GROUP FARMING AND STATECRAFT IN UGANDA

Note: Rural Development Research papers are written as a basis for discussion in the Makerere Economic Research Seminar. They are not publications and are subject to revision.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss, in the context of Ugandan agricultural development policy, some problems which arise when economic planning is subject to overriding political considerations. It is further intended as background to a study of the effects of group farm participation on peasant enterprise.
Five years after a top-level government decision elevated group farming from a low-priority pilot project to a major thrust of Uganda's agricultural development policy, and two years after the Second Five Year Plan reaffirmed the prominence of group farms in public planning, the group farming programme is again being de-emphasized. Five year's experience permits a more circumspect economic evaluation of group farming in Uganda than has heretofore been possible. Yet some care must be taken to understand the motives of government decisionmakers for whom public sponsored development projects were elements in a strategy of consolidating national and political party power. Simplistic application of project analysis techniques to the group farming programme, suppressing political factors and 'economic side effects', would result in misleading conclusions about its impact on Ugandan economic and political development. Even political leaders ascend and subdivide specific projects of the development plan according to their objectives and constraints - which differ from and dominate economic planning criteria - then ex-post project evaluation using only economic benefit and cost criteria is likely to reveal major inaccuracies in the use of scarce national resources. If, however, it is possible to comprehend the ways in which 'politics' altered decisions on important variables of project design and execution, then the disparity between the project as undertaken and an economic planner's ideal can be turned to the useful purpose of estimating the economic cost of political intervention.

Systematic underemphasis, or relegation to the category of 'side effects', of benefits and costs which are conceptually difficult and not easily quantified is a second limitation to the usefulness of overly-simple project analysis. In an economy numerically dominated by peasant farmers, important obstacles to sustained agricultural development in the early years of national development planning may be the values, beliefs, and farming abilities of the peasants themselves. Inadequate peasant entrepreneurship (the performance of four interrelated decision-making functions: production management, provision of capital, risk bearing, and innovation)¹ is one of the major limiting factors in Uganda.
rural development. Thus changes in farmers' values, skills, and beliefs—which underlie entrepreneurial performance—should be considered primary benefits of the Government's agrarian program, regardless of conceptual and empirical difficulties. 2

I hope ultimately to investigate changes in group farm participants as economic decisionmakers, especially their risk bearing and innovative behavior. The political context of group farming decisions is significant for the study. Termination of the First Five Year Plan's group farming pilot study—one of whose objectives was to produce information on the ways in which group farming could induce changes in peasants' economic behavior—effectively reduced farmer enterprise to a 'side effect' whose complexity and economic importance were often ignored in subsequent government decisions.

1. GROUP FARMS IN UGANDA'S FIRST FIVE YEAR PLAN (1961/2 - 1965/6)

In the First Five Year Plan (FFYP), a scheme to encourage group farming ranks last in a lengthy list of measures to expand cotton production. 5 The appendix on project funding indicates that "Proposals are being worked out for pilot projects in selected areas of the country to encourage farmers to merge their existing plots in order to provide more economic units for farming. Once larger units have been formed, these will be backed up with tractor hire services and improved credit facilities." 4 The Plan allocated 50,000 to the pilot group farms, expenditure to begin in 1963/4 when the Plan actually began to function. This sum was 1.4% of the 64.5 million total central government allocation to "Agriculture and Cooperatives." 5 Granted that a portion of the 50,000 earmarked for tractor hire services and 5135,800 for cooperative society credit would be used in conjunction with pilot group farming, it was still an insignificant part of the agriculture sector plan. 6

The Plan's stress on rapid expansion of cotton production bears notice: first as a salient example of Uganda planners' sanctioning of the recommendations of the 1960 TRD survey of the Uganda economy; second because it served in 1963 as a vehicle for economic justification of the decision to accelerate government assistance to group cotton farms. Giving cotton top priority among
crop expansion program, the Plan stated that, "One of the principle objectives of the program for the plan period is to increase the production of cotton from the present average of 370,000 bales to an average of 500,000 bales per annum, in order to achieve a quick increase in national income and to provide both farmers and the Government with the finance necessary for further and more long term development." (Subsequent over the period 1967-68 raw cotton production averaged 15.4% of monetary GDP — cottonseed and oil products contributed a small additional amount; raw cotton provided 32.2% of export revenues; and cotton export duties accounted for an average of 10.7% of central government revenues).  

