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Assessing the Progress of the Operation Wealth Creation Project (2013-2022): The Perspective of the Social Framework for Projects

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Abstract: The paper assesses the performance of OWC project based on its objectives. The paper used a Social Framework for Projects approach. Data used included macroeconomic social and economic indicators, project performance reports, and published literature. Findings showed that the OWC project has strengthened subsistence households by enhancing crop and livestock inputs, access to factor and product markets, husbandry training, and entrepreneurship development. However, program planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation obstacles have prevented the program from achieving its principal goal of transforming the country's subsistence households into commercial agriculturalists. The paper proposes policy recommendations to redress the obstacles.

Keywords: OWC, subsistence, commercial agriculture, household livelihood, welfare, Uganda

I. Introduction

Uganda is predominantly an agricultural country. The most recent statistics indicate that between 65% of Uganda's working population is engaged in agriculture (UBOS, 2018) and of that percentage, 90% are small scale farmers using less than 2.5 acres of land on average (Muwanguzi, 2020). The small pieces of land are the main source of livelihood for most of these farmers. When the OWC project was initiated in 2013, the majority of the farmers were still in subsistence production and underutilising their farmlands due to lack of modern inputs to increase productivity (Taremwa,2019). In other words, the low productivity that is associated with subsistence production is as result of farmers using rudimentary farming practices (Kalyesubula,2019). Moreover, farmers continue to experience limited access to improved crop and livestock varieties, and modern farming inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides and equipment that is required for high farm production and processing.

Equally important are the difficulties rural farmers face in dealing with production surpluses. Rural farmers sufficient transport facilities to sell their produce, lack modern storage, and do not have access to processing facilities that would extent the 'shelf' life of their produce (Labeja, 2018). Finding a lasting solution to the above obstacles formed the background to the decision of the Government of Uganda to initiate the OWC project, the progress of which, this paper assessed.

II. The Background of the OWC project

The OWC project was initiated as an integral part of Uganda's Vision 2040, specifically the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (MAAIF & MFPED,2016) The main goal of the program was to address the obstacles that subsistence farming households face, thereby enabling them to improve their livelihoods and welfare by shifting from subsistence to commercial agriculture. Specifically, the main purpose of the OWC project was to fix the failures that plagued the 25-year NAADS (National Agricultural Advisory Services) project, which was initiated in 2001.The establishment of NAADS was aimed at tackling the same challenges (Malinga & Nampung, 2015).

Thus, the design and implementation of OWC project was underpinned by the consideration that it should be improvement, expansion and strengthening, rather than replacement of the NAADS project. To make OWC project more efficient at addressing the NAADS' challenges, its coordination and implementation was placed under the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF). This was based on the assumption that the good performance of the UPDF in handling its issues would be translated to equally excellent performance on OWC project. To achieve the overarching goal of transforming subsistence farming into commercial agriculture in 7 years (2013-2020), the OWC project had to achieve several specific objectives (MAAIF, 2019), including i) Mobilise the public to engage in commercial agricultural

activities to boost household incomes; ii) facilitate the distribution of agricultural inputs equitably and timely to boost production and productivity at household level; iii) facilitate rural technological upgrading to allow smallholder farmers to transform themselves into small scale industrialists; iv) stimulate local and community enterprise development across the county; and v) facilitate infrastructure development in rural areas covered by the program.

To support its operations, the OWC project has received substantial funding from the national budget. The amount of funding for the Ugandan government has increased Uganda shillings (Ush) 300 billion in 2014/2015 to USh 5.3 trillion in 2019/2020 (MFP&ED, 2020). This paper assessed the progress that OWC project has made in achieving its objectives. Specifically, the objective of this assessment was to identify factors that have prevented the OWC project from eliminating Ugandan subsistence farming sub sector, thereby creating a middle-income status by 2020 as had been anticipated.

