

Challenges facing Ugandan agriculture

Quite often our leaders talk about farming as the foundation of the country's economy and it is strongly tied to poverty reduction.

The sector employs about 75 per cent of the country's population, contributes about 20 per cent of the GDP and about 48 per cent of export earnings.

However, only a tiny fraction of our national budget (below 5 per cent) is allocated to the sector and most of the country's youths do not have any practical introduction to farming since they spend at least seven years of their childhood attending primary schools that have no school gardens.

Some four million households in the country depend on small scale farming merely for self-sustenance.

With 78 per cent of its population under 30 years of age, Uganda has the youngest population in the world according to the UNFPA 2017 report.

A big population such as we have requires increased agricultural production to feed it and to create jobs. Yet, in our case, a big population also means more pressure on land, degraded soils, deforestation, wetland destruction, smaller gardens, unemployment, drug abuse, early marriages, HIV spread, malnutrition, and poverty.

A recent Uganda Youth Survey by the East African Institute of the Aga Khan University revealed that only 12 per cent of the youth would wish to go into farming.

Our land tenure system in which smallholder farmers cling to their small plots of land using hand hoes is not supportive of modern commercial agriculture which uses heavy machines and automation instead of intensive human labour.

(Andrew Mwenda - *The problem with Africa*) We need large chunks of land to use heavy machines and there should be fewer people in agriculture for meaningful production.

Despite emerging natural challenges such as climate change, pests and diseases, our leaders are slow to accept solutions provided to them by the very science institutions like NARO (National Agricultural Research Organisation) that the government has put in place and always funded for that purpose. Food crops like potatoes, bananas, cassava, and maize are under attack by pests and diseases and quickly disappearing.

NARO has come up with some solutions but our leaders are taking their time to accept the solutions.

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