

Tonny Okech; My Network in Northern Uganda, 2013

By Tonny Okech ¹



This impact story describes the work in 2013 of one of Uganda's new Network Managers, Tonny Okech. His network of 15 agents and around 500 farmers in Northern Uganda is supplying white sorghum to East African Breweries in Kampala.

My Network



Tonny Okech at AgriNet's Lira Office

I have been a member of AgriNet as an information board manager (IBM) and Transaction Security Service (TSS) agent since 2011. In 2012 I became a Network Manager. My area covers Lira, Apach, Alebtong and Otuke. These areas produce white sorghum, maize, sunflower, cassava chips and beans. I have links to 500 farmers through my 15 agents. I was managing 33 agents but now I have 15. First we dropped the guys who did not send in market information. Then we dropped guys who did not send in details of their IDs and references. Then some agents didn't sell seed to farmers even with a commission of 200/ UGX per kg. So now I am left with the good reliable agents, I have worked together with these agents and I trust them. I expect to access COB 2 in the next weeks (November 2013) and use it to collect the white sorghum crop from the farmers to link to the buyer East African Breweries in Kampala.

¹ Edited by Anne Dennig in 2013

The Effects of Northern Uganda's War

Because of the years of war in the area many people have not been to school and some of our farmers even need help to write their names. This all makes agent and farmer registration more difficult in this area. Of my 15 agents only five can read and write but they all know business. They can use a calculator and keep records. They all have phones but some can't send SMS messages.



Quality check of white sorghum

Getting Ready for White Sorghum

In 2012/3 my network completed three deals of ten tonnes of white sorghum. Then in June and July this year, my network sold 50,000/ kg of SILA white sorghum seed to our farmers. We sold these seeds through the agents. This variety of seed is improved white sorghum with a better yield and faster growing than the local type. One kg of seed produces 100 kg grain. One acre takes five kg of seed and produces five to six 100 kg bags. The farmers planted from July until September and we are harvesting now (November) until February. When the crop is ready it is cut, dried and then threshed. The grain must be cleaned and then bagged for the store where it will be checked to see if it reaches the quality standards.

Collection Points

Using a sampler for quality control



It has been important to train my agents on how to do good quality control and to keep detailed records. Each of my agents has a store and a weighing scale. The agents do the quality checking; they know their crops. They weigh accurately with a scale that has been checked and certified this year by the government. We have a Local Purchase Order (LPO) for supply to East African Breweries (EABL) in Kampala, the quality requirement is for clean, dry (less than 12.5 % moisture) white sorghum. The agents do not have moisture metres so they take a sample out with the sampler and test it by hand.

AgriNet is awaiting the delivery of a ten tonne truck to be based in Lira and which we can use on a regular basis for picking up produce from the six districts we are operating in here. It could transport to Kampala but we can also bring ten tonnes of produce to Lira town to add to larger loads; we have a store in Lira for this. The sorghum will be delivered at Sunrise (contracted by EABL) in Kampala for final cleaning before it goes to the brewery. The price offered by EABL is 1,050/ UGX per kg, AgriNet is offering 700/ UGX to farmers, cash-on-the-bag (COB).

Explaining TSS to Agents and Farmers



Bonny Ocol, agent for AgriNet

It is difficult to explain TSS to agents and farmers and I have to do a lot of training with agents; to do this I need to make regular visits. I am not getting any payment from AgriNet for this, just commission from deals. I will earn around 260,000/ UGX for my next ten tonne deal. This income will be ok when it is weekly or if we are selling 20 tonnes it will be a reasonable commission.

Mobile Money Challenges

Mobile money payment will be difficult at first in my network area. Not all of the farmers have phones, the network is unreliable and there are very few mobile money agents in the trading centres. Even where there are agents, they do not usually keep a large float for payments, so we will have to work around these challenges. For some time I think that we

will need to pay the agents via mobile phone and then they will pay the farmers in cash. However, if the farmers will accept mobile money they can be paid directly.

Learning Information Technology Skills

Since I began working with AgriNet I have learned how to send and receive market information on my phone through SMS and how to use a computer and to send emails. Now as a Network manager one main challenge that I am experiencing when I am doing deals is that it is very difficult and expensive for me to get onto the Internet to complete TSS forms and to communicate about my deals on mylll. I have a smart phone but I cannot download files, such as the TSS form. I live in Dokolo, but I have no laptop and so I have to travel to the Lira office to use the computer and Internet there. Another problem is lack of capital to run the network business with my agents. I need this money to rent stores, buy airtime and for travelling around the region to visit and train my agents on TSS. The commission from the deals that we do helps me and my network agents to improve our lives to a higher level. There is a good commission to be made when doing regular deals with the TSS system. The system is fair.



Jacinta Namubiru, Paul Nyende and Tonny Okech at the 2013 COB 2 Workshop

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