The purpose of any project is to ensure that resources that are used in its implementation contribution to achieving expected value. To that end, the assessment is part aimed at determining the extent to which the project achieved the expected value, and if it didn't , obstacles that led to such an outcome (Doskočil, et al., 2016). The outcome of the assessment is expected to identify what needs to be done to improve the effectiveness of the project where necessary. Understanding the extent to which any project is on the right trend is vital as it provides valuable knowledge about the performance of the project, thereby providing invaluable inputs into the decision-making process about what needs to be done to improve performance (Kloppenborg, et al.,2014). In fact, the assessment is particularly needed for government development-related projects that are initiated by governments. This is because resources that used in financing students' education were drawn from taxes that citizens pay to enable governments not only to deliver public services but also to facilitate those who need assistance to improve their livelihoods and welfare (Marthur, 2016).

III. Methodology

The assessment of the progress and performance of OWC project was based on the Social Framework for Projects. The Social Framework for Projects was developed by Smyth Eddie and Vanclay Frank to assist in assessing, planning and managing the social impacts of projects (Smyth & Vanclay, 2017). This model is used in this assessment because it provides a variety of indicators that can be adapted to assess any development-related project regardless of its nature, size and scope (community, national or international level).[1]

The development of the Social Framework for Projects Indicators is based on a combination of tenets of the earlier frameworks such as the impoverishment risks and reconstruction model, asset-based community development the sustainable livelihoods approach, the capability approach, and others.[2] The indicators are grouped into eight social and environmental categories of factors that determine people's wellbeing. These factors include people's capacities, abilities and freedoms to achieve their goals; community supports and political context; livelihood assets and activities; culture and religion; infrastructure and services; housing and business structures; land and natural resources; and the living environment.[3]

People's capabilities, abilities and freedoms include the right to satisfy health and nutritional well-being, education and skills needed to exploit livelihood resources, and freedom to fully engage in livelihood and community activities.[4] Community support and political context include roles that communities and political institutions and processes play in supporting households to gain access to land, housing and livelihood resources.[5] Specifically for the OWC project, community support is required in mobilising farmers and extending assistance to them through groups or associations.

Meanwhile, the political context includes the nature of the politics characterising the project with respect to arrangements and mechanisms stakeholders (government, planners, coordinators and implementers) support its activities in achieving its objectives as opposed to promoting their own interests. Culture and religion include the beliefs and values people cherish and how they influence them to engage with and support each other. Culture and

1. [1]*Ibid.*
2. [2]*Ibid.*
3. [3]*Ibid.*
4. [4]*Ibid.*
5. [5]*Ibid.*

religion provide insight into what people attach value and importance , to which, therefore, planned project that are aimed at influence their behaviour should pay attention[6].

Farmers have their own different cultures and religions, which influence their involvement in farming activities. Understanding these different cultures and religions provides insights into approaches and methods that cane be used to mobilise and train the farmers to induce change from subsistence to commercial agriculture. Meanwhile, livelihood assets and activities include households assets in the form of land, production tools, savings, food reserves as well as political and weather environment.[7] The activities refer to land, water, enterprise and wage-based activities people do to support their households.[8] In the case of OWC project, the focus is only on land-, water-, enterprise-based activities that can receive support to enable farmers to transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture. The assessment, therefore, leaves out wage-based activities.

Infrastructure and services include transport, healthcare, water, sanitation, education, energy, social security, communication, markets, enterprise support among others, needed to support households' well-being (Smyth & Vanclay Frank).[9] One of the objectives of OWC project, is contributing to the development and provision of infrastructure and services. Thus, assessing the contribution the project has made toward infrastructure development serves as a gauge of project performance in achieving its objectives.

With respect to housing and business structures, the framework considers a household to consist of a house that meets the basic quality standards of strength and existence of walls. Business structures are assessed on the basis of whether or not the household uses farm or non-farm structures to conduct activities that support its livelihood. The implementation of OWC project was based on the notion that one of the ways of improving household welfare is by empowering households to have permanent house structures. Thus, the existence of is expected of OWC performance and by extension in line with the goal of improving livelihoods of farmers by creating enabling environment that transforms their mode of operations from subsistence to commercial agriculture. To that end, the assessment evaluated the contribution of OWC project towards achieving that objective.

