

Enhancing Productivity, a Must for Agriculture in Uganda

Endowed with vast arable land and with the majority of its population dependent on the agriculture sector for employment and livelihoods, improving productivity in Uganda is a prerequisite for development and poverty eradication. Government and its development partners should implement policies aimed at narrowing the gap between present farm yields and the attainable potential yields, as demonstrated at the research stations.

In Uganda, the government through its various institutions and agencies has initiated various policies and projects aimed at improving the agriculture sector and thereby improving the livelihoods of the majority. Development partners have also complimented these efforts through various interventions. Despite this, agriculture productivity has continued to decline over the past decade. For instance, coffee and maize have experienced productivity decreases of over 60 per cent.

Decline in productivity is partly attributed to lack of access to improved inputs by the majority of farmers in the country. The utilization of important inputs, such as fertilizers, improved seeds, pesticides and others, is quite low throughout the country. For instance, in the case of fertilisers, the national level application is barely over 1 per cent, accounting for the vast margin between current farm yields and attainable potential.

Productivity, which is measured by the value of total crop output per acre of cultivated land and, in the case of livestock, by the gain in stock of animals and value of products, is essential for optimal utilisation of resources in agriculture. Improved productivity no doubt leads to increased production and therefore affording the farmers higher yields that can then be traded for improved livelihoods. For this to happen, government and its development partners should consider the following:

- ❶ Support research institutions in developing and disseminating the requisite farming techniques and inputs, required to improve productivity throughout the country, and more especially to the smallholder farmers, who are the majority in the agriculture sector.
- ❷ Provide farmers with subsidies to access critical inputs at affordable prices, e.g. fertilisers, in addition to equipping them with the necessary skills and knowhow through capacity building programmes.

← QUICK FACTS

» Since 2001, the agriculture sector growth rate in Uganda has been declining.

» Coffee, Uganda's largest export crop and main source of income for a sizeable number of rural households, has had an unstable production pattern, with steep drops in 2002 and 2006.

» Maize, one of the most important food crops in Uganda, has also registered slow growth on account of low productivity.

» Only 1% of Ugandan farmers use fertilisers for their crops

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What are the productivity related challenges?

Uganda's agriculture sector is faced with several challenges that are manifested in low productivity and the attendant production. Seasonal fluctuations in the supply of quality resources such as animal feeds are prevalent. In addition the high cost of inputs makes them unaffordable for the majority. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, fertilizer utilization in Uganda is among the lowest worldwide, standing at about 1 Kg per hectare.

What is the importance of improved productivity?

In order to attain the desired high and sustained agricultural growth, productivity would have to be improved. In the early stages of development, agriculture growth is imperative for the rest of the economy, since it enables general patterns of development that are employment intensive and favourable for the poor.

Improved productivity and the resulting increase in production would benefit both the rural and urban poor by providing more food, as well as feeding raw materials to the nascent industries at lower prices. This would in turn free-up foreign exchange, saved on food that would otherwise have been imported. These savings can then be utilized for importation of strategic industrial and capital goods, leading to industrial development and poverty reduction through improved employment opportunities.

Currently, the limited progress in the efforts directed towards poverty reduction is a manifestation of the poor performance of the agriculture sector. Agricultural growth lags far behind the population growth, and this would have to be redressed in order to meaningfully address poverty reduction.

What needs to be done?

To successfully facilitate improved agricultural productivity, the following should be taken into account: integration of agricultural research with extension services, the private sector, training, capacity building, and education programmes designed for the specific needs of each sector; empowerment of end-users to ensure relevance of designed programmes; and ensuring evidence-based approaches in policy development, priority setting and strategic planning for agricultural research, extension, and training.

USEFUL RESOURCES

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