

Organic exports from Africa to Europe. The experience of small scale farmers from Ghana

PATRICK DEEGBE

Key words: Small scale farmers, export, Africa, Ghana

Author's Background

The author studied at the University of Ghana, Legon and graduated with Master of philosophy in Crop Science in 1993. He researched into the biological means of control of insect pest on vegetables. He carried out a second post graduate in environmental auditing with special reference to ISO 14001 at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne in 1999. He worked as a consultant in Switzerland before forming his company Weija Agricultural development limited in Ghana.

The author has since forming his company Weija Agricultural Development limited now Wad African Foods limited concentrated his time in promoting small scale farmers products in Europe notable Switzerland and Germany. He is a member of IFOAM and a founding member of INOFO in Vignola, Italy and was part of INOFO delegation in the 17th OWC in Korea in 2011.

Summary

Wad is the acronym of Weija Agricultural Development limited, the company is an associative enterprise; it works exclusively with small scale farmers from the rural areas in Ghana. The company doesn't owe farms. It depends on farmers for its products. The farmers it works with also depend on the company for marketing of their products. There is therefore a synergy between the company and the farmers groups it works with.

It works with various farmers groups, for example Ekumfi Atwia Wad organic farmers association for pineapples from the Ekumfi district of the central region of Ghana EAWOFA.

The company is export based; all its products are exported to Switzerland and Germany.

Background and main chapter

The company started processing in the year 2003 and in 2004 it got an order from a big importer in the organic products in Switzerland. The condition for purchase is that products are certified organic. The company faced initial challenges to get certified.

Historically the pineapple fields, were the Ekumfi Atwia Wad Organic Farmers Association members grows their crop has not been treated with chemical fertilizers and pesticides. However documentations were very important in the EU regulations which were missing with the farmers.

Third party certification was also very expensive among other hurdles that the farmers have to pass through to get their products exported.

Solutions were found for the hurdles with time. Today the export of products from the small scale farmers has greatly increased and continues to increase due to the organic exports.

Core message and conclusions

The author will like to discuss how, those solutions were found and how that can help other small farmer groups that are interested in organising themselves and export their products, from developing countries to Europe and Switzerland.

The experience of Wad African foods limited with the Ekumfi Atwia Wad Organic farmers could help some small scale farmer organisation to adopt appropriate approach to their business.

Background

In Ghana majority of the rural agriculture is based on organic agriculture production although not certified. Most of the farms are very small and sustainably based. Agriculture employed about 55% of the working population and in most case on subsistence basis. Due to the unstructured nature of small scale farmers and the sizes of their farms, they are not attractive to enter into the main stream of the export market where they can attract good price for their products to reward their efforts.

The objective of Wad African foods limited was to organise and export small scale farmers products. The company started in the year 2000 with the aim of participating in the fight against poverty in the rural poor in Ghana.

Organising small scale farmers and certifying them under the EU organic regulations and exporting their produce came with some challenges which were overcome with time.

The author wants to share the experience with other organisation or people who are or will be interested in initiating similar projects like Wad African Foods Limited.

Main chapter

Wad is the acronym of Weija agricultural development, the company is an associative enterprise; it works exclusively with small scale farmers from the rural areas in Ghana. It depends on the farmers for its products. The farmers it works

Organic exports from Africa to Europe. The experience of small scale farmers from Ghana

Practitioners' Track, IFOAM Organic World Congress 2014, 'Building Organic Bridges', 13-15 Oct., Istanbul, Turkey

with also depend on the company for marketing of their products. There is therefore a synergy between the company and the farmers groups it works with.

The company developed a marketing model based on high quality products produced by small scale farmers and linking them with export demand as can be seen on the schematic diagram.

It works with various farmers groups, for example Ekumfi Atwia Wad Organic Farmers association (EAWOFA) for pineapples. The group can be found in the Ekumfi district of the Central region of Ghana. For Mangoes the company gets its produce from Wad organic farmer mangoes from Somanya (WOFAmS) in the Eastern region of Ghana. Different regions have different soil quality and environmental conditions that influence fruit quality. The company therefore look for the best product from where it can be suitably cultivated in the country.

In 2001 the company started exporting only small quantities of fresh pineapples to Switzerland. The fruits were sold to small organic shops and fine food shops in the French part. These shops required no certification as they trusted the direct contact and shop owners were more interested in knowing the origin and method of production rather than having a certificate. The company added products like mango, coconut, papaya and banana with time and demand.

