

Policy Memorandum Proposal

TO: The Ugandan Department of Farm Management
FROM: ATHGO International, Group #8
SUBJECT: The North Ugandan Seed Loan Program

The situation in Sub-Saharan Africa—in particular the food crisis, political instability, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic—has resulted in prevalence of humanitarian efforts and social programs in the region. While individuals and organizations have worked tirelessly to improve the situation, there is still much more that can be done. Poverty has been reduced by 43 per cent in Uganda's urban areas, but has not even reached half that amount in its rural regionⁱ. The north of Uganda, in particular, is one of its biggest rural areas and has been constantly stricken by political instability. This has hindered the region's agricultural development, maintaining widespread poverty.

Uganda has evolved from a nearly failed state, battered by violent dictatorships and vast political instability, to a country with a track record of growth and institutional reform. A strong partnership between the Ugandan government, the World Bank Group and other development partners has helped Uganda slowly improve its infrastructure and institutions. Nevertheless, the northern regions of Uganda that are highly agricultural have continued to struggle with poverty. It is recognized that the northern areas must improve agricultural productivity in order to combat this problem. As a result several programs have been implemented, including the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund Project (NUSAF), the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), and USAID's Multi-Year Assistance Program, which work to assist and educate farmers in agricultural development. Though these programs have had positive externalities, the greatest obstacles for these farmers have not been overcome. According to a report published in February 2008 by the NGO Cooperative Office for Voluntary Organisations (COVOL), the largest factors prohibiting greater crop production stem from a lack of basic resources, such as seeds and the availability of creditⁱⁱ. Although in previous programs seeds and other tools were sold to farmers at a discounted rate, farmers still found it extremely difficult to purchase these necessities because of their unavailability of funds and the inaccessibility of credit.

Because of the obvious need for basic supplies, such as seeds and fertilizer, and the lack of credit available, we propose a publicly funded program to loan seeds and give fertilizer to rural farmers in the north of Uganda—specifically Lira, Apac, Nebbi, Arua which are the most populated regions. As a part of this program, the Ugandan government would give out fertilizer and loan out a set number seeds of pigeon pea, cassava, sweet potato, finger millet to any farmer who registers with the program. This quantity would be recorded and catalogued at the program's nearest branch office, which would be a cooperative effort between salaried employees from the Ugandan government, local officers and trained farmers. Recipients would be allowed to plant the seeds and fertilizers in their own lands with the condition that after one year they would be required to return to the government at least 10 per cent of the total amount of seeds they initially received. Farmers would have to "repay" these seeds loans over a 10 year period (this loan, however, would not impede a farmer from borrowing other types of seeds under the same program). Failure to return a per cent each year will result in the revocation of credit to these farmers—that is, they would be prohibited from receiving any more seed loans until the original seed amount was repaid. It is important to note that recipients will also be required to undergo training in sustainable agriculture as part of this policy. Education is a key component because it ensures recipients have the appropriate knowledge to reap the maximum benefits the seeds and fertilizer. The training process would undoubtedly build upon education provided by the already-existing programs. Furthermore, it would serve to facilitate contact and communication between the administrators of our program and the recipients. This would then allow the administrators to closely monitor the progress of the farmers and ensure accountability for sustainable farming practices. NAADS can assist in the education and monitoring process, as it already has related programs in place in northern Uganda.

Our group's role would be to oversee the initial setup of this program. We will raise the initial funds as a means to assist the Ugandan government, help promote the program through the region, and

train individuals to work in the program's offices. We will have continuous involvement in the program by monitoring its progression. If need be, we will also help establish the program in other regions in the north of Uganda.

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- ⁱ International Fund for Agricultural Development. "Rural Poverty in Uganda." Rural Poverty Portal. 7 March 2007. Retrieved 10 July 2008. <<http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/english/regions/africa/uga/index.htm>>
- ⁱⁱ Cooperative Office for Voluntary Organisations. "Northern Uganda Food Security Project(DERO): Pilot Phase (1997-1999) and Reconstruction Phase (2008-2012)." 27 February 2008. Retrieved 10 July 2008. <<http://www.covol-uganda.org/downloads/COVOL-DERO-Project-Achievements-and-Impacts-1997-1999.pdf>>

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