

**ASSURING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA BY 2020:  
Prioritizing Action, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships**  
April 1–3, 2004, Kampala, Uganda

**SUMMARY NOTE**

**Parallel Session:**     **Implementing Action in Key Areas: Strengthening Governance**

**Panelist:**            *Norah Owaraga*, Executive Secretary, Uganda Change Agent Association,  
Uganda

**Title:**                 **Strengthening Good Governance**

**Date:**                 April 2, 2004

**Understanding of Concepts**

The theme for this conference is: “assuring food and nutrition security in Africa.” My understanding of this theme and, therefore, the purpose of the conference is that this conference is intended to discuss and come up with practical strategies that will ensure that by 2020 there will be mechanisms in place in Africa that will mitigate occurrences of famine and/or chronic hunger in Africa. Famine being a situation in which people starve from insufficient or no intake of food, whilst chronic hunger is a situation where people experience sustained nutritional deprivation.

My role at this conference is the challenge to present, from a Ugandan perspective, learning experiences of how to successfully implement change at the grassroots level, with regards to strengthening good governance.

The concept of governance connotes power, authority, and control, amongst others. Within the framework of this conference, therefore, governance can be understood to mean people and processes that have the power, authority and control over food and nutrition security in Africa.

Since the session for which these notes are being prepared is about how to successfully implement change at the grassroots level with regards to strengthening good governance, it is important to clarify what the grassroots level means. My understanding of grassroots level is the ordinary people who, in this context, would be the producers and consumers of their own food (subsistence small scale farmers) as opposed to the Extension Officer for example. So, in essence this presentation is about how to successfully implement change amongst subsistence small-scale farmers with regards to power, authority and control over the mechanisms that mitigate occurrences of famine and/or chronic hunger in Africa.

**The Status Quo of Governance in Africa**

The premise of these notes is the liberal ideal that “the government is not the giver of rights to the people; it is the people who are the source of government’s legitimacy”<sup>1</sup>.

Arguably, the status quo of governance in Africa is far from the liberal ideal, even in those countries where the people supposedly democratically elect governments. It is questionable whether there is a country in Africa in which the people at the grassroots truly believe that they are the source of their government’s legitimacy. That they can, for example, use their collective power to demand that their governments ensure every citizen is entitled to a basic quantity and quality of food. For example, that their governments should protect the processes of production and distribution of basic African staple foods from the onslaught of cheap, imported foods that are sold on the African markets, and/or the dumping of foreign foods in Africa that is sometimes done in the name of relief aid. The reality is that most people at the grassroots in Africa are suffering from spiritual poverty that is sustained by a psychological feeling of inferiority and this, therefore, does not allow them to participate fully in the governance of Africa.

On the other side, it is also questionable whether there is a country in Africa in which those in government truly believe that the source of the legitimacy of the government (leadership) is the people. For example, those who are in positions of power and authority are answerable to the people at the grassroots. In fact, it can be argued that governments and leaders, in general (extension workers, members of parliament, NGO staff, etc.), in Africa govern with an attitude of a superiority complex that encourages them to believe that they are doing the people at the grassroots a favor.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jim Peron, “The Liberal System of Values,” published in *The Liberal Tide —From Tyranny to Liberty*, Institute for Liberal Values (2003).

## Strengthening Good Governance at the African Grassroots Level

In order to strengthen good governance at all levels and in order to bring about sustained positive change at the grassroots level, it is imperative that processes intended for the conscientisation of the people at the grassroots are stimulated. People at the grassroots need to be enabled to go through processes that provoke them to look inward to establish why they have a psychological feeling of inferiority. The people at the grassroots need to be enabled to grapple realistically with their problems, to attempt to find solutions to their problems, to develop a conscious awareness and physical awareness of their situation, to be able to analyze it, and provide answers for themselves. Once people at the grassroots level go through these processes they will undoubtedly experience a new found dignity and pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their cultures, their religion and their outlook to life and will, therefore, be in a position to participate meaningfully in decision making organs and processes that determine their survival including assuring food and nutrition security.

The work of Uganda Change Agent Association (UCAA)<sup>2</sup> gives an example of how the potential of people at the grassroots can be enhanced through conscientisation and the promotion of the self-reliant participatory development methodology (SRPD).

UCAA is a nationwide indigenous Association of rural men and women, development workers, who are committed to the propagation of the self-reliant participatory development methodology. Full membership in UCAA is reserved for those development workers who have undergone the UCAA 8-week residential Change Agent Training Course. At the end of 2003 UCAA had a total 1,732 Full Members. In addition, at the end of 2003, a total of 700 Individual development workers and 25 development Institutions had joined UCAA as Working Partners. The members of UCAA, by the end of 2003, had organized themselves into a total of 221 branches located in 51 of the 56 districts of Uganda. In districts where there are more than one branch, the branches and the members form the District Change Agent Association (DCAA).

The work of UCAA is based on the conviction that the foundation for all development is personal (human) development. Personal development is an on-going process in which individuals develop self-respect, self-confidence, tolerance and determination and become cooperative and innovative. UCAA recognizes that personal development can be achieved through helping individuals to become aware of the costs of their misdirected priorities and their opportunities for self-improvement in order to change their priorities; to develop their skills; acquire knowledge; and eliminate their dependency thinking. It is for this reason that UCAA is implementing a countrywide human resource capacity building Change Agent Training (CAT) Programme in Uganda.

It is UCAA's experience that once people attain personal development it is inevitable that they will take interest in their economic, political and social situations. It is inevitable that they will become more innovative and engage in economic activities geared towards improving their standards of living. It is also inevitable that they will take interest in the way they are governed and they will be more likely to take active participation in the political development of their community and country at large. In UCAA we use the analogy of a house to show development relationships, the foundation is personal (human) development, the pillars are economic and political development and the roof is social development (see Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows the two ways in which UCAA accesses the communities that we work with as follows:

- a) UCAA goes into a community and identifies already existing self-help groups. UCAA then selects potential change agents from the members of those self-help groups and invites them to a Change Agent Training Course, subsidized by UCAA, utilizing grants from our funders.
- b) UCAA enters the community through other development agencies (other NGOs, funding agencies, and government structures) and in 'partnership' with these agencies UCAA selects and trains potential change agents. In most cases the relationship is contractual, where UCAA is contracted by another agency to train their staff (development workers) and/or community members within their project areas. In this way, UCAA attempts to propagate the self-reliant participatory development methodology and to influence other agencies to adapt it and integrate it in their work.

After their training, Change Agents have the opportunity to voluntarily join UCAA as members and become part of the collective owners of UCAA.

Most importantly, however, after their training, change agents are expected to go back into their communities and share their experience and knowledge with members of the self-help group from which they were selected. In addition, they are also expected to share their experience and knowledge with members of other neighboring groups that did not have the opportunity to have one of their members trained. This is the process that Figure 3 is attempting to reflect.

Change agents are also expected to stimulate formation of new self-help groups. They are expected to facilitate processes that encourage self-help groups with similar interest to federate, in order to form associations, through which they can influence macro policies.

At the self-help group level, UCAA, through the change agents, acts as a stimulant. UCAA facilitates the process of conscientising the change agents and, in turn, we expect that the change agents will do the same at group level.

At community level UCAA encourages cooperation through participation in self-help groups, but does not really decide the form and shape of the self-help groups, which are expected to remain autonomous.

---

<sup>2</sup> UCAA can be contacted via email on [ucaa@infocom.co.ug](mailto:ucaa@infocom.co.ug) for more information or check our website: [www.ucaa.or.ug](http://www.ucaa.or.ug)

The work of the change agent is to encourage men and women within their communities to enter the cycle of savings, in order to accumulate capital for investment. The change agent then acts as a consultant, who advises rural men and women to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge that will ensure that their investments in income generating activities are viable. The change agents are trained to be able to transfer such technical skills as, bookkeeping (cash book accounting and/or double entry bookkeeping), record keeping (minutes, etc.), feasibility and viability analysis, etc.

Change agents are also trained to be able to facilitate processes in which men and women in their communities acquire analytical skills that can help them to carry out such analyses as poverty analysis, how gender issues affect development, how culture and tradition affect development, etc. These skills are intended to help men and women to throw off the debilitating burden of personal disempowerment and to motivate them to actively participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

An example of how the work of UCAA is positively impacting on and enhancing the potential of people at the grassroots can be seen from the testimony of one of our change agents shown in Box 1.

