

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UGANDA FARM SCHOOLS

A Preliminary Survey

by

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INTRODUCTION

This paper forms part of a programme of research designed to improve the teaching of agriculture in Uganda secondary schools. When this programme was started, it was felt to be essential to look at the past experience in agricultural education in Uganda, so that the relevant lessons could be learned, and hopefully, some at least of the mistakes of the past could be avoided.

Therefore a preliminary survey of the evolution of the Uganda farm schools was carried out as part of a wider study of the development of agricultural education in Africa.

The main objective of these schools was always to give their pupils sufficient training in modern scientific farming methods so that they could return to the land as improved farmers.

Part of this paper is concerned with an attempt to find out to what extent this aim was fulfilled; and a preliminary survey of the occupations and achievements of some of the ex-pupils of one school - the Busoga Farm School - is described.

THE FARM SCHOOLS.

Very briefly, the evolution of the farm schools be divided into three main phases. There was a long history of attempts, mainly by individual missionaries to introduce the teaching of agriculture into the early school system, starting with Mackay, who gave simple agricultural instruction in his workshop at Mengo as early

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as 1882. The early mission boarding schools were, of course, heavily dependent on their school farms, for their own food supplies, so it seemed an obvious development to give some simple agricultural instruction on the farms. The success or failure of these efforts seemed to depend very greatly on the ability, enthusiasm, and knowledge of the particular missionary - usually the headmaster who was involved. There was considerable resistance to agricultural instruction from the parents in certain areas, particularly in Buganda, as far as boys were concerned, but not for girls.

Although some headmasters, notably Syson of Ngora, seem to have been extremely successful in teaching agricultural science in their schools, (Syson is said to have made an outstanding contribution to the development of cotton growing in Teso District.) , their efforts usually disappeared fairly rapidly when less agriculturally interested teachers replaced them.

I think it should be noted here that many Protectorate Government officials, in so far as they concerned themselves at all with educational matters, did give considerable backing, and even put pressure on the missions, to encourage the teaching of agriculture in schools.

But the fact of life was that the government required clerks and chiefs for whom an academic education was thought suitable, and parents and pupils were quick to recognise this, and to react accordingly.

The next phase was the period of smallholder training, both on the Government stations at Serere and Bukalasa, and in the farm schools at Gulu and Namutamba, which arose out of the surge of activity in agricultural education after the publication of the Phelps Stokes Reports in the early 1920's.

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On the whole these schools did not achieve this aim, which was to train improved farmers, partly because of the fact of life mentioned earlier, but several other factors seem to have been involved. Therefore in 1938 the Committee on Smallholdings and Agricultural Extension recommended, as a matter of policy, that farmers should be trained on their own farms by extension workers; so the farm schools were closed down.

After the war the third phase in the farm school story started with the reopening of the Gulu school in 1951, stimulated by the spate of post-war commissions which had visited Uganda. (It is not at all clear to what extent these commissions and other authorities took into account the pre-war experience with farm schools in formulating their policies.)

In addition to the farm schools, which by 1963 had reached about and in number, attempts were made to teach agriculture in a variety of other post-primary institutions, particularly junior secondary and rural trade schools, and in one or two secondary modern schools.

A curious feature of this period is that little real effort seems to have been made to train agriculture teachers for all these schools, apart from one short course at Bukalasa, which was allowed to lapse after, year, until teacher training was started at the Busoga, Farm School in 1960.

Although it is difficult to assess the full impact of these efforts on the farming life of the country, most of them can hardly be said to have been any more successful in training modern farmers, than their pre-war predecessors. Also several of these schools experienced considerable difficulties in attracting sufficient pupils, staff, and finance, to remain viable. But there was

one exception to the rather gloomy picture painted so far. This was the Busoga Farm School which was generally successful in attracting a good number of pupils, and in giving them a sound basic education with a good practical training in agriculture. The reasons for this schools success lie firstly, I think, in the enthusiasm and experience of the Principal, who gathered a good staff around him, secondly in the fact that the resources available to this school enabled it to be fairly lavish with its buildings and equipment, and thirdly in the good general education which it was able to provide.

