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Farmer awareness, coping mechanisms and economic implications of coffee leaf rust disease in Uganda

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Abstract

Coffee leaf rust (CLR) still remains a serious threat to the economics of coffee farming in Uganda. The disease is more severe on Arabica coffee (*Coffea arabica*) at mid and low altitude (1500 m and below) where crop losses is up to 50%. The objective of this study was to document farmers' knowledge about the disease, economic implications and coping strategies across the Arabica growing zones in Uganda. A stratified random sampling procedure was adopted. The main data collection tool was a semi-structured questionnaire for face-to-face interview and checklist for focus group discussions (FGDs). SPSS for windows (Version 16) was used for statistical analysis. Overall, 83.8% had knowledge on the disease. The disease reportedly causes premature defoliation and loss of photosynthetic surfaces, leading to appearance of pale yellow spots on the lower surface of the leaves (72.3%) and expanding berries failing to fill up and young berries shedding off (11.5%). The most susceptible variety reported was SL14; while KP423 was reportedly tolerant. Results further revealed that rust incidence led to a significant ($p \leq 0.01$) reduction in Arabica coffee productivity and income by 49.5%. As cope up strategies, farmers practiced timely weeding (81.5%), chemical spraying mainly using Bordeaux mixture (20.8%), phyto-sanitary methods (8.1%), concoctions (10.4%), fertiliser application (12.4%) and planting tolerant varieties (9.2%). The use of concoctions and phyto-sanitary methods significantly ($P \leq 0.01$) reduced the impact of the disease on annual production per ha by 1139 and 1255 kg, respectively.

Key words: Coffee Leaf Rust, Indigenous knowledge, economic implication, Uganda

Introduction

Coffee Leafrust causes Arabica coffee trees to shed their leaves, resulting in fewer beans, of inferior quality (Rutherford and Phiri, 2006). Leaves turn

into pale-yellow on the surface and orange beneath and eventually shed off (Kushalappa, 1989), leading some beans to fall off while others are malformed and lighter because the pods are not filled properly (Small, 1928). This damage leads

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to stunted bushes, which are low yielding and usually die after a few years (Avelino *et al.*, 2004). As a cope up strategy, farmers practiced different control options. The objective of this study was to document; farmer indigenous knowledge about the disease and their control strategies, information on the economic implications of the CLR in Uganda.

Materials and methods

Study area

The study was conducted in 2009 in the major Arabica coffee growing regions of Uganda; Mt. Elgon region (Kapchorwa and Sironko districts) which borders with Kenya, and West-Nile region (Nebbi district) which borders Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The Mt. Elgon area lies between latitudes 1° 17'N and 0° 51'N and longitude 34° 13'E and 34° 25'E, at an altitude of 1288-2135 meters above sea level (van Asten *et al.*, 2011). In Nebbi district, the study area lies between latitudes 2° 14'N and 2° 46'N and longitudes 30° 76'E and 31° 52'E, at an altitude of 1450-1800 m above sea level. Mt Elgon region receives mean annual rainfall of more than 1520 mm; while West-Nile receives 1100 mm, following a bimodal pattern in both regions. Temperatures at both locations range between 15° -30 °C throughout the year.

Sampling and data collection

A stratified random sampling procedure was adopted, where in each district, two sub-counties were purposively selected. From each of the sub-counties, two parishes were randomly chosen and in each of these four villages were selected and subsequently in each village four small

holder coffee farm households were surveyed. Sampling and mobilisation of coffee farmers was done with the help of district coffee coordinators, sub county NAADS coordinators and Local Council (L.C.) 1 village chairpersons.

The main data collection tool was a semi-structured questionnaire, designed to capture information on farmers' socio-economic status, farming systems and effect of CLR infestation. A total of 173 small holder farmers were interviewed. The questions focused on the change in productivity due to CLR infestation, farmer's indigenous knowledge about the disease and their control strategies. The questionnaire was administered in a face-to-face interview, with farmers, mainly household heads as the respondents. A checklist was developed and used for focus group discussion (FGD). One FGD consisting of 15 – 20 individuals was involved in the study per district. Specifically, FGDs involved the district coffee coordinator, district production officer, extension staff, local council political leaders, leaders from the district farmers association, prominent coffee farmers and coffee dealers. Results from the FGD were used as a check list to the individual responses, and for easier interpretation of the farming systems of the respective district communities.

