

## Training them to catch fish?

### Farmer education and training programmes in Uganda's organic agricultural subsector

Nedson Pophiwa

This policy brief explores the nature of training and education activities of civil society organisations and tertiary institutions in Uganda. An internet search of the training and education activities in organic agriculture in Uganda shows overwhelming indications of the hard work that is being put into educating and training Ugandans. Critical questions therefore arise: 'What is driving these training and education programmes?' 'Who is running these programmes and what are their focus areas?' and, 'Qualitatively speaking, how effective are these programmes?' Using the analogy of 'train them to catch fish', the policy brief grapples with answering these complex questions. Recommendations are made to both civil society and the Ugandan government on strategies to carry forward the process of growing the sector.

#### Introduction

Certified organic agriculture (OA)<sup>1</sup> has been on the increase in Africa owing to the growing demand globally for naturally grown and healthier food, particularly by consumers in the developed world. It is defined by the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM) as a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people.<sup>2</sup> African subsistence farmers have been generally organic farmers by default, in that their traditional farming methods are largely comparable to organic farming except that they are not certified. Uganda is exceptional in that it has made huge strides in growing the organic farming sector; so much so that by 2003 it had the world's thirteenth-largest land area under organic agricultural production

and the greatest in Africa.<sup>3</sup> More than four years later, in 2007, 296 203 hectares of land were under organic agricultural production by 206 803 certified farmers.<sup>4</sup> Most of these farmers are rural based and small scale. They form farmers' groupings and associations which are registered with the umbrella body for organic farmers, the National Organic Agricultural Movement of Uganda (Nogamu). As an umbrella organisation, Nogamu links farmers with markets, in a sense assists with training regarding certification and general organic principles, and lobbies for the recognition of the subsector by government and international donors.

Nogamu argues that there is a need to build capacity in production and processing of organic products by training farmers to gain skills in soil management, pest control and post-harvest management in a way that does not contravene the

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principles of organic farming. This is important, as the majority of people employed in organic farming in Uganda are not formally educated, though a few who are in management have trained in marketing and attended short courses in organic farming.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in order to fully exploit the potential of organic farming, there is a need for farmers to get training in some basic principles of OA, such as pest control and maintaining soil fertility using organic procedures.<sup>6</sup> Because Ugandans have responded to the need for skills training through the assistance of international donors, it is important in this policy brief to explore the training and education activities in the country and the limitations they face in growing the required skills for organic farming. An internet search of the training and education activities in OA in Uganda shows overwhelming indications of the hard work that is being put into educating and training Ugandans. Critical questions therefore arise:

- What is driving these training and education programmes?
- Who is running these programmes and what are their focus areas in OA training?
- Qualitatively speaking, how effective are these programmes?

Relevant to the issue of training programmes are the cautionary statements in one donor's report: that in East Africa, training courses, workshops and seminars are immensely popular with donors and citizens, especially those that come with incentives such as allowances for participation.<sup>7</sup> While it could be difficult to ascertain the motives behind massive training schemes and why they are popular, this policy brief will tackle these complex issues.

## Drivers of training and education programmes

There are several drivers of organic agricultural training and education in Uganda, among which are the demanding nature of organic farming principles, the neglect of training by government extension services, and the perceived benefits of skills acquisition to the farmer.

The strict rules of OA that farmers need to adhere to are embedded in the four principles of organic agriculture, which were put forward by IFOAM;

- i) *Principle of health*: OA should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible;

- ii) *Principle of ecology*: OA should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them;
- iii) *Principle of fairness*: OA should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities; and
- iv) *Principle of care*: OA should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment<sup>8</sup>

These principles also partly inform the criteria used by certification bodies in certifying organic farmers and their produce, particularly for overseas markets. Therefore export companies, together with Nogamu, play a significant role in training their suppliers (Ugandan farmers) in best practices of organic agriculture, from the soil to value-adding stages.

