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Coffee Production in mid-Northern Uganda: Prospects and Challenges

Mbowa Swaibu, Odokonyero Tonny and Munyambonera Ezra

Executive Summary

At the beginning of the 21st Century, the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) introduced coffee in the mid-North sub-region. This marked the beginning of the sub-region's transition from dependency on annual crops such as cotton to a perennial crop. While the long-term objective of UCDA was to find ways of sustaining the coffee sector amidst the coffee wilt disease in the traditional coffee growing regions, the opening up of coffee growing opportunities to enhance the incomes of agricultural households in a former war-ravaged Mid-North was a well-conceived strategy. Several studies have demonstrated that coffee sector remains key in Uganda's poverty reductions efforts as well as pointing to the limited poverty reduction effects among those households who depended mainly on annual crops such as cotton. This policy brief draws from the research paper by Mbowa et al. (2014)¹ focusing mainly on the prospects and challenges of the coffee sector in the mid-North of Uganda. There is growing evidence in the sub-region that the systematic coffee planting by the UCDA has yielded positive results in the sub-region. On average, there are 16,000 farmers with 10,045 hectares of coffee, and in 2013 coffee output was 154 metric tons and projected to increase to 16,323 metric tons by 2017 with start of harvesting of new planted trees. Apac, Lira, Nwoya and Oyam are among the districts with the highest potential for coffee production. Despite the faster adoption of coffee in the sub-region, there are challenges that need to be addressed if the UCDA's objectives are to be realized. The major challenges relate to lack of organized marketing and processing infrastructure to support value addition; and inadequate coffee specialized extension support system to narrow the knowledge gap about recommended agronomic practices among farmers.

Introduction

The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries through the commodity approach identifies coffee amongst the priority crops with highest employment potential and poverty reduction effect.² Accordingly, the introduction of coffee by UCDA to non-traditional coffee growing areas of the mid-North – suggests that the country is making efforts to promote inclusive growth.

UCDA introduced coffee a perennial crop in this sub-region between 2001 and 2005; with a medium term objective of opening up opportunities for increasing incomes for farming households. The over dependency in the sub-region on low value annual crops (such as cotton, maize, millet, sorghum and rice, among others) resulted into limited poverty reduction effects. UCDA's long term objective - was to sustain Uganda's coffee exports, which were on a downward trend due to the coffee wilt disease in the traditional coffee growing regions (Central, Western and Eastern) since 1993. It was in 2005 that the UCDA results revealed that robusta coffee could grow favourably in the Mid-North, and that the

quality of the crop from the sub-region was consistent with other robustas from the traditional growing areas. As a result, UCDA rolled out its coffee development program campaign in the sub-region through supporting more farmers to grow high yield elite (rooted) clonal robusta coffee. This variety of robusta coffee is highly tolerant to drought and coffee wild disease.

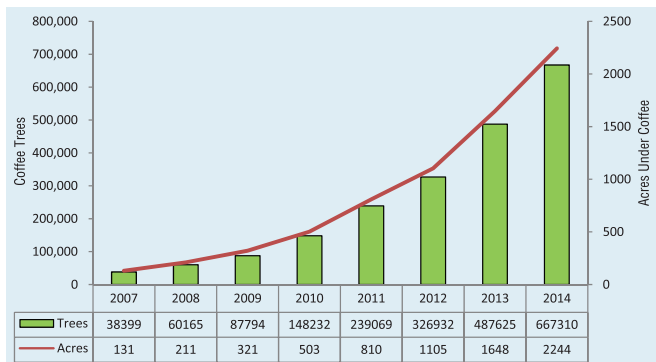
Prospects

Growing adoption of coffee production through acreage expansion: The introduction of robusta coffee in the Mid-North enables the coffee sector to expand beyond the land constrained traditional coffee growing areas (Central and Eastern Uganda). The sub-region has abundant fertile and uncultivated land proven to be suitable for coffee production. It is exposed to the high performing elite (rooted) disease resistant clonal robusta. Already, there is a positive response from farmers to the UCDA coffee development program through the expanded acreage under coffee with varying progress across districts as illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 1 - the districts of Apac, Lira, Nwoya and

Oyam each contributing to more than 12 percent of the total acreage under coffee in the sub region. Indeed, there are prospects of a new generation of coffee farmers hailing from the former war-ravaged sub-region.

Coffee production to increase by more than hundred-fold by 2017/18: During the 2012/13 coffee season, the sub-region produced 154 metric tons of kiboko (dry coffee cherry) from about 15,589 coffee farming households registered by UCDA (Table 1). The coffee output varied across districts largely due to the different maturity of the coffee trees. All other factors held constant, the sub-region is projected to produce 16,326 metric tons of Kiboko by 2017/18 from the existing stock of coffee trees planted (given the gestation period of 3-4 years).

