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Who says my land cannot be productive?

A farmer's journey to a forest
full of food security!

by Magdalene Amujal and Gillian Avako, Uganda

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Stories
of
Change

Connecting traditional knowledge and
innovations for fair and sustainable
food systems

United Nations
Decade of
**FAMILY
FARMING**
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Stories of change: Connecting traditional knowledge and innovations for fair and sustainable food systems

In December 2017, the [United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Family Farming \(UNDAF, 2019-2028\)](#) thus constituting a framework that recognizes the importance of family farmers, which includes peasants, indigenous people, traditional communities, pastoralists, fisherfolks, upland farmers, and many other groups of food producers that possess a unique potential to promote transformative changes in the way food is grown, produced, processed and distributed.

All over the world, there are thousands of stories of distinctive work carried out anonymously by family farmers, including women and youth, on successful transitions to more inclusive, sustainable and fair food systems. Those stories are based on co-creation and sharing of traditional knowledge and innovations that are helping to make food systems sustainable, leaving no one behind.

In this context, the [Family Farming Knowledge Platform](#) in collaboration with the [Barefoot Guide Connection](#) organized a series of “writeshops”, writing classes to support practitioners to write their own experience, generating knowledge which highlight the practices, changes, innovations and impacts of what they do in support of family farming.

These writeshops represented an opportunity to share the creative process through which identify, recognize, write and exchange stories and experiences from young people, women, farmers, small-scale producers who work to promote, improve and strengthen family farming and achieve prosperous and inclusive rural societies.

This initiative was conceived to provide a space to highlight the human, cultural and social dimensions of family farming, including the human rights embedded in family farming and its social and economic organization.

The stories presented in this compilation - selected among those written during the writeshops, highlight the different ways in which family farmers responsibly and creatively manage their natural resources, landscapes and ecosystems as well as the cultural and symbolic values that define their identity.

Cover photo by Magdalene Amujal

Who says my land cannot be productive? A farmer's journey to a forest full of food security!

by Magdalene Amujal and Gillian Avako, Uganda

We are Magdalene and Gillian, trainers working for Kulika Uganda. We are passionate about seeing that people engaged in agriculture adopt sustainable farming practices which are easy to implement and have benefits for the people and the planet.



Legume shrub of Caliandara for animal fodder. Photo by Magdalene Amujal.

Kulika is a non-government organization working with rural communities to empower people to build their livelihoods and that of their communities with skills and technologies in Ecological Organic Agriculture alongside, social and business education and creative capacity building.

Let us introduce to you Lovinsa, a farmer who lives with her husband and five children in Lutisi

Village, Namayumba Sub-county, Wakiso district where they have two acres of land. The family used to grow bananas and legumes on this land but until they came to us they could not meet their food and income needs. Lovinsa was always looking for ways of increasing the productivity of their limited land and improving her farming activities. In her community, extension service workers hardly reached the farmers and this meant that farmers couldn't get support to improve their farming methods.



Sweet Potatoes and maize. Photo by Magdalene Amujal.

When she learnt about Kulika Training Center through her friends, she made an effort to visit. During the visit, she was introduced to different agricultural technologies and practices. With encouragement and support from family and group members, Lovinsa then, full of excitement, registered to attend an eleven months Ecological Organic Agriculture Training course organized by Kulika Uganda. From the course, Lovinsa learnt of a basket of options for family farming from which she could make choices.

She was particularly interested in the food forest as a sustainable way of improving her farming systems. Lovinsa learnt ecological organic agricultural technologies and practices such as planting in rows, making organic manures, looking after livestock, agroforestry and integrating animals and crops.

As trainers, part of the challenge of teaching this course is to help the farmers to let go of their conventional ways of farming which is not always easy. For example, training farmers to switch from one crop combination to a more convenient one is usually met with some resistance”



Plantain (Matokee). Photo by Magdalene Amujal.

The training has 11 modules, all structured to support the improvement of household agriculture. The trainees' learning is divided into residential blocks (at Kulika Training Centre) and on-farm periods in between to allow utilization of knowledge and skills learnt. This enabled Lovinsa to practice what she learnt.

The frequent follow up visits by Kulika field officers coupled with her own interest and commitment meant that Lovinsa and family members would develop confidence in the processes and started believing in themselves. This unlocked her potential that led to the success of her food forest.

She worked hard and followed all the steps, establishing a food forest in a quarter of an acre with the help of her family members as well as the group members. All the materials for establishing the food forests were obtained from her own savings and from the group members.

Lovinsa learnt that household waste is valuable in contributing to the fertility of the

land. She established rubbish holes for both biodegradable (crop refuse and peelings) and non-biodegradable materials (plastics, broken bottles etc.). That contributed not only to the manure for the plants but also to better sanitation at home.



Sack mound vegetable growing. Photo by Magdalene Amujal.

A food forest is a garden which has all types of food crops all year round, regardless of the season. In the garden, there is maximization of the productivity of the land as the crops are carefully established following their characteristics e.g. feeding habits, nutrient needs, growth patterns and maturity periods. This promotes biodiversity and stabilizes the ecosystem. With all this in place, disease and pest incidences are reduced.



Pumpkin on an anti-hill. Photo by Magdalene Amujal.

Kulika Uganda provided the extension support to help her set up the garden and build her capacity to practice what she had learnt.

You should pay her food forest a visit now. If you do, you will be inspired to find a wide variety of vegetables, bananas, potatoes, maize, fruits, leguminous plants (caliandara, climbing beans) and cassava. With this mixture of crops, by the second month of the first season Lovinsa was able to feed the family with vegetables.



Jack Fruit. Photo by Magdalene Amujal.