Another crucial driver for training is the attitude of the state. The Ugandan Government's official channel of support to agriculture is through the extension and advisory roles played by the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS).<sup>9</sup> NAADS offers extension services such as seeds and other inputs to farmers as well as training them. The NAADS programme is lauded for having a substantial positive impact on the availability and quality of advisory services provided to farmers, promoting adoption of new crop and livestock enterprises as well as improving adoption and use of modern agricultural production technologies and practices.<sup>10</sup> Despite the good work, the programme's relevance to organic farmers is not very significant, as the lack of policy means that OA is not formally recognised and therefore NAADS does not consider training farmers in OA as part of its extension services.<sup>11</sup>

Thirdly, because of the perceived benefits (true or false) of adhering to OA principles, it is a vital driver for Ugandan farmers to receive training and be educated on these issues. Organic farmers require training in order to properly maintain and utilise their natural resource base. Not only is the training that farmers receive in organic techniques a prerequisite for certification, but it has several benefits for the household:

- Aside from learning new techniques that can increase their crop yields and the stability of their farming system, they are also put in touch with a broader network than they are normally in contact with.<sup>12</sup>
- Organic farmers have the opportunity to continuously increase their human capital,

as they are connected to a framework of organisational support, as well as to their buyer contact, through whom they have better access to extension and training than they would otherwise have.

- Training also appears to be a status indicator for many households, a visible proof that they have connections and access to resources that others in the community do not have.
- When the increase in knowledge and skills is applied to the farming system that makes up the household's livelihood, it results in an increase in the economic capital.

Overall it is important for farmers to be trained because the knowledge of organic techniques is what gives a farmer the practical tools to improve the production system he or she depends on and make it into one that produces goods acceptable to the buyer (market).<sup>13</sup>

## Organic agriculture training and education

### Who is training and educating farmers?

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and private-sector companies are the key players in organic farming training and education in Uganda, although state institutions such as Makerere University have begun to embed organic agriculture in their curriculum and research activities.<sup>14</sup> This scenario does not come as a surprise, because the development of the OA sector has largely been a brainchild of development organisations in the country, while the state promotes conventional agriculture. It may be difficult to trace historically the organisations that pioneered OA training and education, but some of these organisations have been in Uganda for over two decades,

initially focusing on ecologically friendly agriculture and issues around soil conservation before turning their focus to OA. Organisations such as Grolink/SIDA's Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa programme (Epopa), Kulika Uganda,<sup>15</sup> CARITAS Kampala, Rural Community Development (RUCID), Send a Cow Uganda (SACU), Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (Pelum) Uganda<sup>16</sup> and Nogamu, which was formed a decade ago, all come to mind when one tries to understand the network of organisations that facilitate knowledge dissemination and training on OA in the country. In terms of tertiary education, the Uganda Martyrs University is one institution that recognises OA, in that it offers a B.Sc. in Organic Agriculture (See Box 1 for the curriculum).

As it is not possible to document the activities of each NGO involved in OA training, the policy brief will not delve into greater detail on each NGO's activities but rather discuss some of them, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 gives the reader the impression that although there are numerous NGOs working in this field, their areas of focus are not all that different, except for the regions that they operate in and their target groups. The discussion that ensues explains these issues.

### What is involved?

Ugandan rural farmers involved in OA are usually trained in basic understanding of OA, certifiable internal control systems, participatory mapping, agricultural extension methods, training in post-harvest technology and overall sustainable farming systems.<sup>18</sup> In its training programmes, Nogamu specialises in organic production of various crops (agronomy), soil fertility management in organic systems, soil and water management, weed management in organic agriculture, post-harvest handling, processing of organic products (fruits and vegetables), different organic standards, internal

### Box 1: Uganda Martyrs University list of course modules for B.Sc. in Organic Agriculture <sup>17</sup>

- Sustainable Environment Management and Development
- Research, Extension Methods and Internal Control Systems
- Organic Agriculture Production
- Integrated Pest Management in Organic Agriculture
- Appropriate Agro-mechanization in Organic Agriculture
- Commodity Development and Biotechnology for Organic Farming.
- Agro-Product Development and Processing
- Market Chain Management: Organic Products Market
- Organic Standards, certification and regulation
- Applied/Professional Ethics and Social Accountability (Fair Trade/ Traceability).
- Organic Farm Planning and Management
- Agrotourism

