

Issue 2

# AROMATIC QUARTERLY

Magazine for The Association of the Vanilla Exporters of Uganda (VANEX)



## SUBSIDIARY LEGISLATION

### FOR VANILLA PRODUCTION

The development of ordinances at district level

## IMPROVING HARVEST DATE DETERMINATION: VANILLA POLLINATION DATA COLLECTION

## INTERVIEW: FLORENCE NAGAWA

IMMEDIATE FORMER VANEX ED



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# WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We are delighted to bring to you the second issue of our **Aromatic Quarterly** magazine that features news, information, and highlights of the developments in the Uganda vanilla industry, as well as spotlighting what is happening in the general global vanilla industry. In general, *Aromatic Quarterly* covers production, productivity, the social, political and economic environment dynamics and trends of the vanilla industry.

The second issue comes to you when we are about to start the second season of the vanilla harvest, season 2022B, that was declared by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries to start on 10th January 2023. We are very excited with the good progress we are making towards a collective voice, that represent the industry interests. Key among them is promotion of high quality vanilla production from Uganda to the international market. This is the reason the industry stakeholders will always be at work, to ensure that happens. In this issue our lead article is about the introduction of the vanilla pollination data collection approach, and how it may support the strengthening of the approach the vanilla harvest date declaration. Read this article to get informed about why it was introduced, and what stakeholders have to say.

The industry stakeholders continue to rally around promoting a sustainable industry that is orderly through regulation. Working with our partners, the Catholic Relief Services- Vines project, we continue to push through the processes of getting the industry regulated by Government, at the same time fostering industry interests. We feature an article highlighting the progress we have made towards supporting a regulated industry, from local level at district local governments to national level. This article spotlights the gains achieved so far where ordinances have been gazetted in some vanilla growing districts, as we continue to work towards national level regulations for the industry.

Vanilla production and productivity increases through sustainable practices is critical. We bring to you an article providing a brief of the challenges of vanilla production in Uganda and the interventions we are undertaking with partners to ensure we stay on track with increased and sustained production, and productivity of vanilla in Uganda, amidst the challenges. In the same track of information, we have a narrative of the envi-



Ms. Phiona Florence Nakusi - Executive Director, VANEX.

ronment surrounding the production, and trade of vanilla amidst the challenge of theft.

As we lobby and advocate for an enabling environment for vanilla production, processing and marketing, for a sustainable industry, we reached out to a diversity of stakeholders to get their opinion on what has been good in the initiative of vanilla harvest date declaration since its inception in 2019. I invite you to read this section to get an insight what the harvest date declaration means to different stakeholders and what they think has been achieved, and what can be improved.

Lastly, we present to you the departing thoughts of Ms. Florence Nagawa the immediate former Executive Director. She shares her experience and work done while she was at the job. You will read what has been achieved in terms of implementing the organisation's mandate. She also shares thoughts about what may be done by the industry as it continues to maximise its potential. Read through her interview and also receive her words of gratitude.

Finally, vanilla is a crop of unmatched aroma, but passion too. *"The vanilla fraternity world over are the most passionate people about their aromatic crop, I have ever seen"*, said, one vanilla buyer. We agree with that buyer. In the vanilla industry, everyone has something to say about vanilla. We invite you to send us feedback about our **Aromatic Quarterly** magazine. I wish you a happy reading.

# VANILLA POLLINATION DATA COLLECTION:

AN APPROACH TO IMPROVING VANILLA HARVEST  
DATE DETERMINATION BY THE INDUSTRY



By Florence Nagawa  
Immediate Former Executive Director, VANEX



*A farmer pollinating his vanilla*

Uganda's vanilla industry is on the move; commercially revived, putting the experience that beset the industry when farm gate prices slumped in 2003 and 2004 behind. Farmers have embraced vanilla growing, expanding in production areas from just 4 districts in early 2000s, to now over 30 districts. As a matter of fact, there also more processors and exporters involved in the value chain. The government through the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries identifies and declared vanilla as a strategic crop. VANEX members together with other industry stakeholders are supportive of initiatives that provide an enabling environment for vanilla production, productivity improvement, processing, and marketing to the global market. One of these initiatives is the determination of the start of the vanilla harvest date, through a declaration issued by the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries.

The vanilla harvest date declaration was initiated four years; and evidence of its benefits have been echoed by several industry stakeholders.

