Sh180b to boost maize, rice yields

Korea International Co-operation Agency Uganda country director Jun Joungsuk, Park Jong-Dae, Kibazanga and the director agriculture extension services, Beatrice Byarugaba, display copies of the new agro processing model at Serena Hotel in Kampala. Photo by Maria Wamala

By Taddeo Bwambale

The Ministry of Agriculture has unveiled a new plan to improve the production of rice and maize in Uganda.

The plan targets to help farmers cut post-harvest losses and increase their incomes by improving handling, storage and access to markets.

The agro-processing and marketing for rice and maize, launched at Serena Hotel, Kampala yesterday, is hinged on modern agricultural practices. Under the plan, farmers' groups will undergo training, acquire modern equipment and get access to community storage facilities.

The plan introduces a producer-processor-public-partnership model that targets all the levels of production to ensure that farmers are linked to markets and modern technology.

The plan was designed by the agriculture ministry in collaboration with the Korean International Co-operation Agency.

It will require sh180b to roll out to more districts over the next five years. Moses Kasigwa, the assistant commissioner for processing and value addition at the agriculture ministry said the plan would complement existing interventions but with a different approach.

"In the past, focus has been on either the farmer or processor. This model looks at the entire value chain because they are interconnected," Kasigwa explained.

Government contribution

The Government allocated sh600m in this financial year's national budget for activities to promote the new model," said Kasigwa, who revealed that the ministry was due to conduct an awareness campaign in the rice and maize producing regions.

Recently, the Government embarked on a countrywide registration of farmers' groups to ensure that they benefit from activities of Operation Wealth Creation.

To assess the capacity of farmers countrywide, the Government has contracted Uganda Co-operative Alliance to compile data on farmers' groups.

Origins of model

The model is built around the experience of South Korea's agricultural modernisation drive in the 1940s, turning the Asian country from poverty to 11th largest economy.

South Korea's ambassador to Uganda, Park Jong-Dae ,said the plan has the potential to transform the agricultural sector and propel Uganda into a regional food baske

> *"Under the plan, farmers' groups will undergo training."*

"Uganda is blessed in terms of potential. What we need is better implementation and focus," he said.

The State minister for agriculture, Christopher Kibazanga, said the Government was prioritising value-addition to boost the agricultural sector, which employs over 80% of Ugandans directly or indirectly.

The agricultural sector contributed 36% to Uganda's Gross Domestic Product last year and accounts for 63% of exports. Maize and rice are two of the 12 agricultural products listed in the second National Development Plan for which the Government will invest in value addition to boost food security, increase export earnings, create jobs and improve nutrition.

Maize

In Uganda, maize is the most important cereal, providing over 40% calories consumed in both rural and urban areas.

The grain has become a major staple food in many parts of the country due to changes in people's eating habits.

The largest share (about 80%) of maize production in Uganda comes from rural small- scale farmers. Previously, Uganda imported maize until 2005, when domestic production increased and the country started exporting to neighbouring countries.

In 2015, Uganda produced 2.8 million metric tonnes of maize and exported 358,000 tonnes.

Rice

Rice has lately become a major food security crop, as well as a cash crop in several districts in Uganda. Its cultivation has increased partly due to the introduction of upland rice varieties.

Rice production has increased sharply from 80,000 tonnes in 2004 to 293,193 tonnes in 2015, according to statistics from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

Uganda imports 60,000 tonnes of rice every year. The country targets to produce at least 680,000 tonnes annually by the year 2020.

The new strategy places emphasis on not only rice growing, but also value-addition to ensure that farmers benefit from the crop and its by-products.