Fifteen years
AgriProFocus
Collective Impact

15 YEARS NETWORK
HOW WE GOT STARTED

UNUSUAL BUSINESS
GENDER IN VALUE CHAINS

FINANCE FAIRS
YOUTH IN AGRIBUSINESS

FACTS AND FIGURES
COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS

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Facts and figures
It is quite an exercise reading through the forewords and prefaces of all the AgriProFocus network publications that saw the light over the last 15 years. There is a wonderfully rich diversity of angles in the prefaces written by ministers, embassy staff, representatives of member organisations and professionals from across the network. During the first years, forewords (some in Dutch) explained how AgriProFocus came about and focused on expectations: coordination and cooperation between members, farmers and their organisations in the driver’s seat, and impact of agricultural value chains in developing countries. With time, the forewords tended to elaborate on the bigger picture: boosting food production for the cities of Africa and Asia, the role of the Dutch in aid and trade, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

This magazine is the last publication of the AgriProFocus partnership. Its contents celebrate what the different constellations of stakeholders were able to trigger and achieve under the ‘flag’ of the network; by articulating their ambitions, by joining forces and by sharing resources in a living network. We offer you a glimpse of the AgriProFocus network action as it spanned 15 years of working in over 15 countries, and above all its main drivers: stimulating joint action, learning and advocacy. You can read about experiences ranging from support to organised producers to knowledge development on food security. Common to all the articles are the drivers in our history, plus highlights from our 12 country networks.

As ever, we use this AgriProFocus foreword to thank the professionals in the network who collaborated on publications in the past. This time, our thanks go to Lieke, Loes, Lucy, Babette and Wim, the AgriProFocus staff who compiled this magazine from the material collected from archives and libraries. I would also like to extend our thanks to all other staff who have been with us in the past or more recently, and to our network partners worldwide who have driven the network’s results.

Happy reading,

Roel Snelder
Operations Director
15 years of the AgriProFocus network

AgriProFocus was initiated in 2005 in the Netherlands as a network organisation with the objective to stimulate farmer entrepreneurship and strengthen the capacity of producer organisations in order to improve food security. Over time AgriProFocus has evolved in terms of scope, outreach, approach, operations and in affiliation and partnerships. This timeline captures the AgriProFocus network and its evolution.

Network operates from NL
Dutch members working in support of producer organisations
Joint learning and advocacy by 550 NL professionals

Joint agenda setting and action in 7 countries + NL
Dutch member, national partners + NI Embassy involvement
11,000+ agri-professionals exchanging online

12 country networks for brokering, innovation and debate
350+ Dutch and (inter) national partners in 12 countries + NL
23,000+ agri-professionals exchanging online

12 country networks for linking, learning and leadership
625+ Dutch and (inter) national partners in 12 countries + NL
30,000+ agri-professionals exchanging online
Free agents get the Dutch Diamond to act together

The Dutch Diamond refers to the combined strengths of agribusiness, civil society organisations, knowledge institutes and government bodies. The concept stems from the very Dutch tradition of consultation and balancing different interests. AgriProFocus is rooted in this tradition, which has become known internationally as the ‘growth diamond in action’.

The AgriProFocus network has been active for 15 years, and actors representing the different corners of the growth diamond may have different perspectives on what the key elements of the network’s success are. But what was it like being part of the network? What has helped to find common ground and how has ‘neutral facilitation’ contributed to collaborative efforts?

Different perspectives on success

“Being part of the AgriProFocus Food Policy working group working group gives us the possibility to organise and position ourselves better towards policymakers. Collectively we have a stronger voice,” explains Nout van der Vaart, of HIVOS. He cites the Food Transition Manifesto, which was compiled in mid 2017 and supported by a broad coalition of more than 45 Dutch organisations and companies. The manifesto calls for collective action, and was well received by the Dutch parliament and the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Agriculture.

Frank Buizer, agricultural counsellor in Uganda (and before that PSD coach at RVO), shares his perspective: “For me the added value lies in the local AgriProFocus networks. The support teams can easily reach out to many national stakeholders and that is very helpful in activities or projects that are run under RVO or the Netherlands Embassy. The Poultry Africa Expo, held in Rwanda in 2019, was a great example of good network collaboration. Poultry farmers from 7 countries attended masterclasses, made field visits and met poultry input suppliers. AgriProFocus was the linchpin and facilitated activities with PUM, Resiliencia and the embassy in Kigali.”

Glenn Pardede of EWINDO, the Indonesian branch of East West Seed, mentions the value of linking education to the private sector: “The AgriProFocus team came to interview
us on how we work with the SMK schools (vocational or pre-professional high schools, Ed.). In March 2020 they asked us if we would host the launch of a magazine on Green Education in Indonesia. We eagerly accepted, as our sector needs young entrepreneurs. But then COVID-19 hit us hard and all schools were closed. During the crisis they came back to us with a proposal to co-create a series of youth webinars, combined with a small competition on urban farming ideas. It is inspiring to work in this way with teachers, scientists and youth."

The art of compromise
Joint action between actors with different perspectives works when partners can agree to disagree on some issues while working together on others. AgriProFocus provided this common ground by setting up innovation communities around urgent issues. Examples being the absence of good quality, accessible market information, dysfunctional farm-firm relations, control of foot and mouth disease, feed issues in the dairy sector, inadequate planting material, and land issues.

Some communities existed for as long as they were needed to solve a particular issue; others were disbanded due to lack of joint ambition or leadership. Others, however, became longstanding effective coalitions, for example the co-creators of finance fairs, of coaching tracks on gender in value chains, and of agribusiness cluster programmes in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Niger.

An effective community requires not only positive behaviour and commitment from partners, it also requires facilitation by a trusted party. AgriProFocus has derived much of its inspiration for its role as facilitator from the ‘living networks’ approach developed by Eelke Wielinga. A living network requires a ‘free agent’ that starts working with people and their energy to move towards a dot on the horizon. One of the key tasks of the free agent is to ensure that leadership remains a group responsibility, as an expression of mutual trust.

In the network the role of free agent goes beyond being a neutral facilitator

Living networks live on
The AgriProFocus teams played the role of a free agent, going beyond being a neutral facilitator. Facilitators need to be trusted by partners in their search for common ground. Trust and local ownership have been most deeply felt when AgriProFocus helped partners to organise themselves in innovation communities around specific issues. This approach requires smart facilitation, for example by sharing knowledge developed elsewhere in the AgriProFocus network. Participating in innovation communities has led to meaningful changes in the work of partners. And conversely, communities’ experiences have also found their way into new programmes and knowledge products. Thus, ‘living networks’ live on.

Collectively we have a stronger voice
Looking back on kick-starting living networks

AgriProFocus was established in 2005, starting in the Netherlands as a multi-stakeholder initiative for agricultural development cooperation. At that time, agriculture ranked low on the Dutch aid agenda and initiatives were fragmented among many stakeholders. The answer to this fragmentation was to use a network approach to linking, learning and joint action between the stakeholders. The Dutch Diamond in action was expected to produce practical results for its members and also draw policymakers’ attention to agricultural development.

The first expectation was addressed by choosing a clear focus for stakeholders to rally around: ‘More and Better Support for Organised Producers’. A strategy plan was developed by a multi-stakeholder team of professionals from Agriterra, ICCO Cooperation, SNV, Wageningen UR backed by the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Agriculture. Its rationale: the combined expertise of members would yield better results for producers.

Weaving a way forward
This strategy meant two things. For starters, ensuring visibility for each organisation and its specific expertise in agriculture – the first publications introduced the Dutch members and their thoughts on producer organisations and market chains. Secondly, the strategy concerned the role of the secretariat, initially a team of four hosted by Agriterra in Arnhem, the Netherlands. Its role was defined as ‘fostering collaboration’ between members around concrete demands from producer organisations, and building a knowledge platform, a forum for collecting and exchanging knowledge about producer organisations and agriculture.

Activities and events were organised around a wide range of topics, from bananas and tea to agricultural finance. A database of producer organisations supported by members was set up, but keeping it up-to-date proved to be quite a challenge. It was easier for professionals and the secretariat to call around and collect the latest intel as and when it was needed. By the end of the first four years, a substantial number of joint action trajectories had been co-created in Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda and Mali.

Casting the net wider
The strategic decision to bring the network approach to priority countries for Dutch agricultural cooperation was taken in 2008. The challenge was to enhance joint action...
to promote farmer entrepreneurship. As a result, AgriProFocus went overseas and online. The first ‘network countries’ (Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia) were selected on the basis of priorities set by Dutch ministries and embassies in combination with members energy and commitment on the ground for organisation and staffing. Cordaid, Hivos, ICCO Cooperation, Oxfam Novib and SNV adopted lead roles in the countries, while KIT and WCDI facilitated the start-up phase.

Members funded the start-up together, from budgets that were still flexible. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs granted AgriProFocus a matching fund to stimulate joint action, allowing the country networks (or Agri-Hubs as they were known for a time) to follow the energy and interests of members and their partners.

Other country networks followed. In 2011 Benin and Mali started networks at the request of the Netherlands Embassies located there. Burundi, DR Congo and Tanzania followed in 2012, Indonesia in 2013, and Myanmar in 2016. Unfortunately, the network approach did not gain enough momentum in Mozambique and DR Congo. More recent explorations in Bangladesh and Nigeria revealed interest in a network but not enough financial commitment from members and partners.

Shifting roles and responsibilities
Looking at the initial triangle of support, both lead members and facilitation partners gradually phased themselves out of their roles, placing the facilitation role squarely on the shoulders of the AgriProFocus team. The lead members became legal hosts of country network teams which operated under the responsibility of AgriProFocus Netherlands. The secretariat gradually increased its staff numbers so that it could develop its support role as country liaison, and organiser of cross-country learning, (online) communication and in due course business development.

The nature of the network also changed. Relevant in-country stakeholders quickly joined once they saw the value of doing so. Other international partners also joined and the emphasis shifted from assisting Dutch Partnership members to facilitating linking and learning for a range of partners.

Member energy with public support equals country action

Lessons
❖ Kick-starting living networks requires a relatively small but dedicated facilitation team. Such a team can trigger a huge network of actors to link and learn and provide better support to farmers and their organisations.

