



**Thomas
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Ban kavera alcohol so as to improve agriculture productivity

Tomorrow August 12, is International Youth Day. However, as this day is commemorated, more youth are being wasted away by cheap alcohol packed in *buvectras*. This is directly affecting alcohol productivity, especially in agriculture.

Alcohol abuse and consumption of illicit/illegal produced alcohol packed in sachets is common in Uganda, especially in rural areas and slums. Because sachet liquor is cheaper than the bottled alternatives, consumers are able to get intoxicated without spending a lot of money.

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2014, 72% of the working population in Uganda is engaged in the Agriculture sector. The sector also contributes to over 70% of Uganda's export earnings and provides the bulk of the raw materials for predominantly agro-based industries.

About 44.2% of households derive their livelihoods from farming, according to the Uganda National Household Survey 2012/13. The World Bank Poverty Assessment Report 2016, shows that poverty reduction among households working in agriculture accounts for 79% of the national poverty reduction observed between 2006 and 2013. Keeping our able-bodied youth in active productivity is a strategic decision that this country needs to take otherwise the country will face famine, increased crime and health related incidents, reduced export earnings and many other factors caused by alcohol abuse.

For example, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) June 2017- January 2018 has predicted that during this period, "poor households will face relatively greater difficulty meeting all of their basic food and non-food needs in October, after first season production is exhausted and before second season production arrives."

"At this time, households are likely to be more reliant on markets and will face typically high staple food prices, which will lower food access," further said the report.

While there are other challenges like climate changes, civil society and local leaders have pointed a finger at cheap and poorly packaged alcoholic drinks that have "trapped many youths and husbands in vicious cycles of addiction" leading to food insecurity and other effects of alcohol misuse. It is, for example, worrying that Uganda, which boasts of being the food basket of the region is witnessing notable declines in the production and exports of key staple foods like maize and beans and is instead increasing its food imports. For example, figures from Bank of Uganda indicate that food imports grew by 149% from \$298m (sh1 trillion) in 2006 to \$743m (sh2.3 trillion) in 2012 and have since been erratic. In 2016, Uganda imported \$572.5m (sh2 trillion) worth of foods, beverages and related items.

With a population growth rate of 3.03% and food production growing at 3% (according to the last Agriculture census in 2011), it means there isn't enough food production. Ultimately, there will be competition between food for homes and food for sale, leading to malnutrition and famine in some homes.

That is why I support efforts by the local leaders in Gulu district, who insist that all alcohol must be packaged in breakable bottles of 250 millilitres and above as a way of controlling access for, especially the youth.

Whilst Uganda's food crisis cannot be merely reduced to the availability of cheap, illicit and uncontrolled alcohol, it is certainly a big contributor and a critical solution lies in here.

I support all regulatory moves aimed at banning the packaging of alcohol in cheap and easy to access *kavera* amongst many other initiatives.

Regulation should also see many of the illicit distillers brought into the taxable fold, which will bring in additional revenue for the Government and also contribute to price adjustments that will make it more expensive for the youths and underage consumers- a double win, if you ask me.

I was disappointed when the deadline for production of alcohol in *kavera* was further extended from September 30, 2017 to March 1, 2019. I believe this issue has not been accorded the urgency it requires! With all the effects, the ban of alcohol produced in sachet needs to be done sooner than later!

The writer is the MP for Ruhinda North and member on the Committee on National Economy