



Kampala to Hoima: Volunteering with Eco-Agric Uganda

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*Here's a short account of my experience with [Eco-Agric Uganda](#), a local NGO operating on several fronts to **empower disadvantaged people** in the country, and how you can **support the organization**.*

[Eco-Agric Uganda](#) is run by a couple, **Josephine and Robert**, with an inspiring story to tell. They both came from poverty, became veterinarians with their own strengths, and did well with their lives: they managed to have a nice house and raise their children the way they envisioned.

But the place where they came from never left their hearts. Once they realized **they achieved what they wanted**, they started to slowly look into the lives of **people in need** in the country. They knew what to do and how to do it, and they knew their knowledge and experience could be useful to many other people. Eco-Agric Uganda was born.

Uganda is poor, this is no secret. It is ranked among the 20/30 poorest countries in the world by many indexes and international organizations.

Jobs are difficult to come by. There are a lot of **under-educated and unskilled** people that just need an opportunity. There are a lot of **children** (one-third of the entire population!) often orphans and unschooled, left to themselves. When you travel around, you just see all these children everywhere along the roads. There are huge problems

with some **health issues** such as HIV. **Farmers** are in need of training and guidance, and contracts to secure their sales on markets they don't fully understand.



A village in rural Uganda

Josephine and Robert started to act. In **Wakiso** they established the main office of the organization and their **vocational training centre**. Here, for a period of six months and several times per week, young **women and mothers** with no other opportunity can train and learn how to sew or become hairdressers, or how to make small handicraft objects that can be sold at the markets in the capital.

The principle applied isn't to just hand over materials or spoon feed them in any way. Eco-Agric tries to **drive these women** to think about **feasible economic activities**, which can become a real source of income and support for their families. I have assisted to some training myself, and one day we all went together to **Kampala**, the capital of the country, to check out handicraft markets and understand what are the needed products.



The end of a training session at Wakiso offices

It was one of the best days so far in Uganda for me, and together with other volunteers we also took advantage to visit around, including the big **Gaddafi National Mosque** on

the top of the hill, from where you can see the whole city.



View of Kampala from the top of Gaddafi National Mosque

After that, we moved to **Hoima**, in the North-West part of the country. This is a **rural province** where Eco-Agric has built, with the help of previous volunteers, [Wamu Eco-Cottages Hoima](#). The place can be booked by tourists, and all the money for (the very affordable) rooms, will go into helping the activities of the NGO. Hoima is a very good location to go visit the famous **Murchinson Falls National Park** or to continue your travels somewhere else in the country.

Hoima is the place where **most of the activities** take place. I personally visited some **farming** communities for their regular meetings (featured image). The work here is to **economically empower** families by training them on **sustainable agriculture** techniques. There is also work going towards training and educating people on the **protection of their environment**, and on **contract farming**, which is essential to give some certainty of income for these families in rural Uganda. Without collective contracts, their production would be too small to even be able to sell.



Wamu Eco-Cottage Hoima, managed by Eco-Agric Uganda

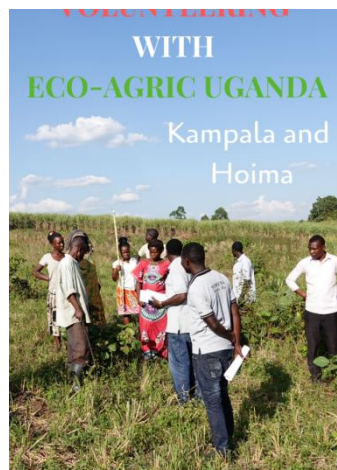
While I was there, other volunteers helped with projects supporting **orphaned children in schools**, or with **HIV prevention and control**, or at **refugee camps**. I could not see it all, but considering the small size of the organization and the limited resources available, Eco-Agric really does a lot.

Volunteers are welcomed as part of the family by Josephine and Robert, and there is always some useful skills that can be shared and can be good for the organization. As for my work, I just supported by creating or organizing some communication tools, for donors and fund-raising.



A kid in front of his house, in the countryside of Hoima

The experience was definitely positive, **Eco-Agric does important work**. If you feel like supporting them through volunteering, with some donations, or simply by staying at the Eco-Lodge in Hoima, please do so. All the information are in the links provided in this article. For more stories and to follow their work, here is the [Instagram account](#).



