

# THE EXPERIMENT AT NYAKASHAKA, UGANDA

by

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Buhweju County was until recently the highest, most inaccessible and least developed part of Ankole District in Western Uganda. Because of the steepness of its slopes and quality of its soil, Buhweju did not share in the modest prosperity which came to Ankole with the widespread planting of coffee following the Second World War. The population was slipping away, having dropped by approximately 50% in the previous twenty years, mostly to the neighbouring Igara County, an area much more suitable naturally for peasant-grown coffee. By the early 1960's, large areas of the Buhweju Hills were almost entirely abandoned.

It was this empty, remote and beautiful area that was selected by the Church of Uganda to launch its first experiment in the informal training and settlement of school leavers. The project was made possible by the Church acquiring the services of an agricultural missionary with many years of practical experience with projects of this type in the Sudan.

Land ownership in Ankole is a vexing problem, still without any clearly defined system of regulation. In general, any Munyankole who wishes to farm can look out for himself a vacant piece of land which suits his taste and begin to cultivate it. More recently, there have been attempts to introduce a system of land titles which would work against the traditional system by apportioning the land in individual holdings to selected farmers who would have the right to fence and exercise the prerogatives of ownership. At Nyakashaka, the problem of obtaining the land has been solved partly by only using Banyankole in the scheme and partly by the Church receiving a "lease" to an area of 3,000 acres of hilly land from the local chief, an official who holds his office on a hereditary basis, he being a direct descendant of the former Kings of Buhweju. Elements of both the traditional and the modern systems of land tenure are visible in the land tenure arrangements adopted at Nyakashaka.

The Church obtained an area of 3,000 acres of uncultivated land mostly on steep hillsides at an altitude of 6,000 - 7,000 feet. The area has a cool climate and more than adequate rainfall (50" per annum) but the acidity of the soil made it unsuitable for the cultivation of those crops which the Ankole peasant farmer naturally inclines towards ("matoke" (plantains), coffee, groundnuts and maize). It was obvious that if an agricultural settlement was to be successfully established at Nyakashaka, the need was for high value crops which would make best use of the area's main natural resource, its relatively cool climate. The most comparable area to Buhweju climatically is Kigezi District in the extreme south-west of Uganda where a similar terrain and climate has enabled many co-operatives to emerge growing vegetables for the Kampala market. In the event, it was decided that the Nyakashaka settlement would base its economy on tea (particularly suitable for the acid soil) with strawberries and "English" potatoes as secondary cash earners. The settlement also has a small dairy herd attached to it although this is not felt to be especially successful.

The human factor is however the most important element in the Nyakashaka scheme. Those who founded the settlement were guided by certain general considerations. Firstly, and most urgently, young men with six to eight years of basic education had to be attracted to the land. This could be achieved only by producing in them a changed attitude to agriculture. It had to be shown that a life in agriculture could be, firstly, profitable, secondly, challenging intellectually, and thirdly, could provide for them and their families the benefits of community living hitherto associated with town dwelling.

It was also recognised that in many countries attempts to provide training for farming through farm schools or farmer training centres had been both costly and not particularly successful. The Nyakashaka experiment was therefore conducted on the assumption that farmer training could not be effectively carried out other than on the actual land which the future farmers would themselves work. There was also built into the scheme a positive attempt to counteract the attitude of the primary school "graduate" that he, as an educated man, could only be trained in agriculture for a place in the Government's advisory service. Young men joining the scheme had to be prepared to work as general labourers for a six month period with no definite prospect of acceptance as settlers at the end of this period. Having completed this "probation" period, the management selected from the labourers those considered suitable for acceptance as

settlers. The element of selection is felt to be important<sup>1</sup>. Even then, the settler's status is not guaranteed. For the three years the trainee farmers are allocated six acres of land. Of these, five are placed under tea and the other acre used for the settler's house and minor crops. During his three year "apprenticeship", the farmer is both trained in modern farming techniques, particularly as they affect the specialist crops grown at Nyakashaka, and in organising a system of co-operative marketing. The training given is to the largest degree possible of a practical sort. The trainees can implement directly, on land which they are personally identified with, the techniques they are taught. The ultimate reward comes at the end of the three year period when the farmer, provided he satisfies the management, receives an individual land title to his own farm, and membership of a successful co-operative organisation.

