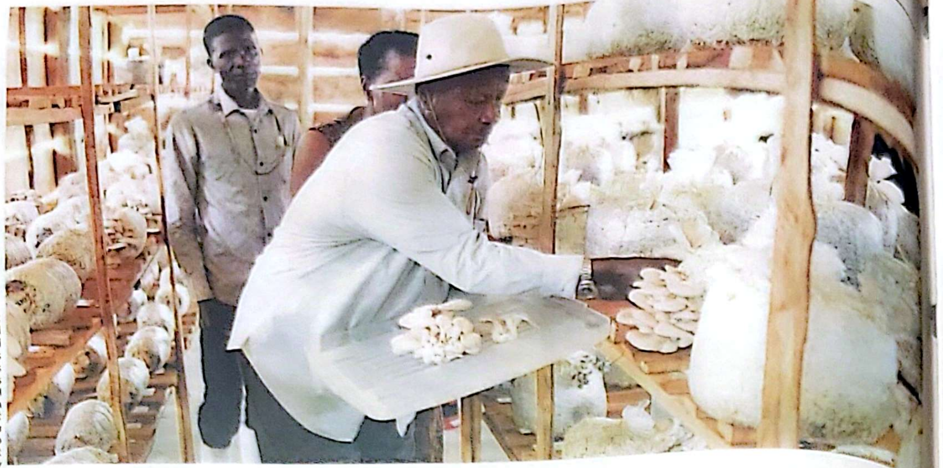


President Yoweri Museveni harvests mushrooms at his presidential demonstration farm at Kawumu in Luwero district recently

The government hopes to increase coffee production to six million bags by 2020 so as to boost exports, thereby increasing revenue and household incomes

Agriculture: Has the NRM kept promises to farmers?

By Joshua Kato

If one was to go by the promises made by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government in its 2016 manifesto, farms in Uganda would be as beautiful as the biblical Garden of Eden. It has been two years since these promises, that spans 2016-2021, were made and while some have been fulfilled, a lot more still needs to be done.

State of the agriculture sector

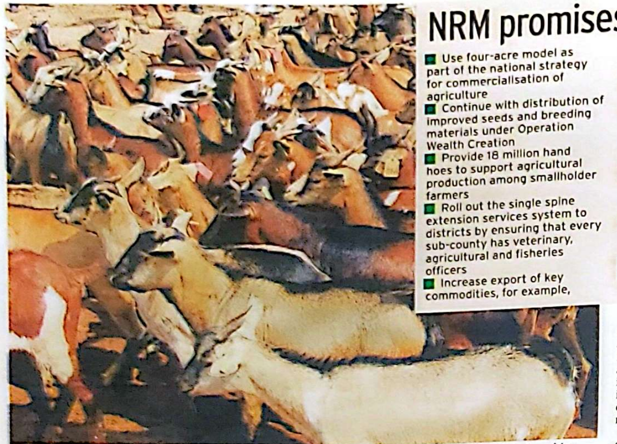
According to the 2014 National Household Census, 68% of Uganda's working population is engaged in agriculture-related activities.

With a working population of around 16.4 million people, this means that at least 12 million people are directly engaged in agriculture. This shows how important the sector is to the country.

In 2016, the agriculture sector was growing at less than 2.9%. According to the agriculture ministry statistics, it is now growing at around 5%. The 2017/18 national budget report indicated that the agricultural sector contribution to the economy stood at around 25%.

Production of staple foods like maize increased from around 2.4 million tonnes in 2015 to around 4.2 million tonnes in 2016. Production of cash crops such as coffee, tea, fruits and flowers has also risen in the last few years.

On the fight against hunger, Uganda has maintained her position as the regional food basket. According to the 2016 World hunger Index, Uganda's hunger index dropped to 14 points from 19 in 2011, making the country the less likely to suffer from hunger and famine across the east and central African region.



