EPRC
Increasing income and food security in rural Uganda

The *Economic Policy Research Centre* (EPRC) is helping the Government of Uganda increase farmers' yields with a new fertilizer strategy.

**SETTING THE SCENE** — Once known as the Pearl of Africa for its abundant crops and fertile soils, Uganda has experienced a steady decline in agricultural productivity in recent years. One of the key causes of this decreasing productivity is low soil fertility and the continuous depletion of soil nutrients, exacerbated by the limited use of fertilizers. Fertilizers have the potential to increase cereal output by up to 50 per cent of current production levels. However, fertilizer use in Uganda averages 1 kg per hectare compared to the target of 50 kg per hectare set in the *2010 Abuja Declaration on Fertilizer for an African Green Revolution*. Smallholder farmers, in particular, are affected as they lack sufficient knowledge about fertilizers and are often unable to afford fertilizers at market prices.

Despite its poor performance, agriculture remains a critical sector in Uganda as it is a source of livelihood for the majority of the country’s smallholder farmers. The country’s five-year *National Development Plan* recognizes agriculture as a critical area of focus for increasing the incomes of farming households and helping them meet their basic nutritional requirements. However, while countries such as Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda have made great strides with agricultural subsidies and other simple approaches to encouraging fertilizer use, Uganda has lacked a policy framework to promote fertilizers among smallholder farmers. As such, agricultural productivity remains very low and approximately two-thirds of Ugandans are food insecure.

**WHAT EPRC DID** — The Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) was established in 1993 to contribute to Uganda’s policy processes through national economic research, policy analysis, and capacity building. Using evidence from its research studies, EPRC made a strong case that the decline in agricultural productivity in the country was partly linked to low use of fertilizers. The Centre recognized the need for a national strategy, complete with policies and regulations, to guide and promote the use of fertilizers by smallholders. This marked the beginning of EPRCs proactive engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF). Through several public consultative events, and using its strong policy networks, the Centre was able to constructively engage in the development of three key national fertilizer policy documents on policy, regulations and strategy with the support of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. The process began in November 2010 with the development of the fertilizer policy and regulations.
Through several public engagement events on fertilizers, EPRC demonstrated the breadth of its expertise and the reach of its policy connections. In June 2011, with Think Tank Initiative funding, EPRC was able to bring together an impressive gathering of specialists at a national conference exploring the potential of fertilizers to transform agriculture in Uganda. The Centre has been able to maintain momentum among the relevant stakeholders while discussing how to promote fertilizer use and create a well-functioning fertilizer market. Because of this, in July 2011 EPRC was invited to make a presentation to the Sessional Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture on the state of fertilizer use in the country. This was followed by a Cabinet request for EPRC’s publications on the topic. In addition, EPRC’s work on the development of the fertilizer policy, regulations and strategy was cited in the country’s Agricultural Financing Year Book 2013.

**THE OUTCOME** —EPRC’s research helped to shape and influence the development of Uganda’s new fertilizer policy and regulations, which were approved by MAAIF’s Top Policy Management and brought before Cabinet for approval. A National Fertilizer Strategy is currently being drafted, and in July 2013 EPRC hosted the Technical Consultative Workshop on the Fertilizer Strategy as a means of bringing together stakeholders to guide this process. The draft Strategy was validated at a national stakeholder workshop in November 2013 and will be presented to the two technical committees of MAAIF prior to presentation to Top Policy Management. It highlights desired changes aimed at increasing the demand, access and use of fertilizers among smallholder farmers. These include: (i) appropriately applied fertilizers countrywide; (ii) increased farm productivity and sustainable fertilizer use; and (iii) additional resources to ensure equitable access to fertilizers for all farmers.

Overall, EPRC succeeded in demonstrating to relevant stakeholders that Uganda’s soils are no longer fertile, resulting in a change of mindset regarding the use of fertilizers. In order to ensure sufficient fertilizer supply and to meet the demand anticipated by implementation of the strategy, there is also growing recognition that there is a need to invest in local fertilizer production. To this end, there is debate about the exploitation of the Sukulu hills in Tororo for fertilizer production from phosphate mining, and the possibility of producing fertilizers as a by-product from oil is being advanced as an argument for building an oil refinery in the country.

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