



A FARMER'S SAY >
By Michael J. Ssali

The future of farming

Land disputes are getting more frequent as population pressure on land builds up. The population is increasing at the same rate as the struggle for people to get farming space.

Chunks of natural forests and wetlands have been turned into farmlands. In the majority of cases the people scrambling for land tend to ignore the legal processes of land ownership.

They work on land whose tenure they are not sure of, which often limits their freedom to carry out gainful investments.

Others farm on borrowed or hired land and they cannot invest in long-term ventures like growing high paying crops like coffee, or constructing permanent irrigation systems.

They cannot use the land as security to get loans from banks or other money lending institutions since they don't have legal title deeds.

Many farmers work on small, fragmented pieces of land scattered in different, often far off, places and they lose a lot of time traveling to the gardens, which makes farm inspection difficult.

Since they work on small gardens they have to use simple hand tools like hoes, knives and pangas which are inefficient and require much labor, making farming less paying and unattractive especially to the youths.

Yet due to population pressure land fragmentation is increasing. Gardens are getting smaller; soils are becoming more exhausted and less productive leading to reduced income, food insecurity, and malnutrition.

On the other hand many people in the rural areas own potentially productive agricultural land but it lies idle because the owners live far away or they are just not interested in farming.

The big paradox is that the more farmers we have the less agricultural production we have.

In the so-called developed countries where agricultural production is superior to ours, only about 5 per cent of their population is engaged in farming yet Uganda's farming population is about 80 per cent.

The solution seems to lie in driving people out of their small gardens, finding them work in urban areas, and consolidating the small gardens into larger units that are more economical to farm using heavy machines like tractors and combine harvesters.

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