

Listening to Program Farmers

AgFinance, Opportunity Africa, and Knowledge Management Team Up for an Intimate Look at Farmers in Western Uganda by capturing their stories

Project Overview

Using a unique story-capture client research methodology developed by Opportunity International, researchers interviewed farmers in Western Uganda to generate insights to support farmer training in regenerative agriculture, as well as other interventions.

Key Research Findings

Findings reflect on participants relationship with—

- **Self:** People’s sense of self is closely linked to their farming (and business) and family identity.
- **The Environment/Land:** Farmers suffer from unpredictable weather and insufficient rain, soil exhaustion and rocky soil, insufficient availability of manure and crop waste for fertilization and mulching, and negative perceptions of commercial fertilizers and chemicals.
- **Community:** There are many self-help groups in the community, many associated with churches, and access to finance is limited to savings groups. Many social vices plague the community – alcoholism, gambling, prostitution, teen pregnancy, and witchcraft.
- **Family:** There is a wide variety of family structures and experiences, all male dominated.
- **God:** God plays a strong role in the lives of people interviewed; the church plays a critical role in people’s lives and community.

The research also noted, in terms of gender, that women are the main crop producers and gender division of labor and labor shortages give women heavy workloads. The research generated case stories and quotes that can be used to supplement core training materials.

PROJECT CONTEXT

The research took place in the context of a project Opportunity is implementing with Prosper Mama Africa (PMA), a social enterprise-driven organization. The project aims to increase the resilience and build the livelihood of rural smallholder communities. The research itself took place in five western Uganda districts of the pilot project.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Holistic Community Assessment (HCA) Methodology is a qualitative methodology inspired by the vision of multidimensional flourishing found in the biblical concept of *shalom* – speaking of the enjoyment of one’s relationship with God, self, others, and nature – reflecting Opportunity’s belief that poverty is about more than just financial deficit. As a qualitative method, the sample size can be small (12 clients), but the research seeks to capture deep insights to understand life from a client perspective. It captures and amplifies client voices as directly as possible in order to give implementers the ability to respond to client perspective and need.

In this approach, researchers ask participants to share significant mini-stories from a recent period touching different dimensions of their lives which is then supplemented by additional informational and agricultural questions. The key question, however, was, “Can you tell me a story about how your relationship has changed for better or for worse in the last two years” in the client’s relationship to themselves, their environment/ land, their community, their family, and God. Analysis involved scoring the stories considering context, intentions/values, and actions the story revealed; identifying participant hopes and common themes that constitute the key findings of the research; and interpreting findings into recommendations for training or broader development interventions, pulling out quotations along the way to both illustrate the findings and generate useful training material.



FINDINGS AND REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE TRAINING

The following are summary findings and recommendations for training.

- **Self:** People's sense of self is closely linked to their farming (and business) and family identity.
 - ▶ **Regen Ag Training will**—leverage people's hopes and dreams around farming and family life and reference a wide variety of personal circumstances.
- **The Environment/Land:** Farmers suffer from unpredictable weather and insufficient rain, soil exhaustion and rocky soil, insufficient availability of manure and crop waste for fertilization and mulching, and negative perceptions of commercial fertilizers and chemicals. They cultivate a wide variety of crops.

"No artificial fertilizers in my land since they require money and once the soil gets used to it, you get nothing in a season when you haven't used the fertilizer."

 - ▶ **Regen Ag Training will**—reference and be relevant to a wide variety of crops; address the key challenge of soil exhaustion; and offer a way forward with regard to the manure and plant waste supply challenges – going beyond general awareness which is well established and providing insight amidst farmer confusion regarding the effectiveness of commercial fertilizers and chemicals. Efforts will be made to make materials and training available in local languages.
- **Community:** There are many self-help groups in the community, many associated with churches, and access to finance is limited to savings groups. Many social vices plague the community – alcoholism, gambling, prostitution, teen pregnancy, and witchcraft.
 - ▶ **Regen Ag Training will**—leverage and strengthen existing groups, counter mistrust of banks, and integrate values-based messaging to counter negative behaviors.
- **Family:** There is a wide variety of family structures and experiences, all male dominated.
 - ▶ **Regen Ag Training will**—reference a wide variety of family structures and experiences in case examples to help make this relevant for the variety of people's family situations.
- **God:** God plays a strong role in the lives of people interviewed; the church plays a critical role in people's lives and community.

"Working together with the church in the youth programs as parish youth leader has even made my faith grow in God as I serve my community actively and see change for the better."

 - ▶ **Regen Ag Training will**—leverage the spiritual life of clients to promote personal and professional growth, and lever role models by providing them with leadership opportunities.
- **Gender:** Women are the main crop produce, and often feel alone in farming on their own, as well as trapped by circumstances. The gender division of labor and labor shortages give women heavy workloads.

"I have poultry and piggery projects which I have been running now for 2 years with permission from my husband. What I like is that I can buy, sell, and carry my own money and even save in my bank account."

 - ▶ **Regen Ag Training will**—promote labor-savings solutions, take labor into account in tools like crop-budgeting, and be wary of labor-intensive solutions. It will incorporate gender equity strategies and engage men in these.

For a detailed look at the research and recommendations, the report can be made available upon request.

This study shows Opportunity's strengths in:

Holistic client engagement that enables Opportunity to understand client perspectives and to design training (and other interventions) that resonate with clients and meet their needs.