

ENHANCING THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF DRY LAND AREAS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

By: Leonard Msemakweli

Uganda Co-operative Alliance (UCA)

1.0 Introduction

- Uganda, with per capita income of US\$ 330 per annum has an economy largely based on natural resources.
- Over 80% of the population live in rural areas and 73% are engaged in agriculture for food and income
- Uganda's total population is estimated to be nearly 30million, with a 3.2% per annum population growth rate.
- For sometime to come, natural resource exploitation will continue to form the basis for livelihoods of the majority people in Uganda.

Introduction (Cont'd)

- Farming is almost entirely by small-scale farmers, with an average farm size of 2.5ha
- Uganda used to have some of the most fertile soils on the African continent, but currently soil degradation and general environmental degradation is becoming a big problem.
- About 35% of Uganda is dry lands occupying what is commonly referred to as the “cattle corridor”, an area of approximately 84,000 km²

Introduction (Cont'd)

- The country is increasingly faced with challenges of environment management, even more so in the dry lands which are more fragile.
- It is estimated that Uganda's forests are disappearing at an alarming rate of 2% per annum.
- Six thousand (6,000) ha of trees are being cut down every month or about 72,000 ha in a year.

2.0 Major Problems in Uganda's Dry lands

■ Overgrazing

- Much of the so-called cattle corridor is considered over-stocked and seriously degraded.
- This has resulted into soil compaction, erosion (particularly gully erosion) and emergence of low-value grass species and vegetation with subsequent declines in carrying capacity of the land and therefore low productivity.

Major Problems (Cont'd)

■ Deforestation

- The major causes of deforestation are provision of wood fuel and clearing of land for agricultural activities.
- About 80% of the total population who live in rural areas directly depend on firewood for their energy needs, and a big fraction of the urban dwellers depend on charcoal.

Major Problems (Cont'd)

■ Inappropriate farming systems

- The most critical problem in Uganda is that the majority of farmers have inadequate knowledge about improved farming methods.
- There is intensified land and environmental degradation leading to loss of the productive potential of the dry lands leading to famines, low household incomes and increased social unrest in the affected areas.

Major Problems (Cont'd)

- This is exacerbated by the fact that in Uganda, there is widespread reliance on rain fed agriculture, subsistence farming and pastoralism, poor crop and animal husbandry practices, and population pressure all contributing to vulnerability to drought.

3.0 Uganda Cooperative Alliance (UCA) and its Role in Enhancing the Economic Value of Dry lands.

3.1 About UCA

- UCA started in 1961 as the umbrella organization for all cooperatives in Uganda.
- Its mission is to provide high quality support services to cooperatives and their members on a sustainable basis.
- Since the early 90s UCA has been involved in reviving and re-organizing the co-operative movement in Uganda which had totally collapsed due to sudden and unfavourable changes in government policy at that time.

UCA (Cont'd)

UCA was set up with three main objectives:

- Advocate for and represent the Ugandan cooperatives.
- Member Education and training of leaders/managers
- Mobilization of resources for the development of the cooperative movement in Uganda.

UCA (Cont'd)

- Government withdrawal of financial and technical support that it used to extend to co-operatives, played a major role in making the co-operatives collapse.
- With that collapse, UCA found it inevitable to take up the challenge of getting directly involved in co-operative development activities without which co-operatives would never have come back.
- Currently UCA provides a range of services, including strengthening the role of co-operatives in Agriculture, micro-finance, gender and youth and developing new opportunities for the co-operative members.

UCA (Cont'd)

- UCA collaborates with a number of development partners both at national and international levels.
- UCA's key international partners include the Swedish Cooperative Centre –Vi Agro forestry (SCC-Vi), the Canadian Cooperative Association (CCA) and the Royal Norwegian Society for Development (NorgesVel).

3.2 Interventions of UCA that contribute to enhancing value in dry lands

A. Identification and Development of new Opportunities

- With liberalization and growing regional integration, new markets for new products that did not exist before are emerging.**

- Internationally we are also witnessing increasing demand for products such as fresh water fish, a variety of tropical horticultural products, honey and even beef.
- UCA identifies the products, searches for a partner and decides which area of the country have the potential to produce such products.
- The potential of different ecological zones, including dry lands, are taken into account when new opportunities are being identified.

B. Provision of a Wider Choice of Income Generation

- In Uganda, cooperatives in the past only engaged in a few cash crops like coffee and cotton.**
- This has changed as co-operatives now produce and market a wide range of commodities and products such as pond fish, beef, honey, dairy products, upland rice, horticulture products and many others.**

- **With such a wide range of possibilities and choices, combined with education, people in the dry lands will soon have no reason to depend on things such as charcoal burning that exacerbate the risk of environmental degradation especially in dry land.**

C. Enterprise Selection

- As part of our effort to contribute towards moving farming from subsistence to commercial farming, cooperative members are being guided in the selection of enterprises based on the suitability of the environments.**
- Related to this, UCA collaborates closely with Research organizations in the country to enable farmers to access crop varieties that are drought resistant and those that have short maturity periods.**

D. Organic Farming

- **There is a continuous effort to encourage and train farmers in our programmes to make and use compost manure from crop and animal wastes/residues.**
- **This is extremely useful particularly in dry lands where the majority of our farmers cannot afford inorganic fertilizer.**
- **Besides, many of the farmers in the dry lands keep cattle and therefore it is not so difficult for them to make their own manure.**

E. Rainwater Harvest Technologies

- **Many rain water harvesting are now available on the Ugandan market.**
- **UCA takes interest in identifying such technology and bringing them to the people so that they can use it to raise productivity and reduce risks.**
- **UCA trains small scale farmers to harvest water both for domestic consumption and livestock production.**

- Small-scale irrigation technologies are also coming on the market and UCA identifies and promotes these among the small-scale farmers in co-operatives.
- Furthermore, livestock farmers in the cattle corridors which fall in the dry lands of Uganda are encouraged to dig communal valley dams which makes it a lot easier and cheaper than it would be for individual farmers.

F. Promotion of Agro Forestry

- **Agro forestry initiatives are currently being promoted among the members of co-operatives.**
- **In order to sustain the production of tree species farmers are trained in tree nursery establishment and management**
- **As well, centralized tree nurseries have been and continue to be set up at cooperative level for the members in different regions.**

- Members of these cooperatives benefit since they get the tree seedlings at substantially lower prices than on the open market. This is an incentive to them.
- The youth in the cooperative movement have benefited from tree nursery -related projects because they sell the seedlings and earn good income. Hence, a source of employment for the youth.

G. Introduction of energy saving technologies

- UCA has been promoting the use of energy saving technologies among the farming community through use of energy saving stoves in the households.**
- This has contributed to reduced rate in forest destruction in some areas and we intend to continue.**
- The energy saving stoves have been found to have up to 30% efficiency compared to our conventional three stones cooking stoves.**

- UCA has also started exploiting possibilities on use of biogas as an alternative for cooking. We are setting up demos.
- UCA's trainings on energy saving technologies targets mainly the women and youth so as to help reduce on the time wasted in collecting firewood.

H. Networking with other Players in Environment Management in Dry lands

- UCA collaborates closely with a number of players involved in the management of the environment.
- Some of these are public bodies, Research organizations and NGOs

4.0 Conclusion

- There is potential for enhancing the value of dry lands in Uganda.
- Two of the lessons that UCA has learnt;
 - a. The potential cannot be realized unless the small-scale farmers themselves are well-organised.
 - b. It is very critical that interventions are undertaken through partnerships if they are to be effective.

Thank You