

Farming

A study leaflet based on experience in the linked dioceses of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Suffolk and Kagera, Tanzania

Exploring the Link

Kagera

The area of the Kagera diocese in NW Tanzania is largely virgin scrub. 92% of the population are dependent on farming. The majority of farmers are subsistence farmers with plots between 1.5 & 6 acres. The main crops grown are bananas (a staple), cassava, maize, finger millet & various vegetables. Many houses also have some hens & goats. Any excess is sold in local markets as poor roads make it difficult to access towns where the prices are higher. Some farmers have a small amount of coffee as a cash crop, but the local price does not cover the cost of production. The price per kilo of coffee beans fell by 93% between 1998 and 2001. There are no tractors or other farm machinery and soil quality is generally poor.

Suffolk

Suffolk has a very wide range of employment opportunities and only 3% of the population work in farming. But over 75% of the land is used for farming. The main crops are sugar beet, oil seed rape, wheat, barley & potatoes. Pigs and chicken are the main farmed livestock. Farmers are having subsidies taken away and supermarkets are pushing down prices. The price the farmer receives for a pint of milk is often less than the cost of production. It is difficult to compete in a free market and some are going out of business. Many have signed up to the Stewardship Scheme which rewards them for managing the land in an environmentally beneficial way whilst improving public access.



Suffolk pigs



New banana shamba



Mama Vicki and colleagues on their land

First hand experience

Gwaza a Kagera subsistence farmer

For Gwaza and his family of five, growing bananas & vegetables and looking after two goats on his two acres is necessary for his survival. "If the rains come we grow enough to stop us from being hungry. We never have enough to sell. We have a few coffee trees and we used to get a small income by selling coffee, but the prices are now so low we do not bother to cultivate them and harvest the coffee."

Peter a Suffolk pig farmer

"I farm just 7 acres," says Peter, "rearing pigs which are sold to high street butchers via the local abattoir. I receive no subsidies and am in competition with Eastern Europe." Peter hopes to develop sales through local outlets and dreams of being able to have some days off. His day begins at 6am feeding and cleaning out the pigs and ends just before bedtime with a final check of the pigs. None of the pigs are for his own consumption.

Michael a Suffolk arable farmer

Michael farms 720 hectares, growing winter wheat, spring barley, oil seed rape, woodland and grassland. He is in partnership with his father, mother & brother, employing three people. "I am totally dependent on subsidies," says Michael, "though there is no guaranteed price for my produce and stiff competition from the Baltic states where labour is cheap. I long for the day when there will be less political interference."

Mama Vicki

A group of women with 2 plots of land in Ngara are growing half their vegetables for sale in order to generate an income. "We are learning how to dry some of them so that we can store them for times of shortage," says Mama Vicki. "This way we hope to lift ourselves out of poverty."

Farming and international trade

For farmers in the Diocese of Kagera producing enough to feed themselves is a struggle. Selling any surplus locally is not easy because all are likely to have surplus at the same time. If they can find a way to take it to town they may find, in common with many poor farmers across the world, that the same items (tomatoes, cotton) are on sale for a cheaper price. These have often come from the EU or from the US. Here many farmers are still heavily subsidised and after many years of support their improved technologies can undercut poor farmers. Sometimes these governments are deliberately dumping surpluses at below the cost of production.

Poor countries represent a minute fraction of international trade (0.04%) and yet the developed nations continue to erect trade barriers, restricting their ability to trade themselves out of poverty. In Kagera Diocese, coffee and bananas are grown. These items are traded internationally on a large scale yet are not currently exported from here. Consumers in the west are not prepared to pay a price which would enable this to happen. The idea of the Fairtrade mark is to ensure that producers get a fair price for their efforts. It also provides a premium to be ploughed back into whatever social, economic or environmental project the producers decide.

Many farmers in Suffolk also receive no subsidy and have to compete in a cutthroat international market. Often they are

required to maintain husbandry and environmental standards above those of their competitors and they feel exploited by the big supermarket chains. Producers once again are not receiving a fair wage for the work they put in and suffer from unfair competition.

A poor man's field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away. Proverbs 13:23



Farming in Suffolk

For Prayer

So that financial systems
may no longer burden
the poorest;
So that nations may no longer
grow rich
at the expense of others;
So that trade may no longer
trap people in poverty;
God's kingdom come,
God's will be done,
On earth as in heaven.
Amen

Peter Graystone, Christian Aid. From Trade Justice, a Christian response to global poverty. Report by Christian Aid, Church House Publishing 2004 [p31]

Though what is past
may be full of loss,
and the present insecure,
never shall despair
take away the future.
Give us the seeds of hope,
O God,
and we will clear the ground,
plant and weed and work
and laugh,
our harvest safe in your hands.

From Dear Life Praying through the year with Christian Aid ed Janet Morley, Hannah Ward & Jennifer Wild. Christian Aid 1998 [p101]

God of the just weight
and the fair measure,
Let me remember
the hands that harvested
my food, my drink,
not only in my prayers
but in the marketplace.
Let me not seek a bargain
that leaves another hungry.

From Dear Life: Praying through the year with Christian Aid, ed Janet Morley, Hannah Ward & Jennifer Wild. Christian Aid 1998 [p114]

Bible resources

The Bible sees the whole world as created, loved and cared for by God. Since God entrusted stewardship of the earth to human beings, caring for the earth to make it fruitful is as much a part of faith as caring for people. Peace, harmony, *shalom* include fertile land as well as a just society (Psalms 65, 72, 147).