The World Bank Mission provided optimism and argumentation underpinning the stress on cotton: Despite the unimpressive progress in cotton farming for many years, post-war raw cotton output had never approached the 1957/58 level of 418,000 bales; we believe that cotton now represents the best opportunity for a rapid increase in output in the coming years. Their logic can be summarized as follows: Ugandan cotton is grown very labor intensively and with simple technology on peasant farms; peasant family labor and suitable unused land are abundant in many parts of Uganda; the payoff to cotton is quick, relative to exportable perennial crops; and, because of American price support policy, international cotton prices should be fairly stable in the near future. The catalytic ingredient in the INRD prescription was control through government subsidization of INRD system.  

The World Bank economists were dubious of the value of mechanization to peasant farming — and of group farming, which was seen essentially as a means of making mechanization more efficient. Their reservation followed from the assumption that labor for most farm operations was relatively abundant and that significant labor bottlenecks (such as harvesting in cotton production) were not readily overcome by mechanization. Yet the possibility was acknowledged that consolidation of scattered plots would render tractORIZATION of some operations economically feasible; consequently the INRD survey urged ---some experimentation in the evolution of a system of more rational land use and mechanization through group farming.  

During their three-month stay in Uganda the World Bank visitors relied extensively on the knowledge and judgments of resident economists, and agronomists.
They urged a group farm pilot study—suggested a $25,000 prioting—along lines suggested by a Symposium on Mechanical Cultivation in Uganda, held at Makerere College in 1960. The consensus of the symposium was that Uganda had considerable long run potential for profitable agricultural mechanization. But the symposium report warned often and in considerable detail of the need for thorough prior study of existing agricultural resources and production techniques; of the capital and operating costs of farm equipment; of the natural environment; and especially of the likely peasant responses to alternative modes of mechanical cultivation. They concluded that no irreversible, large scale commitment to mechanization should be made without major investigation. Despite the financial failure and organisational demise of most of the cooperative group farms established in the 1960's and 1970's, (The bulk of which were not tractorised), the symposium upheld the possibility of establishing group farms—through the medium of the burgeoning farmers' cooperative movement—as focal points of rural change. Ideally, cooperative societies, with group farms as ancillary organisations, could provide an institutional basis for farm credit provision, agricultural extension services, economising scarce managerial talents, and efficient use of farm equipment.

The Five Year Plan was thus very largely a professional's document, firmly based on the advice and expertise of economists, both residents and itinerants. Cotton was king; group farming, as a means to increased cotton output and general agricultural development, was shown passing interest, then placed low on the list of short run priorities. In 1968 the priority list was shuffled and group farming, despite experts cautioning that it needed experimentation, came out near the top.

A Discussion on Pilot Projects

A pilot project in development planning is a variant of the risk diminishing practice of prior study of a potentially desirable project: assuming that the more research is done on a project, the lower uncertainty remains about its expected return and the way to maximize returns. A pilot project is an economic experiment, supplementing the contribution of deductive logic and interpretation of extant data...
to determine likely costs and benefits of the larger parent project. A
number of characteristics of the parent project justify undertaking
a pilot study:

1. The pilot project "on the ground" closely resembles its proposed
hypothetical parent, but on a smaller scale; that is, the full
scale project must be divisible without distortion of its essential
features. In the actual planning sequence, the parent project is
the pilot project, corrected for discovered deficiencies, blown up
'n' times. (The parent project in group farming is a program of many
group farms; the pilot study = a small number of experimental farms.
meets the divisibility criterion very well. Individual group farms
may also have a range of scale variability without gross distortion.
of major characteristics, however, this form of divisibility is less
crucial. For evaluation of Ugandan experience).