Although every effort and help was given to settle its ex-pupils back on the land, and a few of them do seem to be making a success of farming, the figures in the table speak for themselves. Only 50 or 15% of 333 boys who left the school between 1959 and 1970 are actually farming their own land. On the other hand, 320 of the ex-students, or 90% of the known population, are either employed or self-employed in some occupation directly connected with agriculture.

There is no doubt that the majority of these trained technicians are fulfilling very valuable functions in all sorts of occupations requiring practical and low-level managerial and supervisory skills, in Government Departments and on parastatal and private estates, large farms, and ranches.

In 1965 it was decided that all full secondary schools should offer at least one technical subject for school certificate, and in 1969 the remaining farm schools were brought into line with this programme, two becoming full secondary schools and two being transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture as District Farm Institutes.

CONCLUSIONS

I think that the main conclusions which must be drawn from this study are first, that on the whole the farm schools did not fulfil their educational objective, which was to train boys to return to the land as improved farmers.

The reasons for this failure are complex, but Professor Foster has pointed out that schools have always appeared a way of escaping from small farms, and entering more attractive and better paid employment. Also there is no doubt that there were considerable difficulties in setting the farm school leavers back on the land.

These boys had been trained in modern farming methods, and yet they were expected to return, usually to their home areas, and often to their fathers' farms, and to practise the improved methods which they had been taught, in the midst of a very traditional social environment.

Innovations such as fencing would immediately lead to suspicion of land grabbing, and the insecurity of land tenure was a constantly recurring theme. Again there were the difficulties involved in establishing really profitable small farms, which included problems of obtaining capital, and the time required for the establishment of perennial crops.

Perhaps if more and better organized settlement schemes could have been provided, and training in the schools could have been closely linked with such schemes, there might have been more chance of persuading some of the pupils to settle on them.

But I think the Committee on Smallholdings was right when it decided that the best place to train farmers is on their own farms, and later experience has so far borne out this conclusion.

In the future, if and when rural transformation really gets under way, and profitable modern scientific farming becomes widespread, a demand may arise for

boys to be trained in schools to return to the land.

But in the meantime, my second conclusion is that a developing agricultural economy such as Uganda's needs an increasing number of middle-range agricultural technicians to be employed as farm managers, field assistants, agriculture teachers, and in all sorts of other practical occupations connected with the agricultural industry.

Many of the ex-Sasoga pupils are fulfilling very useful functions, especially as farm managers on large farms and estates. Some of them may have contributed considerably more to the country's prosperity and development in this way than they could have by farming individually.

Lastly, I consider that a great deal of thought and research needs to be given to the whole question of the continuous adaptation of formal education systems and of educational objectives to the needs of the societies which they serve, in such a way that they satisfy the aspirations of these societies, and at the same time are fully integrated into the rural environment. In particular they should take account of the relative attractiveness of the opportunities for further training, employment, or self-employment, which are available to the school-leavers, and try to adapt their educational systems accordingly.

I realise that these suggestions will do little to solve the school-leaver problem, but I can only say that although education can and should arouse an interest and develop an attitude towards agriculture which is positive and constructive, until farming can be shown to be more attractive and profitable than possible alternative employment opportunities, few school leavers are going to choose it voluntarily.

TABLE 1. Occupations of Busoga Farm School Leavers, 1959-70.

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number of ex-Pupils</u>		<u>%</u>
Agricultural Department	70		
Veterinary Department	25		
Prisons Department	26		
Other Government Departments	<u>5</u>	<u>126</u>	<u>38</u>
Farm Managers	36		
Tea Estate Workers	15		
Sugar Estate Workers	11		
Other Agricultural Schemes	<u>18</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>24</u>
Farmers (Own land)	42		
Farmers (Mubuku Irrigation Scheme)	<u>8</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>15</u>
Teachers (Mainly agriculture)	44	<u>13</u>	<u>3</u>
TOTAL 8- AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS		300	90
Working in Business (Not agriculture)	11		
Business Men (Own, not agriculture)	7		
Police and Army.	6		
Miscellaneous	5		
Further Education	<u>4</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>10</u>
TOTAL -- NON- AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS		33	10
GRAND TOTAL		<u>333</u>	<u>100</u>