**Table 1** Short profiles of selected training institutions in Uganda

Institution and/or partners	Region and areas of focus
Grassroots Reconciliation Group (GRG) and the National Organic Agricultural Movement of Uganda (Nogamu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Northern Uganda</li> <li>Imparting to war-affected communities and former child soldiers organic farming, banana- and pineapple-growing skills. <a href="http://grassrootsgroup.org/2011/07/our-new-organic-farming-training-for-war-affected-communities/">http://grassrootsgroup.org/2011/07/our-new-organic-farming-training-for-war-affected-communities/</a></li> <li>It began its activities in 2005</li> </ul>
Gumutindo Coffee Cooperative and Twin-UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mount Elgon, on the eastern border of Uganda.</li> <li>Twin-UK and Gumutindo Coffee Cooperative in Uganda are working to plan and implement activities that enhance the climate resilience of its members and the wider community, and to raise awareness about the impacts of climate change.</li> <li><a href="http://www.twin.org.uk/projects/climate-change-adaptation-mount-elgon-uganda">http://www.twin.org.uk/projects/climate-change-adaptation-mount-elgon-uganda</a></li> </ul>
Gorilla Organisation,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>South-western Uganda, near Mgahinga National Park</li> <li>The Gorilla Organisation began training the Ugandan communities alongside the park in sustainable farming techniques in late 2006. Through the project, 100 farmers received intensive training in the theory and practice of sustainable organic agriculture to become 'Key Farmer Trainers' (KFTs). These KFTs will then each pass what they have learnt on to a further ten farmers. <a href="http://www.gorillas.org/Project/Detail/Kisoro_District_Farmer_Training">http://www.gorillas.org/Project/Detail/Kisoro_District_Farmer_Training</a></li> </ul>
Uganda Institute of Organic Farming: a project of Kiima Foods (NGO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kasese, western Uganda</li> <li>Training organisation supporting member households through organic farming skills. <a href="http://internationalcommunitydevelopment.org/how-we-do-it/meet-our-local-partners">http://internationalcommunitydevelopment.org/how-we-do-it/meet-our-local-partners</a></li> <li>Started in 1995</li> </ul>
St Jude Family Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Masaka, Central Uganda</li> <li>Rural training centre for Sustainable Integrated Organic Agriculture focusing on women's groups and young farmers around the community <a href="http://fsdinternational.org/node/1560">http://fsdinternational.org/node/1560</a></li> <li>Started in 1994</li> </ul>

control systems, internal quality management and marketing of organic products (local and export).<sup>19</sup> Below are some of the different methods of training:

- *Training of trainers.* This is the most common method of training used by NGOs, in which selected farmers who are part of a farmers' group are trained in such a way that they can further train fellow farmers. For instance, Kulika arranges farmers into groups of up to 20 individuals and trains one or two of them in its programme of Sustainable Organic Agriculture (SOA), and these then pass on their knowledge to the rest of the group. Some tools and seeds are also provided.<sup>20</sup>
- *Training and visits.* Field officers train farmers and monitor improvements through follow-up visits, where possible in the field.
- *Contact farmers.* Active and progressive farmers are sometimes selected to become contact farmers who would then train fellow farmers and function as successful examples.
- *Farmer-to-farmer visits.* In some projects farmers visit other farmers' fields located in other regions to learn from their experiences with organic farming. However, Epopa admits that

this is a relatively costly form of learning and so the method became unsustainable.<sup>21</sup>

- *On-farm research.* In some projects, field trials and demonstration plots have been established within farmers' fields.

A more practical understanding of how these methods could be used is captured in the brief case study on the nature of training conducted by Africa 2000 Network, which intervened in poverty eradication through sustainable technologies in Iganga District (Box 2 on next page).

What also needs to be borne in mind is that the majority of these training workshops are usually hands-on, so that participants gain practical experience and a certificate of attendance, though not a certificate of competency, for which one would have to have written and passed examinations.