L'ESSENTIEL

Ouganda

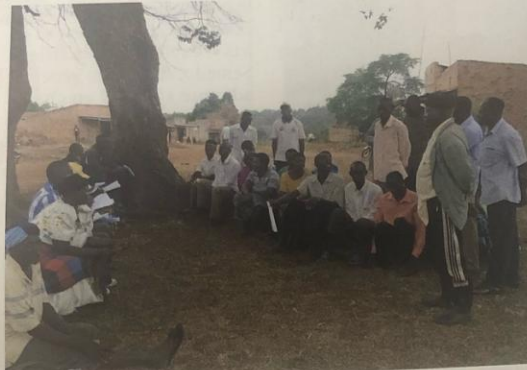
Des contrats agricoles prometteurs

1 350 agriculteurs ont passé un contrat avec le groupe Exo Exim pour cultiver du chia et du soja biologiques dans les districts d'Hoima et de Kibaale. Les premiers résultats sont prometteurs.

En Ouganda, l'agriculture bénéficie d'atouts majeurs tels que son sol fertile et son climat clément. Seulement, pour les agriculteurs, les revenus liés à cette activité restent faibles, parfois pas plus de 50 000 shillings par mois (environ 13 \$). Aujourd'hui, un partage des connaissances entre divers acteurs et les fermiers locaux est entrepris afin d'apporter des réponses immédiates.

Moyens de subsistance

Ainsi, depuis 2007, l'association Eco-Agric Uganda soutient les agriculteurs locaux dans les régions d'Hoima, de Kibaale et de Wakiso. Là, elle agit auprès des personnes dans le besoin, notamment les habitants aux revenus faibles, les femmes et les jeunes mères. À travers divers projets, comme la culture de tomates et de champignons, l'association tente de donner des moyens de subsistance grâce à des formations, un renforcement des capacités, une transformation de l'agriculture et une meilleure pratique environnementale.



Réunion de fermiers dans la région d'Hoima. Le chef du groupe portera ensuite les difficultés, les enjeux ressentis, lors des réunions avec les partenaires du contrat.

Depuis décembre dernier, Eco-Agric travaille avec les associations Just Hope Internationale et Eco Exim. Just Hope est une ONG américaine qui identifie les besoins dans divers pays. Parallèlement, un contrat a été conclu avec le groupe Exo Exim dans le but d'augmenter les revenus jusqu'à 130 000 shillings par mois pour les agriculteurs qu'Eco-Agric suit et soutient.

Le projet d'agriculture contractuelle biologique

concerne 1 350 agriculteurs : 450 à Hoima et 900 à Kibaale, pour deux saisons. Pour la première semence, les cultures de chia et de soja ont été privilégiées. Le sésame sera également cultivé lors de la seconde récolte.

Grâce au travail d'Eco-Agric, les fermiers se sont mobilisés pour ce nouveau projet. Ils ont suivi une formation spécifique qui comprend l'utilisation de pesticides biologiques. Les semences ont été distribuées aux

agriculteurs de mars à avril, en fonction de la superficie de leurs terrains.

Des plantations de choix

L'intérêt de faire pousser du soja en Ouganda réside dans les propriétés médicinales de ses feuilles. De plus, une consommation quotidienne de soja apporte des bénéfices nutritionnels. Les cultures de chia et du soja sont peu gourmandes en eau et résistantes aux conditions climatiques, ce qui laisse espérer peu de pertes de production.

Fin mai, les résultats étaient déjà visibles. 80 % des graines étaient germées et les cultures étaient en phase de croissance, conformément aux attentes compte tenu de la pluviosité. Les agriculteurs doivent maintenant prêter attention au désherbage, à l'éclaircissage et plus généralement à tout ce qui concerne la gestion des cultures.

Ce nouveau projet initié par les associations est très prometteur et porteur d'espoir pour les agriculteurs en vue d'une récolte prochaine.

ÉLÉONORE ARRIAL



Mugisa Arriet dans son champ de Chia. Photos: Éléonore Arrial



Le soja fait partie des cultures contractualisées.