



AGRICULTURE in Kuron Peace Village

Impacts and Challenges

(Nov.2021)

Since 1999, Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron, has been working with techniques and methods for agriculture production in the Toposa lands. The black cotton soil is fertile and can produce a great deal of food if managed properly. The rainy season is substantial enough to support large fields of cultivation. The area is sparsely populated and the Toposa are mainly pastoralists who move with their animals as the seasons unfold. However, the women have always traditionally supplemented food income by cultivating sorghum. Field preparation is very labor intensive and has been traditionally done by women. With the introduction of the Jembe (hoe) there has been an increase in cultivation while at the same time making it a bit easier for the farmer.

Mr. Thomas Mogga along with Mr. Milla Elizeous, both of whom were trained in Agriculture, arrived in 2000. At that time there were very few people practicing agriculture in this area. These two men began the initial demonstration farm in the very early stages in the history of Kuron Peace Village. The early plan in 2000 was to encourage the Toposa to grow supplemental crops in these chronically food deficit areas. But it seems from 2000 to 2013 even though a variety of seeds were distributed, the Toposa concentrated their efforts on only one crop, Sorghum. This is what they knew and were not about to change quickly. See below for the changes.



Mr. Milla discusses sorghum crop with local farmer

As part of the effort to expose the Toposa people to other possibilities in agriculture, visiting tours to Kenya and Uganda were undertaken. One example: in 2015, members of HTPVK and several community members from this area went to Kisumu, Kenya. The members of the tour were able to see how other farmers are working the land and perhaps to widen the vision of the Toposa. Some of those who went on this trip replicated what they learned. They started small vegetable gardens with cow peas, Sukuma (kale), maize, and other greens.

Over the years, different methods were also introduced such as: planting in rows to facilitate weed management, more efficient harvesting, and easier time management. Hybrid seeds were also introduced but the bad thing is these are not sustainable as they have to be purchased annually.

The Toposa are astute and don't accept things so quickly. First, they will watch and only use a small part of their land with these new methods. They want someone else to take the risk first and prefer to observe. Once they see the positive results only then are they more open to new ideas. These people are very quick in saying how good something like animal traction is, but slow to actually adapt to the new methods.

A sorghum seed bank was organized whereby the farmers were asked to contribute ten KG of their crops seeds to the bank. HTPVK would store and wait for the next planting season so that no loss from mildew, weevils or rodents occurred. Usually, the local people would eat these seeds at times when food is lacking. Seeds were treated with natural medicines/protection which the Toposa could easily replicate.

The general Toposa community perception is that there is value in increasing crop yields. Some communities have better leadership and do accept some of the new methods much easier. Due to being a semi-arid region, drought plays a factor in the success for the agriculture program. Sorghum is a drought resistant plant. The problem with cassava is that the dry season is a bit too long and the tubers become spongy and inedible.

There are certain communities which accept new ideas rather quickly. One example is Namalia Village where a community of 70 households each have their own banana plants and maize. They eat and sell their crops. This community has the kind of leadership which can motivate all the people to accept this type of new idea. Gumarieng is another model community similar to Namalia in that they are trying these new crops and methods. We hope to use these communities to expand out to other villages.



Farmers display their banana suckers

It seems Maize is one crop that was not cultivated here in Kuron area when the Bishop first started out here. Now you can find Maize in many places. The Toposa have said that the taste is good and provides diversity from their usual sorghum. Maize has even become so valuable as to see some members of one community trying to steal from another. In 2021, we had the unfortunate incident of one of the HTPVK staff stabbed while trying to prevent a thief from stealing his maize in the middle of the night. (Staff person is okay and the man is in jail.) We also heard that in another incident the people of Namalia arrested two youth who were trying to steal their maize. So this crop has become rather

dear to the Toposa. (Maize contains approximately 8 to 11% of protein while sorghum provides roughly 9 to 10% protein.)

IMPACTS

In 2000 and the years up to 2013 there were very few crops being grown beyond sorghum. Now in 2021 we know that almost every kraal (village) has a garden. These are communally owned and cultivated and kept within the confines of the village or surrounded by thorn fencing.

We can say that close to 100% of the women in the rural areas are cultivating some land with some type of food. In 2000, when we first arrived, men were not involved in any agriculture. Now we have seen some change due to the heavy influence from HTPVK. Generally, men don't help their wives and they are really only interested in looking for cash-for-work opportunities. We estimate that about 25% of the men are presently involved in agriculture.

The introduction of Jembes (hoes) has been widely accepted and this had reduced cultivation time, reduced the heavy burden on the women, and increased crops as the weeding and clearing is easier.

BeeKeeping has increased the income of those who are caring for bees. Honey is expensive and can bring in extra income if properly managed.

Several crops are seen as annual crops such as plantain, eggplant and maize. However, over the past two decades more and more people are consuming these nutritious vegetables. Okra is a traditional vegetable here in Kuron but now there is a market to sell to HTPVK staff for extra cash income.