The Social Framework for Projects defines land and natural resources to include the access of a household to land, water bodies, forests and other natural resources to support livelihood activities.[10] Projects ,which aim at improving livelihoods are expected to enhance the ability of households to have to the above resources, or if they already have access, to enable them in optimising the use of the resources to achieve better livelihoods. One of the objectives of OWC project is to support famers in optimizing resources .

Thus, one of the areas of this assessment was the contribution of OWC project toward enhancing the ability and capacity of farmers to utilize resources efficiently. The living environment comprises a stable and clean setting needed by a household to maintain its wellbeing, including clean water, air, fertile soil, good weather, and vegetation?[11]

While some of these indicators are natural, a project such as OWC project in collaboration with the National Water and Sewerage Corporation is expected to sustain their preservation through improving water supply to farmers for irrigation, outsourced operators of seedlings nurseries to improving tree planting to mitigate weather vagaries, and providing farmers with fertilisers to improve soil fertility (The Uganda Farmers' Common Voice Platform, 2019). Thus, assessing the progress that this project has made is necessary.

In general, the Social Framework for Projects can be adopted to assess the impact or progress of projects. Reflecting on OWC project objectives, most of the indicators of the framework can be used as a guide to evaluate the progress achieved in empowering farmers to transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture, thereby improving their livelihoods and welfare.

Thus, the operationalization of the Social Framework for Projects in assessing OWC project performance indicators adopted from social framework for projects instrument, and comparing actual and expected performance on project goals, objectives and targets. Secondary data on relevant indicators was obtained from various sources including OWC progress reports, statistics on social economic indicators that were issued by the Uganda statistics

6. [6]*Ibid.*
7. [7]*Ibid.*
8. [8]*Ibid.*
9. [9]*Ibid.*
10. [10]*Ibid.*
11. [11]*Ibid.*

agency, official statement and reports issued by relevant ministries and previous published academic papers on issues that are related to the OWC project.

IV. OWC project progress and performance assessment results

Based on the foregoing framework, the following sections present assessment results of the OWC project progress. The assessment is made by adopting indicators of the Social Framework to relevant project objectives.

4.1 Mobilising the public to engage in commercial agricultural activities to boost household incomes

In 2013 when the OWC project was launched, 75% of the 7.3 million households in Uganda were engaged in subsistence agriculture. This implies that 5.5 million households were in subsistence farming. The OWC's annual target was to mobilise and encourage the transition of one million households from subsistence to commercial farming (MAAIF & MFPED, 2016). This would translate into all the 5.5 million and more households becoming commercial farmers by 2020, thereby turning Uganda into a middle-income country However, based on assessment results, 65% of the households in Uganda were still engaged in subsistence agriculture by 2020 (UBOS, 2021). To that end, while the OWC project has been able to mobilise farmers to engage in commercial agricultural activities, the percentage of households engaged in subsistence farming experienced only 10 percent reduction during 2013-2020 period from 75% to 65%.

The reduction of 10% (75% – 65%) is however, therefore far below target, and represents only about 730,000 of the 2013 households, but 854,324 of the households of 2020 (that is 9.6 million). Therefore, results imply that at least 8.7 million households are yet to be mobilised to engage in commercial agriculture (Figure 1). Accordingly, as regards the objective of mobilising the public to engage in commercial agricultural activities to boost household incomes, OWC project has made little progress. To that end, the impact of the OWC project on the livelihoods of subsistence farmers remains insignificant. Consequently, OWC project has not propelled Uganda from low income developing economy into a middle income economy. Based on World Bank standards, middle income status is attained when a country attains per capita income of at least US$1,036 (World Bank, 2020a), but in2020 Uganda's income per capita was US$794.341 (World Bank, 2020b).

