



Agriculture in Karamoja

The need for integrated livestock-crop development

Introduction

Uganda is ranked as the 163rd country in the UN Human Development Index, and falls within the least developed country category. Within Uganda, there are also profound north-south differences in development - the north accounts for 38% of Uganda's population, but 70% of the country's chronically poor households.ⁱ Within the northern region Karamoja is the poorest sub-region with reports of 75 to 80% of the population in poverty.ⁱⁱ This Policy Brief explores the role of agriculture in Karamoja's development, and in particular, the need to support balanced and integrated livestock-crop strategies.

The Government of Uganda has long recognized the importance of agriculture as a pathway to resilience-building and economic growth, and agriculture is referenced in the Constitution: Objective XI (ii) provides that the state shall, "... stimulate agricultural, industrial, technological and scientific development by adopting appropriate policies and enactment of enabling legislation", while Objective XXII (a) provides that the state shall "... take appropriate steps to encourage people to grow and store adequate food."ⁱⁱⁱ

Prioritizing agriculture make good sense as agriculture plays a central role in the economy, including providing 60% of the population with its main form of livelihood. While agriculture's contribution to gross domestic product declined from 64% to 37% from 1985 to 2016, it "... contributes more than 70% of Uganda's export earnings and provides the bulk of raw materials for most of the industries that are predominantly agro-based."^{iv} Studies carried out by the World Bank confirm that, "In countries where the share of agriculture in overall employment is large, broad-based growth in agricultural incomes is essential to stimulate growth in the overall economy, including the non-farm sectors selling to rural people" and that "... every dollar of growth from agricultural products sold outside the local area in poor African countries leads to a second dollar of local rural growth from additional spending on services, local manufactures, construction materials, and prepared foods."^v

While there is a strong case for investment in agriculture at the national level, it is less clear that agricultural-led development improves resilience outcomes in Karamoja, due to its different agro-ecology and socio-economy. For example, in contrast to Uganda's bi-modal rainfall with two distinct rainy seasons, rainfall in Karamoja sub-region is mono-modal, with a single rainy season. This starts in late February or early March and continues with breaks through to September. Rainfall in Karamoja is also highly variable, averaging 300 mm in the east and rising to 1200mm in the west, annually. In some years too, the rains are well below normal, the dry season is extended, and drought impacts not only on cropping but also on livestock production and productivity. There are also important socio-cultural differences between Karamoja and the rest of the country, as described below.

Historical context

The sub-region has a long history of violent conflict that can be traced back to the colonial administration's attempt to disarm the Karamojong in the late 1920s. This was unsuccessful and in response the British declared Karamoja a closed district. Closing Karamoja off from the rest of the country fostered 'war-like' and other negative caricatures that further encouraged 'them-and-us' thinking. Idi Amin sought to 'solve' the Karamoja problem through detention, torture and killings. After his overthrow in 1979 the Karamojong and their neighbours in South Sudan and Kenya acquired huge numbers of small arms, that precipitated new and more violent forms of cattle rustling.^{vi} In the period 1980 - 2000, the Karimojong rustled half-a-million cattle from Soroti and Katawi Districts,^{vii} together with hundreds of thousands from Teso, Lango and Acholi districts.

Ethnographers report that the Karimojong have inhabited the sub-region since the early 1800s, gradually occupying the central belt through agro-pastoralism that successfully combined seasonal cropping with transhumance livestock production. As with other agro-pastoralists in East Africa, the Karimojong regard the combination of crop farming and transhumance livestock keeping as mutually reinforcing: when the first fails, the second helps absorb the shock, and vice-versa. Livestock can also be trekked out from drought affected areas whereas crops cannot.

In 2001, President Museveni launched a disarmament campaign in Karamoja,^{viii} but this stalled when the army was redeployed to fight the Kony insurgency. A second phase of Karamoja disarmament was launched in 2006 (when Kony relocated to South Sudan), and this phase included “protected kraals”, which required livestock be herded in proximity to army barracks. As a result, pastures were overgrazed, milk production collapsed, and thousands of livestock lost; between 2008 to 2013 these losses were estimated at 75% of cattle, 68% of goats, and 65% of sheep.^{ix} The scale of these losses has been described as “a once-in-a-lifetime drought”, which would need 10 to 12 years for recovery.^x Having lost most of their livestock, the Karimojong handed in their weapons, the protected kraals were dismantled, and relations between the Karimojong and Government have steadily improved.

