

From the Editor**PUT MORE FUNDING IN
EXTENSION SERVICES**

THE Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries has announced that funding to the agriculture sector will rise to between 7 to 10% in the next financial year. This is certainly plausible. For the last few years, the funding has hovered around 4%, way below the 10% proposed by COMESA. This meant that agriculture activities were 'left wanting'.

However, it will be useless if the Government just increases funding without targeting it to particular elements of the sector.

Among the most starved sections of the agriculture sector are the extension services. In most districts, extension workers are invisible. And yet, it is through extension workers that new research findings at the various research stations filter down to the farmer. In simple terms, they are the link between the farmer and the researchers.

However, there is just one extension worker at a sub-county and not at every sub-county, against an average of 500 farming homesteads! And since he is alone, the system lacks the variety of expertise to engage farmers doing different enterprises.

As a result, farmers keep operating in the dark. They miss vital information like when the rains will come or stop, or what crop to plant on which kind of land since there is no body to tell them.

Policy makers claim there is no money to employ enough extension workers. But now that more funding is coming, this must be a priority.

The other sub-sector is the mechanisation of agriculture. Tractor usage in Uganda averages 6% per hectare and this is largely amongst big corporations like the sugar and tea producers. And yet, unless the ordinary farmer is helped to drop the hand hoe and make use of mechanisation, there is no way they can develop.

Some of the increased funding should, therefore, be geared towards helping the mechanisation cause. The average cost of a big tractor is sh80m, while walking tractors cost as low as sh7m. Certainly, the Government has got the means to start mechanising farming now.

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