

Patrick Bitature, Chairman Private Sector Foundation of Uganda

Oil is coming but let us not forget our gold

The country is operating on a time table that first oil will be seen in 2020.

There is a lot of frenetic activity around building supporting infrastructure, getting investment approvals, ensuring local participation and any number of other things to ensure readiness the moment the oil starts gushing down the pipeline to the coast.

And so we should. I was intrigued the other day to read in the Kenyan press how Kisumu County, just across Lake Victoria from us, has set upon an ambitious project to ensure egg and poultry meat self-sufficiency for the county within the next few years.

Under the plan, Kisumu County will train 100 farmers every month over the 12 month pilot period. The intended aim is to be able to satisfy the county's demand for 25,000 broilers and 75,000 eggs daily.

Whereas I would have preferred that this was private sector driven deal, I like this plan for a number of reasons not least of all that it

shows leadership by the county and secondly, it relies on locally sourced materials and thirdly, that the production of such volumes can very well set up Kisumu, over time, can set up Kisumu as a hub for all that is poultry.

And for Uganda, an agricultural initiative like this would suit as to a tee as we ideally suited for agriculture with nearly half the region's arable land here and a fifth of the land under a water, it does not take a rocket scientist to see our competitive advantage staring us in the eye.

We can borrow a leaf from them.

What if we trained 1,200 farmers for poultry in Busoga another 500 in Masaka for goats, 500 farmers for mangoes and oranges in eastern Uganda and any number of agricultural products from around the country?

Some attempts are underway in that direction but we need to be a bit more systematic and include the private sector more fundamentally to ensure sustainability of the project.

I propose we rethink our current



model and go beyond just supplying farmers with inputs to organising, educating and facilitating them to penetrate established and new markets.

I have no doubt that our farmers are not productive for lack of application or good lands but because they do not know what to do.

We are still using the hoe to till the land and even there, according to agriculture ministry statistics,

we do not have enough hoes in the country. Our farmer is seeing his sweat disappear in post-harvest losses, which can be as high as half the crop. And our farmers because of the measly amounts they produce have little to no bargaining power in the market losing more value to middlemen and the general market.

It is no wonder they continue to wallow in poverty despite the general growth in the economy over the last few decades.

It is a linear logic: Our farmers need to produce more and lose less during postharvest as a way to enhance their bargaining power in the market.

And another important outcome of increasing our farmer productivity is that it will form a good foundation for a robust agroindustry.

A cursory search on the internet for a tomato paste making plant indicate that you can get one for between \$10,000 (sh36m) and \$600,000 (sh2.2b). Not out of this world numbers. The catch is the capacity the smaller one can manage a load of a tonne of tomatoes an hour!

I also discovered that in 2007, Uganda produced 14,000 tonnes of tomatoes, most of which went to our own kitchens. But let us assume we converted all our tomatoes into tomato paste, using 50 small plants (one for every two districts) we would go through Uganda's annual crop in other two weeks.

To keep the plants working at at least 50% capacity year around we need to produce at least 12-times as much tomato as the 2007.

It is within the realm of possibility. We have the manpower. We have the land. We even have the capital.

And that is only for tomatoes. The same principles can be applied to matooke, coffee, fruits, vegetables, goats. There are issues of markets, as markets will not just lap up all you produce, but if we can begin to ramp up production, we can address the other impediments as we go along. That is how you do business. I should know.

The writer is the chairman of the Private Sector Foundation of Uganda

Parliament