2. There are major uncertainties about the costs and benefits of the
project which planners' experience and a priori reasoning cannot
resolve. Obviously no development project is undertaken with complete
certainty or even with full information about persistent uncertainties.
A pilot project may be justified when planners haven't enough reliable
information even to predict with confidence the probability distribu-
tions of important project variables. (such was clearly the case in
planning for group farms. For example, planners had little systematic
information about peasant skills, learning capacity, value structure,
risk perception, and conflicting uses of time. They also lacked a complete
knowledge of the physical environment: soil characteristics,
topography, water resources, etc. Consequently, it was impossible
to establish sound criteria for such diverse project decision variables
as membership selection, training programs, plot size, conditions of
credit, and crop rotation.

a) Pragmatism about going ahead with the parent project is
reinforced by the certainty that key cost elements will be large.
(It was certain that managerial salaries and the capital, operating, and
maintenance costs of farm equipment - all of which are in scarce
foreign exchange - would be great on group farms).

b) The return to the parent project is expected to be large if
information generated by the pilot study permits affluent parent
Although a pilot project may have directly measurable outputs, such as a group farm's net addition to output production, it is valued primarily as a learning process. An important implication for my study is that: if planners are prone to suppress or underemphasize important project characteristics because they involve great uncertainty or are difficult to quantify, then a pilot project specifically designed to provide information on those problematic features helps to overcome bias against their inclusion as 'direct effects' - or direct requirements - of the project. Changes in peasant behaviour - those required for group farm success as well as those seen as a 'partial measure' of success - evolve haphazardly as 'side effects' unless project designers have sufficient understanding to plan directly for induced changes in peasant enterprise.

NB: Theoretically a pilot project can be subjected to benefit-cost analysis. Its peculiarity is that the major exponent of benefit is its effect on the rate of return to the parent and that a major cost factor is the opportunity cost of time devoted to the pilot study before launching - or rejecting - the scale project. In the case of projects rejected, the major benefit of a pilot study is avoidance of losses or low returns to the parent project. Benefit can be measured by an index of the increase in expected rate of return and decrease in variance of the return to the parent project, due to more reliable information and less uncertainty about variables of project design. (As mentioned, the pilot study also permits a more systematic inclusion of factors like peasant change in estimates of expected return).

If a pilot project, like other learning processes, is subject to diminishing returns to time, then, hypothetically, an optimum project duration (r) exists, at which \( \frac{dB}{dt} = r \) (where \( B \) is the index of Social benefit, \( r \) is the social rate of discount, \( t \) is a continuous variable, and \( dB/\sqrt{t} = 0, dB/\sqrt{t^2} < 0 \)). If at the end of \( r \), the expected rate of return to the parent project increases over final variance is within tolerable limits, then the project should be accepted. Prescotting the termination date of a pilot project is a commonly used rule of thumb which notionally incorporates declining marginal return to time and positive opportunity cost of time.
II. DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND UUC CONSOLIDATION OF POWER.

Uganda achieved independence in October, 1962, with a vigorously competitive political party system but with no Parliamentary majority party. A tenous coalition comprised of the Uganda People's Congress (37 seats) and the Uganda National League (21 seats) - strange bedfellows considering the intense latent antagonism between Buganda and the other regions of Uganda - was pitted against the Democratic Party opposition which had 26 legislative representatives. The Uganda confederation of kingdoms and districts was a volatile mixture of minority groups, divided into hostile camps on religious, tribal, antitie, regional and other issues. In many of the old kingdoms - not solely in Buganda - advocates of national cohesion were challenged by parochial alliances of the masses and elite alike. Divided loyalties, and among some radical groups native separatism, threatened the capacity of the fragile new state to survive intact a major political crisis.

In this context of precarious political relations the UUC attempted to secure greater popular support and a clear parliamentary majority by pursuing a two-front strategy: one set of tactics to encourage defection of its nominal allies: the MP legislators, to the UUC; and a second, more intense competition with the MP throughout the rest of Uganda. Fragmentation of the Uganda polity into overlapping minorities, each with a set of demands on its particular vital issues, had important implications for UUC strategy. First, separatistic loyalties and divergent local interests precluded creation of a single, coherent ideological core over a majority of the Ugandan people (or, more precisely, over the electorate of a majority of MP's). Consequently, the UUC adopted an essentially non-ideological and rather ad-hoc platform in order to coalesce minority groups into a national-oriented majority. The UUC appeal was conveyed largely by means of pledges specific issues of local importance. As dominant party in the post-independence cabinet, the UUC was well situated to use patronage - in allocating both recurrent expenditures and development project funds - to fulfill its pledges and to enhance state building and its own control over national politics.

