

# February News letter



## Editorial Note

Vanilla lead farmers from Kasese, Bundibugyo, and Ntoroko recently travelled to Ibanda district for a learning exchange through the VIBRANT project funded by Enabel. The host, the Kyeikucu Turihamwe Cooperative, offered a close look at what can happen when farmers organize and work with clear systems. The visit highlighted how collective action helps address common challenges such as premature harvesting, theft, and weak market bargaining power. Participants also explored how certification standards such as Organic, Fairtrade, and Rainforest Alliance open doors to premium markets, provided that farmers maintain good practices, proper records, and traceability from garden to buyer.

This edition features the story of Etien Ndugu, a refugee from Congo, one of the many people whose lives are slowly changing through the Kulea Watoto project. After taking part in the project's participatory sessions, Etien chose pig rearing as his livelihood activity and later received practical training in piggery management. The training quickly paid off when his pig gave birth to ten piglets. With the income from selling some piglets, he was able to buy food for his family, and scholastic materials for his children. For Etien, the experience is a clear reminder that with the right skills and a small opportunity, families can begin to rebuild their livelihoods and look to the future with renewed hope.

The team in Rhino camp hosted a global donor delegation to one of our Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions (EASE) caregiver groups. The visit offered a meaningful chance for donors to hear directly from caregivers about how the program is shaping life at home. Many spoke candidly about the challenges they faced before joining EASE like frequent conflict, and uncertainty about how to manage emotions within the family. Through the sessions, they have gained practical skills in positive parenting, emotional regulation, listening, and problem-solving. The message from caregivers emphasized that programs like EASE are not just training sessions they are helping restore calm, confidence, and connection in the home.

Vanilla thrives under the right conditions' humidity, fertile soils, and protection from damage. Proper fencing and buffering are proving important as a measure to protect the crop from roaming livestock that can easily break the fragile vines, help deter theft, a real concern given vanilla's high market value, especially during harvest season. These farming practices are more than farm boundaries they are a smart investment that protects farmers' effort, improves productivity, and supports the long-term sustainability of vanilla farming.

By  
**KATO UMIL**  
Communications officer

# Farmers learning from farmers: Strengthening Uganda's vanilla value chain through exchange visits.



**Compiled by Eric  
Oteba KRC-Uganda**

**Farmers from Kasese district learning  
at the youth farmers' garden in Ibanda**

Vanilla farmers from Rwenzori region are increasingly discovering that some of the most powerful lessons in agriculture come not from classrooms, but from fellow farmers. A recent farmer exchange visit to Ibanda District demonstrated how peer learning can inspire practical change, strengthen farmer organizations, and improve participation in high-value markets.

Farmers also learned how strong institutions help solve common challenges in the vanilla sector, including premature harvesting, theft, and low market prices. By working collectively and promoting good farming practices, the cooperative has significantly improved both production and quality among its members.

**Learning from a successful cooperative  
model**

The exchange visit, organized by the Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC-Uganda) under the Vanilla Initiative for Building Resilience and Nurture Thriving Communities (VIBRANT) project funded by Enabel, brought together 60 lead farmers from Kasese, Bundibugyo, and Ntoroko districts. The farmers visited the Kyeikucu Turihamwe Cooperative in Ibanda—one of Uganda's successful examples of organized vanilla production and marketing. The objective of the visit was simple but powerful: expose farmers to a functioning cooperative model while strengthening their knowledge on collective marketing, improved agronomic practices, and certification systems that enable farmers to access premium markets.

**Certification and premium markets**

A major focus of the exchange was the role of certification in accessing premium markets. Farmers learned how compliance with standards such as Organic, Fairtrade, and Rainforest Alliance certification can increase market opportunities and attract higher prices.

Certification requires consistent adherence to good agricultural practices, environmental conservation, fair labour conditions, and strong documentation systems. The cooperative demonstrated how farmers maintain records, follow traceability procedures, and implement environmentally responsible farming practices in order to meet certification requirements. These systems ensure that vanilla delivered by farmers can be traced from the garden to the final buyer, a critical requirement for global markets

**Practical lessons from model farms**

Beyond cooperative management, the visit provided hands-on learning through visits to model vanilla farms. Farmers observed practical agronomic techniques such as proper pollination, soil fertility management using organic manure, mulching, natural pest control, and responsible harvesting. They also learned innovative approaches such as using natural inputs like ash and aloe vera for pest management, protecting farms from contamination, and maintaining clean storage environments since vanilla beans easily absorb surrounding odors.

