

## New move to boost irrigation farming

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Dar es Salaam. Tanzanians in arid and semi-arid regions may soon adopt improved water management systems for better farming to increase food production and environmental conservation.

Under the AgWater Solutions, a project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, farmers will be trained on agricultural water management (AWM) solutions – especially how farmers can gain access to them and the benefits they provide.

To achieve this, the government is working on policies aimed at boosting agricultural production targeting smallholder farmers in the country, it has been observed.

This was said by the deputy permanent secretary, ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives, Mr Mbogo Futakamba, during the Agricultural Water Management Dialogue in Dar es Salaam this week.

He said central to the approach and to effective AWM solutions is market access, farmers would only invest in AWM options if they make economic sense.

“The government is committed to helping farmers to advance their knowledge” he said, adding that the government was determined to boost agriculture.

He said irrigation holds the key to stabilising agricultural production in Tanzania and improve food security, increase farmers' productivity and incomes and produce higher value crops such as vegetables and flowers.

The major constraint facing the agriculture sector is falling labour and land productivity because of inadequate technologies and dependence on rainfall which is unreliable and irregular, a situation that AgWater Solutions aims to improve.

Country AWM project coordinator, Dr Victor Kongo, who is also a researcher from the University of Dar es Salaam, said when farmers are confident of having water and markets for their crops, they are willing to invest in inputs, thus eliminating the need for government handouts.

He noted that there is a need for strategic public investment as a way to boost smallholder farmers' production. “Smallholder farming can and should be an engine for economic growth, poverty reduction and food security.

In many areas, reliable access to water is what's missing from the equation.” he said.

Agricultural Water Management (AWM) investments that enhance both women's and men's productivity are likely to yield the greatest gains in agricultural growth and poverty reduction, as well as narrow the 'gender gap'.

To achieve this requires an understanding of the different roles women and men play in agricultural production systems.

Currently, too little information is available on the gendered organisation of farming. The AgWater Solutions project is helping to fill this gap by mapping the estimated prevalence and scale of the various gendered farming systems in the six project countries and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa.

The majority of the world's 1.7 billion poor people, according to the World Bank 2007 report, live in Africa and

Southern Sahara Africa.