

Impressions from South-West Uganda

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Summary

Certain features of the prevailing agricultural and livestock management practices in four districts of the South-West Uganda are briefly described. This area is characterized by rather high elevation, good rainfall, fertile soil and hills with steep slopes and mountains in some parts. In three of the four districts land is becoming scarce though agricultural production is high but traditional. Cash and food crop production are prevalent; the staple food being plantain banana and milk production is noticeable. The economy shows evident difficulties mainly due to the so called mismanaged Amin's regime and the ensuing Liberation War. Comments are made on the Queen Elisabeth National Park and some prices are given.

Résumé

Les caractéristiques de l'agriculture et de l'élevage de quatre districts dans le Sud-Ouest de l'Ouganda sont sommairement décrites: altitude assez élevée, bonne pluviosité, sols fertiles, mais collines à pentes raides et montagnes dans certaines parties. La terre devient rare dans trois districts, ce qui explique une production agricole assez élevée quoique de type traditionnelle. On pratique des cultures vivrières et de rente, mais l'aliment de base est la banane plantain. La production laitière n'est pas à négliger. L'économie montre les traces du régime Amin et de la guerre de libération. Quelques commentaires sont faits sur le Queen Elisabeth National Park, et quelques prix sont indiqués.

The author had the opportunity of participating in a project preparation mission in Uganda in March-April, 1985 at the request of the Food and Agriculture Organisation/International Fund for Agriculture Development/Belgian Survival Fund. The findings and the recommendations of the mission have been submitted through appropriate channels and no comments there on will be made here.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to brief the readers of TROPICULTURA on some present day factuals and informations on Uganda.

Following a request from the Government of Uganda, it had been decided to launch an Integrated Rural Development Project in the south-western part of the country. A preliminary identification team visited the country in early 1984 to identify and set up the broad guidelines for this project while the aim of the present mission was on actual project preparation. A rather large team of experts had been sent to Uganda for some weeks to analyse the situation and to submit detailed proposals. The team was composed of a mission leader for coordination and contacts with local authorities as well as an agronomist, a livestock specialist, a road-and-water-supply specialist, an economist, and a human health specialist.

Some of these specialists were F.A.O. staff representatives while the others were external consultants; the World Health Organisation sent its own staff member. The Government of Uganda fully supported the project preparation mission by providing vehicles and drivers and by appointing officers from the Ministries of Agriculture, of Animal Industries and Fisheries, of Culture and Community Development and of Health. Supplementary vehicles were also provided by the local offices of the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Health Organisation.

The Republic of Uganda lies on the equator and is a landlocked country; the nearest port of Mombasa in Kenya being 1,000 kilometres away. The country covers an area of 241,139 square kilometres (i.e. 8 times the area of Belgium) but 17 percent of this area is covered with water. Situated on the East African plateau, most of the country lies at an altitude between 900 and 1,500 metres and is flanked by the mountains on the eastern and western sides. The highest peak of Mount Margherita reaches a height of 5,119 metres in Ruwenzori range.

Large areas of land in the southern and central parts of the country are agriculturally rich sustaining intensive farming and ranching while in the north and east, the land is ideally suited for pastoralism.

Wild animals are found in some areas. The favourable elevation provides Uganda a mild and pleasant climate throughout the year (18°3 to 29°4) with little monthly temperature variation. The Lake Victoria, one of the sources of the Nile river, generates its own weather pattern due to its very large area and volume; waves are common and storms weather may prevail.

The average annual rainfall in Kampala was 1,502 mm until 1966 but in more recent years only 760 mm precipitation has been recorded.

The population is estimated at 13.9 million (based on 1980 census) with an annual population growth rate of 2.8 percent. Approximately 90 percent of the population is rural and depends on agriculture for subsistence.

The stipulated project area is composed of four districts in the south-west, i.e. Mbarara, Bushenyi, Rukungiri and Kabale whose characteristics are quite different.

Mbarara district, the largest of the zone, is mainly involved in extensive cattle production; it is estimated that there are about 1 million cattle heads. Goat rearing is also very popular (estimated population: more than 0.4 million) followed by sheep (estimated population: approximately 0.14 million).