The Nyakashaka scheme is one of the few examples of this type of project which can be fully analysed in terms of cost-effectiveness. By the end of 1967, one hundred and twenty farmers had been trained and settled. The voluntary organisation which provided most of the financing for the first phase of the project has produced an analysis of capital and recurrent costs over the period 1963 to 1967. Capital costs are estimated as adequate to cover up to four hundred farmers<sup>2</sup>. These divide into a returnable and a non-returnable element. The former comprises loans to settlers for the purchase of tea stumps and fertiliser plus assistance with house building (£16,500<sup>3</sup>). The latter consists largely of capital equipment (tractor, rotavator, lorry, workshop equipment) and staff housing (£5,500). Recurrent expenditure over the same period again divides into a returnable and non-returnable element. The former covers the hire of occasional labour and maintenance costs (£7,500), the latter, staff salaries and travel costs (£10,900). The total cost of the scheme over the first four years was estimated at £40,000 of which £27,400 was ultimately reckoned to be recoverable from the farmers.

The Management insist that settlers should repay the various loans which they receive under the scheme. It is felt that repayment is good for the morale of the settlers and that

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<sup>1</sup> The scheme began with 110 applicants. Of these, 30 were accepted as the first batch of settlers.

<sup>2</sup> By mid-1967, 120 farmers had been settled.

<sup>3</sup> Calculation based on the cost of settling 100 farmers.

money recovered in this way can be used to train and settle further young men according to the principles already established. The repayments are made over several years by deductions from the individual settler's earnings through the co-operative dairy or from his green leaf account once the tea is fully productive.

The cost of launching this experiment can be estimated fairly easily. It is a much more difficult task to define precisely what has been gained by the Nyakashaka scheme since the impact of this project is registered in much more than economic terms and, even in economic terms, its effect extends over a much wider area than the one hundred and twenty or so young men who had been trained and settled by the end of 1967.

Firstly, it is possible to make a rough assessment of the earnings of fully trained farmers once the first tea attains full productivity (1968). It is estimated that the Nyakashaka tea will yield approximately £50 per acre to the grower after it has been processed. This figure is a modest estimate; in certain areas of Western Uganda tea has yielded £75 per acre. A settler should be able to earn from tea alone more than £250 per year. This sum will be increased by whatever he earns from dairying, strawberries or potatoes. From this, the settler will have to make a regular repayment towards the cost of his training and settlement but care will be taken not to overburden the young farmer with over heavy financial obligations. A net income of £300 per year should be possible.

Secondly, Nyakashaka is more than just an agricultural settlement. From the beginning, it has been the Management's policy to build up the ancillary services of the settlement. One of the first major achievements was to break down the isolation of Nyakashaka and Buhweju County generally by the construction of a road fifteen miles long through the hills to connect with the main Mbarara-Fort Portal road. This road was primarily necessary in order to get the newly plucked tea to the Ankole Tea Estates processing plant at Kyamuhunga but incidental benefits have accrued, not least being an intrepid free enterprise bus driver who makes a daily run from the main road at Bushenyi to the settlement and usually succeeds in getting there. A whole new area has been opened up by the road. This is well evidenced by the newly built housing, churches and schools, and the newly planted "shambas", which follow the road as it approaches Nyakashaka.

The economic effects of the Nyakashaka scheme do not

confine themselves to the settlers alone. The opinion has been expressed on various occasions that settlements composed exclusively of one age-group and one level of educational attainment are unbalanced socially. One of the scheme's main achievements has been its success in attracting other farmers to the area, settling in the valleys below Nyakashaka and deriving a steady income out of catering for the food needs of the settlers. At Nyakashaka itself, the land does not lend itself to the cultivation of local food crops and, in any case, is too valuable under cash crops. Local farmers have also been induced to settle on the periphery of the Nyakashaka area and to begin cultivation of their own tea which is marketed at the Nyakashaka co-operative. This trend should become more pronounced when the tea processing factory which the Uganda Government has pledged itself to establish in this area makes its appearance.

