

By Abou Kisige

Operation Wealth Creation officers tipped on improving productivity

Co-ordinators of Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) have been urged to facilitate strategies to increase smallholder farmers' production, productivity and profitability, through improved market accessibility.

"It is important to appreciate that raising smallholder agricultural productivity is only possible if smallholders can sell their products at a profit and make the necessary investments to improve productivity," the Minister for Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Vincent Bamulangaki Ssempijja, said.

He made the remarks during a review meeting for OWC co-ordinators, regional co-ordinators and line agencies in Bwebajja, Wakiso district.

The conference was attended by 24 Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) officers, 18 regional/zonal co-ordinators, 112 district co-ordinators and 141 constituency co-ordinators.

He said agricultural markets in Uganda and the whole of Africa were underdeveloped and inefficient because of narrow markets, low farm-gate prices, high end-user prices, weak farmers' organisations and lack of market information.

Ssempijja, however, said he is hopeful that OWC will address these problems by mobilising farmers, building the capacity of farmers' groups, establishing better storage facilities and availing accurate market information, among other interventions.



Ssempijja talking to some of the Operation Wealth Creation co-ordinators during the annual review conference in Bwebajja, Wakiso district recently. Photo by Abou Kisige

He called on OWC to promote community participation, accountability, record keeping, consultation and identify with the communities they serve. Ssempijja said President Yoweri Museveni was right to hand over most of the National Agricultural Advisory Services

(NAADS) work to the army. He said he was confident that they would achieve remarkable results because the UPDF is the most reformed organisation in the country.

He appealed to beneficiaries of OWC to preach the success stories of the project as a way of

encouraging others to eradicate poverty in their homes.

The Chief of Staff, Lt. Col. Philip Mugarura, said OWC is intended to create a system that facilitates effective national socio-economic transformation, with a focus on raising household incomes for poverty

eradication and sustainable wealth creation.

The deputy chief co-ordinator, Maj. Gen. James Lakara, urged the OWC co-ordinators to fight poor quality seedlings and reduce post-harvest losses by sensitising farmers.

He said the secretariat now

boasts of an effective command, control, co-ordination and communication with all the agencies geared at implementing the President's directive.

The programme, through which improved planting materials are supplied to farmers, officially started in 2014, after President Museveni relieved NAADS co-ordinators of their duties over allegations that they had failed to fight poverty among the populace.

However, the programme is still grappling with the lack of structured marketing systems in the agricultural value chain and insufficient financing of the actors within the sector, as indicated by OWC chairman Gen. (rtd.) Caleb Akwandwanaho, alias Salim Saleh in 2015.

Other challenges, according to Saleh, are lack of quality inputs and the high levels of post-harvest losses.

ON THE GROUND

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