The countryside is hilly with large areas of savannah and some ranching schemes; rainfall recorded is 928 mm and the altitude of Mbarara town is 1,470 m.

The inhabitants belong mainly to the Bahima tribes.

Bushenyi and Rukungiri districts are much smaller but are more densely populated, leaving no land available for extensive farming. Thus a very small number of heads of cattle are available and most of these are kept for milk production in small farms of 5-10 animals. On the other hand, these two districts are very active in crop production viz. coffee, tea, cassava, sweet potatoes, cabbages, beans, etc.

The fourth district, Kabale, has been called the small Switzerland of Uganda as it lies at a higher altitude (Kabale town though in a valley is 1,870 metres above sea level) with mountains and steep slopes. However, the shortage of land has induced the population to cultivate where ever land is available including the top of the hills; terrace cultivation is still practised. Morning fog is common, which favours tea and pasture production, but the mean temperatures are low (10° to 22°C).

Consequently, one of the main differences between Kabale district and the rest of the country is the relative absence of the banana plantation. The staple food in Uganda is *Musa* or "plantain" called locally "matoke" and huge parts of land are covered by banana plantation which grow well like most of

the other crops. Indeed the soil in general is very fertile and thus substantiating Winston Churchill's observations "Uganda is the pearl of Africa".

In fact, Uganda has been one of the most productive countries and remained the best of East Africa until Idi Amin's decisions in 1972 to expell all the settlers of Asians origin who were mainly involved in trade. With this exodus the decline of the Ugandan economy started. The growth rate of domestic products averaged 0.2 percent only over the years 1970-78 compared to 5.9 percent during the decade prior to this period. The Amin's regime fell down in April 1979 after the Liberation War which was initiated with the support of Tanzania.

Mbarara town has been one the worst hit and most destroyed towns during the Liberation War. Many buildings were bombed and property looted and even now scars of this war of liberation can be seen in the town. Uganda has not yet recovered from the ravaging effects of this war.

The local administration is evidently lacking financial resources and there are general complaints of shortage of funds for running costs and maintenance works (buildings, roads, vehicles, etc). Nevertheless, the civil servants have still a very high morale and private businessmen are quite active.

Visitors or consultants originating from the Continent will discover in Uganda many traces of influence of the British colonial period. English together with Swahili are the official languages of the country and, once again very typical British, one has to drive on the left-hand side of the road. Police's uniform is the same as it had been in the sixties, signal posts are in wood and painted in black on white, people keep on measuring the distances in miles although the metric system is official, and use of tea is widespread as well as of golf courts. I have been offered by almost all the civil servants I met something to eat or to drink in a bar in town or in a "field-boutique" on livestock markets.

One of my Ugandese colleagues occasionally explained that it is very traditional to offer some foodstuff to a visiting guest because of the belief that what one should have spared by not offering to the guest would in any case be wastefully eaten by rodents who will invade host's house, if the guest has not been adequately welcomed.

The team decided to break the pressure for weekend and moved to the renamed Queen Elisabeth National Park: less than two hours drive from Bushenyi.

I happened to have visited this Park earlier in 1958 and spent few nights at the Mweya Safari Lodge. The view of nature is evidently as wonderful as it was during my last visit and the lodge is situated on

a peninsular part of Lake Edward. The Ruwenzori mountainous range cut the horizon but the Margherita Peak, well known for its all the year round glaciers and snow covers, was not very spectacular.

An evening and a morning trip in the Park enabled us to see many Uganda waterbucks, buffaloes (from a distance), some warthogs, guinea fowls, fish eagles, etc. Hippos were abundant on the lake side, and we saw at a short distance some of these grazing. On our way back to the lodge and with the approaching dusk, a ranger guide suddenly ordered us to stop the vehicles since a herd of about 30 elephants was crossing a track just behind a curve but inside an area covered by thorny trees and high bushes. Animals of all ages were present, from old to very young ones. The impression I got was that the abundance of wild animals had been tremendously reduced. This was subsequently confirmed by the following story circulating locally. During the Liberation War, the animals of the then called Idi Amin Park went into voluntary exile in Zaïre where from these kept on monitoring the Ugandan troubles and later returned to the Queen Elisabeth Park after the election of President Milton Obote.

