

TACRI increases coffee production in Kagera

From MEDDY MULLISA
in Bukoba

JACOB Thabimare (65), a resident of Bukoba Rural's Kanyangereko Ward has for the last 30 years been cultivating coffee on his farm.

Initially, he was harvesting between 30-50 bags annually. However, production dropped to ten bags due to various reasons including diseases, lack of enough management skills and the effects of climate change.

The presence of the Tanzania Coffee Research Institute (TACRI)-Maruku has contributed significantly on the development of the coffee industry in Kagera Region. Coffee production increased from 12,500 metric tonnes between 1991-2000

to 43,680 metric tonnes during 2020-2021 seasons. The increase of coffee production in the region has positive impact on farmers' livelihoods and the national economy.

Zonal Coffee Manager, Dr Nyabisi Ngi'ona attributed the achievement to application of good agricultural practices, management of Coffee Wilt Diseases (CWD) and planting of improved coffee varieties. In the next ten years TACRI has planned to increase coffee production from the current production of 43,680 metric tonnes to an average of 130,260 metric tonnes annually through rejuvenation of old coffee trees and planting improved coffee varieties.

Dr Ngi'ona told this paper in an interview that during 2004-2021 period, TACRI Maruku continued to disseminate and promote appropriate technologies to coffee stakeholders with aim of improving coffee production, productivity and coffee quality.

The technology disseminated includes multiplication of improved coffee seedlings, good agricultural

practices and promoting internal coffee consumption. The technologies were disseminated through village and on station-based training sessions, exhibitions during agricultural shows, open days, the media, and establishment of demonstration plots and distribution of extension materials.

During the period of ten years about 164 demonstration plots were established and supported by the Zone. The plots have been useful tools of transforming farmers from traditional coffee cultivation to the use of good agricultural practices that resulted into increased coffee production, productivity and coffee quality.

Agricultural shows is one of the important tools used by TACRI to disseminate knowledge and skills. The sub-station continued with its efforts of establishing and expanding coffee nurseries for Robusta coffee varieties that are resistant to the coffee wilt disease. About 54,260 clonal mother plants with capacity to produce 3,513,600 seedlings were established in Bukoba, Karagwe, Misenyi, Mulleba and Kyerwa districts.

TACRI Maruku in collaboration with other coffee stakeholders multiplied and distributed a total of 25,067,798 coffee seedlings. According to Dr Ngi'ona, at least 61,197 farmers and 958 Trainers (TOTs) were trained on good agricultural practices, coffee processing, diseases and insect pests management. The village-based trainings resulted into increased coffee productivity from 320 kg/ha in 2004 to 856 kg/ha in 2020.

Exchange visits are one of the tools used to impart knowledge and skills to farmers and other stakeholders on the importance of investing on coffee production. At least 11 exchange visits were conducted in the



FARMERS from different villages in Kagera Region learning how to multiply coffee seedlings using clones.

TCB Regional Manager, Mr Melkiad Massawe told the "Daily News" in an interview that 1,300,000 improved Robusta coffee trees had already been distributed to the farmers for the planting season.

Zone and stimulated farmers to start investing in various coffee business in the coffee value chain.

Over 1.5 million clonal coffee varieties which are resistant to coffee wilt disease (CWD) have been distributed to the farmers in Kagera region in efforts to revamp the coffee crop. Kagera Region has embarked on the implementation of a five-year plan to increase coffee production from 75,000 metric tonnes to 200,000 metric tonnes by 2025.

Kagera Regional Commissioner (RC), Brig Gen Maroo Gaguti appealed for increased coffee productivity to bring the region back to the right track. Equally, he directed district councils to allocate enough land for the youth to engage meaningfully in coffee production.

During a five-year period (2020-2025), the government in collaboration with other stakeholders including Tanzania Coffee Board (TCB), Cate 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 metric tonnes during 2018/2019 to 78,300 metric tonnes during 2020/2021 season enabling the farmers to pocket about 96,4bn/-.

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

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Cate Africa Tanzania Programme Manager, Mr Daniel Mwakalinga, on the other hand, explained that they had already produced at least 300,000 improved Robusta coffee trees. Tanzania Agricultural Bank (TAB) has for three consecutive years issued about 98bn/- as loans to Kagera Region farmers to purchase coffee and raise their earnings.

TADB Managing Director, Justice revealed that 45bn/- was issued in 2018, 30bn/- in 2019 and 23bn/- last year. Apart from supporting the farmers, it was evident that the agricultural sector was bankable and persuaded other financial institutions to channel their finances through it. "Agricultural sector is bankable and for Kagera Region it has minimized smuggling and exploitation," he remarked.

Elaborating, the TADB MD said the loans issued to farmers were of low interest rates and hence urged Cooperative Unions in the region to pay farmers on time. He noted that the farmers will now benefit from the reduced interest rates of 9 per cent from 12 per cent aimed at reducing costs and increase productivity for farmers.

Kagera farmers produce Robusta coffee which constitutes 30 percent 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.

The Robusta varieties were high yielding and resistant to the coffee berry disease. A well-managed Robusta coffee plant could produce up to two kilograms enabling a farmer to pocket at least 6,000/- per kilogram compared to the current 1,200/- per kilogram. Clonal coffee yields three times more coffee and is resistant to the coffee wilt disease. The word clonal means that the coffee plants have been multiplied asexually from a single parent plant or clone. Coffee is grown in Bukoba, Mulleba, Karagwe, Kyerwa, Ngara and Misenyi Districts in the western areas along Lake Victoria. This constitutes about 30 per cent of the total coffee production in Tanzania.

total coffee production in the country. However, coffee produced by small-scale farmers was threatened by smugglers who used to take farmers' produce at a throw-away price to neighbouring countries.

Coffee farmers in Kagera Region have been historically smuggling the crop to neighbouring countries, while some were selling them in an informal system called "bunula".

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