

KNOW-HOW  
3000

*Experience*

*IN DETAIL*

# Enabling Rural Innovation



HORIZONT  
3000

AUSTRIAN ORGANISATION  
FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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## List of Abbreviations

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ERI	Enabling Rural Development
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ANA	Apoolo Na Angor (NGO)
SNF	Safe Neighbourhood Foundation
YARD	Youth Association for Rural Development
MADDO	Masaka Diocesan Development Organisation
KST	Kolping Society of Tanzania
ACT	Anglican Church of Tanzania
CIAT	International Centre for Tropical Agriculture
BOKU	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna
UEEF	Uganda Environmental Education Foundation
PAED	Participatory Agro Enterprise Development
CDF	Community Development Facilitators
DECECE	Development Education Services for Community Empowerment
VIFAFI	Victoria Farming and Fishing-Projekt

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### See also:

<https://eriea.wordpress.com/>

<sup>1</sup> DKA Austria - Development Cooperation Agency of the Catholic Children's Movement of Austria, Catholic Men's Movement of Austria – KMBÖ, Catholic Women's Movement of Austria – kfbö, Caritas Austria, Department for mission and development of the Archdiocese of Vienna, Welthaus Diocese Graz-Seckau, Brother and Sister in Need – Diocese of Innsbruck, Brother and Sister in Need - Catholic Action Carinthia

## 1. General Information

The ERI approach (Enabling Rural Innovation) has been implemented by six local NGOs in Uganda and Tanzania: Apoolo Na Angor (ANA), Safe Neighbourhood Foundation (SNF), Youth Association for Rural Development (YARD), Caritas MADDO (Caritas MADDO), Kolping Society of Tanzania (KST), as well as Anglican Church of Tanzania, Diocese of Mara (ACT Mara). The implementation and trainings on the ERI approach are coordinated by the HORIZONT3000 Regional Office East Africa in Kampala (Country Office East Africa).

The organisations as mentioned above have different objectives and areas of work. However, all of them work in the field of agriculture and rural development, where the ERI Project is positioned. They work with several farmer groups, which are mainly situated in their surrounding areas.

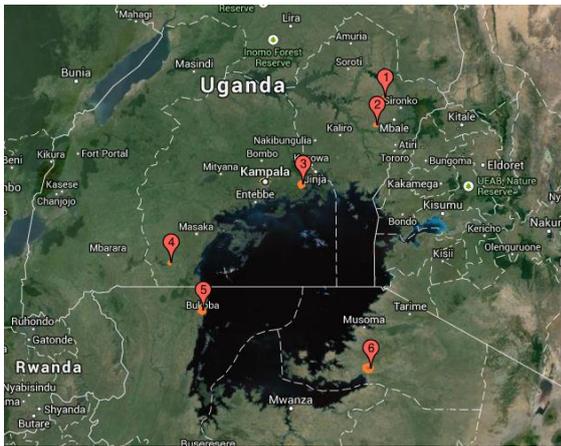


Chart 1 Localization of the experience

- 1) ANA: Eastern Uganda, Bukedea
- 2) SNF: Eastern Uganda, Budaka
- 3) YARD: Central Uganda, Buikwe
- 4) MADDO: Central Uganda, Rakai
- 5) KST: Kagera Region, Bukoba
- 6) ACT Mara: Mara Region, Bunda

## 2. Context of the Experience

Agriculture, and in particular crop production, remains the dominant source of livelihoods of rural households in developing countries. As the vast majority (70-80%) of the people in East Africa rely on agriculture as their prime source of food and income, the agricultural sector and its stimulation is key to ecological, economic and social sustainability. Since subsistence farming is no sufficiently effective strategy to escape from poverty, access to markets is of paramount importance for improving farmers' livelihoods at household level. An entrepreneurial culture among rural farming communities does hardly exist due to poor

market orientation, poor nutrition and health, poor natural resource management, and top-down extension services.

Additionally, agricultural production and food security amongst smallholder farmers in East Africa is threatened by HIV/Aids, and gender relationships in most rural communities in the target areas put the highest workload on women. The ERI approach encourages equal participation and sharing of responsibilities among men and women, and groups and activities shall be gender balanced. The topics of HIV/Aids and gender are also being targeted and mainstreamed in ERI trainings with community development facilitators.

