

# A Primary Source of Growth

## INTERVIEW WITH THE HON DR RWAMIRAMA BRIGHT

MINISTER OF STATE FOR AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL INDUSTRY AND FISHERIES (AI), UGANDA



**RWAMIRAMA BRIGHT** joined the National Resistance Army (NRA) in 1983, later renamed the Uganda People's Defence Force, where he served as Director of Finance. On retiring as a Major, he entered politics and was elected Member of Parliament for the seat of Isingiro County North. He has an MBA and was appointed Minister of State for Animal Industry in 2006.

### How important is the agricultural sector to Uganda's continued economic growth?

Agriculture has been, and continues to be, the most important sector in Uganda's economy because it employs the largest proportion of the workforce (73 per cent) and accounts for 23 per cent of total GDP. Even though its share in total GDP has been declining in recent years, agriculture remains important because it provides the basis for growth in other sectors such as manufacturing and services, and in the process generates employment opportunities. Agricultural exports account for around 46 per cent of total exports, and therefore help improve the country's balance of payments position.

Agriculture has the potential to be a sustainable and significant source of economic growth and poverty reduction. It is for these several reasons that agriculture is being given a lot of attention in our national development agenda strategy. Failure to do so would mean leaving behind the majority of Ugandans and that would affect the development outcomes in other sectors such as health and education, in addition to holding back overall economic growth.

### What is your ministry's strategy to realise the potential of agriculture in Uganda over the next 10 years?

At policy level, agriculture is at the centre of the national development agenda. There is a general consensus that agriculture can and does play a significant role in raising household incomes, providing employment and contributing to overall economic growth.

The National Development Plan recognises agriculture as a primary source of growth in Uganda. There are several factors in favour of agricultural development in Uganda. The country has adequate land and water resources to enable it to produce enough food for domestic consumption and have sufficient excess for export.

The future of Uganda's agriculture will depend on how the country takes advantage of what science has to offer. There is capacity in the country to develop appropriate technologies to boost production and productivity. This needs more support though, especially funding

agricultural research is aimed at addressing the needs of farmers.

### How is agricultural production organised?

We have four clusters of production: Plantation owners, who mainly grow sugar, tea, coffee, cotton, and cocoa for export; ranchers, who rear our 14 million head of cattle; middle-income commercial farmers who grow cash crops and raise livestock such as pigs, sheep, and goats; and small holders, who are still mainly subsistence farmers. There are several factors in favour of agricultural development in Uganda. The country has adequate land and water resources to enable it to produce enough food for domestic consumption and still have excess for export. Our position on the equator means that we have two growing seasons per year. A large part of Uganda has only two months a year without rain, so we are now looking to bridge the gap between the wet and dry seasons through better use of irrigation. In this way we are aiming to move to three growing seasons a year. As rains become more erratic due to climate change and other factors, Uganda's agriculture will increasingly rely on irrigation to ensure a steady supply of food. Fortunately there are abundant water resources in rivers and lakes, and in ground water, in many parts of the country. However, the biggest gains will be obtained from using improved inputs, including seed, stocking and planting materials, to boost productivity. Current crop yields are about one third of what has been obtained at research stations. Therefore, crop yields can be increased substantially, and this is the most promising option especially as land available for expansion gets more limited with increase in population. Uganda will have to increase its use of inorganic fertilisers on soils that have lost fertility due to overuse without replenishment.

### What opportunities would you say are the most attractive to foreign investors in Uganda's agriculture sector?

There is potential for investment in dairy, coffee, cotton, tea, animal production, and also in fishing: 25 per cent of Uganda is fresh water, so fish farming is one area we are working on. Fish exports rank high in our exports, particularly to the EU. Rice is another area we are working on to increase production. We

had challenges in meeting the domestic demand of 240,000 tonnes. We have now exceeded demand, producing 270,000 tonnes, and this year we aim for 300,000 metric tonnes. We have also increased production: 18 tonnes, so there are opportunities for processing cocoa. Tea production has gone up; we grow the best tea in the region. We are increasing coffee production. Uganda is now the number two coffee producer in Africa.

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**What direct support does the government offer farmers to improve rural communities?**

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In recent years, the Ugandan Government has shown commitment and interest in reviving the cooperative sector. The government has strengthened surviving cooperatives and promoted the establishment of new marketing and financial cooperatives to reach farmers with services that contribute to improving rural livelihoods and reducing poverty. Cooperatives have access to financial services and bulk-marketing services for farmer produce. The cooperative movement is expected to avoid many of the mistakes made by agricultural cooperatives in the past and to increase rural incomes, linking farmers to profitable markets, with the overall goal of decreasing rural poverty. The government contributes directly, supporting primary processing by providing machinery through grants: we give half and the farmers pay half.

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**Is land reform necessary in order to improve agricultural efficiency in the medium term?**

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All land is privately owned in Uganda. This is an incentive to improve and protect land. Unused land is not tax exempt. Another policy we are pursuing is to discourage division of land through inheritance. We

are still facing many of the challenges that are a legacy of our colonial history. For example, we still have land that is owned by landlords who are not using it, so the government will pay those landowners to give land to smallholders.

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**Where do you see Uganda's agricultural sector in 10 years time?**

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Agriculture will continue to play a key role in the economy, even if its contribution to GDP falls as other sectors take off, such as oil. There is huge export potential that we intend to take advantage of. Uganda is linked to regional markets such as Tanzania, Kenya, Sudan, the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda. Several of these countries face food supply shortfalls periodically, for a variety of reasons. Regional integration through the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) has developed formal mechanisms for trade within the region. Uganda will continue to position itself to consolidate and expand food supply and agricultural products to these markets. At the continental level, the African Union is encouraging member states to invest more in agriculture by increasing funding to agriculture to 10 per cent of the national budget. At the international level, there is also renewed support for agriculture to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets of 2015 and beyond. The World Bank's 2008 World Development Report highlights the importance of agriculture in pursuing growth and development. Therefore, the renewed recognition of the central role of agriculture to development in low-income countries should help galvanise strategies and provide a basis for mobilising more resources to invest in the sector. 

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Farmers inspecting the quality of their crop before harvest.