❖ The AgriProFocus vibe became visible in the many inspiring and lively events. Their multi-stakeholder character helped to break down the silos of fragmentation. Professionals felt part of a community.

❖ The start of country networks owes a lot to the flexible resources of Dutch members and their national partners. Over time, members’ resources became scarcer and more earmarked. The need for partial cost recovery conflicted with the role of free agent and changed the network’s image.

❖ The role of the AgriProFocus support teams has always been a balancing act: between the need to produce results quickly and the need for depth, an inclusive process that takes time. The golden rule is co-creation or no creation for stakeholders to stay the course.
From the outset, AgriProFocus was set up as a multi-stakeholder initiative, with a clear interest in including the private sector in its network and activities. Involving the private sector in development initiatives was also an important element on the Dutch ‘aid and trade’ policy agenda. In this sense, AgriProFocus viewed farmers and their organisations as entrepreneurs and (local) businesses, whose demands for support ranged from capacity strengthening, local market development, trade and investment to influence at agricultural policy level.

Over the years, the private-sector membership remained stable at between 20 and 30%. In the course of 15 years, 18 Dutch companies became a member in one of the following categories:

- **Inputs and raw material** Companies offering inputs to or sourcing raw material from organised farmers: AgroFair, Bejo, FairTrade Original, FrieslandCampina, Heineken and RijkZwaan.
- **Business services** for organised farmers and/or their direct partners. AgroEco, AgroCares, Delphy, Fair & Sustainable Consulting, Partners for Innovation. The approach of BoP, CBI and PUM fits in this category.
- **Financial service providers** Loans, guarantees, equity, financial management: Oikocredit and Rabobank. ScopeInsight and ProFound provided related services.

Many other companies were involved in the network but not as members. These include social enterprises (KIT Annona, Woord en Daad Incluvest) and Dutch SMEs (AnteBV, SingleSpark, Roodbont). The largest group were local businesses, ranging from Bayer in Indonesia to Equity Bank in Rwanda. Being an open network, all companies were welcome to join AgriProFocus’ events and activities anyway.

**Linking for cross-fertilisation**

As a support structure, AgriProFocus did not cater for the requests of individual companies, regarding those as the domain of its members. A more natural role for AgriProFocus was to help bodies such as RVO organise consultations (e.g. with women entrepreneurs in the Sahel) and sector studies (e.g. horticulture in Zambia) and local matchmaking for trade missions. Successful products of collaboration included the Dutch trade missions to the Kigali Horticulture Regional Fair (2015), AgriTech Zambia (2017), Poultry Africa in Rwanda (2019), SARA Abidjan (2019) and the Uganda Harvest Money Expo (2017-2020). AgriProFocus also served companies through the Young Experts Programme (YEP), co-organised with the Netherlands Water Partnership and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 2015, 43 agri-food companies have hired 103 young professionals.

Farmers and their organisations need to be addressed as entrepreneurs and businesses - not as beneficiaries.
Learning about the farmer-firm interface

In learning, the role of AgriProFocus was to foster mutual understanding and cooperation between the private sector and other actors. In 2011, AgriProFocus organised an e-discussion on its online platform about ‘Farmers as Shareholders’. The discussion covered rights and duties, business skills, financial literacy and business strategy. In 2013, AgriProFocus put together another learning track, triggered by a quote from a Ugandan businessman: “we understand farmers, but farmers do not understand firms”. This track culminated in a publication ‘It takes to two trade’ (2016) with cases on beer in Burundi, dairy in Kenya, and cashew in Benin. WCDI and VHL started using this two-to-trade tool in their courses.

Lessons

❖ Only a limited number of Dutch companies committed to AgriProFocus as a formal member. Membership of an open network had no clear advantage, as non-members from the private sector were also welcome to join events and activities.

❖ Because AgriProFocus was primarily a support structure it did not cater for the requests of individual companies. This was the domain of members and dedicated business platforms.

❖ Some have suggested that the private sector was not comfortable with AgriProFocus’ culture of lengthy consultation and use of jargon. The attendance numbers for private-sector representatives at events show otherwise, even when farmers are counted as a separate category.

❖ Dutch businesses appreciated most the link to local actors, the intel in the Netherlands and from focus countries, support for trade missions, exhibitions and fairs, and simply the online visibility.
Marrying gender with agri-economics

Gender in Value Chains has become one of AgriProFocus’ most successful innovation areas, with a capacity to renew its activities and products and adapt them to stakeholders’ interests in knowledge for theory and practice. It has become known worldwide, thanks to member commitment, back donor support and an emerging market for knowledge products on the subject.

It started with an acknowledgement in the network: ‘We do a lot on gender and we do a lot in agri-economics, but the two do not meet – neither across the boundaries between teams nor in our understanding of basic concepts’. Early in 2008, AgriProFocus and members ICCO Cooperation, Hivos, Oxfam Novib, CIDIN and KIT embarked on a joint learning process, exchanging experiences from within their programmes. This led to a first Gender in Value Chains (GVC) guideline on analysing the gender dimension in value chain development. Agriterra, Solidaridad, Cordaid, and WUR joined the community, bringing their own cases. The GVC guideline helped trigger action-learning on 17 varied live cases with overseas partners – from coffee to dairy to Responsible Soy. Participants greatly appreciated AgriProFocus’ Community of Practice (CoP) approach.

AgriProFocus developed an online platform (using ‘Ning’) which helped the CoP members to engage their overseas partners and international experts. GIZ, ILD, USAID, SIDA joined, as did members’ partners from their regional networks, and knowledge institutes from across the globe. By 2010 the gender platform had become a vibrant online community with over 400 active participants and a growing compilation of tools.

An emerging GVC framework led to two publications, both with massive input from the network. In 2012, KIT published Challenging Chains to Change, following a writeshop that drew from more than 100 cases from the CoP. Following this, AgriProFocus commissioned Fair & Sustainable Consulting to publish a toolkit structured to fit every project cycle stage. Both publications were translated into French and Spanish.

Improving practice

The CoP’s success was boosted by increasing international interest in gender in agriculture. The need to integrate gender became part of the discourse and a funding criterion for the main players and donors in agricultural development, also in the Netherlands. Hence the CoP’s focus changed from ‘gaining a conceptual understanding to how to incorporated gender in practice as part of a change process’. Coaching tracks were developed and in 2013 KIT and Fair & Sustainable Consulting (under the umbrella of AgriProFocus) launched these tracks in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda, and later in Benin, Indonesia, Myanmar, Niger and Zambia. The recipe: launch workshop to stimulate interest; sign-up by organisations with their own live cases; issues to improve identified; expert support offered for one year. The
uptake was rewarding. Per track 10–14 organisations participated, ranging from local NGOs to local companies, and from farmer cooperatives to development organisations.

Other examples of uptake include Swisscontact, IDH, Hivos and IFDC. In total 13 partners invested almost € 500,000 enabling 13 coaching tracks and other GVC support activities, and training more than 590 practitioners in 19 countries. In addition 200 national coaches were trained in-company to help organisations and companies in their quest for gender sensitive value chain development. Several knowledge products were developed including videos with practical examples, e-modules to blend with basic training (developed with Three Mountains). Members such as Van Hall Larenstein used the knowledge and tools to improve their curricula. Internationally, working with FAO helped to further strengthen their framework for gender-sensitive value chains and practitioner guidelines. And GVC was incorporated into the Dutch Young Expert Programme by training young experts on the subject.

“Alliance Ginneries participated in the Zambia Gender in Value Chains Coaching Track. Our staff was trained and Alliance Ginneries developed a manual for extension staff and lead farmers. As a result, Alliance Ginneries has increased the number of women groups from 120 to 143, more than doubled the number of female lead farmers and increased female contracted farmers by more than 7%. Women groups now contribute to 13% of Alliance Ginneries sourcing.” — Merit Tembo Phiri, Gender Focal Person at Alliance Ginneries

Lessons

The GVC story is a success not only because of the continuous learning, but also because it exemplifies the power of a living network. GVC connected with with the aspirations of many. Through a multi-stakeholder approach, academic work has been transformed into hands-on expertise and practical tools to improve practice, face-to-face with practitioners from NGOs, local companies and cooperatives. The challenge remains to engage the (international) private sector.

None of this could have been achieved without a strong group of AgriProFocus members acting as ambassadors. Another indispensable core driving force was Fair & Sustainable Consulting. Moreover, the work would not have been possible without the combination of content and implementation partners facilitated by AgriProFocus – as a free agent. Nor could it have been done without the commitment of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Scaling has been a strategy from the start, by making the connection to members’ programmes and by connecting to the AgriProFocus country networks. Going further online has helped us tremendously to tap into a latent and growing demand.
Finance fairs: success story with a learning curve

AgriProFocus piloted the first two finance fairs in Fort Portal, Uganda and Eldoret, Kenya, in November 2011. The organisers’ aim was to help close the rural finance gap that hampers investments in agriculture by matching farmers and bankers. Both fairs attracted about 20 exhibitors including banks, microfinance institutions and other financial service providers, and hundreds of farmers. These events were a novelty for regional towns and attracted widespread media attention, plus VIPs from local government and banking sectors.

AgriProFocus went on to develop a basic format:
1. Formation of an organising committee of key partners, who decide together on date, days, budget and communication, 2 months ahead of the event.
2. Printed catalogue, containing information on financial service providers and their services; producer organisations can profile themselves and their agricultural products.
3. Fair itself, where financial providers showcase their financial products & services and meet & greet farmers.
4. Forum space at the fair for presentations and discussions on access to finance.
5. Award scheme to recognise innovative financial services and the best stands at the fair.
6. At the event, a mobile survey of visitors and exhibitors by youth in local language yields valuable feedback for co-organisers and donors.

Over the years, the country network teams shared tips and tricks. Improvements included prepping farmers to pitch their business plans and embedding the finance fairs within bigger agricultural events. Some Dutch embassies and local authorities also started to invite our teams to co-organise their pavilions and fairs, adding their elements too.