Indeed, Paineto's personal development continues to grow and he continues to facilitate social, political and economic development processes in his home area. Paineto's work is recognized internationally. He was the only Ugandan among 12 Kenyans and a Tanzanian who were the first recipients of the Ufadhili East African Community Service Award, on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2002, in Nairobi. Early this year, Paineto purchased a vehicle (station wagon) in order to transport eggs from his poultry farm, milk from his dairy farm, and pineapples from his farm to the markets in Kasese Town. He is also assisting members of the groups he is working with to transport their produce. Paineto reports that he is currently working with 23 well organized groups who have shares amounting to Ush 7,299,350 and savings amounting to Ush 20,706,300 in the Bukonzo Joint Savings and Credit Association.

The self-reliant participatory (CAT) methodology as implemented by UCAA and the concept of conscientisation are well explained by Burkey<sup>3</sup> in his book "People First".

**UCAA Major Achievements:** As of November 2003, a total of 2,505 rural men and women had been trained as change agents. Sadly, 143 of them have since passed away and so as of November 2003, there were a total of 2,362 living trained change agents (1,215 men and 1,147 women). These trained Change Agents reported that they are working with over 3,490 self-help groups having a total membership of 85,306 (30,058 men and 55,248 women). UCAA's experience indicates that women more than men are responsive to the self-reliant participatory development methodology.

- **Stimulating Economic Development Processes:** A sample indicates that of those groups reporting 76% have their own internal savings schemes; and 59% have their own internal credit schemes for members. In 2002, 46% of the groups reported having paid dividends to their group members during the year. Reported cash dividends amounted to Ush 216,453,063. In 2002, 84% of 42,539 members of self-help groups that change agents that were surveyed felt that their standard of living had improved in the past year.
- **Nurturing Social Development Processes:** Perhaps the greatest achievement of UCAA with regards to social development is fostering of the volunteer spirit of the change agents and ensuring gender equality. All the work that change agents do with the self-help groups they do voluntarily. UCAA does not pay them to work with groups. Amongst the membership of UCAA we have come to expect gender equality and so in all of the association's structures at all levels, our simple policy of equal participation for both men and women is actively implemented, without resistance.
- **Nurturing Political Development Processes:** Within UCAA, the members of UCAA respect the UCAA Constitution and often refer to it before major decisions about the association are taken. We trust that the change agents are also trying their level best to inculcate constitutionalism among members of the self-help groups that they are working with. During the local council elections in 2002, a total of 587 change agents and UCAA Working Partners contested the elections and 70% (414) of them were elected at all levels from village committees to district councils. Men and women were roughly equally represented. In addition, a total of 627 change agents and UCAA Working Partners assisted as polling officers, civic educators, campaign managers, etc. During the elections for members of parliament and during the presidential elections in 2001/2002 change agents were also actively involved.

Since this presentation is about how to strengthen good governance as an example of the effectiveness of the UCAA methodology we share this testimony given to a Journalist by one of our change agents, who is now a politician: **Beatrice Ventice Omony**, is the woman representative, LCV, Lira District. She says: ("I have been looking at women councilors but they would never come back to consult with the grassroots. When I realized that I had the knowledge of how to work with the grassroots people, I said let me try my luck." "Before training as a Change Agent, I looked at the LCV post as a no-go area. I thought that was a post for very educated (formal) people so how could a person like me with an Advanced Level Certificate stand for the same? CAT helped me attain self-confidence to reach out to the people

---

<sup>3</sup> S. Burkey, *People First — A Guide to The Self-Reliant Participatory Development Methodology*, Zed Books (1993).

especially since they had taught us how to approach people. During the campaigns I was just insisting on what I was coming to do. There were three of us who stood for the post. The race was tough but I eventually made it,” adds Omony).

