

A note on factors influencing the transfer of animal traction technology in Uganda

by

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Abstract

Many environmental, social, political and economic factors have limited the development, efficient use and spread of animal traction technology in Uganda. This paper lists some of the problems and describes efforts that are being made to develop the use of this technology in the country. Reference is made to the work of non-governmental organisations operating in Karamoja and other regions.

Some constraints to animal traction

Animal draft power was introduced in Uganda in 1909, but its potential has not been fully exploited. Many factors have limited the development and spread of animal traction technology in the country.

Environmental factors include steep, undulating topography in Kigezi and Bugisu; thick forests in Budongo and Budanga; tsetse infestations in the south-east and south-west.

Social factors include migratory tendencies of pastoral communities such as the Bahima in western Uganda and Karamajong in north-eastern Uganda; inter-territorial raids or cattle rustling among various tribes; illiteracy; cultural and religious affiliations; large families; apathy and resistance to change and ideas that animal draft power is an out-dated technology compared to modern tractors.

Political factors include clashes between rebels and government troops leading to a dramatic decrease in the cattle population in affected areas of northern and eastern Uganda; mass exits of technical personnel during the military regime of the 1970s, and following economic difficulties in the country; policy variations as a result of changes in governments; attempts to satisfy the electorate during the post-independence era, such as massive investments in tractorisation schemes, at the expense of animal draft power technology—a result of politics overriding technical decisions.

Economic factors include poor infrastructure; lack of institutional support, scarcity of equipment; liquidity and capital limitations; foreign exchange

constraints and keeping animals for prestige rather than for profit.

Karamoja programme

In Uganda, especially among the pastoral community of the Karamajong and Teaso, cattle keeping is a tradition. The work animals currently available include 38 000 pairs of oxen as well as some donkeys and camels. The need now is to provide institutional and infrastructural support to the farmers.

It is said that whatever the elders council "Akiriket Angi Kathikou" approves will be adopted by the people. It is therefore a question of introducing the subject to elders to obtain their consent. For example, they might be convinced that the use of oxen could relieve the burden on the women of Karamoja who do much of the cultivation work and head portage.

The oxenisation programmes in Karamoja are supported by several non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including the Lutheran World Federation, Inter-Aid, Action International contre la Faim and the Church of Uganda, all working under the coordination of Karamoja Development Agency within the policy framework of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries. For example, Inter-Aid provided inputs and implements at affordable prices and organises training workshops.

The Kangote Ox Training Unit was established in Bokara in 1988. The project involved volunteers selected through local authorities. Animals, volunteers and farmers were trained in practical workshops. The community identified problems and provided oxen, land and local materials for yoke making. They also paid for ox carts and equipment manufactured by the ox unit.

Some of the farmers who could not afford to pay the full price of an implement in one lump sum expressed the need for credit or hire purchase

schemes. The government assisted by giving subsidies and reducing tax on agricultural inputs.

New developments

The newly initiated Animal Traction Development Organisation is an indigenous NGO that started from grassroots level in Kaabong. It has bases in Kaabong, Kotido, Namalu in Karamoja, Kasese in western Uganda, Mukono in central and Sebei in eastern Uganda.

The Dairy Industry Development Project implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in conjunction with the Department of Animal Industry and Fisheries, launched a programme to promote use of animal power in dairy farming in Uganda. Training provided at Nakyesasa Livestock Station included basic training of field staff in ox handling, pasture establishment and the use of animal power. Buganda and western Uganda had not been using animal draft on a large scale. These areas often have thick elephant grass vegetation, and so land clearance and preparation is very important. Local people believed that oxen cannot work. Many observers came to watch the exercise with anxiety and interest, and realised that oxen can work just like a tractor. There is now a high demand for trained oxen, ox carts and implements in Buganda and the western region.

The recent fuel crisis and the high initial capital investment on tractors have increased interest in animal draft power. The fragmented land holdings are not economical for tractorisation and delays in land preparation are inevitable: oxen are more suitable and cheaper.

In Namulonge, heifers have been trained for traction. A collar harness system and an "improved" yoke have been tested by staff of the Ministry of Agriculture (supported by USAID). The NGO agency Acord has played a big role in Gulu and Kitgum Districts.

Concluding observations

There is urgent need to mobilise the fragmented resources and knowledge relating to animal traction in Uganda. This calls for a network for information exchange and dissemination, the production of audio-visual aids, and the monitoring and evaluation of the different programmes. This will lead to collaboration, cooperation among manufacturers, researchers, policy-makers and NGOs.

More use could be made of ox carts in order to alleviate the heavy transport burden of women.

Suitable animals are available in Uganda, but there is a need for improved supply in some areas.