

AGRICULTURE | Small scale farmers must be supported to help tackle food insecurity, experts say

Experts dig in for small farmers

African governments urged to create policies and improve markets for small scale farmers

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African countries have been asked to tackle market challenges to address perennial food shortages that have left them over-relying on relief aid.

Scientists and government representatives attending the tenth anniversary of the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) in Nairobi noted that without sustainable markets, crop production will remain at its low.

Prof Gordon Conway from the Imperial College, London said farmers would adopt emerging technologies if they were assured that they would get better prices for their produce.

Prof Conway and the African Union Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, Prof Rhoda Tumusiime, said political good will among developing countries for pro-poor agricultural policies was necessary.

"This can be well achieved if governments put the needs of the small scale farmers in mind because they constitute a majority in the agricultural sector within African countries," Prof Conway.

Farmers need the seeds that can withstand harsh climate, particularly drought, and pests and diseases that threaten crop production, he said.

The Professor of International Development added that governments should support technologies that can improve yields per hectare and save farmers from incurring high production costs.

In Africa, farmers can hardly real-



BACKGROUND

Kenya's food security efforts

Maize production: The government intends to put some 500,000 acres under maize in the next four years. This is expected to help realise 60 million bags of maize per year from the project, and open up the high potential maize producing areas to other high value crops.

Seeds: The government is working with private sector to ensure that quality standards in production of seeds are upheld, according to Deputy President's advisor on food security James Nyoro.

ise one tonne of produce per hectare, while in developed countries, the

AATF executive director Denis Kyetere (centre) and Syngenta Foundation's head of agricultural partnerships Ian Baker (left) sign an agreement. Looking on is Professor Gordon Conway from the Imperial College, London.

PHOEBE OKALL | NATION

average production per hectare is 11 tonnes, according to the professor.

"Such a worrying trend can change with biotechnology, as it offers better solutions to pests and diseases," he said, citing the ban on genetically modified food imports by the Kenyan government as a blow to efforts to food production.

The AATF executive director, Dr Denis Kyetere, said that policies that support agriculture were still not strong in Africa, slowing food production in the continent.

Dr Kyetere said investment in agriculture would increase if governments created better policies that link farmers to appropriate markets.

Agriculture should be viewed as a business and farmers should be certain on where and how much their produce can fetch, he added.

"If there is no market, production will be affected. Policies of financing agriculture must be in place to spur the agriculture sector and empower the small scale farmers," he said.

A government senior advisor on food security Mr James Nyoro said the government intends to put some 500,000 acres under maize in the next four years to increase Kenya's reserves of the staple food.

Mr Nyoro said the government expected to realise 60 million bags of maize per year from the project, which he said would help open up the high potential maize producing areas to other high value crops.

The government was implementing measures to protect farmers from fake seeds by working with the private sector to uphold quality standards, he added.