

A FARMER'S SAY >

By Michael J. Ssali

Are we making the best use of land?

As we think about a future with a bigger population to feed we must think about the best way to use the agricultural resources at our disposal. Land is one of the agricultural resources whose use needs reorganization to ensure that farmers really own the land on which they work and that they have sufficient amount of it to carry out gainful agricultural production. Population pressure has forced many farmers to work on small plots without land tenure registration documents. They live and work under constant fear of eviction by landlords and they are slow to invest heavily in long term paying economic activities such as coffee growing. Many of them merely hire the land for some months or years on terms that in most cases limit the investments they can make on the land. Some people just own parcels on which they practically do nothing and live far away in large towns as absentee landlords waiting to sell the land when need arises. Some other farmers own numerous small gardens scattered over a wide area and lose a lot of time traveling from one piece of land to another to do the cultivation and supervision.

Land fragmentation or subdivision is bad for agricultural development in the sense that the farmer's attention is divided between the numerous holdings which may require different agronomical practices instead of one solid work plan on a single large farm.

In his book *"The Struggle for Land in Buganda"* Samuel Lwanga Lunyiigo has argued that while we think that large-scale farms will deliver an agricultural revolution and spur development they may actually lead to massive unemployment and poverty. His observation is that a lot of land would be made available to large scale farmers who are expected to offer employment to the masses. "These days however farms can be much mechanised and may need just a handful of skilled workers. Investors are after profits and not the employment of peasants. Machines do not get tired, they do not bury relatives, they do not fall sick and their output is many times more than that of human labour."

CamScanner