However, it is not without challenges. Issues of discontent regarding how to adapt and scientifically approach the determination of the start of the harvest season using evidence has been a discussion at several industry stakeholder fora. Some arguments have focused on the fact that there is climatic variability in different regions. For example, occurrence of the dry season spell, high temperature, followed by rain in series, trigger emergence of vanilla flowers, and this differs in different localities, and districts where vanilla is grown. The arguments and opinions have been radically varied to an extent that a single district, for example; Bundibugyo which has lower lands and higher slopes of the mountain Rwenzori ranges, claims that vanilla in lower lands matures a month earlier than the one growing in the higher lands. Such arguments have challenged a single vanilla harvest date declaration for all vanilla growing districts in the country. On the other hand, it is a known fact that vanilla flowering season lasts almost twelve weeks, with high occurrence of flowering happening in the middle of

those weeks, and at the same time, it is well known that vanilla bean physiological maturity is at nine months from date of pollination, to attain the best vanillin content that signifies maturity. For that reason, some stakeholders have proposed and advised, that vanilla harvesting should be approached with what has been termed as “selective harvesting of only those beans that have reached maturity”. The current initiative depends on the principle that; the start of the harvest season is when at least 75% of the vanilla beans estimated throughout the vanilla growing districts have reached maturity.

As the initiative has taken root, the industry also recognises the emerging opinions and arguments, suggesting a need to strengthen the initiative by adopting a continuous improvement approach to its determination. For example, a need to embrace a more evidenced based approach. This recognition has given birth to the Vanilla Pollination Data Collection approach, using a specially designed *Vanilla Pollination Data Collection Tool*. VANEX working in collaboration with MAAIF and CRS Vines project introduced this tool and piloted it five major vanilla growing Districts, that is; Ibanda, Rubirizi, Kasese, Bundibugyo, and Ntoroko during a vanilla maturity assessment survey conducted in the April 2022, and was also presented to wider stakeholders for review and approval. Seven VANEX members participated in piloting this tool, and collected data on vanilla pollination during the flowering season of September to November 2022. The data collected will be sub-



*VANEX member inspecting vanilla maturity*

jected to scientific analysis and reporting, pointing to the time in the cycle when the highest percentage of the vanilla beans were pollinated in all the growing districts. The analysis is also able to independently report on a case by case basis on District specific data. The vanilla pollination data collection approach is well received by industry stakeholders. It is open for use by willing farmers, government extension agents, district agricultural officers, and cooperatives or businesses. The District Production Office provides a collective report, and submits it to MAAIF on behalf of the district. *The approach is purposed to make use of evidence and records to determine harvest dates.*

One of the stakeholders in support of the vanilla pollination data collection had this to say; “the tool that has been provided to us will address the issue of early harvesting; which is a major issue, but lack of scientific evidence on when pollination took place was the major weakness, and I believe that once we become more scientific in knowing when pollination took place, it will help in setting the date to be declared”; Another stakeholder said, “the tool examines pollination tracking to determine which regions pollinated when and the helps to determine maturity of their vanilla. That is the right direction, and we fully support it”. This initiative, is another testimony to VANEX’s is commitment to its Vision, to promote a sustainable vanilla industry that delivers highest quality vanilla from Uganda to the global market.

**The approach is purposed to make use of evidence and records to determine harvest dates.**

# DOES VANILLA NEED SUBSIDIARY LEGISLATION IN UGANDA?



By Kiiza Kizito,

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*The Writer is the Project Manager, Policy and Advocacy, CRS/Vines project Funded by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Vines project aims to help reinvigorate the Ugandan vanilla industry and return it to a place of global prominence.*

It is quite interesting to think about legislation in the Vanilla industry in Uganda. For instance, there is no Principal legislation (Law/Act of Parliament) currently in place in Uganda for the vanilla industry. Yet it is recognized that the industry has overwhelming challenge of theft, in turn causing insecurity in the communities that grows it. Reports of killings of thieves, or thieves killing farmers have been recorded in the past and they continue to happen. Leave alone the premature harvesting by some farmers due to fear of losing their gardens to thieves and uncoordinated buying process.

