

Angola AGRICULTURE

By the end of the colonial period, a variety of crops and livestock were produced in Angola. In the north, cassava, coffee, and cotton were grown; in the central highlands, maize was cultivated; and in the south, where rainfall is lowest, cattle herding was prevalent. In addition, there were large plantations run by Portuguese that produced palm oil, sugarcane, bananas, and sisal. These crops were grown by commercial farmers, primarily Portuguese, and by peasant farmers, who sold some of their surplus to local Portuguese traders in exchange for supplies. The commercial farmers were dominant in marketing these crops, however, and enjoyed substantial support from the colonial government in the form of technical assistance, irrigation facilities, and financial credit. They produced the great majority of the crops that were marketed in the cities or exported.

After independence, the departure of Portuguese farmers and traders in the rural areas undermined agricultural productivity. In response, the government set up state farms on land formerly owned by the Portuguese and established the National Company for the Marketing and Distribution of Agricultural Products (Emprêsa Nacional de Comercialização e Distribuição de Produtos Agrícolas-- Encodipa) to maintain the rural trading system. Neither body, however, was successful, and by 1984 the government started phasing out the state farms and turned production over to individual farmers. In December 1985, the government also put most rural trade back into private hands. To help peasant farmers, the government established agricultural development stations and provided bank credits for small-scale agricultural projects. Several hundred state farms were to be turned over to associations of tenant farmers as an embryonic form of cooperative. The association was to buy or rent tools for shared use, share marketing initiatives to strengthen prices, and share transport. By the end of 1985, the Directorate of Farm Marketing controlled 4,638 farm cooperatives and 6,534 farmers' associations; but of these, only 93 cooperatives and 71 associations were operational.

In the late 1980s, the country faced serious problems in resuscitating agricultural production. By 1988 the departure of the Portuguese, rural depopulation, and the physical isolation of the farming areas had almost totally halted commercial production of such cash crops as coffee and sisal, as well as the subsistence production of cereals. Production was stagnating because of marketing and transport difficulties; shortages of seed, fertilizer, and consumer goods for trade with peasant farmers; and the impact of the war on planting, harvesting, and yields. Land mines and fear of attacks had forced peasants to reduce the areas under cultivation, especially fields distant from villages, and to abandon hopes of harvesting some planted areas. Moreover, the internal migration of peasants to safer areas had resulted in the overcultivation of lands and decreased yields.

Despite these obstacles, there were some successes. The relatively secure Huíla Province maintained a fair level of production, and the reorientation of government policy away from inefficient state farms and toward peasant producers promised to provide services to and boost production by peasant farmers. By the end of 1987, there were twenty-five development stations providing services to peasant producers in ten provinces, and four more were being set up.

Data as of February 1989