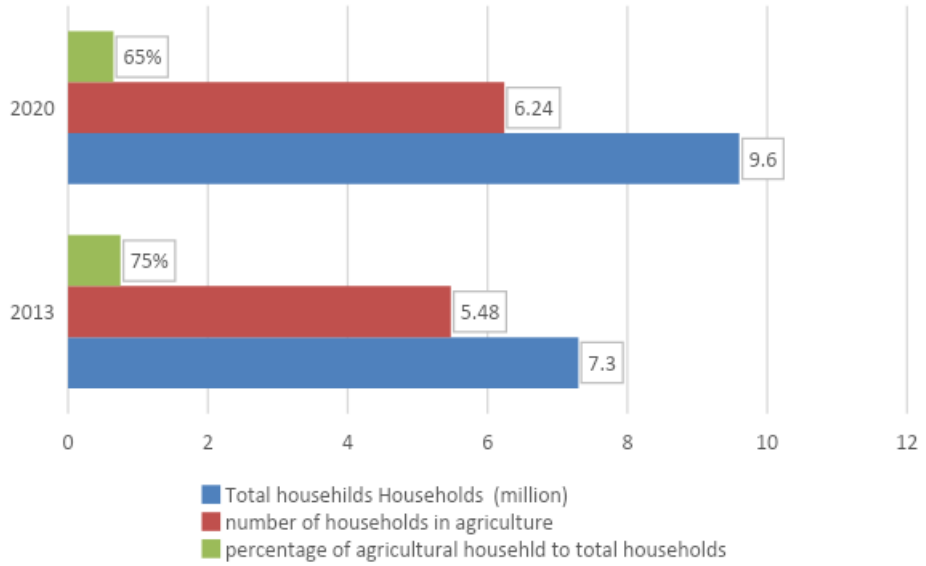

Figure 1. impact of OWC project on number and percentage of households agriculture 2013-2020

4.2 To distribute production inputs equitably and timely to boost production and productivity at the household level

The OWC project succeeded in mobilising between 730,000 and 854,324 households in Uganda to engage in commercial agriculture. Most of such households were headed by young people, women, people with disabilities and the elderly. Project implementation the provision of various agricultural outputs as shown in Figure 2. Based on Ministerial Policy Statement of 2019/2020 (MAAIF,2020), program implementation has entailed the procurement and distribution of pesticides, herbicides, and inorganic fertilisers, 3,124,800 kilograms (Kgs) of high yielding maize seeds and 315,550 Kgs of high yielding bean seeds; 368,820 tissue cultured banana suckers, and 6,856 bags of potato seeds.

In addition, to enhance livestock production and productivity, the project procured and distributed improved livestock breeds, including 3700 heifers, 212 beef bulls, 2450 goat breeds, 1157 pigs (gilts, boars), 60,000-day old layer chicks and 10,000 broilers. Households that received livestock also received pasture seeds, while those that got poultry were beneficiaries of 144,000 kgs of feeds (chick and duck mash) and 261,560 kgs of growers' mash. Besides, the project saw the distribution of , 2,881,000 Tilapia, 790,000 cat fish, 291,190 mirror cap fish fingerings and 250,000 kgs of fish feeds to households. The project further distributed (Figure 2).

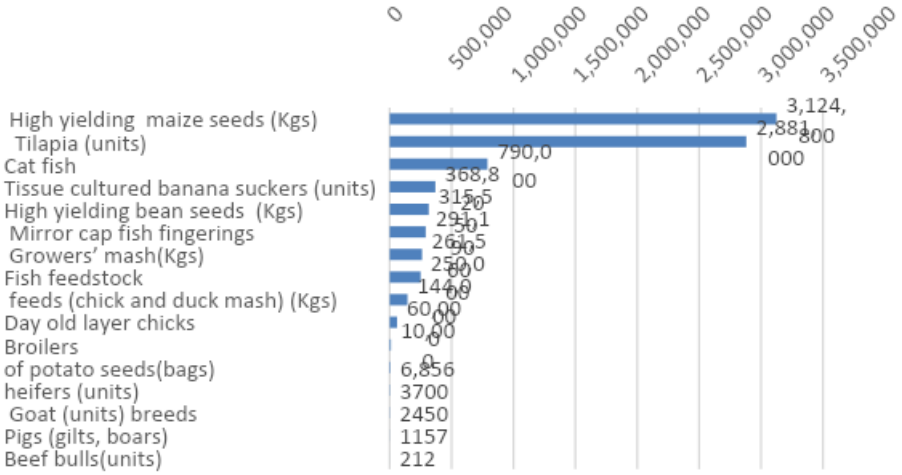

Figure 2. Agricultural inputs provision facilitated by OWC project during 2013-2020 period

