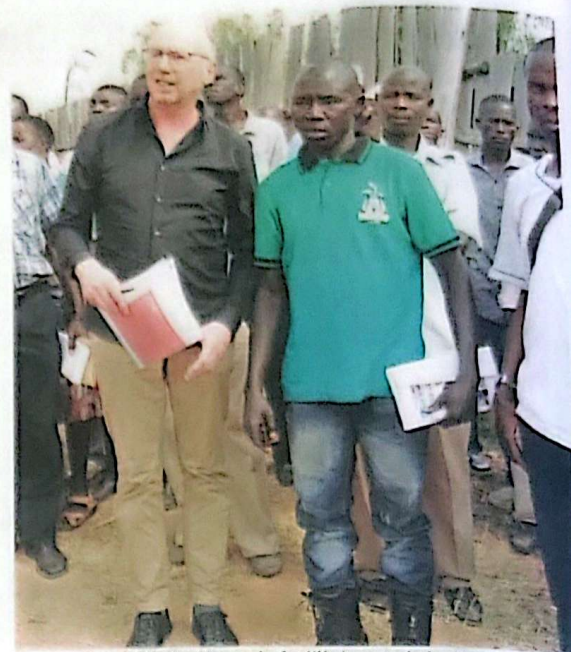




Sprinkler irrigation system on Alisiku's farm. Most farmers have not embraced the idea of irrigation



Boesveld and Alisiku the main facilitators on irrigation training



# Best farmer takes irrigation to West Nile

By Joshua Kato

**O**n the banks of River Enve, about 12km on the Arua-Maracha-Koboko road, they gathered. Over 150 of them, at a small but well-organised horticulture and tree seedlings farm: Men and women of all ages, some carrying their babies, eager to learn about irrigation.

"I have never seen any irrigation on a farm. I have only heard about it in books and far away from here," Martin Enza, one of the farmers, said.

### Irrigation master class

The learning sessions, sponsored by the Embassy of the Netherlands and Vision Group, were called the 'Irrigation Master Class'.

These classes are now running for the second year. The first master class was done in February 2017.

According to Josephat Byaruhanga, the agriculture policy officer at the Embassy of the Netherlands in Uganda, the main objective of these trainings is to sensitise people on the use of water for crop and animal production.

"We realise that the weather is changing fast. Rains are no longer dependable and now farmers must learn how to use resources around them in order to be productive," he told the gathering.

So the embassy brings in an expert in irrigation and water use from the Netherlands in partnership with local farmers to conduct the trainings.

This year, the expert was Harm Boesveld, a university lecturer, extension worker and irrigation



Alisiku teaching participants the benefits of using irrigation on a farm

enthusiast, not only in Netherlands but across Africa.

Similar trainings are to be held in Soroti and at Teddy Wabomba's farm, today in Mbarara, at Nicholas Matsiko's farm on January 29 and in Kalungu/Masaka at Bashir Mayiga's farm on January 30.

### Innovative Alisiku

"We have a lot of rivers running through this area, but we are not using them to our advantage," Lawrence Alisiku, the owner of the farm where the training was held, told the gathering.

Alisiku is nearly 40 years now and fairly well-known in West Nile.

In 2014, when Vision Group,

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together with the Embassy of the Netherlands, dfcu Bank and KLM Airlines organised the first best farmers' competition, he emerged the best farmer from West Nile. Because of this, he got a cash prize of sh20m

and also flew to the Netherlands on a study trip.

At the time, Alisiku was growing mainly oranges and mangoes in Kijomoro sub-county, Maracha district. Four years later, he has added vegetables and *bogoya* on his farm on the bank of River Enve.

"Initially, I was farming in a dry area, about 2km from here, however, my crops were always affected by the dry season, this is why I moved to this river bank," he told the farmers.

While pointing at the river, he added, "That is not just water running away, it is money running." This prompted the gathering to turn their gaze to the running water. All along, they had never thought beyond the little mud

### IRRIGATION

An expert, a university lecturer, an extension worker and an irrigation enthusiast, Harm Boesveld's message largely covered the various methods of irrigation systems that can be adopted easily.

There is drip irrigation, overhead irrigation, for example, Alisiku's sprinkler, surface irrigation, where the farm is flooded with water.

"However, choice of each system depends on the source and amount of water," he advised.

Boesveld pointed out that the source of water can be a river, such as River Enve, a well or even water harvested from the rain and stored in reservoir.

"In Uganda, all these sources are applicable and are easily available," he said.

By the end of the training the over 150 farmers had realised that they were sitting on gold.

"Fellow farmers, we are lucky our eyes have been opened this training, so let us go back and start using our resource Robert Asiku, the Marac LC5 vice-chairman, advised.

His fellow farmers agreed and after a sumptuous meal they walked away, vowing to tap into these resources.

fish that they occasionally hook the river.

Surprisingly, other than Alisiku other farmer is using these profitably.

"This is certainly an irony that gave the country these resources few can see their value," Alisiku said.

To get water to his crops, 1 two power water pumps, a 1 pipe and a standing water sprinkler water over the crops. The entire system cost him sh3.5m.

"I am sure that other farms adopt the same system," he said.