

Agriculture Can End Uganda's Job Problem, Study

Lira — Agriculture, if fully embraced, can save Uganda from the current youth unemployment crisis, a new study has said.

According to the study, which was conducted by Advance Afrika, an NGO, in Lira, Soroti and Abim districts in 2018, the agricultural sector is a potential source of jobs for the growing number of Ugandan youth.

However, the researchers said this can be made possible with more investment in the sector as well as changing the youth's negative attitude towards it.

The study discovered that youth and other marginalised groups such as women and persons with disabilities in rural areas faced numerous challenges in accessing agricultural financing and instead depended on the largely underfunded village saving schemes.

Observations

The researchers also observed that youth involved in agriculture face challenges of limited access to land, access to collateral and finance, lack of specialised agricultural skills, and limited understanding of market opportunities. "Achieving the [youth] potential will require both the expansion of agricultural modernisation and investment in skills-building with these target audiences.

The target beneficiaries need access to markets, higher prices, higher quality crop output and diversification in order to increase profits and improve their livelihoods," reads the report in part.

Researchers also observed that Uganda's education system is structured around formal instruction, which produces graduates who are more inclined to formal employment.

"As a result, the youth view jobs in the formal wage sector as the more secure and the best alternative. While increasingly specific training focused on agriculture and entrepreneurship is being offered at secondary school level, teaching tends to be highly theoretical and barely takes into account the realities and challenges of small-scale farming in rural Uganda," the report says.

The study findings indicate that though many rural advisory service providers were found in the target districts, there is still inadequate service delivery. Secondly, the study shows that there is still limited coordination between the local government service providers and private ones.

Recommendation

The study recommends the need to mount a strong advocacy campaign to mentor youth so as to have a positive mindset towards agriculture.

Lira District male youth councillor James Omara Elem said the report is a reality check to government, which he said has failed to make agriculture attractive to the youth.

"Government has made boda boda to be attractive to the youth. People are now going to the extent of selling land to buy motorcycle for boda boda," Mr Omara said.

"Also, the youth have resorted to sports betting because they want quick cash to help them urgently sort out their problems. They look at agriculture as a dirty work which is not true," he added.

Uganda is famous for good equatorial climate and productive soils. These factors, according to experts, make a case for supporting and sustaining agricultural sector in the country realistic. However, experts said Uganda's agriculture is under performing in comparison to many of the countries that are not as naturally gifted.

Methodology. The study was conducted using a mixed methods approach based on cross-sectional survey design.

Data was collected from smallholder farmers, district and sub-county officials and private service providers both from NGOs and private-for-profit organisations using questionnaires and interviews.

Source: Daily Monitor