In her own words, moreover with a smile on her face, Lovinsa told us; *“As a family, we were so malnourished. Consuming a variety of foods from our forest garden, we now eat a balanced diet and we are healthier. Even our neighbors comment on how healthy we look! When I have visitors, I do not worry about what to feed them. I simply go to my forest garden, get the food and prepare.”*

“I used to suffer so much during the dry season without green vegetables, but now I can enjoy vegetables throughout the year. This is because we use different manures to fertilize the soils and practice mulching. We have also channeled most of the runoff water into the gardens and with all that, our crops are sustained longer than before. We also adopted a small garden near the homestead where vegetables like kale are planted”.

She told us she was now so happy that she did not need to spray her crops with harmful chemical pesticides. With the knowledge she got, she

would easily prepare her own bio pesticides and bio fertilizers using locally available materials. The husband added: *“Our home used to be dirty, but with these new technologies, especially the making of organic manure from the household waste we improved the hygiene in our home”.* That practice saved the family income from buying chemical pesticides and at the same time improved the soil fertility.



Pawpaw tree. Photo by Magdalene Amujal.

We at Kulika are encouraging farmers to revive traditional approaches to farming from our ancestors, and to be proud of their local and indigenous knowledge, combining them with modern organic, permaculture innovations. Moving away from harmful chemical pesticides and fertilizers not only produces better food and saves input costs but it also restores the soil which absorbs carbon dioxide and can contribute to climate cooling.

After six months, Lovinsa and her family realized that the pilot forest garden could not give them the needed income, as most of the crops were consumed by the family members. So, she demarcated another $\frac{1}{4}$ an acre for a second food forest. Although the food forest was established, the family had to wait for six more months to begin earning income from vegetables and other crops.

From their savings, the family added livestock to their farm: 2 pigs and 10 local chickens and a cow. This became an additional source of manure to enrich the fertility of the land.

With the improvements on the farm, Lovinsa started receiving visitors. Agriculture extension officers and other organizations came to learn about the food forest. She became a role model in her community. She got additional income from organizations who took their farmers to learn from her food forest garden and she was also hired to train groups of farmers by other development partners.

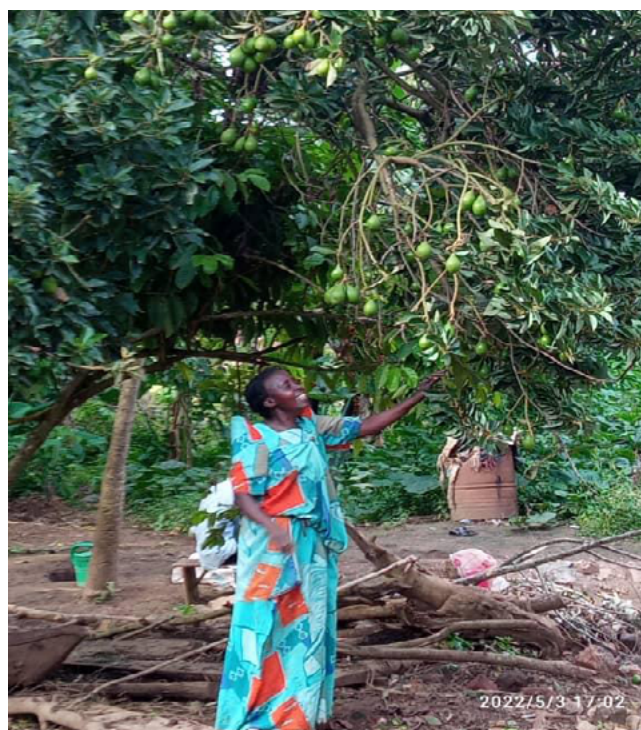
The family was now able to meet their basic needs: *"We have enough food to eat at home and we enjoy a lot of fruits. My parents are able to provide us with books and pens for our education."* one of the children told us with a proud smile.



Mango tree. Photo by Magdalene Amujal.

Lovinsa realized that a family can become food secure if the land is made productive by using simple and effective technologies. Her home became a meeting venue for her ten group members and they would always learn from her garden. Lovinsa remarks with lovely sense of a leader:

"I want all my group members to adopt the food forests in their homes because I have experienced how beneficial it is!"



Avocado. Photo by Magdalene Amujal.

Whenever they visit Lovinsa, they observed new improvements in her garden such as new seedlings planted, healthy crops and also her family commitment to the success of the garden. They realized that a family can grow a variety of food using food forest technology on a small piece of land! This was motivating to the members.

They all expressed an interest to start their own garden with the help of their new trainer! Thereafter the group members worked together

on a rotational basis to establish forest gardens in each member's home.

The members also established a routine for visiting each other to encourage, advise, learn and pool labor to support one another where needed.

The members told us *"We now have a learning center and agricultural trainer in our reach. We can access home-grown agricultural extension assistance easily!"*

She is receptive to technologies that add value to her agricultural production. She has new ideas on how to improve her farming methods and to increase her income. Lovinsa observed that with the increased number of visitors to her farm, it was important for her to incrementally improve the quality of her work.

She plans to continue training the group members and provide her services to other

organizations. Her farm has been registered as a model farm that hosts other farmers during Kulika's 11-month training.

Kulika Uganda has continued supporting the family and other group members through extension visits and connections to other partners. Through social innovation, Kulika will ensure that Lovinsa becomes part of a training team to not only build the capacity of other farmers but as a source of encouragement and inspiration.

There are too many farmers needing support. It is through the experiences of local farmers like Lovinsa that the new ecological approaches, like food forests, can spread horizontally, far and wide. We need to cultivate local models, like Lovinsa, to spread the skills and technologies through farmer-to-farmers extension outreach.

Dairy cow. Photo by Magdalene Amujal.



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