



2026 Annual Letter from the Director General

Happy New Year to you all, our Stakeholders! I hope you celebrated the end of 2025 and the start of 2026 safely and in good health with your loved ones. I would like to share the New Year's message from the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) with you all. Firstly, allow me to congratulate our staff, partners, clients, and other stakeholders on the various achievements we have attained together during the year 2025. Indeed, last year I made 19 field trips and received firsthand feedback from staff and partners who are working extremely hard with dedication to advance our goals for humanity. Through these visits, I became exceedingly confident and fulfilled that NARO continues to contribute to national and regional development as a science leader with enormous future prospects and responsibility to innovate for sustainable agricultural transformation.

For NARO, 2025 can be described as a year of global, regional, national, and institutional transformation driven by challenges of immense proportions. Most importantly, the research funding landscape came face-to-face with real geopolitical risks as a result of policy changes by some of those we had partnered with for decades in advancing science. The sudden and unpredictable funding cuts, together with the closure of some global collaborative research programs by these partners, have had a major impact on research collaborations, tested the stability of our national research system, and presented us with a wealth of lessons for the future. Gladly,

with the support of the Government of Uganda and unwavering partners, NARO has adjusted to this situation and continues to ascend on the path that serves mankind. Particularly, we reformed our financial mobilization and management strategies in addition to prioritizing high-impact projects.

Despite the funding headwinds, we managed to maintain stable operations, increase the quality and quantity of research outputs, and steadily undertake transformational research and upscaling activities. To this we are grateful to various development partners notably the Gates Foundation, Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the World Food Program (WFP), the World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Centers, Jiangsu Academy of Agricultural Sciences (JAAS), AC Planta of Tokyo, Faeger Company Ltd, Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (SNV Netherlands Development Organisation), Korea Programme on International Agriculture (KOPIA), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Uganda Revenue Authority, Uganda National Bureau of Standards, Pearl Bank Uganda (formerly PostBank Uganda), Regional University Forum for Capacity Building in Africa (RUFORUM), the media, local and international Universities (such as Makerere University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Busitema University, Bugema University, Uganda Martyrs University, Uganda Christian University, Massey University in New Zealand, University

of Copenhagen, Michigan State University, Kagoshima University, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, among others), and many more allies in social transformation.

Furthermore, some of our regional and international partners put off time from their busy schedules in 2025 to visit with NARO and share their experiences with us in the spirit of shared learning for continuous improvement. These, among many, included the Director General of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), the Director General of FAO, the Ambassador of Japan, the Ambassador of France, the European Union (EU) Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to Uganda, the leadership of Gates AgOne Program, the Divisional Director of the World Bank, the Regional Director of the World Bank, Members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of the Senate of the Republic of Kenya, and Delegations from various Governments around the world (e.g., South Korea, the People's Republic of China, the Arab Republic of Egypt, South Sudan, and Eritrea, among others). Additionally, various notable national leaders and stakeholders visited with us in 2025, and these include the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, the National Resources Sector Audit Committee, the Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit, the Permanent Secretary and staff of the Ministry of Public Service, the Permanent Secretary and Secretary to the Treasury (PSST), the National Drug Authority, and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology, among others.

We are grateful that our partners have appreciated the Institutional changes we undertook in 2025 to serve the stakeholders better. Importantly, we seamlessly moved and settled the National Banana Research Program (NBRP) from the NARO National Agricultural Research Laboratories (NARO NARL) to the NARO National Crops Resources Research Institute (NARO NaCRRI). We subsequently had it twinned with the research programs of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) to create immense opportunities for our farmers in the

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region and beyond. Likewise, NARO is undertaking all efforts possible to emerge NARO NARL as a Regional Center for Agricultural Laboratories and Biosciences and set it on the path to drive agro-industrialization, one of the four anchor growth pillars of the fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV). The center will focus on research, services, and training. To further harness the benefits of the twinning strategy with partners, the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) and International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) relocated their country offices to NARO.

To ensure that NARO's business is aligned to the fourth National Development Plan, we launched the NARO Strategic Plan 2025/26–2029/30. The goal of the plan is to increase agricultural productivity and product competitiveness for

agro-industrialization and sustainable socio-economic growth. The plan prioritizes value addition as one of the key drivers of double-digit economic growth. At the end of the five years of this strategic plan, NARO is expected to achieve five strategic results, namely increased availability of resilient and superior technologies, innovations,

and management practices for agricultural productivity and production; increased availability of improved harvest, post-harvest handling, and storage technologies and innovations; increased availability and diversity of value-added products and services for industry and markets; increased adoption of agricultural technologies and innovations; and improved capacity, management, and coordination of agricultural research.

Further, in line with continuous improvement of service delivery, in 2025, NARO started actualizing the establishment of the National Sugar Research Institute in compliance with Uganda's Sugar Act, 2020 (Act 13 of 2020). This Institute has since received the founder staff as well as funding from the Government of Uganda with the aim of emerging it as a Center of Excellence for sugar research. Importantly, the Government of Uganda also

inaugurated the Uganda Sugar Industry Stakeholders Council, with NARO's Deputy Director General (Research) representing the agricultural sector.

The internal repositioning also saw NARO establish the National Dairy Center of Excellence. The Center will serve to integrate and advance excellence in dairy science research, education, and training to all stakeholders with the aim of enhancing the efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainability of the dairy sector. It will be a hub to drive innovation, collaboration, and skill development within the dairy industry to foster sustainability, profitability, and growth in line with the National Development Plan IV and other national commitments. In addition, because NARO's National Coffee Research Institute (NaCORI) has proven itself to be a hub of innovation and a catalyst for the growth and development of the cocoa industry, NARO established the Cocoa Research Program. The elevation of Cocoa is aimed at accelerating innovations to increase the production, productivity, export revenues, and industrial development in the region.