As the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) exercises its mandate of creating an enabling environment, the ministry is working with vanilla stakeholders to frame a national regulatory framework for the vanilla subsector though it takes a longer time to be accomplished. As it involves so many processes like conducting a Regulatory impact assessment (RIA), until the draft legislation is approved cabinet and later by parliament. Therefore, it is advisable for relevant authorities to formulate subsidiary legislation (ordinances and Byelaws) at the local government levels; as instruments to guide vanilla production, harvesting, processing and marketing in the near term.

In fulfilling this demand, CRS in collaboration with MAAIF, the district local governments, and VANEX has facilitated the development of subsidiary legislations (ordinances) at the district level. In addition to the already existing Sub County Byelaws in some of the vanilla-producing districts. The Byelaws are impacting the vanilla-growing

communities, Buikwe district, for instance, is proud of having benefited from the byelaws in the respective vanilla-producing sub-counties. According to Maurice Kyambadde, Buikwe district Agriculture officer, the byelaws they have put in place have ensured quality production of vanilla in the district. With the district ordinance now at the Solicitor General's office for approval and final gazetting for it to become a district law, the district is working with the agriculture police to enforce policies on vanilla growing.

Notably, Rubirizi and Kasese districts whose Ordinance was recently gazette has reported some progress in implementing what the law entails in their respective district. Although there is still a need for more sensitization to make every stakeholder aware of the law and hence abide by what it entails. Other districts including Ibanda, Bunyangabu, Ntoroko, Bundibugyo, Kayunga, Bukomansimbi, Lwengo, and Kalungu are also in the process of developing their Subsidiary legislation (Ordinance) to help regulate the industry in their respective district.

As all these developments are ongoing, the stakeholders need not lose focus on developing the National regulatory framework which will have a more positive influence on the quality and quantity of vanilla produced in Uganda. Since Uganda's vanilla main export destinations like the USA, Canada and EU countries are extremely quality sensitive and have explicit market specifications. And striving to meet these market specifications demands coordinated efforts from all stakeholders in the vanilla industry coupled with proper regulatory framework.

**CRS in collaboration with MAAIF, the district local governments, and VANEX has facilitated the development of subsidiary legislations (ordinances) at the district level.**



*Immediate former VANEX ED together with partners from Catholic Relief Services and Sustainable Vanilla Initiative meeting the Minister of State for Agriculture, Hon. Fred Bwino Kyakulaga (centre).*



*Meeting with the Rubirizi district officials that included the CAO, RDC, DAO and the DPO to discuss ordinances to guide vanilla production, harvesting, processing and marketing.*



# VANILLA PRODUCTION IN UGANDA

By Annet Masika  
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CRS Vines Project staff Annet Masika guiding a farmer on pruning of all crops on a vanilla farm

Vanilla is a climbing crop/orchid that grows on a support tree (tutor) in forested/agroforestry systems. In Uganda vanilla is grown in banana, coffee and permanent shade trees- agroforestry systems. The main producing areas include: the Rwenzori, South-Western and Central Regions. The major producing districts include: Bundibugyo, Kasese, Rubirizi, Ibanda, Mukono, Kayunga, Buikwe. Other districts of production include; Ntoroko, Kamwenge, Kagadi, Kyenjojo, Masaka, Bukomasimbi, Rakai, Sironko and Mbale. There is generally high possibility of expansion within the old new districts, and to new districts with a favourable climate for vanilla cultivation

Vanilla is one of the high value crops grown in Uganda. It greatly contributes to the household incomes of the farming households, and overall, to the National Economy. The current average price per kilogramme of green vanilla beans is about UGX 40,000. When prices increase, this

sometimes goes up to over UGX 100,000 per kilogramme. Average production per farming household ranges between 50-200 kgs or more for the large commercial farmers. This evidence therefore suggests that vanilla can move Ugandan communities out of poverty.

Uganda has opportunities to produce high quality vanilla on a large scale, and for accessing a better market. These include a favorable climate that enables production of high-quality vanilla under organic conditions, the 2 rainy seasons thus 2 harvesting seasons in a year, the high vanillin content of the cured vanilla among others. However, there are also constraints that limit Ugandan farmers from realizing optimum production, high quality, and a reliable/better market for their green bean. These constraints include the following:

- Theft of green vanilla and sometimes vanilla vines on the farm especially when vanilla



prices are very high.

