

Theft of premature vanilla hurts economy

EDITOR: Vanilla farmers in the country, especially in central and the western districts of Kasese and Ntoroko, have continued to experience rampant theft of premature vanilla from their gardens. There have also been reports of killings of some vanilla farmers by the thieves at night while guarding their gardens. As a result, the farmers are pleading with the Government for firearms so that they take charge of the security of their gardens.

This is dangerous because some of the farmers are not trained in handling guns, which may again endanger their lives and that of their communities. Besides, the vanilla thieves could be using armed guards during the theft at night, which further puts the lives of the farmers in danger.

The vanilla thieves, we assume, are

well organised groups of individuals within the community who are connected to the external buyers within the country. Such people, with good intelligence, can be traced and isolated. Unfortunately, in the case of vanilla theft in Kasese, there is already accusation by some members within security circles, accusing their colleagues of aiding the vice, an allegation we suggest should be taken seriously and possibly investigated.

The theft of immature vanilla not only hurts household incomes of the vanilla farmers and leads to a loss of lives, but greatly damages the vanilla market and the national economy, because the quality of the product will be substandard. This will eventually lead to blacklisting of vanilla products from the country in foreign markets.

Economically, promoting and protecting vanilla is a viable agricultural investment, being one of the most expensive crops in the world. Besides, vanilla growing can give Uganda an economically viable comparative advantage given the good climate we have, since the crop is grown in a few countries such as Madagascar, Mexico, Indonesia and China.

It is, therefore, imperative that vanilla farmers and their gardens are protected from the thieves, an intervention which requires deliberate effort like that of the fisheries sector. Community vigilance in liaison with the Police, in identifying the local collaborators within their areas is one of the best strategies in curbing the vice.

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PICTURE BY JOSEPH WANZUSI

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