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LETTER OF THE DAY

Why people with land are still poor

The other day, the President posed a question while launching a demonstration farm. He asked: How come people without land are richer than those with land.

He even advised that with only four acres, one can transform themselves economically. I have my practical experience with having land and farming. But first, I would like to mention one assertion a friend of mine made about Ugandan farmers. She said 80 per cent of high rank public servants engaged in farming will collapse within months if they lost their jobs. Reason?

That they get involved in farming not on basis of conviction, but because they take advantage of their positions to invest in farming.

For instance, if you see the people allocated land to plant trees by government today, you will find that many of them are either people in government or those connected to officials in government or officials working with its agencies like NFA.

They cut down natural forest cover for sale as firewood or charcoal. My experience is that Naads has provided planting materials,



but it has greatly overlooked the ground preparation.

Mr President, to use a tractor to plough an acre of land costs Shs100,000 per acre in parts of the country. This puts the cost of preparing 10 acres for planting at about Shs2 millions per season minus costs for post-planting care, weeding, herbicides and harvesting.

Mr President, the tractors are owned by rich people who have chunks of land yet they are not carrying out farming themselves. Besides, the high cost of herbicides and pesticides is a hindrance

to farmers leave alone the numerous caterpillars that destroy crops. I spoke to a tomato grower who said they were spraying twice a week to keep the plant.

It is high time Naads started providing agricultural equipment at sub-county level to benefit farmers better. Otherwise unscrupulous middlemen are over charging people on agricultural supplies.

My advice is that Naads should be broadened in terms of scope and funds allocation in order for it to have meaning to farmers.

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