Aware that it would take years to rebuild their herds, many Karimojong turned to cropping, supplemented by activities such as the sale of firewood, poles, and grass; making and sale of charcoal and bricks; brewing local beer; and casual labour, including mining. Recognizing too the agro-ecological limitations of the central zone and its variable climate, many migrated to the wetter “green belt”. This shift was encouraged by the Government which, for example, distributed 7,000 oxen and ploughed more than 10,000 hectares for planting between 2012 to 2016. The Karimojong were operating under the purview of the state, more settled and increasingly dependent on cropping.

The Peace Dividend

The peace in Karamoja that followed disarmament attracted increasing levels of international development assistance, which in 2016 reached an estimated US\$60 million. Forecasts for 2018 suggest a further increase in aid to more than US\$75 million. An analysis of investment by sector confirms that basic services attract the most funding, followed by food and nutrition security.^{xi} The impact is visible: tarmac is replacing rutted murrum on the main access roads; towns are better connected to the national grid; health, education and transport services have been strengthened; mobile phone usage has been expanded; there have been impressive gains in the provision of potable water and sanitation; there are more public and private clinics; and access to health and nutritional information is improved.^{xii} Administrative and market towns are booming.

Despite this impressive progress, a food security and nutrition assessment in June 2016^{xiii} found that:

- More than half the population were food insecure, and 12% were severely food insecure;
- From December 2014 to March 2016, the number of children without access to milk rose from 30% to 70%;
- Only 12% of households reported access to animal-source proteins;
- Global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates improved from 14% to 11% during the year, but, *“This probably reflects a scaling-up of food distributions to almost half the population.”* Without intervention, the, *“Trend in GAM in Karamoja over the last five years would likely depict a worsening situation, in particular, for children of 6–23 months, where GAM prevalence is at critical levels in most districts.”*

Factors driving food insecurity were listed as follows:

- Erratic rainfall has resulted in poor harvests for the previous three consecutive seasons, and only 24% of households reporting any food stocks;
- Increased food prices to very high levels have significantly impacted on access to food. Three quarters of the population derive 50% of their food from markets. Incomes are low and typically earned from agriculture as produce sales, wage labour, and charcoal making.

Agriculture and Development

Despite different reports about reductions in the levels of poverty in the north of Uganda, it is widely recognized that GDP in the region will need to grow at 11% for the next 25 years, if 2 million people in the region are to be lifted out of poverty and share comparable income levels with the rest of the country. Clearly, investment is needed in the north, and in particular, in Karamoja as the poorest sub-region in the country. Without investment that is targeted at poverty alleviation in the sub-region, inequality with the rest of Uganda will continue to grow.



To address poverty in Karamoja it will also be necessary to move beyond the alignment of agriculture sector investment in the sub-region with national agricultural policies and strategies, and instead, use the agro-ecological, economic and social distinctiveness of the sub-region as reference points. The Karamoja Integrated Development Programme (KIDP, 2015 - 2020) offers a useful starting point, because it recognizes that, “*Due to the semi-arid climate, agro-pastoralism will remain the most viable livelihood*” and that the livestock sector represents, “... *the biggest development opportunity.*”^{xiv} Informed by the KIDP, policy makers and investors can adapt typical ‘commercial agriculture’ investment strategies in favour of investment schemes that are informed by the following four issues:

A clear enough future – mixed transhumance livestock with crops

In the short- to mid-term it seems clear that the 90% of people in Karamoja who currently depend on mixed livestock-crop systems, will continue to do so. The livestock and components of these systems are mutually reinforcing and reduce risks - when crops fail, livestock help to absorb the shock, and vice-versa. Therefore, it is important that investment in the Karamoja agriculture sector supports both mixed cropping and transhumance livestock development. This has not been done in the past, and now needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

In an era of climate change and increased uncertainty, it is equally important that increased attention is given to environmental protection. This requires agricultural investment to move beyond the ‘business as usual’ model to ensure that all investment leads to improved environmental outcomes: soil health, carbon capture, and protection of interconnected grassland and savannah woodland.

Alternative futures

In addition to investing in livestock-crop systems, more investment in the rural business sector is needed so that these businesses can be grown and multiplied. In this way, households that drop out from agriculture have increased employment opportunities within the sub-region.

It is also important that increased, targeted support is provided to the poor and very poor in the sub-region. Living in squalid conditions in and around urban settlements, these people are among some of Uganda’s poorest and most vulnerable. Not only are such households unlikely to acquire the capital that is needed to return to mixed livestock-crop production, they are also often unskilled and so unable to compete for better-paid and more secure jobs. Instead, they are time-and-again forced back into the seasonal casual labour market with all its associated vagaries and low wages. To ensure that food insecurity does not become entrenched and multi-generational, social protection programs (currently targeting the elderly) might offer conditional transfers to poor and very poor households, linked to improved health and educational outcomes.

