



Jumbo Groundnuts: A Case Study in Wasted Opportunities

Sudan once had a successful project cultivating large-kernel groundnuts, commercially known as “jumbo” groundnuts, in River Nile State.

The project was not merely an agricultural experiment. It was an established productive enterprise that cultivated, produced and exported groundnuts to overseas markets, generating economic returns for the investor and contributing export revenues to the State. This variety differed from conventional groundnuts grown for oil production. The economic value of jumbo groundnuts lay not in their oil content, but in the quality, size and commercial specifications of the kernels, which made them attractive in international markets.

They were exported as high-quality raw kernels to overseas markets, where importers subsequently processed them according to market requirements, whether by selling them in their original form, shelling or roasting them, or using them in various food industries. The crop was therefore a specialised export commodity, distinct from crops cultivated primarily for oil production or oil extraction. Experience demonstrated that the region possessed the necessary conditions for producing this crop. The land was suitable, water was available, global demand existed, and the economic returns were attractive.

The project served as a model for an agricultural enterprise that could have been expanded and integrated into Sudan's agricultural export system. However, the activity subsequently ceased. Accounts circulating among those involved in the agricultural sector suggest that, during the presidency of Jaafar Mohamed Nimeiri, a decision concerning the pricing of oilseeds resulted in this variety of groundnut being included among crops subject to administered pricing, without taking into account its distinctive characteristics as an export commodity with an economic purpose different from that of groundnuts grown for oil production. Regardless of the details of that decision and the circumstances prevailing at the time, and without entering into whether initiatives or attempts were made to review the decision or to exempt this particular variety, the important point lies in the practical outcome.

The activity remained outside organised production and did not return to its practical path as an agricultural export project until the Agricultural Development Authority—a presidential body established during the Ingaz era—began reviewing the region's agricultural history and examining opportunities to reintroduce economically viable crops. As part of its strategy to introduce new crops, implement pilot projects to demonstrate agricultural and economic viability, and support agricultural development, the Agricultural Development Authority began studying the region's agricultural history and reviewing past experiences that could serve as a foundation for future development.

During this process, the Authority discovered that a successful large-kernel groundnut cultivation project had previously operated in the region but had been discontinued. The study showed that the activity had not ceased because of poor crop performance or unsuitable agricultural conditions. Rather, it was a project with the foundations for success that could be revived and developed within an investment- and export-oriented strategy. The Agricultural Development Authority therefore began taking practical steps to revive the activity.

Appropriate seeds were imported, and more than 2,000 feddans were cultivated as a pilot project to demonstrate the potential for expansion and the crop's return to commercial production. The significance of the experiment lay not only in the area cultivated, but also in the knowledge it generated about the crop and the region. The Agricultural Development Authority accumulated detailed data on soil, its chemical and physical characteristics, agricultural requirements, appropriate ploughing depths and fertilisation programmes, and groundwater resources, following scientific analysis.

The technical experts who participated in implementing the project also gained practical knowledge of crop cultivation. This is an important asset for any future expansion, as prospective investors would not have to start from scratch. They would have access to an existing field experiment and established technical data. The success of the project attracted investment interest. A foreign investor proposed establishing a large-scale project to produce jumbo groundnuts for export. The plan was for the project to begin with production of between 20,000 and 30,000 tonnes during its first phase and subsequently expand towards considerably larger production capacities, potentially reaching approximately 500,000 tonnes, taking advantage of the region's extensive land and available water resources.

However, this initiative has not yet developed into a large-scale production project due to challenges related to institutional readiness and certain regulatory requirements for investments of this magnitude.

- The opportunity nevertheless remains available, supported by the fundamental data and information required by any serious investment project.
- This story demonstrates that economic opportunities are not always lost due to resource shortages.
- The land may exist.
- Water may be available.
- The market may be ready.
- Technical knowledge may already have been accumulated.

Yet inadequate institutional preparedness and coordination can delay the transformation of an opportunity into economic reality.

- The importance of this crop becomes even clearer when considering the potential of River Nile and Northern States.
- These regions possess extensive agricultural land, diverse water resources and practical experience demonstrating their capacity to host major export-oriented agricultural projects.
- The story of jumbo groundnuts is therefore not merely the story of a crop that disappeared and was later revived.
- It is a case study in how the State manages economic opportunities.
- A successful project should not disappear from institutional memory simply because circumstances change.
- It should be reviewed, developed, and restored to a productive path whenever appropriate conditions arise.
- A wasted opportunity is not necessarily an opportunity lost forever.
- It may simply be an opportunity waiting for a vision capable of rediscovering it and institutions capable of clearing the path towards production, exports and development.

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