

## **VOLUNTEER EFFORTS FOR DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS' (VEDCO) IMPACT ON THE KYAGALANYI PIGGERY FARMERS GROUP IN UGANDA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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This research was carried out in Luweero district in Uganda, September 2006 to study Volunteer Efforts for Development Concern's (VEDCO's) impact on the livelihoods and resource management in Kyagalanyi Piggery Farmers Group. VEDCO is a local non governmental organization (NGO) working with food security, agricultural trade activities, development of community groups and other actions that help to expand poor farmers'. A qualitative research with semi and unstructured interviews was carried out. Fifteen informants for the interviews were selected by random sampling during a previous village meeting. Furthermore, a focus group discussion was done and the participants were selected randomly. All the respondents were farmers rearing pigs and most of them worked on their land. Swine fever has been a serious problem and killing some of the pigs that were given to people by VEDCO. Farmers have received technical advice from VEDCO, but only a few farmers had received pigs. VEDCO has also given seeds to farmers like banana suckers, yam seeds and tree seedlings. The respondents mentioned that advantages of being a member of the Piggery Group included receiving training in piggery with subsequent increased pig productivity, training in crop production, cooperation and market opportunities. Farmers were happy with the trainings that they had received from VEDCO, but they expected new knowledge and more attention to their requests.

**Key words:** Resource management, pig productivity, piggery farmers

### **INTRODUCTION**

Luweero district is located in the central region of Uganda, approximately 65 km north from Kampala. Its principal towns are Luweero (administrative headquarters), Bombo and Wobulenzi (both trading centres). Agriculture is the main activity in the region with focus on food crops (cassava, sweet potatoes, maize, banana, and soya beans), cash crops (coffee), fruits, vegetables and animal husbandry. Most of the farmers produce for subsistence, but some can sell surplus in local markets. The Luweero area suffered civil war for 10 years where both the people and the economic activities were heavily affected. Currently there is much effort from the government and NGO's to support the inhabitants of Luweero and one of those organizations is VEDCO. VEDCO is a local NGO, which started to work in Luweero district after the civil war (1986) in order to address poverty and other problems in the area. The organization promotes food security, agricultural trade activities, community groups' development and other actions that help to improve poor peasants' livelihoods.

The Kyagalanyi Piggery Farmers Group was founded in 2003, so it was already established before VEDCO contacted them. The farmer group started with 47 members, but the number has dropped to 30, most of whom are subsistence farmers. The requirements to join the group are to pay the membership fee of 10 400 Ush, to coordinate group activities like meetings and proposal writing, to be a resident in the area and to follow the by-laws created by the group. Some of the member benefits are fixed assets, trainings from government and NGO's in crop production and animal husbandry and other assistance to develop their livelihoods. As a group, they have challenges such as lack of time to attend meetings and envy from non-members. From VEDCO the group has gotten training and seeds for different crops like banana and yam. They have gotten training about pigs and help to build pigs pens. Most of the group members have reared pigs, especially the traditional breeds. They said that the demand for pigs in the area is good so pig rearing is a good income source. January 2006 VEDCO introduced 15 females of exotic pig breeds. These breeds grow faster and produce more offspring than the local breeds, but they can not survive with the same low amount of fodder as the local breeds. Additional challenges with the pigs are lack of food during the drought and swine fever. The purpose of this report is to study the impact of VEDCO on the livelihoods and resource management in the Kyagalanyi Piggery Farmers Group.

### **METHODOLOGY**

For the research conducted in Kyagalanyi Piggery Farmers Group (from now referred as the Piggery Group) a qualitative research was conducted by using semi and unstructured interviews and focus group discussion. A questionnaire/ check list with questions divided into six different categories was made:

1. Demographic, 2. Livelihood activities, 3. Membership, 4. Food security, 5. Funding schemes and 6. Development agencies in the community. Fifteen respondents were selected by random sampling, during the

village meeting, to be interviewed. For the focus group, four households were selected randomly. The purposes were to cross-check information and identify differences between individual and group responses. To analyse the data an 'inductive approach' was chosen, which means that the data collected gave information that was built further on. Mikkelsen (2005) describes the inductive approach as one where "one begins with concrete *empirical* details and then works towards abstract ideas or general principles. There is often a 'bottom-up' perspective – seen from the point of view of the subjects – in the empirical analyses".

