Govt scaling up efforts to ensure sustainable food security - official

By Emmanuel Nitenganya

RWANDA, YESTERDAY, joined the rest of the world in marking the World Food Day. The occasion came at a time the Government was stepping up efforts to mitigate impacts of climate change, an official said.

Specifically, efforts are designed to prevent crop failure and possible loss of life, according to Dr Charles Murekezi, the director of Agriculture Development at the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI).

This year's World Food Day was celebrated under the theme: "Climate is changing, Food and agriculture must too."

At the national level, the day was marked in Gashaini Sector, Huye District.

Murekezi said the theme for this year's World Food Day resonated with "what we are seeing and, therefore, we need to change our agriculture." He said the government would strengthen the resilience of smallholder farmers to guarantee food security.

Murekezi said such efforts would help countries globally to end hunger. Global population is expected to hit 9.7 billion by 2050 and to feed them agriculture and food systems will need to adapt to adverse effects of climate change, experts say.

Rwanda has in recent times experienced prolonged droughts. In the Eastern Province, spanning the last two planting seasons, causing crop failure and loss of some 20,000 ews in season 2016/17 alone, according to the minister.

The drought is the worst to hit the country in 60 years, according to the government.

In an interview with The New Times on Wednesday, Murekezi said that Rwanda has experienced an increase in temperatures, delayed rains and droughts as well as floods and landslides that have adversely claimed lives of the people and affected crop productivity.

In the recent past, some 28,000 households have been affected by drought in Eastern Province, while many others were ravaged by landslides mainly in Northern Province’s Gakenke District. The government extended food support to households that faced acute food shortages, as well as some 160 tonnes of seeds to grow this year.

Murekezi said there are several measures the government has taken to help tackle climate change, including scaling up irrigation, especially in Eastern Province.

So far, Murekezi said, there are approximately 45,000 hectares of irrigated hectares in the country.

"We have to scale up interventions in those programmes and to ensure that farmers adopt irrigation, whether under schemes run by the government or small-scale irrigation projects that government subsidizes through irrigation equipment for rainwater harvesting," he said.

He said that 13 valley dams have so far been constructed in Eastern Province to address the issue of lack of water especially for cows.

The official also said the government encouraged cattle keepers to reduce dependence on natural pasture to feed their cattle by growing fodder and store it for use during dry spells.

Government is also investing in a scheme to grow nutritious grass that increases milk production while farmers have been advised to raise manageable cows for better productivity, he added.

Murekezi said the government will continue to re-stock the national strategic food reserve to be used to extend food relief to people faced with food shortages in the future.

He also cited continued effort to find long-term solutions including terracing the country’s hills to control soil erosion and planting trees and promoting agro-forestry across the country.

Agriculture contributes a third of Rwanda’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and by far remains the main source of livelihoods in rural areas, especially for women.

About 70 per cent of the total Rwandan population is engaged in agriculture with the sector meeting up to 90 per cent of the national food needs, according to Murekezi, who added that the sector also generates more than 50 per cent of the country’s export revenues.

Government forecasts agriculture to grow by 8.5 per cent per year by 2018 up from the current 5.5 per cent.

Citizens living under primary agriculture are expected to reduce from 34 per cent to 25 per cent with government hoping to scale up agro-processing, while exports are also expected to increase from 8.2 per cent to 28 per cent per annum and imports maintained at 17 per cent.

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EALA pushes for chapter offices in partner states

By James Karuhanga

THE East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) has passed a resolution calling for the setting up of chapter offices in each East African Community partner state to enable better co-ordination, improved linkages and consolidation of processes of the assembly.

Passed during a session in Zanzibar on Wednesday, the resolution says this would also ensure increased access by citizens of the six partner states and other critical stakeholders to the assembly.

The motion, moved by MP Abubakar Zein (Kenya), points to the need to enhance interaction between the assembly and national institutions, particularly parliaments.

Martin Ngoga, one of Rwanda’s representatives to the regional assembly, told The New Times that the idea was proposed earlier and such offices would help take EALA closer to the people.

"The offices would help in coordinating different activities we undertake in partner states and serve as points where citizens would engage with EALA members on different matters,” said Ngoga.

Earlier, during debate, MP Nsura Tiperu (Uganda) said there was no reason, as the current assembly is to leave behind a strong institution for new members who will be joining in June next year when the current term wraps up its five-year mandate.

Tiperu said: "The assembly needs to be proactive and needs to come up with appropriate proposals and standards required to enable it to scale its services and to handle matters more effectively and efficiently.”