The Government campaign to get all Ugandans into farming has picked up momentum countrywide

NRM promises at a glance

- Use four-acre model as part of the national strategy for commercialisation of agriculture
- Continue with distribution of improved seeds and breeding materials under Operation Wealth Creation
- Provide 18 million hand hoes to support agricultural production among smallholder farmers
- Roll out the single spine extension services system to districts by ensuring that every sub-county has veterinary, agricultural and fisheries officers
- Increase export of key commodities, for example, coffee from 3.6 million bags in 2016 to six million bags in 2020.
- Invest in research and disease control
- Strengthen regulation and surveillance to ensure that the right pesticides, insecticides and acaricides are on the market
- Continue establishing value addition processing factories where response from the private sector is slow
- Provide machinery for construction of valley dams/ tanks and for drilling boreholes
- Promote mechanisation
- Ensure self-sufficiency in rice production

In 2017, however, the hunger index rose to 25%, largely due to disease outbreaks and little rains in some areas.

"There were not enough rains through two seasons of 2016 and this affected production," says Vincent Ssempijja, the Minister of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries.

In addition, in the last two years, however, there have been several disease outbreaks and a long drought has had an impact on the growth of the sector.

In late 2017, the poultry sector was affected by rumours about an outbreak of bird flu, which led to some countries suspending poultry imports from Uganda. Then in March 2017, there was an attack of the fall armyworm against maize and other crops in the country, the is still destroying crops even today.

According to projections, these may reduce agriculture growth and production as the NRM strives to achieve its promises.

The promises

In the 2016 manifesto, President Yoweri Museveni promised to improve many aspects of the agriculture sector.

"Over the next five years, our commitment is to transform subsistence agriculture to market-oriented or commercial agriculture. The NRM will do this by increasing investments in several areas as contained in the five-year agriculture development plan," the manifesto stated.

The promises include revamping the irrigation sector, creating an agriculture funding facility for farmers and enhancing value-addition. Other promises are improving extension services and improving the road network to enable farmers move produce to markets easily.

Indeed, there have been some achievements, but overall, there is a lot more that needs to be done. One of the achievements is that for the first time in many years, the direct allocation to the agriculture sector topped sh823b in the 2016/17 budget.

Proposals from the 2018/19 budget for agriculture indicate that there will be an increase to sh863b, which is around 3% of the budget. According to the sector budget policy paper, the increase is intended to mitigate emerging threats like diseases and water for irrigation.

Extension services

According to the strategy, the extension services run from the national extensions directorate, through the districts up to the sub-county levels. The national level should have a total of 47 staff, who include a director, commissioners, assistant commissioners and support staff.

As per the end of 2017, 26% of the national directorate was constituted, with another round of recruitment in the coming financial year 2018/19 to bring the total to 50%.

Each district should have of 13 staff. At the moment, there are 116 districts in the country, which brings the total number of staff to around 1,508. These include production and marketing officers, extension co-ordinators, as well as principal veterinary, crop and fisheries officers.

Others are senior veterinary, crops and fisheries officers, animal production officers, entomologists and vermin control officers.

Meanwhile, 30% of positions at the districts were filled in the 2016/17 financial year. Another 30% of the positions was filled in the 2017/18 financial year, bringing the total to 60% in 2018. The plan is to have 100% by 2020.

At the sub-county level, a total of 9,548 staff are targeted. These include veterinary, agricultural and fisheries officers plus their assistants and an entomologist. Of these, at least 36% were recruited, with another recruitment exercise coming in the next three years to make 100% by 2020.

With around 3,700 extension workers already recruited, out of a targeted 11,111 (according to figures in the extension policy by 2020), the ratio of extension workers to farming households is 1:2,472.

Milk production is still low in Uganda, but the Government has put in place mechanisms to increase it, for example, training farmers in how to feed cattle

According to Beatrice Byarugaba, the director of agriculture extension at the agriculture ministry, this is still far below the internationally recommended 1:500. But if all the 11,111 workers are recruited in three years time, the ratio will drop to 1:800.

"We are sure these will be able effectively carry on the tasks," Byarugaba says.