Linking up and learning to do business
From the start, AgriProFocus’ aims with the finance fairs were linking and learning to do business. The links were weak: farmers were reluctant to enter banks and bankers regarded agriculture as risky. In response, the fairs were designed to lower the threshold for a first engagement and open doors for follow-up visits and deals. Farmers were free to meet new people, listen to a debate or presentation, and get the latest on financial products. Food and live music added fun to the fairs.
Two surveys held after the finance fairs in Uganda and Rwanda in 2012 revealed that men and women were more comfortable with using banks proactively, opening bank accounts and understanding how to apply for a loan.

**Bigger and better?**

By 2015, organising finance fairs had become a relatively smooth routine, yet it was hard work for the country teams. The concept had transformed in various ways:

- Non-financial exhibitors started to join the fairs: seed companies, input and machinery dealers, and development partners interested in the target group of emerging farmers.
- In West Africa, the finance fairs became big events with national exposure
- The ‘fair within a fair’ approach led to much more visitors in East Africa fairs.

The finance fairs were then at a crossroads. Plans for further professionalisation would require a business-based approach and cost recovery. That would make the network teams full-time event organisers and the co-organisers clients, which was not considered to be the path for a subsidised network. Instead focus on the rural finance was sharpened.

Meanwhile, in West Africa the finance fairs became the top agri-food event of the year and are a lasting success. In Benin, the 2020 Salon Financier was once again a success, but AgriProFocus will now hand it over to an organising committee of local and international partners.

**Lessons**

- Agri-finance fairs played a crucial role during the initial phase of building the country networks and put AgriProFocus on the rural map. No other thematic activity has yielded such an impressive number of events or reached so many businesses and farmers in the last 15 years.
- Successful fairs led to repeat events and to growth in size. The success was owned by the country network teams who developed effective routines in resource mobilisation, communication, organisation and monitoring appreciation.
- In due course, agricultural input suppliers and other service providers joined the events, which became reframed as agribusiness and finance fairs. This brought a new dynamic and extra income. The downside was that the theme of access to finance became overshadowed.

The context of agricultural finance has changed considerably since the first finance fairs were held. The COVID-19 pandemic and the transition of AgriProFocus into the Netherlands Food Partnership may trigger new approaches to tackle the persistent issues in rural finance.
The energy of young people fits well in living networks

Youth was first picked up as a strategic topic by a trainee, who prepared a quick analysis for the 2014 meeting of country network coordinators. The key point was that many young people considered farming neither cool nor profitable. Worse, the agriculture sector is a bastion of age-old habits, not really open to young entrepreneurs and innovative approaches.

The session sparked lots of ideas on how to trigger more interest in youth as a theme among members and partners. In subsequent years ‘Youth in agribusiness’ became a key topic for AgriProFocus.

Caravans and campaigns
AgriProFocus started its youth activities in Mali in November 2014 with a Caravane des Jeunes, a three-day road trip in which about 50 students made their way from Bamako to Sikasso. The trip included visits to young agri-entrepreneurs and modern farms, and opportunities to exchange ideas with rural youth. Workshops and discussions were facilitated by local partners. AgriProFocus Mali made this into a yearly event, and the example led to a series of youth-centred events and projects in Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Indonesia, Mali, Niger and Myanmar. In all these events, the AgriProFocus country networks involved Dutch members and national partners, including youth representatives.

Internships are for learning too
A second cluster of youth-oriented activities centred around agricultural education. In 2013, AgriProFocus, Van Hall Larenstein and HAS (both Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences) collaborated to create intern placements for their BSc students. Although 25 companies in East Africa showed interest, it led to only three placements. In 2015, the Young Expert Programme was more successful. In this collaboration between AgriProFocus, the Netherlands Water Partnership and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 169 young experts have been placed as trainees in the agri-food sector to date.

AgriProFocus country teams noticed interest being shown in the way Dutch education makes internships a learning experience for students. This emerged as a topic in Nuffic projects for strengthening agricultural education in Africa and Asia. In a number of projects AgriProFocus took up the role of linking colleges and universities with businesses for intern placements and feedback on curricula. One example of this were the Regional Bizconnect workshops held in Myanmar with MDF and AERES University of Applied Sciences.
Community of Practice
With all these different activities going on, the need grew to learn from the experiences of the Youth programmes of the network and its members. To address this, AgriProFocus started the Community of Practice Youth in Agribusiness (CoP-Y) in 2017. The CoP-Y led to lively discussions on studies and experiences, such as youth-run organisations (with Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation), the role of youth in cooperatives (Agriterra), youth-led social innovations and enterprises, a youth and migration event (Edukans), and a mapping tool for youth initiatives (Wageningen University & Research and the Technical Centre for Rural and Agricultural Co-operation, CTA) was peer reviewed by the CoP-Y.

Youth in the driver’s seat
The need to learn from the experiences of the Youth programmes implemented by partners also led to steps to structure youth activities co-organised by AgriProFocus country networks. The intention was to improve support and to promote internal learning between country teams. A first attempt was made in 2017 by the Rock Group, who designed a Youth Entrepreneurship Academy. However, this lacked the partnership approach that AgriProFocus champions, which would have made AgriProFocus a competing implementer.

The next step was to integrate AgriProFocus’ youth activities worldwide into one Global Youth Program. The focus was on promoting and enabling youth participation and engagement, getting young people into the driver’s seat instead of being obedient passengers in well-intentioned youth projects. The IKEA Foundation was very interested in the concept, and with their support, the Global Youth Program evolved into the Youth in Agroecology and Business Learning Track Africa (YALTA) project. Today this project operates in four countries in East Africa where, with financial support from the IKEA Foundation and together with Dutch, local and international partners, youth participation and engagement are promoted, strengthened and applied in the development and realisation of youth-led agribusiness initiatives.

Lessons
◆ The AgriProFocus approach of living networks fits well with the energy of youth. Many youth-led events and activities have blossomed in many countries since 2014, and these have helped change young people’s perceptions of agriculture.
◆ In contrast, many agricultural education projects and activities have more rigid planning and reporting cycles which do not allow for much youth engagement. AgriProFocus’ main role was to connect schools with the private sector.
◆ Support of youth activities started at country level. In due course, AgriProFocus added internal learning between country teams, and gradually a global youth programme emerged, geared to learning between members supporting youth activities.
◆ AgriProFocus’ lessons on youth activities have been taken up by members and applied in their programmes and implementing coalitions such as JEEN Niger and YALTA East Africa.
Since it started in 2011, the AgriProFocus Benin network has become well anchored in the agricultural sector landscape thanks to synergetic action between the various actors in the country. The network was initiated in close cooperation with the Netherlands Embassy, SNV (hosting organisation) and other Dutch parties, and a range of sustainable collaborations between network members and stakeholders have since emerged.

Working together = win-win

Unique to the Benin network is the continuity in its approach: when partners join the network, they discuss how to achieve a common vision, so they find out what they can bring to the network and where they can benefit from collaboration with other network members. It is crucial that competing organisations undertake activities collectively, as they would have less impact if they did this alone. The Hunger Project, a Dutch NGO with presence in Benin, is a good example, as the local Entrepreneur Development Programme Coordinator Gisele Ouinsavi explains: “First we had a pre-partnership with the AgriProFocus network, and we identified what we couldn’t do alone and discovered what others in the network could offer us for win-win collaboration.”

Fish farming as a business

At yearly planning events, network members identified various themes that could be worked on collectively. A key example is the fish-farming sector. In early 2017 post-harvest losses in this sector sparked the interest of the network. AgriProFocus Benin brought the Dutch SNV and local partners together – in particular the training institutes Ceridaep, Ferme Kaklaka and TONON Foundation. AgriProFocus played a facilitatory role and the players set up the Agro-Business Center programme under which training activities were organised. Through this programme over 200 young agripreneurs have now been trained in fish farming and linked up with established stakeholders in the fish sector. And 30% of the young entrepreneurs have been able to set up their own fish business with the support of a coach. AgriProFocus Benin

“Our biggest impact is in organising the Salon Agricole et Financier, now for the 6th year in a row, together with a steady partner coalition”

– Marcel Djihoun, AgriProFocus Benin coordinator
strenthened this support by facilitating linkages with financial and business support institutions. Fish businesses have remained very active as local members in the Benin network.

**Network action on post-harvest losses**

During this same period the Post-harvest Network (PHN) and the AgriProFocus network jointly initiated a programme consisting of a series of workshops on post-harvest losses and agro-logistics in the tomato, pineapple and fish farming sectors. The workshops were opportunities for networking, learning, promoting innovative technologies and solutions, and for exchanging and sharing experiences.

Through these workshops the AgriProFocus network was able to help Dutch and Beninese stakeholders identify the main causes of food losses in the tomato, pineapple and fish value chains in the country.

First, at a very practical level, AgriProFocus Benin helped BoPInc with their Food Connection Challenge by supporting four SMEs to turn their innovative post-harvest business solutions into ready-to-implement plans with a sound business case. Results included an in-depth study that reported the lessons learnt about post-harvest losses in the three sectors. Key bottlenecks to reducing losses were identified, such as the high cost of fish feed, fingerling quality and outdated harvesting techniques. Subsequently levers for action were formulated to address the bottlenecks.

Next, AgriProFocus helped organise seed money from the Dutch Top Sector Agri & Food for a fish-feed trial in Benin. Experts from Wageningen University and local universities compared tilapia production results using commercial feed and a feed mix recipe made by using the FeedCalculator app. This app was developed by a social enterprise, SingleSpark, who added tilapia to the options. The idea of the FeedCalculator app is to provide small and medium-sized fish farmers with a tool they can use to optimise their feed mixes, and thus achieve significant cost price reductions.

