

Why every school needs a garden

Edward Mukiibi, the vice-president of Slow Food International, has written in a book titled: *Uganda from Earth to Table* that Uganda is the richest among East African countries in terms of biodiversity and that it is one of the countries with the most diverse foods in the world.

"The truth is that a vote of thanks is owed to the local, traditional and indigenous food species and the great caretaking skills shown by the small-scale peasant and artisan producers, practicing traditional farming systems in different regions of the country," reads a part of his message.

It is not enough for our country to be described as "Gifted by Nature" when we do not take practical steps to ensure that we sustain and preserve the environment and work principles that encourage the production of the diverse indigenous Ugandan food crops. They are our heritage.

Different ethnic communities in the country have traditional vegetables, grains, tubers, mushrooms, edible insects, and fruits, specific for each season and, in many cases, even enshrined in the people's traditions and cultural beliefs.

Many of these crops and insects are not commercially produced, they are neglected by modern agricultural research, and they may be described as at risk of disappearing, yet they are Ugandan delicacies that for centuries have been part of our agriculture. The children learnt how to produce the food items from their parents and other elders in the community. Today, however, all the children must attend school. This reduces their time for agricultural work at home.

The child's education should provide the basic skills of food production as one of the components for self-reliance.

Our vision of education has got to change and include farming as an essential skill to be emphasised in every school.

That is why we need a school garden where the children can practically be taught how to grow crops, especially our traditional food crops.

The teachers of course are not expected to make it appear as if work in the school garden is a punishment for the children.

Rather, they should make work in the garden, dignified, enjoyable, and interesting.

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