The group farm pilot project was a low priority experiment in
the First Five Year Development Plan - by consensus of economic advisers. Thus, the top-level cabinet decision in early 1965, to quadruple the allocation to group farming (to about $80,000 in 1965–66) and to press for quick establishment of numerous group farms was a major reversal of agricultural development policy. The decision to import a large number of tractors and to begin preparatory land clearing was apparently a hasty one, taken without public discussion - except in the form of campaign rhetoric - or even consultation with civil service advisors and UFO membership.17 Lack of evidence that new insights had radically boosted the expected economic benefits from group farming, motivation of the policy reversal must be sought in its political payoff.

Syntheses on Cabinet Level UFO Motives

There is no inside account of the process through which the decision to accelerate group farming was taken. I cannot identify the time or place of the decision, nor most of the participants in decision-making, their sources of power and weakness, their areas of conflict, or mechanisms of conflict resolution. My discussion of the 'decisiveness' calculus is, therefore, highly conjectural. Nonetheless, the conclusions drawn by observers of the UFO rise to power18 correlate my impression that some combination of the following objectives and contingencies prompted the group farm decision:

1. In the 1965 parliamentary election campaign and in post-election politicking, both UFO and UP candidates appealed to farmers, especially through the Cooperative movement, by promising tractor services to relieve the drudgery of farm labor. Group farming, with tractorization, was apparently a powerful lure to rural voters who envisioned the program as a government giveaway, simultaneously labor-saving and income increasing. The anti-communist sentiments of most Uganda farmers underlay 'patriots' stress on individual family plots on the promised group farms.19 The Symposium on Mechanical Cultivation had prefigured the appeal of mechanized farming to Ugandan peasants: "There is evidence that in Uganda there is a remarkable awareness of the existence of tractors. Requests for tractor services have been received from all over Uganda."20 Considering that tractor hire services had existed
since 1943 and that many of the large estates employed tractors, peasant awareness was not "remarkable", but it was politically significant.

The decision to expand group farming, utilizing the cooperative institutional structure and stressing mechanization, must be seen both as a part of the partisan UEC - IP competition for rural support, and as a means of eroding citizens' traditional loyalties. Specific (interracial) motives may have been to overcome campaign promises, establishing the credibility of UEC pledges and proving its 'good faith'; to neutralize the IP appeal to individual voters and its 'incogitant' control over some farmers' cooperatives; to use group farm activities as a medium for establishing UEC party cells, on the group farms and in the cooperatives; to encourage defection of IP leaders to the UEC in Raykot by convincing them that UEC control of "pork barrel" expenditures made it possible to be on the side of the Government instead of the opposition.

2. A less tangible, but important, government/party objective was to create a compelling symbolism of national development: an image in which progress, defined differently by each minority, would be identified with the governing party and its leaders. Note that in 1983 the cabinet also contended economic advice and empirical projections by deciding to build the Apollo Hotel, a more glamorous symbol and appealing to a different clientele, but like mechanized group farming an attempt to establish the identity and progressiveness of the nation and to secure prestige to its government. 22

By my interpretation, the cabinet-level decision to expand group farming implies that these anticipated benefits were perceived to outweigh the major costs, namely: dissatisfaction of economic planners, Department of Agriculture civil servants, and the UEC rank and file who were not consulted or whose counsel was overruled by the decision; and the net economic costs, probably stressing short-run foreign exchange and public revenues impacts. If the decisionmakers expected a rapid expansion of cotton exports and export tax revenues from the group farms, then the use of scarce developmental resources may have been the least anticipated cost of
the project. The availability of a soft, but tied, development loan from Great Britain probably further diminished concern for the short run foreign exchange costs of imported farm equipment. It is even possible that the large amount of ready credit itself induced decision-makers to "kip around" for likely projects to absorb imported farm machinery. In conformity with Albert Hirschman's "Principle of the Hiding Hand", UGO politicians may have systematically suppressed the many difficulties involved in establishing economically viable group farms — the nexus of problems which led economists to propose a pilot study in the first place.

To the general lay public, however, the Government had a plausible rationale for a crash group farm program. Cotton was a cornerstone of Ugandan development: a major source of peasant income, foreign exchange, and public revenues. However, cotton production was not expanding according to the Plan target; in fact 1968 had been the worst year for cotton in recent memory. Group farms would address cotton production and they would begin to yield benefits quickly. Thus the propaganda problem of justifying the decision to the public must have been small.