Competent administration and coordination

The scale of the development challenge in Karamoja is such that it can only be addressed if Government and international development partners work collaboratively and ensure that all investment is mutually reinforcing and drives improved resilience, food security and nutrition outcomes. This requires international development partners to continue to work with the Ministry of State for Karamoja Affairs as the main coordinating body. It also means that the Ministry has sufficient staff who have the skills to work with international development partners using participatory and inclusive processes. Without this, development partners and NGOs will likely show varying commitment to key meetings, and policy and strategy processes.

A sufficient budget with long term security

Addressing poverty issues and challenges in Karamoja requires substantial funding, but in a context of competing demands for international development assistance across northern Uganda. If, government and development partners are serious about addressing poverty in Karamoja and significantly improving development indices by 2025, current funding will need to be sustained and possibly, increased, in real terms. They will also need to be mutually accountable, and use evidenced-based findings to ensure improving value for money.

Systematic learning and evidence

There is a need to identify, collate and share good practices in agriculture and livestock development in Karamoja. The region would benefit from a Regional Livestock and Agriculture Research and Learning Group, with an emphasis on research actors who can generate independent evidence of good practices.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this Policy Brief do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government, UK aid or the UK government, or Irish Aid or the Government of Ireland.

More information

This Policy Brief is based on a review of agriculture policy and programming in Karamoja in 2018, conducted by Adrian Cullis for the KRSU, and assisted by the Kabuin Zonal Agriculture Research Institute. A full copy of the review is available at:

<https://www.karamojaresilience.org/publications/item/agricultural-development-in-karamoja-uganda-recent-trends-in-livestock-and-crop-systems-and-resilience-impacts>

For more information on the Karamoja Resilience Support Unit please visit www.karamojaresilience.org.

Endnotes

ⁱ World Bank, 2018. *The World Bank in Uganda: Economic Overview*. The World Bank, Washington, DC.

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda>

ⁱⁱ Lamphear, J., 1976. *The Traditional History of the Jie of Uganda*. Oxford Studies in African Affairs. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries, 2013. National Agriculture Policy. Entebbe. <http://abi.co.ug/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Uganda-National-Agriculture-Policy-2014-F-2.pdf>

^{iv} PricewaterhouseCoopers, undated. Agriculture - Uganda. Kampala. <https://www.pwc.com/ug/en/industries/agriculture.html>

^v World Bank, 2009. An Engine for Growth and Poverty Reduction. www.worldbank.org/ida

^{vi} Numbers of small arms proliferated after the overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979 when the Karimojong and Turkana from neighbouring Kenya looted the Moroto Army barracks, which had been abandoned by the fleeing Amin soldiers.

^{vii} Including revenge attacks on the Teso people for atrocities perpetrated under previous administrations.

^{viii} The President based himself at a tented camp at Morulinga just outside Kangole and met with elders and *kraal* leaders to establish a dialogue on the imperative for disarmament.

^{ix} Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2014. *Special Report, FAO/GIEWS Livestock and Market Assessment Mission to Karamoja Region, Uganda*. FAO, Rome. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/019/i3674e/i3674e.pdf>

^x Cullis, A., 2018. *Agricultural Development in Karamoja, Uganda: Recent Trends in Livestock and Crop Systems, and Resilience Impacts*. Karamoja Resilience Support Unit, Kampala. <https://www.karamojaresilience.org/publications/item/agricultural-development-in-karamoja-uganda-recent-trends-in-livestock-and-crop-systems-and-resilience-impacts>

^{xi} Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU), 2017. *Karamoja Donors Mapping Report*. KRSU, Kampala

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^{xii} Stites, E., K. Howe, and D. Akabwai. 2017. *Five Years On: Livelihood Advances, Innovations, and Continuing Challenges in Karamoja Uganda*. Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, Boston

http://fic.tufts.edu/assets/FiveYearsOn_EStites_v-2.pdf

^{xiii} United Nations Children's Fund and World Food Programme (WFP). 2016. Uganda - Karamoja: Food Security and Nutrition Assessment, July 2016. Analysis conducted by the Analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, WFP, Uganda

http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp286262.pdf?_ga=2.209637460.757413946.1524236084-50302021.1506589210

^{xiv} Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). 2015. *Karamoja Integrated Development Plan 2*. OPM, Ministry for Karamoja Affairs, Kampala

http://www.karamojaresilience.org/publications?task=callelement&format=raw&item_id=154&element=1e14ee27-afba-442f-a2f3-712f8d683bab&method=download