

Ugandans can make money through farming

I have been travelling to parts of the north and eastern Uganda as part of a team assessing smallholder farmers, growing sorghum and barley for Nile Breweries. The brewery uses barley and sorghum to make beer and has an agricultural programme for local production by Ugandan farmers.

We visited Lira, Dokolo, Kumi and Soroti, where sorghum is grown and then continued to Kween beyond Kapchorwa, where the altitude and conditions are right for growing barley.

Nile Breweries pays a guaranteed price for the crops, provides inputs in form of good quality seeds and employs agricultural extension workers to train the farmers in optimal farming practices.

Most of Uganda's agricultural production comes from small farmers, many of whom grow just enough food for their own consumption. The challenge is to improve their efficiency so that they produce a surplus, which they can sell as cash crops to improve their livelihood.

There are many subsistence farmers around my farm in western Uganda, who grow plots of maize. They live on what they produce and live just above the poverty line, but if there are any natural disasters, such as drought, their situation become precarious.

Uganda is gifted by nature and blessed



Dr Ian Clarke

the rains fail and people are reduced to starvation. We need to lift people out of this borderline existence to improved farming techniques and commercial collaborations such as those with Nile Breweries are part of the answer.

Nile Breweries is shooting two birds with one stone by meeting the need for their own raw materials and raising the standard of living for farmers. However, one of the issues they face is getting farmers to change to more modern and efficient farming methods. An example is how the seed is planted. The traditional way of planting sorghum and barley is by broadcasting seed, where the farmer simply scatters a handful of seeds, rather than planting them

in rows, the yields are higher. Despite this, most of the farmers continue to broadcast their seeds because it is cheaper and easier. Yields are also increased with correct application of fertiliser, but many farmers do not apply them because they are expensive.

For budgeting purposes, a farmer should set aside money for the next season for the purchase of seeds, herbicide, preparation of the land, planting and weeding, so he should estimate the cost of these operations and save enough money. This is not a complex calculation, but most farmers keep poor records and are not good at forward planning. Farming is a business, just like any other, which needs sound financial planning.

The previous week, I visited small coffee farmers on the opposite side of the country in the Rwenzori foothills. The farmers grow Arabica coffee, which is on high demand by international coffee houses. The only coffee factory in Fort Portal, the New Bukumbi Coffee Processors Ltd, is now being rehabilitated so that it can provide coffee-drying and processing facilities for the farmers. They are also supplying small pulping machines to the villages so that farmers can bring red cherry and sell it to the operator of the pulping machine for ready cash. This coffee is then transported down to the factory, where it is dried and hulled to produce green bean, which is exported. There is international demand



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for good quality Ugandan coffee, but international buyers need consistent quality and regular supplies, so Bukumbi Coffee Processors will be bulking the coffee from that area into sufficient quantities for the international market. They will be able to pay the farmers an above market price because they will get a premium on the international market for good quality Arabica coffee.

Farming is a business, which depends on synergies, value-addition and partnerships as I have explained. If the barley and sorghum farmers sell their produce on the open market, the prices will fluctuate and they may get a low price when there is a glut, but Nile Breweries will guarantee a fair price. Also, if they use inferior seeds, they will have lower yields, so by working with Nile Breweries, there is a win-win situation.

The small coffee growers in the Rwenzori foothills do not have sufficient supplies to interest international coffee houses, but Bukumbi Coffee Processors can ensure the quality, find that market and pay the farmers above the local market price. All this adds to the value-chain, which can bring improved livelihoods to small farmers and help lift them out of subsistence farming. Of course, there are many other factors which can improve livelihoods, but these kinds of collaborations are a start.