

Eradicating Poverty: The Case of Equator Valley Farm

Agriculture is by far the most important sector of the Ugandan economy; 89% of the population is rural. The sector accounts for 51% of GDP, 90% of exports, and employs 80% of the employed household population. Agricultural output comes almost exclusively from about 2.5 million small holders, 80% of whom have less than two hectares each. The predominance of small-holder farming implies that any improvements in this sector will be equally distributed.

The country is favored by a good climate and fertile soils and the agricultural sector has the potential to feed the country, to supply food for the regional market, to export horticultural products in addition to the traditional crops, to produce industrial raw materials, and generally to act as a powerful engine of growth. The key to realizing this potential is increasing yields by raising the productivity of the farmer. The government of Uganda is well aware of this and has already taken steps to provide a system of land tenure conducive for development; control of plant and animal disease; improve feeder roads; investment in research and extension; dismantling of monopolies in the agricultural sector like Coffee Marketing Board, Produce Marketing and Lint Marketing boards in a bid to improve market prices.

It is clear that the government has a heavy task ahead of it. We at Uganda Martyrs University, through the Equator Valley Farm projects, are supplementing some government efforts here amongst the farmers of Nkozi in a bid to improve their yields and thereby their incomes.

Nkozi Sub-county

Nkozi sub-county is situated at the southern end of Mpigi district and is

bordered to the west by Masaka district and to the south by Lake Victoria. It lies in what is known as the Lake Crescent area which receives 1200 - 2000mm of rain annually into two rainy seasons. The sub-county is approximately 308 square kilometers and for administrative purposes is divided into 8 parishes. It has a population of 25,000 inhabitants, the majority of whom are women. There are about 23 schools, 1 hospital, a few health centers and 1 university in the area.

The majority of the inhabitants are farmers and grow mainly sweet potatoes (the major cash crop), coffee, bananas, beans, sorghum and water melons. As regards livestock, there are a few commercial dairy farmers (normally with 1 - 3 animals), and poultry farmers (a typical farmer would have 200 birds). Most homes, however, keep chicken and pigs that scavenge in the coffee and banana plantations, and some families own 1 - 3 local cows which they either tether or graze with other animals on land considered not to belong to individuals.

Equator Valley Farm

The farm is owned by Uganda Martyrs University and was started in 1993 with the following objectives: to provide food for the university community; to generate income; to form a base for extension work in the Nkozi area; to form a base for the establishment of a Faculty of Agriculture. The farm land is approximately 560 acres and is adjacent to the university. Current farm activities include: poultry and pig rearing, dairy farming, crop production: maize, bananas, passion fruit, cassava, and sweet potatoes and agro-processing producing animal feeds and extension work.

For purposes of my presentation, I will focus only on extension work and farm support services. We have only concentrated on those areas which are related to our activities in which the local community has indicated interest and which we can support financially. The farm employs a full-time extension worker who works closely with the Assistant Agricultural Officer from the district.

Our main input areas in relation to food production have been workshops, demonstration gardens, the provision of reliable seeds, and providing a market for local produce. Several workshops have been conducted for the farmers in Nkozi focusing on improved methods of maize, soya bean, passion fruit, poultry and dairy production. Demonstration gardens have been set up in 8 parishes mainly for maize

production. The plots show correct spacing and the benefits of using certain inputs like fertilizers and early timing. Our banana plantation (approximately 15 acres) is also used for demonstration purposes and as a source of clean planting material. This garden was developed in close collaboration with one of the research stations near Kampala. We are agents of Uganda Seeds Company and we provide seeds at a reasonable price to the farmers at the beginning of the planting season. We are currently multiplying planting material for mosaic resistant cassava plants. We buy all maize and soya directly from the farmers in Nkozi at reasonable prices; we do not use "middle men".

With regard to livestock, we have also employed demonstration units. We have designed simple poultry houses using cheap local materials for purposes of demonstration and we are encouraging the farmers to use them. Our zero-grazing unit (with four dairy cows) is being used to train farmers on the feeding and management of dairy cows and we are also carrying out trials on different methods of fodder conservation at the unit. Through our heifer programme, some heifers will be passed on to families who will, in turn, pass on their first heifer to another family. The first heifer will be given out in April 1999. The piggery has also been a source of high-quality piglets to interested farmers. We shall soon be able to sell birds at the point of lay (after we have raised them from day 1 to 18 weeks). This is very important because many farmers do not know the techniques of chick rearing.

Our Impact

Although it is difficult for me to quantify at this stage, I can say with confidence that we have made contact with at least 60 farmers and signs of our work can be seen in some of the following areas. Some farmers have mobilized themselves into productive groups through which they can be reached by us easily, and there 13 such groups in the area. Many farmers are now producing maize using the guidelines we gave them, such as: the spacing of the plants and post-harvest storage. Farmers have

adopted some of the practices employed in our banana plantation. Our workshops are well attended and rarely do we have below 40 participants, many of whom come back for follow-up to our offices. Many farmers have approached us for technical information in different aspects of agriculture. For example, we are working closely with the Nkozi livestock Breeders Association to try and get a lasting solution for tick control in the area.

In all this we have been agents for development in the region and, more importantly, a means whereby the local farmers can improve their yields and livestock. It is in ways such as this, that poverty eradication can progress at a healthy pace.

Equator Valley Farm
Uganda Martyrs University
Uganda

Esau Galukande