ERI has initially been developed in East Africa by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) to overcome the linear, top-down mode of technology development and market access in agriculture. In collaboration with various research and development partners, an interdisciplinary team of people developed the approach over several years (starting around 2000). In a pilot project in Hoima and Mukono, Western and Central Uganda, CIAT and University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU) tested the ERI approach in collaboration with local project partners: Africa 2000 Network (A2N) and Uganda Environmental Education Foundation (UEEF). The Projects took about six years.

In 2009 HORIZONT3000 picked up the approach and carried out its first ERI projects with the partner organizations YARD (Uganda, see above), ACT Mara (Tanzania, see above) and DESECE (Kenya, (DESECE)). At the same time TRIAS Uganda (TRIAS), a Belgium NGO, also used the ERI approach under the name 'Participatory Agro Enterprise Development (PAED)'. With joint efforts in 2011 and 2012, HORIZONT3000 and TRIAS developed a new ERI manual and training material (ERI) for Community Development Facilitators resulting in a new training concept. Compared to the earlier materials the new training materials are more illustrative and have a stronger orientation towards the practical work with farmer groups.

After an initial period of sensitization of potential project partners, pilot phases and project development, the HORIZONT3000 project called "Enabling Rural Innovation East Africa (ERI-EA)" started in March 2013.

### 3. Main Characteristics of the Experience

Enabling Rural Innovation is a strategic approach that helps smallholder farmers to become self-reliant entrepreneurs (ERI). Based on the motto “producing what you can sell, rather than selling what you have produced”, the approach balances an increased market orientation with investments into food security and sustainable natural resource management. Key to the ERI approach is that it motivates farmers to organise themselves into strong groups and work towards common goals. It empowers farmers to make use of their own resources and make informed decisions on production, marketing and consumption. The ERI approach supports change in a non-instructive manner. In short, ERI is a strategic approach that strengthens the capacity of farmers to identify market opportunities and develop competitive market opportunities while enhancing household food security and securing the natural resource base.

ERI builds on principles of participatory agricultural development as described in the core literature of participatory development; see e.g. “Farmer First” (Pacey, Chambers, & Thrupp, 1989), “Beyond Farmer First” (Scoones & Thompson, 1994) etc. The ERI approach integrates a wide spectrum of participatory methods into a framework of five core modules. Each of the modules draws on several decades of experiences with participatory development and research methodologies. None of the five elements are new, but linking them into a fully-fledged process for developing farmers’ innovation capacities while putting a focus on agro-enterprise development is a novelty:

- Participatory Diagnosis (PD): Farmer groups assess which resources and opportunities they have available, and how they can use them to achieve their goals
- Participatory Market Research (PMR): Farmer groups conduct market research to identify and analyse profitable markets and enterprises
- Farmer Participatory Research (FPR): Farmer groups experiment on their own fields to test which practices, technologies and varieties work best on their farms
- Enterprise Development (ED): Farmer groups develop profitable enterprises and build sustainable business relations through business plans and market intelligence
- Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation (PME): Farmer groups keep track of their

progress towards achieving their goals and learn from successes and errors.

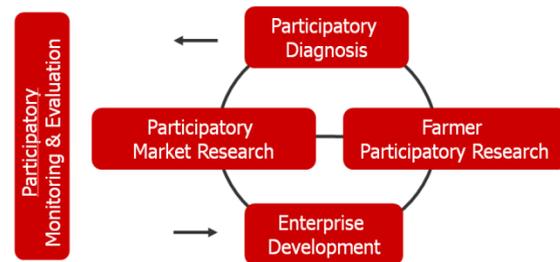


Chart 2 The 5 modules of the ERI framework

The 5 dimensions happen parallel and affect each other. Farmers play an active role in the process. It’s about strengthening the farmer groups and communities, market researching and identifying opportunities; testing different crops in production and on the market. The farmers themselves also monitor and evaluate the project, and give feedback.

### 4. Stakeholders and Partners – Roles and Responsibilities

The main beneficiaries of the experience/practice consist of farmer groups and/ or communities, and rural populations in general, who predominantly depend on subsistence agriculture. The ERI-approach empowers them to take self-determined, pro-active production and marketing decisions. Especially women in those groups are empowered through gender balanced group formation and leadership roles. Furthermore, six organisations and their staff, who acquired expertise in the ERI approach, now form a regional learning alliance for sharing their experiences.

