



Alexander Opiyo (R) and a couple of his group members pose for a photo with some watermelon they had just harvested. With support from USAID/CSSA, the group planted 10 acres of watermelon, which sold for over USD 8,000.

Youth Cultivating Opportunities in Nwoya

Shy smile, calm demeanor — Alexander Opiyo's warm personality carefully masks the hurdles he has had to overcome to provide for himself and support his aging parents, especially for a young man barely in his twenties.

"I used to go around providing casual labor for very little pay. Weeding gardens, carrying farm produce, and things like that", he says, "In a month I would make about 20,000 Uganda Shillings (USD 6)", he says.

Alexander's plight is very relatable for many youths from his home district of Nwoya, Northern Uganda. Nwoya is still tardily recovering from a two-decade war that deeply scarred the region, creating a lasting economic and social void. Due to disrupted education and infrastructure destruction during the war, many youths lack the skills or capital to pursue sustainable livelihoods.

With the joy in his voice almost palpable, Alexander shares that he feels like the sun is finally starting to shine in his life.

"I have started a small poultry project, and now, because of the agricultural techniques I have learned, I also get occasionally hired to work on bigger farms that require modern farming knowledge. They pay a lot more than I used to earn", he smiles.

A patchwork of fertile fields and untamed wilderness, Nwoya's virgin lands provide a remarkable opportunity for agriculture, as evidenced by the countless thousands of acres of foreign-owned plantations stretching to the Nile River on the horizon.

Land is, therefore, a critical livelihood resource in the district, yet limited access hinders youth's ability to engage in agriculture - and for those with access, lack of modern farming skills greatly affects their yields.

USAID/Uganda Civil Society Strengthening Activity (CSSA), through the Ugandan organization Young Farmers Champions Network (YOFCHAN), is empowering youths to overcome these challenges by providing access to land and high-quality agricultural inputs, as well as hands-on training in modern farming techniques and financial literacy. The project also provides young people with market access and associated services such as financial linkages and access to government programs that they could benefit from.

To achieve this, a 30-acre Youth Agricultural Park (YAP) has been set up in Nwoya district.

“At the park, we were taught advanced agricultural skills in areas like proper crop management, fertilizer application, irrigation, and many other modern farming practices, and I feel like I am now an expert, especially in growing watermelon and maize”, says Alexander, who is one of the 75 pioneer beneficiaries of the project.

The project provided the young farmers with modern farming inputs including seeds, irrigation technology, fertilizers, and technical guidance to cultivate 10 acres of watermelon and 20 acres of maize, both of which were harvested and sold for 50 million Uganda shillings (about USD 14,000), part of which money was divided among the youth and part of it put back into the farm for the new planting season.

“I was finally able to move out of my sister’s house and rent my own space”, says a delighted Alexander, “I am also able to support my parents more, and now I am saving to rent a garden of my own, and expand my chicken business - soon I will be able to marry and start a family of my own”.

Besides the agricultural skills, Alexander and his colleagues at the park were also trained in entrepreneurship, building their capacity in business management and marketing.

“We were also able to connect the youth to the district leadership to make it easy for them to walk in and ask for the services they need from the local government”, says Tumwebaze Khamutima, YOFCHAN’s Executive Director. “We supported 31 youths from the project to apply for the government Parish Development Model loan, with 15 so far successful. They have rented land and already planted their own maize and watermelon gardens using the expertise they got from the park”.

Under the project, the youth also planted 20 acres of maize

Tumwebaze Khamutima, YOFCHAN’s Executive Director (front row, second left) poses for a photo with some of the youth at the park

