



## CASE STUDY **How agricultural intensification increased inequality in Southwestern Uganda**

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This study used participatory methods to compare the farming system and the social and physical environment of 2018 and 1998. It was shown that while household levels of wealth on average have increased as a result of intensified cooking banana production, inequality between households and within households has also risen on multiple fronts. Economic progress such as an overall increase in agricultural commercialization shows trade-offs with environmental and social sustainability.

### Important Details

time (or time period)	focus on 1998-2018
country & region	Isingiro district in western region of Uganda
context & agro-eco landscape type	Savanna grasslands – wetlands – banana-based farming systems
key actors, stakeholders & beneficiaries	smallholder farmers
model and/or tools used	participatory community methods, focus group discussions

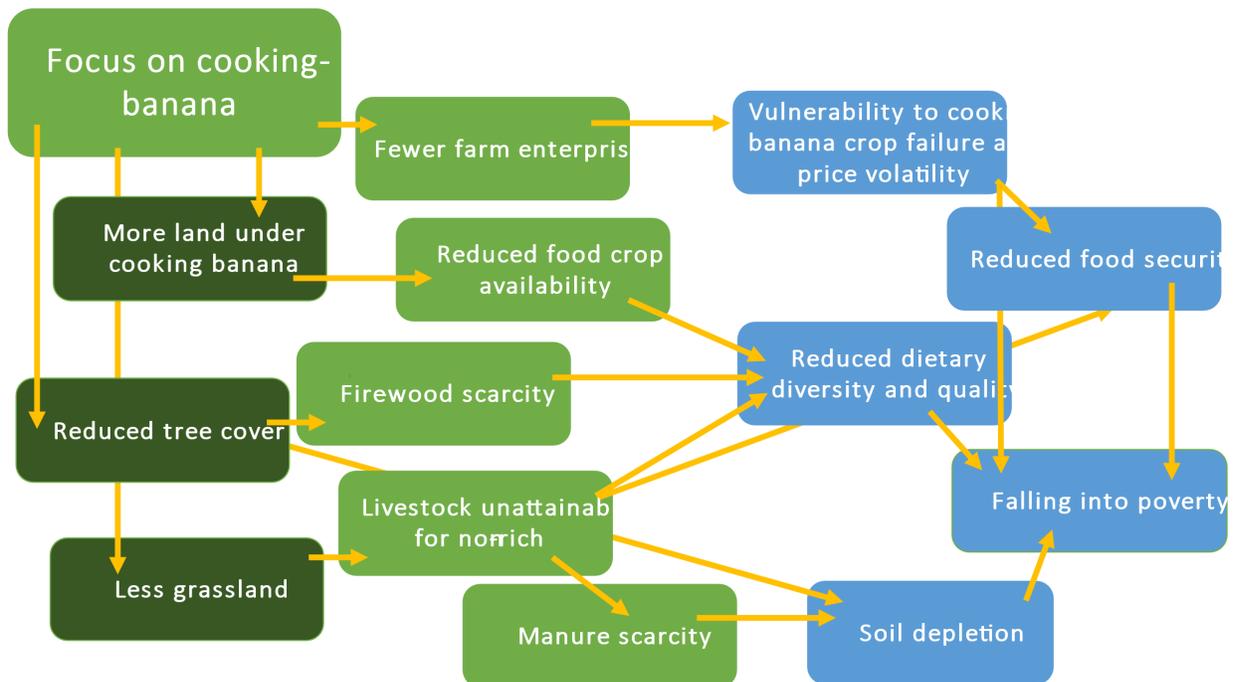
### Overview

In our case-study of a sub-county in Southwestern Uganda we use participatory methods to compare the farming system and social and physical environment of 2018 with 1998. We identified the following main changes over this period of time: 1) Large decrease in tree cover with currently no communal and /or natural forest remaining; 2) Decrease in grazing land; 3) Large increase in land under cooking banana cultivation; 4) Large increase in human settlements and population; 5) Privatization of former communal lands; 6) Large decrease in cultivation of crops other than cooking banana; 7) Enlarged and improved road network; 8) Small increase in privately owned, planted trees; 9) Hillsides are increasingly bare and eroded; 10) Increased access to drinking water through household water retention and creation of bore-holes; and 11) Increased access to electricity through grid and micro solar systems.

