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UCF White Sorghum Project:

Background:

The inability for rural poor farmers to access markets for their produce is the core challenge that keeps every single farmer in our region in extreme poverty. So, the UCF — ourselves being farmers who have struggled with exactly the same challenge — is keen to explore value chains that have the potential to capture a wider market.

Not long ago, we noticed that Uganda Breweries, and other locally-based multinational brewers like AB InBev (or Nile Breweries) and Heineken, were turning to using local farmers' produce, after decades of depending largely on imported produce. Uganda Breweries, in particular, even introduced an initiative called "Local Raw Materials Program" that encourages local farmers to grow sorghum and cassava, which UBL then buys from these farmers.

Incidentally, while farmers especially in Northern Uganda were already working with all the above-named breweries, none of those breweries were presently working with farmers in our region, or buying anything from our region. So, we contacted them, starting with Uganda Breweries, and we chose to start with growing white sorghum. The AgriBusiness Manager for Uganda Breweries, right away offered to provide a ready market for our sorghum at harvest, and also oriented us on all the guidelines that we need to follow to meet UBL's standards.

Current Work:

Today, the UCF is running a project where we provide rural poor farmers in Kamuli and Buyende, eastern Uganda, with free white sorghum seed, training, and inputs like tarpaulins (for clean post-harvest handling). At harvest, we gather all the participating farmers' sorghum at the UCF storehouse (at our office in Namisita), from where it is taken to our buyers. Please note, however: in our first two planting seasons (of 2019/2020), although we used seed bought from UBL, we decided to sell our sorghum to other suppliers who then take it to UBL.

Reason?

All our farmers are only learning to grow sorghum, and we felt their first harvest couldn't meet UBL standards. Still, we are now part of the farmers working with UBL, so we can directly supply UBL anytime, once our work improves.

Project Costs — and What We Can Do If You Helped Us Raise Support?

Our sorghum project is only still in its establishment phase. For this reason, our operational costs are a little high because, for instance, we are providing all the participating farmers with inputs like tarpaulins that we wouldn't otherwise have provided if this project was already established, e.g. if farmers were already earning a steady income from their sorghum — which, in effect, would give them enough self-motivation in this work.

Another cost that we currently incur, but which we wouldn't otherwise have incurred if this project was more established, is that of gathering sorghum from all participating farmers at the time of harvest, rather than the farmers themselves bringing their sorghum to the UCF, before it is taken to our buyers. This is because most of the farmers (who are only getting started) are often too poor that even hiring a truck to bring their sorghum to the UCF may impoverish them even the more. These are the things that make our project costs high right now.

Nonetheless, we have no fixed budget for this project. Rather, as the UCF has no reliable source of funding, the number of farmers that we work with each planting season depends on the amount of support we are able to raise. So, if you are willing to support this work, every little support that you can help us raise (whether that is \$500 or \$10,000) will do something. But, as a guide, we need \$37,000 to support 400 farmers, as shown below:

Budget Breakdown:

- a). Seed procurement:** \$12,100 for 4,000 kg of seed (i.e. 10kg of seed per farmer, enough for two acres).
- b). Farmer orientation/training and ongoing follow-up** (includes fuel for distributing seed at planting, fuel for daily field visits, and basic allowances for an outreach team of five people) for a period of 6 months: \$4,500 (i.e. \$750 a month, of which \$400 is monthly fuel, and \$350 is monthly allowances for our outreach team).
- c). 200 tarpaulins** (two neighboring farmers share one) for clean post-harvest handling: \$8,400 (\$42 each).
- d). Gathering & delivering sorghum to our buyers:** \$12,000, in fuel costs. Depending on weather and other factors, we expect up to 600 tons from 400 farmers (1.5 ton/farmer). This costs a lot of fuel in gathering that sorghum from farmers, and 150 round trips to deliver it to Kampala (using the UCF's own 4-ton dump truck).

Total Project Cost (to support 400 farmers): \$37,000 for one planting season, i.e. a 6-month planting cycle.

Current source of funding: our white sorghum project, to date, has only been supported by USAforAfrica.org, with a total of \$20,000 granted to date (that is, \$10,000 per planting season, in 2019 and 2020 respectively).

