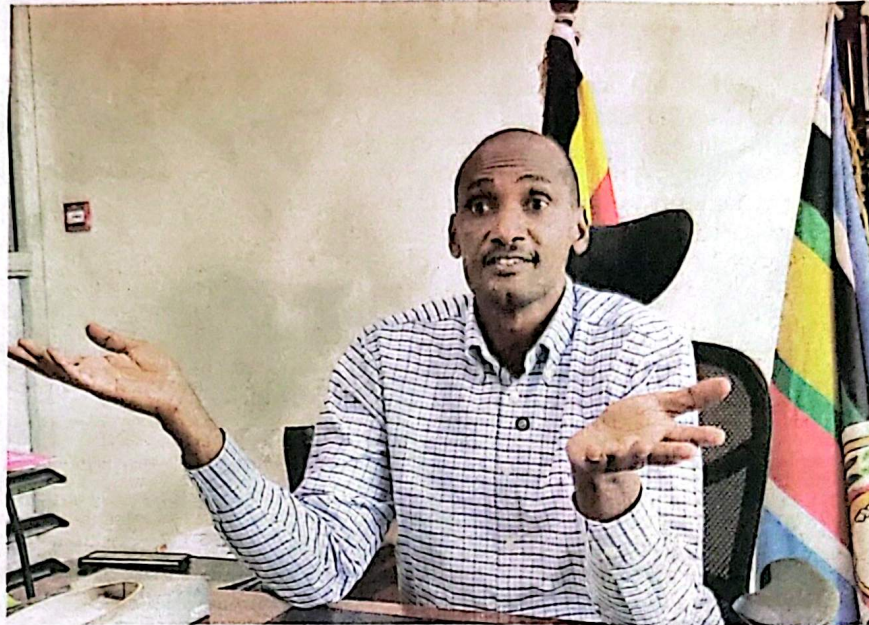


Agriculture is more than Uganda's backbone; it is the lifeblood of the nation. With over 70% of the population depending on it for survival and nearly 80% of exports rooted in farming, the sector fuels both households and industries. From coffee plantations earning billions on the global market to dairy and fish processing plants driving industrialisation, agriculture is not just about food security; it is Uganda's greatest economic engine. Mr Frank Tumwebaze, the Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) talked to Daily Monitor's Racheal Nabisubi about the sector's outlook.

Tumwebaze: Why agriculture powers Uganda's economy



Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries Mr Frank Tumwebaze. PHOTO/RACHEAL NABISUBI

Why is agriculture central to Uganda's future and current prospects?

Agriculture is not only the backbone of our economy but also the livelihood of more than 70% of the population. Nearly 80% of Uganda's exports are agricultural, and most of our industries rely on agricultural raw materials, milk processing, milling, animal feeds, fish processing, among others. Agro-industries dominate our industrialisation agenda, making agriculture central to both economic growth and household livelihoods.

How has coffee contributed to Uganda's economy?

Coffee is a major revenue earner, bringing in about \$2.2 billion annually. Ugandans have planted more coffee, and global prices have risen. New markets like China are opening up, with younger consumers preferring coffee over tea. Our Arabica and premium Robusta varieties are highly demanded internationally. This has encouraged Ugandans to expand from small plots to medium and large-scale plantations, transforming agriculture into a serious commercial enterprise.

How has this transformation impacted households?

Agriculture's value chain is vast and employs people at every stage. From planting and weeding to harvesting and marketing, livelihoods are sustained. Take dairy as an example: it employs cattle owners, caretakers, milkers, transporters, and workers at collection centres and factories. Every link in the chain supports families. Beyond employment, agriculture guarantees food security, which stabilises the economy and protects against

inflation.

What challenges does the agricultural sector face?

Currently, one of the main challenges is sourcing seeds. However, it is possible to purchase seeds from various suppliers. Fortunately, there are now individuals who cultivate the components needed for seeds, which is beneficial.

Another major challenge is the reliance on manual labor, as many farmers still lack access to modern technology. While we are looking to integrate more technological solutions for farming practices, particularly in weeding and planting, many aspects of the sector depend on labor-intensive methods.

How important is food security to Uganda's economy?

Food security is critical. It directly influences inflation rates and overall economic stability. When food production is stable, it safeguards against inflation spikes, which are often driven by food shortages. Therefore, ensuring food security is paramount to our overall economic health.

What does success in agricultural transformation look like for Uganda?

