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**REPUBLIC OF UGANDA**

**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL INDUSTRY AND FISHERIES**

**OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL INDUSTRY AND FISHERIES**

**OFFICIAL SPEECH**

**DELIEVERED BY;**

**HON.CHRISTOPHER KIBAZANGA THE STATE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE**

**AT THE UGANDA MEDIA CENTRE**

**5TH DECEMBER, 2019**

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**STATEMENT OF THE HON. MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL INDUSTRY AND FISHERIES ON THE OCCASION TO COMMEMORATE THE WORLD SOIL DAY ON 5TH DECEMBER 2019**

* **UN FAO Representative in Uganda**
* **The Vice Chancellor, Busitema University,**
* **Professors, Doctors and Soil Scientists from Makerere and Busitema Universities,**
* **Technical staff, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries,**
* **Civil Society organizations**
* **The Media,**
* **Fellow Ugandans,**

1. Today, the 5th of December 2019, Uganda joins the Global community to commemorate the World Soil Day.
2. Soil is a critical component of the natural system which is a vital asset for human livelihood. However, despite its fundamental importance, the soil resource is threatened by widespread degradation through misuse. Productive soil has living and non- living elements which reduce the quality of the resource if mishandled.
3. Recognizing the serious dangers on the soil resources in the World, the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) initiated awareness raising campaigns against soil degradation at Global, Regional, National and Local levels in 2002.
4. Subsequently, the IUSS adopted a resolution proposing the 5th of December as World Soil Day to celebrate the importance of soil in human life. The Food and Agricultural organization (FAO) of the United Nations supported the formal establishment of World Soil Day primarily as a global awareness raising platform.
5. In June 2013, FAO conference unanimously endorsed World Soil Day and advocated for its official adoption by United Nations (UN). On December 2013, the 68th UN General Assembly declared 5th December as the World Soil Day.
6. Since 2014, the World Soil Day has been commemorated with a different theme each year. In 2015, the theme was “**Healthy Soils for Healthy Life** “. In 2016, it was **“Soils and Pulses: Symbiosis for Life”**. In 2017, it was **“Caring for the Planet starts from the Ground”**. In 2018, it was “**Be the Solution to Soil Pollution”.**
7. Besides, being the principal medium for plant and crop growth through provision of support to roots, essential nutrients, moisture, gaseous exchange between roots and atmosphere and protection of crops from destructive physical, biological and chemical activity, soils also offer other ecological functions which include: **Habitat for a wide range of organisms**, **Filtration system for surface water,** **Carbon storage and maintenance of atmospheric gases.**
8. Despite the capacity of soils to provide these services, however, the resource is being severely eroded due to rampant degradation. It is estimated that over 33% of the soils are degraded globally. Consequently, over 820 million people are food insecure and 2 billion (26% of the world population) are affected by malnutrition.
9. Africa is endowed with vast arable land compared to other continents. However, due to diminishing soil productivity, her Agricultural Domestic Product lies between 2% to 3% only. Such a scenario compelled African Heads of State to ascend to the Abuja Declaration in 2006. The Abuja summit called on individual countries to increase fertilizer use from 8 to 50kg per hactare per year.
10. Uganda’s soils have always been taken for granted, yet the country has some of the oldest and highly weathered soils whose productivity is low. Farmers’ yields are far below potential compared to research stations. Areas like Rakai, Kayunga, Iganga, Bugiri, Tororo, kumi have been observed to be producing with Negative Nutrient Balances. Continued cultivation of such soils without fertility enhancing technologies does not guarantee sustainability of agricultural production. Some Districts in Eastern Uganda are infested by Striga (Kayongo in Lusoga). This notorious invasive weed is an indicator of low soil fertility. Besides fertility decline, Soil degradation in Uganda is also being experienced through Soil Erosion, Excessive Compaction, Acidification and Salinization.
11. This year, the World Soil Day is being commemorated with a theme: **“Stop Soil Erosion, Save our Future”.** This theme comes at a time when soil erosion in Uganda is getting severe in many parts of the country. According to Karamage and others in their findings reported in 2017, the estimated soil loss through erosion by water was 3.2 tons per hectare per year in 2014, which resulted into a total loss to the country of 62 million tons of soil. Yet, soil scientists say that to form an inch of soil, it takes 1000 years!
12. In Uganda, we can address the major contributors of soil erosion which include: **cropping systems without soil and water conservation practices, deforestation, loss of vegetation cover through bush burning.** This year’s theme reminds us of our noble responsibility to protect the soil from one of the major causes of degradation-**Soil Erosion**.
13. Government is committed to reversing soil degradation in order to achieve sustainable agricultural production. Through my Ministry, Government approved the National Fertilizer Policy (2016) and the National Organic Policy (2019) to provide direction to Agricultural productivity improvement through use of fertility enhancing technologies from both Inorganic and organic sources, as well as soil management.
14. Government has also attracted many investments in fertilizer manufacturing and blending such as Guanzhou Dongsong Energy Group at Sukuru in Tororo and Grain Pulse at Rwanyonyi in Mukono. I appeal to all farmers and users of soil to take advantage of the enabling environment established by government to manage and utilize our soils for posterity.
15. My Ministry has also recruited more staff to handle soil and water conservation and generally, agricultural extension. Collaborative efforts with our partners have delivered on proven sustainable land management practices. Plans are underway to scale up the identified best practices in soil and water conservation and fertility management. More awareness programs on the proper use of our soils are required from both Government and Non-Government actors.
16. Government appreciates the work of Soil Scientists at Makerere University and other Universities for inventing a soil testing kit which can be used to rapidly determine the fertility status of a given soil. Such Innovations need to be scaled up and popularized among farmers. There has also been general improvement in fertilizer use in the country from 1 to 3kg per ha per year, on average. This is still abysmally small and it cannot enable us to realize our target of attaining 20 million- 60kg bags of coffee by the year-2020.
17. Government calls for more initiatives directed towards sustainable use of soils. Therefore, my Ministry strongly supports the establishment of the proposed Uganda Soils Institute.
18. I take this opportunity to thank Busitema University that has offered to host the Uganda Soils Institute. Once the institute is fully established, it will serve as a one stop center for soil management technologies, soil information and innovations. **THE INSTITUTE WILL ACCORD SOILS THE PROMINENCE IT DESERVES.**
19. The main events for this Year’s celebrations will be held at Busitema University, Busia District. The event will be marked by a seminar where prominent soil scientists will discuss issues of soils, in particular soil erosion and sustainable use of soils. Other activities will include an exhibition of soil improving inputs, soil and water conservation practices and technologies, among others.
20. Fellow Ugandans, let’s join hands and strive to stop Soil Erosion and Save Life. **Together, we can!**

I thank you all.

***For God and My Country,***

**Hon. Christopher Kibazanga (MP)**

**Minister of State for Agriculture (MAAIF).**