With respect to the distribution of agricultural inputs, by leveraging the services of UPDF officers , the OWC project was able to achieve better performance than NAADS. This is reflected in its ability to fulfil some of the project input distribution targets as well as exceeded others such as in areas of seed, livestock, poultry and fish farming. Nonetheless, based on the Report on the Implementation of the Operation Wealth Creation Programme in Uganda that was issued by the Sectoral Committee on Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF, 2019), the distribution of some farm inputs was plagued by delays, poor timing, insufficiency or delivery out of season. Consequently, farmers opted not to get the inputs , which rendered them to waste

With respect sufficiency of agricultural inputs delivered to farmers under OWC program, most of the farmers were not able to get the inputs they needed. For instance, a household, which required 500 apple seedlings could only get 70 seedlings. There were also quality issues. The quality of seeds that were distributed was far from expectations due to the fact seeds of different quality were combined into packages that were sent to farmers.

Consequently, some of the distributed seeds failed to germinate, and where they did, could not withstand the long dry spells that are typical in some of the regions in Uganda such as Karamoja. The problem of poor quality seeds is attributable to the procuring process of some of the that involved uncertified nursery operators. In other cases, the distributed inputs were not appropriate for areas for the agroclimatic areas where they were sent. For instance, mango and tea seedlings were distributed in some districts where they could not do well. Another problem that plagued farm input distribution was the fact that no heifers were allocated for the central region.

The foregoing observations demonstrate that the implementation of OWC project was characterised by instances where would-be beneficiary households did receive expected benefits because of its failure to take into account their specific interests. As a result, farmers' utilisation of some of the distributed inputs was suboptimal. In general, moreover, an argument can be made that the distribution of agricultural inputs to support OWC project implementation faced poor timing, quality and quantity management problems. To that end, there is need for OWC project planners and implementers to improve management of timeliness, quality, quantity and equity of input distribution.

4.3 Facilitating rural technological upgrading for transforming smallholder farmers into small-scale industrialists

The OWC project upgraded the technological capacity of farmers by procuring and distributing different value-adding equipment and technologies. The equipment included at least one farm tractor and related equipment to 47 districts that were selected randomly from all four regions of Uganda.

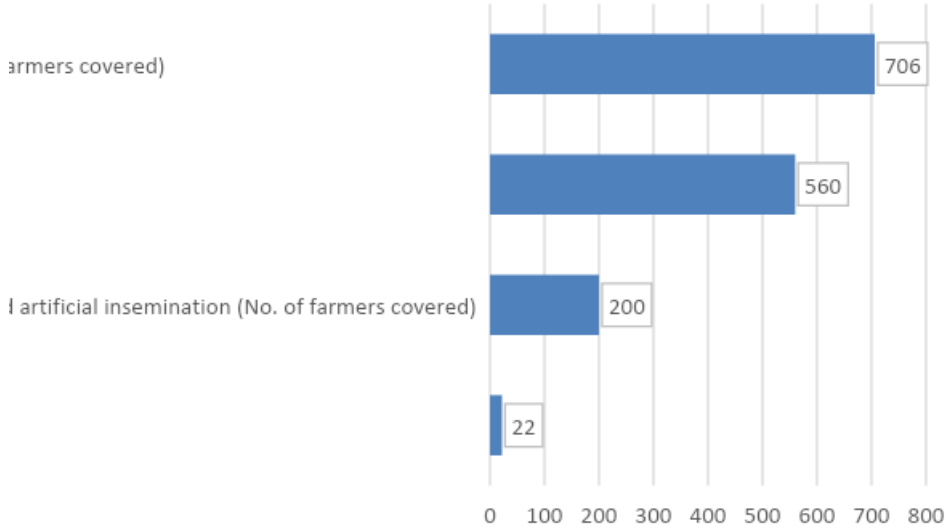

Figure 3. Improving technology in agriculture

Besides, OWC project facilitated the adoption and upgrading of existence technology used by farmers in various ways. OWC project with the collaboration of involved UPDF officers and local government extension workers facilitated training of farmers in using productivity enhancing practices and technologies that included 200 cattle farmers who received training in dairy cattle management and artificial insemination, 560 farmers modern practices in poultry keeping and 706 farmers in better cultivation technologies and practices (MAAIF, 2020). In addition, OWC project facilitated the provision of 22 micro irrigation systems that increased farmers' ability to reduce the vulnerability of crops to f rainfall uncertainty (Figure 3).

