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Uganda, Factor 15: Human Rights

Women in Uganda Could Increase Food Security

Uganda faces several problems today, including HIV/AIDS, poverty, safe water, and sanitation. A problems involving food security and farm productivity is women's rights. Various farm systems are used to maximize farm productivity, but adding female farmers could further maximize farm productivity on a national scale. In Uganda, women's rights are legally present but are generally dismissed by the agricultural population. Women make up half the population and a large majority of the agricultural work force, but are discouraged from owning land. This takes away great potential for women and for increased food security and farm productivity. Every family is affected by women's rights, whether it is through their children, income, or future. Uganda could benefit from women's rights through economic development, which would come with the increased agricultural productivity and food security. The fertility of soil in Uganda and the growing young population will affect the development of women's rights. To help women's rights and agricultural productivity, education on human rights and agriculture should be provided. Communities in Uganda will play a large role in improving both women's rights and agricultural productivity. Government programs and non-government organizations would play a large role in providing education and raising awareness about the legal rights of women in Uganda. Every family would be able to help in some way, from implementing the farming techniques taught to supporting the female landowners in their communities. To improve food security and farm productivity through women's rights advancements, education should be provided to both men and women about women's rights, farm management, and sustainable agriculture.

A typical agricultural family in Uganda is composed of about 5 people on average. Many families have more than 1-2 children and also sometimes include relatives who are not immediate family, like aunts and uncles or grandparents (Uganda 13). Many families normally eat various dishes that involve seafood, rice, chicken stew, and various other meats. Tea is very popular. Education is limited in most of Uganda. Only 1/4 of all youth have access to school-places, partly because of a poor-quality road system and partly because of the ballooning young population of Uganda (Coughlan). Even if children arrive for school, many teachers do not show up because they are severely underpaid. Half of all Ugandan citizens live within five kilometers of a medical facility; however positions like main doctors and laboratory technicians are not always filled by a medical professional. Healthcare in Uganda is improving, however, largely because of various organizations within Africa, like the AMREF (African Medical and Research Foundation).

An average farm in Uganda is about 2.5 ha. in size (Ronner and Giller 9). Most farms grow fairly drought resistant crops, though this depends on the farm. Several different farming systems are used in Uganda to suit plant needs with the diverse climate zones. The first system, called the Banana-Coffee System, is used mainly in areas with high rainfall. Areas near the Lake Victoria Basin and in Central Uganda use this system the most. The main crops of this system are coffee (Robusta coffee) and bananas, with secondary crops being sweet potatoes, maize, various beans, and tea plants. The Banana-Millet Cotton system is

very similar to the Banana-Coffee system, however users usually receive rainfall which is less consistent and thus coffee is usually not grown. The Teso system is used in areas with a clear yet short rainy season. Farm sizes increase with this system because of the short growing window. Livestock is depended upon during the dry season. The crops usually grown in the Teso System are cotton, ringed millet, sorghum, maize, sesame, sunflowers, and sweet potatoes. For areas that receive very little rainfall at all, the Northern System is often used. Drought resistant crops are very common, as is keeping livestock. Sorghum, finger millet, sesame, tobacco, cotton, and sunflowers are grown in this system. The West Nile System is similar to the Northern System, though there is usually a more defined rainy and dry season. Crops vary widely, but livestock is not kept because of the tsetse fly in Northwestern Uganda. The final two systems are the Montane system and the Pastoral system. The Montane system is similar to the Banana-Coffee system, though it is usually used at altitudes between 1500-1750 m.a.s.l., and Arabica coffee is often grown in place of Robusta coffee. The Pastoral system relies mainly on livestock. Nomadic grazing is very common. If crops are grown, they are usually maize, beans, and finger millet.

Although these systems are all designed for specific rainfall regions, problems regarding soil fertility, erosion, and AIDS have hampered agricultural productivity. Most land has been over-farmed and has consequently been depleted of nutrients. Most farmers cannot afford to use the amount of fertilizer required to maintain the fertility of all the land they own. Although manure is a natural fertilizer, tying livestock to a stake and penning has become more common. Manure can also pose safety hazards. Soil erosion is another large problem that many farmers in Uganda face. Overgrazing by animals has taken the necessary supports for topsoil away, and the precious soil has started to erode. This also contributes to fertility problems. A non-land factor affecting farm productivity is AIDS. If the parents or heads of a household have HIV/AIDS, they will probably be unable to do work. If they have children, their children will have to manage the farm and probably call upon other relatives to help. Most children have probably not been educated on how to handle a farm, and that type of responsibility is difficult to handle at a young age. These three issues are major barricades to farm productivity in Uganda.

Food markets are also difficult to find, and nutrition is not prioritized in Uganda. The road system is very poor, preventing produce to reach or leave rural areas in any reasonable amount of time. Various trade restrictions with neighboring countries make markets limited for Ugandan farmers. With these two factors put together, a farmer who produces a large quantity of high-quality crop may have nowhere to sell it. Nutrition is also a problem in Uganda. Only five out of the eighty districts has a nutritionist, so health information pertaining to nutrition is already difficult to attain (Malnutrition). Food insecurity is also common, because the crops that farmers grow are not always edible. If they are edible, they most likely cannot provide all needed nutrients alone. Frequent illness and unsanitary conditions can also contribute to nutrient deprivation. Although this is a large problem in Uganda, uncoordinated government policy across districts has placed adequate nutrition as a low-priority problem.

