

Wakiso, Mukono, Luwero farmers get training in managing seedlings

By Umar Nsubuga

Aisha Lwanga has grown eggplants and tomatoes in Kiwenda, Wakiso district for the past four years. However, one of her main challenges is accessing good planting materials.

"Initially, getting good planting materials, especially for tomatoes was difficult. It was costly to purchase these materials from places such as the Container Village in Kampala. Today, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Uganda provides us with good varieties," she says.

The project is being funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

Joseph Kisitu, a research assistant at IITA, says the project is being implemented in Uganda and Ethiopia.

According to Kisitu, over 70 farmers in the districts of Mukono, Wakiso and Luwero have been involved in farm trials of the planting materials over a period of two-and-half years (five seasons). Other partners in the project are Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns (VEDCo), a local non-government organisation that provides agricultural extension services.

The crops that have been successfully tried out are pepper and tomatoes.

"We have promoted environmentally-friendly bio-pesticides in managing and controlling vegetable pests and diseases," he explains.

"However, abuse and or misuse of synthetic pesticides is not only economically expensive, but these pesticides also impact negatively on consumer and animal health and the environment in general," Kisitu adds.

Ivan Sekanjako, a research technician at IITA, says their



Some of the trainees getting practical skills on how to handle and prepare a nursery bed for the seedlings



A farmer tends a garden. Using good seedlings improves crop yields

aim is to solve the problem of low yields, pests and diseases through the introduction of improved varieties.

"We aim at increasing vegetable yields through varieties that are resistant to pests, diseases and are rich

in nutrients," he says. The breeding process involves selection of vegetable varieties that have good traits like

resistance to pests and diseases and high yields.

Challenges

According to Kisitu, the project has increased farmers' access to nutritious and high-yielding vegetable planting materials and improved profitability. He says some seedlings have not yielded the expected results because of not observing guidelines such as sterilising the substrate (soil) where they are planted.

Unsterilised soil exposes seedlings to diseases such as powdery mildew, damping and downy mildew.

The varieties

Kisitu says tomato and pepper germplasm varieties that are resistant to nematodes and bacterial wilt have been screened and identified. He explains that these varieties are key in integrated pest and

75

The number of farmers that have been engaged in farms trials over two and half years

20,000

The number of seedlings each nursery has to produce at any given time

disease management.

"They can be recommended for cultivation in areas where pests and diseases to which they are resistant are prevalent."

According to Sekanjako, yield from gardens primed with these bio-pesticides have been significantly higher than from seedlings raised under conventional farmer practices.

Kisitu says each of their nurseries has the capacity to produce over 20,000 seedlings at any given time. Farmers get training, including all basic nursery management and agronomic skills to manage seedlings in the field.

Beneficiaries

Four master's of science students have had their research projects (that were in line with the project's research agenda) sponsored at the IITA research station at Sendusu (Namulonge).

Agnes Nakalega, a farmer in Busiika, Wakiso district, says the project has promoted market-oriented agriculture and also improved their quality of life.

Charles Kintu, a farmer in Zirowwe, says the project is currently training farmers to conduct market surveys before planting vegetables as this would make them plan.