

Duty Bearers' key in propelling Climate Change adaptation



A community wood lot of Eucalyptus trees



Protected wetland

It is three o'clock (03:00 p.m) local time in Uganda. Edisa Angoro a female farmer in Opuyo village, Soroti district drags her self-uphill carrying a basket with pieces of cassava tubers and a hoe. Beads of sweat form on her face as she concludes the climb up from Opalatau wetland. She woke got up at 05:00 a.m to work on her vegetable plot down at the wetland. Her home about 32 kilometers away is dry and her gardens do not hold any moisture to boost plant growth. Her solace is in the wetland where she hopes to harvest vegetables in 3 months' time. Edisa watches the clouds form in the sky and keeps wondering when the rain will fall. She prepared her land for the upcoming planting season three months ago and wonders when the rains will come down so she can plant her seeds. She is one among many farmers in Soroti district Eastern Uganda who face such a dilemma.

Over the years, the dry season has become increasingly hotter and drier. Rainfall is more erratic. Farmers are becoming aware of the changing weather pattern, but have limited information on effective strategies for adapting to the changes. Many farmers in Soroti are pondering on the climatic changes that seem to be eating away their livelihood. Their leaders are not silent either. Bye laws have been enacted as well as integrating climate change activities in development plans. Mobilization, sensitization and enforcement are a good mix for climate action to take place.

The Local Council 5 chairperson (District Chairperson) Mr. George Michael Egonyu keeps a stern warning to persons who encroach wetlands” Keep the wetlands for wetlands. Avoid living near the swamps, so that when the floods come they do not affect many people. Stop cutting trees. Plant more trees.”, he states. He shows off a copy of a draft bye law entitled” ***Presentation of the draft forest management and tree planting Ordinance to the district Executive Committee Meeting***”; he adds that

“Improving food security and resilience in Africa is a matter of political will: the solutions are known but must be implemented. To succeed, all sectors need to work together to scale up climate-smart agriculture”. That was one major conclusion that emerged from the U.S.- Africa Leaders’ Summit.

However, “Beyond political will, there is a full menu of interventions that boost production in ways that are climate smart and also manage demand for food”; notes Robert Winterbottom of the World Resources Institute at the Food Security and Climate Change in Africa Conference in 2014.

Having the political will and the mandate to lead citizens, leaders and duty bearers can contribute to climate change adaptation by sensitizing people, implementing projects that build climate change resilience and can enact laws that could change practices that are pro –environment.

The Ministry of water and Environment in Uganda has taken on the water catchment approach to enable proper management of water to build climate change resilience among the communities. It is an integrated approach that has the Ministry officials work with the Local Government Officials in the water zones to plan and effectively manage water issues at the catchment level. Dr. Calist Tindimugaya the Commissioner for Water Resources Development in the Ministry of Water and Environment says that using the water catchment approach is a solution to climate change in its self. “When the catchment approach is done properly, we would have addressed the climate change challenge”. Integrating climate change resilience building involves the communities, private sector and the local governments, he adds.

The Office of the Prime Minister in Uganda has projects that work to oversee the livelihood improvement of people. Such projects integrate issues of climate change adaptation. Mr. Opus Joseph, an Agricultural Extension officer working with Soroti district local government, notes that communities are aware of the climate change resilience issues and in their local community budget meetings, they demand for services that help them build resilience to climate change.

Joseph coordinates the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF project) in Soroti district. "They will ask for fast growing seeds so that they harvest fast maturing crops before the droughts set in, they will ask for fruit tree seedlings that will cater for their nutritional needs but will also help regulate the environment. They may not explicitly demand for climate change solutions but ask for services that will enable them be more resilient to the climate change vagaries".

Building climate change resilience demands that leaders take their places in ensuring that set guidelines and laws are implemented and enforced, become more innovative to respond to the demand of their citizens that require solutions to the environmental challenges as well as continuous sensitization and mobilization.

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