- Sale of immature vanilla beans by some farmers; this affects the quality of the cured vanilla beans
- Presence of some traders/buyers who purchase immature beans
- Poor farming practices by some farmers which result into low productivity of vanilla on the farm, and low quality of the vanilla produced
- Price fluctuations, which results in some farmers cutting down the vanilla plantations when the prices of the green beans are very low. This is coupled with inadequate knowledge on vanilla agronomy and agroforestry whereby the productivity of vanilla farms is very low (about 0.25kg per plant). Yet the vanilla plant can produce about 2kgs per year.

The Vines project in collaboration with VANEX, private sector processors, MAAIF, Local Governments, and other stakeholders are undertaking several interventions to enhance the productivity and quality of vanilla, with the overall aim of strengthening the vanilla sector in Uganda and enabling participating farmers to earn more money from Vanilla, and improve the well being of their farm families. These interventions include:

- the development of the vanilla manual to guide extension workers, field agents and farmers on the good practices of vanilla agronomy/agroforestry.
- Building the capacity of the extension agents, who in turn deliver trainings to the vanilla farmers.
- Enhancing practical learning by farmers through establishment of farmer learning centres/demonstration sites (hosted by farmers) and building the capacity of the host farmers to train other farmers.
- Building the capacity of large-scale commercial farmers to produce and market quality vines/planting materials on farm within their localities.
- Collaborating with research institutions such as NARO to define and implement the vanilla

research agenda.

- Mass media sensitizations e.g. conducting radio talk shows on vanilla agronomy/agroforestry, to reach out to many farmers.

It is envisaged that enhancing and sustaining farm productivity of high-quality green vanilla will guarantee a reliable source of high-quality raw materials for the processing of high-quality vanilla. This will result into export of high-quality vanilla and a good brand name for the Ugandan vanilla on the international market. This will therefore widen our market base, and also translate into more viable businesses for the buyers/processors, traders and the farmers. However, this end result will require the collaboration of all the stakeholders especially the farmers, traders/buyers, processors and the strengthening of their business-to-business relationships.



*A farmer appreciating vanilla beans in her garden in Kayunga*

# THE TRADING ENVIRONMENT FOR UGANDAN VANILLA IN THE FACE OF THEFT

By Immaculate Ndagire  
Communications and Membership Services Officer  
VANEX



*VANEX team together with stakeholders after meeting the district leadership and agricultural technical team in Kasese District.*

The vanilla industry in Uganda has received increased public attention in recent years because of the ongoing high vanilla prices, vanilla theft, and quality issues resulting from extensive harvesting and processing of immature vanilla. Vanilla export prices have remained remarkably high over years, including at the farm gate, benefiting farmers. However, when farm gate prices are high, vanilla becomes extremely valuable in the context of the main producing regions, causing serious quality issues as farmers are pressured to harvest immature vanilla in response to theft concerns.

Vanilla is an orchid grown in agroforestry systems and is the world's second most expensive spice after saffron, with one of the most volatile global markets. Once vanilla is mature, healthy beans are clipped from the vines and harvesting begins by carefully cutting off beans from the stem using a sharp knife and at this point beans are usually green and with less or no scent. The beans are collected by middlemen/agents who approach farmers in their gardens or taken by farmers to the local stores from where their money is paid. Crops are then transported by motorcycles to local stores and then by motor vehicle to processing facilities where they are cured and packed for export.

The vanilla industry contributed US\$26M in 2021 and is expected to rise to US\$47M by 2025

at current prices, but the value chain makes a net contribution to the country's balance of trade of US\$22M because taxes are collected at the level of formal traders and exporters and no government subsidies are provided.

The industry is highly dependent on exports that makes it vulnerable to the international prices that are determined by the production levels of Madagascar as majority of Ugandan vanilla is exported to international food companies in the United States, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and South Africa making the crop the 38th most exported product in Uganda. Uganda vanilla export is mainly dominated by few major exporters who account for 98% of vanilla exporters with less than 2% exported by intermediary organizations and individuals. Locally, Vanilla trade is dominated by trade in green beans partially processed vanilla and limited consumer retail trade. The bulk (80%) of the green beans are traded through the intermediary Channel, 20% is directly traded with the processor/export agents with few Cooperatives and farmer producer associations offering organized intermediary trading services.