### **Challenges Faced by UCAA**

**Illiteracy.** Perhaps the biggest challenge faced by UCAA as we move further down the grassroots, is the very high levels of illiteracy. Thousands of rural men and women are unable to read and write and are, therefore, unable to access UCAA training programs. UCAA is hopeful that the government’s Universal Primary Education program will go a long way in mitigating this challenge in the future. However, in the meantime, UCAA has translated our key training materials to 14 Ugandan languages and we have training teams that are able to deliver our training packages in 20 Ugandan languages. We are also exploring mechanism to partner with other development agencies that are providing functional adult literacy classes.

**Development AIDS (Aid Induced Dependency Syndrome)** is a condition in which development agencies (especially foreign aid agencies) cause or induced a dependency on more foreign aid and thus destroy or kill efforts at self-reliant development. The scourge of development AIDS is wide spread in Uganda and continues to be nurtured by the majority of development agencies (government and civil society organizations). These organizations operate within the same communities as UCAA and the work of UCAA is often frustrated by the extravagant expenditures of those organizations that give the wrong impression to the grassroots men and women that all development agencies have a lot of money to waste. So, sometimes our training programs are by passed by the people at the grassroots as they rush to a ‘workshop’ where seating allowances will be paid and/or material handouts (cooking utensils, seeds, farm implements, etc.) will be dished out for free. Similarly, UCAA is also challenged by the negative effects of Micro Finance Institutions that just give out loans to people without giving them prior training to manage the credit and without promoting the culture of saving. UCAA subscribes to the philosophy of “do not do anything for the people that they can do for themselves”.

### **Some of the Conditions that Facilitate the Work of UCAA**

**Economically,** Uganda has come a long way and, indeed, Uganda is often quoted as an example of one of the poorest countries that has successfully reversed negative economic trends resulting from poor macro economic policies. For example, Uganda is seen as one of those countries that has successfully liberalized the economy and, therefore, making Uganda attractive to investors, both local and international. In general, it could be argued that Ugandan’s have indeed reaped from the positive effects of successful liberalization of the economy. Generally, household incomes in Uganda have increased. This can be manifested in the lifestyles of the urban rich who own and enjoy such luxuries as mobile phones, televisions, computers, washing machines, etc. In the rural areas it is manifested in the high increase in the number of bicycles, new houses and shops, school enrollment, etc., for example

**Socially,** Uganda compares favorably as compared to other countries in the region. There has been a certain amount of social growth in terms of provision and access to social amenities such as transport/roads, health care, education, etc. It is now possible to travel from any part of the Country to the capital, in one day, by road, for example. The government’s Universal Primary Education program has ensured a huge increase in the number of children enrolling and attending school. Communication has improved with the liberalization of telecommunications. Mobile phones are now accessed in some of the remote areas of the Country, which had never had telephone services before 1995.

**Politically,** Uganda has gone through several transformations, in terms of governance. From chiefdoms/kingdoms to a British Colony to a multi-party democracy to a dictatorship and to the movement (no party) democratic system, the impact of all these kinds of governance manifest themselves in different ways in the current political situation of our Country. However, generally, since 1986, when President Yoweri Museveni took over power, Uganda has enjoyed the status of a ‘miracle’. People visiting Uganda before 1986 cannot believe the Uganda of today. As compared to other countries in the region, Ugandan citizens enjoy a certain amount of freedom of speech. The mushrooming of private media houses and in particular FM radio stations (from none in 1992 to 83 in 2002) is a manifestation of this positive trend. Ordinary Ugandans are not afraid to air their views on issues that affect the way in which they are governed.

The decentralized system of governance, with all its weakness, is still a positive trend in terms of the politics of the Country. Ordinary people at all levels are involved, through regular elections, in deciding who their leaders should be.

