

## **Drought Tego to address Food Insecurity in Africa**

For a very long time African farmers have suffered under the harsh climatic conditions that has wiped away their livestock and crops. According to research, three-quarters of the world's severe drought occurs in Africa, affecting small scale farmers whom rely on rainfall to water their crops. Maize has been the most affected. According to the numbers over 300 million people rely on maize as their staple food in Africa, hence maize production has been enormously affected by the droughts currently experienced in the continent.

Kenya as a country is not left behind, the current drought situation has affected its maize production scale and most farmers have suffered severely from this catastrophe which has led to unpredictable and low yields if not none. But thanks to Water efficient maize for Africa dubbed WEMA which is a public/private partnership project that has ensured that a drought tolerant maize variety with high yields under moderate water supply is introduced to Africa to address the drought menace. The WEMA project is being co-ordinated by the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) through a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

To this extent farmers have been relieved from the stress of bad weather which in past has resulted to loss of their hard earned sweat in the farm. Most asals areas in Kenya such as the



North Eastern regions and other similar regions can now enjoy planting the new variety of maize called the *TEGO* maize. Tego maize is one of the maize breeds introduced by *WEMA* for areas experiencing droughts.

Other than its drought-resistance properties, the new variety can also grow well in soil with low fertility. This is a boost, especially to small-scale farmers in areas with erratic rainfall patterns.

Maize in a farm. FILE PHOTO | KALRO

A follow up on the progress of this maize variety in the areas initially experimented has shown promising results with farmers and experts giving positive testimony as far as the variety is concerned. The Nithi in Tharaka-Nithi County is one of the regions where farmers have given positive feedback as they have harvested in bulk despite the drought that has hit the area in the previous months.



“Tego maize is a good maize variety as compared to other breeds due to its unique properties” said Mary Nthiga, Tego farmer in Nithi.

The Tego maize seed has proved to be drought tolerant and can produce high yields even under moderate water conditions. According to experts the maize variety can do even better in water areas but mostly it is preferred to be grown in water efficient areas.

The breed was created with a goal to enhance food security in Sub-Saharan Africa through developing and deploying water-efficient maize royalty-free to the smallholder farmers. This increased yield stability has the potential to help reduce hunger and improve the livelihood of millions of Africans. Farmers from Asal areas are therefore urged to grow this type of maize to avoid the strains caused by other maize breeds.

Ms Mary celebrating her bulk harvest. FILE PHOTO | KALRO

A report generated by the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization show that in the past, many farmers have not been able to access this variety but to date it has been authorised to be sold in various seed stores hence increasing its accessibility to all farmers across the nation.

The worrying factor is the proper knowledge, it has come to our realization that farmers lack the knowledge when it comes to planting of the seed and how to scoop high yields from it. Scientists found out that on first planting this maize variety produces high yields as compared to the second planting, this therefore means its productivity level depreciates as it undergoes many generations a fact that is not known by many. Therefore, it is advisable for a farmer who dreams of a heavy harvest not to buy already harvested seed from a fellow farmer instead visit a nearby authorised agro store or seed dealer and buy a first generation breed (hybrid).

The WEMA project aims to produce and distribute at least 25 drought-tolerant maize hybrids to farmers in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa.



Tego maize in Tigania East- Meru. FILE PHOTO | KALRO

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