Women's rights plays into agricultural productivity because a farm owned by a woman is culturally discriminated against and may not be able to produce as much as one with a male owner. Women in Uganda can and do own farms; however they are discouraged from doing so. Buyers may choose not to buy crops from a woman if they have other options, or they may insist upon lowering prices. This affects how readily a female farm owner can purchase fertilizer, which would make her farm more productive and hopefully more consistent. Women also make up 50% of the population and 70% of the agricultural

workforce (Tripp 6). If encouraged to own farms, women could provide a new view on agriculture in Uganda and that may lead to methods to increase agricultural productivity.

The children, income, and future of a typical agricultural family are all influenced greatly by women's rights. The children of this family are very influenced by women's rights. The treatment they see within their home has a very high chance of determining how they will act and what they will believe in the future. A son who observes that his mother is never involved in the business of the farm and is discouraged from owning property may come to believe that that is proper treatment for a woman. A daughter may observe the same treatment and come to expect it or accept it in her future life. In this case, women's rights completely affect the way the children of the family may grow up. Women's rights also affect the income of a family. If a family is headed by a woman, income might be lower than if it was headed by a man because she might be discriminated against in the marketplace. Her family may also have trouble gaining respect in their agricultural community for the same reason. The future of this family is also influenced by women's rights. If a family's farm fails because the mother (owner) is discriminated against and not supported by her community, she may have to move elsewhere to either live with relatives or start a new farm. The mother may have to seek marriage solely to secure economic safety for her family. In these ways, women's rights impact the children, income, and future of a family.

Women's rights in Uganda are legally present, but culturally, women have very few rights. In many marriages, women are still "purchased" from her parents. This lowers the woman to the status of property. Women are also discouraged from having many personal belongings that are not clothing, pots, and other necessities. Because women are often considered property, they are discouraged from owning property. Many women do not invest much in their land, because they fear eviction. This situation is very severe, because women are still treated like property. Though there has been no widespread cultural change on this topic, various organizations plan to address this problem through human rights education for both men and women.

If the cultural aspect of women's rights improved, Uganda would benefit through increased agricultural productivity and economic development. If women were accepted as landowners and as non-purchasable items, women could invest in their land without fearing immediate loss. These land investments would in turn hopefully increase land productivity. This increased land productivity could ensure food security her family and for another family, as she would earn money to buy food with and other families would have food to buy. Widespread increased food security might help families earn more money, because less time would be spent worrying about food. This could lead to economic development in Uganda through increased international trade.

Population growth and soil fertility will greatly affect cultural acceptance of women's rights in Uganda. The population is growing in Uganda, but more importantly, the population of young people. Young people are often more easily influenced and taught than older persons who have lived their entire lives believing an idea. The growing young population may be the key to changing the how women are treated in Ugandan culture. In the near future, soil fertility will play a key role in women's rights developments as well. Women who do own farms may be judged for how productive and successful their farms are by individuals who do not feel strongly about whether women should own land or not. Their opinions matter, and if a consistent trend in decreased soil fertility continues, female farmers may be treated less seriously

for having less consistent and productive farms. Male farmers may not face these problems because they have been able to invest in their land for a long time, whereas many female farmers still feel that they cannot. These factors will both influence women's rights in Uganda.

In order to secure women's rights culturally and improve food security, education needs to be provided on a large scale about human rights and agricultural productivity. First, women's legal rights need to be established more specifically or need to be emphasized. Volunteer workers could talk with citizens in markets and town centers about the benefits of including women more completely in agriculture. In schools, women's studies and human rights units could be introduced to address the issue with some of the young people of Uganda. During and after the attempts to improve women's rights happen, education for both men and women about increasing soil productivity and maintaining ecological health should be provided in a formal setting to either slow or reverse problems like soil erosion and nutrient depletion. Organizations that could help with these ideas include UN Women, which has worked successfully in Rwanda to educate women about managing and budgeting. They have also persuaded local officials to include more women in agriculture and decision-making. Actionaid Australia has also worked to help women through education about their rights.

Communities should play a huge role in efforts to support women's rights. Social change is key to widespread women's ownership of land, and communities are what determine social codes. Without community involvement in education, women's cultural rights will have a difficult time changing. International organizations would be most important for providing the education about human rights and farming, though farm sponsorship programs for women would also be important to consider. Farmers would be involved by trying to implement methods that have been taught to them, as well as supporting the women in their communities.

Education about women's rights, farm management, and sustainable agriculture should be provided to both men and women of all ages in Uganda to improve women's rights, agricultural productivity, and food security. Improvements in all of these areas may lead to economic development, which could improve Uganda as a whole. Economic problems would be lessened, and the government may be able to focus more on adequate nutrition and programs to help bring more health professionals to each district of Uganda. Education may also become a more prioritized element, and teachers may see salary raises. More school building could be built to accommodate the growing youth population. Although HIV/AIDS is already a major focus, more funding could go toward education and prevention. Clean water could become another priority, as well as sanitation. After agricultural productivity is achieved, environmental impact can be more clearly assessed and measured. Then, efforts to manage environmental impact can be initiated. It is clear that improving women's rights will in turn aid food security and agricultural productivity, which can then help Uganda face some of its other problems. There will also be immediate results. Women can begin to invest more in their land, which will inspire others to do the same. Other nations in Africa may become inspired by the changes in the cultural rights of women in Uganda. This could lead to an improvement in women's rights all over Africa.

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