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Tanzania Goes for Climate Smart Agriculture

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The government is implementing the Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) initiative that will improve land and water management, with experts urging its speeding up to enable farmers shift from traditional to improved mode of farming.

The CSA initiative is looking at best practices and technologies applicable to the country by establishing efficient and effective mechanisms to address climate change adaptation and mitigation to achieve sustainable agricultural development in Tanzania.

The initiative also looks at agriculture that sustainably increases productivity and income (profitability), raises the ability to adapt and build resilience against climate change and enhance food and nutrition security while achieving mitigation co-benefits in line with national development priorities.

Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Development's senior officer Theresia Massoy said that urgent action was need to build resilience to climate impacts by improving agriculture that sustainably increases productivity and income, increases the ability to adapt and build resilience to Climate Change and enhances food and nutrition security while achieving mitigation.

"Currently, the country faces amplified water stress which calls for need to improve water management practices, improve irrigation, planting pits and basins as well as water harvesting, storage and mulching.

"The agriculture land and water management government policy should address water availability and climate when considering irrigation plans," she said.

Adding that, there was need to make farmers aware of the need to adopt water harvesting means, water storage investments and adoption by smallholder farmers system of rice intensification (SRI).

"CSA initiative is aimed at maintaining ecosystems services by providing farmers with essential services, including clean air, water, food and materials," she said.

She said that the goal is to use the agricultural land and water according to its suitability and conserve it with respect to its needs, ensuring sustainable livelihoods and to enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change in agriculture.

Another goal is to establish efficient and effective mechanisms to address climate change adaptation and mitigation to achieve sustainable agricultural development.

However, Climate Action Network (CAN) Tanzania executive director Sixbert Mwanga said that despite governments' ambitious plans they were yet to be integrated to farmers.

"A majority of our farmers still depend on rain fed agriculture which is no longer applicable due to the current weather variations caused by climate change," he said.

According to him, the government should come up with a strategy that looks at mechanisms that will empower farmers to stop dependency on rain-fed agriculture.

Explaining further, he said that the country's semi-arid areas still depend on rainfall to practice agriculture while there are so many options including water flowing which the country still lacks mechanism to harvest.

Stressing on that, he said that after the rainy season, potential areas like Kongwa, Mpwapwa and Kondoa have water flows which if it were to be harvested it could have helped farmers to use have water even during dry spells, but this has not been being done due to lack of technical know-how.

There are initiatives like charco dam which the government needs to invest in and make the public aware because it is a simple method of capturing running water by both pastoralists and farmers especially in semi-arid areas.

Meanwhile, he said that countries like Burkina Faso, Mali and even Kenya have adapted technologies that can address drought known as the Zai pit where farmers come up with holes like pits in potential areas identified for planting their crops so that when the rain comes, water is not allowed to flow out but it is retained there to enable plants grow.

He noted that the country is yet to adapt this practice and while it is still in the process of doing so, it should integrate farmers by providing them with weather updates to make them aware of when to farm or not to farm.

According to him, it was important because if the country experienced dry spells of up to 30 days before farming it was likely the farmers would lose a majority of crops before they grew further.

For his part, a consultant with the Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa (OFAB), Dr Nicholas Nyange said climate change has brought about many adverse effects including drought and now armyworms which destroy crops and cause farmers to incur huge losses.

"Researchers are currently on the ground looking for solutions aimed at killing the armyworms," he said.

According to him, researchers from Tanzania, the region and other parts of the world are collaborating together to find quick solution as the fall armyworms attack all the leaves, and the stem is left with no support to produce food for the crop to grow.

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Marc Evans

A very worthy program. It must be noted though that the apparent focus is on plants and water rather than soil. The world's vegetation is 50 gigatons of carbon. The world's soils hold 150 gigatons of carbon, largely in the top few meters of it. Good farming is using decomposed organic matter to feed the soil food web, which then feeds the plants' roots and traps carbon. Good soil management is creating fungal associations (mycorrhizae) in the topsoil that gives true drought resistance using all of a region's vegetative "waste", far more than is achieved by simply choosing tougher plant types (or worse, genetically modifying plants to fit an ecological niche that simply needed better soil management).

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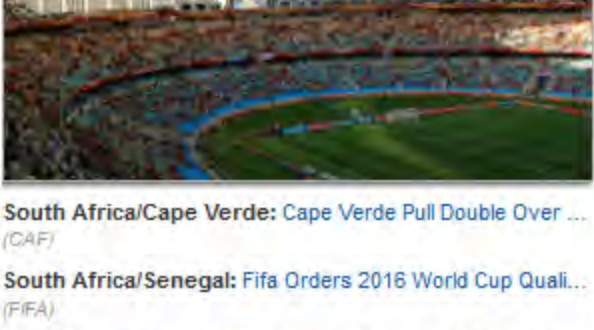
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