Data from both male and female focus group discussions further highlighted that: 1) Market economy, labour markets and agri-food trade are now well-established and common; 2) Commercial cooking banana production has brought wealth to land-owners; emergence of a new class of rich farmers; 3) Gender roles and norms in relation to crop production, access to land and income generation have changed; 4) Polygamy has become common as wealthier (male) land-owners marry more wives; 5) Emerging new class of farm (banana plantation) laborers with little or no land consisting of both locals and migrants, men and women; 6) Livestock keeping increasingly unattainable for the non-rich because of disappearance communal lands; 7) Increasing land prices and land scarcity; 8) Decreasing availability of fire-wood for food preparation; 9) Decreasing soil fertility combined with increasing costs of manure

(chemical fertilizer is hardly used); 10) Increased occurrence of drought and regular crop failure and famine; and 11) Decreasing access to fresh food products and reduced dietary diversity.

So, although household levels of wealth on average have increased over this 10 year period of time as a result of intensified cooking banana production, inequality between households and within households has also risen on multiple fronts. At the community level, differences between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ have increased as larger land-owners have often managed to not only considerably increase their income but also to diversify into non-farming which makes them less vulnerable to the recurring droughts. Simultaneously all land has been fenced off inhibiting households with no or too little land to collect firewood or graze goats. Women also lose out compared to men; although they are spending more time on cooking banana management than before, they do not have control over revenues nor expenditure. They do have more freedom to cultivate other crops that were formerly in the domain of men, but their access to land is decreasing as more and more land is brought under banana cultivation. In addition, there is a strong tendency amongst men to invest banana income in raising new and additional families, often to the disempowerment and deprivation of first wives and their respective children. This trend also promotes land fragmentation which will increasingly put pressure on the current farming system.



**Figure 1.** Results of Economic progress and trade-offs with environmental and social sustainability as a result of intensified cooking banana production

This intensification process is far from being sustainable. Soil depletion is a problem in many cooking banana fields and current production levels under similar management are unlikely to be maintained. When moving away from field-level analysis and taking a system approach that includes a focus on the

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social dimensions of sustainable agricultural intensification , a multitude of other negative externalities and consequences emerge. Within households, over-dependence on cooking bananas breeds vulnerability to droughts and malnutrition and disempowers women as compared to men. At the community level new classes emerge and the poor suffer from increasingly restricted access to the resources they need to maintain their livelihoods.

## Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Agricultural innovation and change such as Agricultural Intensification sometimes disproportionately benefits ‘well-off’ farmers, while it can decrease opportunities and further limit access to resources for poorer farmers. This inequality can increase at the landscape and/or community level; for instance, because new social classes such as landless laborers emerge or increase in size. But increased inequality can also occur at the household level for instance because women do not share in the increased incomes of their spouses.

It is important to keep in mind that economic progress in the form of an overall increase in agricultural commercialization does not necessarily lead to universal “wins” for all stakeholders involved, and in fact can have the negative effect of increasing the inequality between the “haves” and “have nots.”. The overall resilience or sustainability of a farm system at the landscape level is not served by increased inequality 'neither does it contribute to outcomes such as 'reducing poverty'.

Ensuring that marginalized groups actively participate in community processes of change is critical. Policy making and interventions should be carried out with these groups included at all steps and after a thorough analysis of their situation and prospects, for example through a gender analysis, to reduce possible negative effects of increased inequality.

### Key references

Anne M. Rietveld, Jeroen C. J. Groot & Margreet van der Burg (2021) Predictable patterns of unsustainable intensification, *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, DOI: 10.1080/14735903.2021.1940731  
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