



ECOTOPIA Programme Launched to Strengthen Agroecology and Climate Resilience in Eastern Uganda

Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF) Uganda officially launched the ECOTOPIA programme in Eastern Uganda on March 2nd, 2026, marking the beginning of a structured, community-driven effort to address the growing challenges facing small-scale farmers.

The programme was introduced through a series of inception and multi-stakeholder consultation meetings held in Mayuge and Kumi districts, bringing together local government leaders, farmers, researchers, and civil society organisations.

The launch comes at a time when agriculture in Eastern Uganda is under increasing strain. Farmers in the region are contending with erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and declining soil fertility, all of which have contributed to reduced agricultural productivity.

At the same time, many farming households have become heavily reliant on inorganic chemical inputs, which are often expensive and can further degrade soil health over time. These conditions have made it increasingly difficult for small-scale farmers to sustain their livelihoods and maintain stable food production.

Women and youth, who make up a significant portion of the agricultural workforce in the region, continue to face additional barriers. Limited access to land, agricultural training, and market opportunities has restricted their ability to fully participate in and benefit from farming activities. These challenges have highlighted the need for more inclusive and locally responsive approaches to agricultural development.

The ECOTOPIA programme, implemented under the Enabling Transformative Agroecology Programme (ETAP), is designed to respond to these issues through a model that prioritises community participation and locally generated solutions. Supported by DKA Austria and implemented in partnership with Horizont3000, the initiative focuses on strengthening agroecological practices while building the capacity of farming communities to adapt to climate-related challenges.

One of the central components of the programme is the establishment and strengthening of Community Agroecology Schools. These serve as local platforms where farmers can meet regularly to exchange knowledge, test farming practices, and develop practical solutions suited to their environments. Through these schools, farmers are introduced to agroecological approaches such as the use of organic fertilisers and bio-pesticides, which aim to improve soil health and reduce dependence on costly external inputs.

The programme also places strong emphasis on inclusion. Women and youth are actively engaged in training sessions, leadership structures, and decision-making processes within their communities. This approach is intended to ensure that groups that are often marginalised in agricultural systems are able to contribute to and benefit from the programme's activities.

In addition to community-level engagement, ECOTOPIA is working closely with academic and research institutions to support farmer-led innovation. Partnerships have been established with Lira University and Busitema University's Arapai Campus. These institutions are contributing to the development of a joint research agenda that reflects the realities of small-scale farmers and focuses on generating practical, locally applicable solutions.

During the launch, key activities were undertaken to prepare communities for full programme implementation. These include awareness campaigns to introduce ECOTOPIA's objectives, participatory consultations to identify local priorities, and the formation of community-level committees to guide implementation. Farmers, particularly women and youth, were involved in discussions on issues such as agroecology, land rights, and climate resilience, helping to shape both advocacy and research priorities.

Local government leaders welcomed the programme as both timely and complementary to existing government efforts. The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of Mayuge district Mr. Onoria Alex Okirigi reaffirmed government's commitment to partnerships that advance support for small-scale farmers, while promoting sustainable and resilient agricultural practices

"We welcome this partnership because it complements the district and government's efforts to support small-scale farmers through sustainable farming practices and improved livelihoods in farming communities. It also contributes to the National Development Plan,"- he noted

"This project comes at the right time for our farmers. Strengthening collaboration between the district and development partners will help improve small-scale farmers' livelihoods and productivity," noted Nelson Elungat Lakol, LCV Chairperson, Kumi district.

The initiative has increased awareness and understanding of agroecological practices among farming communities, contributed to the development of a clear advocacy and research agenda, and strengthened collaboration between community groups, research institutions, and civil society organisations.

By focusing on community engagement, knowledge sharing, and locally adapted practices, the programme aims to strengthen the resilience of small-scale farmers while contributing to more sustainable and inclusive food systems in the region.