

FEATURE

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AGRICULTURE/Improvement

Tanzania embarks on fresh drive to improve cashew industry

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There is certainly no doubt that cashew nut farming in the country is still an important cash crop earner to an estimated 300,000 small farmers with Mtwara and Lindi Regions taking the largest share of the industry.

Recent statistics show that this crop covers an area of about 600,000ha of which three quarters of the area is found in Mtwara and Lindi.

As the country is currently implementing what is known as "the big results now" initiative aimed at improving the economy, agricultural sector is regarded as the leading sector in this initiative.

That is why however the country has now embarked on a fresh bid to revive the industry after years of poor farming practices, by farmers which resulted in low earnings.

To address the problem, cashew nut stakeholders have established an investment trust fund, called (CIDTF), Cashewnut Industry Development Trust - Fund, charged to spearhead the reviving war of the industry by giving active support in funding, training and playing an advisory role on how best to run the industry on a sustainable manner.

CIDTF executive Secretary Selemani Lengua has said in an interview that the programme will be implemented within three years starting from 2012-2015 with a total budget of 101 teni-contributed by various stakeholders including farmers, coops unions, district councils, cashewnut board (CBT), Naliendele Agriculture Research Institute and other partners.

The programme stresses on

practical training rather than on theory with emphasis on application of improved seeds and planting of grafted seedlings which are partially or tolerant to diseases and pest attacks.

A budget of 750.6 ha/ has been earmarked for running short courses during the three year period 30 ha/ also allocated for procurement of inputs and that to be used for purchasing improved seeds and development of planting materials known as grafted seedlings all researched and developed by the Naliendele Research Institute.

CIDTF Agriculture Officer responsible for training and extension services Rashid Chagapama points out that a total of 350 participants from 35 districts out of 45 have been selected to attend the four days of training workshops during 2014/2015 year alone costing a budget of 230,965,000/.

A further 800 trainers including community extension agents farmer groups and nursery attendants from various villages in all cashew growing areas, completed courses in 2012-2013.

The Agriculture Officer believes that by imparting knowledge on scientific farming, farmers will be able to run the industry on a profitable basis and alleviate abject poverty.

Already a strategic plan is in the offing to develop and distribute 10,000 planting materials to farmers for 2014/2015 season out of 10,000,000 seedlings, expected to be planted in 45 districts during the three year period.

CIDTF says that the planting materials are capable of producing between 15-20 kilograms per tree per annum compared to local cashew trees which produce

between three and five kilograms of nuts per tree every year.

According to research findings, the improved seeds have the characteristic of producing improved nuts with more than 52 percent of kernel content in the pods.

The local breeds have less than 52 of kernel content in the pods.

And since the improved breeds are less vulnerable to diseases and pests, production cost is exceptionally low as they do not require heavy capital investment for purchasing pesticides to control pests and powdery mildew, say research findings.

It is for this reason that the programme envisages to distribute 10m/ improved seedlings to the farmers in the hope that the Country will be able to increase production capacity by 150,000 tons of quality raw cashew nuts in 15 years to come. Current production stands at 160,000 tons (2012-2013).

As CIDTF expects a bright future of the industry's development, past production records show devastating effects to the welfare of the farmers.

For instance in the 30s, cashew production plummeted as all time low of 16000 tons due to poor farming methods but gradually jumped to a staggering 160,000 tons during 2011/2013 season.

Input component has been included in the operational process of the programme with a budget of 30m/.

CIDTF officials say, at least 1000 tons of Sulphur dust to control powdery mildew disease has been earmarked during 2013/2014 season.

Inputs like insecticides, and motorized dust mist blowers have also been earmarked for

purchase by the Fund. Statistics show that a total of 2000 motorised blowers will be procured, plus 310,000 litres of insecticides, all to cost 5,985,460,000 billion for the 2014/2015 farming season alone.

In addition, CIDTF has formulated short term priority plans for Cashew development.

The plans include planting of 1.5 million cashew trees between November 2013 and February 2014 as part of a five year cashew development plan which projects to plant 10 million cashew trees by the year 2015-2016.

Already three regions namely Dodoma, Singida and Morogoro have joined the club of cashew growers in anticipation of strengthening their economies.

CIDTF have distributed 500,000 improved seedlings and 20 tons of improved seeds to 30000 farmers in these regions planted on 10000 acres this season.

Many Stakeholders are optimistic that the establishment of the Fund will act as a catalyst in promoting the industry. Currently beset by poor farming methods.

Globally a similar Fund was set up in the Netherlands in 2004 which provided for promoting various commodities including cash nuts in seven African countries of Malawi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Madagascar, Mozambique and Tanzania.

The Common Fund for Commodities (CFC), seeded Naliendele Research Centre as the head office and Coordinator of the regional Cashew Improvement network for Eastern and Southern African Countries mainly for Cashew research and development.



Cashewnut Industry Development Trust Fund (CIDTF) Chairman Selemani Nindi (Left) handing over cashewnut seedlings to Tunduru District Commissioner Juma Masha on behalf of cashewnut growers in the district.