

Agriculture key plank in Kenyan general elections

The major political coalitions wishing to come into power in Kenya next month have pitched on agricultural reforms and revolution as key campaign planks.

Both Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) and Jubilee Coalition, main protagonist in the March 4 general elections, last week launched ambitious political manifestos, with agricultural reforms among their priority plans. Raila Odinga led CORD has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with farmers promising to enhance agricultural production and food security.

The landmark treaty includes the firm undertaking that CORD will implement revive agriculture sector through restructuring and improvements. This includes subsidies to farmers and elaborate extension services. The coalition also promises value addition to agricultural produce like cereals, horticulture, trees, fish and livestock products (milk, beef and hides) and ensure strategic marketing of these products for improved (maximum) profits, direct to farmers.

It will also prioritize the structured return of state owned Kenya Co operative Creameries (KCC) to dairy farmers, the conclusive payment to thousands of area dairy farmers. The CORD principals have also promised to expand agriculture sector operation to cover the entire country. The coalition will also ensure that at least 10% of the national budget will be invested in the sector to operationalize irrigation agriculture and institute support services and industries to complete the sustainable national food security design and produce more for export. That is a major improvement from the acutely deficient current 4.5% of the budget which the Jubilee side are determined to retain.

“This sector alone with accompanying industries and businesses offers clear window to generate CORDs’ promised 1 million jobs per year, from the farms to processing, transportation, industries and trading. Kenyan youths will get plenty of opportunities to earn a descent living,” expounds CORD deputy President Kalonzo Musyoka.

On the other, Jubilee coalition will prioritize job creation and food security, especially in the agro processing industries. Jubilee flag-bearer Uhuru Kenyatta says the manifesto underscores their plans to transform Kenya under the banner themes of Umoja (national cohesion), Uchumi (economic transformation) and Uwazi (transparency in governance).

The Jubilee team says that issues of food and water, healthcare, education, women empowerment and wealth creation as its priority and promises that they will no longer be any other business (AOB) items on their government's agenda. The major agricultural products in Kenya include tea, coffee, horticulture, corn, wheat, sugarcane, dairy products, beef, pork, poultry, and eggs.

Jubilee also says that economic development through devolution will be a key priority and promises to fast-track the transition to County governments. The coalition deputy President William Ruto says apart from agriculture, they will promote the growth of Kenya’s major economic assets are horticulture, tourism, commerce, infrastructure and technology. These sectors have provided powerful instrument for advancing economic and social development.

With 75 percent of Kenyas' engaged in farming, agricultural is the mainstay of the Kenyan economy, contributing estimated 26 percent of GDP, and generates 60 percent of the total foreign exchange earnings. "Due to land scarcity and over-reliance on cash crops, Kenya import large amounts of food in order to feed the population annually. This is one of the key plank the new Kenyan government will focus, " says Raila Odinga.

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