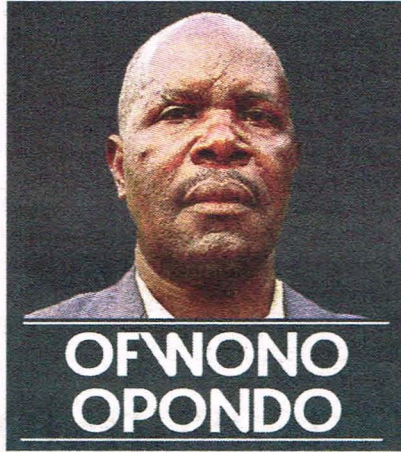


PDM PROGRAMME AND MISSING LINKS

The National Resistance Movement and President Yoweri Museveni's flagship programmes for small commercial producers, particularly in rural areas is good, as it is putting some money, even if to eat or waste away, in the hands of rural households that had never touched big money. However, these programmes have to be restructured and get several missing links introduced in order to reinforce their socio-economic transformation.

Granted, when government has handed out farm inputs, planting materials, livestock and money to small peasant producers, under the Rural Farmers Scheme, *Entandikwa*, Operation Wealth Creation, Women Fund, Youth Fund, Emyoga and now the Parish Development Model (PDM), people have increased production and in some instances productivity. And as a result, Uganda has had a very long period when families have food security. Shops, supermarkets, roadside businesses and stores are brimming with local Ugandan products. Uganda is a food basket for regional neighbours, especially the border communities in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Sudan and DR Congo.

Increased agricultural production and productivity have accelerated regional trade in these commodities both in their raw and processed forms, thereby adding to Uganda's overall export revenue and favourable balance of trade and gross domestic product (GDP). In addition to helping rural households and intermediate Ugandans join the money economy, they are providing the catalysts for skilling in entrepreneurship, business and cottage industries, but only as scattered and unlinked individuals.



On their own, these small farmers cannot produce the required volumes and verifiable quality products for a sustained market supply, which exposes them to exploitation, market discrimination, as Kenya and Tanzania have been doing and therefore, are unable to gain access to the lucrative niches.

Unfortunately, for a long time now, and likely to continue for a while, ministers and the so-called government 'experts' have not been able to provide coherent advice, let alone sufficient support to the sector or individual producers to enable them scale up or maintain their enterprises to match the public talk. The resultant effects have been the zig-zag movements and glaringly visible disastrous policy reversals, stagnations, frustrations, collapses and abandonments.

To pull out from the holes, as a restarting point, there must be a recalibration of government manpower, from the ministers and civil servants in the critical sectors of finance, banking, enterprise, agriculture, industry, commerce and trade. From my limited

experience as a modest farming entrepreneur in Tororo, Mukono, and Kapelebyong districts, many of those the Government calls 'extension workers' stationed at district or sub-county levels, are in reality, crude extortionists and at best, unconcerned, unbothered, unhelpful and lacklustre fellows.

There ought to be a well-calculated, intentional, facilitated and regulated linkage between small, medium and large-scale farmers, processors, industrialists and bulk traders. There is a need to have a cold-storage chain of facilities and the warehouse receipt law and system in place to support farmers and traders, especially those dealing in fresh, perishable and fragile commodities.

We could have big, well-established farm enterprises supported by government on condition that they host, offer training, mentor and buy produce from small farmers attached to them. As it stands, government may continue to pour huge amounts of public resources into rural household efforts, but without achieving the desired socio-economic transformation.

There could also be parish incubation projects or programmes where farmers can learn best practices, and institute incentives for entrepreneurs who have achieved or surpassed the planned target, product output, job creation or innovation, which can be in the form of tax rebates or additional support.

The PDM savings and credit cooperative organisations ought to be gradually turned into schemes where mindset and entrepreneurship are taught or mentored, otherwise PDM and other similar government efforts will remain for nurturing political corruption and inefficiency.