Uganda's First Five Year Plan was an amalgamation of broadly formulated social and economic ends with a set of public sector projects, or means. The relationships between its ends and its means was fairly tenuous. Furthermore, UGO leadership was not intimately involved in its formulation. Consequently, it is not surprising that the Grote cabinet did not regard the Plan as gospel, but rather as a useful tool, selectively interpreted as the need arose, in the process of statebuilding and nationbuilding. Economic development and political stability are interdependent in a non-authoritarian and federated nation, especially over the long run. But in the short run it seems likely that the power consolidation motive dominated criteria of economic rationality in the decisions of Uganda political leaders — and that group farm policy can best be understood as part of a strategy of political development.
III. THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN IN A FRAGILE NATION

The idealized development process, reflected in academic models and outlined by most published national development plans, is a pristine, coherent exercise of socio-political harmony. Political decisions, not explicitly represented in such models, provide planners - agents - with a fully and usually simply specified social objective function, reflecting the national consensus on costs and benefits of economic development. Thence forward planning is fundamentally an intellectual exercise in optimum resource allocation over the plan's time horizon.

The plan's constituent public sector projects are chosen for their high rank among alternative means to maximization of the social goal set. The rest of this paper is an attempt to conceptualize political decisions affecting development in early post-independence Uganda, indicating some of the limitations of simple and unambiguous 'conventional' objective functions for interpretation of project selection in newly independent less-developed countries.

Definitions:
1. Power: The ability to take binding decisions over a specific group of people or institutions on a delimited set of issues.
2. Nationbuilding: increasing citizens loyalty to the nation and their commitment to the policies and actions of its government, relative to other loyalties and commitments.
3. Statebuilding: extending and increasing the security of governmental power over more inhabitants and more social, economic, and political activities within the nation.
4. Economic Development Objectives: Perceives income growth, equitable distribution of income and wealth, co-investment, employment expansion, export promotion, import substitution - the set of ends which, with varying emphases, typically underlie economists' project rankings.
5. Democracy: "A political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials;" with side conditions: the electoral system is respected, i.e. the opposition acknowledges its allegiance to the constitutional process and the right of the majority to govern until the next scheduled election; all groups within the national society accept - de facto - their subordination to
the Constitution.

The Pragmatic Imperative in a Nominal Democracy

By working assumption is that the complexly interrelated government objectives of statebuilding, nationbuilding, and economic development are in partial conflict: if all resources available to the government are used efficiently, in the Pareto-Eigeworth sense, then no increase in attainment of one objective can be achieved without some sacrifice of another. Even without appealing to this notion of efficiency, political leaders must be concerned with facing trade-offs among objectives. No explicit function relating objectives need exist for segment scrutiny of decisions to reveal something of decisionmaking’s probable motives — that they behaved “as if” they had a maximand. By contention is that the bias of governing politicians, who make use of the trade of possibilities latent in development plan projects, reflects the intensity of their anxiety about the insecurity of their control of the government and the nation.

It is impossible to identify a monolithic decisionmaker; even in the most rigid dictatorship, the ruler relies in many overt and subtle ways on information advice of others. Decision to expand sugar farming in Uganda was apparently taken within a small (and hypothetically identifiable) group of top UFO cabinet members and advisers — that is, by the leadership core of the dominant party in a coalition government. Lindblom asserts that in such a situation no objective function can be — or need be — specified because the individuals participating in the decision do not fully agree on objectives. The important condition for a decision to be taken is that participants, in pursuit of diverse ends, can reach agreement on a common means — a policy. If certain criteria are met, the group can usefully be identified as the decisionmaker. In the case of choices made in the inner sanctum of the dominant party in a parliamentary system, Lindblom’s necessary condition (agreement on means) will be overfulfilled because party leaders, regardless of their ultimate personal objectives, share the proximate goal of perpetuating the pre-eminent role of their party. Intra-party conflicts over authority and objectives
can never be eliminated, but they can be accommodated. Assuming
t that party leaders perceive their individual interests to be best
served by remaining within the organization (and that otherwise
they will disassociate from it), then, by members' consensus, the
first rule of action must be to attain and to reinforce party power
through party solidarity. If the party and its leaders can only
achieve their ulterior social/personal goals by control of the govern-
ment, then attainment or continuance of control is their pragmatic
imperative. Thus, according to T.H. Marshall, the power variable has an
autonomy of its own - the holders of power tend to establish it as
the most important criterion - to which all others are subordinate. 26