AgriProFocus in Benin will especially be remembered as the initiator and organiser of the finance fair in Benin. These started small, but over the years the Salon Agricole et Financier has turned into a big annual event, known throughout the country. In addition to the more than 10 national and international partners involved, ICCO Cooperation, Oikocredit and The Hunger Project contributed to the fair. The 2020 edition of the Salon Agricole et Financier will certainly not be the last, but AgriProFocus has now handed over its role to an organising committee of local and international partners.
The AgriProFocus Mali country network was officially launched in 2011, in response to a request from the Netherlands Embassy and AgriProFocus members, amongst them ICCO Cooperation, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), Netherlands Senior Experts (PUM) and Agriterra. A multi-stakeholder workshop was organised to define the priorities of the network. Of the nine Dutch member organisations that attended, three flew in specially for this meeting, a sign that commitment to start a country network in Mali was very high. The 70 participants identified the following priorities: access to financial services, seed quality and modernisation of production techniques for sustainable agriculture. During the meeting, the participants also identified opportunities for Dutch agribusinesses through local network contacts in the field, for example in sesame, mangos and horticulture.

Mali network coordinator Oudou Bengaly has seen the network change over the years: “A few years ago, this country wasn’t even considering agriculture as a business. It was just a way of making sure you had food for yourself, but not something to make a future out of. That has changed now! A lot of young people are starting their own business in the agricultural sector.”

Pioneering in organic cotton
Although the AgriProFocus Mali network was not officially established until 2011, there had been activity in the country before that. Starting in 2007, AgriProFocus Netherlands facilitated a joint initiative in the Mali cotton sector. AK-O Mavideniz, a trader in organic cotton, saw that the world market was booming but supply was lagging behind. AgriProFocus, the cotton company, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), ICCO Cooperation and producer organisations in Mali jointly designed a sourcing plan. At the end of 2008, the trading house Yiriwa SA was established with ICCO Cooperation, KIT and producer organisations as shareholders. Yiriwa bulked, processed and marketed organic cotton and organic sesame, the latter being rotated with the cotton. In addition to the business part, a support programme was developed between SNV and the producer organisations. In 2007 and 2008, 1,500 producers were trained and certified as organic producers. After a few good years for the farmers, Yiriwa started to make losses and went into liquidation in 2013. Since then, the AgriProFocus Mali network has mainly focused on the domestic market.

Fairs throughout the country
A very successful series of network activities are the agriculture shows and finance fairs, FASKO in Sikasso and FINAGRI in Bamako and Segou. The first FINAGRI was held in 2012 and drew over 6,000 visitors. Both events have been organised every year since. The fairs bring farmers, input suppliers and many other stakeholders together for a lively combination of doing business and policy debate. Inspired by their success, the number of fairs grew...
from 8 in 2014 to 32 in 2016. These were smaller fairs organised in rural towns, thus reaching more farmers and providing learning opportunities for farmers on business planning, pitch training and coaching.

The FINAGRI in Segou, March 2015, was organised with support from the Netherlands Embassy, IFDC, Oikocredit and national partners. The event attracted 3,258 participants and 40 exhibitors. AgriProFocus Mali organised a business-plan training, which resulted in 53 business plans being presented to three banks and four microfinance institutions. In the end, 30 of the plans were financed. The event represented the first contact between producer organisations in the region and banks, microfinance institutions and donors such as USAID. Unfortunately, the deteriorating security situation has made it increasingly difficult to organise fairs in some regions of Mali.

The larger fairs continue to attract many visitors, and the 2018 FASKO agribusiness fair attracted over 26,000 visitors. The fairs help entrepreneurs with new ideas or perspectives, says Oudou: ‘It is not only the farming itself that can bring them a future, there are also business opportunities in processing, distribution and all other parts of the food system – also for young entrepreneurs.’

International caravans
AgriProFocus Mali has been organising youth caravans since 2015. These Caravanes des Jeunes pour l’Entrepreneuriat Agricole are road trips for students and youth entrepreneurs during which they visit modern farms and agribusinesses. The first trips were to Sikasso and Mopti, but later youth caravans also toured in Senegal, Burkina Faso and Niger. The trips were strong triggers for youth associations and agricultural education centres, and brought about reflection on the importance of business skills in the school curriculum and creating a positive image of agribusiness through debates on TV and social media.
Jobs and social stability for the youth of Niger

During the first years, the network’s activities benefited a lot from Oxfam Novib’s main programme Accompagnement à la Promotion de l’Entrepreneuriat Agricole (APEA). Led by a consortium of farmer organisations, APEA created a vibrant dynamic between the farmer organisations and with other stakeholders in the agriculture sector. They all really enjoyed the multi-stakeholder approach and the collaboration around common goals.

In the same spirit AgriProFocus linked to the other Dutch members and their partners in Niger. SNV and Agriterra piloted support to farmer organisations. WUR CDI conducted value-chain action research on onions, an important product in the regional market. The 2010 research paper Peeling the Onion inspired the federations of onion producers to undertake collective action such as improving storage and onion seed quality.

In 2012, the Niger network organised the first Semaine de l’Entrepreneuriat Agricole (SEMEA) which attracted 10,000 visitors and became an annual event. From 2013, the network went through a few years where funding for its activities was limited. The hosting role passed to Partners for Innovation, while Rakiatou Gazibo remained coordinator. “It was difficult, but we were able to rely on the commitment of local members. And in due course we gained the trust of the regional Dutch embassy in Mali. They asked us to co-organise the Dutch trade mission to Niger in 2016 and also to monitor the business deals made in the country.”

“We have been able to rely on the commitment of local organisations and the trust of the Dutch embassy”
– Rakiatou Gazibo, AgriProFocus Niger coordinator

Dutch Sahel policy an upturn
Since 2016, AgriProFocus has co-organised the yearly Foire sur le Financement de l’Agriculture au Niger (Finagri Niger). The Finagri was new and transformative as it engaged bankers and farmers in a business dialogue, and has now been endorsed by the high commissioner of Nigeriens nouris-sent Nigeriens (3N) and the FISAN, the government mechanism for agri-food sector finance.

In 2017, things took a positive turn when the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Coopera-
tion, Sigrid Kaag, introduced a new Dutch policy for the Sahel region. The presence of AgriProFocus in Niger became an asset for her Ministry, who requested AgriProFocus to co-organise workshops to identify opportunities for promoting entrepreneurship and private-sector development in value chains. The Niger team facilitated a fact-finding mission for the Ministry and welcomed the Minister at a lunch meeting with female entrepreneurs. Another assignment was coordinated with AgriProFocus teams from Benin and Mali, namely the organisation of a regional SME trade mission to the Salon de l'Agriculture et des Ressources Animales d'Abidjan, the SARA expo in Cote d'Ivoire.

Combining business with fun
A domestic highlight in 2018 was the campaign Je mange local et toi? which promoted local food consumption through pop-up markets, with 60 exhibitors showcasing food from Niger. The pop-up markets drew 350 visitors, including several national ministers and the high commissioner for the 3N initiative. Combining business with fun, a competition for best food item was run, and first prize was shared between two female entrepreneurs. The most important result of this campaign is the trajectory for certifying local food items, an innovation in Niger. AgriProFocus and the high commissioner of the 3N initiative jointly launched the SME certification guide at the Salon de l'Agriculture, de l'Hydraulique, de l'Environnement et de l'Elevage du Niger, the SAHEL–Niger 2020 expo.

Meanwhile, AgriProFocus in Niger is now participating in a new flagship programme Les Jeunes Entrepreneuent et s’Emploient au Niger (JEEN) with SNV, Oxfam Novib, Government and UNCDF. The aim of JEEN is to improve the entrepreneurship, employability and economic opportunities of 3,750 young people in the Tahoua and Zinder regions. The JEEN Zinder team manager Ali Tayabou and business finance expert Malam Abdou Nahiou are both familiar with AgriProFocus. Malam: “I worked in microfinance before. The meetings and fairs that this network organises have benefitted our customers and partners a lot! Also, I personally discovered the diversity of our agri-food sector.” Ali adds: “AgriProFocus and its members have contributed content to the studies on youth employment, and have also been active and constructive in the exchanges on social media and online platform created for JEEN. They have already helped us connect to key players in the Zinder region.”

THE CAMPAIGN JE MANGE LOCAL ET TOI? PROMOTES LOCAL FOOD CONSUMPTION THROUGH POP-UP MARKETS

NETWORK LAUNCH
2009 (network host: Oxfam Novib and later Partners for Innovation)

ACTIVE DUTCH MEMBERS
Agriterra, Both Ends, ETC, ILEIA, Oxfam Novib, Partners for Innovation, RVO, SNV, WUR and the NL Embassy

INTER)NATIONAL PARTNERS
82
Agri-finance, Agri-business clusters, Entrepreneurship, Gender and Local products and markets

TOP NETWORK THEMES
130
Agri-professionals registered online

AGRI-PROFESSIONALS REGISTERED ONLINE
601

PROMOTES LOCAL FOOD CONSUMPTION THROUGH POP-UP MARKETS
AgriProFocus opened the Indonesia country network in 2013 in response to growing interest from Dutch members in the country’s agri-food sector. HIVOS Indonesia took on the role of hosting organisation and has done this ever since. Based on an analysis of the context and of successful Dutch-Indonesian projects in the past, the choice was made for youth empowerment as a core theme for the network in Indonesia.

**Convincing young people of agriculture’s potential**

One early success story was the *Duta Petani Muda*: the Young Agripreneurz Ambassador programme which was carried out in 2016 and 2018. This involved a competition and campaign organised by the network’s Innovation Community on Youth and Agriculture. The campaign involved young ambassadors promoting agripreneurship among youth and highlighting the potential of agriculture as a source of income. Over 500 young entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector, 22% of whom were women, entered the competition in the first year. The country network involved a wide range of members and stakeholders in this programme, including Oxfam Indonesia, East-West Seed, Koalisi Rakyat untuk Kedaulatan Pangan (KRKP), Kuncup Padang Ilalang (KAIL), Workout.id, HIVOS and many other local partners.

The programme received major media coverage and achieved broad outreach, which strengthened the image of young farmers in rural areas. All programme finalists became ambassadors, actively promoting agriculture to other young people and stakeholders, and gaining new opportunities through workshops, seminars, talk shows, peer mentorship and the youth forum. One of the youth ambassadors is Rici Solihin, owner of the Paprici paprika farm. He became a role model, with his video clip as youth ambassador in horticulture getting more than 41,000 views on YouTube.