However, the tractors that were distributed were very few and not easily adaptable to small-scale farming. Moreover, instead of using the district as a unit for distribution, OWC project would do better by distributing the tractors based on the parish level. In addition, the tractors should be the small type that can be adapted to small and medium scale commercial agricultural production. Giving tractors to farmers without providing prior training in operating and maintaining them limited their efficient and effective use, which in turn undermined the contribution of mechanization to agricultural productivity.

Besides, farmers received tractors but they were not provided with means to make their operational including fuel, oil and spare parts for maintenance in the event of breakdown services. Consequently, the tractors did not serve the purpose for which was to increase land and labour productivity.

Nonetheless, the impact of training that agricultural extension officers with the collaboration of UPDF officers provided on farmers production was undermined by the limited , the number of training staff which could not cover all the farmers who were participants in OWC project. This was partly attributable to the fact that the involvement and engagement of agricultural extension workers who were charged with providing training farmers on improving households' farming technologies was woefully lacking(MAAIF,2019).

Agricultural extension workers neither did pay visits to farmers to provide technical guidance and information about modern farming methods nor train the farmers on techniques of adopting better farming practices. The main reason for that was that the number of extension works on the ground was very limited , which undermined their efforts to do their work effectively. The situation was exacerbated by the fact despite ensuring successful distribution of agricultural inputs to various parishes and village councils where farmers could access them easily, most UPDF officers who were entrusted with the implementation of OWC project lacked the technical competence and capability to provide agricultural extension services to farmers.

4.5 Stimulating local and community enterprise development across the county

Besides technological upgrading, the OWC project stimulated local and community enterprise development in Uganda. According to the Ministerial Statement (MAAIF,2020), the project facilitated the procurement of processing equipment for mangoes, citrus fruits and pineapples for various small and medium scale farmers' associations ; supported the establishment of six fruit processing plants in a number of districts, including Yumbe, Kayunga, Nakaseke, Nwoya, Greater Masaka and Greater Busoga areas. Besides, the project also equipped different farmers' associations with 16

small, medium and large-scale milling equipment for maize, rice and oil; facilitated the procurement of 20 milk coolers and matching generators for farmer groups; and fostered the establishment of four community grain stores in n mid, western, central, west Nile and Karamoja.

The establishment of local and community enterprises was preceded by an assessment of the capacity of the beneficiaries to manage them, and conducted technical inspection and monitoring of the enterprises during project implementation to ensure that they were working well. However, the number of enterprises established so far can only cover less than 2% of the potential farmer associations. This implies that OWC project progress in facilitating and supporting the establishment of enterprises farmer association based enterprises is still extremely low.

4.6 Facilitating infrastructure development in rural areas.

OWC project has contributed to improvement in rural infrastructure. Based on statistics obtained from the Uganda Farmers' Common Voice Platform (The Uganda Farmers' Common Voice Platform, 2019)[12], OWC project has rehabilitated 3289 km of all-weather rural community access roads and over 538 km of district feeder roads.

