to their progress, it does not adequately explain how some people continue to be poor. Other factors such as people's attitudes, lack of creativity and laziness are

partly attributed to the persistence of poverty in certain households, but this may be explained in turn by lack of opportunities.

Several NGOs and government at all levels are challenged not only to provide continuous hand-outs, but also to identify alternative income-generating activities and equip the poor with the necessary skills to enable effective utilisation of the opportunities and resources at their disposal.

The intervention Swisscontact proposes to overcome the persistence of poverty in Mayuge is a market-driven, youth-focused approach that can provide ongoing economic growth, whilst investing in life skills among the youth.

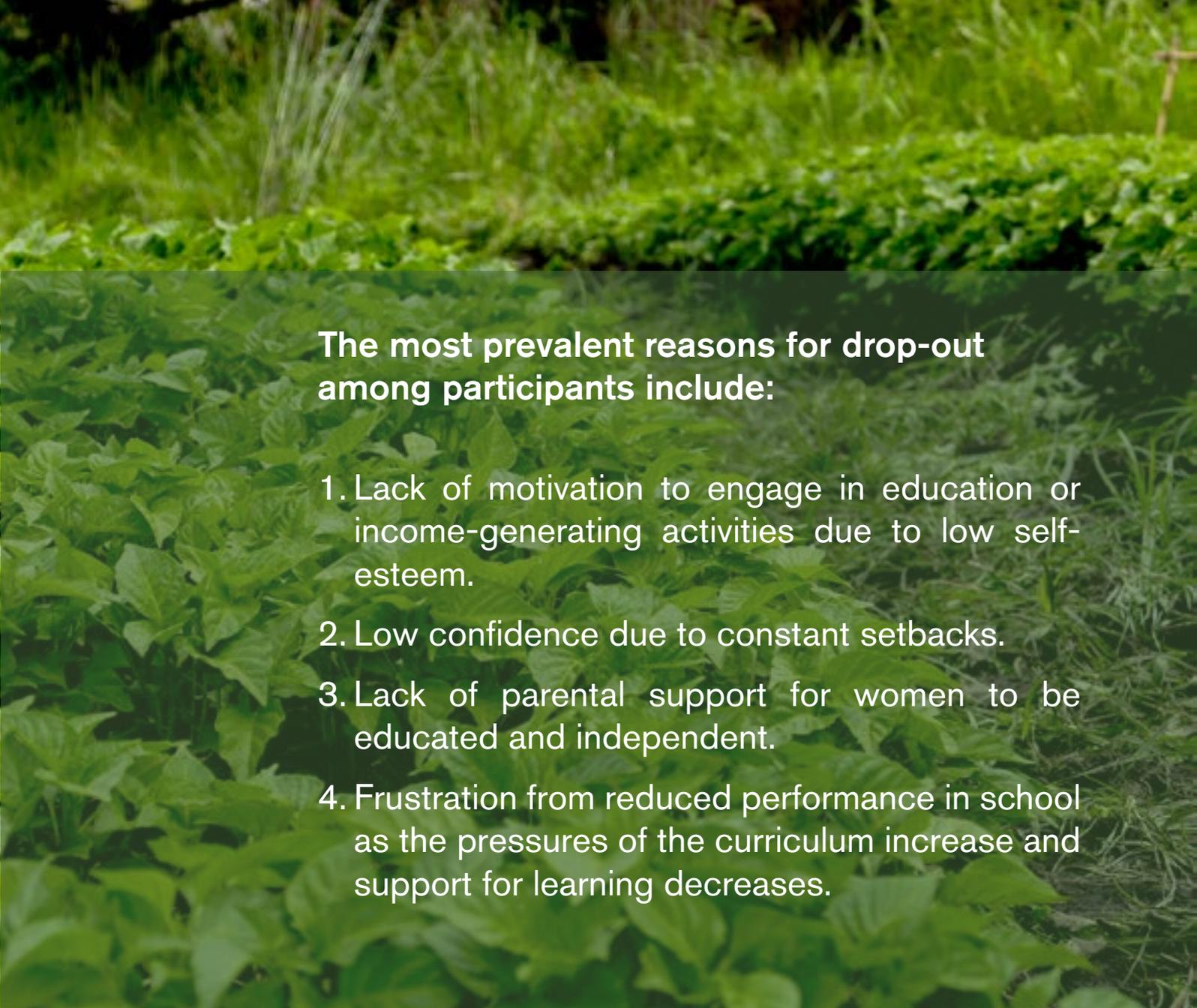
# About the LSDY Project and methodology