MP Dora Byamukana (Uganda) said the majority of the Ministries in charge of EAC affairs were no longer staffed due to the lack of full implementation of the EAC Treaty and all had to be reduced even at the Community level.

MP Abdallah Navinya (Tanzania) said that due to the current lack of representation of both the National and Regional Assemblies in the Parliament, there were currently no offices set aside for EALA.

At the moment, members of EALA coordinate activities through their respective Chapters, which have loose structures.

Some chapters, including Rwanda’s, have offices in their respective countries but members said this needed to be formally replicated across the bloc and the offices facilitated to have tangible impact.

Each member state is represented by nine members.

Meanwhile, Odda Gasiririza, the former Minister for Gender and Family Promotion, said he was yesterday sworn in as a new member of EALA, having been elected the previous day by Rwandan national parliamentarians to replace Christopher Bavuzima, who was in June appointed EAC deputy secretary general in charge of finance and administration.

Bavuzima had in the same year during the assembly’s session in Zanzibar in September 2016, was replaced by Jean Marie Muhinja, who replaces Hafsa Masuji, who was appointed in the Burundian capital of Bujumbura in July at EALA.
Govt scaling up efforts to ensure sustainable food security — official

By Emmanuel Ntirenganya

Rwanda, yesterday, joined the rest of the world in marking the World Food Day. The occasion came at a time the government was stepping up efforts to mitigate impacts of climate change, an official said.

Specifically, efforts are designed to prevent crop failure and possible loss of life, according to Dr Charles Murukuri, the director of Agriculture Development at the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI).

This year’s World Food Day was celebrated under the theme “Climate is changing. Food and agriculture must too.”

At the national level, the day was marked in Gashumfu Sector, Musanze District.

Murukuri said the theme for this year’s World Food Day was estimated with “what we are seeing and, therefore, we need to change our agriculture.”

He said the government would strengthen the resilience of smallholder farmers to guarantee food security.

Murukuri said such efforts would help countries globally to end hunger. Global population is expected to hit 9.6 billion by 2050, and to feed them, agriculture and food systems will need to adapt to adverse effects of climate change, experts say.

Rwanda has in recent times experienced prolonged droughts, mainly in the Eastern Province, spanning the last two planting seasons, causing crop failure and loss of accessing economic value in season 2016-17 alone, according to the minister.

The drought is the worst to hit the country in 60 years, according to the government.

In an interview with The New Times on Wednesday, Murukuri said that Rwanda has experienced an increase in temperatures, delays in rains and droughts as well as floods and landslides that have adversely claimed lives of the people and affected crop productivity.

In the recent past, some 18,000 households have been affected by drought in Eastern Province, while many others were ravaged by landslides mainly in Northwestern Province’s Gitarama District.

The government extended food support to households that faced acute food shortages, as well as some 160 tonnes of seeds to grow this year.

Murukuri said there are several measures the government has taken to help tackle climate change, including scaling up irrigation, especially in Eastern Province.

So far, Murukuri said, there are about 45,000 hectares of irrigated areas in the country.

“We have to scale up interventions in those programmes and to ensure that farmers, particularly in Eastern Province, are in a position where we can have vulnerable stakeholders to the assembly,” Murukuri added.

In the interview, the minister said investors in agriculture should establish different offices and projects that governments need to leave behind a strong infrastructure in the country.

He also cited continued effort to find long-term solutions including terracing the country’s hills to control soil erosion and planting tree and promoting agro-forestry across the country.

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THE EAST African Legislative Assembly (EALA) has passed a resolution calling for the setting up of chapter offices in each East African Community partner state to enhance better co-ordination, improved linkages and officialisation of processes of the assembly.

Passed during a session on Wednesday, the resolution says this would also ensure increased access by citizens of the six partner states and other critical stakeholders to the assembly.

The motion, moved by MP Abubakari Zein (Kenya), also points to the need to enhance interaction between the assembly and national institutions, particularly parliaments.

Martin Ngoga, one of Rwanda’s representatives to the regional assembly, said The New Times that the idea was proposed by the assembly and the current assembly and the need to have such offices would help EALA to closer to people.

“The offices would help in coordinating different activities we undertake in partner states and serve as points where citizens would engage with EALA members on different matters,” said Ngoga.

Meanwhile, Mafura said: “While we are seeing that floods and landslides have been ravaged by landslides mainly in Northwestern Province’s Gitarama District, the government has extended food support to households across the country.”

Evaluations of the last two planting seasons in the country, spanning the last two planting seasons, are expected to hit 9.6 billion by 2050, and to feed them, agriculture and food systems will need to adapt to adverse effects of climate change, experts say.

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