

ANALYSIS

FARMERS DAY: TANZANIA'S LOST GLORY?

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In the past three decades it was known as Saba Saba throughout and it was widely celebrated, but today, as the Farmers' Day - Nane Nane - it has lost its glory and popularity across the Lake zone.

Mwanza city - a town established by a German colonial agent called Emin Pasha in 1892 to control exportation of cotton across the region - was a famous place for celebrating the Farmers' Day in the early 1980s.

Entering Mwanza or Shinyanga Region in those days, you would have noticed that there were farmers trade exhibition and celebration taking place.

Today, it is not easy to realise that an agricultural show is going on in the city or elsewhere across

the region. From the way it is organised, publicised and marked, it is quite clear that this unique day - which used to bring thousands of farmers and their products together about two decades ago - is no longer that important.

No one can give credible reasons as to why the event has been losing its popularity.

Some believes that the dramatic fall of production and prices recorded by farmers in the past decade has minimised enthusiasm among thousands of people across the region.

"We used to celebrate Farmers' Day in those days when agriculture was valued and it was paying. But today with poor prices and low yields, we have no reasons to celebrate this day," said Shija Maganga (55) a farmer from Magu District.

"In those days we were told that

the ruling party, the country and the economy belonged to two people... peasants and workers. Today nobody knows exactly who owns the economy and even our party CCM," this old farmer said.

Maganga, like many other farmers, sees no reason to celebrate the Day at this time when farmers feel 'ignored and left stranded' under the umbrella of trade liberalization. "Tell me what will you exhibit there if you have poor and low yields... the day was used to show how farmers were growing quality and high crops ranging from food to cash crops," he added.

Introduced by the government to boost morale and capacity among farmers as well as exchanging agricultural knowledge through crops exhibition, the day has ended up becoming a village market clouded with industrial products than

agricultural produce.

As a result, the number of people attending this event in most parts of the Lake Zone especially in Mwanza has also declined dramatically according to sources within Mwanza regional authorities.

Two decades ago, in towns like Mwanza and Shinyanga, this was one of the biggest events that used to attract thousands of people from various places, being clouded with cheerful celebration and traditional dancers from Sukuma community.

It was marked one month after the start of cotton season, which is the main income earner for the majority of people across the lake zone regions.

After selling their crops at better prices offered by the cooperative societies in those days - under the close monitoring of government - farmers would cheerfully attend

this special day anywhere at any cost to celebrate the fruits of their hoes and land.

John Manoni, 60, a farmer from Kisesa who attended the Nane Nane show in Mwanza this week, believes that the presence of active cooperative societies in those days as well as the commitment of the government to improve agriculture, boosted the morale of farmers to participate in this day.

If the government is fully committed in boosting agriculture said Manoni, it should ensure that the event is well organised and publicised three-month before its commencement.

It should also strive to enable farmers exchange knowledge and production technology among them apart from being an opportunity to establish business contacts for their produce.