

Armyworm ravages Zombo

ZOMBO

By Benedict Okethwengu

Maize farmers in Zombo have suffered losses as a result of armyworms, which have invaded their maize plantations. The situation has been worsened by the drought.

The farmers fear they will struggle to contain the threat posed by the brown caterpillars that have been known to be destructive predators.

"We are heading for more disaster and it is coming at a time when we are yet to come to terms with the long dry spell," Zenone Bidong, 55, a farmer at Arokosi village, Kango sub-county, said.

Bidong, who owns a six-acre maize garden, says he is nearly losing the battle to contain the caterpillars, saying he has no money to procure the pesticide needed to kill the worms.

Bidong, who looked devastated, was among the many farmers whose gardens were visited on Friday by a team of officials to monitor the Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) in Zombo.

The field visits were organised by community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD), under their project, Raising Community Voices, Participation to Enhance Accountability in Service Delivery in Zombo.

In addition to the armyworm, destructive brown caterpillars have also been common sight in Atiak, Zeu, Warr and Kango sub-counties.

The fall armyworms are believed to have originated from Togo and Nigeria and they have already caused damage to crops in many parts of the country.

The caterpillars eat maize, wheat, millet and rice, which are key



A farmer spraying his garden. Inset is a brown caterpillar. Photo By Benedict Okethwengu

food crops for many in the region. Residents are already struggling with food shortages after the drought.

Bosco Okaya, the programme officer at CEFORD, said the armyworm is likely to negatively impact on food security and the livelihoods of the people in the district.

However, authorities in the district said they are yet to investigate whether the brown caterpillars were armyworms or not.

"We are going to investigate, but again even if it was true, we have no mandate to declare that these are armyworms," Dorothy Acirocan, the agricultural officer for Kango sub-county, said.

Isaac Lulaba, the Zombo resident

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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district commissioner, who led the team, urged the district to come up with a report on the fall armyworm.

During the field visits, many farmers complained about the delivery of immature seedlings under OWC programme.

Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) is the sole

distributor of coffee seedlings in Zombo, under the OWC programme.

The required standards of coffee seedlings for distribution must be four by seven inches, but those distributed were three by six inches, the farmers said.

"I had planned to plant my coffee in July, but they delivered them in May and the worst part is that they were very immature. So, I have been left to take care of them," Emilio Anwankane, a resident of Apiku village, Zeu sub-county, said.

John Urwiny, the Zombo LC5 chairperson, said there will be lessons learnt during the field visit to address the gap being experienced in the implementation of OWC.