

International Youth Day is celebrated annually on August 12 to bring youth issues to the attention of the international community and celebrate the potential of youth as partners in today's global society. This year's theme was "Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health". Over the years, SEATINI has been working closely with youth associations by creating platforms for the youth to make their voices heard in trade, fiscal and investment related policy processes. To celebrate this year's International Youth Day, we reached out to some youth and youth leaders who spoke out on issues that matter to them. Below is what they had to say:



“We need to appreciate that the largest population of Uganda is youthful and it is estimated that 78% of Uganda's population are people below 30 years. This makes Uganda a youth centered country and the second youngest country in the world. Most of the challenges Uganda is facing are economic in nature and so as young people, we want to be agents of the much needed socio-economic transformation, we want to be meaningful participants in the transformation process. As youth leaders, we are supposed to constantly remind young people of our generational mission and how best we can achieve it. As a Member of Parliament for the youth, my fundamental role is four-fold; Legislate, Appropriate Budgets, Represent young people and do oversight of government programs. The National Youth Council also has a key obligations as enshrined in Uganda's Constitution. The National Youth Council also

has its fundamental obligations such as to champion the empowerment of young people. In Uganda, we have structures of the youth running up to the village level. Government has several programs targeting the youth especially the youth Livelihoods Program, Youth Capital Venture Fund, Green Jobs Program among others. As Youth Leaders, we are aware that some of these programs have loophole and some of these include; limited access among others. However, we commit to ensure that all these challenges are solved to the end that these programs work for young people. The available funds should enable the youth to thrive rather than enslaving them.

The theme for this year's International Youth Day is relevant because agriculture is the main economic activity in Uganda even among young people but because of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, there has been several challenges with all the economic activities. One of the things we appreciate about agriculture is that it has remained extremely important in a time like this and the demand for food is ever increasing. Therefore, there is need to strengthen our agricultural related policies to make the sector more vibrant.

The value chain for agriculture has many activities including marketing, value addition, post-harvest handling and all these activities within the agriculture sector can employ young people sustainably for their survival. Our fundamental goal now as youth leaders of Uganda is to ensure that our young people get into the four core sectors that will spike employment and growth. These sectors include; commercial agriculture, ICT, services and industries. We want to appreciate SEATINI Uganda because the work that the organization does is about providing alternative policies. Some of Uganda's programs have not managed to score on account of poor policy. Over the years, SEATINI has been interrogating Uganda's policy regime and continues to play a key role as a "policy surgeon" which is fundamental at a time like this and we appreciate this. As young people, we must be open to forces that negate our proposals, this is the only that we shall thrive. We are grateful that SEATINI works closely with youth and youth leaders at large.” ~ **Hon. Boniface Okot, Youth Member of Parliament for Northern Uganda**



“The youth and youth-led startups should be prioritized in the post COVID19 economic recovery agenda. I call upon my yellow youths to use their voices to contribute to the conversation towards reviving the economy post COVID 19. I am really humbled by the nature of work that SEATINI Uganda has been doing for a number of years. It does not just fit into what the National Youth Council Strategic Investment Plan envisages for the youth but it also fits into what our country needs for development to be kick started and for it to have successful take off into economic prosperity. SEATINI’s work around issues to do with tax and budget advocacy and economic

equity in the country speaks to the core of the National Youth Council’s interest which is to engage young people in productive activities. We strongly believe tax justice advocacy is important to us because the future we envisage is one where there is affirmative action in taxation policy. We are yet to embark on an initiative where the Youth Members of Parliament will table the Youth Bill for Tax Amendments that are really hinged on the lessons we have learnt from SEATINI’s research and reports. One of the things the National Youth Council has been grappling with is the question of how and when youth leaders and youth at large would participate in tax and budget processes is just part of the work we needed but never knew who would help in this regard but we are glad that we can count on SEATINI for the much needed training and a lot more that the organization brings on the table.” ~ **Jacob Eyeru, Chairperson, National Youth Council**

“I successfully completed a diploma but failed to get formal employment and so I decided to take on Agriculture. Most young people do not consider agriculture as a source of employment, but it has helped me survive and look after my child. There are some challenges like low market prices especially for pineapples which has affected me and other pineapple farmers in Luwero. I produce a lot of pineapples but end up earning less than expected. I therefore call upon government to come in and set a minimum price for our produce and also provide train us on how we can add value to our produce like pineapples so that we can access viable markets. I call upon my fellow youth out there to join agriculture as a way to keep them engaged.” ~ **Namubiru Scovia, Small holder farmer based in Luwero.**



“I plant food crops for my home consumption but I have also been growing cassava which I dry and sell to middle men or produce dealers and sometimes sell locally because it is used as raw material for making local gin. The biggest challenge I face is the pest and diseases and lack of storage facilities. Sometimes it’s hard to dry cassava properly especially in the rainy season and this affects the quality. The middle men are the biggest beneficiaries in the business and dictate prices for the dried cassava because it’s hard to transport this cassava to major towns because of high transport costs, so the only option is to wait for the middle men to come and buy it.” ~ **Awio Thomas, farmer based in Apac District.**



“I used to work with a Private Secondary School in Lira but schools were closed following the Presidential directive in line with the COVID 19 containment measures and I had to find other ways of surviving. I decided to resort to dealing in agro-produce because I did not want to suffer with climate change related issues that pose a challenge to farmers. I borrowed some money from a SACCO to begin this business because I did not have collateral such as land. This business of buying agro-products has helped me and I do not think I will go back to working in teaching when schools re-open. I call upon the youth to be innovative. We the youth are very vital in the food system and if supported by government, we can do a lot in transforming the food systems. One of the challenges I have faced with dealing with agro-products is the issue of low prices from

middle men from Kampala and Busia. Government should support the farmers to improve post-harvest handling so that they produce good quality agro products hence better bargaining power and better prices.”~ **Solomon Anok, Agro-produce dealer based in Lira District.**

“Government needs to prioritize young people in the COVID 19 economic recovery plan and more importantly involve young people in debate around post COVID 19 economic recovery.” **Thomas Etwop Odora, Program Officer, Agricultural Trade for Rural Transformation, SEATINI Uganda**



“There is need to redesign the stimulus packages to make it work for the youth and youth-led Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) at large for their survival and recovery.” **Brenda Akankunda, Program Officer, Investment for Sustainable Development**

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