Figure 1: Growth in Acreage and Number of Coffee Trees in Acholi Sub-Region



Source: UCDA regional Office Data Base (2014)

Table 1: Coffee production in Northern Uganda, Acreage, and Farming Households, by District (October 2012 – September 2013)

District	Number of Trees	Hectares	Farming Households	Metric Tons	
				Current	Potential ¹ by 2017/18
Lira	1,677,624	1,511	2,512	29	2,720
Apac	1,864,028	1,679	2,253	33	3,023
Oyam	1,356,310	1,222	1,989	21	2,199
Kole	1,131,505	1,019	1,398	9	1,835
Dokolo	851,289	767	1,116	4	1,380
Aleptong	543,278	489	727	3	881
Amolatar	325,000	293	566	3	527
Otuke	259,600	234	236	-	421
Kaberaido	8,800	7	44	-	14
Gulu	533,812	739	1,334	13	866
Nwoya	963,202	1,333	2,408	25	1,562
Amuru	438,165	606	1,095	11	711
Pader	76,635	106	191	4	124
Lamwo	38,285	38	18	-	62
Total	10,067,533	10,045	15,887	154	16,326

Source: UCDA (2013) regional Office Data Base

¹ Coffee has a gestation period of 4 years to get to peak production. Most (70%) of coffee in mid-Northern Uganda was planted around 2011/12 – 2013/14 peak (potential) production would be realised by 2017/18.