**Internships**

AgriProFocus Indonesia focuses its youth activities not only on young entrepreneurs but also on agricultural students. Indonesia counts over 14,000 vocational and pre-professional high schools, Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK), of which 500 offer agricultural courses. After the governments of Indonesia and the Netherlands committed in 2016 to bring vocational education in Indonesia to a new level, AgriProFocus supported a coalition of Dutch and Indonesian educational institutes with linking and learning activities. This coalition was funded by the NUFFIC INNOCAP (Innovation for Capacity Building) Programme and included Van Hall Larenstein and HAS Universities of Applied Sciences and AERES MBO.

These collaborated with seven SMKs to develop staff training in didactic methodology, course development, student motivation and labour market orientation in cooperation with stakeholders and the industry in the sector. The Dutch coalition organised their support for the SMKs around three agricultural sub-sectors: ruminants, poultry and horticulture. They also engaged the.

**YOUTH ACTIVITIES ARE FOCUSED ON YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS BUT ALSO ON AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS**
Dutch private sector in this support. AgriProFocus Indonesia facilitated the teacher exposure visit to the Netherlands and the teacher training and coaching in Indonesia. Former network facilitator Mitha Wulandaru recalls: “I prepared the visits from Dutch teachers and helped translate. But most of my work was in the follow-up of organising work-field advisory committees in which private sector representatives and SMK teachers discussed the organisation of more internships, and the competencies expected from graduate SMK students.”

Webinars
When the teacher training courses were completed, AgriProFocus proposed using the remaining funds for a bi-lingual online magazine Green education to strengthen human capital to publicise highlights of the INNO-CAP programme. AgriProFocus invited vegIMPACT NL partners to join in the magazine. VegIMPACT NL is a horticulture programme implemented by Wageningen University & Research, Bogor Agricultural Institute and companies from Indonesia and Netherlands.

The programme includes a track to promote youth entrepreneurship in the horticulture sector through knowledge transfer, innovations, and vocational education and training. The joint magazine was launched on the occasion of the Netherlands state visit to Indonesia in March 2020.

As a follow-up to the magazine, AgriProFocus Indonesia and all partners co-created a series of ten online training webinars for SMK students. This idea came up when all schools closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. AgriProFocus first tested a few topics and noticed that urban farming triggered most interest. The webinar series concluded with a SMK student competition on urban farming ideas. Best ideas were awarded starter kits for urban farming with containers, rockwool substrate, various seeds and instruments. Meanwhile, the organisers of the webinar series have been rewarded with requests for repeat webinars from educational centres and companies.
Many organisations in Myanmar are trying to improve the agribusiness sector, but they face challenges in this emerging market. AgriProFocus provides them with a network within which they can set common goals and share and exchange knowledge. The programme that really put AgriProFocus Myanmar on the map was the AgroFood Youth Bootcamp in 2018, with partners Agriterra, DeHeus, East West Seed, Fresh Studio, ICCO Cooperation and MDF. The Dutch Diamond (see page 6) was well represented and voiced their interest in collaborating on a common goal – youth involvement in the sector.

**Recruiting youth**

Getting young people involved in the Myanmar agribusiness sector is very important as the average age of farmers is currently 56, and this is only increasing. AgriProFocus Myanmar not only engages with young people, but encourages them to take leadership, while also encouraging stakeholders to focus more on youth and put more emphasis on including youth in their activities. Bizconnect is a successful example of this. The project consists of a series of workshops at State Agriculture Institutes throughout the country, organised together with Aeres, MDF Myanmar and Nuffic. During the workshops, teachers and students learn about the skills and capabilities that agribusiness companies look for in junior staff. The workshops provide students with an opportunity to build or expand their network in the agricultural sector and to hear about job opportunities. And teachers get the chance to discuss with agribusiness companies how they can improve their curriculum and seek alignment with the labour market.
The workshops are part of a Nuffic OKP project that aims to strengthen agricultural vocational education in Myanmar. The objective is to improve linkages and exchange between the private sector and agricultural institutions. This will help agricultural institutes to learn and understand what agribusinesses are looking for in terms of capabilities and skills, while also helping the students learn about opportunities and build their network. Each workshop is attended by over 300 students and teachers, who have the chance to connect with 20 regional agricultural companies.

Entrepreneurial spirit
With MVO Nederland, AgriProFocus started the Sustainable and Inclusive Business Project in 2019. The objective of the project was to map sustainability challenges and opportunities in Myanmar’s agriculture sector. Working through a circular economy lens, opportunities to transform the agriculture sector were identified during three stakeholder sessions, where donors, NGOs, government, agriculture and food processing companies were brought together in round-table discussions.

After reflection on these discussions, a multi-stakeholder meeting was conducted during which the identified opportunities were presented to key players in the respective value chains, and discussion held on how they could contribute to them. In total, 31 private and public companies and organisations have actively participated in this sustainable and inclusive business scan in Myanmar. Country coordinator Babette Bodlaender is optimistic about the future: “I see a lot of entrepreneurial spirit and curiosity. The network in Myanmar has taken time to start up, but the various actors are willing to work together. They see the added value of bringing in Dutch knowledge and expertise and the local connections we established ensure a lot of success.”

“OUR ADDED VALUE IS BRINGING IN DUTCH KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE AND ESTABLISHING THE LOCAL CONNECTIONS”
– Babette Bodlaender, AgriProFocus Myanmar coordinator
Activities in Ethiopia actually started before AgriProFocus formally developed its country approach. In 2007 the Ethiopia Learning Alliance (ELA) was crafted between AgriProFocus and the then members: Agriterra, Cordaid, FFARM, ICCO Cooperation, IIRR, KIT, and SNV. The Alliance initiated a joint effort in farmer chain empowerment involving 18 producer organisations and their partners, which culminated in a business contest for farmers. This was one of the first AgriProFocus ‘trajectories’ for more and better support to producer organisations.

ELA organised a series of learning and coaching activities that provided farmers with entrepreneurial skills. These farmers gained a better understanding of value chains and export requirements so they could negotiate chain partnerships more successfully. Knowing that they deliver quality produce increased the farmers’ confidence towards buyers and encouraged them to continually look for new business opportunities. For example, eight Farmer Marketing Organisations (FMOs) decided to join forces and set up a joint trading company to sell their produce in larger volumes. The farmers invested themselves and ICCO’s local partner CDI then provided a matching fund. This funding strategy won the FMOs the ELA business contest, and they used the prize money to invest in machinery to rent out to their shareholders, thus increasing their working capital. This case and several others, combined with lessons learned, have been published by KIT in the book ‘Learning and earning: how a value chain learning alliance strengthens farmer entrepreneurship in Ethiopia’.

Enhancing entrepreneurship
The success of the ELA sparked the creation of the Food Security and Rural Entrepreneurship Fund (FSRE Fund). Financed by the Netherlands Embassy in Ethiopia and managed by ICCO Cooperation on behalf of AgriProFocus, the objective of the FSRE Fund was to finance activities that improve the food security of farming families, enhance entrepreneurship, income and investment, and create jobs in agriculture, especially for farmers, producer organisations and SMEs. The Fund supported organisations and companies that were
working closely, directly and practically with smallholder farmers. Over a period of four years, the FSRE Fund supported 75 initiatives, granting over 5 million euros to different proposals. AgriProFocus organised linking and learning events for the organisations receiving FSRE support and organised coaching in the field by experts from Fair & Sustainable Ethiopia. The latter allowed for a deeper dialogue with implementers on how to bring their innovation to adoption. AgriProFocus Ethiopia also organised collective learning around contract farming, by analysing eight cases from the FSRE portfolio. This resulted in two publications in 2017, on agricultural innovators and agricultural policy, respectively.

**COACHING IN THE FIELD IS A DIALOGUE WITH IMPLEMENTERS ON HOW TO BRING INNOVATION TO SCALE**

The campaign adopted the slogan ‘Healthy Soils for Healthy Lives’ and prepared a message to back it up on the importance of soil health, water retention, food security, climate adaptation and biodiversity conservation in agriculture.

Meanwhile, AgriProFocus and partners have continued to link up and learn on soil-related topics, country coordinator Sarah Assefa tells. “The network’s energy remains, in a community of practice on Ethiopian agroecology and in the acid soils coalition. The latter is bringing partners from government together with farmers, experts, private sector and civil society to develop a strategy to deal with acid soils. This requires the redesign of input supply systems and access to finance.”

Promoting soil health

Another successful project is the Ethiopian Soil Health Campaign. We are particularly proud that its special model of multi-stakeholder sharing and learning has been adopted by the Ethiopian government as a priority in their agricultural policy. The Campaign started in 2014 and had a twofold purpose: raising general awareness on soil health and creating synergy between stakeholders on this topic.

When Ethiopia’s top soil scientist professor Tekalign Mamo was appointed FAO Special Ambassador for the International Year of Soils in 2015, the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources added its power to the campaign and amplified the outreach to thousands of soil stakeholders across Ethiopia through dozens of different events. The campaign also brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including top decision makers, soil experts, soil researchers, farmers, agribusiness entrepreneurs and students. The Ministry of Agriculture continued work on the issue by developing a 10-year soil health and fertility strategy.

**“THE NETWORK’S ENERGY REMAINS – IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE ON AGROECOLOGY AND ON ACID SOILS”**

– Sarah Assefa, AgriProFocus Ethiopia coordinator

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**NETWORK LAUNCH**

2009 (network host: ICCO Cooperation and later F&S)

**ACTIVE DUTCH MEMBERS**

Aeres, Agriterra, BopInc, CORDAID, Edukans, ETC, F&S, ICCO Cooperation, IICD, KIT, PUM, SCOPEInsight, SNV, VHL, Woord en Daad, WUR and the NL Embassy

**[INTER]NATIONAL PARTNERS**

77

**TOP NETWORK THEMES**

Agri-finance, Dairy, Gender, Horticulture and Sustainable agriculture

**MORE THAN 160 NETWORK ACTIVITIES**

with an outreach of 9,200 participants

**AGRI-PROFESSIONALS REGISTERED ONLINE**

2,362
AgriProFocus Uganda kicked off in 2009 with a three-day pressure cooker event attended by 40 national stakeholders, over 10 Dutch members and the Netherlands Embassy. This led to an exciting action agenda being drawn up with topics such as market information, farming as a business and access to finance. By addressing these and other topics through online exchange, live debate in ‘friendly and provocative cafes’ and innovation communities, a network feeling quickly grew.

