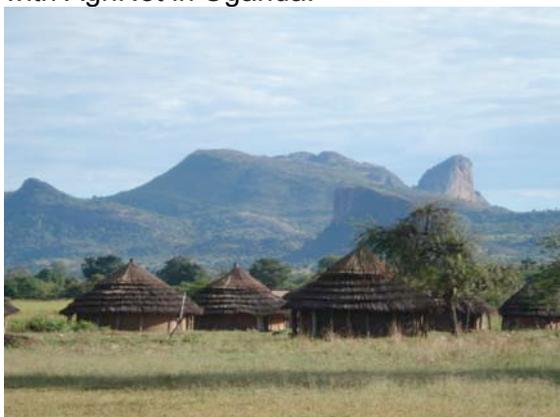


Ugandan Baseline Blog, November 2013

By Anne Dennig

This is a summary of the learning points gathered through interviews and field visits with AgriNet in Uganda.



South Karamoja, Northern Uganda

Ugandan Blog

Today we crossed back over the border at Malabar after ten days in Uganda. If I had to choose one word to describe our time in Uganda I would say "exciting". That's not only because of the floods, driving through some interesting "swimming pools" with water coming over our bonnet, but because of the impressive developments of the AgriNetwork in Northern Uganda. I will document what we have seen in detail but for now I wanted to write something informal that would give everyone an impression of what is developing in Uganda and how AgriNet are coping with the changes which are needed to access the training COB.



Flooding in Northern Uganda on the way to a collection point

Network Expansion in Northern Uganda

Our trip was not long enough to see the extent of the expansion of the networks in Northern Uganda, an area that has been through very troubled times and which has been receiving relief for the past 20 years. Sadly this has brought with it a dependency syndrome in the farmers. However, this is an area of great potential for the production of maize, sorghum, soya beans, sunflower, cotton, simsim, cassava etc. AgriNet has been supported by GOAL to bring the farmers in this area towards farming as a business through market information, supply of seeds, and collective marketing. To do this AgriNet has built up a strong network of farmers and agents, supported by the network managers Tonny Okech, John Patrick Olara, Jacinta Namubiru and Lira office manager Rebecca Acam. We visited many agents and farmers around Lira, then further away in Abim and even South Karamoja where we saw the first collective marketing with the Karamajong.

Challenges with Registration Process

One of the key things that we have learned is that there is a huge amount of work that the network managers are doing in training their agents to bring them up to the stage of registering for the Academy deals. It is easy to forget when we sit in our offices how difficult simple tasks can be on the ground if you don't have power, a smart phone or laptop, a scanner etc. Sending in deal plans, filling in the pending TSS form and providing all the details for final registration, is a long and arduous process when you don't have the equipment and Internet connection that you need. Then add to this the distances that managers need to travel to visit their agents and their farmers' groups. The journeys were hard with a Landrover and even harder if you are on a motorbike like Tonny and John Patrick.



Checking through records in South Karamoja

Is Mobile Money Practical Here?

Access to money through mobile phones was an issue that we wanted to explore. In the areas we visited there are still many farmers without mobiles or without the mobile money facility on their Sim. The network coverage is patchy and there is a lack of mobile money outlets in the rural trading centres; one reason for this is the large float needed to operate them. Many agents and farmers want to use mobile money, they know the risks of carrying cash only too well but they are all suspicious as they are used to keeping what little money they have under their beds and seeing the cash is the only way of believing that they have been paid. Mobile money looks very practical in some areas but it will take time to get established in others. To start with, mobile payments authorised by network managers and sent to the agents seem the most practical option.

Sorghum to East African Breweries



White sorghum in the field

White sorghum is the crop that the AgriNetwork is sourcing now (November). The farmers that we met were very happy with the quality seed that they had bought from AgriNet in June and were therefore ready to sell to them. AgriNet has an Local Purchase Order (LPO) from East African Breweries in Kampala (for the second year) and has a ten tonne truck based in Lira to collect from the agents' stores; nevertheless the roads are not easy due to flash flooding and this may cause some pick up delays. On the main road in Lira is another larger store, rented by AgriNet, that can be accessed by 20 tonne trucks. The harvest for white sorghum is starting now and will continue for the next few months; we saw a lot of white sorghum in the fields, some drying ready for threshing and cleaning, and the first of the bags ready for quality checking,

weighing, tagging and collection. Two white sorghum deals are expected in the next few weeks - so watch this space.



Discussing mobile money with agent Alfred Alao

Paul, Jacinta, Tonny and John Patrick, I hope that my impressions give a fairly accurate account of what AgriNet is doing. Thank you so much for being such attentive hosts for our trip. The baseline and impact stories will follow in more detail. But for everyone who wants to know more, just ask AgriNet!



Jacinta, Rebecca and Tonny in the Lira office

Contact: Paul Nyende

Email: panyende@agrinetug.net

Mobile: + 256 772 495950