The LSDY Project follows the Swisscontact model of a learning cycle that is driven by 'markets and youth' and focuses on creating learning groups which ensure that with economic growth the youth are also building social confidence and life skills. This learning cycle is presented in the diagram on the right.

In line with the LSDY Project's mandate to maintain the engagement of a high volume of women and young mothers, LSDY adopted the tailor-made interventions of the Swisscontact U-Learn Project successfully implemented in other parts of Uganda, whereby the project would ensure that 50% of the participants are always female, whilst also ensuring that 65% of the engaged females are young mothers.

These interventions include facilitating engagement with private sector agribusinesses and other activities such as home-based horticulture for income generation; access to women-focused loan products and integrated mentoring; and life skills support (e.g. parenting as young mothers, balancing the responsibilities at home with those of work, and long-term planning for poverty reduction in their families). The project also builds on the adaptations of the U-Learn Project for reaching out to young females through female peer-to-peer support, women associations, female role models for coaching, and interventions through training modules, and local female-led savings groups.

This case study focuses on the change in the lives of the female youths and the change in their economic and social roles in households and communities.



**The most prevalent reasons for drop-out among participants include:**

1. Lack of motivation to engage in education or income-generating activities due to low self-esteem.
2. Low confidence due to constant setbacks.
3. Lack of parental support for women to be educated and independent.
4. Frustration from reduced performance in school as the pressures of the curriculum increase and support for learning decreases.

## 3. The Business Partnership

LSDY entered a business partnership with Tropical Dynasty, a private sector agribusiness in Uganda. The partnership is intended to demonstrate the potential in scaling up the company's business activity by engaging young people and increasing their capacity to produce the key agriculture crops that are of interest to Tropical Dynasty.

Tropical Dynasty agreed to provide expertise and link youth farmers to input dealers, arrange an agronomist to visit the farm(s) on a regular basis to check the farmer's crop, advise on the good agricultural practices (GAP) and provide a guaranteed purchase with a minimum price guarantee.

The youth farmers on the other hand agreed to make resources and land available to plant crops that are required by the company, learn from the agronomist and aim to have a minimum quantity available for purchase.

Under this business partnership, Tropical Dynasty has engaged 180 farmers and increased incomes of 100% of these youth farmers.

## Profile of young women farmers in Mayuge prior to their engagement with LSDY

Young females in the Mayuge district communities often find themselves excluded from all economic opportunities. Their options are limited to household chores, including working on the family farm to provide food for the household, or fetching water. Some women interviewed reported that from time to time they would travel to the nearby highway or market to sell some of the crop from their subsistence gardens. The small amount of money they would make from selling crops would be used to buy any medicines or supplies for the young ones in the house and sometimes they would put the money into a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) for emergencies. This simple description was consistent across the entire group of men and women farmers that were interviewed in Mayuge district for the case study.

The interviewed male and female youths reported some education before engaging with the LSDY Project. The average level of education is primary 7 (on average completed at age 13). Participants responded with a variety of reasons for dropping out after primary 7.

Furthermore, female youths are not encouraged to take on income-generating opportunities and continue to be considered a liability in these communities. These issues often lead the females to take on household responsibilities which leads to a burden on the household income, continuing a vicious cycle of disadvantaged female youths.

In many cases, to resolve this issue of economic burden, female youths choose to get married at an early age or are pressured by their families to get married. Whilst LSDY has proactively engaged female youths in programme activities, many female youths continue to face these challenges.