Strategy in action

Actually, AgriProFocus initiated activities in 2007 with start phase support for the Uganda Oilseeds Sub-sector Platform (OSSUP). AgriProFocus prepared the ground for action research by Wageningen UR and Makerere University to address systemic issues such as seed quality, access to finance, the bulking challenge and collective marketing arrangements. SNV started a support programme for the oilseed sector involving OSSUP as a sector platform. Once AgriProFocus was established in Uganda, it supported OSSUP with dedicated pages on the online platform, enabling exchange between regional platforms in Lira, Mbane and Gulu.

‘Homegrown’ network action effective

One of the early successes was a series of national and regional symposia (2010–2013) on the harmonisation of market information systems in Uganda, which led to a policy white paper endorsed by sector players and the government. AgriProFocus supported members in the Ugandan regions, reaching out to over 7,000 farmers with user-friendly market information methods. And in 2015 the Nyama (Meat) Platform under AgriProFocus spearheaded the fight against Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and worked together with the Ugandan parliament to push for government action. A petition to parliament led to the allocation of 5 billion Uganda shillings (USD 1.18M at the time) to the national budget for FMD vaccines. These examples show the influence that joint ‘homegrown’ network action can have.

At the same time, AgriProFocus’ innovative work on gender in value chains sparked huge interest in the country. Late 2010 a kick-off meeting was organised, exchanging information on tools and approaches for addressing gender in value chains. A year later, a national coaching track on gender in value chains was rolled out with network partners for Ugandan farmers’ organisations. The demand for expert consultancy and coaching on gender in value chains remained high, and spread to international organisations. In 2017 Uganda hosted the last big AgriPro-
Focus event on gender: an international training for gender coaches followed by a meet-up for the National Gender in Value Chains network.

With its strong links to Ugandan private sector networks and platform initiatives such as the AAA, NUTIP and the Uganda Chamber of Commerce, AgriProFocus Uganda was able to add value to the promotion of trade and investment. Right from the start AgriProFocus developed a strong working relationship with the Netherlands embassy, assisting the development of the embassy’s food security programme and with the promotion of Dutch instruments and businesses to connect them with the Uganda agribusiness market. Highlights include the ‘Promoting Agribiz Investment Networking & Trade’ (PAINT) programme, which brought together over 350 local, regional and international businesses in coaching and matchmaking sessions, resulting in 32 pipeline deals valued at over 50 billion Uganda shilling (about US$13.5 million). Recent highlights include the successful Harvest Expo: 4 times in a row from 2017–2020 with a Holland Pavilion and Best Farmer Award.

Promoting the business side of farming

The plight of smallholder farming business has remained top of AgriProFocus Uganda’s agenda since its inception. The network started with knowledge sharing on agri-business models with organisations such as NUCAFE, Agriterra and Trias. From that it progressed to joint action, linking farmers to the private sector and other players within the value chains. Young entrepreneurs benefited in particular. One is Odong Markfat, a pig farmer who participated in an AgriProFocus Uganda’s Youth in Agribusiness event in Gulu: “I was selected to participate in FinAfrica’s business skills training and have been able to recruit over 260 outgrowers. My business revenue has increased threefold.” Network members benefited by accelerating their programmes. Annet Masika, Manager of the Agriculture & Market Support project adds: “AgriProFocus has linked our AMS project to the key players in the agro-inputs industry. With the wide range of members in the AgriProFocus network, our farmer meetings attracted central and local government officials, as well as local and national agri-related traders. AgriProFocus’ experience in facilitating constructive engagements has helped the farmers we work with to identify potential quality input suppliers and reliable commodity buyers.”

Over time, AgriProFocus Uganda became the largest AgriProFocus country network, including many international actors operational in Uganda, in effect linking not only stakeholders but also networks. Network thinking is essential, according to country coordinator Lucy Asiimwe: “We always look at everything from different perspectives. It is always at the back of our minds that we can’t do it by ourselves: when someone walks in with an idea, we think about who else could make this better. We notice that the insights generated this way are really listened to by policymakers and the Dutch embassy as legitimate opinions from the field.”

“We notice that the insights generated in our network are really listened to by policymakers and the Dutch embassy”

– Lucy Asiimwe, AgriProFocus Uganda coordinator
Kenya was the first country where a multi-stakeholder workshop was organised in 2009. Jointly prepared by Agriterra, SNV, KIT and AgriProFocus, the workshop resulted in a shared analysis of the problems in Kenyan agriculture. Many themes emerged from this process: agribusines development, access to finance, gender, and policy engagement. There was also interest in extensive livestock, potatoes, coffee, and domestic horticulture. After the kick-off, groups of network members worked together on topics of their chosen interest. Examples from the first years include a joint mapping study on agri-finance, a study into livestock feeds, a field visit to Amiran greenhouses, and a first gender in agriculture workshop.

“REALLY ENGAGING PEOPLE IN WORKING TOGETHER IS WHAT IS MOST EXCITING ABOUT OUR WORK”
– Andrew Mwaura, AgriProFocus Kenya coordinator

In terms of network organisation, SNV took up the lead role and appointed a country coordinator. Later on, Hivos took over this role and became host to the support team, facilitating the working groups, their events and activities. This also involved actively seeking other relevant stakeholders, to bring in a wider range of expertise and additional resources to make joint action effective.

Beyond linking professionals
The network approach gave partners and members a good understanding of ‘who is doing what’. However, the pitfall here is when this goes no further than creating an overview and requests just get passed on between actors. ‘Linking people is easy, but really engaging them in working together is the next level. On the other hand, that is what is most exciting about our work,’ says Andrew Mwaura, country coordinator for Kenya.

An example of a joint effort was the 2015 ‘Herding for the Markets’ event organised together with Kenya Commercial Bank, University of Nairobi, SNV and organisations representing pastoralists and the extensive livestock sector. The three-day event combined a conference, a student essay competition, a livestock business fair with 100 exhibitors and a B2B session for selected businesses, and it attracted over 4,000 visitors. Several attempts to repeat this event in northern Kenya failed, due to budget constraints and security concerns.

In 2019, an event for the dairy sector was co-organised according to a different and cheaper design. Andrew explains: ‘We now linked up with the yearly ESADA dairy expo here in Nairobi. At the expo, we organised a knowledge corner with SNV, Solidaridad, PUM, WUR and VHL. The day before the expo, we organised a workshop for 100+ professionals together with the Netherlands East African Dairy Partnership (NEADAP). And the Dutch embassy offered a business cocktail’. The results of this Kenyan workshop fed into the process for a Dutch dairy action agenda which was launched on World Milk Day, 1 June 2020.
Vegetables are valuable!

Over the years, the Netherlands Embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have invested millions in Kenya’s horticulture sector. One example is the HortIMPACT programme, implemented by SNV, Delphy, Hivos, Solidaridad and others. The role of AgriProFocus Kenya was to co-organise studies and mappings (including an overview of mobile apps for horticulture in 2018) and field days for horticulture farmers. Some of the field days attracted as many as 3,000 farmers and 40 exhibitors. In addition to farmer learning on production and marketing, substantial sales were reported during the field days, as well as a healthy number of follow-ups afterwards. HortIMPACT itself was included in a learning journey for food security staff of Netherlands embassies in Africa in 2017.

The next step in joint learning from horticulture programmes was the Valuable Vegetables initiative, which started in 2019 and is facilitated by the Food & Business Knowledge Platform and AgriProFocus, in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. The objectives were to verify the impact of earlier investments, and identify remaining challenges and ideas how to solve these. As part of this initiative, the Kenya team facilitated a multi-stakeholder workshop which identified post-harvest losses, compliance with standards and food safety as the most pressing issues in horticulture.

After 2020, network support in Kenya itself will focus on the Youth in Agroecology and Business Learning Track Africa (YALTA), supported by the IKEA Foundation. This initiative includes a series of youth network events, coalition building and an agroecology business challenge. Andrew Mwaura explains: “YALTA is capitalising on the strengths of our network. Even in times of corona, the network enables us to mobilise youth, reflect on agroecology as a business opportunity and organise mentorship for young entrepreneurs.”

“WE MOBILISE YOUTH AROUND AGROECOLOGY AS A BUSINESS”
– Andrew Mwaura, AgriProFocus Kenya coordinator

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Network Launch

2009 (network host: SNV and later Hivos)
AgriTerra, CORDAID, Hivos, F&S, ICCO Cooperation, IFDC, KIT, Oxfam, SCOPEInsight, SNV, Solidaridad, WUR and the NL Embassy

76
Agri-finance, Dairy, Horticulture and Youth

160 Network Activities

4,205 Agri-professionals registered online

2009 (network host: SNV and later Hivos)
AgriTerra, CORDAID, Hivos, F&S, ICCO Cooperation, IFDC, KIT, Oxfam, SCOPEInsight, SNV, Solidaridad, WUR and the NL Embassy

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76
Agri-finance, Dairy, Horticulture and Youth

160 Network Activities

4,205 Agri-professionals registered online

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76
Agri-finance, Dairy, Horticulture and Youth

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4,205 Agri-professionals registered online
The Rwanda country network kicked off with a strong coalition of Dutch members. Oxfam Novib, Agriterra, SNV, ICCO Cooperation and IFDC started working together in the Initiative pour la Promotion de l’Entrepreneuriat Rural (IPER). The aim was to introduce an agri-cluster approach to intensify collaboration in the sector and to coordinate support to producer organisations. Fourteen agri-business clusters were formalised around six commodities: cassava, maize, rice, honey, potatoes and wheat. The agri-clusters were led by producer organisations and included other value chain actors such as suppliers and finance institutions. Facilitators from KIT, WUR, SNV and IFDC coached the agri-clusters in developing concrete proposals and activities, and the clusters stepped up with new insights and issues that needed solving.

