

Climate change Experts embark on research to develop drought resistant coffee variety

Climate change experts have warned that Coffee and Banana production in Uganda will be affected by climate change as temperatures are expected to rise by 2⁰ Celsius in the next few decades.

This was disclosed during a half day workshop organized as part of the International Course, “Climate Change Adaptation in Agriculture and Natural Resources Management”. The course was organized by Makerere University College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) in partnership with Wageningen University and Research Centre, the Netherlands held on March 14, 2012 in the senate building.

In his opening remarks, the Deputy Principal, CAES Prof. Frank Kansiime told participants that climate change is no longer an issue but how to handle it. “The message is what we have learnt and what we are going to do starting at household level to mitigate the impacts of climate change”.

The Netherlands Agricultural consultant Laurence Jassogne observed that high temperatures will cause drastic changes with high incidences of pests and disease, decrease coffee flowering, quality and quantity.” There are two strategies of adaptation; change within systems of mono cropping to improved shading in coffee, intercropping and diversification”. She said expressing the need to look at the whole production chain and consideration of agro forestry and irrigation systems as key strategies.

The head of Coffee researchers - NARO Dr. Africano Kangire noted that Ugandan farmers have already cut down on coffee production due prolonged droughts, dry bear unproductive soils and hills, unreliable rainfall and resurgence of pests and diseases.

He challenged researchers to be better prepared by breeding drought resistant coffee varieties, monitor and control pests and diseases; strengthen genes for resistance, promote good agricultural practices and map climate change impact in respect to coffee production to respond to skepticism.

Dr. Africano disclosed that research on developing a drought resistant coffee variety for climate change adaptation has started. “We have identified areas like Zoka forest in Northern Uganda and Kibaale in Western where natural wild coffee has been growing and not adopted. We shall subject them to hot stress by denying them sufficient water in the green house then, detect and select those that are resistant”. He said in an interview.

Deus Nuwagaba from the private sector decried the declaiming productive capacity of coffee urging the private sector to work with the public sector to boost the coffee trade. He said, there will be reduced suitable production area, tradable volumes, farmer income variation and poor returns and investment.

He urged the private sector to link sustainable management and environmental benefits of coffee agro forests with appropriate remuneration for farmers through better access to markets and payment for environmental service.

“The private sector has a role to lobby and advocate for climate friendly adaptive policies, like the national coffee policy, risk base coverage like the weather index, information dissemination, investing in certification, farmer training and support for irrigation and conservation methods”.

In addition to applying fertilizers, pest and disease control measures farmers were advised to embrace best practices with innovations and technologies for better storage water conservation and agro forestry. “Farmers should organize in groups as a collective power for bargaining and demanding for policy change in agriculture insurance, access to market and information” , Oxfam representative, Anthony Walimbwa advised.

He said, Uganda’s coffee production capacity rose to 200 million bags in 1972 but since then the country has failed to reach that capacity despite improved technology. It remains a huge task for farmers to adapt climate change as many factors related to social structure contribute towards their adaptive capacity.