The economic implications of the widespread production of tea and other valuable cash crops at Nyakashaka and in the surrounding area cannot as yet be fully ascertained. Tea takes several years to become fully productive and, in fact, only in 1968 did the first Nyakashaka tea reach this stage. Nevertheless already it is possible to draw certain parallels between Buhweju before the scheme and the same area afterwards. Whereas the area produced virtually nothing in the early 1960's, with a scattered and dwindling population, it is estimated that the value of sales from the area during 1967 should be between £12,000 and £15,000, and this is before any of the Nyakashaka tea reaches full production.

The outward social effects are plain. A new society has emerged where previously there was nothing. The sound economic base built up at Nyakashaka is already being reflected in improved amenities, although the area where the scheme itself is situated does not lend itself to the building of community facilities. Land is carefully apportioned among the settlers, individual holdings being directly contiguous. Facilities such as schools, churches, a community centre, a sports field are already developing in the valley below Nyakashaka, not on the scheme itself. There are obvious social, as well as practical advantages in this. The settlers, by participation in the life of the the local community that is emerging, do not develop an exclusive society of their own but become one element in a more natural social unit that is building up in and around Nyakashaka.

Despite these social links with the rest of the area, the Nyakashaka settlers have a corporate spirit of their own which

is felt to be one of the most important factors in the success of the scheme. It has been the deliberate policy of the Management to promote this spirit through a variety of procedures which have now become firmly established. The farmers elect a committee which presents the settlers' collective viewpoint to the Manager and which has the right to consult with the scheme's Board of Governors who are the Trustees of the Nyakashaka land. It is felt to be important that the Manager should always be at hand for consultation with the committee. The members therefore know that the Management shares their detailed problems and that the scheme is not being directed from some distant official centre. Similarly, the co-operative society is an elected body. The farmers themselves are entirely responsible for its operations. It handles all the scheme's income and is responsible for the grading of the settlers' tea prior to despatch to the processing plant. Again, the success of the co-operative rests largely upon the community sense which has developed at Nyakashaka.

A recent observer of the Nyakashaka experiment<sup>1</sup>, in commenting upon the spirit of the settlers, has stressed that this feature dates from the early days of the settlement when the pioneer settlers living in grass huts were breaking in the first plots in preparation for the planting of tea. There was at this stage little indication to the young men of what Nyakashaka could become and hope could easily have been lost. The northern part of Ankole District has a rigorous dry season and in fact the first planting of tea stumps succumbed because of lack of rain. It was decided then that, in order to reinforce the group's determination and spirit, there should be a daily gathering of the farmers for prayers and to exchange the day's news. These open air assemblies did much to fuse the settlers together and cause them to stick to their purpose. Other factors undoubtedly contributed to the solidarity of the settlers. Nyakashaka in the early stages was a very remote and lonely place, particularly before the outlet road to Bushenyi was constructed. All of these factors no doubt contributed towards the sense of collective purpose which has enabled Nyakashaka to survive and prosper. As an indication of the degree of technical success which membership of a compact and determined social group of this sort can achieve, only one farmer was expelled from Nyakashaka in the first four years of its existence for failure to maintain an adequate standard

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<sup>1</sup> Belshaw 'The resettlement of school leavers in Uganda' p.3.

of husbandry and observe the rules which govern the scheme<sup>1</sup>.

The real test of Nyakashaka's success as an experiment in diverting the young school leaver into rewarding agricultural activity rests on whether the method which has succeeded in Buhweju can be transplanted elsewhere. The environmental conditions in Buhweju were after all rather exceptional. Empty mountain ranges, fertile enough to allow a cash-crop economy to be built up, are not all that common even in tropical Africa although Uganda still has large areas of virtually empty country which could be farmed profitably. Some guidance ought to be available within the next few years from what results from an experiment started in 1967 in Bunyoro District.

#### WAMBABYA PROGRESSIVE YOUNG FARMERS SCHEME

The original Manager at Nyakashaka, having launched the Nyakashaka experiment, accepted an invitation to attempt to repeat the Nyakashaka experiment in Bunyoro District. There the social problem of how young school leavers should be constructively employed is also present and, as in Buhweju, there is abundant empty land. At that point, the resemblance ceases. At Kidoma, near Hoima, on the peripheral flats of Lake Albert, the second training and settlement scheme for school leavers has been launched. The country is low, very wet and hot. Population is sparse and tropical forest very thick. Environmentally this area is a complete contrast to Nyakashaka.

