Govt urged to adopt new technology to increase productivity

By Gerald Tenywa

Uganda's agriculture will become more productive if the country applies new technologies that will reduce post-harvest losses among other things, according to the director of Galilee Institute Centre for Planning and Development – Consultancy Unit, Brig. Gen. Alon Navot (Israel Army).

Navot said Israel does not have minerals and a good climate like Uganda's favourable weather conditions (Israel's 40% of the land is desert), but they produce surplus and export agricultural products. He added that engagement of the Israeli national army was crucial in turning around the agricultural sector and addressing effects of climate change.

"The Ugandan army can be part of it like we did," he said, adding that Israeli soldiers were taught military as well as agriculture skills and that they work in farms when they are not guarding.

Navot was on Friday speaking during a symposium under the theme: *Climate Change, Food Security and National Stability in East Africa.*

The symposium was organised by Advocates Coalition for Environment and Development (ACODE) in partnership with a youth group at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala. Officers of Uganda People's Defence Forces, youth and civil society activists attended the function.

The Israeli army officers' advice was re-echoed by Gen. Caleb Akandwanaho (Salim Saleh), the senior presidential advisor on defence and security.

The technologies, according to Saleh, could help to add value to Uganda's maize. He said Uganda is losing a lot of revenue by selling raw maize to traders in neighbouring countries that later process the grain into different products for export.

He argued that the situation is occurring due to lack of enforcement of standards and an open border policy. The informal traders from Kenya, Rwanda and South Sudan continue to roam villages in search of low-priced and unprocessed grain.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

The director of Galilee Institute Centre for Planning and Development – Consultancy Unit, Brig. Gen. Alon Navot, said Israel does not have minerals and a good climate like Uganda's favourable weather conditions (Israel's 40% of the land is desert), but they produce surplus and export agricultural products.

"Unless addressed, Uganda will remain a source of cheap poor quality grain in the region and investors/ processors will continue to lose out on their investment," said Gen Saleh, adding that the private sector has invested over $150m in the last four years. He called for more investment from the Government into the sector.

Saleh, who is also the chief co-ordinator of Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) said the production of maize and beans is where Uganda realises surplus output, despite the fact that Uganda is among the countries that apply the lowest amount of fertilizers in the world.

"We are not earning as much as we should, which becomes difficult to re-invest in the sector," Saleh said.

The Chief of Defence Forces, Gen. David Muhoozi, said climate change can be a catalyst for instability and a threat multiplier if not addressed.

"The risks posed by climate change are real and time is of the essence. We need to act together," he said.

Climate change on food security

State minister for agriculture Christopher Kibanzanga urged Saleh and his colleagues to liberate the country from food insecurity.

"We are faced by an enemy, which is difficult to fight, climate change which causes food insecurity," Kibanzanga said, adding that World War III will be between how to share the dwindling resources, citing water and oil, two natural resources that have led to a prolonged crisis in the Middle East.

Paul Mafabi, the director of environmental affairs in the Ministry of Water and Environment, said forests and wetlands are important ecological assets that shield the population from climate change impacts but are being decimated.

"We are losing wetlands and forests at an alarming rate, he said, adding: "Forests have declined from 24% to less than 10% and wetlands from 10% to less than 8%. Freshwater sources declined by 36%."

The executive director of ACODE, Dr Arthur Bainomugisha, said agriculture remains rain-fed and as a result, most of the poor outcomes in the sector have been attributed to drought.

He pointed out that climate change is real and that Ugandans have to adapt to the changing climate.

Delphine Mugisha, the programme director of Care International in Uganda proposed improvemen in meteorological services so th adequate responses are taken at t district and grassroots.

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