Along the lane of governance, last year, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda and his Cabinet approved a new Governing Council for NARO. The 6th Council was inaugurated by the Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries with a message to reform the governance frameworks of the Institution and ensure that NARO undertakes deep research in modern technologies that drive agriculture. Following its inauguration, the Governing Council further appointed the Advisory Committees for all Institutes. These Committees are purposely constituted to oversee how our Institutes are connecting research with universities, industry, and society.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that NARO has a technology commercialization arm called NARO Holdings Limited (NHL), which complements the private sector route of technology transfer. Last year, a new Board of Directors was inaugurated to superintend over the affairs of NHL. The technology markets received the new Board with great optimism, signaling confidence in NHL as it seeks to revitalize and broaden the routes to serve the clients better. On the other hand, NARO licensed 6 more seed companies in 2025 and worked harder through NHL and

Institutes to ensure that the cumulative 32 licensed seed companies received adequate early generation seed of the over 100 NARO varieties licensed for commercialization. This to some extent increased the supply of improved varieties in the country and beyond.

I am also happy to inform you that NARO National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRRI) marked 75 years of existence and impact. We thank the partners and stakeholders at large who ensured that this Institute's achievements since its inception were concisely captured in the **NaCRRRI@75 Legacy Book** and in all the ostentatious presentations delivered at the event to commemorate the 75th Anniversary in November. In a special way we are grateful to the government and people of the United Kingdom for supporting the establishment of NaCRRRI and continued research partnerships and technical capacity development initiatives. Those who made financial and non-financial contributions to the commemorative events are much appreciated. Importantly, we wish to inform you that in 2026, the NARO National Fisheries Resources Research Institute and the NARO Mbarara Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institute will celebrate their 80th and 100th anniversaries, respectively. We will invite you to the testimonies of how we have impacted societies through these two service delivery points within the realms of their mandates.

Being the national leader we are, I also inform you that NARO hosted the 2025 World Food Day national celebrations under the theme **"Hand in Hand for Better Foods and a Better Future."** The events attracted several key national and international stakeholders, including policymakers, researchers, farmers, students, and agripreneurs, to mention BUT a few. The event presented a great opportunity for stakeholders to share, learn, and appreciate the latest developments and progress made toward addressing challenges around food security, nutrition security, and economic security. During the event, eight newly released crop varieties by NARO were launched i.e., these were varieties for Banana (**NAROban 6**), Potatoes (**NAROPOT 7,8,9 & 10**), and Millet (**3 varieties of Foxtail**). We continue ensuring that the farmer has the varieties that are best for their markets, soils, and the climate. While doing

this, we also recognized the scientists / plant breeders who have developed products that have performed exceedingly well in the market and industry in the past year. In addition to recognizing captains of success, NARO scientists published a notable paper in the *Journal of Natural History* describing the newly identified parasitoid named *Encarsia agona Otim & Polaszek* (partly named after the former Director General of NARO) for biological control of parasites that affect cassava.

Still, NARO ensured that Uganda successfully hosted the 2025 African Potato Conference under the theme “*Fostering Climate-Smart Cropping Systems for Sustainable Potato and Sweet Potato Value Chains.*” A major outcome of the conference was the joint communiqué outlining clear areas of focus and concrete actions to be implemented by governments, regional bodies, and institutions across Africa. These include: Regional Coordination and Knowledge Sharing; Innovation and Research Commercialization; Investment and Infrastructure; and Nutrition, Youth, and Community Empowerment. This came on the heels of NARO hosting 4 farm clinics in 2025, which saw outreach to over 70,000 farmers and various value chain actors. Building on the success of the past conferences and as part of the NARO-Universities conference series, we are thrilled to announce the 13th International Working Conference on Stored Product Protection (IWCSPP), which will take place from 19th to 23rd October 2026, in Uganda. IWCSPP is held every four years and is the most important multi-stakeholder international forum on all aspects of stored product protection. The 13th IWCSPP will be hosted by NARO and Makerere University under the theme “*Advancing research, technology, and innovations in stored product protection for sustainable trade, food, and nutrition security.*”

Looking forward, the year 2026 will be a defining year for NARO because of the actions lined up for execution within its strategic vision. We have collectively decided to ensure that livestock farmers have unlimited access to the anti-tick vaccine, Aflasafe (against aflatoxins), and seedlings for key priority crops. We will also ensure that



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the 40 MSc, 23 PhD scholars, and 72 Competitive Research Grantees awarded by NARO under the Uganda Climate Smart Agricultural Transformation Project undertake their research without encumbrance and that every output serves the farmer. We promise to accelerate the research pipelines, roll out the products, and link them with local and international manufacturing capacity.

As we plan to deliver on our promises, we understand that we need to invest in Artificial Intelligence and risk management, deepen it, and continue making it an integral part of our operations in the new year. Much as the AI revolution is unstoppable and makes our operations efficient, its estimated impact on agricultural research systems, human resources, and institutional values dictates that NARO must be at the forefront, and so we will. However, we can only do this with you standing side by side with us. Therefore, as we look forward to 2026, we are energized by the promise of even greater collaboration with all of you as we leverage our greatest strength, which is the unity in partnership, like never before.

NARO Innovates for Sustainable Agricultural Transformation.

For God and My Country.

Dr. Yona Baguma

DIRECTOR GENERAL

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