Hosted by ICCO Cooperation, the network tackled both cross cutting and sectoral challenges in areas such as access to finance and business development services for producer organisations. As of 2015, horticulture became a key focus sector for joint network action.

Horti innovation fair
A big milestone was the 2015 regional event Promoting Innovation and Trade in Horticulture held in Kigali. The event attracted 300 conference participants, 96 exhibiting companies and around 1000 exhibition visitors from the East African region. Organised by the Rwandan Private Sector Federation (PSF), the National Agricultural Export Board of Rwanda (NAEB) and AgriProFocus, the event discussed issues still relevant today: demand-driven vegetable breeding; African greenhouse technologies; supply of clean and healthy produce to consumers; and tackling trade barriers in the region. Speakers and innovators included African experts, among others from TAHA Tanzania and the Kenya Commercial Bank, as well as a number of Dutch companies and experts from Rijk Zwaan Afinsem, Koppert Biological Systems, WUR, and SNV. Participating companies valued the regional marketplace, the new intel and the opportunity to build new business relations. Prize-winning companies AfriBanana from Uganda and KoFar from Kenya gained recognition for their innovations in value addition and soil care respectively during the innovation competition sponsored by the Netherlands Embassy. While a repeat event in Tanzania did not take off due to limited resources, the event paved the way for network action together with the Food and Business Knowledge Platform in subsequent years in Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia.

Caravan
Horticulture remained a prominent theme in recent years, the biggest highlight being the Youth in Agribusiness Caravan in 2018, which was co-organised with the HortINVEST.
“THE YOUTH CARAVAN WAS A REALLY INSPIRATIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR THE YOUNG AGRIPRENEURS”
– Assumpta Uzamukunda, Enabling Environment Advisor for the HortINVEST project

Complementarity
According to the coalition partners, the AgriProFocus network in Rwanda is a particularly useful platform for communicating and advocating in a way that leads to tangible impact within the agri-food sector. In particular, the Rwanda network has focused on sustainable linkages and making the agri-food sector more efficient. Assumpta: “We have many actors within the agri-food sector in Rwanda, all undertaking divergent activities, and this creates a pressing need for streamlining and convergence if we are to scale up our impact. For this it is crucial to map and know what each partner organisation is doing so that duplication in the sector can be avoided. This is where AgriProFocus’ added value comes into play, because when a new organisation enters the community now, it is easier to know where to start because there is an overview of what has been implemented previously by other organisations operating in the area. This enhances complementarity and leads to sustainable development in the country.”

AGRIPROFOCUS’ OVERVIEW OF WHAT EACH ORGANISATION IS DOING IN AN AREA AVOIDS DUPLICATION AND BRINGS COMPLEMENTARITY
Focus on networking for youth empowerment

The Dutch development cooperation programmes in Burundi have long been active in food and nutrition security, and have achieved considerable results. These programmes also add to security and stability in the Great Lakes region. In its programmes with partners, the Netherlands Embassy promotes the Plan Intégrée de Paysan (PIP) approach, which combines integrated farm plans, farmer-to-farmer extension and intensive village participation. A competition for best PIP plans is even organised between villages. Scaling this successful approach up to community and district levels requires coordination between project partners, local authorities, private sector and farmers. This is where AgriProFocus Burundi stepped in, identifying, together with Burundian and international partners, access to finance as the most relevant theme for growth in the agri-food sector. Inspired by the example of AgriProFocus Benin, in 2014 the Burundi team and partners organised three fairs. AgriProFocus initiated the first Foire Agricole Nationale du Burundi (FONABU) in 2014 in Bujumbura, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Belgian development cooperation agency, the network of Microfinance Institutions and the national farmers’ organisation CAPAD. This fair was the first organised by multiple stakeholders, and it gave a new face to agribusiness in Burundi. After the FONABU, regional events followed in Kirundo, Bururi, and Ngozi provinces. All four fairs gave farmers the opportunity to learn about markets beyond the local. They also increased the visibility of farmer’s products and their growth potential.

Sparking interest

The focus on business and finance also resulted in the start of the Microfinance, Agribusiness and Value Chain (MAVC) programme, supported by the Netherlands Embassy and implemented by ICCO Cooperation. For this, AgriProFocus Burundi facilitated knowledge-sharing events around the potato, cassava, banana and rice value chains, and events focussing on gender and youth. It also organised an event where SMEs in the agri-food sector could meet with banks and MFIs. Meanwhile, agribusiness managed...
to increase the interest of the public authorities and private sector in ensuring the country’s food security. AgriProFocus coordinator Elyse Muhorakeye explains: “Our country needs agribusinesses to ensure that one day all Burundians will be able to eat a balanced diet. Dutch members such as ICCO Cooperation are working on this with the authorities, local businesses, and farmers in programmes such as MAVC and its successor PADFIR. Currently things are moving: farmers are joining forces in producer organisations and cooperatives to obtain credit, and microfinance is also being mobilised. This business approach improves food security and increases household incomes.”

This all sounds very promising, but there are challenges as well. The Burundian agri-food sector is still in its infancy. There is still a lot to do in terms of food systems transformation. Elyse: “In the harvest period, for example, huge amounts of fruit that are not sold or consumed go to waste. So, how can producers connect better to consumer markets? We and our partners believe these challenges can be overcome by using a network approach which works the whole chain from consumers back to production.”

**Inspiring example**

In recent years, youth empowerment and access to finance have become a combined theme for the network. In 2016 Dutch members of the network worked together with the Network of Microfinance Institutions of Burundi (RIM) on the Agricultural Innovation Competition. This was a first for the network and was co-organised in the sidelines of the Microfinance Week in Burundi. AgriProFocus selected 10 young entrepreneurs, through the network, and promoted and connected them to financial institutions. Three of them were successful and indeed kick-started multiple agribusinesses.

Cyriaque Ndayiragije, President of the COPIMUCOPO Cooperative in Bubanza: “Through this competition we were linked to several investors, and were able to acquire broodstock fish for our cooperative. Now our monthly turnover has risen from 1.5 million to 2 million BIF. We have been able to increase our cooperative staff numbers by six and we have two new ponds as well. Our success has even inspired other young people in the area, and they have set up a tomato cooperative. I hope the AgriProFocus network keeps on organising these kinds of linking activities in the future.”

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**CHALLENGES SUCH AS CONNECTING PRODUCERS BETTER TO CONSUMER MARKETS CAN BE OVERCOME BY USING A NETWORK APPROACH**

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**Network Launch**

**2012** (network host: ICCO Cooperation)

**Active Dutch Members**

CORDAID, ICCO Cooperation, IFDC, Oxfam Novib, SNV, ZOA and the NL Embassy

**International Partners**

64

**Top Network Themes**

Agri-finance, Gender, Entrepreneurship, Post-harvest losses and Youth

**Network Activities**

75

**Agri-professionals Registered Online**

588

with an outreach of 5,600 participants
Although the Tanzania network was officially launched in 2012, with SNV as hosting organisation, demand for collaboration and network action had originated three years earlier. The request came from one of the first companies to join AgriProFocus, Rijk Zwaan, which produces tomato seed in their Arusha unit. Rijk Zwaan became interested in developing the seed market for local vegetables such as eggplant, African kale and Chinese pepper. AgriProFocus facilitated contacts with local horticulture producer organisations and finance opportunities in Tanzania. In due course, Rijk Zwaan and East-West Seed started a joint venture called Afrisem, developing and introducing breakthrough hybrid varieties. AgriProFocus gladly helped to mobilise healthy numbers of visitors for the Afrisem demo days and invited Rijk Zwaan to exhibit at its farmer events. Co-creation under AgriProFocus continued into 2020 with change makers Rijk Zwaan, Rikolto, TAHA, Solidaridad and others starting joint network action on food safety in local markets.

Breaking the barriers to collaborate

Changemakers
Since the start of the network, AgriProFocus Tanzania has focused on linking actors from various parts of the agri-food sector to stimulate joint initiatives and efforts. Different partners came together within the network to discuss hot issues and co-create joint agendas, for example during Business to Business (B2B) meetings. Tom Ole Sikar, coordinator of the AgriProFocus team when the network was hosted by SNV in Arusha, remembers the Tanzania Youth in Agribusiness Forum (TYIAF) as a unique event that stimulated young entrepreneurs to become changemakers and promote their innovative technologies. “This was a challenge, through which young agripreneurs gained a platform for learning, building a collective voice and taking collective action,” Tom recalled.

Learnings gathered from TYIAF were useful inputs in developing the National Strategy in Youth in Agriculture (NSYIA 2016 - 2021).

Meanwhile, AgriProFocus also facilitated learning and platforms for collaboration through input and finance fairs that brought together different stakeholders. A joint mapping of onion and garlic value chains around Arusha and...
Tanzania was impactful. Enumerators did a survey using mobile technology among almost 300 farmers and suppliers, which revealed bottlenecks with regard to quality input and farming practice. This collaboration assisted farmers’ organisation Mwiwata and support organisations such as TRIAS and Agriterra to understand the needs of agribusinesses further up the chain. Tom Ole Sikar: “Working with unlikely others in the network helps break through barriers of resistance.”

Learning Labs
In 2015 AgriProFocus Tanzania contributed to a dairy sub-sector scan in the Kilimanjaro, Arusha and Tanga regions with SNV and MatchMaker Associates. The study was accompanied by (validation) events that brought stakeholders together to share results and plot steps for future joint action. These actions put dairy on the network’s joint agenda, and SNV and Matchmaker used the results to formulate an inclusive dairy programme, eventually funded by Comic Relief. For AgriProFocus this was the start of work on dairy development in Tanzania with PUM senior experts and different sets of implementing partners. The Dairy Learning Lab is about practical learning for adults. This combines morning farm visits with questionnaires and afternoon classes, sharing observations and then linking these to analysis, theoretical background and practical advice. On the second day, repeat visits invariably led to much better observations and livelier discussions. Even smallholders are prone to operational blindness and they learn best by being exposed to other experiences.