To bring the figure to the 1:500, about 17,000 workers should be recruited.

According to Madina Guloba, there are an estimated 8.9 million farming households at the moment. This means that each extension worker is taking care of 2,472 homes. If he is to visit at least five homes per day, it means that he needs 494 days to visit each of them. Certainly, extremes like the ravaging fall armyworm cannot wait for that long.

THROUGH THE FOUR-ACRE MODEL, THE GOVERNMENT HOPES TO FIGHT POVERTY AT HOUSEHOLD LEVEL COUNTRYWIDE

"The fact is that recruitment of all extension workers must have been done yesterday," says Nebbi MP Jacquiline Aol.

She, like most MPs, says if there were enough people to guide farmers, the current effects of drought and diseases would be low.

Her colleague, Sandra Santa, the MP for Oyam district, agrees. "It is improper for the Government to continue distributing farm inputs without guiding people," she says.

Four-acre plan

The manifesto emphasises the four-acre per family plan, which will be implemented through the Operation Wealth Creation/NAADS programme.

"It will involve supporting each family to have four acres of basic enterprise, that will be supported with farm inputs," the manifesto says.

Continues on page

How NRM has fared in agriculture two years after launching campaign

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The enterprises include poultry, piggery, zero grazing and crops.

According to Gen. Salim Saleh, the overall co-ordinator of OWC, if well-implemented, the system will help fight poverty.

Implementing this promise is going hand-in-hand with the distribution of farm inputs under the OWC programme. In the last one year, at least 300 million seedlings of coffee, tea and cocoa have been given out to farmers under the OWC programme.

As for coffee, the target is to produce at least 20 million bags by the end of 2020.

According to Emmanuel Iyamulemye, the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) executive director, coffee production has been rising gradually from 2.2 million bags in 2013, to around 3.6 million bags in 2016. It rose to around 4.6 million in 2017. The target in the manifesto to have six million bags by 2020 is still achievable. All the seedlings being given out are expected to start yielding coffee by 2019. Certainly, there will be a drastic rise in production by 2020.

Other inputs given out in support of the four-acre programme include seeds and dairy cattle.

Some of the tractors among other agricultural equipment that were officially handed over by the President Yoweri Museveni to various districts during a ceremony at Kololo Airstrip in 2015. This was in a bid to promote mechanised agriculture so as to increase yields

Financing credit

Agricultural loans remain elusive for small farmers.

In the manifesto, the NRM promised to set up an Agriculture Credit Facility to ease farmers' access to finances.

"We have set up this facility so that farmers can access loans easily. I call upon farmers to take advantage of it," the President said.

The ACF is supposed to be accessed at around 12%. Agricultural loans grew by just 20% compared to 70% for other loans by commercial institutions in 2017. The loans, according to a statement by Bank of Uganda, are channelled through participating financial institutions.

By the end of 2017, there were 17 such institutions. The money can be used for funding agro-processing machinery, tractors, farm equipment, irrigation equipment, greenhouse facilities, farm expansion and modernisation, as well as poultry brooders and storage facilities, among others.

Among banks that are mandated to give out this facility is the Uganda Development Bank (UDB).

Samuel Sejjaaka, the board chairman of UDB, said: "We have given out this money to many farmers and agribusiness groups across the country."

One of the latest recipients of the fund was Alfasan Ltd, a veterinary medicine manufacturing plant, which received sh5b to support construction of their new factory in Namanve, Mukono district launched last year.

However, the average farmer still finds it difficult to access the credit facility.

"The banks require a lot of things that most farmers do not have, before they can access the loans," says Johnson Basangwa, a poultry farmer in Kamuli district.

He says only farmers like him who have security can access the loan.

"The Government should make access to the loan simple for farmers," he says.

Increase value addition

Value addition has been touted as the big leap to better farm earnings. Value addition on agriculture products accounts for over 35% of the processing industry in Uganda. However, for the small farmer, most of his produce is still sold as raw food. In the 2016 manifesto, NRM promised to promote value-addition in agricultural products by providing milk coolers, rice hullers and maize mills, among others, at sub-county level.