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Household interviews***

#### ***Demography***

In the demographic part the aim was to find out about the land situation of the households, the occupation of the household, educational level, as well as age, sex and religion to get an overview of the living standard. The youngest person interviewed was 27 whereas the oldest was 82. This indicates that the age level of the members in the Piggery Group has a wide range, concluding that the Piggery Group does not leave anyone out due to their age. Most of the households work their land themselves, which has not changed since VEDCO got involved in the community. The number of acres per households ranged from three to 17, which indicates that land access was not an issue for the members of the Piggery Group. Farming was the main source of livelihood for all the respondents, while three had other occupations. Most of the households had been members of the Piggery Group for several years, while two had become members during the past year (2005), meaning that most of the interviewed households had been involved since VEDCO started working with the group.

#### ***Livelihood Activities***

Most households reported that the main sources of expenditure were school and medical fees. The main food crops grown were bananas, cassava, beans, sweet potato and yams, other crops grown were soybean, groundnuts and vegetables. Coffee was the main cash crop and the only crop for commercial purposes was vanilla. Fruit trees grown included jackfruit, papaya, mango, orange and avocado. All surveyed households were rearing pig and local chicken. Cattle was a fairly common, some has goats, but very few had sheep. One respondent was practicing apiary and another was carrying out fish farming. Eleven of the respondents complained about swine fever being a problem and killing some of the pigs they had received from VEDCO. They had all gotten technical advice from VEDCO, but as the total number of members in the group was 30 only a few of them had received pigs. VEDCO had also given seeds to the farmers like banana suckers, yam seeds and tree seedlings. Some of these were fruit trees.

The farmers complained that the district officials, from the government and NGO's, never visited them. If they came the visits were too short, maybe five minutes. They managed well with the local pigs before VEDCO came, but VEDCO had given them valuable trainings and improved breeds. NAADS (National Agricultural Advisory Service) also carried out training in pig rearing. None of the farmers had received tools, fertilizer or financial support from any organization though some admitted to have gotten cement to build piggery pens and they had to pay back within a year. All the respondents had received training from VEDCO and organizations like NAADS. Few respondents were complaining, but some complained that they got planting materials and seeds in the dry season resulting into weathering, wilting and death. Other complains were that some farmers were able to attend training in handling and use of pesticides with IBERO (NGO), but they did not get any pesticides and herbicides.

#### ***Membership***

Requirements for becoming a member were:

- Payment of the membership fee.
- Abiding to the group's laws
- To be a long time resident of the locality, not a short-term visitor.
- Annual renewal of membership, with payment of a yearly subscription fee of 3000 Ush.
- Request for permission to join the group.
- Be a pig farmer.
- Provide the group with one's home address (fixed abode) for easy communication

A lot of figures were given for the membership fee (5000, 10 000, 10 400, 12 000, 15 000 Ush). The Chairman of the group gave the amount of 10 400Ush and a yearly subscription fee of 3000Ush. Only one other respondent knew of the subscription fee. Most of the respondents showed knowledge of provision for payment

of membership fee in installments. The various reasons for joining Kyagalanyi Piggery Farmers Group are summarized below, in no specific order:

1. Wanted development for the household
2. Objectives of the group were in line with needs of the household
3. To learn more about the management of pigs
4. Members of the group paid her a home visit and explained the benefits of belonging to the group
5. Promises of help in meeting household needs when group obtained aid from development organizations.
6. Admired the activities of the group in Kyevunze village. Not being a resident of the village, the only way to be part of these activities was by joining the group.
7. Was eager to learn more about farming techniques.

Advantages of being a member of the group included receiving training in piggery with subsequent increased pig productivity as the most important. Other advantages were training in banana and yam management; to receive cement for the construction of pig houses and to receive piglets from VEDCO and NAADS. The group members knew how to look after the exotic pigs while the non-members did not. The group membership was also a good way for community members to get to know each other, to create unity; cooperation and to get market opportunities. Surprisingly, 'just received training with no tangible assets' was given as a disadvantage of being a member of Kyagalanyi Piggery Farmers Group. This was closely followed by the group receiving a lot of many visitors that promise a lot of things to no avail. Many members traveled long distances to attend seminars organised for the group as the seminars were usually organized in distant villages. The group demanded monetary contributions for ad hoc activities from its members. After the group was formed in 2003, it had 47 members, but this reduced to 15 due to founder members leaving the group. At the time of this research the group had a membership of 30 as new members had joined. Enquiries into why 32 founder members left the group revealed two major reasons:

1. Some of the members had 'unrealistic' expectations. They joined the group expecting immediate returns. They thought they would receive pigs even before undergoing the Piggery training. When this did not happen they left, disappointed.
2. Some members of the group could not attend the group meetings and trainings, and were thus not moving at the same pace as the rest of the group.

