

# Agroecology in Action



Stories from the continent

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## Using farmer champions to spread agroecological practice in Uganda

### FROM THE EDITOR

In Uganda’s Mityana District and beyond, a bold grassroots movement is growing, led not by officials, but by farmers teaching farmers. At the heart of this agroecological revival is RUCID’s Trainer-of-Trainers model, which transforms ordinary smallholders into farmer champions and schools and homes into spaces of learning and resilience.

This story is a reminder that transformation happens when knowledge is shared, not stored. From WhatsApp group mentoring to public exhibitions, from soil cover practices to revived indigenous seeds, the momentum here is unstoppable.

A shining example from AFSA’s My Food is African storytelling series, this piece celebrates the idea that when everyone becomes a teacher, the future of farming, and of Africa, is in good hands.

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Warmly,

Abbot



By Samuel Nyanzi, Rural Community in Development (RUCID), Uganda and Abbot Ntwali, AFSA

Farmers, students, and extension workers in Uganda are not only learning new skills in agroecology but also becoming teachers themselves. Agroecology is spreading naturally, built on friendship, trust, and shared examples rather than instructions or policies. At the centre of this movement is the Rural Community in Development (RUCID), an agroecological training centre based in Mityana District. Since its founding in 1994, RUCID has grown from a small local training centre into a continental Centre of Excellence under the Healthy Soil Healthy Food (HSHF) initiative, hosted by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA).

In 2021, RUCID launched a Trainer-of-Trainers (ToT) program with 30 carefully selected farmer leaders, also called farmer champions. These individuals began an intensive journey through a non-modular agroecology curriculum, starting with the foundations of agroecology and moving into farm establishment, management, and agroecological practices. The program had a unique

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approach where every trainee was required to train others in their communities, document their activities, and share their experiences in a WhatsApp group. This cascading model grew rapidly, and by 2024, more than 5,500 farmers across nine Ugandan districts had been trained, with women making up over two-thirds of the participants. Even schoolchildren and youth became agroecology ambassadors, bringing fresh energy into their families and communities.

The impact of RUCID’s work soon extended beyond individual farms and into public spaces. In May 2024, RUCID organised a national exhibition in Busimbi Sub-County, where 30 trainers showcased their achievements and created a joint demonstration garden to inspire others. The outcomes were remarkable. Local leaders permanently allocated the exhibition site for annual events and community training, and the Minister of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries opened direct



discussions with RUCID and AFSA to explore ways of scaling the program nationally. The trainers also began organising their own smaller exhibitions, hosting radio talk shows, and running farm camps, such as those held by the Uganda Youth Development Network (UYDNET) in Buikwe District. RUCID’s influence continued to grow, and through AFSA’s virtual tours, it became recognised as one of the most visible agroecological training centres on the African continent.

However, this journey has not been without its challenges. Some of the original trainers dropped out along the way, requiring RUCID to recruit and train new participants to fill the gaps. Following up and providing mentorship proved difficult because trainers were spread across different regions of the country, making coordination challenging. Interest from farmers and community groups also grew so rapidly that it exceeded the project’s budget and timeline, especially as the HSHF initiative approached its final stages. Despite these challenges, the central idea remained powerful and intact: when everyone is trained to teach, the movement cannot be stopped.

The program has already led to important innovations and successes within communities. Farmers are now producing and selling biofertilizers locally, improving soil health and boosting incomes. Many have adopted the practice of maintaining 365-day soil cover to protect biodiversity and enhance soil fertility. Local seed varieties that were once disappearing have been revived and are now exchanged freely among farmers, strengthening seed sovereignty. Most importantly, a strong culture of equality and shared responsibility has emerged, where every trainer, regardless of their background or status, takes on the same role of teaching, learning, and leading alongside others.

At the heart of RUCID’s approach is a simple but powerful belief: everyone can teach, and everyone can learn, everyone can unlearn. By empowering communities with the skills and confidence to share knowledge, agroecology is spreading faster and more effectively than ever before.