

Café Africa takes action to boost coffee production in Kagera

From MEDDY MULISA in Bukoba

STANDING in the middle of his two-hectare coffee plantation, Solomon Tilwirukwa (56), a resident of Buganzuzi village in Muleba District has sad memories. A few years ago he could harvest at least 50 bags of coffee but now he gets below ten bags. Almost a half of the plantation was destroyed by the coffee wilt disease (CWD).

Farmers in Kagera Region are highly encouraged to plant clonal coffee varieties which are resistant to the coffee wilt disease (CWD), for increased yields and earn more money.

Kagera Region produces an average of 21,000 metric tonnes of coffee annually. Coffee is grown in Bukoba, Muleba, Karagwe, Kyerwa, Ngara and Missenyi districts in the western areas along Lake Victoria. This constitutes 30 per cent of the total coffee production in Tanzania.

However, for quite a long time the average production stood at 0.32 kg per tree due to lack of proper management and aging of the trees.

Key challenges experienced by smallholder farmers include poor extension services, high costs of inputs, adulterated inputs, low coffee price, and minimum level of engagement of youth in coffee production.

Other challenges are poor institutional support, poor marketing systems and effects of climate changes. All these challenges have contributed to low coffee productivity, poor coffee quality, low farm gate prices and coffee racketeering.

The government has embarked on the implementation of a five-year plan that aimed to increase coffee production from 60,000 metric tonnes to 200,000 metric tonnes by 2025.

During a five-year period (2020-2025), the government in collaboration with other stakeholders including Café Africa Tanzania, TACRI, Cooperative Unions, Prisons Department and the private



KAGERA Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS), Professor Faustin Kamuzora (right with cap), inspects a coffee vegetation propagation unit (VPU) established by Café Africa Tanzania. On his right is Kyerwa District Commissioner, Rashid Mwaimu.

sector was keen to increase coffee production in Kagera Region from 60,000 metric tonnes to 200,000 metric tonnes.

Café Africa Tanzania Programme Manager, Daniel Mwakalinga explained that within five months they had multiplied over 200,000 and by end of this year they aim to produce at least 300,000 improved robusta coffee seedlings which will be distributed to farmers for planting.

The robusta varieties were high yielding and resistant to the coffee berry disease. A well-managed robusta coffee plant can produce up to two kilogrammes enabling a farmer to pocket at least 6,000/- per kilogramme compared to the current 1,200/- per kilogramme.

Clonal coffee yields three times more coffee and is resistant to wilt disease. The word clonal means that the coffee plants have been multiplied asexually from a single parent plant or clone.

Café Africa Tanzania with support from a Dutch company, Jacobs Douwe Egberts, is implementing a five-year programme towards sustainable revival of coffee production in Western Tanzania. This includes training extension officers using

the National Sustainability Coffee Curriculum (NSC).

The training will take place at three levels based on the district structures as well as coffee farmers' organisation structures. The local government structure includes districts, wards and villages while the government employs and places extension officers at district and ward levels.

Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Societies (AMCOS) serve as the organising structure for farmers at the village level.

Mr Mwakalinga explained that the 445-trained coffee specific extension officers will ultimately, using a training of trainers (ToT) approach, serve at least 22,250 farmers by the end of five years. This was based on the estimate of training at least 50 farmers in each of the 250 AMCOS.

"As with previous training programs under the National Sustainability Curriculum, these trainings will be practical, result-based, and scheduled over the production cycle of 9 - 12 months. The impact will be monitored and measured based not only on expected outputs (attendance and number of trainings held) but also on outcomes, in terms of production level (quality and quantity) and the

well-being of the farmers," he said.

Under this component, 24 farms in each of the 250 AMCOS will be selected (through a set of criteria to be developed) for the rejuvenation and rehabilitation of their farms on which stumping, gap filling, and some replacement of old trees will take place.

The component will provide support for the selected farmers to stump 50 trees per farm, and to prune the remaining trees, while at the same time doing the infilling of gaps with new improved clonal seedlings.

The purpose is to demonstrate to the farmers the positive impact of this action on coffee productivity. This will ensure that not all production is lost for the farmer in one year, and it is anticipated that he/she will then be motivated to stump additional trees progressively on his/her farm.

The project is under partnership implementation of Cooperative Unions, Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS), TACRI and the Tanzania Coffee Board (TCB).

Kagera Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS), Prof Faustin Kamuzora commended Café Africa Tanzania assuring them of government full support.

"The government was keen to promote Public Private Partnership (PPP). Coffee is vital to the economy, providing a major source of foreign exchange earnings and as a cash crop, supporting the livelihoods of millions involved in cultivation, processing, marketing and export," he said.

Plant breeders under the Tanzania Coffee Research Institute (TACRI), have identified four robusta coffee clones, which are high yielding and have the most desired bean size.

TACRI Zonal Manager at Maruku, Dr Nyabisi Ng'homa named the varieties as Maruku 1, Maruku 2, Muleba 1 and Bukoba 1 adding that at least 49,000 clonal mother trees of robusta varieties resistant to Coffee Wilt Disease (CWD) have to-date been established.