



EZRA RUBANDA > COFFEE

Uganda must up her game on political-economics of coffee

Progressive politics is an art of managing resources that influence life of a given society beyond on-spot sight. The difference between developed world and struggling world lies in the fact that once the former identifies an opportune resource, they quickly engulf it while to the later, we gradually slumber by it. Likened to petroleum and cocaine, coffee is a key strategic resource beyond determination of mere market forces. Of late, there is a hoax on social media, that 'Germany is a global chief exporter of coffee without a single coffee tree in the whole of Deutschland'.

Actually, the deeper paradox is that the headquarter offices of International Coffee Organisation (ICO), are located at 47 Parliament Street, next to the British Houses of Parliament and has never reallocated since establishment in 1962. The most contentious coffee dispute recorded in history involved the world's biggest producer and the world's biggest consumer. In the 1970s as Brazil attempted to elude the 1940 US-backed Inter-American Coffee Agreement of 1940 in which Brazil and Colombia were given export quotas for exports to the USA, USA complained that Brazilian soluble coffee exporters had access through tax concessions to cheaper coffee than did US manufacturers.

Brazil government took a stand against all the odds, and countered that Brazil had a right to process its own raw materials and protect a fledgling industry. The turnkey result of that stand is that currently Brazil consumes 70 per cent of its coffee other than exporting it as raw material and importing it back as USA coffee.

Back home in Uganda, coffee is 'a chief without chieftom'. It has been the chief forex earner for 65 years, but has never been accorded the necessary attention and status it deserves to transform this economy. Compared to petroleum that has been accorded a 'new bride' status, coffee has a wider and deeper propensity to increase household incomes and create distributive efficiency across the regions of the country in the fight to alleviate poverty than petroleum whose allocative inefficiencies have already manifested before a barrel of oil has been drilled.

True, it is not a game of comparison, neither a priority trade off, but quick re-definition of the significance of coffee is critically called for in the national development strategy.

First, there has to be creation of coffee commercial producers. The economics of coffee production is highly volatile to allow large commercial farmers to emerge by default. There has to be a national level delib-

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erate plan to identify, support and grow these producers. For instance, if Uganda targets to create 2,000 commercial farmers with output capacity of 20,000 bags in the next five years, we would be exporting 40,000,000 bags per annum by 2027.

In fact, this is the strategy Germany has used. The difference is that it has used surrogate countries like Uganda where these commercial farmers operate from. Kaweri Coffee Plantation, the largest producer of Robusta in East Africa (22,000 bags), is owned by a German firm. Kilimanjaro Coffee Plantation, the only fully irrigated coffee plantation and the largest producer of Arabica coffee in EA, is largely owned by a Germany multilateral.

This is not to underscore the approach of supplying coffee seedlings to existing small holder subsistence farmers implemented by Naads soldiers, but to remind propo-

nents that the degree of elasticity for small holder farmers to change production equations is highly inelastic.

Secondly, there has to be strategic engagement at local governance levels. This is where the fulcrum of coffee success is pegged. For the budget period of 2014/15 out of major 89 coffee producing districts of Uganda, only one had a specific stand-alone coffee development plan. Only four had coffee integrative plans. However, all the four plans had no specific deliverables that would measure the indicative vote outcomes budgeted for. It is such disengagement of other key coffee actors that makes UCDA over stretch through policy and regulatory mandate to grass root farmer engagements.

As a society, we need to reconstruct coffee perception. There are strong facts of political-history that underpin coffee since its introduction in 1895 and, therefore, it is important that coffee strategies reflect on such milestones. For instance, in 1914, when Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu in Kenya - the first African leader to grow coffee was prosecuted at Privy Council in London for growing coffee - all his counterparts in neighbouring chiefdoms to whom he had sent pleasantries of coffee seedlings quickly uprooted them and there since began the culture of arms- distance relationship between traditional leaders and coffee.

This is when coffee went wild in Bunyoro forests. This turns into a current action point since the same kingdom has the highest potential for producing coffee given the hundreds of square miles of fertile virgin land owned by Omukama.

Therefore, necessitate the current government to put better what their predecessor put unjustly. Otherwise, coffee is beyond just an agricultural crop to be planned only technically.

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