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**An Assessment of how Agricultural Liberalization has Affected Cotton Production in Kitgum District: A Case Study of Selected Cotton Farmers.**

This study aimed at assessing how agricultural liberalisation has affected cotton production among rural farmers in Kitgum district. The study set out to answer the following research questions: (i) How has agricultural liberalisation affected cotton production among rural cotton farmers in Kitgum?; (ii) What are the underlying causes of the poor farm level cotton production in the era of agricultural liberalisation?; (iii) Can agricultural cooperative unions leverage cotton production among rural cotton farmers? This was a survey that employed descriptive research design to obtain information concerning the current status of cotton production among the rural smallholder cotton farmers. Pre-testing of the data collection instruments was done. Multistage sampling was used to arrive at the sample size and snowball sampling for element sampling. Primary data from 368 respondents was collected through a standard interview guide of open-ended and closed-ended questions. This study employed descriptive statistics from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse the primary data obtained. The results showed that cotton production in Kitgum has been relegated to smallholder farmers operating individually with most of them belonging to poor and low income households. On average, a rural cotton farmer cultivates cotton on only 1.7 acres, representing only 30 percent of the total land accessible to him/her annually. 97.8 percent of the farmers indicated that agriculture is their first principle source of income; with 33.4 percent depending solely on it for a livelihood. Only 18.2 percent use the ox-ploughs with the use of human labour and the hand-hoe dominating at 53.8 percent. Forty five percent of the farmers have roads that are inaccessible during the rainy seasons. Results also showed that 33.9 percent of the farmers travelled over 30 kilometres to the nearest trading centre, with 61.4 percent of them agreeing that liberalisation demoralised them from producing cotton. With only 4.6 percent of the household heads qualified with tertiary education, and 16.8 percent having no formal education, the rural cotton farmers are very vulnerable to exploitation by lint buyers. Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that cooperative unions might help in addressing their problems; while 54.3 percent of them said they would strongly support the reinstatement of the cotton cooperative unions. It is clear from this study that agricultural cooperatives are the best mechanism to address market and supply chain failures not only in cotton but in almost all agricultural commodities. Cooperative Unions encourage collective farming that maximally exploits the advantages associated with the pooling of scarce resources to invest in farmers' operations which helps farmers to become more active market participants, allows them easy access to credit facilities, from funding institutions such as Small Medium Enterprises (SME), commercial banks, etc. The only caveat being that, the formation of cooperatives has to be with the full involvement of all members. Their operations emanate out of detailed supply chain analysis and needs analysis using Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA), engagement and training of community members on cooperation principles so that it is internalised and entrenched within the members. Additionally, relevant tie ups and use of business principles to run and manage cooperatives professionally are important factors of success.

**Key Words: Agricultural Liberalisation, Cotton Production, Kitgum District.**