

# AGRITERRA GREAT LAKES COOPERATIVE POTATO PROGRAMME

Advice - Training - Exchange



**AGRI  
TERRA**



**FOR COOPERATIVES**

# STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE ACTION OF POTATO FARMER COOPERATIVES IN THE WIDER GREAT LAKES REGION

Most potato growers in the wider Great Lakes Region cultivate on small parcels of land, typically less than one hectare. The land used is often rented land, as land ownership is regularly considered as a too large investment. This land situation constrains crop rotation, which hampers the increase of productivity and profitability. In Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and DR Congo potato is increasingly considered as a small-holder cash crop of the future and a pathway out of poverty. However, potato production contains several challenges in production that hinder productivity and profitability. Potato is vulnerable to pests and diseases, implying a high risk of failure, requires substantial capital and intensive care and attention. More than 90% of the seed potatoes used in production are informal seeds, which are cheaper and more accessible for small holders, but also limit productivity and increase vulnerability for pests and diseases.

## Low yields, high potential

Agriterra's experience in the potato value chain shows average yields of 10-12 tons per hectare in the Great Lakes Region and this is still low compared to the potential yield of 30 tons per hectare. Potato producers have relied heavily on traditional methods of production with minimum exposure to modern good agricultural practices, improved seed distribution, access to credit, extension services post-harvest handling and intelligent marketing strategies. As individual farmers, potato growers depend on their respective governments to provide them with the services required to take their farming

business to the next level. In practice governments face difficulties in reaching individual farmers, while organised farmers can take matters into their own hands. Cooperatives can organise various types of services addressing the common needs of their members, like collective marketing, and storage of potatoes, but also when input supply and agronomic services are concerned. When approaching other institutions, like banks or the government, organised farmers stand stronger together.

## Agriterra in the wider Great Lakes Region

Agriterra is a Dutch agri-agency, founded by farmer organisations in The Netherlands and it has been given the mandate to strengthen business-oriented farmer cooperatives in emerging economies. In the wider Great Lakes Region, Agriterra has designed a cooperative development programme specifically for the potato value chain. Since 2015 Agriterra has built a portfolio of approximately 50 potato cooperatives in the wider Great Lakes Region, with a membership total of approximately 10,000 ambitious potato farmers. These cooperatives act as farmer-led businesses and strengthen the bargaining power of their members on the market. By investing in storage facilities, many of these cooperatives provide post-harvest services to better anticipate market price fluctuations. As availability of cash often hampers farmers to invest timely in quality inputs, the cooperatives have started coordinating input procurement with more favourable prices and some even operate as a guarantor for members towards credit providers.





### Building upon Dutch expertise

Because of its strong connection with the farmer organisations from The Netherlands, Agriterra can tap into the expertise of Dutch cooperatives when building the capacities of their counterparts in Africa.

The Dutch seed potato sector is the leader of the international potato value chain. Dutch seed potatoes are planted around the world. Over the last ten years, the Dutch seed potato sector increased exports by 300,000 metric tons, to almost 1m metric tonnes in 2017. With an export share of over 50%, Dutch seed potato growers are a very important source of high-quality seed potatoes. When one analyses the average yields of ware potatoes around the world, one can see that the leading countries are able to reach yields of 40-48 metric tons per hectare. This is more than double the yields which are being reached on average in the wider Great Lakes Region.

## BUILDING BLOCKS

### Financial management



- Financial management training for cooperatives
- Supervisory board training
- Production planning
- Record keeping
- Linkages with financial service providers

### Cooperative governance



- Cooperative governance training for cooperatives
- Member commitment
- Internal capitalisation
- Cooperative strategy development

### Improved production practices

- Good agricultural practices, peer to peer
- Organic agricultural practices
  - Composting
  - Liquid fertilizer production
  - Organic insect damage prevention
- Efficient post-harvest techniques

### Demand-driven cooperative services

- Rapid multiplication techniques
- Anticipation of supply on demand of early field generations
- Efficient agronomic services
- Farmer field school interventions

### The importance of demand-driven cooperative services

The potato value chain as a whole, from invitro plantlet until ware potato includes over six seasons, which makes this one of the most stretched and fragile agricultural value chains on the continent. National governments are in differing intensities increasingly involved in the early generation seed multiplication activities but fail to successfully regulate the entire value chain. Building on the complexity of the value chain, Agriterra emphasizes the importance for potato farmers to organize themselves. Major weaknesses in the chain can be addressed by farmer cooperatives, as their members shift from the role of supplier and buyer up to three times a year. Finding synergies in the needs of their members, regarding timely availability of quality seed potatoes and timely availability of reliable markets, often comes down to the need to invest in proper storage techniques for tubers and access to finance to make sure the cooperative can play its role as an actor in the chain in the benefit of its members.

When cooperatives can develop value adding services to their members regarding improved potato production practices, post-harvest handling practices, crop rotation and organic principles, the business cases of these farmer led businesses have the potential to make hundreds of members benefit from its interventions.

### AGRITERRA ADVISORY SERVICES



Trainings for cooperatives



Exchange between cooperatives



Cooperative business advice



International agripool services



Agriterra is an agri-agency founded by the Dutch agricultural sector that professionalises cooperatives and farmer organisations worldwide in order to better serve the needs and interests of their member farmers.

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