These practical demonstrations helped farmers visualize how improved practices can increase productivity while maintaining the quality standards required by premium markets.

## Building stronger farmer communities

One of the strongest messages that emerged from the visit was the power of collective action. Organized farmer groups not only strengthen market bargaining power but also help farmers share knowledge, maintain quality standards, and mobilize resources for growth. Participants were encouraged to return to their communities and replicate the lessons learned by strengthening farmer groups, promoting improved agronomic practices, and encouraging collective marketing.

## A path toward a stronger vanilla sector

As the VIBRANT project continues to support farmers in the Rwenzori region, initiatives such as exchange learning visits are expected to play a crucial role in transforming the vanilla value chain. By connecting farmers with successful models, strengthening cooperatives, promoting certification and quality production, these initiatives are laying the foundation for a more resilient and competitive vanilla sector in Uganda

Ultimately, the lessons from Ibanda highlight an important truth: when farmers learn from each other, the entire agricultural community grows stronger.



**The model farmer of Kyeikucu cooperative in Ibanda taking Vanilla farmers of Bundibugyo and Ntoroko through certification processes during exchange visit.**

# Etien Ndugu's Piggery Venture under Kulea Watoto

Compiled  
by Kaudh Sharon



**The piglets at Etien's piggery farm**

## Etien at his piggery project

Etien Ndugu, a 46-year-old man from Congo, lives in Mukondo C with his wife and children. In 2023, he learned about the Kulea Watoto project through his neighbors and Refugee Welfare Council 1 of his zone. He was interviewed during data collection and became a Kulea Watoto beneficiary. In order to improve Livelihood and economic well-being for beneficiaries as one of KRC's objective, Etien was among the beneficiaries who participated in participatory sessions and chose pig rearing as his enterprise. He attended training on piggery management covering disease prevention & control, pig health management, nutrition and feeding practices, and pig breeding. These skills helped him care for his pig, which gave birth to 10 piglets.

In the first round, he sold 7 piglets at 70,000 Uganda shillings each, earning 490,000 Uganda shillings. He kept 3 piglets to expand his piggery project and income source. With part of the money, he bought pig feeds, food for his home, and scholastic materials for his children.

Early January Etien's pig gave birth to 12 piglets which he intends to sell off so that he can raise money to rent land for agriculture in the national area.

He is part of the VSLA groups where he receives different teachings on financial management, he used part of the money he got at the end of last years' cycle to buy 10 hens and 5 ducks, which he is currently rearing at his home to boost the income and nutrition status of his children from the eggs they will lay.

Etien attributes all this to the Kulea Watoto project for positively transforming his life.

# DONOR VISIT SHOWCASES EASE IMPACT ON FAMILIES: VOICES OF CHANGE.

**Compiled by  
Keneema Trashillah  
EASE officer Rhino camp.**

This month, we had the honor of hosting a global donor visit to our Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions (EASE) caregiver group. The visit created an opportunity for direct engagement between donors and caregivers, allowing participants to share firsthand experiences of how the program is transforming their families.

Caregivers described challenges they faced before joining EASE, including frequent conflict, limited communication with their adolescents, and difficulty managing emotions within the home. Through the sessions, they gained practical skills in positive parenting, emotional regulation, active listening, and problem-solving.

One caregiver shared:

“Before EASE, my home was always full of shouting and misunderstanding. I did not know how to handle my child’s emotions. Through EASE, I learned to listen and guide instead of reacting in anger. Today, there is peace in our home.”

When asked for recommendations, caregivers emphasized the importance of continuing and expanding the EASE program so that more families can benefit from its positive impact.

The visit reaffirmed the value of investing in community-based mental health and parenting support initiatives.

**Together, we are strengthening families, nurturing resilience, and shaping brighter futures for adolescents.**



**EASE caregivers sharing the impact of EASE intervention in their families and communities to the Donor during the Global Donor visit in Rhino Settlement.**

# The importance of buffering or fencing in Vanilla farming

Compiled by  
Gerald Tumwesige



Vanilla farming, particularly the cultivation of *Vanilla planifolia*, is a delicate and labor-intensive enterprise that requires careful environmental and farm management. As one of the world's most valuable spices, vanilla thrives under specific conditions such as shade, humidity, fertile soils, and protection from physical and biological threats. In tropical countries like Uganda, where vanilla is emerging as a profitable agribusiness, buffering or fencing is a critical practice that directly affects productivity, quality, and sustainability. This article highlights why fencing and buffering should be a priority in vanilla farming.

