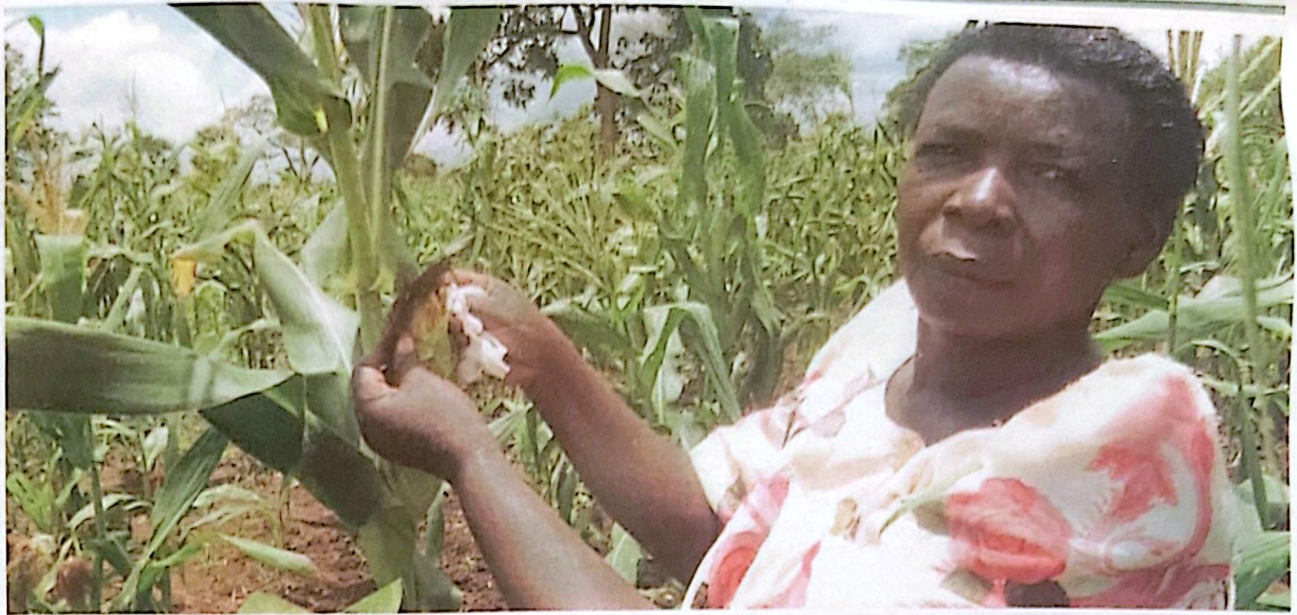


Harvest. A farmer in Inomo Sub-county, Apac District, checks on her maize crop last week. Farmers are being encouraged to ensure that they wait for the crops to mature before harvest to avoid post-harvest losses. PHOTOS BY BILL OKETCH



Training pays off as Apac, Lira farmers reap big

Reaping. Apac District was heavily affected by the drought. It is, however, food secure thanks to a bumper harvest.

BY BILL OKETCH
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APAC/LIRA. As farmers recover from a prolonged drought, Mr Morris Engin is enjoying a bumper harvest of maize and soya beans that he planted in a gazetted wetland.

The 52-year-old has a 12-acre farm at Olweny Irrigation Scheme in Barr Sub-county, Lira District, where he grows maize, rice and soya beans, for sale.

"In the first season, I planted five acres of maize and I got 55 bags. I also planted two acres of soya beans and I got 25 bags in the same season," says Mr Engin, a resident of Ayel Village in Barr Sub-county.

Mr Engin, who has invested nearly Shs10 million in commercial farming, says he expects to earn more than Shs20m this season.

Mr Engin is a member of a group of farmers that has already harvested 15,000 tonnes of rice from 3,500 hectares at Olweny Irrigation Scheme.

The 850-member Iték Okile of Rice Growers and Multi-purpose Cooperative Society Ltd, is expecting to get more than 30,000 tonnes of rice, up from 15,000 tonnes in the first season.

The government invested Shs42 billion in the rehabilitation of Olweny Irrigation Scheme that started in the early 1940s, and was later abandoned. Today, the scheme covers Iték and Okile smallholder rice projects in Barr and Agali sub-counties.

At the scheme, water is pumped into farmers' fields by means of grav-

ity. There are seven smaller dams that act as a reservoir for the scheme.

The former State minister for Agriculture, Prof Zerubabel Nyiira, says the scheme would act as a demonstration farm of modern agricultural practices to small-scale farmers and increase farmers' accessibility to markets and financial resources.