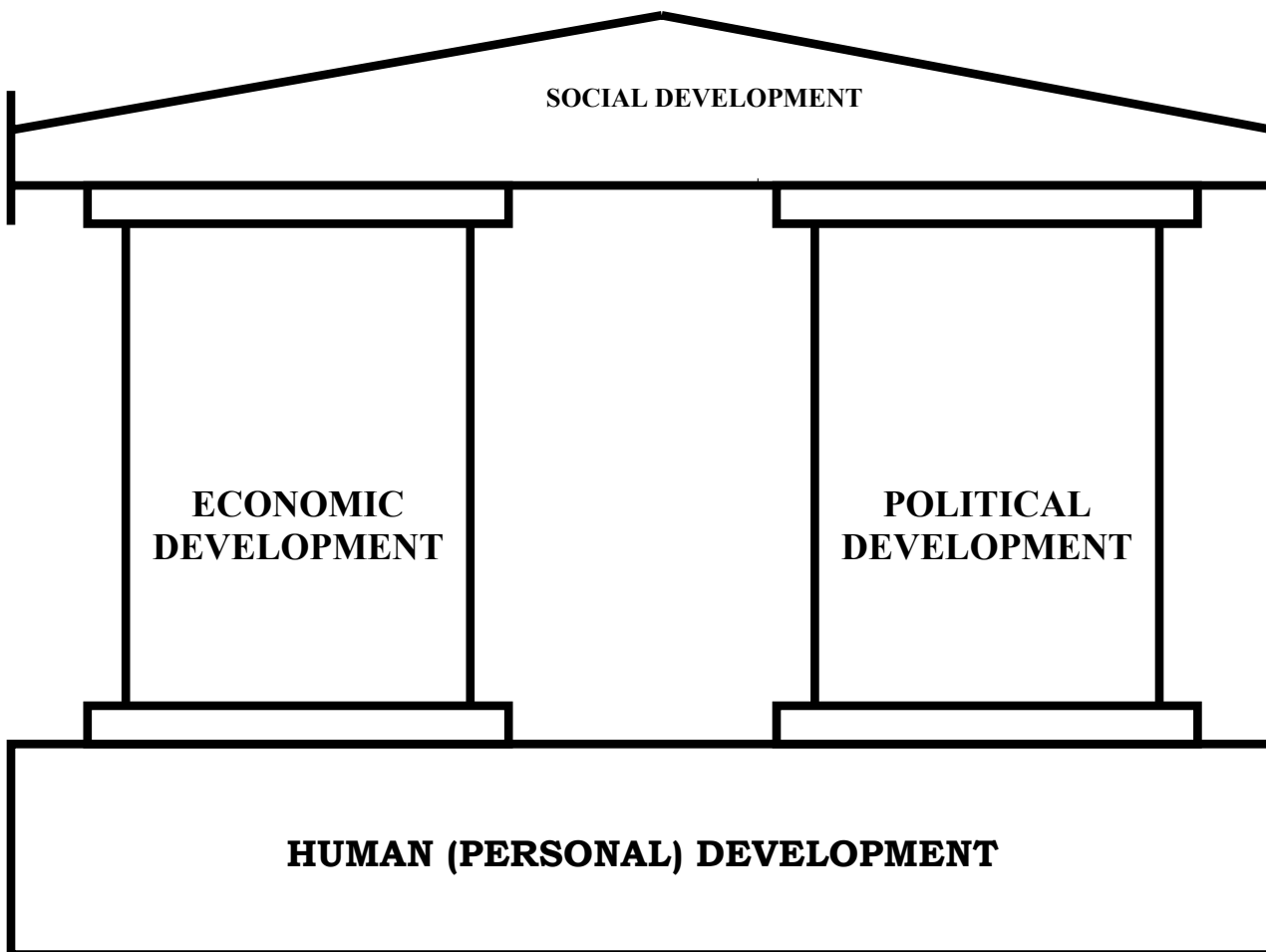
### **Bringing About Change at the Grassroots by Changing the Leadership Norms**

It is imperative that processes intended for the conscientisation of those in government and in leadership in general are stimulated. The leaders of Africa, especially those in middle leadership (civil servants, members of parliament, NGO staff, etc.) with formal education qualifications, need to go through conscientisation processes that will enable them to reach a realization that they are not necessarily more competent than the people at the grassroots. They need to be taken through processes that will lead them to appreciate the abilities of grassroots men and women. If the African leaders can acquire an appreciation of that kind then inevitably positive change at the grassroots level will occur. This is so because, with that kind of appreciation African leaders can begin to stop believing in the myth that they are more superior and they would be more willing to allow people at the grassroots the opportunity to utilize their skills. This is as opposed to the current status quo in which African leaders, in general are more inclined to outrightly disrespect people at the grassroots. It is my conviction that

the solution to assuring food and nutrition security in African lies in African countries moving towards the liberal ideal that it is the people who are the source of government's legitimacy. This can be achieved in a meaningful way through conscientisation of people at the grassroots and those in leadership.

