

STAPLE FOODCROPS AND OILSEEDS

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ROOTS OF CURRENT PROBLEMS

Background Information

(a) Foodcrops

A wide diversity of foodcrops is grown in Uganda. In different regions different crops predominate; for instance, bananas form the staple in the high rainfall areas of the south whilst cereals become more important in the north. Some food crops such as bananas, cassava, sweet potato and various lentils are produced primarily for local, i.e. on-farm or rural, consumption, whilst others, such as maize, groundnuts, Irish potatoes and rice, are for export from the area of their production.

2. The effect of the economic war on the various food crops differed from area to area. Basically there were two conflicting sets of forces at work: one led to the increase in the area under a particular crop whilst the other reduced it. In the former case, a rise in the price of the food crop relative to traditional export crops led to resources, especially labour, but also land, being transferred to the production of food crops. This trend was reinforced as purchased foodstuffs became increasingly scarce. It should be noted, however, that 'farm-gate' prices of food crops did not rise uniformly throughout Uganda. This was due first to the increasing deterioration of all forms of road transport and secondly to the increased harassment of traders by Amin's troops. In the latter case the carriage of goods at night became impossible and during the day traders ran the risk, at the best of being forced to sell their produce below cost, or worse, of having their load, and also possibly their lorry, confiscated.

3. Against the forces working towards an expansion in foodcrop production were those which led many farmers to retreat further into subsistence production (that is, simply to maintain production at a level necessary to meet the food requirements of their own household). These forces were complex but possibly principal amongst them was the shortage of consumer goods, and especially the basic necessities - soap, sugar, salt, etc. As the economic war proceeded these became increasingly expensive at magendo prices and consequently out of reach of small farmers. Purchased agricultural tools, such as hoes and ox ploughs, also became difficult, if not impossible, to obtain, and so for many farmers both the incentive and the ability to increase output were absent. Between 1970 and 1978 the overall area under foodcrops probably increased by about 14% (i.e. 4.5% per annum). In contrast, the area under groundnuts fell by 32% and finger millet by 7%. One worrying aspect of the changes which have taken place in the area under the different foodcrops is the fact that the cultivation of cassava, a crop with a low nutrient content is increasing, apparently at the expense of the more nutritious grain crops, finger millet and sorghum.

4. There are in Uganda several areas which are likely to suffer a food deficit. The capacity of the nation, as a whole, to meet these deficits is dependent not only upon its total foodcrop production but also on its distributive network. Clearly, this has deteriorated greatly under the effects both of the economic and the liberation wars. It is most unfortunate, then, that it is reported that in Teso District there is likely to be a 60% deficit in food between October and January next due to poor rains and an outbreak of cassava mite. In Acholi due to the disruption of the liberation war, farmers did not plant as much as usual and this has been compounded by the rains being late. The District Commissioner has estimated, at the end of this year, there will be an 80% deficit in East Acholi and a 60% gain in West Acholi. Normally in such circumstances Acholi is able to obtain ample supplies of food from the neighbouring Lango area but this year that may not be possible because of the shortage of road transport. Another compounding factor is the purchase of food in the north of Juba. In this case, as always, the maldistribution of food during times of famine is increased by the 'free market' mechanism.

(b) Oilseeds

5. The major oilseed crops, excluding cottonseed, are groundnuts and sim-sim (sesame) and the minor ones are soya bean and sunflower. The main groundnut producing districts are Teso, Busoga and Bukedi whilst sim-sim is grown mainly in the Northern Region and north Bunyoro District. Soya beans do best in the wetter areas of the Lake Victoria crescent whilst sunflower is mainly restricted to Sebei, West Nile and Acholi Districts.

6. Various projects for increasing the production of oilseeds have been proposed since the early 1960s but none has been effective and, as mentioned above, groundnut production has actually fallen. As a result Uganda remains a net importer of oilseeds.

OUTSTANDING NEEDS

7. There are two aspects of food crop production which require attention. First there is the need for rehabilitating farmers' productive capacity through the supply of adequate inputs, and second there is the need to make special provision for possible food deficit areas. Oilseeds offer good prospects for increasing farmers' cash incomes as well as improving the people's diet. Production of vegetable oil also provides valuable animal feedcakes as a by-product.