Ket-can-itic group, a model women group in Inomo Sub-county, Apac District, has planted 100 acres of maize and they expect to sell the grain in bulk after the harvest.

Statistics from Apac District production department indicate that crop production has gradually increased over the years, because of the use of fertilisers, chemicals, improved seeds and land consolidation mechanisms.

Farmers celebrate

Six farmer groups in Inomo Sub-county last Friday slaughtered two cows, four goats and 12 chickens as they celebrated the season's produce.

"These farmers are celebrating because they used to get something very small which could not sustain their families but after being trained by Sasakawa Global 2000, they are now realising bumper yields," says Mr Tonny Okello, an extension worker in Akokoro Sub-county.

Mr Geoffrey Ocen, a farmer at Awila Trading Centre, says the season's production is worth celebrating.

"What we are harvesting is more than what we had expected and now we can sell our produce and remain with something which can sustain us for a long period of time," he says.

Another farmer Sarah Nyangkori says: "Most of the farmers have now built permanent houses and some of them have bought animals which

Voices

"Farmers have been trained in best agronomic practices. They are now able to buy improved seeds, fertilisers and chemicals for spraying their crops."

PASKWALI OBTU,
EXTENSION WORKER



"When we come to the farmers, we don't only address production issues; we take them through the entire value-chain of each crop. That means we are now targeting from production upto consumption."

BETTY JOKENE,
APAC DISTRICT
AGRICULTURAL
OFFICER

"What we are harvesting is more than what we had expected and now we can sell our produce and remain with something which can sustain us for a long period of time," GEOFFREY OCEN, FARMER

REHABILITATION OF OLWENY SCHEME

The government invested Shs42 billion in the rehabilitation of Olweny Irrigation Scheme that was set up in the early 1940s, and was later abandoned. Currently, the scheme covers Iték and Okile smallholder rice projects in Barr and Agali sub-counties. 850 members of Iték Okile Rice Growers and Multi-purpose Cooperative Society Ltd are expecting to get more than 30,000 tonnes of rice, up from 15,000 tonnes in the first season.



they are rearing for future use."

Ms Nyangkori's neighbour, Ms Betty Angulu, agrees that hardworking farmers can now afford to educate their children in good private schools within the country.

Mr Robert Ogwal, a farmer at Awila village, says: "We are much better than government employees...the farmers are buying improved seeds, we are using modern agronomic practices; buying improved seeds, planting crops in line, and farmers are spraying their crops."

Post-harvest handling training

While the crops in the farms are looking good, many farmers say they neither access good markets nor storage facilities for their produce.

"We store produce in our bedrooms but we have been trained on post-harvest handling and market linkages," says Ms Lilly Okello, chairperson of Ket-can-itic women group.

Apac District agricultural officer, Ms Betty Jokene, says the district piloted "model farmers approach" with six groups. Under this initiative, farmers receive inputs and the extension workers follow them up to give them advice.

"When we come to the farmers, we don't only address production issues; we take them through the entire value-chain of each crop," she says.

"That means we are now targeting from production upto consumption where post-harvest handling, agro-processing - all those processes are encumbered within the value chain for each crop."

Ms Jokene is optimistic that with the interventions by the district and

its development partners, farmers will realise bumper harvests this year.

"Previously, most farmers were hesitant in adopting the technologies but now when these organisations come and they do the hands-on training of the farmers, they (farmers) may not adopt 100 per cent in the first year but with time when they see that their fellow farmers who were like them are now progressing, they begin following suit," she adds.

According to Ms Jokene, Apac has also adopted the group approach in most of its farming interventions.

"We have noticed that going to the individual farmers or households may not be applicable because there are too many households and the extension workers are few so we have adopted the group approach," she says.

Water harvesting

Eighty per cent of the people in Apac District rely on agriculture. Apac, with a population of 368,786 people, has about 70,000 households.

She says they are advocating for water harvesting and "we are also demonstrating on small-scale irrigation activities so that the farmers who can afford can also acquire such interventions."

An extension worker with Sasakawa Global 2000 in Inomo Sub-county, Mr Paskwali Obutu, says farmers have been trained on best agronomic practices.

"Farmers are now able to buy improved seeds, fertilisers and chemicals for spraying their crops," he says.

KEY ISSUES

Fertilisers. Statistics from Apac District production department indicate that crop production has gradually increased over the years, because of the use of fertilisers, improved seeds and land consolidation. Initiative. Apac District agricultural officer, Ms Betty Jokene, says the district piloted "model farmers approach" with six groups. Under this initiative, farmers receive inputs and the extension workers follow them up to give them advice.