



The National Alliance of Agricultural Co-operatives in Uganda – NAAC

A call to Action on Food Security in Uganda Amidst COVID-19

As the country and indeed the whole world continues to grapple with the Covid-19 Pandemic, most business operations have been affected due to disruptions in movement, limited manufacturing operations for all commodities including agricultural inputs. While we have a running pandemic that has devastated many parts of the world with no known vaccines or medicine to-date and therefore no immediate solutions, there is a potential risk of even a bigger catastrophe if we do not act urgently to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on agricultural production in the country.

Agriculture employs about 70% of the country's population and contributes close to 25% of the country's GDP which contribution is set to increase because of the numerous investments made by government and development partners into the sector. The investments made are targeting increasing production, agro-processing, value addition as well as streamlining the market system for the benefit of smallholder farmers and their transformation from subsistence to commercial agricultural production. The agricultural sector already provides a livelihood to majority of Ugandans, contributes highest to the EAC region's food balance sheet and the country's export base and therefore foreign exchange earnings. There is therefore potential for an even a bigger crisis if the sector is not carefully catered for during this crisis.

On the other hand, as countries like China are benefiting from manufacturing Covid-19 related supplies like equipment and protective gear, the crisis could also have a silver lining for Uganda's economy in the form of increased food demands on the regional and international markets. Therefore, as farmers and representatives of farmers, we appreciate the directive of the President to keep agro input supply shops working and the movement of agricultural commodities. While we agree and indeed support the measures put in place by government of Uganda to prevent the spread of the pandemic, we are also conscious of the post Covid-19 period if farmers' ability to produce optimally is not enhanced during the crisis. A post Covid-19 Uganda should be food-secure with ability to meet the domestic food requirements as well as meet the export needs that will arise because of reduced production across the board. As government realigns resources to support the Covid-19 response, it is important that the agricultural sector is given the necessary attention to enable it operate at full potential, given the comparative advantage we possess as a country in this area. The measures put in place to curtail the spread of the pandemic in Uganda should not affect production, supply chains and marketing of agricultural products.

As the National Alliance of Agricultural Co-operatives in Uganda-NAAC, we call upon government through its planning agencies and all stakeholders in the agricultural sector to urgently consider the following:

1. **Re-align the budget** for the remaining part of the financial year to allocate adequate resources to finance for agricultural production-related investments e.g. timely inputs distribution to minimise disruption to production activities. MAAIF should develop a supplementary budget to facilitate this realignment.
2. **Provide adequate resources** to the production departments in the districts to ensure frontline staff mobilise and organise farmers to actively participate in production activities
3. **Provide incentives** to companies dealing in the manufacture of agricultural inputs to ensure a steady and reliable supply of quality agricultural inputs to farmers
4. **RDCs, Media and other political leaders** should be supported to drum up a campaign of agricultural production at all levels
5. **Ensure that the 2020/2021 FY budget** adequately takes care of investments in post-harvest handling, value addition and agro-processing to provide a good buffer for the export market and any future crises
6. **Avail the Ministry** of Trade Industry and Co-operatives and MAAIF with enough resources to better coordinate the market and agricultural trade functions especially increased awareness of regional and international standards amongst smallholder farmers.
7. **Facilitate the Co-operative Department** in the Ministry of Trade Industry and Co-operatives to provide good and strong oversight and capacity to agricultural cooperatives for enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in operations

NAAC also calls upon all CSOs, NGOs, Development Partners and all agricultural sector stakeholders to support the farming community accordingly so as to enable them sail through these delicate times.

NAAC is a national level umbrella organization for agricultural cooperatives in Uganda and exists to provide a VOICE for agricultural cooperatives and seeks to facilitate the inclusive and active participation of small holders in the market system to increase incomes and better their livelihoods using the co-operative model.