The sector nearly collapsed in the 1970s due to the departure of the British and Asian workers because Ugandans lacked the expertise to process and market vanilla. In the 1980s, the private sector reawakened it, and exports resumed in the 1990s, with TIMEX and UVAN playing key

roles. However, as a result of the 2004 global price crash, Ugandan vanilla production was essentially halted between 2005 and 2015 and it was revitalized in 2018 after Madagascar as the leading exporter was hit by cyclones that washed away all of its vanilla gardens. During this time, the vanilla industry appeared very profitable for the smallholder farmers, as they were able to save good money and improved their livelihoods, as most labor was/is done by family members.

Uganda produces some of the best vanilla on the market due to its higher vanillin content, and vanilla is traded based on its vanillin content, size and color. In his speech at the vanilla harvest date declaration for season 'A' 2022, the Minister stated that due to the growing demand for organic vanilla by major global food companies, Uganda presents a significant opportunity to secure a growing long-term profitable vanilla sector, as the country has the best climate for increasing production of premium quality natural and organic vanilla, with the potential to drive the country into middle-income status.

The highly profitable nature of the crop makes it more vulnerable to theft, as thieves frequently take immature vanilla beans from gardens pushing some farmers to sell their vanilla crop before it has reached full maturity in order to avoid the

financial losses caused by theft. To curb the issue of vanilla theft, VANEX and CRS have supported some of the vanilla high growing districts to develop ordinances that govern the selling and buying of vanilla in those districts. Some farmers have also resorted to stamping their names on their vanilla pods and others have gone as far as hiring armed guards, while others are sleeping in their gardens to protect their crops.

MAAIF also established an agriculture police unit to prosecute those whose practices degrade the quality of vanilla grown and the severity of the punishment will be determined by the district ordinances. The establishment of harvesting dates, spearheaded by VANEX and MAAIF, has also aided in the control of vanilla standards and the reduction of theft cases, as most (if not all) buyers wait until after the declared date to begin purchasing vanilla from farmers.

In conclusion, as VANEX continues to raise farmers awareness on good agronomic practices in vanilla and encouraging buyers not to purchase immature vanilla, it is the responsibility of all value chain actors to maintain the quality of vanilla in order to reach our goal of becoming a reliable alternative source of high-quality vanilla with a high vanillin content.

**The establishment of harvesting dates, spearheaded by VANEX and MAAIF, has also aided in the control of vanilla standards and the reduction of theft cases.**



*VANEX team engaging some stakeholders in a dialogue on vanilla industry challenges.*

# HAVE YOUR SAY

## WHAT HAS BEEN GOOD IN THE INITIATIVE OF VANILLA HARVEST DATE DECLARATION SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 2019?

### **Mr. Abu baker Mulindwa From NEI Limited**

*The process by which harvest date is declared is continuously improving and it is likely to improve with the introduction of the vanilla pollination data collection tool that was developed by VANEX. This date setting has created orderliness in the market and has been great though we experienced abrupt changes that hampered our schedules during the previous season.*

### **Patricia Tushabe from Enimiro**

*This declaration of harvesting dates has helped improve the quality of vanilla, reduce on vanilla theft, and cut down on illegal or unofficial vanilla trade.*

### **Didas Barigye (DAO Rubirizi District)**

*Since the Ministry started announcing harvesting dates, the quality of Ugandan vanilla has improved. Respecting these declared dates is very important because they are usually set after looking at gardens in different areas to see when they are ready. Vanilla needs to be harvested when it is fully mature so that it has the flavor that international buyers want which tends to be the main reason why harvesting dates are set.*

### **Joseph Lukandwa, Operations Manager, UVAN Ltd**

*There's been tremendous improvement in the farmer's response regarding the quality measures enforced, farmers are very comfortable, and they look liberated that measures to protect them are in place. I am told they've even started enforcing it themselves, some (farmers) are taking it further to even fight those who violate, which is a good thing, I got news from Mityana today about a similar incident. There is more sanity, and they feel aligned., yes early buying and theft are there, but you can see momentum.*

### **Abaho Peter, District Agriculture officer Ibanda District**

*The harvest date is okay, but the problem is that it has no backup law, so enforcing it has become problematic, in Ibanda, what we are doing is*

*simply drive through the fields with Police to only scarecrow. The challenge here is that even if you apprehend somebody, you cannot prosecute them in court. As Ibanda district, we are in the final stages of ensuring an ordinance. If we had one like what coffee farmers have, we would control this with confidence. So generally, it's okay to have a harvest date but not much is under control.*

