

New study of Uganda soils begins

By Vision Reporter

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Experts have commenced a new study of Uganda soils to develop a National Soil Atlas



Prof Otim Nape of Africa Innovations Institute (centre) shows some paper work to Agriculture Minister Tress Bucyanayandi during the Vital Signs workshop at Ridar hotel in Seeta. Looking on Vital Signs Africa field Director Dr. Patrick Mutuo.

PHOTO/Denis Dibebe

By Alfred Wandera

Experts have commenced a new study of Uganda soils to develop a National Soil Atlas to map areas where various agricultural activities can be favourably carried out in order to promote sustainable agriculture.

The study is being carried out under the Vital Signs project, a scientific, tested monitoring system that provides integrated data and tools.

“To achieve food security, smallholder farmers need to increase productivity while sustaining the ecosystems that provide them with healthy soils, clean water and other benefits. Farmers and decision makers across the globe need better data on agriculture, ecosystems and livelihoods to help them achieve agricultural development that is sustainable for people and nature,” Dr. Patrick Mutuo, Vital Signs Africa Field Director, said.

Mutuo was speaking on Monday at the opening of a two-day agricultural sustainability workshop for policy makers at Ridar Hotel in Seeta, Mukono district.

The workshop brings together participants comprising policy makers – directors and commissioners in Government ministries and agencies – to discuss how to use agricultural and environmental data to help inform policies on agricultural development and sustainability.

The study involves collecting data on soils, climate, weather, crop yield and other fields, to build an agricultural data system for Uganda. The country has been zoned into 480 agro-ecological landscape areas during the 10-year period of study whose first phase will close at the end of next year.

“We started the exercise in January in Mpigi district and we are now in Bududa district. We expect to complete the first phase in two years. It is a time series exercise because ecology is not static. It keeps on changing and we need monitor performance of agriculture and see whether it is improving,” Prof. George William Otim-Nape, the chairman and chief executive officer of Africa Innovations Institute, the organization hosting Vital Signs project, said.

The project is being implemented in collaboration with the ministries of Agriculture, Water and Environment and Uganda Bureau of Statistics with \$350, 000 (about sh1b) funding per year from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

It was launched in three African countries – Tanzania, Ghana and Uganda – with plans to expand to Kenya and Rwanda by the end of this year, according to Mutuo.

Otim-Nape said with estimation of Uganda’s population hitting 103 million people by 2050 and 130 million by 2100, most of who will be in urban areas, there will a heavy burden on agriculture to feed the ballooning populace.

“To feed the rapid growing population, agricultural land and other resources must produce more per unit of land and other inputs, and it must do so in perpetuity. Consequently, designing and implementing a sustainable agricultural programme calls for evidence-based policy making, and approach which helps people make well informed decisions about policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence at the heart of policy development and implementation,” added Otim-Nape.

Agriculture minister, Tress Bucyanayandi, who was the chief guest, said Uganda has seen production of its key cash crops like coffee and cotton plummet, and welcomed the initiative.

“We have to do something about it in a sustainable manner because we cannot increase the size of Uganda yet the population is growing. By doing soil mapping, we shall identify some deficiencies, but we need evidence for this. The Government welcomes better policies that will propel our agriculture forward,” explained Bucyanayandi.

Dr. Nicholas Kauta, the director of Animal Resources in the ministry of Agriculture, said it is high time Uganda nipped in the bud the dependence on primitive approaches to farming and turn to evidence-based scientific ways.

“Risk analysis is evidence-based. Most of the decisions that have been made have been based on individual perceptions especially by politicians without logical scientific thinking. But after this meeting, we should be able to gain confidence to talk to our people at district level so that they all embrace evidence-based agriculture practice,” said Kauta.

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