Anthony Downs has developed the concept of efficient policy
choice in a multi-party parliamentary democracy: characterized by
strict party discipline and regular periodic elections. 27 Under
conditions of uncertain voter preferences, the governing party
(or inter-party bargaining in a coalition) selects a mix of policies -
activities and their operation levels - which it anticipates will
maximize its vote in the pending elections. At first glance this
non-ideological basis of policy choice appears similar to the UWO
strategy which I described in Part II above. However post-independence
Uganda qualified only as a nominal parliamentary democracy because the
side conditions of my definition of democracy (page 11) did not
obtain. Neither the opposition party nor ... dissident groups could be
relied upon not to foment insurrection, encourage party defections,
secede from the nation, or otherwise challenge the constitution and
the authority of government. In these conditions of great political
uncertainty and instability, the pragmatic imperative dictated both a
short-term horizon than the next scheduled elections (set by the Uganda
constitution for 1967) and the dominance of state building over
economic development criteria in policy selection. The strength of
the imperative, in these circumstances, is reinforced by leaders'
certainty that their vision of the good society and their 'blueprint
for achieving it are a 'right'.

Though attainment of ultimate social
goals be reckoned distant and economic development of prime importance
to their achievement, short-run and non-economic considerations are
 paramount when the cost of underfulfilling the pragmatic
imperative is loss of power - and possibly heads.

The Uganda First Five Year Development Plan was, among
other things, a vehicle for legitimation of UPF statebuilding
activities. Some of its projects were ripe to be exploited for
short run political ends. As I have argued, the group farm
pilot program was such a project; originally intended as a source
of information on desirable long run developments in Ugandan
agriculture, it was reinterpreted and exploited by political leaders
who, after all, were the Plan’s spokesmen to the nation.

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25-10-68
FOOTNOTES


2. Increased stress on agricultural extension services in Uganda is an acknowledgement in theory if not in practice of the importance of intervening directly to influence peasants' entrepreneurial performance; extension aims partly at improving the factors available to farmers, but it also attempts to change peasants' their organisational skill, perceptions, attitudes, etc.

3. The First Five Year Development Plan (1961/2 to 1966/7), (hereafter FYP) Uganda Government, pp. 87.

4. FYP, opcit., pp. 81.

5. " Op cit., pp. 94.


| A. Raw Cotton | 17472 1941 15526 14230 13226 6860 14350 |
| Reports (x 1000) | |
| B. Total Reports | 52137 55615 48455 46820 46132 48065 63758 |
| C. Monetary CIP | 107,376 105,382 107,882 110,875 111,370 107,225 120,706 |
| Current Prices (x 1000) | |
| Table UN | 14.0 17.1 14.3 13.5 14.2 7.7 11.1 |
| A/B (%) | 33.5 34.4 34.9 35.1 34.7 17.4 22.8 |
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| A/B (%) | 33.5 34.4 34.9 35.1 34.7 17.4 22.8 |


10. Planners were sanguine that cotton yields could be raised from the prevailing average of about 400 pounds per acre to 1000 pounds or more per acre by the simple means of a heavily subsidized INT spraying program. A 1,588,340 was allocated to this purpose, THE FIRST FIVE YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN, pp. 77.

11. IBRD, opcit., pp. 245.

12. IBRD

16. Lewis and Valentine, op cit., page 2.


23. I have no documented evidence of these hypotheses, although I hope to be able to verify or refute them in the future.

24. See data for 1962/3 in footnote eight.

25. Viz., for example the essays of John Finberg and Hollin J. Chifney - or Van Arkdale and Prakash; ECONOMIC ACCOUNTING AND DEVELOPMENT: Planning, Part IV.


30. It is a truism that the less stable political regime, the more uncertain will be its short-run bias in decision-making, if its greatest concern is to retain control of the government.

31. My assumption is that UFO leaders, though 'pragmatic' in their choice of policies, may nonetheless have had an idealistic image of Uganda's future; that they were not cynics.