"NRM shall promote the use of local materials and by-products of maize, soya beans, cotton, sunflower, wheat and rice, among others, in the fast growing animal feeds industry," it said.

They promised to utilise all other cotton by-products for oil, paper production, and many other specialised uses.

NRM shall construct over 44 warehouses and over 190 satellite collection centres in grain-producing areas, targeting to reach over 52,000 households, 50% of which will be women-headed households.

Most of the facilities will be owned by the private sector. One large plant shall be established to produce fortified foods to improve household nutrition security.

Gen. Salim Saleh

Additionally, NRM promised to increase coverage of the Warehouse Receipt System to provide storage to farmers who can use the receipts to acquire credit.

NRM shall establish 17 grain milling and fortification plants under a Private Public Partnership (PPP) arrangement, to support (and pilot at zone level) cold-chain storage facilities supporting high value perishable products, including milk, meat, vegetables, fruits and mushrooms.

According to NAADS officer Samuel Mugasi, who is directly responsible for distributing the equipment, in the last three years, 40 maize mills have been constructed for farmers in various parts of the country.

"These have come complete with big stand-by generators and are doing well," he says.

Among the beneficiaries include farmers in Busoga, Mubende, Luwero, Mityana, northern Uganda and Teso.

"We are in the process of setting up five regional maize silos with a capacity to store at least 5,000 metric tonnes each. We are also setting up small units with a capacity to store 200-300 metric tonnes at sub-county level," Mugasi says.

For other value addition sectors, Mugasi points at the newly installed fruit factories as big achievements, for example, the over 50 milk coolers that are now scattered along the cattle corridor. Because of this, milk production went up from 1.5b litres in 2010 to 2.2b litres in 2016.

The estimated production at the end of 2017 was 2.8 billion litres. According to records at the Dairy Development Agency, the number of milk processing plants has also gone up to 40.

Other achievements

In December 2012, the construction of the Soroti fruit factory, which is intended to add value to fruits mainly from Teso region, was launched. This is one of the largest achievements towards value-addition. Soroti district's production officer, Patrick Eyudu, says the construction of the fruit factory is in its final stages.

"The buildings have been completed and electricity and water have been connected. The construction of the road network and sewerage system has also been completed," he says.

"What remains is the fixing of machines, which will not take more than two months."

In August 2016, the first meat processing factory was opened in Luwero. The factory, located near Bombo, has a capacity to process at least 300 cows a day. While launching it, President Museveni pointed out that this was going a long way in improving the earnings of livestock farmers.

"There should be no more worries about market for beef," he said. However, getting enough good beef cattle to slaughter per day has been a big challenge.

IN AUGUST 2016, THE FIRST MEAT PROCESSING FACTORY WAS OPENED IN LUWERO DISTRICT, WITH THE CAPACITY TO PROCESS AT LEAST 300 COWS A DAY

More tractors/mechanisation

Farmers need tractors in order to move to the next level of production. However, while President Museveni indeed promised tractors in his manifesto, he also promised 18 million hoes to farmers across the country during the campaigns.

"NRM shall promote farm mechanisation through loaning tractors and related implements to sub-county Savings and Credit Co-operative Societies (SACCOS) and youth groups, which will operate as service providers to farmers in the sub-county.

"Furthermore, NRM shall promote other forms of appropriate technology like the use of ox-ploughs in areas where the technology is appropriate.

"NRM government shall establish a mechanisation workshop for technology generation and testing for appropriateness in different agricultural production zones. A mechanisation unit shall be established in each zone for hire by farmers for bush clearing and other on farm uses," the manifesto reads.

Meanwhile, 99% of farmers in Uganda use the hand hoe as their main tool of trade. At the moment, farmers who want to use tractors pay a lot of money to hire them.

"To hire a tractor, I spend sh120,000 per acre here in

Nakaseke," farmer Edward Ndugga says. "This affects my profit margin."