The scheme has been allotted 5,000 acres which means that the individual farmer, on completion of his training period, will receive more than fifteen acres of land. For the present, all land is held by the Board of Governors who will grant individual holdings only when the Management decides that the trainee farmer has mastered his craft and is otherwise suited for full settler status. The training will again be completely informal, carried out by the Manager working directly with the trainees in the practical tasks of agriculture which they will be required to perform once they achieve "independence". Capitalization is approximately the same as at Nyakashaka.

The most unusual feature of the new scheme is that it

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<sup>1</sup> All farmers, on accepting their plots, must sign a document explaining the rules and conditions which govern the Nyakashaka scheme.

has again been decided that the economic base of the settlement will be tea. Despite the lower altitude and climate differences this is regarded as technically possible largely because of high rainfall (60" per year). It will however be necessary to supplement this by irrigation.

As with Nyakashaka, subsidiary crops will be grown although the exact pattern of cultivation is not yet clear. The extra land available will in this case make it possible for food crops to be grown by the settlers themselves and the main subsidiary cash crop is likely to be vanilla.

The scheme has been launched. Volunteers have come forward. The arduous preliminary phase of bush clearing and road making is now in progress. The ultimate verdict on the success of the Nyakashaka method in an alternative environment can not however be given as yet.

The experiments at Nyakashaka and Kidoma provide many noteworthy pointers in the planning of informal education for modern agriculture.

Firstly, great emphasis is laid on the attainment of commercial viability as quickly as possible. The initial phase is hard and it seems essential that the trainees receive some cash reward for their efforts as quickly as possible.

Secondly, the schemes are not heavily institutionalised. Nyakashaka began with a collection of grass huts and emphasises open-air instruction. Only now, with the scheme beginning to pay solid cash dividends, is there a tendency towards constructing permanent housing and community facilities. Much emphasis has been laid in other schemes on the need to have such facilities from the beginning. Nyakashaka does not bear out this point. The essence seems to be commercial success. The "luxury" items - schools, churches, etc - can come later.

Thirdly, training is completely informal and carried out in direct association with the particular crops in which the scheme is specialising. No need is felt for organising instructional facilities. Much stress is laid on self-education, "learning by doing". The role of the settlers in running the co-operative is noteworthy in this respect.

Fourthly, there is great stress laid on the need for the settler to repay a substantial element of the cost of the scheme.



However, repayments are not insisted upon immediately on the settler being established and are spread over several years so that the farmer is not crushed under an overweighty burden of debt.

Fifthly, emphasis is laid on the need to develop a corporate spirit which will fuse the group together, give them a sense of common purpose and dedication to the task of making their scheme a success. The settlers are closely involved in the operation of the scheme so that they understand clearly that it is their effort not that of some remote external agency. At the same time, the society created must guard against building social barriers between itself and the neighbouring community and practical co-operation between settlement and the rural community at large develops through the participation of the local farmers in certain activities of the settlement and through the sharing of certain community facilities.

Finally, the role of external agencies is clearly delineated; firstly, they provide the necessary capital assistance in order to prime the pump and set the development process going; secondly, they provide expertise, initial leadership and a sense of direction which is always close at hand, particularly in the early stages. The capital element is kept deliberately small in order to guard against the danger of creating over-luxurious training facilities and the external presence is gradually withdrawn as the scheme gains the self-sustaining momentum which is necessary if it is to endure.

Unquestionably, the Nyakashaka scheme is one of the most interesting cases of school leavers being successfully trained for and established as farmers. Whether the formula can be technically duplicated is one of the most interesting rural development issues facing Western Uganda at present. There are however issues which the attempts to reproduce the experiment at Kidoma cannot resolve. These largely centre on the degree to which the Manager's presence is a necessary element in the process and on the effect of the very different climate conditions on the settlers' ability to tackle the physical conditions of Bunyoro. (Buhweju has a most invigorating climate whereas Bunyoro can produce tropical conditions of the most enervating sort). Nevertheless, in a field in which successes are few and costly failures all too common, the experiments in the informal training and resettlement of school leavers in Western Uganda merit the closest attention.