

Developed countries must take the lead in saving the planet

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Climate change has become a major challenge for development cooperation because it jeopardizes the economic and social development of developing countries and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, particularly Goal number 1.

As the United Nations climate conference to be held in Copenhagen in December draws near, Tanzania's President Jakaya Kikwete has challenged the Earth's major polluters, the rich nations, to act.

Opening the 55th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference recently in the northern tourist town of Arusha, Kikwete said developed countries must take the lead in saving the planet from the effects of climate change.

"Unfortunately the poor developing countries don't have the technology, skills and resources to reduce the damage caused by climate change and to act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions", the president said. "Developed countries, which are the major polluters, must assist us to mitigate climate change effects."

Turning to the Commonwealth parliamentarians, he said they could play a pivotal role by encouraging their governments to adopt environment friendly policies both within their countries and in the global arena.

The president insisted on the need to cut the gases blamed for changing the climate. "For a clean and safe planet we must remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, reduce the current emissions levels and prevent new emissions from happening," he said.

President Kikwete acknowledged that his country is already a victim of climate change, giving a assortment of incidents said to be caused by global warming.

He cited the severe drought that is threatening Tanzania's food security and its wildlife-based tourism industry, the deaths of hundreds of thousands of livestock, particularly in the northern regions, and the melting of snow at the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa.

His appeal coincided with a report by the International Institute for Environment and Development which said that global warming could cut Tanzania's gross domestic product by one per cent by the year 2030.

President Kikwete wants the polluters the rich nations to clean up the smoke. But are the big sharks ready to reduce their gigantic industrial production and eventually cut their profit boundaries?

Researchers found that the effects of climate change in Tanzania could have devastating consequences for the nation's entire economic system, warning sub-Saharan Africa that it must now start adapting its agricultural sector to expected climate shifts or risk a severe economic crisis in the future.

Also they have estimated that by the year 2085 Tanzania could see a drop of up to 68 percent in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) due to the effects of climate change on its agricultural sector.

The government of Tanzania must quickly develop a nuanced and well thought out plan to prepare its agricultural sector for the changing climate.

The challenge facing the region's governments is that no blanket solution can be provided to the problem, as each area may see different effects from the climate, affecting the crops differently.

The researchers are suggesting a combination of credit, insurance, and training packages to be offered to the region's farmers, as well as an adaptation within the agricultural supply chain in order to adjust for the coming changes.

The economies of most countries in this region not just eastern African itself but southern Africa in general are underpinned by agriculture, which means that the agricultural sector is quite key and it is quite strategic for other countries to look at the findings for Tanzania and try to establish some of the similarities that the agricultural and economic systems have got with the Tanzanian economy.

The economic models suggested that the economic toll may be relatively modest before the year 2030, giving the region's governments a short time window to begin preparing for the climate-induced economic onslaught.

Not only economic models but changing policies to go inline with moves to address climate change will put a strain on the already cash strapped nation, as there is no other alternative but to change the policies to adapt to the changing climate.

Already the government is mobilizing different programmes that will help the country's farmers adapt to climate change, which will cost money that would have otherwise gone into other development projects.

KILIMO Kwanza' is a newly envisaged initiative aimed at spearheading government efforts to bringing about agriculture revolution in Tanzania.

The initiative was launched by President Jakaya Kikwete early August this year in Dodoma region. At the launching of the initiative the president explicitly stated:

“We have decided to embark on ‘Kilimo Kwanza’ as a national strategy to spearhead a green revolution in our country, and this initiative entails both policies and strategies which are geared not only to utilize available agricultural opportunities but also to confronting critical challenges facing the sector.”

The Deputy Minister for Livestock Development and Fisheries, Dr James Wanyanacha, reaffirmed the need for the government in collaboration with key partners to put in place viable mechanism that will lead to the building of a robust agricultural sector. “We don’t want this to be rhetoric or simply an empty slogan.

Implementation of the initiative will be guided by 10 pillars which include political will to push for agricultural transformation, enhanced financing for agriculture, institutional reorganization and management of agriculture and paradigm shift to strategic agricultural production.

Other pillars are land availability for agriculture, incentives to stimulate investments in agriculture, industrialization for agricultural transformation, science, technology and human resources as well as infrastructure development to support the transformation of the agricultural sector.

With a population of about 40 million people, Tanzania is also approximated to have 29 million acres of land suitable for irrigation schemes but only one per cent of it, which is equivalent to 214,000 acres, is on practical use.

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