At the moment, there are around 1,300 heavy duty tractors across the country, compared to an estimated need of around 6,000.

Ideally, according to agriculturists, every sub-county must have at least four to five tractors. With 1,400 sub-counties, this means that the country should have at least 7,000 tractors.

In March 2017, President Museveni handed over a total of about 50 tractors to various farmers across the Western region, mainly to enhance livestock pasture development. The tractors cost over sh6b.

Early this year, another batch of around 50 tractors was handed to farmers in southwestern Uganda in order to help them grow grass for cattle.

"We realise that the only way to develop the agriculture sector is to use tractors. I implore you to go out and look after them well," the President said as he handed over the tractors.

In total, the 2017/18 budget had planned a hand over of 175 tractors.

"We shall hand them over to selected groups across the country in order to improve production," Ssempijja said while appearing before the Parliament Budget Committee in April 2017.

The plan is also to start distributing tractors that can go beyond ploughing, for example harvesters.

Meanwhile, distribution of the 18 million hoes has already started across the country.

"We still need hoes because tractors cannot be everywhere. Even in countries with the highest concentration of tractors, you can still see hand hoes," Ssempijja says.

Irrigation

"We have not had rain for the last one year," laments Fred Rukundo, a cattle keeper in Kiruhura, which is part of the cattle corridor.

Rukundo's over 100 cattle have been depending on water from dams constructed across the cattle corridor.

But the dams are also drying up, sometimes because they are not de-silting. The rains are getting more and more erratic, because of changing weather patterns.

In 2016, there were less rains between May and August and much less rains from October to December.

"Yes, we have got new dams constructed, but the distance from one to the other is still long. We need more of them to reduce the distances," says Henry Mijumbi, a cattle keeper in Kasozi, Nakasongola district.

He says sometimes he moves his cows to as far as Bulyamuseenyi in Ngoma, about 20 miles away, in search of water.

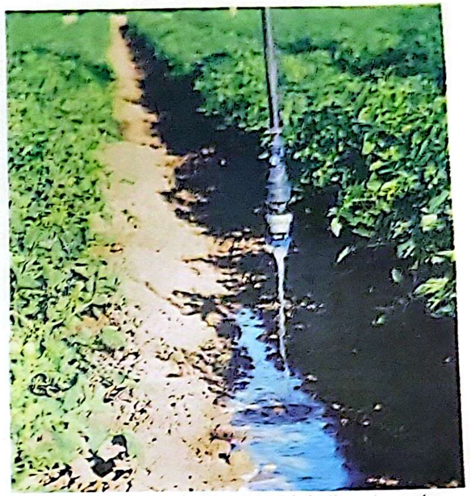
In the 2016/17 budget, funds were set aside for enhancing farm level irrigation across the country. In the manifesto, the Government promised to rehabilitate four medium scale irrigation schemes — Doho in Butaleja, Mubuku in Kasese, Olweny in Lira/Dokolo and Agoro in Kitgum — with a total area of 6,535 hectares.

In addition, Atera in Apac, Ongom in Lira, Odina in Soroti, Labori in Serere and Kiige in Kamuli districts, shall be rehabilitated.

They also promised to establish four new medium size irrigation schemes, each with 2,000 hectares for promotion of irrigation, expansion of Kibimba irrigation scheme to support out-growers and Pearl rice irrigation scheme in Igongero swamp in Bugiri/Iganga districts.

The irrigation schemes would also help expand Doho irrigation scheme in Butaleja and develop Namatala swamp in Mbale/Budaka districts and construct 23 communal valley tanks across the country each with total reservoir capacity of 2.2 million cubic metres to serve 450,000 heads of cattle.

The valley tanks shall be constructed in districts within the cattle corridor — Nakasongola, Luwero, Nakaseke, Kibaale, Kamwenge, Kyenjojo,Masindi, Kiruhura, Kyegegwa, Sembabule, Pallisa, Kotido, Buyende and Moroto. The work is ongoing.



The Government has promised to establish irrigation schemes to fight drought that is affecting both plants and animals