Data analysis

Completed questionnaires were edited, coded and data entered into Ms Excel for cleaning. Thereafter data were transferred to the Statistical Package for Socio Sciences (SPSS) for windows (Version 16) for statistical analysis. K-S tests were run to check for normal distribution of the variables, after which inferential and descriptive statistics were used to summarise farmers' responses

into percentages, averages and graphical representation. Mean scores for the effectiveness of various control methods against CLR as reported by farmers were determined by averaging the score of each control method. Linear Regression at 5% probability level, was used to understand the influence of farmers coping mechanism on CLR Impact on productivity and income (Armstrong and Eperjesi, 2001; Nyeko *et al.*, 2002)

Results

Coffee production

The household agricultural land planted with coffee varied from 0.1 to 4.4 ha with an average of 0.6ha and 2,370 Arabica coffee trees. Most farmers (59%) reported intercropping coffee with mainly banana and planting it under tree shades. SL14 variety was the most commonly grown (45%). Main inputs used in coffee production were manure (66.5%), inorganic fertiliser (20.8%), agro chemicals (19.7%), pruning saw/secateurs (93.2%), and hired labour (4%). Households spent between US\$16 and US\$ 575, with an average of approximately US\$ 45 on inputs per *annum* ha⁻¹. Average annual yield (parchment ha⁻¹) was 432 kg (88.4%)

Farmer indigenous knowledge and economic implications of CLR

Overall, 83.8% were aware of symptoms of the CLR and mostly identified it with premature defoliation and loss of photosynthetic surfaces. A total of 72.3% cited appearance of pale yellow spots on the lower leaf surfaces of the leaves; while 11.5% reported that expanding berries did not fill up and young berries were shed off. Most farmers (26%) perceived the disease to be spread by wind (3.5%) water

runoff (8.7%) human and insect activity (20%) and, movement of infected plant material. While 76.3% reported CLR incidence to be more prevalent during the dry season and 6.4% reported rainy/wet weather. About 2.9% could not tell the mode of spread of the disease.

Variety SL14 was reported as most susceptible while variety KP423 tolerant to CLR (Table 1). However, due to the incidence of the disease, up to 88.4% of the farmers reported that repeated attacks of rust led to decline of the coffee bush, reducing average annual yield per hectare from 855 to 432 kg which is a 49.5% fall in productivity and income, and a subsequent gradual loss of Arabica coffee trees (Table 2). Results further indicate that, without CLR in the farmer's garden, 63% reported a moderate reduction in income from other crops, mainly food crops and a subsequent moderate increase with CLR in the farmers' garden (87.2%). When coffee is affected by CLR, 59.5% of the farmers reported a large reduction in consumption of basic needs, 55.5% moderate reduction in expenditure on social obligations and entertainment, 47.4% large reduction in investment and 59% moderate reduction in hiring farm labor. This elucidates the importance of coffee as income security crop (Table 3).

Coping mechanisms for CLR

Majority of the respondents interviewed had attempted to control CLR as a coping strategy (Table 4). Farmers claimed to have used a wide range of control practices; including timely weeding (81.5%), chemicals mainly Bordeaux mixture (20.8%) because they desperately wanted to eradicate the fungus, Phyto-sanitary methods (8.1%), and using concoctions mainly a mixture of urine, ash and pawpaw or mango leaves applying to

Table 1. Farmer indigenous knowledge about coffee leaf rust disease in Uganda

Variable	N	Percentage of farmers reporting
Knowledge on symptoms of CLR		
a) Premature shading of leaves	147	83.8
b) Leaves turn to pale yellow/ orange/ rust/ golden colour at the lower surface	125	72.3
c) White powdery mass on leaves	72	41.6
d) Drying of coffee tree/bush	25	14.5
e) Coffee berries fail to ripe	20	11.5
Trend of disease occurrence		
a) Increasing	84	48.6
b) Constant	61	35.3
c) Decreasing	11	6.4
Mode of transmission of CLR		
a) Wind	45	26.0
b) Infected plant to non infected garden	35	20.2
c) Human and animals activity	15	8.7
d) Water run off	6	3.5
Field conditions with severity		
a) Unshaded coffee trees	122	70.5
b) Unweeded coffee garden	101	58.4
c) Unpruned coffee	93	53.8
d) Less fertile parts of the farm	91	52.6
Season of the year CLR severity		
a) Dry season	132	76.3
b) Rain/wet season	11	6.4
c) Indifferent (all seasons throughout the year)	6	2.9
Varieties most affected by CLR on the farm		
a) Improved variety (mainly SL 14)	89	51.4
b) Local/traditional variety	30	17.3
Varieties least affected by CLR on the farm		
a) Local variety	81	46.8
b) Improved variety (mainly KP423)	7	4.0

N = Total number of responses

Table 2. Production (kgs of parchment / ha/ year) and income with CLR and without CLR in the farmer's garden in Uganda

Category	N	Without CLR	With CLR	T-test
Average area (ha)	168	3.90(3.82)	3.85(3.75)	0.05 ^{NS}
Average quantity produced (kgs of parchment)	153	855(498.72)	432(156.71)	4.24***
Average Income (US\$)	153	552	283	4.37***