People without assets, protection, security, or power are vulnerable in any rural society. OT laws about tithing and gleaning provided for strangers, widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 24:19-22). Prophets criticised powerful people who cheated and exploited defenceless people (Micah 2:1-5; Amos 8:4-6; Isaiah 5:8-12). They called for justice - active concern for the poor and oppressed (Micah 6:6-8; Amos 5:21-24; Isaiah 1:16-17).

Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.
Isaiah 1:17

Israel's laws required people and animals to rest on the Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Every 7th year the land itself had a rest (Leviticus 25:1-7) and debts between fellow-Israelites were cancelled (Deuteronomy 15:1-6).

He has brought down rulers from their thrones,
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things, but
he has sent the rich away empty.
Luke:1:52-53

Jesus aligned himself with the prophets' defence of the poor (Luke 4:18-19), as his mother Mary had done (Luke 1:51-53).

Jesus spent most of his life among people who earned their living by fishing, farming or keeping animals. He knew the farmer's anxiety about crop yield (Mark 4:1-9); real hunger (Mark 2:22-28, Mark 6:35-44, Luke 6:21); the daily hunt for casual work (Matthew 20:1-16). He knew the trap of debt (Luke 16:1-9); how tenants could exploit a landlord's absence (Matthew 12:1-10); the value of one sheep (Luke 15:1-7); the dangers of a shepherd's life (John 10:1-16).

As the Church grew, Christians cared for the poor, and warned of the danger of wealth (Acts 4:32-37; 1 John 3:16-18; James 2:1-7, 4:13-5:6). They showed God's generosity by their practical support for one another (1 Corinthians 8-9; James 1:22).

Taking food to the market



Bible study

1. Read about Sabbath rest in Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Leviticus 25:1-7. What benefits would this 'rest' have brought the community? Is it realistic today? How far could you apply such principles to land you own, eg a garden, allotment, or churchyard?
2. Read Micah 2:1-5; Amos 8:4-6; Isaiah 5:8-12. Who were the 'oppressed' people then? Who are the 'oppressed' people now, in Kagera and in Suffolk? How can we show God's care for them?
3. Read Luke 12:13-15, the parable of the Rich Fool. When does sensible provision for the future become 'foolish'? What does 'being rich toward God' mean for (a) an elderly pensioner in Suffolk; (b) a subsistence farmer in Kagera; (c) a Christian family doing the weekly supermarket shop? (d) a PCC deciding on their budget?

	Kagera	Suffolk
Area	40,000km ²	3,800 km ²
Population	2.3 million	0.7 million
Employed in Farming	62%	3%
Dependent on Farming	92%	
GDP per Capita (2005)	£180 Tanzania	£20,000 UK

Discussion

1. Can you identify what farmers in Suffolk and Kagera have in common?
2. Michael said he was struggling to keep going? Should the EU be withdrawing subsidies to its farmers? Should we do anything about this?
3. Peter said that his dream was to be able to have some days off. How do you think Gwaza would react to this?
4. Mama Vicki and her friends are looking to lift themselves out of poverty by selling their surplus? What do you think their chances are of achieving this? Are they right to rely on trade? Can we support them in their enterprise? Are there ways others might be supported to develop a business in this way?
5. Mary always buys fair-trade produce at the supermarket. Her friend Jenny says that people living in the UK ought to buy locally to support our farmers. What do you think? Consider the implications for (a) people like Gwaza, (b) countries like Tanzania and (c) Suffolk farmers?
6. Do you think that as Christians we have a duty to take into account our impact on producers when we shop? Should we also be challenging the way trade is carried out? Should we be campaigning for trade justice? Can trade ever be fair between two unequal partners?



Ngara Market

Championing the cause of the poor of the world in the pursuit of trade justice is a truly noble endeavour.
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Action

Discuss the ideas for action below and consider which you and your church community could pursue more actively.

1. Hold people & situations in prayer. Prayer is the way we join our work with God's work, our hope with God's hope.
2. Learn more about God's mission with respect to poverty. Study both the grounds of our faith and the situation in our world. In particular find out more about our link Diocese.
3. The UN goal is that the rich countries should give 0.7% of their gross national income to development assistance (the UK currently gives 0.36%). If we are to have the integrity to demand this of our government are we at least matching it ourselves?
4. Buy ethically. Put your answers to discussion point 5 into action. Invest savings in social enterprises and consider the impact of travel and holidays.
5. A symbolic action (such as wearing a white band - the global sign for the fight against poverty) can be very powerful in this media world. Think of other ways you might raise awareness locally and tell people how much you care.
6. Write to those who are making decisions about international trade rules, dumping surpluses & imposing import tariffs. Join one of the campaigning organisations – your action will be more effective if co-ordinated with others.
7. Celebrate success. Amazing progress is being made. As a direct result of the Jubilee Debt campaign and the cancellation of Tanzania's debts, all children in Kagera can now receive free primary education.

This leaflet was produced on behalf of the World Mission Group of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich with input from the Diocese of Kagera. For further copies of this leaflet and others in the series or for further information please contact Sue Young, World Development Adviser on sueyoung@fish.co.uk 01473 233525 or Elizabeth Moore, Lay Education & Training Adviser on elizabeth@stedmundsbury.anglican.org 01359 233050. We can arrange for someone to visit your church or community to talk about Kagera and farming or to lead a discussion. Bible quotations taken from New International Version. January 2007