Kagera coffee farmers urged to increase output

From MEDDY MULISA in Bukoba

KAGERA Regional Commissioner Marco Gaguti has appealed for increased coffee output to make the region regain its lost glory.

Similarly, he directed district councils to allocate enough land for youth to engage in coffee production.

He made the call yesterday when awarding certificates to more than 200 ward and village extension officers who attended a sustainable coffee production training conducted from June-December, this year, qualifying as Training of Trainers (TOT).

He revealed that during a five-year period (2020-2025), the government in collaboration with other stakeholders, who include Tanzania Coffee Board (TCB), Café Africa Tanzania, TACRI, Cooperative Unions, Prisons Department and the private sector, was keen to increase coffee production from 75,000 metric tonnes to 200,000 metric tonnes.

"During the past three years coffee production in the region increased from 52,000 tonnes during 2018/19 to 75,000 tonnes during 2020/2021. Farmers are encouraged to plant clonal coffee varieties which are resistant to diseases for increased yields to earn more money," he said.

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 while most of the coffee trees are over 60 years old.

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.

Café Africa Tanzania Programme Manager Mr Daniel Mwakalinga said that within five months they had multiplied over 200,000 while by end of this year they expect to produce at least 300,000 improved robusta coffee trees.

By next year they expected to produce 300,000 coffee trees which would later be distributed to the farmers for the planting season.

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

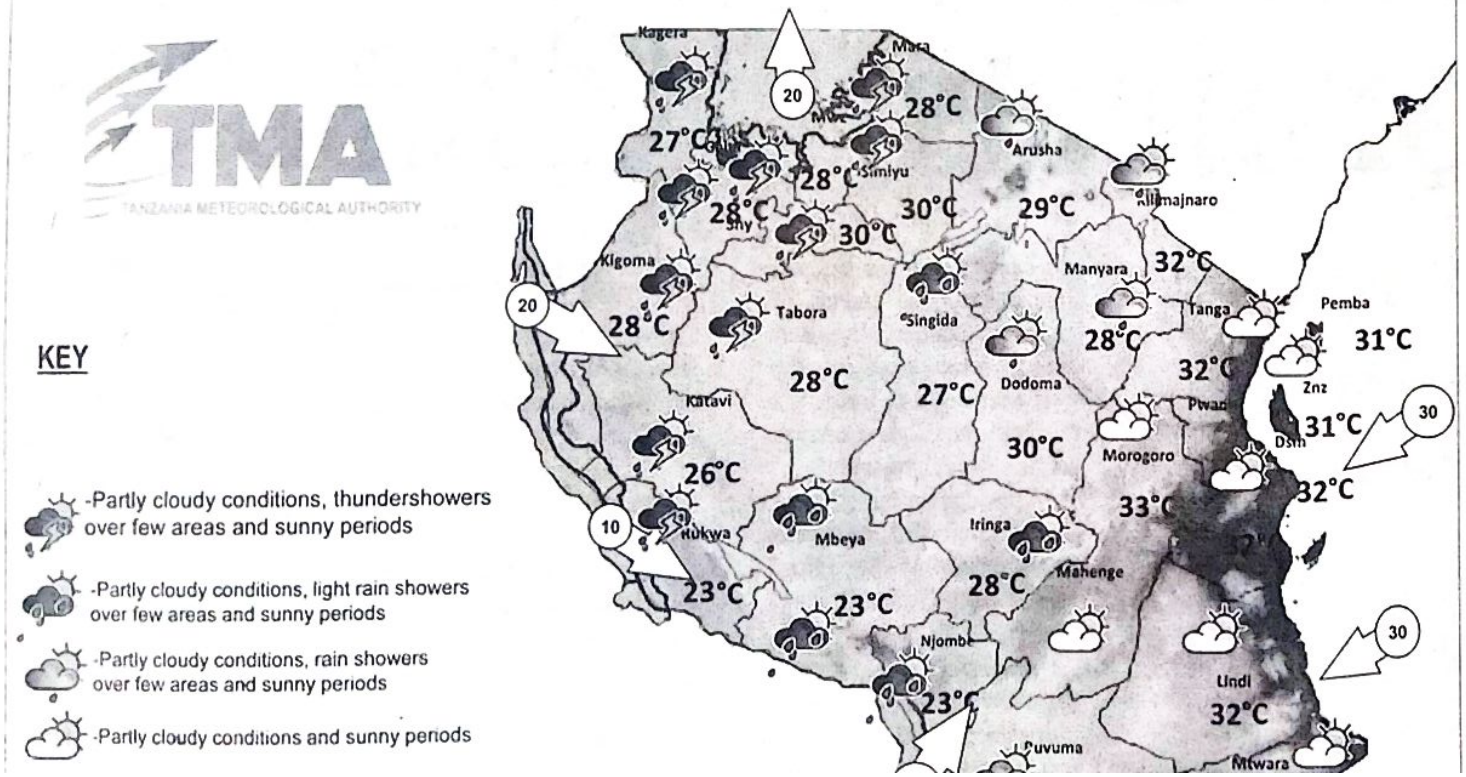
Clonal coffee yields three times more coffee and is resistant to wilt disease. The word clonal means that the coffee plants have been multiplied asexually from a single parent plant or clone.

Café Africa Tanzania with support from the donor, Jacobs Douwe Egberts (JDE), is implementing a five-year programme towards sustainable rejuvenation of coffee production in Western Tanzania.

This includes training extension experts using the National Sustainability Coffee Curriculum (NSC).

The training will take place at three levels based on the district structures as well as coffee farmer 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.

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