

TRENDS IN MARKETING BANANAS IN SOUTHERN UGANDA

Dezi Sebuo Ngambeki

National Banana Research Programme of National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO)

P.O. Box 7065, Kampala, Uganda

E-mail: dezingambeki@yahoo.com

Highland cooking bananas are endemic to East Africa and have been grown in southern Uganda for a long time. However, due to a build up of biotic and abiotic constraints, including population pressure on the land, banana production has declined drastically in the traditional producing areas, where plantation life has shortened and garden size has shrunk. Since 1940, banana communities have experienced seasonal scarcity from August to February, and marketing activities in southern Uganda have become imperative for maintaining a supply to local communities.

The objectives of this paper are to examine a) the components and unique features of banana marketing in southern Uganda and b) the evolution of the marketing system from traditional simple and informal selling and buying to a complex structure involving a large number of farmers and traders, dealing in a huge volume of bananas. Cross-sectional data were collected at two sites from 1998 to 2004 and supplemented with secondary data.

The banana marketing system has many unique features. Consumers may use different units of measurement, including kilograms, fingers, clusters, and bunches. Traders can grade bunches into large, medium, and small, and use units of heaps and trucks. The modes of storage and transportation of bananas require fast, efficient marketing. The market price is determined by the size of fingers and bunches, the number of clusters, cultivar, season, and location.

The marketing system itself has passed through many phases. A farmers' cooperative movement controlled the market from 1960 to 1979, but it collapsed in the 1980s. Then, a strong group of market middlemen emerged, monopolized market information, and obtained large market gains of 30 to 60%. Currently, the banana market structure consists of farmers, four to five middlemen between the farmers, long-distance wholesalers/transporters, urban market wholesalers, and retailers. The improved access of banana farmers to market information has given them better access to markets and allowed them to sell directly to wholesalers at prices as high as 60% of the consumer price.

The current banana marketing system in southern Uganda has evolved to maintain the supply of bananas to communities, despite all the changes and adverse conditions.

Keywords: Banana, Marketing system, Supply, Demand, Community