### Can they really catch fish? Assessing effectiveness of the programmes

This is probably the most difficult question to answer, considering that it requires methodological tools such as monitoring and evaluation that

## Box 2: Organic agriculture and rural livelihoods in the Iganga District, Uganda

The Poverty Eradication through Environmentally Sustainable Technologies (PEEST) project was implemented in the Iganga District, Eastern Uganda, in June 1997 by Africa 2000 Network (A2N). The project aimed to combat environmental degradation by promoting ecologically sustainable development for improved livelihoods among the smallholder farmers in the district.

### Training and provision of extension services

This covered aspects of sustainable agriculture and natural resource management to broaden the knowledge and the technical skills of the farmers so that they are better prepared to meet the challenges posed by changing natural and socio-economic conditions. The training was divided into two parts:

- Part 1: This involved training in organic soil management technologies like compost production and management, mulching, improved fallows using nitrogen fixing legumes and agroforestry technologies, rain water harvesting and soil erosion control.
- Part 2: This was conducted after the planning sessions described above and involved training in crop husbandry, agroforestry, organic pest management and livestock husbandry.

Workshops, demonstrations, exchange visits to other organic practising farmers in other districts were conducted. All the training was carried out in the community, often in farmers' fields and in the local language. During the training, facilitators invited farmers to make contributions about technologies and practices they were utilising and considered successful. These were then discussed and suggestions for improvement made where necessary. In this way, the project was able to build on existing farmers' knowledge. On-farm extension was provided by the project staff and selected 'farmer-trainers' from the community who had been trained and provided with bicycles for easy movement in their respective villages. A practical sustainable agriculture manual for smallholder farmers was prepared by A2N and provided to all farmers groups for reference.

Adapted from: [http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/Y4137E/y4137e07b.htm#P865\\_120559](http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/Y4137E/y4137e07b.htm#P865_120559)

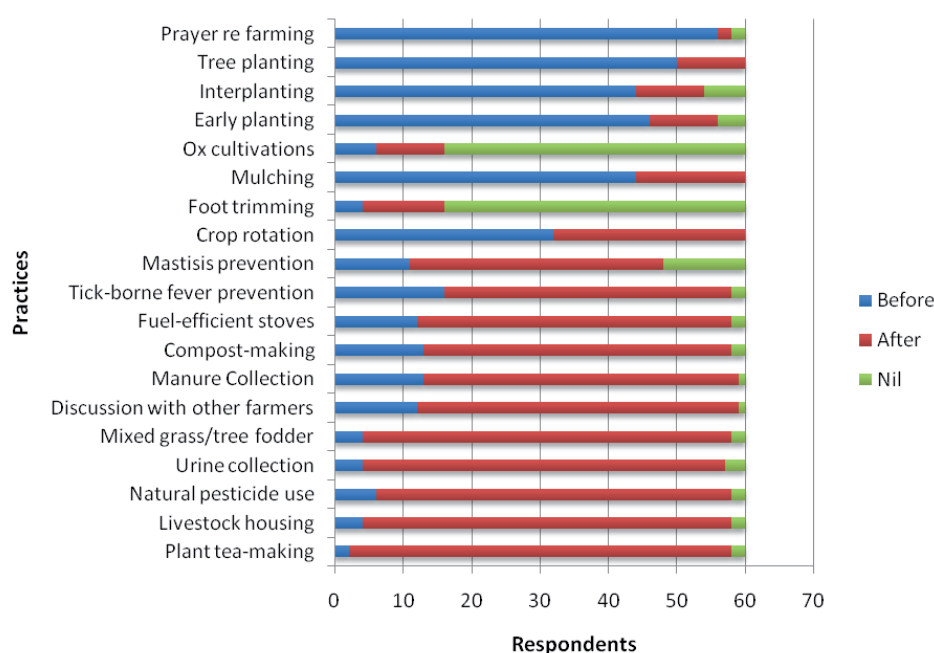
the author was not privileged to be part of. Nevertheless there are other indicators which one can use to attempt to address the question on whether the farmers can now catch fish after all the training and educational programmes. Figure 1 below is part of an evaluation conducted on training programmes offered by SACU, which also trains organic and sustainable farming in general.

