

## Special report

DROUGHT

1.3m

Food security. Last year's dry spell left 45 districts food insecure, leaving more than 1.3 million Ugandans vulnerable to famine.

# Climate change and idle youth: Who will feed 34 million Ugandans?

**Viable sector?** Lack of capital for youth to engage in commercial agriculture, coupled by changing agricultural trends and unreliable weather conditions has discouraged youth from joining the sector despite it employing more than 80 per cent of Ugandans. The government advises youth to adopt value-chain like processing, follow the weather forecast if they are to reap returns, writes Paul Tajuba & Dan Wandera.

Every morning, Mr Kenneth Musoke Kyeyune, walks to his small video library in Wobulenzi Town, Luweero District, to sell music videos and movies.

As he heads to work, the 28-year-old is uncertain of how much he will earn at the end of the day, but he has held on to the business for the last four years.

At home in Tweyanze village, his four-acre piece of land lies idle. "My target was to put up a poultry project [on the land] and have some cows as a modern farming project," Kyeyune says.

"This dream has failed to materialise. I have failed to get start-up capital, yet I want to engage in agriculture," he says, adding that the only alternative is to get a loan from the bank.

"But the terms to access loans and repayment interests are not friendly to people investing in farming projects," Kyeyune observes.

Despite the government rolling out the Programme countrywide, Kyeyune says it has not sufficiently covered youth in the district.

The programme targets the poor and unemployed youth. Its initial budget is estimated at Shs265 billion in the next five years.

Mr Ishak Mugema, 26, the district youth councillor, also gives similar reasons for not commercially utilising his six acres of land.

According to Mugema, the situation has been worsened by the changing agricultural trends and unreliable weather conditions.

"We have the brains to start up projects but the problem is that we lack required funds to invest on the land," he says.

The capital, he says, would help to buy improved seeds or good animal breeds, start small irrigation schemes and buy fertilisers and pay labour.

The predicament that farmers in Luweero face is a mirror of what is happening elsewhere in the country with youth turning to short term solution such as casual labour and boda boda riding to survive.

For instance, over the years, gambling has become the mainstay of many village and urban trading centre starting as early as 8am.

This could be blamed on the lack of long-term planning by government that has pushed youth away from agriculture as it increasingly become unpredictable.

Many Ugandan farmers depend on rains that come either too late or unexpectedly early and in varying amounts, which are sometimes unable to support plant growth.

The changes have been blamed on the effects of climate change brought about by among others



things; deforestation, wetland degradation and burning of fossils that releases dangerous gases into the atmosphere, which results into the warming of the earth.

Uganda contributes too little to global fossil emission into the atmosphere. However, being a poor country with a rain-fed agriculture system, it continues to feel the blunt of climate change.

A 2013 National Water Resources Assessment report warned that the rising temperatures in the country could reduce by 85 per cent of the available land used for growing Robusta coffee. Coffee is one of Uganda's lead exports.

#### Climate change impacts

The country has already tested these occurrences with the most recent being the 2015/16 dry spell that left crops scorched and dried up streams and wetlands, which act as sources of water for domestic and industrial use.

The dry spell also left 45 districts declared food insecure, leaving more than 1.3 million Ugandans vulnerable to famine.

Mr Opolot Okasai, the director of crop resources in the Agriculture ministry, says the changing weather patterns have discouraged many youth who were willing to join the sector.

**Livelihood.** Youth engage in agriculture in eastern Uganda. Mr Kenneth Musoke Kyeyune says lack of capital and changing agricultural trends has discouraged him from farming.

FILE PHOTO.

Mr Okasai also says that climate change has brought diseases and pests such as army worms and caterpillars that have immensely affected hot pepper exports to Europe.

However, he advises youth not to abandon agriculture, since it employs more than 80 per cent of Ugandans.

Agriculture also provides raw material to most of Uganda's industries. Therefore, there is an inherent interest in farming that has the capacity to assist the growth of processing, transporting and marketing of produce.

"I would be wrong to condemn the youth but they can get involved in value-chain like processing. Let farmers follow the weather forecast we issue, plant in time, weed, control pests and harvest early to avoid post-harvest losses," Mr Okasai says.