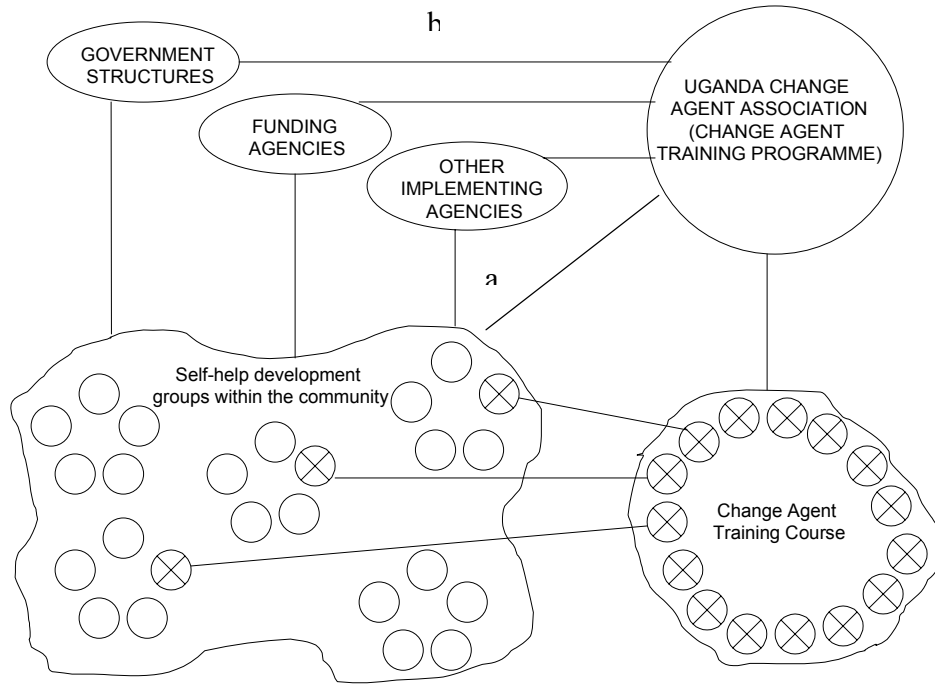
Figure 1

## **DEVELOPMENT RELATIONSHIPS**

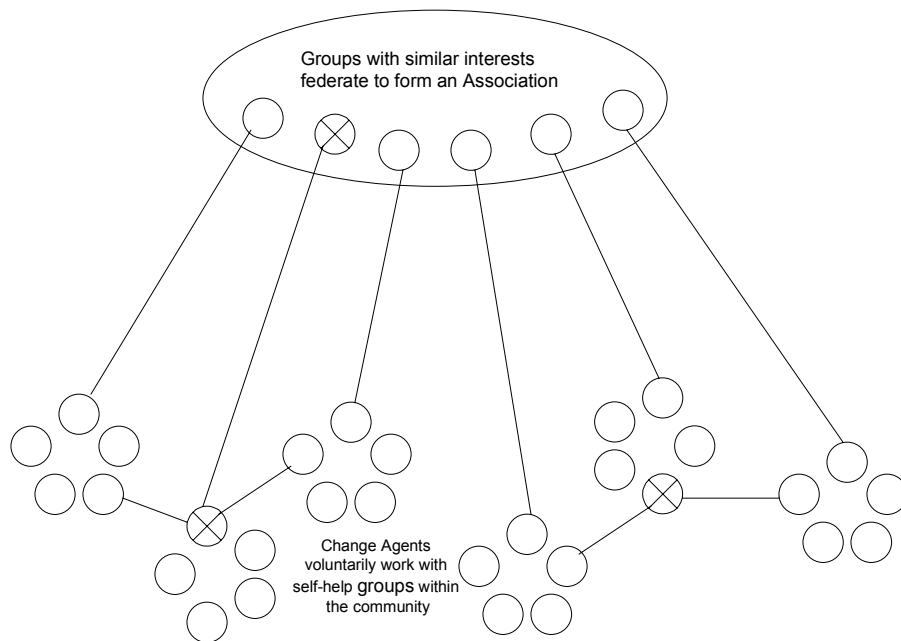


**Figure 2**

**THE CHANGE AGENT SELF RELIANT PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS**



**Figure 3**



### Box 1: TESTIMONY

***Paineto Baluku is now 39 years old. He is married with children. He is a farmer living in the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains (The Mountains of the Moon) in Western Uganda on the border with the Congo (formerly Zaire). He was trained as a Change Agent in 1991.***