### **Wilfred Aliganyira, Field Manager, Esco Limited**

*Harvest date is a good idea, especially for exporters, we were excited about it, but the problem is people are getting behind our backs and buying, in Bundibugyo and Kasese, people are buying. Even today I got calls about incidents, the thing is, we need implementation and a way of reprimanding those who violate, that's what action is. The idea is good but there is no action, and no implementation.*

### **Ayebazibwe Andrew, Farmer Ibanda**

*People are already ending the vanilla season here in Ibanda, very many middlemen from all over, Bundibugyo, Kampala, and Kasese, are buying at 30,000. Thieves too stealing even during the day. Our District police commander for example, when approached, said he had no basis to arrest, even when there is a circular with government directives to do so. By the way, farmers are even selling next season's vanilla now, if you can offer them 25,000. My suggestion is that Security should arrest middlemen, arrest them and this will be the end of it. Otherwise, I am not sure of the future of this vanilla industry anymore."*

### **Paul Murungi, Agriculture Officer-Bundibugyo District.**

*"The harvest date has improved the quality of vanilla, especially vanillin content since the harvest is done when the maturity is realized or attained at peak period. theft cases have been reduced, due to regulations governing the harvest and movement of vanilla. This enforcement has also partly stabilized the market since 2019, for example, vanilla market price has not gone below 10,000/= . The only weaknesses are, the government has not yet considered vanilla a priority crop like others.*

# INTERVIEW: IMMEDIATE FORMER VANEX ED



Ms. Florence Nagawa - Former Immediate Executive Director of VANEX.

**M**s. Florence Nagawa, has been the Executive Director of VANEX, since 2021, at the height of the organization's advocacy in the vanilla sector, she spoke to Eddie Ssemakula about her experience and work during her term of office, and the industry at large.

## 1. You've been the Executive director of VANEX up to Nov 2022, tell us about your tenure?

*I have been the Executive Director since Feb 2021. I joined at a time when the organization was taking a bold step in addressing premature vanilla harvest through the declaration of the vanilla harvest date alongside partners like Catholic Relief Services and the Ministry of Agriculture. I found this effort in its infancy and its now taken root and promising.*

*During my tenure, I've been challenged to build on this initiative in a participatory manner, so it can become embraced by industry stakeholders to ensure they comply by observing it, if it is to deliver to its purpose. It is now a concerted campaign that also involves farmers in the vanilla maturity survey in major vanilla growing districts before the harvest date declaration; its popularization through radio talk shows to educate farmers about the importance of harvesting only mature vanilla, consequently encouraging more buy-in and popularity among stakeholders.*

*As I leave this office, it's worth noting that the campaign is more inclusive and popular now, and has earned its place on the vanilla calendar.*

## 2. What has since been fast-tracked in the execution of the mandate given to VANEX?

*VANEX's mandated vision is to create an enabling environment for sustained vanilla production. In collaboration with Vines Project under Catholic Relief Services, we embarked upon advocating for a regulated vanilla industry. A regulatory Impact Assessment Research was conducted to determine the possible impacts on the industry if it gets fully regulated; stakeholders validated the findings of the research and pronounced themselves that it is time for the industry to be regulated. The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries is leading us on this. VANEX's voice prominent in this campaign.*

*District Local governments support is also now visible in major vanilla-producing districts, especially in western Uganda, towards a regulated industry. For example, Kasese and Ribirizi Districts have vanilla ordinances.*

## 3. What challenges have been most daunting in your role, and how have you overcome them?

*The most challenging aspect at the leadership level has been the reality that the industry is still fragmented, many stakeholders at the value chain level often do not work with a collective voice, and isolation is somewhat the norm.*

*What I have done is step out toward industry stakeholders and often communicate our mandate, highlighting the need for them to participate over and above non-members, hopefully, they will maximize their engagement with the dialoguing opportunities presented by VANEX.*

*There has also been widespread concern about the quality of exported vanilla, driven by industry players focusing on sales, rather than quality. This is a practice that stimulates and sustains premature harvesting and brought down export quality levels in the past. Our advocacy at VANEX though has accelerated government implementation of the harvest date declaration calendar, in order to mitigate this problem.*



#### **4. Where do you see the vanilla industry from the time you first joined VANEX?**

*During my two years at VANEX, we've achieved more collective voice, witnessed increased member subscription of members, and attained more engagement from the government especially through MAAIF.*

