



A FARMER'S SAY >
By Michael J. Ssali

Farmers need demonstrations and practicals

Given Uganda's persistent farming challenges which include long droughts, depleted soils, and incurable crop diseases, among others, there is a need for drastic measures to improve agricultural production.

Farmers need skills to cope with the challenges especially when it is remembered that we have a rapidly growing population to feed.

In the 60s the government set up District Farm Institutes (DFI) across the country whose role was to give short training courses to farmers in agricultural production practices.

The DFIs also served as demonstration farms to show how various agricultural technologies were applied.

They suffered some neglect during the difficult years of civil unrest and up to now most of them are poorly funded.

With support from DANIDA some six of them across the country were renewed under a different name, DATICs (District Agricultural Training and Information Centers).

However, when DANIDA funding stopped about seven years ago the DATICs, like the rest of DFIs, were left in the hands of district administrations which have chronic revenue collection issues.

A point to remember is that while in the 60s we had only 36 districts today we have more than 100 districts and more farming households, which points to the big need for more DFIs and increased funding for them.

Writing in "The Conversation" newsletter late last month Esther Ngumi Ngumbi said, "If carefully designed, they could help revolutionise African Agriculture. They could help solve some of Africa's most persistent challenges including degraded soils or the low adoption of irrigation technologies. They could also help with uptake of new concepts that are transforming agriculture including precision agriculture, a farm management system that soils and crops receive exactly what they need for optimal growth and productivity."

The article further reveals that demonstration farms are used to promote agriculture in both developing and developed countries including the US, Israel, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya. It went on to disclose that China has rolled out 23 demonstration farms across Africa with a goal of upgrading African farming by passing on successes in agriculture and that other donors are setting up more demonstration centers on the continent.