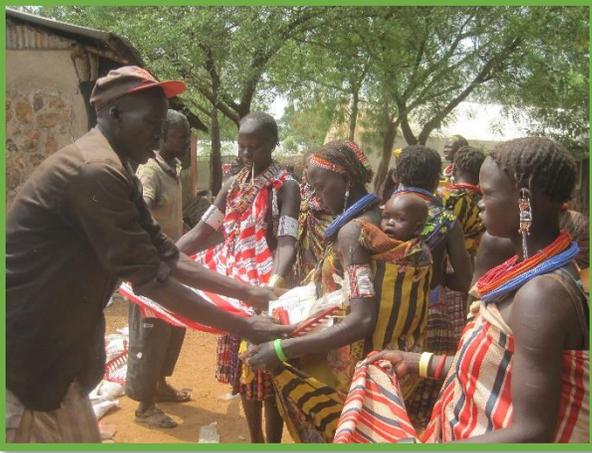
Handmade Beehives from a recent workshop are being used

There are numerous kraals where banana suckers have been distributed and are doing well and the people consume this fruit. They generally sell this fruit to others for cash income.

Cassava did not do very well in the community and it was not accepted by most locals. The dry season was too long for Cassava and the tubers became spongy. Maize is becoming more and more popular among the Toposa.

The tools and hybrid seeds have been accepted well by the people. They do use all of these agricultural inputs. However, with hybrid seeds they will hold some for the next season crop and then effectiveness is less. But on the first two crops the yield is substantial enough to encourage the Toposa to plant more acreage to realize greater gains and harvests.

CHALLENGES



Distributing Tools and Seeds

There is a tendency for a small number of individuals within the area who would rather steal than to cultivate and grow these new products themselves. Some individuals are industrious but others are lazy and won't accept new ideas easily.

Stealing of fruits and vegetables is bad but there is a thought that the Toposa value the fruits which is good. In the case of bananas, many have planted in their own compounds and eat the fruit.

The tools do break over time and there is a tendency to simply ask for new ones each season. This is not viable and they must learn to purchase their own tools. However,

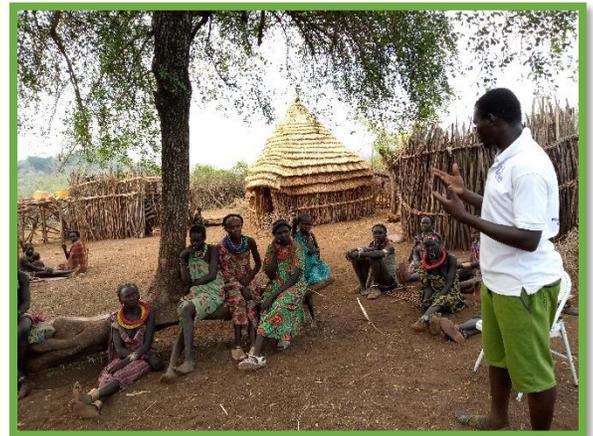
there are no tools sold locally at this moment.

HTPVK staff have, in reality, taken the role of monitoring and supervision which should be carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture. However, the local people have more trust in HTPVK than outside agents(because the staff live in this community and know them well). Until the Government is able to extend it's assistance to the isolated areas, HTPVK will serve as the main facilitators.

LESSONS LEARNED

(what worked well)

All agricultural programs require constant and regular contact is necessary to ensure motivation and enthusiasm to new ideas. In the early years of HTPVK, there was a large and successful demonstration farm at the Village site. Toposa were brought to the site for training and workshops. But we found that only those nearby would come. If the distance was too far, they wouldn't come. So the program was changed from a demonstration at Kuron Peace Village to an outreach program which became much more effective. Agriculture agents would go to the villages and the people were much more eager to participate in their own places.



Meeting with farmers in their villages

Because of the need to do constant supervision, it is better not to spread the staff too far a wide. This will cause fewer contact times with those who are really interested. It is better to focus on model communities and expand out from those. Those villagers can even become the motivators for other villages around their areas.

In just the example of bananas, we find that certain places the crop will grow well due to soil and water issues, in others it does not do well. Most farmers don't have an interest in planting or growing large crops of bananas but just enough to supply their needs. We find that three bananas in each place at different stages can be sufficient to supply a family year round.

The Toposa can seem rather accepting at first but if they do not see results quickly, they will simply walk away from the program. Sorghum is their preferred and traditional food and beyond that they struggle to accept new crops. Maize is the exception as they like the taste. It takes time to develop agricultural contact people who can serve as models in the kraals and convince their own people of the benefits.

Local contact persons have to be established in the villages and then concentrate on teaching these people. They in turn will ensure that activity continues in the village when program staff cannot be there for some time.

Model villages which are more accepting and faster to implement are very useful in convincing other nearby communities of the benefits of a new idea. It is the project leadership job to connect these two and allow them the space to convince each other rather than someone from outside the group.



Ground Nuts harvested

Teak planting is an example of a crop that takes quite a few years to see any income. The Toposa are reluctant to wait for this. Due to their semi-nomadic life style of moving with their animals according to the season, they prefer quick growing crops. It is better to introduce quick turn over crops in the beginning until trust is built up, then introduce these long range crops.



Bee Keeping workshop attendees display their hives made from local materials

Fencing of demonstration plots and plantation areas is expensive. It does not seem to be effective in the long term to keep out the thieves or cattle. Toposa simply cut the metal and use it for jewelry or make other useful instruments. One would need to hire guards with guns to serve as a real deterrent against theft. However, the main way to cut down on theft is to saturate the area with so much food that everyone grows their own supply.

One time while the staff were distributing seedlings of avocado, lemon, lime and mango. The first question of the people was “...how long before we can eat this food?...” Most of those in that activity walked away because we said it would take some three years for the fruit

to come. Only a few stayed with the idea of planting for future generations.

Outreach programs were more logistically difficult but were more effective over-all in the long term. The people are more willing to participate when the program and activities are within their area. They do not have time to walk and spend the entire day far away from their villages.