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“Solidarity in a competing world —
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Operational Context as a Driver for Post-Harvest Product Handling Practices: The Case of Pineapple Value Chain in South Western Uganda

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Abstract

The pineapple post-harvest system in SW Uganda is characterised by a wide variety of goal oriented product handling practices, in which the value chain actor seeks to regulate the activity system through reflexive observation of his actions, learning and setting handling rules, in order to gain the most income from his engagement in the value chain. The chain actor's capacity however, to effectively direct the post harvest activity system towards the direction he desires, is dependent upon the specific characteristics of the contextual frame in which that activity system is functioning.

The operational context usually consists of a wide range of infrastructural, institutional, financial, technical, knowledge and expertise aspects, all of which provide either opportunities for or constraints to the chain actor successfully influencing the activity system into a direction that ensures that his goal for performing a particular post-harvest product handling practice is effectively achieved.

A context with more opportunities, adequate packaging, storage, processing and transport infrastructure, access to credit, ready market and up to date market information, extension support, facilitates the value chain actor to stay in control and more effectively utilise the activity system to achieve his desired goal. On the other hand, an operational context with more constraints, rudimentary packaging, storage, processing and transport infrastructure, limited access to credit, ready market and market information as well as extension support, greatly limits the capacity of the controller to effectively regulate the system. The chain actor's product handling practices in this case are performed as a way of adapting to the unfavourable context, and much of the sought after benefits are not accrued to the actor.

Keywords: Activity system, constraints, operational context, opportunities, post-harvest product handling practice, value chain actor