The following parties/ institutions are mainly involved in the implementation of the experience:

Farmer groups in target areas:

- Their motivation is to gain additional income through a diversified range of products, while maintaining their natural resource base. Strong farmer groups also overcome challenges, such as pests and diseases in their crops, etc.
- Farmers are learning to make informed decisions, take active roles in the implementation process and assume responsibilities for their own future. Moreover, they design their ideas as active producers and become entrepreneurs and researchers, as they are active participants in “Farmer Research Committees”,

“Marketing Committees”, “Monitoring and Evaluation Committees”, etc.

#### Partner NGOs:

- Their motivation is to be part of the new development approach and assist their target groups in an effective and sustainable way.
- They implement their projects with the target population as outlined in the respective project-proposal, develop own ERI capacities through active participation in trainings, share knowledge and experiences with other project teams, monitor and evaluate their own project progress, carry out financial management and monitoring of projects, document their project experiences and contribute to the further development of the ERI approach.

#### Community Development Facilitators (CDF):

- Their motivation is to learn about the ERI approach and enhance their capacity as facilitators even beyond the ERI project.
- They engage in communities with sustainable development approaches for the small scale farming sector.

#### Private Sector/ Agritraders:

- Their motivation is to purchase products from farmer groups in bigger quantities and with constant and improved quality.
- They make sales agreements with farmer groups in advance for better planning.

#### Universities and Research Institutes:

- Their motivation is to learn from the field by lessons learned and experiences capitalized in the ERI process.
- They contribute with earlier experiences within the ERI approach and help to develop the approach further on a scientific level.

## **5. Resources**

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ERI is a learning intensive approach; knowledge and skills are being built up in various training activities by a team of experienced trainers. It requires advanced understanding of participatory methods and advanced facilitation skills. Therefore it is most important to engage capable Community Development Facilitators (CDFs) who are experienced in facilitating training to farmer groups and who are eager to develop their skills in order to support farmer groups in the process of experimenting with farming technologies and developing farming enterprises. The implementation of training activities and the supervision of farmer groups require time and long-term commitment of CDFs. Additionally, it is recommended to use ERI training materials such as a manual and session charts for CDFs.

## **6. Impact of the Experience/ Practice**

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The major achievements of the project included the following aspects:

- Partner organizations learned about a new approach that works without external incentives and hand-outs to farmer (groups), but on the basis of capacity building;
- CDFs have learned about the ERI approach and cross-cutting topics such as gender and HIV/ADS, which enhance their capacity as facilitators also beyond the ERI project and its implementation;
- Farmer groups have learned about the five ERI Modules and cross-cutting topics such as gender and HIV/ADS;
- Farmer groups are able to organize themselves, design action plans and monitor their development process;
- Farmer groups got confidence and skills to approach traders for exploring marketing opportunities and make agreements of selling their products;
- Farmer groups are carrying out experiments and are able to evaluate different farming technologies;
- Farmer groups are capable of calculating a cost-benefit analysis for selected enterprises;
- Farmer groups are developing enterprises with improved production technologies and collective marketing.
- Some farmers, who have been working with ERI for a longer period of time, successfully identified attractive markets and sell their products at higher prices. ERI has contributed to increase their incomes.

The experience contributed to an innovation in the livelihoods of men and women as farmers took an active role in the development of their livelihoods. This is an innovation from the perspective of common NGO interventions and leads to innovations on a farmer level.

## **7. Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

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### **CDFs are the key actors in the implementation of the project:**

ERI is a knowledge intensive approach – the focus is **not** to hand out material benefits to farmer groups, but to build capacities for improving their farming activities and collective marketing. As CDFs are the ones carrying out training sessions, they are key actors in this process. Organizing intensified high-quality

trainings for CDFs, providing specific training materials and assuring mentoring visits to further improve their capacities as facilitators have shown to be effective in achieving project goals.

#### **There is a large variation between farmer groups:**

The partner organizations selected farmer groups according to different criteria. Whereas some organizations selected the 'neediest' groups, other selected the 'most promising' groups, who were expected to perform best in developing new marketing opportunities. Moreover, some partner NGOs selected new groups and others continued working with already existing groups. The results might differ between different groups and will be observed in depth throughout the following project phases. An analysis and conclusion of differences and effects on the success of those groups will contribute to further improve the approach.

