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pollution. He, however, noted that heavy metal pollutants are currently one of

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# NARO wants research budget

By Prossy Nandudu

The National Agricultural Organisation (NARO) wants 1% of the national budget to help them scale up research and innovation in agriculture so as to produce more food for the 40 million people in Uganda.

Dr Ambrose Agona, the director general of NARO, said in the last financial year, NARO had about sh102b, which was partial funding from the World Bank through the Agriculture Technology and Advisory Services.

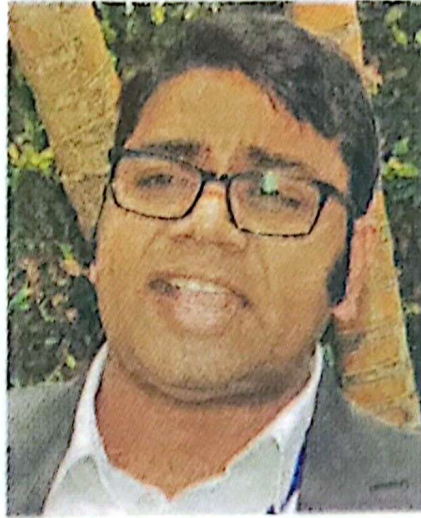
He, however, said the project was ending in June, which means NARO would remain with only sh68b, which cannot speed up agricultural research on increased food production, nutrition and climate change mitigation.

"When we look at the projections, our budget for 2018/2019 financial year will reduce to sh68b. We are looking at a 1% investment of the national budget to NARO, which is between sh147b and sh160b per annum," Agona said.

## New structures

Agona said that the money would be used for establishing new structures for research, recruitment of staff to carry out the job, motivating staff to prevent migration for greener pastures and developing more technologies that farmers can use and increase productivity.

For now, Agona said they would continue working with



Rajeev Varshney

partners develop improved crop varieties that are high-yielding, can with-stand the harsh weather such as drought, pests and diseases.

The crop varieties that have been released so far include the Iron and Zinc-rich beans, Vitamin A and orange potatoes.

Agona made the remarks last week at the review and planning meeting on Tropical legumes and Harnessing Opportunities for Productivity Enhancement projects held at Speke Resort Munyonyo.

The five-day meeting organised by ICRISAT, CIAT, IITA and NARO was supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

In Uganda, the project is working on groundnuts, beans, sorghum and finger millet through the National Crop Research Resources Institute (NaCRRRI) and National Semi Arid Resources Research Institute (NaSARRI).

## Why the selected crops?

Rajeev Varshney, the global research programme director at ICRISAT, explained that in developing countries such as Africa and Asia, farmers depend on agriculture but don't have access to high yielding or improved varieties that can be planted in small spaces.

He added that the other challenge is that farmers still grow varieties that are as old as 20-30 years which can no longer give the needed yields due to the changing weather partners and viability of the seed.

"We want to find ways of demonstrating to farmers that if they continue growing the old varieties, they will not get more food. We want to show and encourage them to grow the new varieties developed by research organisations with support from ICRISAT," Varshney said.

He cited the example of Uganda where he said that farmers are still growing old varieties of groundnuts which are of low yields, giving a farmer less than one tonne per hectare.

"We are using modern methods of breeding to enhance the viability so that farmers can harvest more," Varshney said.

He said once new methods of farming are ignored by farmers, policy interventions should be employed so as to produce more food that will feed the nine billion people in the world at the same time generate income for farmers, jobs for the youth through value addition and improved nutrition.