POLICIES AND RESOURCES REQUIRED

8. Over the period 1972-78 an extreme shortage of basic tools developed. We estimate that 5m. hoes are required immediately. The EEC has made a grant available for the purchase of 1m. hoes and, provided the necessary mild steel imports can be obtained, the local industry - both large-scale and small-scale - has the capacity to produce a further 1m. per year. We recommend that every encouragement should be given to the small-scale producers so that after the recovery of the economy, they can continue to operate economically.

9. The Ministry of Agriculture has provided estimates of the immediate needs for purchased inputs for food production. Urgently required are imported wheat and maize seed for the Sebei area. These are their only crops and as they were unable to import seed in 1978 the quality of their planting materials has greatly deteriorated. They also require fertilisers. The Ministry has also suggested that tractors should be imported for the same area. Whilst we are, in general, opposed to the use of tractors for food cultivation on cost grounds we recognise that this is a special and probably worthwhile case.

10. The estimated cost of the rehabilitation of foodcrop production is shown in Table 6.1:

Table 6.1
Cost of Foodcrop Rehabilitation, 1979/80 - 1980/81

	1979/80		1980/81	
	Shs.m.		Shs.m.	
	Total	F.E	Total	F.E
Hoes (excluding EEC grant)	100.0	75.0	75.0	50.0
Other hand tools	20.0	16.0	15.0	12.
Tractors	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.2
Ox-drawn equipment	10.0	6.0	9.0	5.0
Barbed wire	12.0	12.0	5.0	5.0
Improved seed, etc.	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Fertilisers	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Insecticides and Fungicides	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
	152.0	119.	113.7	81.7

11. The food deficit reported to be likely to develop in Teso and Acholi will depend to a large extent on the mid-year rains. It is imperative that steps be taken immediately to monitor the situation. Transport will need to be allocated for this. We assume that this can be met from the Produce Marketing Board (PMB) estimates whose transport needs have been incorporated into the total transport requirements of the cooperative movement (see transport papers).

12. A further point requiring attention is the financial position of the PMB. It is reported to be seriously in debt. It is essential that its debt structure be examined and if necessary the Board be financially reconstructed. Indeed, there seems little reason why the PMB should not be wound up. Now that it is operating in the 'free market' it would seem likely that its responsibilities could be more effectively handled by private entrepreneurs, acting if required under government license. Its subsidiaries such as the Uganda Grain Milling Company, should be transferred to other parastatals such as UDC.

13. Because of poor communication facilities and lack of weather recording instruments, reports of food shortages are often greatly delayed. A national Early Warning System has been suggested to overcome these problems. It is proposed that this be done in association with the FAO Food Security Committee. Such a programme would require the establishment of a set of weather recording stations in strategic areas, and an appropriate field monitoring capacity. It would also require an expert from FAO for two years. We recommend that the project be commenced as soon as feasible.

14. The Ministry of Agriculture has entered into an agreement with the EEC for the re-establishment of its seed production scheme. Certified and registered seed is to be produced at six farms, two in Bunyoro and four in Lango/Acholi. Seeds will be processed at a factory in Masindi. The cost of the project, which includes the rehabilitation of three of the farms and the completion of a new factory is Shs. 30m. for seeds and equipment. The project should be able to commence in January 1980. Outgrowers should replace the state farms as soon as this becomes feasible.

15. Two other projects relating to the production of seed potatoes and other vegetable seeds have been brought to our attention. The former would cost approximately Shs. 0.9m. spread over two years and also requires the short-term appointment of an expert in varietal research into potatoes together with two overseas training fellowships of one year each. The second - a project which would re-establish the production of high-value vegetables for export requires the rehabilitation of Jezza Horticultural Farm together with its transport. It is to cost Shs. 5.5m. spread over two years. It would also require the appointment of two experts, a visiting consultant and several overseas training fellowships. Apart from providing the springboard for rehabilitating the former export vegetable industry, the scheme should also, through fostering nucleus estates and outgrower schemes, accelerate the diversification of small farm incomes into other high value fruit, vegetable and spice crops. On foreign exchange earning and equity grounds, therefore, we recommend that a start be made on this project in the second year of the reconstruction programme.