The Dairy Learning Labs evolved into a training series between 2016 and 2018, with many farmers joining via Agriterra, SNV, TRIAS and local partners like LITA Tengeru and Talas in Kagera. Solidaridad, the organisation that hosted the AgriProFocus team from 2019 onwards, partnered with PUM and included the approach in their dairy programme. The Learning Lab approach was also applied in poultry farming and taken to different countries. The PoultrySignals teaching material from Roodbont Publishers was used, with a focus on biosecurity and prevention of disease spread. Success factors of the Learning Labs include realistic learning destinations (self-made entrepreneurs instead of model farms), the teaching skills of the experts, and a safe learning environment for participants. In the words of current AgriProFocus Tanzania coordinator Ernest Likolo: “Through the network we understand the importance of relevant knowledge and we are kept abreast of developments in the agricultural sector. This makes us stronger in creating impact, both as individuals and as a network.”
The Zambian agri-food sector faces many challenges, including low productivity, fragmented sub-sectors, skills gaps, poor extension services, unstable energy for agriculture, poor farm-to-market infrastructure and limited access to funding. By starting a country network in 2009, AgriProFocus provided a platform for agribusiness-sector stakeholders where they could address these issues and solve the challenges together. The lead role was taken up by Cordaid, which also chaired a working group on policy coherence between Dutch NGOs and the Netherlands Embassy in Lusaka at the time.

The Zambia network has scaled up collaboration into action

The first year of the country network can be described as very lively, a major highlight being the first multi-stakeholder workshop. More than 50 Zambian organisations and companies expressed their wish to work together with the Dutch members of the AgriProFocus network and listed issues of importance to them. These included five value chains (rice, cotton, honey, dairy and biofuels), and three cross-cutting issues – access to finance, market information, capacity building of producers organisations – were identified.

Going beyond ‘business as usual’

Local partners clearly showed their commitment towards the country network, as they profited from the scaling-up of support by Dutch organisations. For example, DAPP, a local partner of the Dutch Humana and active in biofuels, gained access to the SNV’s ideas on support for biofuels. And local partners of Agriterra, SNV and Woord en Daad benefitted from the coordinated action in the rice sector.

Although there was much enthusiasm and a strong wish to collaborate, the main challenge from the start was that Zambia’s position on the Netherlands’ country list was gradually slipping. The Dutch embassy was downgraded to consulate in 2013 and Dutch NGOs reduced their portfolios in Zambia. Cordaid handed over the lead role to SNV Zambia. In this light, the country network became more business oriented and needed to come up with innovative ways to stimulate cooperation that went beyond ‘business as usual’. It supported innovation communities in the implementation of action plans around value chains and cross-cutting issues. “Small-scale farmers in Zambia greatly lack knowledge and entrepreneurial skills to run their farms. What the farmers need most are optimised and specialised services,” says Chance Kabaghe, Director of the Agricultural Consultative Forum Zambia back in 2009. “AgriProFocus’ work is important in that it brings different organisations together, which enables them to share their experiences and discover stronger and weaker points.”
Nevertheless, some value chains stayed on the agenda, such as poultry, dairy and horticulture. The sector mappings by AgriProFocus and partners revealed that Zambian smallholders invariably lack access to skills, finance and technology from investors and government support interventions. The AgriProFocus network continued to showcase best practices and approaches that could transform farmer groups into sustainable and competitive business entities, thus accelerating smallholder farmer growth. A clear example of this are the poultry masterclasses organised by the network in 2016 and 2017 and funded by RVO. The co-organisers included Poultry Association of Zambia (PAZ), the Livestock Services Cooperative Society, and PUM Netherlands Senior Experts. The masterclasses were attended by about 100 poultry entrepreneurs, and combined morning farm visits with afternoon classes on disease control, feeding, record keeping and business skills.

Events have a lasting impact
Another highlight for the network was the Netherlands trade mission to Zambia, on the occasion of AgriTech Zambia in April 2017. The AgriProFocus network took on the role of local matchmaker for the business delegation led by the Netherlands Export Combination. The Holland Pavilion showcased 18 Dutch companies, who exhibited their products, and knowledge institutions provided information on dairy and poultry. Over a thousand smallholder and medium size farmers visited the pavilion. And the Zambian government was well represented too. The Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Fisheries and Livestock, the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade and even the President of Zambia visited the Holland Pavilion to familiarise themselves with the new technology on show.

In subsequent years, AgriProFocus organised co-exhibits at the Agritech Expo with partners. Chabota Miyoba, Business Advisor for Agriterra Zambia: "From the several events initiated by the AgriProFocus network that we have participated in, I would pick the Agritech Expo to be the most memorable. During that time, we were given space by AgriProFocus to exhibit our work as a network member and we invited one of our clients, the Nyimba District Farmers Association, to exhibit with us. They brought along their cooking oil and dry bananas, which sold well. As a result, they increased their clientele, who have continued to place orders, and their profits have risen."  

“AGRIPROFOCUS BROUGHT DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS TOGETHER, WHICH ENABLED THEM TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND DISCOVER STRONGER AND WEAKER POINTS.”
– Chance Kabaghe, Director of the Agricultural Consultative Forum Zambia
Highlights of the AgriProFocus network in the Netherlands

Elsewhere in this magazine you have read about how AgriProFocus worked in practice – how it started and developed into a living network. In the 15 years of its existence AgriProFocus adopted two intersecting strategies: to become and remain visible and relevant in the Netherlands, by ‘being the place to be in its own right’ and by ‘organising close encounters with other networks’.

The Place to Be
Right from the beginning AgriProFocus marked its spot by organising the Dutch dialogue on the World Bank Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development, thus helping to put the agri-sector back on the agenda and making sure that government policy expressed sector views and experience. This set the scene for high-powered policy interactions during influential events such as the Feed the World conference in 2011 organised with Oxfam Novib through to the public dialogue Food for Thought in 2019. Many such dialogues culminated in joint advocacy, as did the Food Manifesto which is supported by many organisations beyond the membership.

AgriProFocus also took the opportunity to promote learning to the wider sector. Examples are the (bi)annual networking events, such as the exposure trip with national embassy staff to the Arnhem Wine Museum in 2013, focusing on farm-firm relations; the One Stop Shop in Burger’s Zoo the next year, on Dutch knowledge; our 10th anniversary at the Open Air Museum in 2015 and the Push your Luck event in Utrecht in 2018. These events each attracted over a hundred professionals from across the Dutch Diamond and they all combined stakeholder-driven topical workshops, B2B style networking, and the opportunity to connect across borders.

Close encounters
As the Dutch development sector increased its focus on agriculture in the last decade, new initiatives and platforms emerged, all organising their own topical events and exchanges in their area of expertise. AgriProFocus chose not to duplicate but to focus on synergy. It concentrated on adding value to those initiatives, working with the Netherlands–Africa Business Council on Africa Works, and with MVO Netherlands and foodFIRST on several occasions, often with a private (cooperative) sector focus.

Also worth noting have been the development of both the Food & Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP) and the Young Expert Programme (YEP). AgriProFocus became a consortium partner of Wageningen CDI and The Broker magazine under the F&BKP, and a support partner of the Netherlands Water Partnership in the YEP. While the F&BKP – hosted outside the AgriProFocus Netherlands office – created its own brand visibility with policymakers and implementing partners, over time a fruitful collaboration ensued on issues ranging from access to finance, sector innovation in dairy and horticulture, and food security and nutrition policy development. While the effect may have been modest visibility and growth in the Dutch member network, it created the basis for a wider outreach and the co-creation of the Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP). And since the launch of NFP it looks like World Food Day has become the annual event where the vibrant Dutch network engages in food system transformation for achieving SDG2 – zero hunger.
Facts and figures

In the last decade:

More than 1,600 network activities • With an outreach of more than 550,000 participants • Almost 1,000 co-organising partner organisations • 52 Dutch organisations were involved as a network member • More than 30,000 agri-professionals registered on the AgriProFocus platform • 80,000 connections on our social media

Who were involved in the network?

Dutch Diamond division of the members of the network
- Public sector
- Knowledge institutions
- NGOs/Development Agencies
- Private sector

Type of participants in activities
- Farmer organisations
- Public sector
- Knowledge institutions
- NGOs/Development Agencies
- Private sector

Network activities since 2011 | Number of people reached

How many people did we reach with our network activities?

Network activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>B2B events</th>
<th>Network events</th>
<th>Agri (finance) fairs</th>
<th>Campaigns</th>
<th>Workshops</th>
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<td>580,000</td>
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</table>

What was our online outreach?

80,000 people connected on our social media
30,265 professionals on the online platform

How did people rate the network?

An average of 88% of those in the network positively appreciate the AgriProFocus network.

The network:
- ... is increasingly relevant for my work
- ... creates visible synergies among the actors
- ... is a sustainable approach for the agricultural sector

Benefits from joining the network

People indicating receiving benefits from the network grew from 77% in 2014 to 88% in 2019. Overall average over the years was 83%
Connect for bigger impact

This magazine covers 15 years of highlights of the AgriProFocus network. For this special anniversary our team dove into our archives and the collective memory of our members and partners, and selected from this rich base of experiences the highlights and learnings that are presented in this magazine. During its existence, AgriProFocus supported more than 1,600 network activities, reaching more than 550,000 participants. Almost 1,000 co-organising partners and 52 Dutch organisations were involved as well.

There is much to learn from these collective activities initiated and accelerated by our network. Successful pilots, but also the ones that failed, teach us a lot about what works in practice and what does not. But also, long-running flagship interventions such as gender in value chains and access to finance are important to document and share, so others can benefit from them and further build on these experiences.

From business drinks to sector scans, the wide range of network services and interactions that have contributed to the development of joint ambitions and actions are also very inspirational for me. Reading these stories, I see a constant factor in the added value of AgriProFocus: the capacity to listen and adapt to stakeholder aspirations, and the flexibility and creativity to respond to changing contexts, all with the aim of decreasing defragmentation and working in silos. The Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP) will build on this knowledge and expertise, and take it to the next level to increase effective collaboration with relevant Dutch organisations and partners in low and middle income countries, responding to urgent issues that contribute to food and nutrition security and promoting the development of sustainable food systems. We connect for more impact.

Myrtille Danse
Executive Director
Netherlands Food Partnership