*There have been more steps towards quality export and pushing for a better regulatory environment, plus the stability of farm gate prices.*

*The Vanilla industry through VANEX leadership has also taken a bold decision to brand Uganda vanilla. VANEX under the CRS Vines project commissioned research towards establishing a strategy for branding Uganda vanilla. This was out of the discovery that Uganda's vanilla profile was largely unknown globally, even when our quality ranked with Madagascar.*

*So, the strategy is out and was embraced by VANEX board and members to be executed, stepwise. So even at this infancy level of the initiative of branding Uganda branding, we have already decided that we shall establish an online presence as VANEX and this will be bolder with a dedicated website for that; promoting Uganda vanilla industry visibility, and also establish our presence at major international food fairs, among others.*

#### **5. Which stakeholders and industry players do you owe the most gratitude for your performance?**

*I really appreciate the support of the Founding Directors Mr. Aga Sekalala Snr, and Mr. Phillip Betts, and the entire VANEX board, who have kept the industry focused on the vision, and mission, and sustained support to the functioning of the secretariat along with the members.*

*MAAIF has also done a good job highlighting vanilla as a strategic crop in the sector development plan, and dedicating to the industry a Vanilla Desk focal person, Ms. Barbara Komushaago, this is worth applauding.*

*CRS vines project deserves applause, and similarly the farmers who have sustained the increasing production and productivity of vanilla to now being grown in over 30 districts, despite the challenges of Vanilla theft.*

*Thanks to Sustainable Vanilla Initiative, our industry has been spotted by a network of international vanilla buyers and singled out globally as a preferred second origin of high-quality vanilla, among the other 15 countries. That spotlight opportunity has lifted us and we need to harness it by sustaining quality and quantity production to meet market demands. Hopefully, in so doing, we can move from the current one percent market share to a higher percentage.*

## **6. Envision for us where we see the vanilla industry 5- 10 years from now?**

*Uganda is now blessed to have been singled out by a global network of vanilla buyers; it's an opportunity we should embrace. With our conducive environment, we've, for example, grown from 4 vanilla farming districts in 1996, to 31 districts today. Farmers now consider vanilla as a viable crop; even amidst the challenge of theft, vanilla is having the highest price fetched per kilo at a farm gate among all crops grown in Uganda.*

*I nevertheless foresee efforts to help farmers overcome theft constraints and more regulation of the industry through traceability.*

*I also see registration of farmers and traders to operate in gazette places to be the norm, in that, you shouldn't be handling Vanilla without being registered and outside the declared buying time- for green beans, for a given season.*

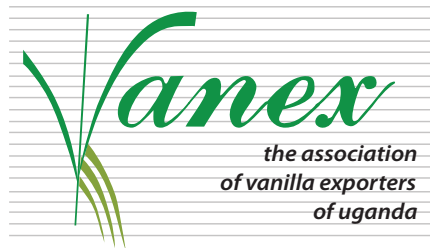
*I also see higher production and productivity, and better branding and visibility of Uganda vanilla on the world market.*

## **7. Any last word, especially to the incoming Executive Director?**

*I leave as Executive Director, but I remain a stakeholder, the spirit of vanilla remains with me. I have kept the passion, and I am off but not out, I have made my contribution.*

*To the incoming Executive director; continue mobilizing stakeholders under one table, so we can collectively address challenges with one voice, with actions implemented from a common vision.*





## WHO WE ARE

The Association of the Vanilla Exporters of Uganda Limited (VANEX) is a membership organization constituted by vanilla buyers and exporters in 2003 and incorporated in Uganda in June 2005 as a company limited by guarantee. Our intent was to pool the resources of the members and to harmonize and co-ordinate our efforts and activities in the best interest of the vanilla export industry in Uganda. We have since grown into an officially recognized organization that serves as a platform, which contributes to the effort to create an enabling environment for sustainable vanilla production and trade with a view of making Uganda a reliable global source of high quality natural vanilla.

We are the private sector voice of Uganda's vanilla industry.

## VISION

We envision a world in which Uganda is the most significant origin of high quality sustainable vanilla.

## MISSION

We aim to pool resources of members, harmonize, and coordinate their efforts and activities for a sustainable and profitable vanilla industry in Uganda.

## CONTACT

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