

A season of rain, floods and landslides

In the last four or so months we have had unusually heavy rains, resulting in landslides and floods. At the time of writing this column some 27 dead bodies have been excavated from the mud in Bududa District where a disastrous landslide occurred and the search for more bodies is ongoing.

In Bundibujjo District a landslide and floods have caused more deaths. In other parts of Uganda, rivers have burst their boundaries and caused untold damage, killing people and destroying crops and buildings. Runoff water has created large channels in rural roads, making it difficult for farmers to transport their produce to markets.

Fighting weeds is harder in the current rains whether one uses a hand hoe or herbicides. Harvested crops like coffee, beans, and maize, which are normally dried under the sun, cannot be spread outside to dry when it is raining most of the time.

We cannot rule out the possibility that the unpredictable and extreme weather patterns such as the prolonged droughts we suffered in the recent years and the unusual rainfall and floods that we are experiencing now are a feature of climate change.

Farmers must worry about the likelihood of massive soil erosion in their gardens. We need rain for successful growth of crops but we must put safeguards to prevent water from taking away soil from our gardens.

Mindless cultivation to remove weeds may loosen the soil and facilitate erosion by running water if the garden is located on a slope.

If you see large bare stones in your garden it could be an indication that you have lost the topsoil from which crops receive their nutrients. The farmers who cover the soil surface with grass or other organic material and plant fodder grass along terraces across their gardens are less likely to experience soil erosion.

Slashing weeds instead of using the hoe to remove them is more protective during the rainy season because the green cover holds the soil in place and prevents rain drops from directly hitting the soil surface. The roots of the weeds and crops act like nails to hold the soil together.