N = Total number of respondents. Figures in parenthesis are standard deviation; *,**,*** implies statistically significant differences between means at 10%, 5% and 1% levels of significance, respectively; NS implies not significant; Parchment refers to unprocessed coffee

Table 3. Household economic implications of CLR

Magnitude of change in variable	Without CLR in the farmer's garden (%)	With CLR in the farmer's garden (%)
Income from other crops		
a) Moderate reduction	63.0	2.8
b) Large reduction	15.0	4.0
c) Constant	8.1	6.0
d) Moderate increase	3.9	87.2
Expenditure on basic needs		
a) Moderate reduction		31.8
b) Large reduction		59.5
c) Constant		
d) Moderate increase		
Expenditure on socio obligations		
a) Moderate reduction		55.5
b) Large reduction		16.2
c) Constant		19.7
d) Moderate increase		1.2
Expenditure on investment		
a) Moderate reduction		37.0
b) Large reduction		47.4
c) Constant		5.8
d) Moderate increase		.6
Expenditure on hiring farm labour		
a) Moderate reduction		59.0
b) Large reduction		13.3
c) Constant		19.1
d) Moderate increase		1.2

Magnitude of change was scored as follows: -50% and above=Large reduction, -0.1 - -50% = Moderate reduction, 0%=Constant, 0.1- 50% = Moderate increase, 50% and above= Large increase

Table 4. Farmers' control methods for CLR and their effectiveness in Uganda

Control method	Effectiveness (mean scores)	%
a) Constant weeding(hoe, hand plucking and spraying herbicides)	1.92	81.5
b) Fertiliser application	1.86	21.4
c) Chemicals(mainly Bordeaux mixture)	1.96	20.8
d) Concoctions(urine, red pepper, ash and pawpaw or mango leaves)	1.51	10.4
e) Planted tolerant varieties	2.11	9.2
f) Phyto-sanitary methods	2.42	8.1

N = Total number of responses. Effectiveness of control methods were scored as follows: 0 = not effective, 1 = low effective, 2 = moderate effective, 3 = highly effective

Table 5. Influence of farmers' control method on CLR impact on coffee productivity in Uganda

Model	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	-184.105	190.1		-0.97	0.334	-559.51	191.29
Constant weeding	-280.632	207.55	-0.104	-1.35	0.178	-690.48	129.23
Fertiliser application	74.087	241.49	0.028	0.31	0.759	-402.79	550.96
Chemicals	174.448	220.88	0.072	0.79	0.431	-267.73	610.62
Concoctions	1107.069	453.95	0.31	2.44	0.016	210.64	2003.49
Resistant varieties	44.189	340.41	0.013	0.13	0.897	-628.01	716.34
Phyto-sanitary methods	-1221.23	441.6	-0.342	-2.77	0.006	-2093.27	349.19

a Dependent Variable: change in production. *P-value significantly different at 1% level of significance

the infected plant (10.4%). Other commonly reported control practices were fertiliser application (12.4%) and planting tolerant varieties mainly local/ traditional varieties (9.2%).

Marked variability was reported in the effectiveness of the control methods used, with Phyto-sanitary methods and planting tolerant varieties as the most effective methods, though used by few respondents. The least effective method reported was the use of concoctions (Table 4).

Discussion

Farmer indigenous knowledge and economic implications of CLR

From the results, majority of respondents (83.8%) were aware of CLR and its symptoms (Table 1). The major symptom reported was appearance of pale yellow spots on the lower surface of the leaves. These spots enlarged and produce spores, which were orange/rust in colour, leading to premature defoliation and loss of

Table 6. Limitations in use of inputs for controlling CLR in Uganda

Type of limitation	% household reporting limitation
1. Poor quality on the market/ counterfeits	93.6
2. Inadequate capital to use and maintain	81.5
3. Inputs are expensive to purchase	43.9
4. Most inputs are not readily available on the market	27.7
5. Long distances/ high transport costs to input outlets	20.2
6. No limitation	15
7. Requires alot of man power like to make organic manure	4.1
8. Some Inputs like fertilizers don't last for a long time	2.3
9. Lack of skill/ knowledge on the use of inputs	31.2

photosynthetic surfaces. According to Hakiza (1997) consequently, the plant resorts to stored carbohydrates in the roots to sustain berry development. This leads to loss of fine feeder roots, thus expanding berries fail to fill up due to lack of required nutrients. Subsequently, the young berries shed off. Infected leaves which remain on the trees provide sources of infection when it rains, thus re-activating the fungus. This is why there is generally a loss of yield even the year after rust outbreaks (Avelino *et al.*, 2004); and the cycle continues until when a control measure is implemented.