No major conflicts between Kyagalanyi Piggery Farmers Group members and non-members were reported. Small vices like envy, suspicions, and accusations of selfishness (especially with knowledge and skills acquired from VEDCO and NAADS trainings) were widespread. Intra group conflicts were rare, but had resulted from some members trying to give back gifts of much reduced value compared to the gifts they had received during the gift cycle. These conflicts were however quickly resolved. Impacts of seasonal changes on livelihoods and livelihood strategies were investigated. Inter seasonal drought was reported by all the respondents. Major droughts were reported to have occurred only twice between 2003 and 2006. Livelihood strategies adopted to cope with the seasonal dry spells were mainly planting of cassava and maize. These two crops were preferred because maize, once dried is easy to store while cassava is a root crop that can stay long in the ground and is left there even in dry season. Other strategies included buying of maize flour for making *posho* (local food), sale of pigs, planting of more trees and high yielding maize and cassava varieties.

All the respondents seemed to be actively involved in the group's activities, but they seemed to resent sharing their knowledge and skills acquired from development and government agencies with non-members. Whether it is piggery management, banana, vanilla, yam or coffee production, their responses revealed a pervasive reluctance to share knowledge with 'people that have no time for trainings or for the group'. Since organizations like VEDCO are now dealing with communities at group level, this may hinder the trickling down of information to community members that for various reasons are not members of groups.

### **Food security**

All the respondents seemed to be well off with food supply. They all owned land, the size varied from 3-12 acres. What was grown on the plots was mainly for household consumption and the leftovers used for pig feeds. Various interviewees explained that they had been provided with banana suckers by VEDCO, but a disease that destroyed their banana plantations and affected the village. So far VEDCO had not been able to help them with this problem. Some farmers had been provided with improved pigs breeds from VEDCO, but they all claimed that they had pigs before VEDCO came to the village. None of their livelihood activities had been initiated by the organization, but VEDCO had encouraged them to plant fruit-trees and to expand their pig rearing. VEDCO

had taught them how to keep the pigs in sheds. This facilitated them to have more pigs at a time and kept the pigs healthier than when they used to tie them with a rope. Several respondents were very happy because of this and said it had lightened their work burden. However, some farmers expressed their dissatisfaction regarding this issue. They explained that they have been promised pigs from VEDCO and the organization encouraged them to build a shed for the pigs. When they had invested in materials and built the shed no pigs were received. They felt deceived and were sorry for the money they had invested in nothing. One respondent even explained that they were promised cement to build the sheds, but as he never received it he built a shed with local materials. He waited for the piglet that never came, and saw no other option but to put his own local breads into the shed. One night it rained so heavy that the whole shed collapsed and killed his three pigs. Another complaint concerned the timing of giving out seeds. Some respondents explained that when they were given seeds by VEDCO the season was not taken into consideration so they could be given seeds that needed a lot of water during the dry-season. They were very happy to be given seeds, but felt it was a waste of resources when the timing was so bad.

Most of the interviewees were subsistence farmers, but reared pigs for sale and could also sell some vegetables if they had a surplus. They said the market access was very good and did not encounter any problems selling pigs. Kyagalanyi had a good reputation in the area for their pig rearing and attracted buyers from within the village and other towns nearby. People came to their doorstep to buy. One respondent explained that one benefit of being a member of the piggery group was that they helped each other in finding clients. The profit they got from sales mainly went to buying medicines when someone was ill, school fees, household-necessities such as soap, paraffin, clothes, sugar etc. and to re-invest in pigs and crops. Most of the respondents expressed that they had benefited mentally from VEDCO because they had been given knowledge and skills in modern farming techniques. Still, several respondents claimed that what they were taught could not be applied because it required too much money and was too advanced for their farms. Drought was the main problem in the village, causing water and food scarcity for humans and pigs. Some of the respondents claimed that it is a part of life and nothing you can do about it, whereas others explained that they had been taught seasonal farming and timing of the planting by VEDCO and that helped them in the dry season. If they planted in time so that the seedlings were strong when the drought occurred they could survive with little water. They also tried to harvest enough vegetables beforehand so that they had something to eat during the dry season.

All in all it seems like the village was doing well considering food security. VEDCO had not initiated any new strategies to cope with the issue, but had encouraged the villagers to expand what they were already employing and had taught them more efficient methods to do their farming. The village seemed to have benefited from VEDCO's initiatives, but there were several aspects with VEDCO's interferences that could be changed to make them more efficient.

