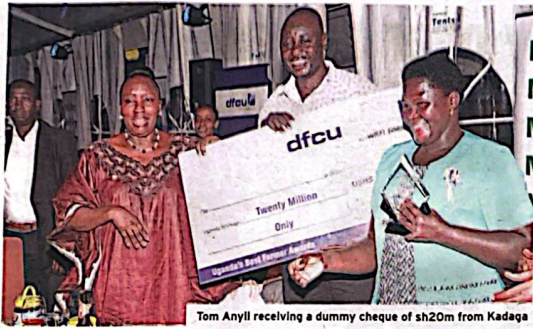
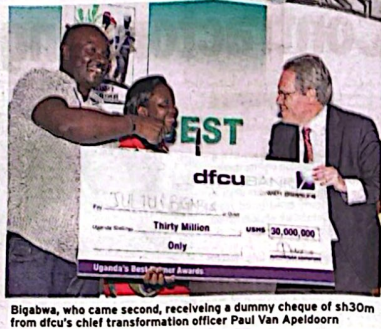




Tom Anyil receiving a dummy cheque of sh20m from Kadaga



Bigabwa, who came second, receiving a dummy cheque of sh30m from dfcu's chief transformation officer Paul Van Apeldoorn

By John Agaba and Geoffrey Mutegeki

Experts speaking during the Uganda's Best Farmers Awards 2017 ceremony on Friday have called for a conducive environment and improved tax legislation, which can favour a sector that continues to make the backbone of the economy.

While speaking during the Uganda's Best Farmer Awards, former agriculture minister Victoria Sekulelele called for the adjustment of the Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) programme to accommodate technology and help create avenues for value addition for middle-status farmers who may not necessarily profit from "seed and goat handouts."

"Can we enhance budgets for Uganda Industrial Research Institute (IIRI) and Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS), who are directly involved in value addition so that the organs can do more?" Sekulelele, an accomplished agriculturalist, said.

She challenged local restaurants and eateries to specialise in indigenous dishes so as to give them a niche over continental food, adding that legislation that can enable women to access land should be considered by Parliament.

She made the comments during the unveiling of the 10 best farmers in the Vision Group's Harvest Money competition on Friday at the group's head offices in Industrial Area, Kampala.

The 10 winners will, among other things, benefit from an all-expenses-paid study trip to the Netherlands.

Isaac Malinga from Kapchorwa emerged the best farmer in Uganda. He was followed by Julius Igabwa from Kabarole and Tom Anyil from Lira. The three also walked away with cash prizes, surties of dfcu Bank to further improve their holdings. Malinga got sh50m, Bigabwa sh30m and Anyil sh20m.

Malinga, 30, owns Maikut Farm. The establishment sits on over 100 acres of land. He concentrates on growing French beans, snow peas and sugar snaps for export.

Bigabwa's enterprises include bananas, mangoes, dairy cows, guinea pigs, quail, birds, ponds, goats, passion fruits and trees. The year-old owns Bigdad Farm.

Anyil, 40, the proprietor of TAF Assured Mixed in Lira district, focuses on bee-keeping and horticulture.

The winners on the night are Justine Omeke from Napak, Timothy Jokene Okeke from Lira, Patrick Makanga Bakumpe from Masaka, Robert Ociti from Arua.

Others are Margaret Muga from Sheema, Ob Noah Barmwe from Jinja and Rachael Ith from Wakiso. The seven shared sh50m of farm inputs.

The national Best Farmers' competition, now running for the 4th year, is sponsored by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kampala, dfcu, Vision Group and KLM Airlines.

Of the 1,535 nominations that were sent to the Vision Group platforms, 325 were

Govt urged to promote



The winner Malinga receiving his award from the ambassador of the Netherlands to Uganda, Henk Jan Bekker

profiled on Vision Group TV, radio and newspapers. 53 top contenders were selected and visited.

Vision Group chief executive officer Robert Kabushenga said the country needs legislation against 'fake fertilisers, seeds and hoes' and other farm inputs.

"We profile farmers and immediately Uganda Revenue Authority comes and imposes taxes on them. This is not helping the country to grow," Kabushenga said.

He called for a stabilisation fund that would guard farmers from middlemen and vouch for construction of cold rooms at major border exits to allow farmers store perishable merchandise before export.

