Agriculture

Farmers tipped on how to increase earnings from agricultural exports

By Racheal Nabisubi and Samuel Balagadde

Farmers have been advised to integrate project management and ICT into agriculture so as to increase earnings from Uganda's agricultural exports.

The call was made by experts during the recent and first National Project Management conference held at the Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala.

Connie Masaba, the head of project management at the agriculture ministry, said farmers would efficiently utilise resources to ensure high productivity and standards for both the local and international markets. "ICT can enhance value even with limited resources," Masaba noted.

Milly Nalukwango Isingoma, the assistant commissioner of research planning development at Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), said lack of value addition had relegated agriculture to contributing only 0.7% of the country's GDP. She said 90% of the farmers are not adding value.

Isingoma noted that a number of factors such as low levels of education, land fragmentation and inadequate labour may be affecting agriculture, but there is urgent need to commercialise farming. She said currently 85% of the country's farmers are small scale.

There is need to ask: "Why is agriculture, the backbone of Uganda's economy not contributing more revenues to the economy yet it employs 80% of Ugandans", Isingoma said.

$198M

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She noted that Uganda imports more than it exports. For instance in 2015, Uganda imported $2.5m worth of meat and $198m worth of cereals.

In the same year, the Economic Complexity Index (ECI), indicated that Uganda's exports fetched only $2.31b compared to imports of $5.52b, a negative trade balance of $3.21b.

"We need project management in order to harness the benefits and opportunities we have in Uganda to improve on the export scores," Isingoma said. "Otherwise, we might soon fail to feed ourselves and others," she added.

"As government, we need to find ways to make people interested in agriculture and also promote an end-to-end management. This involves planning, executing and having readily available market since people require sustainable income. There is need for a systematic approach to agriculture," she said.

This way, the sector would reach self-sustainability and increase its contribution to the government coffers, she said.

Robert Kabushenga, the CEO of Vision Group and proprietor of Rugyeyo Farm, noted that many people claiming to be farmers are not treating their ventures as commercial establishments.

He also advised farmers to keep proper records of their activities to succeed.

"Agriculture can be attained through proper book keeping, knowing the cost of management, returns on investment and identifying your scope," Kabushenga said. Keeping records helps track every activity on the farm right from day one. Write down every amount of money you make this will make you more viable," he added.

Dr Isaac Nkote, the dean of the faculty of commerce at Makerere Business Institute, concurred with Kabushenga.

He said: "We need to define who a farmer is at a ministerial level. If you want to increase agricultural budget, there is need to differentiate between a farmer who grows for home consumption and surplus for sale and a commercial farmer," Nkote said.

Joshua Akandwanaho, an economist with the National Information Technology Authority (NITA), said e-agriculture is the future where ICT will take centre stage.

He explained that ICT will aid integration of different agriculture components and activities in the value chain for improved production and value addition.

Hundreds of bags of maize waiting to be loaded onto trucks to Kenya. Uganda's exports are far less than the imports