

MAPUTO PROTOCOL REQUIRES AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS TO ALLOCATE ABOUT 10% TO AGRICULTURE

By Mary Karugaba

Agriculture Committee wants more funding

The agriculture sector is one of the major areas of Uganda's economy, contributing about 23% of the country's gross domestic product.

The sector, whose exports accounted for 48% of the total exports in 2012, takes care of about 60% of the country's population engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing.

Despite all these, the sector has remained one of the less funded by the Government over the years.

The Parliament's sectoral committee on agriculture has over the years pushed for increased financing to the sector, currently standing at over sh800b, about 3.5% of the national budget.

"For example, in the current budget (F2017/18) for the agriculture sector, no money was provided for recruitment of agricultural extension workers. So as a committee, we said no, money should be provided. We made budget cuts and raised sh50b towards extension services," Lowila Oketayot (Pader district), the committee chairperson, said.

The Maputo Protocol requires African governments to allocate not less than 10% to agriculture, but in Uganda, the agriculture sector budget is still at 3%.

The East African Community (EAC) states have consistently allocated less than 10% of their total budget, to the sector that employs 80% of the total workforce and contributes 30% to the bloc's gross domestic product.

The heads of the EAC partner states were party to the 2003 Maputo Protocol and 2014 Malabo declarations that stress the role played by agriculture towards improving food and nutrition security as well as eradicating poverty.

According to Oketayot, the agricultural extension system in Uganda continues to be underfunded, despite its importance.

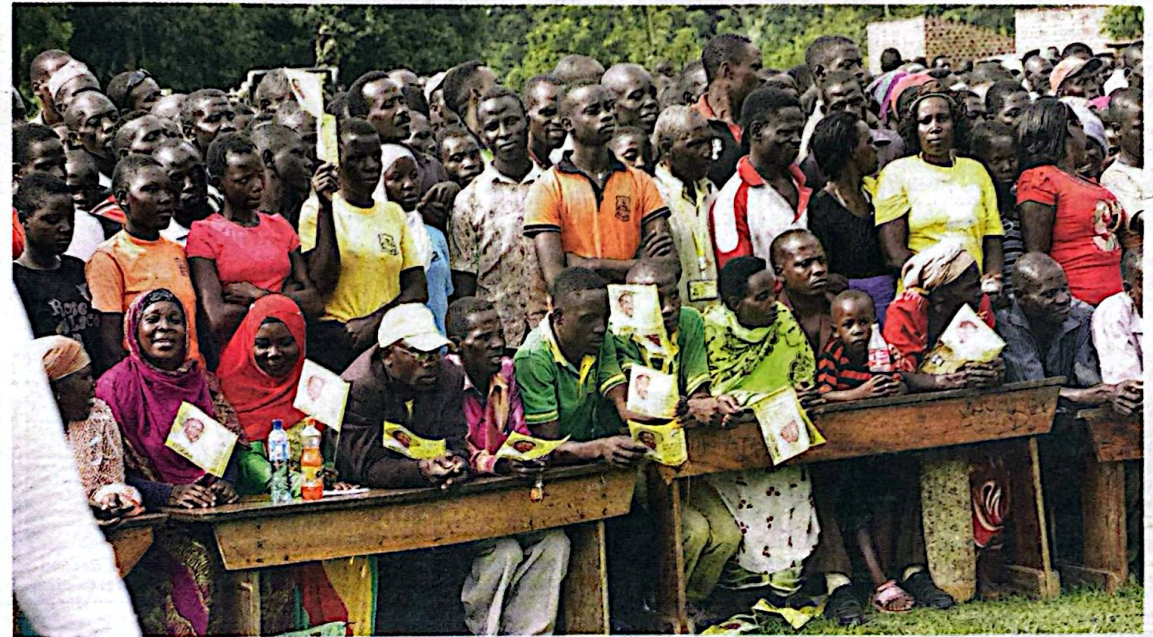
She said the absence of extension workers affects farming and the quality of inputs supplied to farmers since there is an insufficient number of extension workers to monitor both the farmers and the quality of inputs provided.

To improve this, the committee has been at the forefront of ensuring that there is a timely distribution of agricultural supplies to farmers and enough extension workers to guide farmers.

"Through our oversight role, we are ensuring that extension workers are on ground and that the right inputs such as seedlings are supplied to farmers for increased levels of production," Oketayot said.

Project assessment

As part of its oversight role, this year, the committee embarked on a nationwide assessment of government agricultural projects such as the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) programme and the Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) project. To their dismay, the MPs



Residents of Luwero during the Operation Wealth Creation sensitisation meeting at Kikunyu Primary School last year



Farmers harvesting tea. The agricultural extension system in Uganda continues to be underfunded

registered complaints from farmers across the country about unwanted inputs that are given to them by the Operation Wealth Creation team.

According to the committee, seedlings are imposed on farmers and most times distributed off season, which affects production.

"Seeds are being imposed on farmers and it is the work of extension workers to ensure the right ones are distributed to the right people," Oketayot noted.

According to Oketayot, most of the "unwanted" inputs such as seedlings given to farmers have

THE COMMITTEE WANTS CLEAR GUIDELINES ON HOW THE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO HANDLE PESTS AND DISEASES

dried up without being used, which affects the tax payer's money.

In their 2017/18 budget report on the agricultural sector to Parliament, the committee proposed that the supply of farming inputs is decentralised to ensure effective monitoring of the projects and distribution of quality seeds.

The MPs also recommended that district garden fields for farming inputs such as seedlings, are established in every district to avoid ferrying of seedlings from

one district to another. "We realised that continued

ferrying of seedlings from one district to another is promoting the spread of pests and diseases. Seedlings for distribution among farmers should be grown within these districts," Oketayot noted.

2018 priorities

Parliament's agriculture committee is now pushing for a legal framework on operations of NAADS for proper monitoring and distribution of quality farm inputs to farmers.

The MPs are planning to make it a condition that before the 2018/19 budget for the agriculture ministry is passed, the Government puts in place a national irrigation policy to improve food production in the country.

"We cannot continue relying on rain-fed agriculture for food production. So we are setting it as a condition next financial year that the budget for the agriculture ministry is not passed unless this policy is tabled before Parliament," Oketayot assured.

The committee also wants clear guidelines on how the Government plans to handle the pests and diseases outbreak that has in the recent past attacked food crops in the country, affecting food production and the agricultural sector at large.

Statistics indicate that Uganda's agriculture has grown at an average rate of 2.8% per year in the last eight years. It presents immense opportunities for growth in other sectors such as manufacturing, especially agro-processing.