

# Kabushenga said the weeding machines can transform Uganda's agriculture



Kabushenga demonstrates how the weeding machine works at his farm in Namayumba sub-county, Wakiso district. Photos by Godfrey Mutegeki

## Vision Group CEO urges farmers to adopt machinery

### Adoptable ideas

By Godfrey Mutegeki

As one way of reducing unemployment, Robert Kabushenga, Vision Group's chief executive officer, has challenged youth to invest in modern agricultural technology. Such technology includes weeding machines, which can be a source of income.

Kabushenga made the remarks on November 4, when he hosted visitors at his Rugyeyo Farm in Namayumba sub-county, Wakiso district.

Youth unemployment in Uganda stands at 70%, according to data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

"The youth can form groups and buy the machines. The machines can also be used to slash compounds," Kabushenga says.

He says weeding machines can be a profitable investment since weeds are a major challenge on many farms.

"Commercial farmers always look out for people who can weed their plantations, but such people are not always readily available. So, if the youth can buy the weeding machines, they would be hired to do the work," he says.

Weeds are one of the biggest challenges in crop production, accounting for up to 30%-50% of crop yield losses. They are mainly problematic during the rainy season.

The weeds remove nearly 25% to 60% of nutrients from the soil, depriving plants of them. They also host several pests.

Many farmers find it problematic to manage the weeds because of labour shortage. In Uganda majority of the agricultural activities are labour-intensive, yet increasingly, there is a shortage of labour as many youth are migrating to towns.

Thus, the best solution to labour shortage and the weed problem are the portable weeding machines, Kabushenga says.

Kabushenga highlighted two types of weeding machines; the tilling or ploughing machine and the weed slashing machine.

He explained that the hand-held weed



Kabushenga explaining how he deals with coffee bore disease

### Opportunity for youth

Vision Group's CEO, Robert Kabushenga, revealed that the cost of the weeding machine is low, compared to a boda boda.

The machines cost between sh500,000 and sh800,000, which is lower than the price of a motorcycle, which goes for sh3m.

"The machines are easy to use. They will make you more money than what a boda boda would. What's more, there are fewer risks involved in using the machines, in terms of accidents," Kabushenga said.

ploughing machines can be used when the weeds are still young, but when they are overgrown, the slashing machine comes handy.

Richard Kayabwe, a youth from Namayumba, says the machine is easy to operate.

"The machine works does not require a lot of energy like a hoe. One is able to do more work compared to when using a hoe. Moreover,

one does not have to be educated to use it," Kayabwe says.

Many farmers hire manual labourers who charge a lot of money for weeding, but if a farmer has a machine it would reduce that cost.

### Planting coffee

Kabushenga, who grows coffee and matooke, says for one to succeed as a farmer, one needs to be focused, determined and hardworking.

He noted that to earn more from coffee, one should move away from traditional methods and embrace modern farming techniques.

"Keep your coffee garden free of weeds. Coffee is like children; you must love it and care for it in order to get good yields. You must be available for it," Kabushenga said.

He irrigates the coffee field and has also planted *gonja* (plantain) to provide a shade for the coffee.

Kabushenga's farm has become a learning centre for the residents of Namayumba, where farmers are emulating his farming practices.

"We want to see such good farming practices in the whole country. That is why we should learn from each other," Kabushenga urged.

### STATE OF MECHANISATION

Tractors and small farm machines, like the ones at Vision Group's chief, Robert Kabushenga's, Rugyeyo farm, may look expensive, but they have a multiplier effect on production, which in the long run, makes them cheaper than the hoe and manual labour.

Tractors ease farm work, right from preparing the farm, planting, weeding, harvesting to post-harvest handling. Agriculture experts say if a farmer used a tractor to prepare land that he had always prepared using a hand hoe, yields would rise by over 100%.

There are around 18 million hand hoes in Uganda, since each farming household has an average of three. The hand hoe is the main farm tool in Uganda. Farmers say the heavy duty tractors that are on the market are not ideal for the millions of smallholder farmers who dominate the sector.

However, advanced farming countries have long moved away from rudimentary farm tools to embrace machines.

Ideally, every agricultural sub-county should have at least three tractors. This means that to reach a near optimum level, the country needs 5,000 tractors. However, the estimated number of tractors in the country is less than 1,000 for the over 1,400 sub-counties. This means that there is a deficit of about 4,000.

According to statistics, the average number of tractors per 1,000 hectares in Uganda is 1.5 tractors, compared to the world average of 28. Comparatively, the average tractor count per farmer in the Netherlands is two tractors per farming household and about 195 tractors per 1,000 hectares. This means each tractor caters for about five hectares in the Netherlands, while in Uganda, the ratio is one tractor to 900 hectares.

Kabushenga says adopting the cheaper, small farm machines can transform the small farms in the country.

### Easing labour

A big tractor, driven by one person ploughs 10 acres per day. However, if a farmer employed people to use hoes to plough the same size of land, he would need at least 200 people to plough the same area in one day, working from 6:00am to 7:00pm. That amount of human labour is no longer available. A single person needs at least a month of hard work to plough an acre. Also, when it comes to planting, a farmer will need nearly the same number of workers to plant in one day, so that all the crops grow at the same time.

While large-scale farmers can go for heavy duty tractors, medium-scale and smallholder farmers can use smaller, but effective machines. It looks expensive at first, but in the long run, using these small machines is much cheaper.

"The machine saves you all the challenges that come with handling people, such as theft. As long as it is serviced, it will do the work for you," Kabushenga observed.

*Get your machine now*

Those interested in getting the weeding machines may call 0782006608