

Linking farmers to markets: Developing strategies to improve the competitiveness of organic agriculture in Eastern and Southern Africa

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Despite the growing interest in organic agriculture in Africa, it is evident that the transition towards organic management and marketing systems is complex and constrained by a range of biophysical, economic and social factors. We propose that any organic initiative therefore needs to centre on three related paradigms, (i) strengthening biological processes through optimising nutrient cycling and maximising nutrientthe efficiency of their use, (ii) building farmer's capacities to learn about biological and ecological complexity, using participatory approaches and involving farmers in experimentation and learning and (iii) embedding rural innovations in the 'resource-to-consumption' system and developing forward and backward linkages between natural resource management, agriculture production and organic markets.

This four-year research project will develop, implement and evaluate strategies for linking farmers in pilot research sites in Uganda and Mozambique to domestic, regional and international organic and other niche market opportunities. The project will use decision support tools to improve farmer's learning to adapt organic technologies within a resource-to-consumption context. The project will aim at directly addressing the specific research issues that arise from ongoing organic outreach programmes through partnerships with national research programs, NGOs and Universities. Capacity building through student thesis, networking for information sharing within and between sectors and the development and dissemination of policy briefs are inherent components of this project.