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Global warming: Succour for Lagos farming community

By Michael Siniire Property & Environment Editor



A group of migrant farmers in Lagos is a beneficiary to a flagship initiative by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) aimed at building the growers' adaptive capacity to the effects of climate change.

As a result of changes in weather conditions and rainfall pattern that are induced by the warming of the earth, agricultural activities are increasingly being boxed into a corner, leading to production declines, food prices' rise and purchasing power decreases.

With the spate of desertification in the north, erosion in the east and coastal erosion/ocean surge in the south and coastal areas, Nigeria seems to be having her fair share of the brunt of global warming.

But a lifeline may have come to the Ebonyi Farmers Association at Igbe Community in Ikorodu in Lagos who have been at the receiving end of the precarious weather situation, courtesy of the Local Initiatives for Environmental Sustainability (LIFES), which is being supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Under a project that would span a yet-to-be-specified time-frame, LIFES intends to establish a community-based social network through the association, strengthen indigenous coping techniques and options to climate change and build local capacity for use of viable local adaptation techniques in the Igbe economy.

The scheme commenced penultimate Saturday with a sensitisation workshop that attempted to outline a range of practices, approaches and tools aimed at increasing the resilience and productivity of agricultural production systems, while curbing emissions. It had "Impact of climate change on agriculture: The role of local farmers" as its theme.

Executive Director of the Bread of Life Development Foundation (BLDF), Babatope Babalobi, pointed out that while agriculture is highly exposed to climate change as farming activities directly depend on climatic conditions, agriculture too contributes to the release of greenhouse gases (GHG) to the atmosphere that results in global warming.

Babalobi, who spoke on "The role of community farming in addressing climate change," underscored the need to engage the farming community into a debate and action on adaptation needs that underlines the fact that water is essential for broad based agricultural production and rural development in order to improve food security.

In fact, he clamoured efforts to reduce unsustainable water management and improve the efficiency of agricultural water use.

He said, "Generally, innovative and strategic investment, research and development together with local, national and international cooperation should be promoted to improve agricultural water management by means of participatory irrigation management water harvesting, water-saving/drought-resistant crop varieties, water storage, and dissemination of agricultural best practices."

The activist added that, with the increasing rate of erratic rainfall patterns, drought and desertification, the farmers should access drought-resistant and short duration high-yielding crops, as well as those better suited to new weather conditions. He charged the farmers to develop and test new crop and water management practices that will outperform existing farming practices and accommodate future variability in climate variability.

He went on, "There is a need to radically depart from reliance on rain-fed food production through heavy utilisation of irrigation. There is therefore the need for adequate provision of irrigation and drainage infrastructures which could be regarded as crucial for climate change adaptation. Local farmers need to access resources to improve their ability to using data from field trials to refine the cropping systems model

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Cartoon for the day

and use the model for improved predictions of crop production in relation to locally specific climate, crop variety, soil type and management factors.

"Farmers should improve the delivery of seasonal climate forecasting, to increase agricultural productivity, and access information from equipped weather stations as against the scanty and ill-equipped ones currently available. Accurate weather forecast and predictions will help to prevent weather-related disasters through early warning and effective response/adaptation system."

In another presentation, made by this writer, the farmers were tasked on the need to utilise the numerous avenues of mass media at their disposal to be informed on climate change-related topics. They were also encouraged to share their experiences.

Titled "Impact of climate change on agriculture: The role of the media/communication," the presentation stressed that dialogue could make climate change issues seem less puzzling and, if well informed, it is a cheap and powerful development tool. It described person-to-person communication as probably the most effective form of information dissemination in rural communities and one that could influence decision-making.

Similarly, the paper called on journalists to work more closely with scientists, sharpen their skills and simplify scientific jargon in order to make the subject more relevant and easier to understand. "Every stakeholder – journalists, scientists, NGOs, policy makers, funders and farmers – must pull resources together to fill the information gap," it concluded.

Executive Director of LIFES, Tunde Atere, described agricultural production as a source of food and income for various farming communities in Nigeria in general and Ikorodu in particular, but that climate change impacts the four key dimensions of food security – availability, stability, access and utilisation.

Availability of agricultural products is affected by climate change directly through its impacts on crop yields, crop pests and diseases, and soil fertility and water-holding properties. It is also affected by climate change indirectly through its impacts on economic growth, income distribution, and agricultural demand, he noted.

His words: "Stability of crop yields and food supplies is negatively affected by variable weather conditions. The threats of climate change are more severe in developing countries, especially Nigeria due to lack of adequate awareness, finance, and technology. Many low-income countries are located in tropical and subtropical regions, which are particularly vulnerable to rising temperatures, and in semi-desert zones, which are threatened by decreasing water availability. The overall impact of this may range from altering farm management practices to adoption of new varieties, crops, and animal breeds more appropriate to future climate conditions."

"Agriculture in developing countries must therefore, in sustainable ways, undergo significant transformation in order to meet the related challenges of achieving food security and responding to climate change. Most estimates also indicate that climate change is likely to reduce agricultural productivity, production stability and incomes in some areas that already have high levels of food insecurity."

National Coordinator of LIFES, Kolawole Lawal, disclosed that the forum was informed by the need to inform and build the capacity of the farmers so as avoid an impending climate change-induced catastrophe.

"Climate change brings about low farm productivity and, if care is not taken, their (the farmers') means of livelihood will be destroyed," he warned.

The Baale of Igba Community, Lamidi Awolesi, expressed the community's delight over the LIFES intervention, saying that it had their complete support, and that they would ensure that it succeeded.

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