"Farming is the backbone of our economy. How best can we help our farmers? How best can we put extension workers to every corner of the country? It is said that the agriculture sector is run by ignorant people," Kabushenga said.

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Vision Group's Editor-in-Chief Barbara Kajja said: "Our peasantry population forms over 95% of the farmers nationally, who work so hard to feed the country and yet they hardly reap from their sweat. The Government cannot leave the important aspect of markets to chance. The farmers who feed this country must be protected. The examples abound in rural Uganda of the excesses of the middleman."

"While we celebrate the increasing number of silos constructed for grain storage, these are mostly commercial enterprises and there is need for more stringent regulation," she said.

Kajja said the Government must "purposefully" support the formation of farmers' co-operatives so that the farmers reach the markets directly.

This year, the Budget showed that agriculture was growing at a rate of 3% per annum, compared to the negative growth experienced in the previous years.

Last year, Uganda harvested 4.5 million metric tonnes of maize, up from 2.7 million metric tonnes in 2015. Milk production has grown from 1.9 billion litres in 2015 to 2.5 billion litres per year and it is still growing.

In 2015, the country sold 3.2 million bags of coffee and is now producing 4.4 million bags. The cow population has grown to 14 million, up from 11.5 million in 2015. The chicken population has grown from 35 million in 2015 to 42 million.

The ambassador of the Netherlands to Uganda, Henk Jan Bekker, asked the Government to ensure an enabling environment for farmers. Kabushenga appealed to the Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga, who was the chief guest at the awards, to help follow up the pledge of 18 million hoes President Yoweri Museveni made to farmers in 2015.

"It may seem small, but you cannot use a tractor in a banana plantation. You will still need hoes. And when you have to buy 1,000 hoes a year, you will realise that they are expensive," he said. Kadaga said the issue of taxing farmers would be addressed.

"We need to do more to support agriculture. The agriculture ministry is one of the weakest ministries in the country. The issue of extension services is almost non-existent," the speaker said. She agreed to the suggestion that farmers needed a stabilisation fund and a farmers' bank.

On better legislation to enable women access land, the speaker said: "We are trying to make a fair family law (marriage and divorce Bill) so that when a man stays with a woman for 30 years, the woman has a stake in his life and the man cannot wake up and just ask her to leave. However, some people do not want this, but we will keep fighting to give women equal opportunity."

About the hoes, the speaker said she would "get in touch with the man who stays near Parliament



farmers' interests

The win presents a great opportunity - winners



Isaac Malinga

My project sits on over 100 acres of land. I specialise on growing French beans, snow peas and sugar snaps for export. I am so excited to be named the best farmer. This is massive because when I started farming, I never thought of being recognised. The recognition is very encouraging to me and my fellow farmers. When I go to the Netherlands, I will network and see how I can sell my products there. I am also open to ideas of value addition. It will be a learning trip.



Tom Anyil

I am the proprietor of TAF Assured Mixed Farm in Lira and I focus on bee-keeping and horticulture. The win is a blessing from God and I am really happy. I want to thank New Vision for giving me the opportunity. I never expected to win, but here I am ready to fly for the first time. When I go to the Netherlands, I expect to get new ideas on doing business. I will also look for partnerships to help me develop my enterprise into a first class farm. Now that I am one of the best farmers, I will work hard to transform my community.



Julius Bigabwa

The win is wonderful and surprising. Surprising because I did not expect to be the second best farmer in Uganda. It is something that I will remember and forever cherish. Bigabwa's wife, Gladys Natugonza, promised they would be role models and encourage more of organic farming in this era of climate change. "We want to be exemplary to the rest of the community (around us)," she said. The two own Bigdad Farm in Kabarole district.

Kadaga launching Vision Group's Harvest Money book of inspiring stories about the best farmers



part of an exciting project aimed at bringing out "the very best in our Ugandan farmers."

Ambassador Henk Jan Bekker said: "We hope the role model stories will continue to inspire more people into farming. At the same time we realise that apart from building a critical mass of farmers, the bottle necks in the sector have to be addressed," he said.

He urged farmers to work hard, remain committed, and to persevere in their farming businesses.

"These winners have demonstrated that farming is a profitable and rewarding venture. Congratulations all the winners," Henk said.

He also announced that the Dutch Embassy would support the farmers' competition for the next two years.

Robert Kabushenga commended the Dutch Embassy in Kampala, KLM Airlines, dfcu Bank and the farmers "who made the awards possible."