#### **The exchange of experience between ERI partners is very valuable:**

The implementation of ERI requires practical experience and creative thinking. In reflection meetings several implementing organizations have come together to share their experiences with ERI. During reflection on an organizational and individual (facilitator) level a great process of interaction and mutual learning emerged. Participants learned from others' experiences and advised each other with potential solutions. This makes clear the importance of group activities and teambuilding exercises with ERI implementers and of a horizontal exchange on all levels (farmers, CDFs and organisations).

## **8. Challenges**

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#### **Farmers sometimes developed high expectations in external support:**

They expected NGOs to help them in accessing markets for products. The role of NGOs, however, is to build capacities and support farmers methodologically in exploring market opportunities, making agreements with traders and becoming entrepreneurs themselves.

#### **Free 'hand outs' are still a main challenge for project implementation:**

As confirmed by ERI partner organizations, many farmer groups were used to - or have somewhere else acquired the expectation to - receive material hand outs when working with NGOs. This mindset also prevailed in some ERI farmer groups and therefore posed a challenge to CDFs, who offer a service that is solely based on trainings and capacity building.

#### **These challenges have been addressed by:**

Farmer groups learned about the approach before starting with project activities. Therefore, the groups took an informed decision to join the project and knew that the work will be based on learning, requiring their own initiative in order to develop successful farming enterprises. If farmer groups still inquired for any other kind of assistance (e.g. in terms of 'hand outs' at a later time), CDFs reminded them on the principles of the ERI methodology.

#### **Another challenge remained:**

Some farmers, who have been working with ERI for a longer period of time, and who successfully identified attractive markets while increasing their production on expanded land, opted for less sustainable farming practises. An entrepreneurial spirit of farmers with a focus on short term results might jeopardize sustainability of farming practices. The ERI team will address that issue by putting more focus on sustainable agriculture in future trainings and project visits.

## **9. Sustainability**

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The ERI approach ensures **sustainable development on several levels** because the process is owned and led by farmer groups themselves. This prevents the risk of creating dependencies on external actors and the risk of collapsing after the organisations cease project activities.

ERI turns power relationships in markets upside down. Farmers look for market opportunities and take informed decisions instead of traders approaching them with contract farming. This leads to a natural market integration and ensures **economical sustainability**.

**Institutional sustainability** has to be assured by the project and a strategy for supervision and guidance has to be put in place. For example, new farmer groups can be guided by more experienced groups by establishing horizontal networks between neighbouring ERI groups.

**Environmental sustainability** is tackled in the module "Sustainable Agriculture" within the ERI training and creates awareness and long-term thinking in farmer groups. This aspect has to be followed up in the work with farmer groups. For example, exposure visits to sites where non-sustainable practices were applied (e.g. deforested and eroded lands) could sensitize farmers. Also mapping natural resource bases

helps farmers to understand the importance of conservation measures.

## **10. Experience Sharing/ Up-scaling**

Since ERI is a methodological approach, it could be replicated in other agro-ecological zones where different crops are farmed or livestock is raised. Though, markets for products should exist in some forms. The sections of cross-cutting issues (currently gender and HIV/Aids) in the ERI training can be adapted to local conditions and challenges.

The training of Community Development Facilitators (CDFs) takes about 8 weeks and further practice of CDFs in working with farmer groups is needed to implement ERI. Farmer groups undergo a long-term training in all ERI modules. Therefore, the implementation of ERI requires a dedicated team of facilitators and a long-term project that allows appropriate time for training and supervision of farmer groups.

So far, the ERI approach has been shared with the following organizations: TRIAS (Uganda), ZOA (Uganda, (ZOA)), DECECE (Kenya), GROOTS (Kenya, (GROOTS)), VIFAFI (Tanzania) and FarmAfrica (Tanzania, (FarmAfrica)). BOKU, CIAT, UEEF and the Africa 2000 Network have implemented the ERI approach in Uganda before. TRIAS and ZOA are currently implementing ERI in other regions.

In general, the ERI practice/experience could be interesting for the following groups and institutions:

- Farmer communities in similar socio-economic situations could learn from the approach how to organize themselves in groups or how to strengthen existing groups. It could serve as a reference to subsistence farmers to learn and start market-orientated production.
- ERI could also be a reference for public institutions to enable or support market oriented agricultural development for smallholder farmers and to mainstream participatory approaches in national extension systems.
- Other NGOs may be interested to sustainably support smallholder farmers with an encompassing, participatory approach for sustainable development that has proven its effectiveness in the long run.
- Research institutes may be interested to learn from practical experience with implementing a farmer-led, participatory approach and further develop ERI.

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