### ***Credit schemes***

There were two formal credit schemes in the village: Wekembe and Akukwatiraku. However, very few of the interviewees were members of these schemes. When asked about the credit schemes some respondents expressed their scepticism towards such schemes because they were afraid of the consequences if they failed to pay back. They did not want to risk losing their land or their house due to a loan. Various respondents mentioned that they had been part of the formal credit schemes but that they had quit. The reasons as to why they quit was that it got too expensive. One respondent explained that Akukwatiraku required 15 000 Ush to join and the interest rate was 15 %. They had shares, but it was not common for a member to have more than one share in the group. The members paid a weekly fee to the group, and some respondents mentioned that it became difficult to accumulate that fee every week, so they had to withdraw from the scheme. People can be rejected from joining the group if they could not provide any sort of security for the loan in case they fail to pay back (fixed assets). Akukwatiraku used to get their funding from the governmental Poverty Action Plan, but after this collapsed the group is receiving money from the Wekembe group. One respondent mentioned a third credit scheme initiated by VEDCO called Akika Embugga. The only requirement to join was a security in fixed assets. The members of the scheme were encouraged by VEDCO to work hard to be able to pay back their loans. The interest rate of this scheme was 11.5 %. It was not certain that the scheme still existed since the respondent informing about this was no longer a member.

As mentioned very few respondents were members of formal credit schemes, however, several of the interviewees claimed to be actual or previous members of "Nigima", a gift circle. The gift circle had expanded to also be a savings-scheme. Instead of just collecting money to buy household necessities for the members of the group they collected money to save. Not all members of the gift circle were also members of the savings-scheme, but the saving was done within the same group. The savings group would like to open a bank account

in a bank nearby Kyagalanyi, but that requires 300 000 Ush, and so far they had only managed to save 100 000 Ush. The only difficulty they encountered with the gift circle was that not all people gave the amount of cash they were requested.

***Other organizations working in the area***

During the research we wanted to find out what other organizations were working in the area and whether or not they had impacted the households. Overall there four organizations, in addition to VEDCO, were mentioned:

1. NAADS, mentioned by four households
2. IBERO, mentioned by three households
3. Plan, mentioned by four households
4. RUDIFA
5. VEDCO, mentioned by four households

The level of involvement from these identified organizations in the households varied, but mainly they described Plan as an organization working with children under the age of five, meaning that the households with children might have had assistance from Plan. It was reported by several households that Plan had built a school and provided school equipment for the children in the village, in addition to health care. NAADS was reported to have assisted in training related to farming, in addition to some piggery involvement as well as goats, but no households reported having received anything other than training from NAADS.

During the research we also wanted to identify the changes of VEDCO's strategy in the village when they went from "Farmer to Farmer" to group focused work. Fifty percent of the interviewed households had not noticed any changes from this strategy shift. The shift had had mainly positive impacts in the sense that "Farmer to Farmer" included fewer households and if one was to learn the methods and techniques one had to go to one of the trained farmers. Often one experienced that one did not learn as well as if learning directly from the training put forward by VEDCO. It was a general idea that VEDCO changed the strategy to be able to include more people. One negative aspect was reported by one farmer saying that there were more meetings and seminars now and that it took more time because he had to travel more often and further than before.

The research was also conducted to identify the member's attitude towards VEDCO. This was done by focusing on the individual memberships, but also by asking direct questions to the members about their relation and opinion about VEDCO. Twelve out of the fifteen members were satisfied the work VEDCO had introduced in the village. They felt that the training had helped and that VEDCO had not implemented any techniques or methods on the members that had not improved already existing methods. One major issue that was reported from most households was that communication between the members and VEDCO was not very good. VEDCO paid frequent visits to the members, but they were short and the members did not feel that they were able to report back necessary information. In addition several members had given VEDCO requests, but never received any feed back or answers. They felt that VEDCO was not interested in their opinions or their livelihoods.