Success is reflected in our increasing arable land, which has expanded by nearly 40% in recent years. Although we still need more accurate statistics, the ongoing efforts to boost agricultural productivity and expand land usage signify a positive trend towards agricultural transformation.

How are Ugandans changing their perception of agriculture?

Many Ugandans, especially the younger generation, are beginning to see agriculture not just as a means of subsistence but as a lucrative opportunity. This shift is driving them to invest in larger-scale farming and recognize the potential wealth that agriculture can provide.

Poultry farming can even be done in your backyard. If you have 2 or 3 acres, you can establish a small poultry or dairy operation. One of the enterprises recommended under the 4-acre model that our president often discusses includes dairy and poultry farming.

I'm glad to see that many young people, as well as working-class and retired individuals in urban areas, are engaging in poultry and dairy farming. You mentioned the government's support for farmers, which is also noteworthy.

What does success in agricultural transformation look like so far?

We have expanded arable land by nearly 40 percent in recent years, though there is still capacity to do more.

Demand for mechanisation and fertiliser inputs has grown, and many retirees from government and military service are turning to agriculture for guaranteed income. Investors are also entering the sector through contract farming and nuclear farms. Transformation is real, it is visible across the value chain with more actors participating.

Why should young people join agriculture?

Agriculture offers clear financial rewards. For example, an acre of coffee can generate 12-15 mil-

lion shillings annually, equivalent to about 1 million per month; the same income many young people seek abroad. With government support through programmes like the Parish Development Model (PDM), even small-scale farmers can access funds to buy seeds or set up poultry facilities. Agriculture provides sustainable income and opportunities for youth to build wealth at home.

Why is continuous farmer education important?

We need to continuously educate farmers, and everyone can contribute. The media can play a role, and leaders should also help in these efforts. Agriculture brings in revenue, and it is non-partisan. Money doesn't discriminate; everyone needs food regardless of political affiliation. Agriculture is a unifying factor, and we must spread the message of smart farming, sustainable practices, and discourage poor habits such as harvesting immature crops or diluting milk with water.

What strategic crops are most important for Uganda?

Coffee and palm oil are highly strategic. Coffee alone generates about \$2.2 billion annually and has a global market size of nearly \$500 billion. Palm oil, like avocado, has immense value because its byproducts are even more profitable than the raw material. These crops are vital for Uganda's economic growth and global competitiveness.

What is government doing to grow exports in coffee and palm oil?

We are investing in irrigation, pre-

cision farming, mechanisation, and creating markets abroad. China has opened up to our products, Algeria is buying our milk, and Nigeria is preparing to import Ugandan milk. Uganda Airlines is also investing in cargo services to support exports. This is a whole-of-government approach involving agriculture, trade, and foreign affairs.

How are programmes like PDM and MYOGA impacting agriculture?

These programmes provide targeted support. While some misuse funds, many especially women have used them effectively, with testimonies showing real impact. Statistics from the Ministry of Finance indicate a success rate of over 70%. MYOGA, which means "skills" in local language, supports talents and trades, helping people turn skills into income.

This financial support was intentional, as many farmers struggle to obtain loans from banks due to lacking security or collateral.

In addition to this financial assistance, the government has intervened at various stages. They have distributed a significant number of coffee seedlings, milk coolers, and tractors. The government is also beginning to operationalize central mechanization hubs and centers.

Previously, the army was involved in an initiative known as Operation Wealth Creation, during which a large amount of seedlings was distributed, contributing to the coffee boom we are currently experiencing.

Furthermore, the government has invested in infrastructure, opening up community roads and paving them.

Do Ugandans still face mindset challenges about agriculture?

Yes, especially among young people who don't see agriculture as formal employment. Many prefer chasing jobs abroad for small salaries instead of using family land to grow profitable crops like onions, pineapples, or watermelon. This mindset problem is why farming education remains a priority for the Ministry of Agriculture.

What untapped opportunities exist in agriculture?

There are huge opportunities because both can be done on small and large scales. Poultry products, such as eggs, are consumed daily, as is dairy, which means these are items that can be sold every day. You can start a venture on a small scale or expand it to a larger operation.

Agriculture can employ everyone - rich or poor, landowners or landless. Even without land, skills such as silage making, animal feeding, or aggregation can provide employment.

For example, milk transporters often earn more than cow owners. The value chain offers opportunities at every level, from production to processing and distribution.