Farmers were aware of the disease spread. Moreover, the findings corroborate with earlier reports by Eskes (1983) and Hakiza (1997); relating CLR symptoms and spread directly to prevailing ecological conditions such as rainfall, temperature, duration of leaf wetness and wind velocity. Similarly, other researchers (Malhi and Kutcher, 2004; Avelino *et al.*, 2007) reported that slopes are conducive for epidemics of some fungal diseases such as the American leaf spot, *Mycenacitricolor* and several leaf spots. High disease incidence is also, in part, attributed to the presence of

predominantly susceptible Arabica coffee varieties to CLR; notably, Bugisu local, SL14, KP423 and SL28 (Musoli *et al.*, 2001), which were commonly reported to have been grown by the respondents. Matovu *et al.* (2013) reported the highest leaf rust incidence in farms on very steep, steep and medium slopes such as Mt. Elgon region. Indeed reports indicate that the disease has spread throughout the districts in Mt. Elgon region in Eastern Uganda. The reduction in yield associated with the spread of the disease led to the rise in Arabica coffee prices by nearly half (New vision, 16 September 2013).

The observations agree with findings of this study that rust incidence in the region led to a significant reduction in Arabica coffee productivity and income by 49.5%. The economic implication from this is that coffee productivity has a profound and significant impact on livelihoods and food security. Researchers have also linked coffee to poverty reduction, asserting that poverty levels in Uganda have been relatively lower in periods when coffee productivity was high and vice versa¹. Many households go hungry because of food shortage and lack of cash to buy food. A drop in income

from coffee leads to reduction in cash meant to meet other household requirements such as health and education, investments, social obligations, such as contribution to funeral rights and weddings and hiring of labour. Results indicate that when CLR reduce coffee yields, farmers tend to sell off their food stocks in order to offset revenue shortage from coffee. Despite the increase in income from food crops, there was a general reduction in expenditure on household socio-economic obligations. But when there was no CLR, farmers tended to preserve most of their food stocks as proceeds from coffee covered most of the household requirements (Table 3). Therefore, coffee provides the cash needed by the farm households, such that most of the food they produce is reserved for consumption while the cash needed for other socio economic requirements are met from coffee sales. Similar losses due to CLR have been reported by Van der Vossen (2001) and Silva *et al.* (2006).

Coping mechanisms for CLR

The majority of farmers to a large extent, had taken efforts to control the disease mainly through cultural measures; while a few were using chemicals (Bordeaux mixture). This may be attributed to the fact that, since most farmers' proceeds from coffee were low, the costs of purchasing chemicals would have a bearing on the profitability of the enterprise. The most effective control methods reported were phyto- sanitary and planting tolerant varieties to CLR (Table 4).

This observation agrees with findings by others (Bock, 1962; Hakiza, 1997; Mouen Bedimo *et al.*, 2007; Bigirimana *et al.*, 2012) who stressed the influence of some agronomic practices such as pruning, mulching, weed management,

coffee tree spacing and use of soil amendments, on CLR development. However, while the use of phyto-sanitary methods significantly reduced the impact of the disease on productivity, planting tolerant varieties did not. This may be due to the small number of farmers who planted tolerant varieties, either because the majority was ignorant about the existence of the varieties (Silva *et al.*, 2002; 2008; Guerra-Guimares *et al.*, 2009) or lack access to the varieties. Thus, extension and/or research agents are urged to promote and increase access to resistant materials to CLR.

Farmers who reported using chemicals, mainly used insecticides, mainly Bordeaux mixture and concoctions. Application of such control methods by farmers was reported in literature (Wardell, 1987; Logan *et al.*, 1990; Nkunika, 2002; Nyeko and Olubayo, 2005). However, it was observed that many farmers (31.2%) used chemicals without knowing their composition, time of application or frequency of usage (Table 6). They mainly got guidance from fellow farmers without proper technical advice.

Results further show that adulteration was on the rise as many (93.6%) farmers reported using counterfeits. Pimentel (2005) asserts that the decision by farmers to use chemical measures for controlling insect pests is highly influenced by environmental and human health concerns. Propper *et al.* (1996) also emphasizes the use of insecticides by coffee farmers in rural Guatemala for combating fungi. Nyeko *et al.* (2002) found that some farmers in Kabale district in Uganda advised others to use Dithane (fungicide) for combating aphids.

This means that the pesticides would be wasted, resulting in unnecessary and

potentially harmful health and environmental impacts. Thus, the task for extension and/or agro-input dealers to provide technical advice to farmers on the use insecticides because some of these chemicals are highly toxic (Banjo *et al.*, 2003) and prohibitively costly (Orikiriza *et al.*, 2013) and promote more selective, and less dependent use and safer handling of such products (Trutmann *et al.*, 1996). Results further indicate that, though concoctions were used by a few farmers, their influence on the disease was significant.

This calls for further research on the kinds of concoction mixtures being used. Some plant leaves are known to contain fungicides. Such a control method, once validated and improved by scientists could be easier and more affordable to farmers.

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