**Microclimate regulation:** Vanilla requires moderate temperatures, high humidity, and filtered sunlight. Buffering through live fences, hedgerows, or windbreaks helps create a stable microclimate within the plantation. Trees and shrubs reduce strong winds that can damage vines or disrupt pollination, while also conserving moisture and reducing evaporation. In the face of climate variability, buffering helps protect vanilla from extreme weather, supporting consistent yields and quality.

## Protection from animal

**damage:** Vanilla vines are soft, climbing orchids that are highly vulnerable to damage from grazing animals such as cattle, goats, and sheep. Livestock can trample, break, or uproot vines, causing severe losses. Since vanilla takes about two to three years to begin producing pods, damage during early growth stages can delay returns and destroy long-term investments. In rural areas where free-range livestock systems are common, fencing serves as an essential barrier that protects vanilla gardens and safeguards farmers' efforts.

## Security against theft:

Vanilla is a high-value crop often targeted by thieves, especially during peak harvesting seasons. Immature pods are sometimes stolen before harvest, leading to significant financial losses. Fencing reduces unauthorized access and acts as a deterrent to theft, particularly when combined with controlled entry points or community monitoring. A secure plantation gives farmers confidence to invest more in production and expansion.

## Disease prevention and

**biosecurity:** Vanilla is susceptible to diseases such as root rot and fungal infections, which can spread rapidly between farms. Buffer zones and fencing reduce contact with neighboring fields, animals, and people who may carry pathogens. Controlled access allows farmers to implement sanitation measures, strengthening biosecurity and supporting effective disease management.

## Soil conservation and erosion

**control:** Vanilla is often grown on sloping land that is vulnerable to erosion during heavy rains. Buffer strips of grasses, shrubs, or trees help to slow runoff, enhance water infiltration, and prevent loss of fertile topsoil. Over time, organic matter from buffer vegetation improves soil structure and fertility. These practices contribute to the long-term sustainability of vanilla gardens.

### **Boundary definition and conflict prevention:**

Fencing clearly defines farm boundaries, reducing land disputes and encroachment. Clear demarcation promotes good relations with neighbors, improves land management, and increases investor confidence. Well-defined boundaries also simplify farm planning, monitoring, and expansion.

### **Biodiversity and ecological benefits:**

When buffering is done using live fences or agroforestry systems, it enhances biodiversity by attracting beneficial insects and natural pest predators. Although vanilla is often hand-pollinated, biodiversity improves ecosystem health and resilience. Live buffers also contribute to carbon sequestration and environmental conservation.

### **Improved farm management and economic benefits:**

A fenced vanilla farm is easier to organize and manage. Activities such as irrigation, pruning, shade control, and monitoring are more effective in a secure environment. Economically, fencing is a preventive investment that costs far less than losses from theft or animal damage. Psychologically, it gives farmers peace of mind and motivation to invest in improved production practices.

## **Conclusion**

Buffering or fencing is not optional in vanilla farming; it is a fundamental requirement for sustainable and profitable production. By protecting vines from animals and theft, regulating microclimate, conserving soil, preventing disease spread, and supporting biodiversity, fencing plays a critical role in successful vanilla cultivation. For farmers in Uganda and other tropical regions, investing in proper fencing and buffering systems is essential to achieving stable yields, high quality, and long-term profitability. Ultimately, fencing transforms a vulnerable vanilla garden into a secure, productive, and sustainable agricultural enterprise.



**Elaborating importances of fencing the vanilla garden in Kyabarungira subcounty**

# OUR DEAR Subscribers

Dear Subscribers and Esteemed Donors,

As we reflect on the strides made and the challenges overcome, we extend our deepest gratitude to you—our invaluable supporters. Your unwavering commitment and generosity have been the cornerstone of our success in driving sustainable change and improving lives in the communities we serve. Thank you for being part of our journey. Together, we are transforming lives, strengthening communities, and building a brighter future for all.

## CONTACT US:

KRC-Uganda Plot 28, Mugurusi Road,  
Fort-Portal City P. O. Box 782, Fort Portal City-Uganda  
Tel: 0393101852



[www.krcuganda.org](http://www.krcuganda.org)



[krcuganda@krcug.org](mailto:krcuganda@krcug.org)



@ krcuganda

For timely updates, contact us via EWS

<https://krc-earlywarningsystem.com>