



CSOs engage Parliament Agriculture Committee over 2017/18 Agric budget



Left- Mr. David Walakira –CSBAG, Ms. Agnes Kirabo Food Rights Alliance, Mr. Kaggwa Joseph Feed the Future Uganda Enabling Environment for Agriculture Activity presenting CSO paper to the Parliament Agriculture committee on 23rd January 2017

MPs on Parliament's Agriculture Committee today 23rd January 2017 agreed to alternative budget proposals put forward by CSOs led by Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) regarding allocations to the Agriculture sector as spelt out in the Budget Framework Paper for the FY 2017/18.

In a paper presented by the CSOs on the CSBAG Agriculture Thematic Working Group and Agriculture Private Sector Associations, led by Ms. Agnes Kirabo, the Executive Director of Food Rights Alliance (FRA), it was emphasised that proposals regarding the strengthening of the Operation Wealth Creation Programme (OWC), ensuring availability of water for production, strengthening policy to improve standards of inputs and agricultural products if the fortunes of Agriculture are to be turned around in the

FY 2017/18.

Other key areas that were tackled were the non-alignment of the Agriculture sector interventions to the NDP 11, lack of targets for allocated funds, inadequate facilitation to recruited extension workers and a poor Input Distribution System. Ms. Kirabo the Executive Director Food Rights Alliance told the Committee that proposals in the budget are not complaint with the National Development Plan II even as the clock quickly ticks away to the deadline of Uganda achieving middle-income status by 2020. NDP II priorities agriculture as a key growth element in the propelling of Uganda to middle-income status by 2020. "There are gaps in compliance with the NDP II. Task the sector [Agriculture Minister] to align their targets with NDP II. We may be doing so much but not in tandem with the NDP II. Task them to make clear targets and to make monitoring and value for money easier," Kirabo told the Committee.

CSBAG also put the Committee on notice that the agricultural sector is being pegged back by the absence of an efficient, well-linked Input Distribution System that has affected the distribution of supplies to farmers. "The timelines of distribution of supplies and quality of supplies is poor", Kirabo said. "There must be an Input Distribution System that does not operate in isolation. An Input Distribution System that is linked to research. Research indicates that we have a poor performance despite the inputs that are given to farmers. Having an inadequate Input Distribution System is not only going to cost us money but might also cost us Vision 2020," Kirabo explained.

CSBAG punched holes in the proposals by the sector to set aside of Shs 10b for the procurement of hoes for farmers, arguing that worthy farmers should be able to procure hoes. "The response to budgeting to buy hoes is embarrassing. The budget needs to look at strategic issues," stated the civil society and private sector paper on the budget.

Reacting to the presentations, Committee Chairperson Lowila Oketayot (Pader Woman MP) indicated that the Committee is in agreement with the position of CSOs, singling out the proposal to buy hoes that she said will not get the backing of the Committee. Otekayot explained that it would have made sense for the government to buy Ox-ploughs. "If they were talking about ox-ploughs for farmers who cannot afford tractors, then it would be understandable. But hoes? We have also not understood why they are planning for hoes," Ms. Oketayot said.

Former Agriculture State Minister Zerubabel Nyiira, a member of the Agriculture Committee, agreed that the Committee must task the Ministry of Agriculture to unveil a clear policy on the Input Distribution Centre as more money is pumped in. "The issue of Input Distribution Centre should be looked at clearly because it is consumptive and in most cases the value for money is not realised. We do not have an exit strategy. You cannot keep on supplying inputs and inputs .When shall it stop? We need to engage the Agriculture Minister to know when they will stop," Mr. Nyiira said.

Gonahasa Francis Barnabas (Kabweri County MP) agreed with the CSBAG position that the government was getting its priorities wrong by pumping money into procurement of hoes instead of investing in research.

"On priorities, I agree with you. We do not have enough money. We should therefore not be planning for hoes as opposed to research. Even if we were to give the farmers hoes, the hoes would not be useful without agriculture research," Mr. Gonahasa said.

On Agriculture Extension services, Kirabo warned the Committee that the: "the biggest battle is how we are going to facilitate extension workers so that we do not institutionalize them by taking salaries yet they are not doing work" By the end of the year, the Agricultural extension worker to farmer ratio is estimated to be at 1:1.500 way below the recommended UN ratio of 1:500.