

# Understanding Why and When Ruling Elites Support Productive Sectors

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During the last many months preceding the fall semester of 2011, I spent much time in Uganda doing research as part of the collaborative and multi-institutional “Elites, Production, and Poverty” (EPP) program. The program is funded by the Danish International Aid Agency (Danida) and brings together research institutions and universities in Bangladesh, Denmark, Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda.

The program focuses on the roles of elites in formulating and implementing productive sector initiatives that promote economic growth and reduce poverty. Case studies cover initiatives in agriculture, agro-processing, fisheries, and manufacturing that feature prominently in the respective countries.

My colleagues (from Makerere University and Mukono Christian University) and I have done research on the fisheries sector, the dairy sector and on agricultural extension reform in Uganda. In the spring of 2011, we did a final round of interviews and had a workshop preparing for writing up our results in Kampala. In the fall of 2011, I spent time writing and exchanging research results with colleagues here at the UF Center for African Studies.

One of our main premises in the EPP is that elites support productive sectors when it helps them to remain in power. In countries with competitive clientelism, there are often easier ways to remain in power than to support production. This is because ruling elites are primarily concerned with holding their coalitions together in the short term rather than through long term development.

Uganda is an exemplary case to explore when and why ruling elites support specific productive sectors. When coming to power in 1986, the ruling elite had an explicit vision of transforming the economy from subsistence agriculture to an industrialized economy. And in subsequent years, Uganda enjoyed high growth rates. However, almost three decades later, this growth has not re-



sulted in economic transformation. This is because the ruling elite are increasingly vulnerable and are focusing on holding the ruling coalition together and on winning elections. This means that productive sector policies generally aim at spreading resources thinly or at not hurting strong factions who benefit from the status quo. But even under competitive clientelism, some productive sectors may receive

sustained political support, and the Ugandan fish and dairy sectors illustrate this. Our research explains differences between these sectors with reference to their relation to the ruling coalition.

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