## 4. Stories of women: How commercial farming is changing the roles of women

Young female farmers profiled below are beneficiaries of a business partnership between young farmers and Tropical Dynasty, an agribusiness buyer, under a contract farming model. The impact on the farmers is measured by observing the change in the female roles in their households and personal lives, the change in their decision-making and future ambitions of their families.

These women were picked for their different situations which are at the same time reflective of the larger group of women participating in the LSDY Project interventions. According to our understanding, women participants can be categorised as follows:

1. **Young females between the ages of 18 and 30, who have chosen not to get pregnant, and instead pursued a life of economic growth and social responsibility;**
2. **Young single mothers between the ages of 18 and 30, who are eager to generate income to provide a better life for their children; and**

3. **Young mothers between the ages of 18 and 30, who want to change their lives and those of their families by engaging in income-generating activities and becoming leaders in their communities.**

We selected and below tell the stories of two young women who have benefited from the business partnership with Tropical Dynasty.

Whilst all young female participants share their own process of becoming independent, a key element of the intervention that has proven critical is that of life skills development. Participants felt a heightened sense of confidence and value from the life skills training, which enabled several young females to become community leaders in roles such as counsellors at churches and youth representatives at the local district offices, supporting non-government organisations in youth mobilisation and assisting their peers under the business partnership to enjoy successful production.

## Key results of the partnership in Mayuge

1. Accelerated hot pepper and white garden egg production and trade in eastern Uganda through the establishment of a **male and female youth focused grower network** and linking them to inputs and markets.
2. Facilitated a longer-term contract between Tropical Dynasty and the youth farmers for a 4-year period to ensure **income security** for the youths.
3. Cultivated a total of 44 acres under **partnership with Tropical Dynasty**.
4. From cultivation of the first 22 acres, total amount of money earned by 25 youths (of which 14 were female) is UGX 55,439,850 out of which UGX 22,633,725 was earned by females, over an 8-month cycle.
5. Increased **access to inputs for youth** in Mayuge.
6. Demonstrated a **positive perception of agribusiness** among youth in Mayuge.
7. Early **evidence of change in the roles of women** from household chores to economic and community roles alongside their household responsibilities.
8. Visible change in youths' **decision-making and self-esteem**.

# *Doreen's journey to self-confidence*

Story 1



Doreen is 20 years old and lives with her mother and three siblings in a small village 3km outside of Mayuge town. She was fortunate to attend school in her early years, but she was pressured to drop out after primary 7 because her parents did not think it was a good use of money to continue to educate the 'girl child'.

Doreen started her journey helping her mother on their household farm to grow food for the family and take care of her younger sister. When her mother would go to the market to sell some of the produce and buy supplies for the baby, she would stay home and take care of her younger sister and all other household chores, including cooking and cleaning the garden. Doreen did not have any strong aspirations in life because there was no hope and no opportunity. She knew that she had left school, but she did not want to live the life that her mother had to live and therefore would not get married or pregnant. She struggled for four years to find an economic opportunity where she would at least be able to leave her mother's home and make a better life for herself.

She regularly went to the nearby town to attend the church and one day met Joanita. Joanita was already involved in agribusiness and one of the participants of the LSDY Project. When they met, Joanita had been with LSDY for 4 months. Doreen was not very interested in agriculture because it was the same activity (farming) as her mother had been involved in and she wasn't sure if it would bring her enough income to change her life. Joanita had shared this sentiment when she first joined LSDY and therefore could relate to Doreen's concerns.

When she better understood the intervention and learned about this new business model with an agribusiness buyer; that she would have a market for what she produced; that the project would train her on how to run an agribusiness from inputs to market, manage her money and offer her life skills training which would empower her to manage her life more independently, Doreen became interested.

She recalls that day as a miracle, because within one hour of engaging with the LSDY team, she felt hope and courage that could lead to a better life for her. Joanita played a key role in Doreen's life because she was able to guide Doreen from her own experience on matters such as accessing family land, saving to get more land, managing the farm, and balancing home and farm responsibilities.

