

Youth voices on the Harvest Money Expo

From February 27 to March 1, the Kololo Independence Grounds in Kampala hosted the 10th edition of the Harvest Money Expo. It brought together farmers, agripreneurs, private sector actors, government representatives, students and international partners, including a strong presence from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda. As the youth advisory committee of the embassy, our role is to provide insights on how youth engagement and inclusion can accelerate innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable development in Uganda's agricultural sector.

Our experience at the expo was illuminating. Walking through the diverse pavilions, we observed a thriving ecosystem of ideas set into motion: climate-smart farming technologies, value-addition innovations and youth-led agribusiness start-ups reshaping the sector. The expo is more than just a display of agricultural products.

It is a platform for knowledge exchange, networking and capacity-building, connecting local innovators to international expertise and investment opportunities.

One particularly encouraging observation was the presence of secondary schools such as Gayaza High School, MST Junior School and Namulyango College, who were not only present, but also actively engaged in learning, training and purchasing of the exhibited merchandise. They filled the training tents, notebooks in hand and asking practical questions. They were eager to understand the science and business behind the production of black flies, organic fertiliser, poultry, animal husbandry and of course, the soya yoghurt by Smart Foods from Makerere University, which took the best innovation award.

That level of curiosity matters. It signals that agriculture is no longer seen as a fallback option, but as a viable and innovative career path. In many ways, this is how we future-proof Uganda's agriculture sector by inspiring the next generation as early as possible.

A striking observation was the broader level of youth involvement. Young entrepreneurs presented fresh ideas in digitalised and



A student displays Azolla used to feed poultry, fish and cattle during the expo recently. Youth engagement on such platforms accelerates innovation

mechanised farming, poultry, horticulture and livestock management. Under the Netherlands pavilion, two stalls stood out for their energy and creativity: MST Junior School impressed visitors with their snail slime body butter innovation, a bold example of value addition and youth experimentation. Equally compelling were the refugee youth under Kagiira training, who confidently showcased their products and enterprise journey. These initiatives exemplify what meaningful youth participation can look like. They set a strong precedent for other youth-led groups who could productively participate in future expos.

Yet, despite this impressive participation, many promising youth-led initiatives still face barriers to accessing financing, mentorship and structured business support. As advisors to the embassy, we see a critical opportunity for strategic interventions that empower youth as drivers of sustainable agriculture while aligning with Dutch-Ugandan partnership goals.

The embassy's engagement at the expo, including the Netherlands pavilion, exemplifies how international collaboration can catalyse local innovation. Through dialogue with embassy representatives, we noted the importance of integrating gender-sensitive approaches and youth inclusion into

agricultural programming.

Another observation was the emphasis on sustainability and climate adaptation. Farmers and agripreneurs displayed innovative techniques in soil health management, water-efficient irrigation and renewable energy-powered equipment. These innovations are vital for building resilience in Uganda's agricultural landscape, especially for young farmers navigating climate-related uncertainties. Supporting youth access to these tools is essential to safeguarding the future of Uganda's agricultural economy.

The expo also highlighted the value of multi-stakeholder collaboration. The synergy between government agencies, international partners, private sector actors and civil society demonstrates that advancing Uganda's agriculture requires co-ordinated efforts. Our committee sees a unique role for the embassy in facilitating these linkages to ensure that youth perspectives are integrated into policy discussions and practical interventions.

In reflecting on the three-day event, several key insights emerged:

- Youth-led innovation must be systematically supported through mentorship, funding and training programmes that are accessible across

all districts of Uganda.

- Gender equity in agricultural initiatives strengthens the participation and productivity of young women, who remain critical agents of change.

- Climate-smart and sustainable practices are essential for the long-term viability of Uganda's agricultural sector.

- Strategic international partnerships, such as those facilitated by the embassy, amplify impact and create pathways for young entrepreneurs to scale innovations locally and globally.

The Harvest Money Expo 2026 was a reminder of the untapped potential of Uganda's youth in shaping the future of agriculture. Our experience speaks to the importance of creating platforms where young people can contribute insights, showcase innovation and access resources that turn ideas into sustainable businesses. We also encourage even more young people, schools and youth-led enterprises to attend and actively participate in future editions of the expo. Exposure, after all, is often the first seed of transformation.

As the youth advisory committee, we call upon policymakers, private sector actors and international partners to prioritise youth-centred programmes that integrate innovation, sustainability and inclusion. The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands has had a pivotal role to play in ensuring that Uganda's agricultural future is youth-driven, gender-inclusive and globally connected.

Through experiences like the Harvest Money Expo, we witness the transformative potential of collaboration, innovation and empowerment. We look forward to continuing to provide youth perspectives and recommendations that help shape inclusive, sustainable and impactful agricultural policies and programmes in Uganda.

The article was written by the members of the Youth Advisory Committee of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda