Inaugural Speech Coffee Event

Hon Prime Minister
Hon Minister
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I go to a new country, my first question always is: What is the coffee situation at the Embassy?

Like for many people, my working day starts with a cup of coffee. For many of us at the Dutch Embassy, coffee is our daily fuel to get through the day and do our work and frequently we can be spotted at our small coffee room for a refill. No coffee, no work is the adagio.

That statement is to some extent also true for Uganda as a country. The importance of coffee for the Ugandan economy is clear. Uganda is exporting around 150,000 metric tons a year which makes Uganda after Ethiopia, the second largest coffee exporter in Africa. Ugandan coffee is in high demand on the world market because of its quality. And export means foreign earnings and local jobs.

Despite the key economic position of the coffee sector, only 3% of the produced coffee is consumed locally. But things are changing. One of the things that struck me when I recently arrived in Uganda was the popularity of coffee bars: they carry names as Good African Coffee, Café Jaffa, Cafesserie, all appealing to the product they
serve: cappuccino’s, expresso’s, lattés, with all kinds of special flavors.

This is really a change with the past and proof that the world is becoming a global village. One of its attributes is the café culture. Ugandans love the good life and appreciating a good cup of coffee has become part of that. In the past they thought why spend money on a cup of coffee in a restaurant if you could make at home! But nowadays they are willing to pay for it.

It is this kind of fundamental change in perception and value that we also need in the agricultural sector.

Agriculture is still the largest employer in the economy with 60-70% of the people depending on it for a living. But the prevailing perception of many is still that agriculture is tiresome and dirty work and if you are lucky and the rainfall is good, it only gives you a little income. The sector is not appealing to young people and many try their luck elsewhere, often in the cities where they hope they can score a quick buck. The unemployment figures of Uganda and the fact that Uganda has one of the youngest populations in Africa, tell us that this scenario will not offer the solution for Uganda.

So if we could change the way people, and specially the youth, look at the agricultural sector, if we could turn around the current perception and see agriculture as an opportunity for doing business, for earning an income and for building a future, we would realize a change in culture and values, the same as happened in coffee consumption.
I am convinced that we can make this change and I dare say that it is already slowly happening.

We are committed to contribute to this change. The Netherlands is a society that is built on a strong agricultural history. Agricultural production and export is still a significant stronghold of our economy. Despite our small size, we are the second largest exporter in the world of agricultural products. One of the cornerstones of this success is the fact that farmers are considered entrepreneurs, and farming is seen as a business.

We are making our expertise available to strengthen the agricultural sector of Uganda. We also believe that the private sector has a major role to play in Uganda.

Let me give you some examples.

Currently we are supporting the value chains for rice and potatoes, we support the dairy sector in South West Uganda. We are introducing climate mitigating agricultural practices, including irrigation. We have improved the seed production for many of the common Ugandan food crops like cassava, millet, ground nuts, beans. One of the results of the last activity was the introduction, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, of a Quality Declared Seed Label that was launched by the President in July this year and makes certified seeds available to thousands of farmers.

We are supporting The Best Farmer’s Competition, together with our partners New Vision, DFCU bank and KLM Airlines. This program is known by almost all Ugandans. It brings the stories of innovative farmers to your households and it is significantly contributing to the
belief that one can make a good living in agriculture. I visited some of the previous winners and I must say I was duly impressed. In the New Vision Harvest Money of this week a successful lady farmer tells her story. What struck me was her saying that none of them had any farming background before they started and they relied in the beginning on information from newspapers. Now she is running a farm with a monthly revenue of USG 7 million. That clearly shows that the change we think is needed, is possible.

At the moment the candidates for the Best Farmer for next year are being selected again by a jury. The winners will be announced in December. And I must say that we are very proud of this program.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A common element in all our activities is the creation of employment for youth, which is also the central theme of this year’s Coffee festival. Together with our partner AVSI we are engaged in the SKY project, which provides skilling opportunities for young people, in close collaboration with the private sector and training schools. Helping the youth does not stop at increasing their technical skills but should lead to a job, a secured livelihood. Learning managerial skills and livelihood skills (even including CSE) and collaboration with private companies is therefore vital.

We are happy that the SKY project and NUCAFE have recently signed a MoU to advance the skills development of farmers, workers and entrepreneurs in the coffee sector. For the coming years this will provide skilling and job opportunities for 1000 young people.
I am also happy that NUCAFE and SUM, an initiative supported by the Netherlands that introduces index-based agriculture insurance products, have agreed to collaborate. We are all aware of the increasing effects of climate change on agriculture and this also affects coffee producers. Crop insurance can greatly help farmers to secure their income. We welcome the commitment of the Ugandan Government to subsidize the premium for agriculture insurance, making Uganda the second country on the continent with such a scheme.

Hon guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The popularity of coffee consumption is on the rise and reflects a clear cultural shift in Uganda.

The popularity of agriculture in general and more specific coffee production, needs a similar shift in mindset so that youth see agriculture as a promising business opportunity to make a decent living. The Government of Uganda intends to further stimulate coffee production and export. The Netherlands is committed to contribute to this endeavor by skilling youth in several jobs in the coffee value chain.

This Coffee festival is a great event to place coffee, in all its dimensions, in the spotlight of the attention. Let’s celebrate the uniqueness of this product, be inspired by the many things that are happening on this event and enjoy a good cup of coffee.

Thank you.