At the end of one year with LSDY, Doreen farms an acre of hot pepper and 0.5 acres of white garden eggs (a small green horticulture crop). She has been harvesting for three months now and each week she harvests between 250kg to 300kg of hot pepper and white garden eggs and prepares it for pick up by the agriculture business with whom she has an agreement.

In addition to the economic change that she has experienced over the six months since engaging with LSDY, Doreen shares with us that she engages with the field agronomists, traders and truck owners from the business company on a regular basis to learn the best practices of a successful agribusiness. These are all often male. Before training, she would not have been able to engage with them as she felt intimidated working with men, but with the support of the project she has confidence and is able to work alongside them confidently.

In her time away from the gardens, she works with the LSDY team and youth-focused programmes in town, where she can use her learning to help other women. She is now a peer educator and is actively engaged by the LSDY Project when they are involved in helping other women.

Whilst Doreen is very happy with the money she receives from the farms, her ability to be independent and ensure that when she has a family one day, she will be able to care for and educate her children much better than she was educated. She shares that the support she is providing to other women is very rewarding. Her confidence and self-esteem are secured by the trust that other women are putting in her. She is most grateful that she has people that now look up to her and think she is worthy of being their mentor and guide.



*Hajira Kagoya's life as a young mother with a bright future for her girl child*

Story 2

We capture the story of Hajira, as she is one of the participants that did not come across the opportunity in time. Hajira attended school until primary 6 and at the age of 19 was married off to a trader that bought maize from her mother's farm. She is now 22 and has a two-year-old son, Ahmed.

Hajira got into the marriage knowing that she did not have many options and therefore needed to get married and have children. She thought her husband would take care of her and her children for food and other needs. At the age of 21, with trade business not being very good, her husband left her for a new life somewhere else. She was forced to move back to her mother's home, where she now lives with Ahmed. Her main role became the care of her son and some trade in the village to have money for the baby's food. She bought small confectionary goods in town and sold them for a small profit in the village.

One day, Hajira heard of the LSDY Project on the radio and became interested in learning about this opportunity. She borrowed land from her family, although they were only comfortable giving her 0.25 acres. This did not discourage her; she was happy that she had an opportunity to begin this new life. She started by planting hot pepper to sell to the agribusiness company that LSDY had connected her to. Over the next three months, she cleared the land, planted and managed the farm carefully to ensure that she could get the maximum crop from her land. Hajira recalls that her first harvest was the most important and influential moment for her. Recognising the ability to do this on her own increased her confidence tremendously and proved to her mother that she could make a success of it. Over eight months, she has increased her land from 0.25 acres to 2 acres and now also employs farm labour from the village to help her with land clearing, weeding, watering and harvesting.

Hajira recalls that before she engaged with the LSDY Project, she was shy and often intimidated by men, particularly when outside of her village. She thought she was not supposed to compete with men for opportunities as this was not the role of women. Her engagement with the project and the life skills training helped her understand the equality between men and women. She has more confidence when expressing herself and takes independent decisions particularly around self-preservation and the use of contraception. Hajira wants a family and expects that she will have three children someday, but believes she first needs to generate income, be able to afford a house, take care of Ahmed properly and then plan for a new family so that she can give her children a better life and better education than she was able to access.

Hajira is always looking for new ideas and new ways of improving her business. She is not only working with the LSDY Project to produce the crops for the contracted agribusiness, but also looking at services like mobile money and WeFarm's weather insurance service, and enjoying weekly savings through Centenary Bank. She believes that for her to grow and achieve her dreams, she must work very hard and engage with others in the market regularly. She is keen to share her learning with other women so that they too can benefit from these services.

Hajira now serves in her community as a life skills coach. She often plays the role of conflict resolution or guidance on matters of income generation, family and health. She believes that her success in her agribusiness has made her more knowledgeable and this has made her influential in her community.



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**Swisscontact**

Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation

19/20 Off Martyr's Way Ntinda

P.O. Box 21153

Kampala

Uganda

[www.swisscontact.org](http://www.swisscontact.org)