

John Patrick Olara, Network Coordinator in Kole and Oyam, Northern Uganda

By John Patrick Olara¹

John Patrick Olara explains his work with AgriNet. In this story he visits Myene to find out from his agent if the farmers are ready to start Academy deals. It shows how in a remote village the farmers are keen to sell their crops to AgriNet and to receive payments through mobile phone payment either directly to their phones or through their agent Vincentina Oyela.



John Patrick Olara, AgriNet

AgriNet Areas Around Lira

I am based in Oyam, Northern Uganda. I work with Jacinta Namubiru to coordinate two districts, Kole and Oyam, these areas produce white sorghum, maize, soya bean, sunflower and some cotton. I have links to 200 farmers through ten agents. I have been an information board manager (IBM) for AgriNet for four years and a network coordinator for two. The roads are poor but this area is accessible for a ten tonne trucks. My network is spread out, but I have a motorbike, which I use to visit my agents. I cannot easily access the Internet as I have no laptop, but I can get emails on my phone but I can't download documents or fill in forms. I have to work with Jacinta and Paul to fill in the TSS forms.

On Friday 15th November I visited Myene,

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with Jacinta Namubiru and Paul Nyende to arrange with the farmers' group about the collection and sale of their crop and to find out if they would be able to receive mobile money payments.

The AgriNet Agent for Myene

Myene lies around 35 km from Gulu and 100 km from Lira. The village is isolated with poor road access; but this is a fertile region. We sold white sorghum seed (SILA) to the farmers, which they planted in July. It has been grown here for the second year and the harvest this year looks good. AgriNet's agent here is Vincentina Oyela, she has been working with AgriNet for one year. She has an information board that she can use to announce market prices including the 700/ UGX per kg for the white sorghum that AgriNet is supplying to East African Breweries (EABL).



Vincentina Oyela AgriNet agent in Myene

Vincentina is a retired nurse; she is the chairperson of the farmers' group and keeps all the paperwork of the 108 membership, the accounts of expenditure and the records of those farmers who bought the white sorghum seed. Vincentina will be collecting the crop for AgriNet in two stores. Some crop is ready and some is still drying. She wants to announce that the stores are open and collect quickly for pick up by AgriNet.

Cash-On-The-Bag by Mobile Money

We can send the money to pay cash-on-the-bag for the crop to her by mobile phone. Vincentina can give out cash to the farmers or if farmers want to be paid on their mobiles we can send the money directly to their phones. Vincentina is very aware of the problem of security; mobile money is a good way forward for her because she wants to reduce the amount of cash she needs to hold. She is also not keen to have the risk of holding the crop in the store for too long and would be happy to get the

produce collected within a week and sent off to EABL.

Changing Mobile Money into Cash

Jimmy Okidi



Jimmy Okidi is one of the members of the Myene farmers' group. He is also a shop owner and mobile money agent in the trading centre close to Vincentina's store. Jimmy operates for MTN. Jimmy

states "Nowadays the network is not a problem and we can charge phones through the solar chargers. I see no problem with cashing the farmers' money, but I will need to know the estimated amounts two days before the payments. I operate a small shop, so if I don't have enough float for mobile money withdrawals I can use money from my shop float."

Some of the farmers do not have phones and would only like to see cash, but others have asked us to help them to buy phones and to deduct the cost from their sale of grain. AgriNet will start by buying ten phones so that the farmers will be able to do this. The farmers could also use Jimmy's phone if they only have a SIM card. If 20-30 farmers want to cash their mobile money it could be as much as 4,000,000/ UGX.



Jimmy's shop and MTN agency

Jimmy can help the farmers who wish to be paid onto their mobiles with the SIM cards that they will need.

Vincentina will use the AgriNet information board to put out information about the sorghum collection; this will include the price, the quality needed and the collection dates. She will also advertise the possibility for the mobile money payment.

Plans for the Upcoming Deals

I will also be sourcing from my other agents and not all of these are in such a good situation to receive mobile money. Yesterday I visited two agents, Patrick Okello in Aweloabutuory,

and Alfred Olao in Barrrip. In the farming groups there were few with mobiles and no close access to mobile money agents. We did a test with one farmer by using his friend's phone and by cashing the money through our office manager Rebecca Acam. This first test worked, although another test with the second group later that day failed due to the network being down. So mobile money is still a challenge in my area.



Patrick Okello, agent for John Patrick Olara explaining mobile phone payment to farmers

I will be working with Jacinta to organize the registration of the deals from my areas.

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