I am from a poor family. I and my parents used to work for other people to look for school fees and other simple things. After my Senior IV [high school], I went to look for a job in Kasese [the district capital]. I went to Habitat for Humanity [an American NGO promoting housing construction]. These people could not pay me because I was a student learner. I took a course on building simple improved cooking stoves [mud and bricks]. After one year I went to Appropriate Technology Development Centre [a local NGO] to teach many women's groups in Kasese District how to build the improved cooking stoves. In 1991 I was trained as a Change Agent. After the course I realized that it is better to start at home. So I went home and began working with groups in my sub-county. [Paineto was at one time working voluntarily with 15 groups — 300 men and women.]

My Personal Development: Personally, I got married in 1992. From there I worked with my self-help group [Bwemaniro Peasants Group] and other groups to conscientise [awareness creation] on what development is and how it can be achieved. Some of the groups started rotational savings, savings and credit schemes, consumer unions, etc. They had their own record books and cash books.

With the knowledge and skills of UCAA [Change Agent Training], I started buying land in small pieces. I collected some building materials. By 1997 I had 4 hectares [10 acres] of land and my house was completed. Out of that land I have planted trees in one plot, and the other three plots are there for food crops and future plans.

Community Development: In 1994, together with my fellow Change Agent, Milly Kyakimwa Nzirambi, we founded the Bukonzo East Branch of UCAA. We mobilized other people in our home area to take the training. Three branches in Bukonzo were subsequently formed. These are Bukonzo Central, Bukonzo North and Kisinga.

In 1999 our Bukonzo Branches in close collaboration with the Local Councils successfully organized and carried out a full Change Agent Training Course (BKZ/CAT/02/99). The preparations for the course started shortly after the Bukonzo Change Agents successfully organized and held Parish Development Seminars in 1998. As a result of these seminars, the local leaders in Bukonzo requested Change Agents for a full and comprehensive training course, as opposed to short one-day seminars. The Change Agents then carried out visits to LC IIIs in six sub-counties. It was agreed that the 24 places on the training course should be shared among all parishes in those sub-counties. Early in 1999, the local leaders kept coming to our branch offices to inquire about the training course. They were impatient to begin training. The Local Councils contributed a total grant of Ush 2,286,000. The individual councilors contributed Ush 475,000 in training fees and UCAA contributed Ush 3,287,850. This course boosted the number of Change Agents in our home area.

In 1997, we, the Change Agents of Bukonzo East, conceived a plan to build an office building. The plan came about, after we received a donation of land from Kyalhumba Church of Uganda. Building of the office was done by 14 active Change Agents and members from 10 groups of Bukonzo Joint Savings and Credit Association. Every Change Agent of Bukonzo East Branch was requested to buy one share, which cost Ush 150,000. Member groups of Bukonzo Joint Savings and Credit Association were given 10 shares, each group share was Ush 109,000.

In 2001, we completed our office building, with no external assistance. The official opening was on 17<sup>th</sup> August. We have started using the building, which has three offices: a general office, consumer union office, and a secretarial services office. The consumer union has office materials, UCAA materials, refreshments, and other items for sale. Our branch has been operating a consumer union for the last 5 years and it is the only consumer union in the Kyalhumba Sub-County.

I thank UCAA for all the help given to local branches for development forums, regional meetings, Newsletters, Annual General Assembly, etc. I also thank UCAA donors that most of the support has reached to the grassroots person. Thank you for supporting us through UCAA.

s

*Note: This note has not been edited. The views expressed in this summary note are those of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by or representative of IFPRI or of the cosponsoring or supporting organizations.*