

Rwanda: Africa Urged to Scale Up Agro Investments

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KIGALI, Rwanda, NOVEMBER 05, 2013 (THE NEW TIMES) -- Agricultural experts from around the world have called for the scaling up agro investments on the African continent. The experts made the call yesterday during an Information and communications technology (ICT) for agricultural summit taking place in Kigali. It's held under the theme, "The Digital Springboard for Inclusive Agriculture."

According to agro scientists, a scale up in agro technology and capacity building in market research and accessibility by farmers will double productivity in agriculture on the African continent especially Rwanda where almost 80 per cent of the population depend on agriculture.

"Up scaling from infrastructure investments within the sector to narrowing down to real practical problems affecting rural farmers such as limited access to market information, climate, pests and diseases control mechanisms, modern breeds of crops and how to use time and space is what should make a difference at the end of this conference," Michael Hailu, the Director for Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CAT) said during a media briefing in Kigali.

According to Hailu, agriculture faces new challenges such as fake agro inputs, limited agro research information and lack of technological capacity to transform agriculture on the African continent to a more commercial profitable macro economic activity.

This has kept most African farmers at a subsistence level crippling them from participating in the international markets.

"This conference must act as a springboard for all inclusive agriculture where farmers, researchers and policy makers must harness solutions to the enormous challenges agriculture faces as an industry," Hailu said.

In 2003, 53 African Heads of State agreed to allocate at least 10 per cent of their national budgets to investment in agriculture and livestock by July 2008.

Ten years later, countries such as Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea, Senegal, Mali, Malawi and Ethiopia - have reached that target.

Other countries, such as Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau and the Democratic Republic of Congo, currently devote less than three per cent of their national budgets to investment in agriculture.

This is despite the fact that small-scale farmers represent more than 80 per cent of their populations. Rwanda allocated about Rwf54bn to the Ministry of Agriculture for land husbandry, hillside irrigation and water harvesting out of the Rwf1.6 trillion budget in the 2013-2014 fiscal year.

This represents about 11 per cent of the national Budget.

Big opportunity

Benjamin Addom, coordinator CAT, said that the conference brings a great opportunity where the spotlight must be turned on small farmers who present over 60 per cent of the majority of farmers in developing countries.

"A lot of opportunities in the areas of ICT satellite technology, mobile phones technologies, money transfer, market information, advisory services, weather forecasts, plant health, veterinary services, crop and animal husbandry data collection is what will make the difference when it comes to agriculture," Addom said.

Ernest Ruzindaza, the Permanent Secretary in Rwanda's Ministry of Agriculture, said that experts must provide quick solutions to famers and not lengthy theoretical approaches.

"We want to go out there with solutions that will impact on our farmers; we must be practical because our farmers are more interested in practical things and not theory if they must increase on their productivity."

Rosemary Mbabazi, the permanent secretary from the Ministry of ICT said that a marriage between ICTs and agriculture will not only be the key driver of government's Vision 2020 but will attract more people to invest hence uplifting people's house hold incomes.

"We are focusing on ICT in agriculture because agriculture is the biggest employer of our population; we believe this will attract lots of young people to make more innovative investments in this sector which will boost the country's economic growth."

Valentine Sendanyoye Rugwabiza, a Cabinet member and the Chief Executive Officer of Rwanda Development Board, called on stakeholders to emphasise the use of ICTs in agriculture in order to fill the gaps in the country's investments and export sector.

"Emerging innovations in ICT and supporting agriculture and rural development, while strengthening capacity building and empowering rural farmers will transform agriculture from being subsistence to commercial activity where the country can thrive economically."

ICT initiatives benefiting the agriculture sector include the agricultural management information systems, online exchange platform, E,-soko, and internet market solutions technologies.

The summit has attracted more than 400 delegates from all over the world.

The conference, is hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (Minagri) in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and ICT (MYICT) and Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), a joint international institution of the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states and the European Union. **(END)**