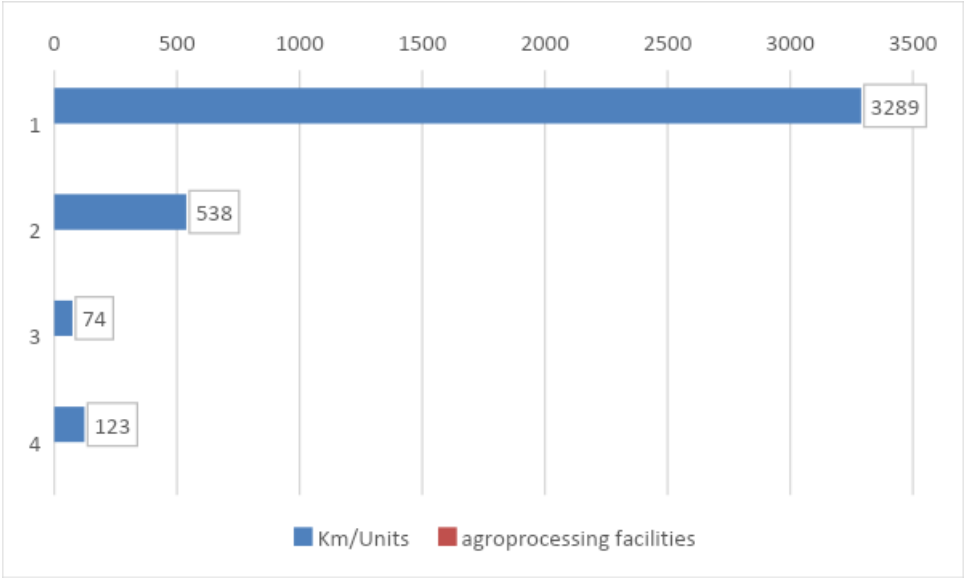

Figure 4. Improvement in access and agroprocessing infrastructure

In addition, OWC project has facilitated the establishment of 74 rural agricultural markets, and installed 123 units of assorted agro-processing and storage facilities, including 14 coffee hullers, 39 maize mills, 33 rice hullers and 37 milk coolers throughout Uganda, especially in areas that are most suitable for each commodity (Figure 4).

Consequently, the implementation of the project has led to an increase farm gate prices, reduced transportation costs for farmers, increased access to produce buyers and produce markets. Moreover, the implementation of the project has not only reduced travel time from rural areas to major towns by more than 50 percent, but has also led to an approximately 20 percent reduction in post-harvest losses. Improvement in infrastructure development that have been possible thanks to the implementation of the OWC project, has spurred the development of a number of rural trade centres and construction of more permanent houses, new schools and health facilities.[13] Nonetheless, it is worth noting that a country with 65% of households are in farming, the above progress is still low.

V. Conclusion and policy recommendations

Results of the assessment of OWC project performance, shows that the objective of as the project has to a certain extent achieved the objective of improving household livelihoods and welfare by transforming subsistence farmers into commercial agriculturalists. Based on available statistics, , that the implementation of OWC project has induced the transition of 10% hitherto subsistence households toto commercial agriculture.

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Nonetheless, the achievement is low compared to the initial target of 75% of households that had were projected to become commercial farmers. Thus, the project has not been able to achieve the target of transforming Uganda into a middle-income country by 2020. Accordingly, the assessment highlights obstacles that have plagued project implementation including problems with quality ,timing, appropriateness and adequacy agricultural inputs, non-involvement of project beneficiaries in project design that hampered understanding their perspectives on right inputs with respect to timing, quality, and quantity; insufficiency of agricultural extension workers; and limited technical capacity of UPDF officers to offset shortages in agricultural extension officers.

The failure of the project to achieve its overarching objective of transforming a large number of subsistence households that vary widely with respect to scale of production, education and technical knowledge, commodity grown, and geographical region, from subsistence to commercial farmers in just seven years, was too ambitious. Areas that need improving to enhance project performance include improving timing, quality and quantity management of input distribution; better targeting of delivery of production inputs in accordance with agricultural zones; addressing the problem of inadequacy and apathy of agricultural extension workers; correcting inequity in the distribution of some inputs; remedying the problem of insufficient agricultural equipment and technologies; dealing with uncertified seed nursery operators; and supporting and facilitating an increase in the enhancing the contribution of farmer associations, groups and institutions to local and community enterprise development by facilitating their transition from informality to formal organizational structures, and. Accordingly, coordination between the government of Uganda , and OWC project implementers and management should go along way to address various challenges that have to some extent undermined project performance.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

The authors hereby state that that are no conflicts of interest to declare

Notes

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