Implementation Plan: All UBL sorghum farmers procure their sorghum seed from only one approved seed supplier (a separate company named GrainPulse), and that is where the UCF currently gets our seed from.

We aim to provide each farmer with 10kg of seed (for 2 acres) in a season. This costs \$30.25 per farmer (\$3.025/kg). Because this seed is imported, the cost of a kg of seed is 10 times the price farmers get per kg of sorghum at harvest, which is \$0.2. But each kg of seed can yield up to 100kg. So, every 10kg will yield ~1,000kg. The number of farmers interested in participating in our project is increasing every season, as more farmers learn from their peers who are already growing the sorghum. Our current goal is to secure 4,000 kg of seed each season, enough for 400 farmers.

Schedule of Activities:

- a) **Securing seed:** we begin each planting season by procuring new seed from GrainPulse. UBL requires that all their participating sorghum farmers secure new seed each season, even if seed from the previous season is still in place (i.e. even if farmers still have seed that wasn't used up in the previous season).
- b) **Farmer orientation/training & planting:** we train and re-orientate all our farmers every planting cycle; visit each farmer to ensure their land is ready for planting, and then give out seed. Daily field visits then begin, to ensure farmers follow the right crop management and soil enhancement practices, till harvest.
- c) **Harvesting & Marketing:** at harvest, we use the UCF's dump truck to gather our farmers' produce from villages to the UCF storehouse (at our office), from where it is then taken to our buyers by the UCF.
- d) **Project Timeline:** From the time funding is secured, the total timeline from farmer orientation to planting and harvest is six months. We have two major planting cycles, that is January -June, and July-December.

Other miscellaneous costs that may be essential — if and only if our budget could allow:

a). One truck of organic wastes per farmer (i.e. animal dung or residues from Kamuli sugar factory) as natural fertilizers) to enhance soils. The UCF has its own 4-ton dump truck. Costs associated with providing each farmer with organic fertilizers only include fuel, and in some cases paying for dung, but the sugar factory manure is free.

To enhance the size/quality of the grain, UBL urges all their participating sorghum farmers to apply fertilizers two times in a planting season. That is what all UBL sorghum farmers in northern Uganda currently do. In our own region (in Kamuli), sorghum growing for beer production is being introduced for the first time by the UCF.

And so, to ensure that our project performs to the same standards as UBL's pre-existing sorghum farmers in northern Uganda, our farmers, too, ought to use fertilizers. Our experience thus far, from the use of organic fertilizers i.e. animal dung at the UCF's own demonstration garden (at our project office), is that the size of the sorghum grain is far bigger than that of farmers who are not using any fertilizers. And that's what UBL is after.

UBL recommends farmers to either use the artificial fertilizers NPK and DAP (at 50kg/acre), or organic fertilizers like cow dung. We prefer the latter, because it is cheaper, and its organic matter content lasts longer in the soil.

The cost for providing 400 farmers with one truck of organic fertilizers per farmer would be \$16,800 (\$42/truck).

b). Spray pumps. In our first planting cycle in 2019, some of the farmers we work with had cases of pests and disease infestations in their sorghum. We have now received several technical training materials from UBL's agribusiness manager, Joseph Kawuki, about this. We also made a field trip to Northern Uganda in January 2020, to transfer hands-on knowledge from farmers who have been growing this sorghum and supplying it to UBL for years—in regard to the common diseases they encounter, and how they manage them, e.g. the pesticides they use.

The information we have thus far means our farmers, too, need to spray their sorghum every subsequent season. Most of the farmers that we are working with have indicated that they would be in a position to buy pesticides on their own, but are not able to buy spray pumps. Our proposed idea is to procure those pumps and cluster every 5 neighboring farmers to share one pump. We would need 80 pumps for 400 farmers, costing \$4,000 (i.e. \$50 each).

Conclusion: Miscellaneous Items (a) and (b) above would cost \$20,800 in total for 400 farmers each planting season, and would bring our total budget (if added to \$37,000) to \$57,800 per season. But that is if and only if.