***Focus group***

The focus group discussion was conducted with four households, one woman and three men. There were many similarities among the informants in the focus group. They had all pigs, and several acres of land where they grew many of the same crops. During the village group meeting we were informed that access to land was not a problem and hence it was interesting to ask the focus group of the average amount of acres per household in the village. They came up with the answer of two acres based on the fact that two of the members in the focus group had two acres of land while the other two had five and ten. The number of acres shows that access to land was not a problem. During the discussion of land access the focus group stated that there was a problem of selling land in the village, when people move to the towns they wanted to sell their land but there was no demand for land in the village among the inhabitants, which support the statement that land access is not a problem. According to the focus group market access was not a problem; usually people came to their house to buy products. Most of the crop was produced for subsistence farming, but coffee was the major crop produced for marketing. This information indicated that all members of the focus group are both subsistence and commercial farmers. It was also indicated that people would come to the households to buy their products and bring them to the market for sale. Whether this was organized or not was not indicated by the focus group, but they did not indicate that coffee was sold by an organization that bought coffee beans from the farmers and sold it at the market for them. When asked what was the most important crop in the village the focus group indicated that coffee was number one as they could sell it and make money to buy food. Maize was listed as number two because they could eat it, sell it and feed it to the animals. When asked about VEDCO and their involvement in the Piggery Group the focus group responded that advice and training in piggery and crops was the most

important involvement of VEDCO. They had been given advice about how to grow certain crops, how to deal with pests and crop diseases, as well as useful information on how to cater and care for the pigs. In addition they had been given seeds for bananas as well as cement for pig houses. The focus group also informed that VEDCO only encouraged organic and sustainable farming, meaning that they have not introduced any fertilizer or pesticides to the members of the focus group; instead they have been given advice on how to deal with crop disease as well as been given new seeds that are resistant to the disease identified. During the discussion about VEDCO and their work it was also identified that VEDCO has helped to increase the productivity, but that the problem of the diseases on the banana trees and the coffee plants was still ongoing and that it had affected the households in the focus group. Another problem identified with VEDCO's initiative to hand out seeds was that the members of the focus group were handed the seeds late in the season and hence the help was not very successful, as they could not grow the seeds in the most productive way. All interviewees had pigs, but only one had a cross breed between the local breed and the new breed introduced by VEDCO. They also stated that they had not yet received a pig from VEDCO as they have been promised, but that they were told that it would take time. However this did not appear to be an issue as all four members was very grateful for the pig training VEDCO had provided which they found applicable to their own pigs. The focus group stated that VEDCO does not help with any funding such as credit or saving schemes and they could not identify any other such activities organized by an organization in the village. During the discussion it was identified that the focus group knew that it was possible to lend money, but it was not an issue as the interest rate was very high and also because payment time was short and since they are farmers they don't have the ability to pay back right away as they are dependent on many unpredictable factors to make a living. The focus group identified the use of gift circles and how it had changed to cash circles, but it was unclear whether or not the members of the focus group used this cash circles due to the problem of providing the cash. We had the opportunity to ask what the focus group perceived as being rich or poor. The group was very unified in the definition of poor as poor being people who are too lazy to work, even people who had land, but did not work on the land was considered poor as they were too lazy to work their land. Rich was perceived as someone who had a motorcar or vehicle such as a motorcycle. It was interesting to hear these answers as the participants of the focus group did not perceive themselves as poor or rich, they also made an emphasis that people in the village was more or less at the same level of living standard because they all had land access and they all produced the same crops for commercial as well subsistence farming. And because they produce the same crops, they all face the same problem meaning that when something goes wrong it affects all and not just a few. In this sense the focus group felt that the village was very equal in wealth measurement, and if someone was considered poor is was due his or her own laziness.

## CONCLUSION

VEDCO has helped the Piggery Group by providing training for piggery such as how to build proper sheds for the pigs, how to feed, breed and care for the pigs in the best way. In addition VEDCO had introduced a new breed of pigs, which eventually will be handed to all the members. Most people had yet to receive a pig from VEDCO, but that the ones who still had not received a pig had gone through training and were waiting patiently for their pig. Most members mentioned that VEDCO had done a great deal for them to improve their livelihoods. The people was happy with the training they had received and also that VEDCO assisted them to work with what they already had and did not put any effort into introducing anything new. Some people found this to be negative, as they have approached VEDCO with requests that have not been answered. These requests were mainly in relation to agro forestry, seeds and assistance to deal with crop diseases. Another issue that was brought up was that most of the households interviewed had kept guest books, from these books we could read and confirm that they households had had many visitors from VEDCO and other organizations. Even though there had been frequent and short visits from organizations, the households never saw any effects from these visits. They had discovered that there was a lot of talk and little action, and that their requests were not heard. Another aspect of this was that many had the concern that VEDCO's short visit did not result in any good findings as they did not listen to the villagers. Many of the people who were concerned that VEDCO did not react upon their requests were also concerned that VEDCO did not benefit from meeting with the household. Based on these findings, the research group has several recommendations to VEDCO.

## REFERENCE

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