

Climate Change threatens millions in Tanzania

By SYLIVESTER DOMASA

Climate change-induced rainfall patterns translated into less frequent but heavier rains had tweaked production of maize, rice and sorghum, staple foods in Shinyanga and Dodoma.

With a much worse situation emerging from October, according to the World Food Programme (WFP) statement, some families are going for weeks without food and therefore resort to eating vegetables and drinking water that is neither clean nor safe.

Right to food is not directly provided by the United Republic of Tanzania Constitution of 1977. However article 9 (f) of the constitution imports the provision of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which article 25 (1) states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food."

The UDHR article bids State authorities; Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Health to execute their duties in line with the declaration.

Besides, the Food and Nutrition Policy of 1992 and the Food Security law No 10 of 1991 which requires the state to ensure food security for all Tanzanians at all times, the requirement is equally not reflected on the ground.

Household food insufficiency is now threatening to tear families apart as most men have run-away after failing to provide food for their families. Most women and children have no option to stay home and single-handedly take care of the households.

Young people have moved to urban areas to look for most elusive jobs - a few being engaged in domestic work but not earning enough to feed themselves and their dependants.

In Shinyanga

Crop production in this diamond-rich region has sharply dropped mainly owing to El Niño and the impact of youth migration to urban areas and HIV and AIDs.

Factors such as a shortage of arable land, poor use of biotechnology and rising levels of unemployment have also aggravated the situation, with an estimated 70 per cent of the population living in poverty.

Shinyanga Regional Agricultural Officer Wilson Mng'ong'o says: "the actual food demand for this year is 503,561 tonnes" but the food available is lowly 283,354 tonnes.

According to unofficial estimates, over a million residents of Shinyanga Region will face severe food shortage, worse to have happened in decades-long.

Magreth Ruhende, a 35-year old mother of six from Ng'wamkanga village in Shinyanga rural district is struggling to take care of her family, after her husband of 15 years disappeared some three years ago.

She says she recorded the highest crop yields on her three-and-half fields. "But then my husband sold nearly all the food in the house and went into hiding. He came back after three months when things had started turning bad ... he, then vanished again and has not returned ever since."

As a result, the woman has been forced to venture into the production of soda-ash, a business employing nearly half the population of women and children in the district.

It takes more than 10 hours every passing day filtering soda-ash. On a good day, one can make up to 200 litres equivalent to 70 pieces of dried soda-ash bars. Each bar is sold between 250/- and 300/- wholesale.

The ever-worsening food shortage and lack of employment have subjected more people to filter soda-ash in exchange for food, according to local leaders.

"Children are also becoming vulnerable of child labour. They need to assist in the work to earn money for school-related needs and food," says Nshishinulu Village Executive Officer William Mnyashi, with only 20 of the 480 households are food secure.

"Bad weather has seriously disrupted agricultural production, leading to severe food shortages," Shinyanga Region Administrative Secretary (RAS) Albert Msovera acknowledged in a recent interview.

But the government authorities in Shinyanga Region argue that shortage of food is most seriously felt among households who sold all the food they harvested the previous season.

Households heavily dependent on agriculture to earn income are especially highly vulnerable, Mr Denis Mpagaze poverty issue analyst at St Augustine University of Tanzania SAUT said.

The rise in the number of children currently on streets is in part a side-effect of food shortages just as are early child marriages and child pregnancies.

Official figures show, that the number of female-headed households in Shinyanga Region has increased from 27 per cent to 30 per cent in the last five years.

In Dodoma

Bahi, one of the seven districts in Dodoma Region, boasts a number of irrigation schemes. But it has been experienced consecutive years of drought-induced food shortages.

Jovin Bararata is a Bahi District agricultural officer, He says: “We’re seeing the impact of climate on food security,” that the size of the land cultivated had peaked in 2011, and food production has dropped appreciably over the period of six years.

In 2015, Bahi District requested 7,000 tonnes of food aid but received only 300 tonnes. There was hope for a bumper harvest this season. Bararata says but erratic rains disrupted production, with some households now having no food and some at serious risk of food scarcity.

Facing the crisis

Tanzania is already experiencing the adverse impact of climate change with Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Minister Dr Charles Tizeba saying: “Climate change has become a bigger challenge suppressing and distorting efforts to improve productivity in the agricultural sector and subsequently affecting national food security and development initiatives.” He made the remarks recently when launching the national Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) guidelines.

The 2015-2025 plan seeks to increase productivity and boost climate resilience in agriculture in Tanzania alongside putting greenhouse gas emissions in check.

Prof Amos Majule, a climate change expert at the University of Dar es Salaam, faults the new plan for what he calls excluding or ignoring the ever ballooning population. It is very common in Shinyanga and other part of the country to come across a 25-years-old unemployed man already with three children.

The professor says, the plan may be good but it is likely to become just another “white elephant” for missing out on parliamentary budget support.

He explains that from the 1970s through the 1990s there was little impact of climate change, many households had big numbers of children each, yet produced enough food for everyone. Today, nearly 80 per cent of the country’s population depends on climate-sensitive rain fed agriculture as the major source of livelihood.

“I feel that there is a serious lack of coordination between stakeholders. The farmers must be educated more on the impact of climate change, and this should go hand in hand with controlling population growth,” said Professor Majule.

The professor further noted that regions such as Shinyanga need to control their livestock herds by selling some of the stock to buy food. He says it is time that farmers go for more scientific approved technology including seeds to improve crop yields.

Prof Majule comments drew similar sentiments from National Network of Farmers Groups in Tanzania (MVIWATA) Chairperson Veronica Sophu.

The farmer, based in Mbarali in Tanzania's southern region of Mbeya, said "confusion" between the government and farmers is "we need tractors to improve production while farmers need water (rain), arable land and agro inputs.

"It is worthy asking how our ancestors ensured that they produced enough food long before the advent of modern day development," she said. She added that the government should have bought all the food at the market price and deploy to hunger-stricken regions.

On meeting the country's Development Vision 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goal Two, the MVIWATA official said there was a need for smallholder farmers to shift from subsistence to modern farming.

Denise Wolter, a commercial agriculture expert, wondered why Tanzania is being a potential food exporter but still imports food. She said, to transform agriculture, "the business environment in general agriculture in particular must undergo intensive improvement and modernization.

The experts said improving agricultural land and water management would ensure food security and promote key social and economic development in Tanzania. Likewise, they added, it would ensure availability of raw materials and a food secure workforce for emerging industries.

Thanks to countrywide coverage of passable road networks and the revival of railway networks. Infrastructure is becoming key to the development of the agriculture sector. In Central and East Asia as well as Latin America, which were both severely hit by extreme hunger adopted best agricultural practices and technologies. It led to a fundamental increase in productivity, rural income generation and subsequently contributed remarkable poverty reduction.

ENDs/....

The investigation of this article was conducted between June and December 2017. It has not been updated and can be subject to changes.