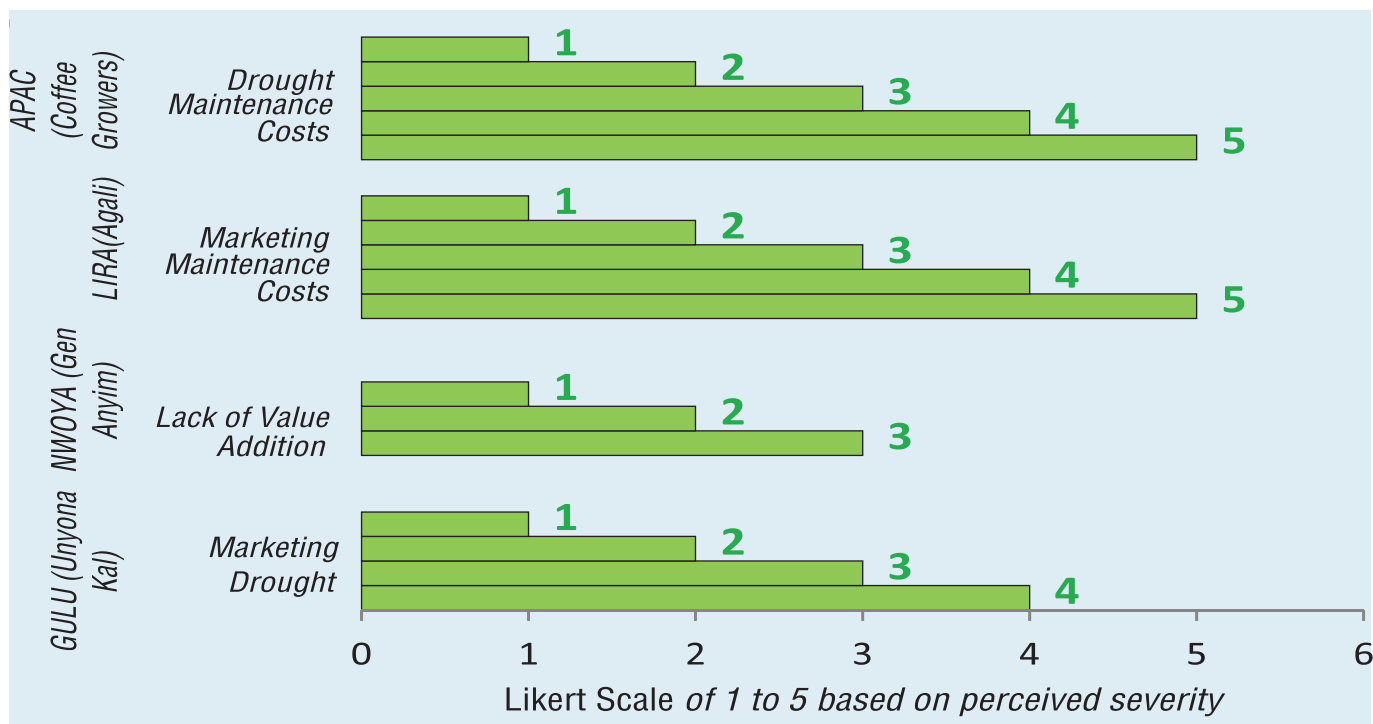


Challenges

The coffee sector in the mid-North is still in infancy stages with challenges that need concerted efforts from different key stakeholders in the sector. The challenges and their severity seem to be indicative of the level of coffee sector development and agronomy in a given district (see Figure 2). For instance, in Apac – the leading district in the sub region in terms of coffee output – farmers cited knowledge gaps to foster appropriate coffee husbandry methods as the most pressing challenge. The lack of knowledge is exacerbated by the limited availability of specialized coffee extension support in the entire sub-region required to cope with the coffee stressed by drought (See Photograph Plate 1). On the other hand, in Lira, it is the lack of value addition that is most frequently cited as the most pressing challenge by coffee farmers in the district – the 2nd leading coffee producing district in the sub-region. The entire sub-region has no coffee processing infrastructure – i.e. machinery (hullers) to add value to the dried coffee cherries (Kiboko) to Kiboko fair average quality (FAQ). Processing coffee within the sub-region would create employment as well as increase coffee margins due to farmers. With processing, the coffee margins would increase almost three times from Shs829 per kilogram of Kiboko to Shs2,214 per kilogram of fair average quality (see Figure 3).

While UCDA is promoting a drought resistant coffee variety in the Mid-North, the recurrence of prolonged drought in the sub-region presents serious challenges to the development of the coffee sector. This challenge is cited by all the districts visited though with varying severity. Prolonged drought dries coffee trees, leads to high mortality of newly transplanted seedlings, retards growth of young coffee trees, and flower abortion. The rather lengthy dry spell in the sub-region restrains coffee production to one season of the year instead of two seasons as is the practice in the traditional coffee growing regions. To mitigate this challenge, UCDA is promoting agro-forestry (planting *albizia* shade trees) practices among coffee farmers. Indeed, the EPRC research team observed adoption of low-tech-low-cost ground drip irrigation methods in Gulu district (see photograph Plate 2) as means to overcome moisture stress during the dry season.

Figure 2: Challenges in Coffee Farming Rated According to Severity



Source: EPRC Field Work, March 2014

Plate 1: Drought Stressed Coffee



Source: EPRC Fieldwork, Gulu district (March, 2014)

Plate 2: Low tech ground drip irrigation in Gulu District



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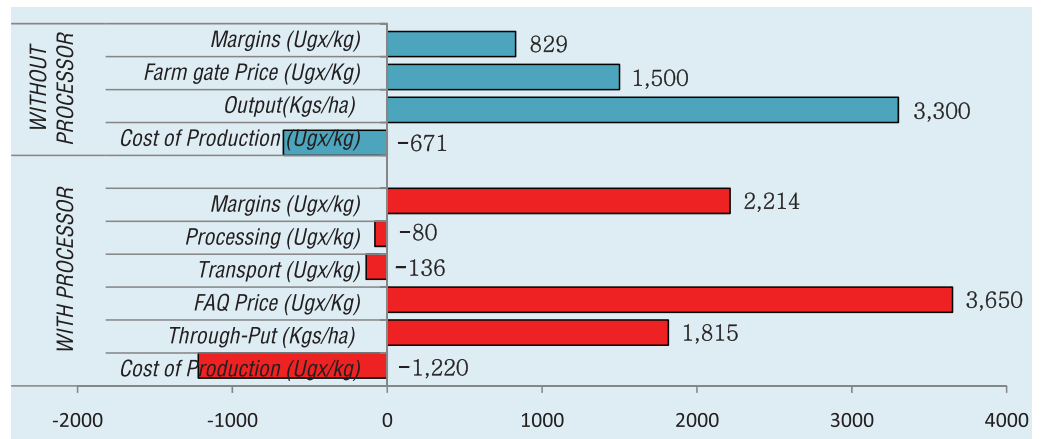
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Figure 3: Effect of Processing on Coffee Margins



Source: Authors’ computations based on field information

Policy Options

The prospects for coffee sector development in the mid-North are encouraging largely driven by the abundance of fertile and uncultivated land. More important is the willingness for the households in the sub-region to adopt a perennial crop in anticipation of improved living standards. To unlock this potential, UCDA needs to strengthen the extension system to support coffee farmers to implement the recommended agronomic practices on coffee fields. This will go a long way in terms of closing the identified knowledge gaps as well as mitigating the effect of prolonged drought. As much as the coffee sector is still in its infancy stage, time is now to

think strategically on the development of processing infrastructure for value addition to not only create employment within the sub-region but also promote the local economy through enhanced incomes from coffee.



Endnotes

1 Mbowa, S, Odokonyero, T, and Munyambonera, E. (2014). The potential of coffee to uplift people out of poverty in Northern Uganda. EPRC Working Paper in collaboration with the Africa Growth Initiative (AGI) at the Brookings Institution (May 2014).

2 Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), (2010), *Agriculture for Food and Income Security: Agricultural Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan (DSIP) 2010/11 – 2014/15*. MAAIF,

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