

Civil Society Organisations, MPs want Agricultural emergency Fund established



CSOs meeting with Members of Parliament to present the Agriculture sector position paper for the FY2017/18, today, 18th April 2017 at the Kampala Serena Hotel. | @CSBAG2017

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At meeting organized by the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) and Feed the Future-Uganda to discuss the 2017/2018 CSO position paper for the Agriculture sector Members of Parliament on the agricultural committee, animal industry and fisheries (CAAIF), backed the for the formation of an agricultural emergency fund.

This they said will help to deal with unexpected outbreak of animal and crop pests and diseases like the armyworm, which has ravaged crops in about 60 districts countrywide, posing the threat of famine due to the drying of the food crops.

The proposal was made by the Member of Parliament, Buvuma Island County, Robert Migadde Ndugwa during a meeting with MPs on the agricultural committee, CSOs, farmers at the Kampala Serena Hotel, today, 18th April, 2017.

“We need to have an agricultural emergency fund established so that in case of any outbreak of unsuspected disease and crop pests and diseases, quick action is taken immediately other than waiting for parliament to pass a supplementary budget or waiting for the Finance Ministry to ask for money to address such emergencies,” he said.

“But as these funds are set aside, it is important that they are well managed and used of the intended purpose. This calls for preparedness, because even if there is money, it can still be misused. To address such emergencies, preparedness is very crucial, he added.

Victoria Ssekitoleko, the former minister of Agriculture, appealed to members of parliament to support extension workers in their constituencies so that in turn can also help farmers in the production of goods and services.

Committee peitioned over irrigation schemes

Meanwhile, a group of youth representing the coffee and rice farmers in Kanungu district petitioned the committee asking government to construct irrigation schemes in Nyanga and Kihhi sub-counties on Ishasha and Kiruruma streams, noting their crops have dried due to lengthy dry spells.

Talking about the wealth creation operation programme (WCO) Hon. Lowila Oketayot, the chairperson of the CAAIF who is also the woman MP of Pader district said it has one major problem, taking of inputs from one corner of the country to another.

“It is very wrong to be ferrying inputs from one district or region to another. It promotes the spread of pests and diseases. We want to see agricultural inputs raised within the same locality to be able to control of the spread of pests and diseases. This ferrying of inputs from one district to another should be stopped with immediate effect,” she said

Presenting the paper on behalf of the CSOs Patrick Katabazi, a Budget policy specialist who is also a member of CSBAG said the sector is not adequately inspecting the distribution of agro inputs and thus it is not able to ensure that there is value for money.

The CSOs asked government to make a commitment to fund the sector to at least 6% of the total budget away from 3% where it is currently.

They also want government to design a system, through which farmers can independently access quality and certified agricultural inputs at a subsidized rate for instance, the e-voucher system.

Bank for famers, cooperatives revived

The CSOs, also asked the government to expedite the process of establishing an agricultural bank for farmers, to help them access credit facilities.

According to the CSOs, shortage of capital and credit remains the biggest constraint to improving production and productivity.

“ The government, through the Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, should exploit the possibility of establishing an agricultural bank, that will focus on farmers’ credit needs, hedge against risks like crop failures and volatilities in prices of agro products,” Katabazi said.