The chart below shows the number, out of 60 respondents, who have adopted any of 19 different practices after receiving training from SACU.

Nearly 70 per cent of group members adopted over half of the 19 practices, while all but three of the remaining practices were already being done by over two-thirds of the group. The least adopted practices are mastitis control, foot trimming, and ox cultivations, largely due to the fact that most respondents do not have cows, nor have they encountered the need.<sup>23</sup>

However, the same positive attributes cannot be reported for the BSc in Organic Agriculture degree students at Uganda Martyrs University.

Figure 1: Impacts and adoption of training in 19 practices in Masaka District, Uganda



Source: SACU<sup>22</sup>

In an interview one of the lecturers lamented that because conventional agriculture is still a key qualification recognised by the labour market, their graduates do not easily find jobs.<sup>24</sup> Added to this, the few who are fortunate enough to get employment normally work in conventional agriculture settings, thus not fully utilising their skills. Ironically, the university does not recognise qualifications such as certificates from the NGO-type courses for those who wish to study in their degree programme. So this is a shortcoming of courses offered at NGO workshops in Uganda, that they do not have accreditation and are not credit-bearing and thus not a prerequisite for degree admission into university.<sup>25</sup>

- Greater public awareness of organic agriculture would also yield positive results for those who possess organic agricultural qualifications on the labour market. This is a task for both state and civil society.

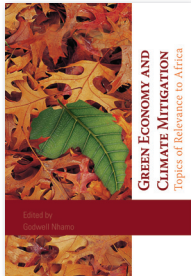
## Conclusions and Recommendations

The discussion above has touched on several aspects regarding training and education of farmers in organic agriculture in Uganda. The nature of the sector requires that farmers continuously get training in order for them to strictly abide by the standard requirements of certification as well as buyer preferences. The fact that the state has not provided official training and extension through NAADS has left a vacuum for NGOs to take over that role. A number of training programmes are in place to ensure that the farmers are not 'given fish but can now catch fish themselves'. For example, the trainer of trainers approach is empowering and has proved efficient. However, it is clear that there is room for improvement and this policy brief thus recommends the following:

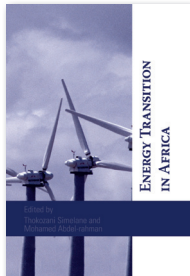
- Civil society organisations should continue to use evidence-based interventions in formulating training programmes. By adopting innovative approaches that are localised through participation of the farmers themselves in crafting the programmes, NGOs will break the culture of just training for the sake of training and becoming redundant.
- The final adoption of organic farming policy by the Government of Uganda would mean that there would be room for organisations such as NAADS to reconsider incorporating OA in their training and extension services work. It would also mean that at national level there would be impetus for more skilling of trainers for organic agriculture who possess recognised qualifications that are accredited by the government's ministry of education.