He also observes that to mitigate effects of climate change, government has set up small irrigation schemes and the National Agricultural Research Organisation to develop crops that are drought resistant.

The Uganda National Meteorological Authority, a semi-autonomous government agency for weather and climate services, issues weathercast more than thrice a year.

Mr Festus Luboyera, the authority's executive director, says forecasts have greatly improved; therefore, farmers can rely on them to make in-

#### WHAT PEOPLE SAID...

**Leaders blamed.** "Many leaders look at politics as employment... If we shy away from telling people the truth, then we are misleading them. Our wetlands are being destroyed but some leaders encourage people to cultivate there for them to gain political capital," Mr Charles Kadyama, the Kibuku District chairperson, says.



**Optimistic.** "The agricultural sector continues to play an important role in food security and nutrition, employment, wealth creation, manufacturing industry and export trade." CHRISTOPHER KIBANZANGA, AGRICULTURE STATE MINISTER



**GETTING WORSE?**

**Findings.**

A 2017 Water and Environment sector review report shows that between 1990 and 2005, natural forest estate outside protected areas reduced by 35 per cent (from 3.46 million hectares in 1990 to 2.3 million hectares in 2005).

On a positive note, the same report indicated that with an estimated 10.9 per cent wetland cover of Uganda, the ministry has demarcated 167.7 kilometres of critical wetlands and restored at least 476 hectares.

"Our wetlands are being destroyed but some leaders encourage people to cultivate there for them to gain political capital," Kadyama says citing Limoto a wetland in Kibuku that was destroyed during the 2016 general election.

Dr Daniel Babikwa, the National Environment Management Authority (Nema) director of district support coordination and public education, says natural cover such as wetlands and forests influence 40 per cent of rainfall received in the area and any destruction on them means little or no rainfall.

The 60 per cent influence comes from Central Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean cooling or warming effects. Unfortunately, a 2017 Water and Environment sector review report revealed that the country's forest cover has dropped to 9 per cent, representing a 3 per cent drop in just two years.

In 2015, a similar review put the country's forest cover at 11 per cent. The 2017 review and indicated that thousands of hectares of Mabira forest, one of the biggest reserves in the country, have been "degraded or under stocked".

**Way forward**

In a country where majority of the population cannot afford smart climate technologies such as fertilisers, irrigations and rain harvest, Mr George Mutagubya, the advocacy and communication manager for Agricultural Business Initiative (aBi), says people need to equip themselves with specific capacities to adopt green growth measures and extend both technical services and financing support.

The Clean Technology Fund was established in 2015 to finance sustainable agribusiness by responding to climate change, promoting green growth and climate smart agriculture opportunities. The organisation is willing to help Ugandans on how to cope with the changes weather.

In addition to climate change, soils have lost or are fast losing fertility, an area Mr Mutagubya says needs to be addressed too.

Uganda has a population growth rate of 3.3 per cent yet agriculture has been growing at 0.8 per cent since 2012. However, last year it registered substantial growth margins of 3.2 per cent.

"Our target is to raise it to 5.6 per cent as stated in the National Development Plan II," Mr Christopher Kibanzanga, the agriculture State minister says, adding: "The sector continues to play an important role in food security and nutrition, employment, wealth creation, manufacturing industry and export trade."

Mr Francis Opolot, the Ministry of Water and Environment acting assistant commissioner in charge of climate change department, says government will continue building irrigation schemes across the country to support the agriculture and carry out mass sensitisation of climate change and ensure that other ministries and departments mainstream the same in their budget planning.



**Losses.** A farmer at Kasanga in Wakiso District shows part of his 3 acres of maize which were destroyed by persistent dry spells.

PHOTO BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU

formed decisions.

The improvement has been attributed to training staff and acquiring modern weather technologies. According to Mr Charles Kadyama, the Kibuku District chairperson, blames some political leaders for the challenges youth face.

Some leaders, Mr Kadyama says, instead of standing firm against environment degradation, encourage farmers to cultivate in fragile ecosystems such as wetlands and forests.

He says scarcity of water, calls for deliberate engagements through which leaders can help people to

adopt self-sustenance measures.

"Many leaders look at politics as employment... The role of a leader is to guide and lead a community which can sustain on its own. If we shy away from telling people the truth, then we are misleading them," Mr Kadyama says.