Some updated financial figures should also be provided here. The official exchange rate of foreign currencies fluctuates, and during the end of March, U.Sh. 550-570 was offered for U.S.\$ 1.

In Kampala, hotel accomodation (old colonial style and acceptably managed) is worth U.S.\$ 40-50 per day but is payable only in a foreign currency.

However, stay for a night at Mweya Lodge which is run by a parastatal costs only the equivalent of U.S.\$10-12. A dinner is usually worth U.S.\$8, but costs only U.S.\$6 at the lodge. Entrance fee for the Park is U.Sh. 1,000 only, and the fee of a ranger-guide is U.Sh. 200. Monthly wages for a casual labourer is around U.S.\$ 30 in Kampala. Bride dowry can presently reach U.Sh. 2 millions but is more often offered in kind such as 6 or more cows in the traditional livestock areas rather than in cash. A mature Ankole cow in good condition is usually valued

at about U.Sh. 120,000. The milk delivered by the producers at milk collecting centres presently fetches U.Sh. 150 for a litre while until March 1984 it fetched only U.Sh. 50.

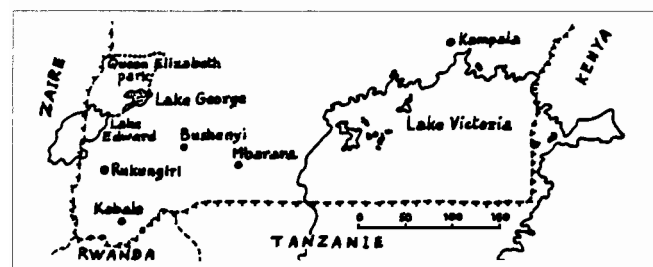
Within the brief period of our stay the cost of a bottle of half-liter local beer in hotels went up suddenly from U.Sh. 900 to U.Sh. 1,2000.

In Kampala and in other areas visited by the mission neither food nor security problems have been encountered but there is a shortage of hotel accommodation. In the countryside agriculture and livestock situations are recovering though much has still to be accomplished. Fortunately, the potential is there, and indeed it is very high.

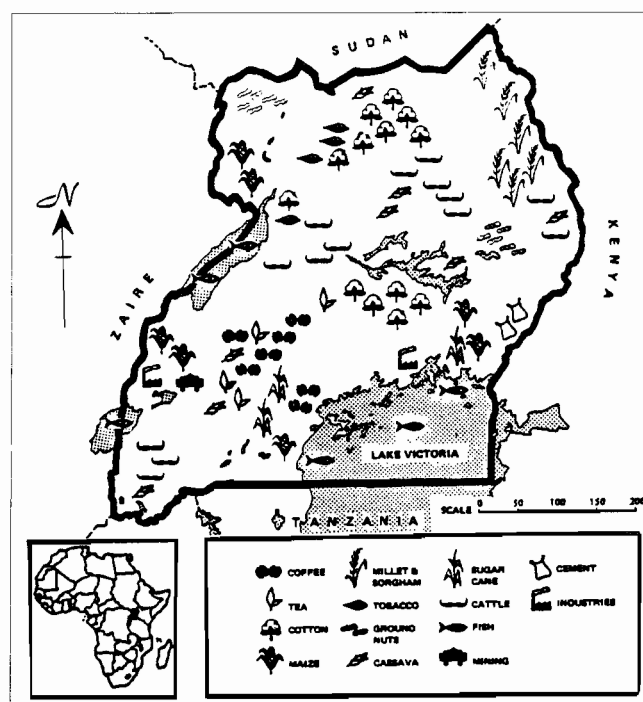
However, this mission gave me the opportunity to experience something new for me, though having been and still travelling in Africa for more than 25 years.

This new element is the "A.B.F." or "African Baking Factor", which is the safety factor one has to use in Africa when planning anything according to European standards.

The views expressed here do not represent those of any of the organisations evoked, and the author assumes entire responsibility. He is indebted to Prof. Dr. V. Kumar for having reviewed the manuscript, written in May 1985.



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Uganda: Agriculture and Industry.