## Notes and References

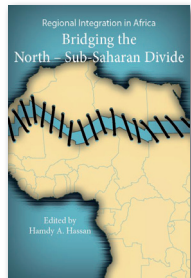
- 1 Organic certification was first instituted in the 1970s by organic farming groups that first developed organic standards. Organic standards have long been used to create an agreement within organic agriculture about what an 'organic' claim on a product means, and to some extent, to inform consumers. Organic standards developed as early as in the 1940s. At present hundreds of private organic standards exist worldwide. They have been codified in the technical regulations of more than 60 countries. Although certification started as a voluntary activity, the market began to demand it for sales transactions, and now it is required by the regulations of many governments for any kind of an 'organic' claim on a product label. This is called third-party certification. For more information, read [http://www.ifoam.org/about\\_ifoam/standards/index.html](http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/index.html)
- 2 See [www.ifoam.org/growing\\_organic/definitions/dao/index.html](http://www.ifoam.org/growing_organic/definitions/dao/index.html)
- 3 *Organic agriculture in Uganda*. URL: <http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/SuccessStories/OrganicAgricultureinUganda/tabid/4655/language/en-US/Default.aspx> [Accessed 15 May 2011]
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 International Labour Office, 2010. *Employability Department skills for green jobs in Uganda :Unedited background country study*. Geneva: ILO, p.21.
- 6 Ibid., p.35.
- 7 Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa (Epopa), 2008. *Organic exports: A way to a better life? End Report*. URL: <http://www.grolink.se/epopa/Publications/Epopa-end-book.pdf> [Accessed 12 January 2012]
- 8 [http://www.ifoam.org/about\\_ifoam/principles/index.html](http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/principles/index.html)
- 9 By its nature, the focus of NAADS is on conventional farming.
- 10 International Food Policy Research Institute, 2007. *Assessing the impact of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) in the Uganda rural livelihoods*. (IFPRI Discussion Paper 00724). Washington DC, IFPRI
- 11 Jacobsen, R.F., 2009. *Organic agriculture in Uganda*, M.Sc. Thesis, Roskilde University, Denmark, p.34.
- 12 Ibid., p.45–46.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Charles Ssekya, 2005, *Organic agriculture research in Uganda*, URL: <http://www.orgprints.org/7687> [Accessed 12 January 2012]
- 15 Kulika was established in 1981 in the UK with a focus on providing educational opportunities through vocational and academic scholarships to Ugandan people. Its emphasis now is on community development and the provision of educational opportunities to help people improve their livelihoods through the Sustainable Agriculture Training Programme, which started in the mid-1990s. Kulika now has a staff of 26, operating from headquarters in Kampala and with activities across the country. See the website [http://www.kulika.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=49&Itemid=53](http://www.kulika.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49&Itemid=53)
- 16 Pelum Uganda, which stands for Participatory Ecological Land Use Management, is an association of over 200 civil society organisations in 10 countries in Africa, which works to improve the livelihoods of small-scale farmers by fostering ecological land-use management. In Uganda Pelum comprises 34 member organisations. See the website [www.pelumuganda.org](http://www.pelumuganda.org)
- 17 Only courses related to OA are listed here. See also Uganda Martyrs University, Faculty of Agriculture prospectus.
- 18 Foss, K & Sterky, E., 2000. *Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa: An Evaluation of Epopa for SIDA*. URL: <http://www.grolink.se/epopa/publications/EOPA-Phase-2-Evaluation-04.pdf> [Accessed 12 January 2012]
- 19 See the website: [http://www.nogamu.org.ug/index.php?page=nog\\_training](http://www.nogamu.org.ug/index.php?page=nog_training)
- 20 Fry, B.P., 2009, *Taking Kulika Uganda to the 'next level': A methodological assessment of potential projects to improve the livelihoods of Kulika's beneficiaries*. M.Sc. Thesis, Imperial College, London.
- 21 Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa (Epopa), 2008, op. cit., p.51.
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- 24 Interview with J. Masereka, Uganda Martyrs University, Faculty of Agriculture, 23 July 2011.
- 25 Ibid.



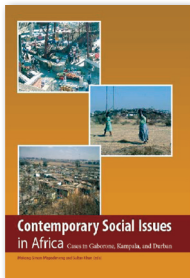
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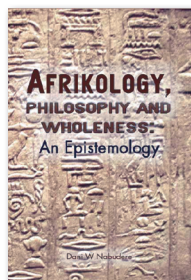
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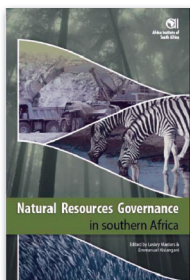
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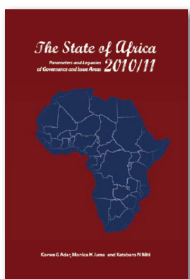
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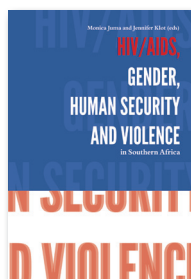
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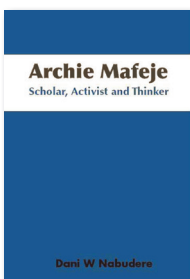
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