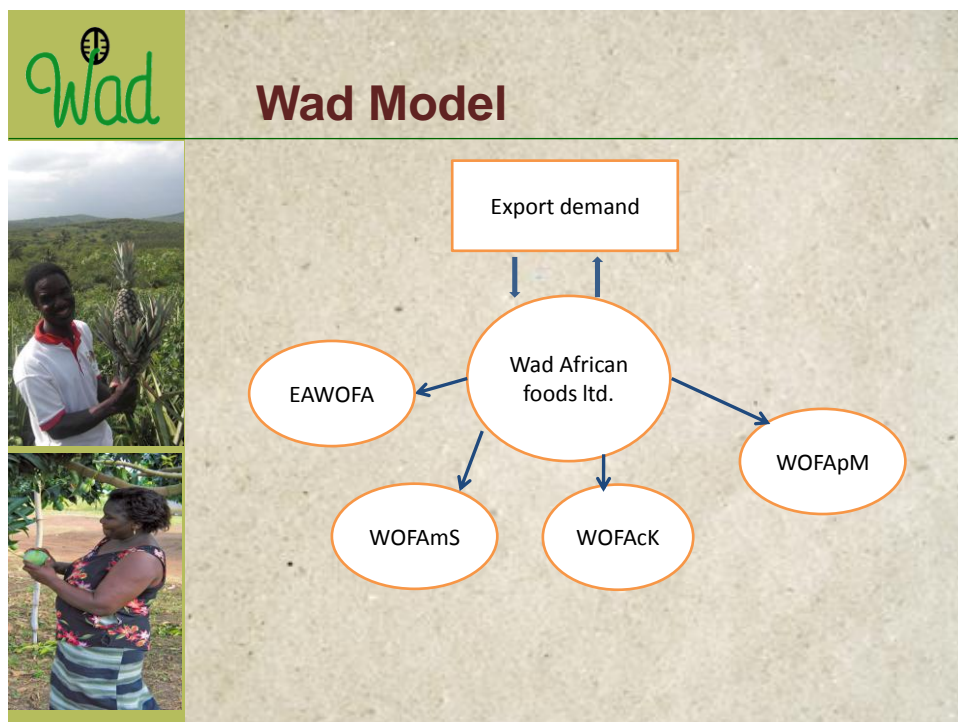
As the farmer based grew, there was a need to process some of its products as the fresh export market was not so big, to absorb all the products due to physical quality requirement

The company decided to add value to the fresh products it purchase from the farmers by processing them into dry form. The main aim being absorbing most of the fruits produced by the farmers. Indeed fruit purchases increased with the processing, for example a single kilogram of dry pineapple produced needs around 20 kg of pineapple.

The processing started in the year 2003 and in 2004 the company got an order from a big importer in organic products in Switzerland. The condition for purchase was that products are certified organic.

These brought some challenges of meeting the EU regulations by our small scale farmers in reference to compliance more particularly on documentation and understanding of the norm.

Schematic diagram of Wad model



Challenges:

Historically the pineapple fields, where EAWOFA members grows their crop has not been treated with chemical fertilizers and pesticides has also not been used. All the farm work is done manually on a small scale, so the organic certification was thought, to be very simple and fast. It didn't turn out to be that way. Some reasons being that there are no organic rules established in Ghana and there is no recognised certification body.

Organic exports from Africa to Europe. The experience of small scale farmers from Ghana

Practitioners' Track, IFOAM Organic World Congress 2014, 'Building Organic Bridges', 13-15 Oct., Istanbul, Turkey

The EU organic rules have to be used, meaning farms had to undergo two years organic in conversion status. With some farmers being illiterate record taking and keeping on planting, harvesting, sales and farm maintenance was a problem. There was also an issue of cost as certification body has to come from Europe.

Initially only few farmers were certified. The company later collaborated with FAO with its project: Increasing incomes and food security of small farmers in West and Central Africa through exports of organic and fair-trade tropical products, this led to a group certification and intensification of value addition to the fresh fruits.

Core messages and conclusions

The products of the farmer groups (pineapple, mango, coconut, papaya etc) are now exported weekly to Switzerland and Germany either in fresh or value added through the transformation into dry fruits. Through the certification the farmers receive constant training in ecological farming methods which has helped maintain soil fertility.

The business strategy that the company chose, that is high quality organic and fair-trade products for special niche market has enable the company to continue to be in business and grow slowly according to its own pace and market demands.