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The VOICE of YOUTH is NEEDED!

Editor: Daniel Paz,
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Topics

Climate Change and disaster reduction

Many districts were affected by floods in Mozambique.

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The worst of the floods are behind them, but now the communities along Mozambique's major rivers face other serious challenges: thousands are displaced and access to food and clean water is limited.

Rivers throughout central and northern Mozambique were swollen to Red Alert level - one notch below declaring a disaster - after weeks of torrential rain locally and in neighbouring Zambia and Zimbabwe.



Some simulation exercises were practiced.

On 23 March a hydrological bulletin by the National Water Directorate announced that "In the next 24 hours" the Zambezi and Pungue river basins in central Mozambique, and the Messalo River Basin, in the north, "will continue to register lower water levels". The Mozambican Council of Ministers brought the alert level down to orange.

Although the flood response would be phased out, Leila Pakkala, the Representative of the UN Children's Agency (UNICEF) responsible for coordination in the Humanitarian Country Team, pointed out that "Many of the [affected] areas were already chronically food insecure [and] the government and partner organizations continue to be preoccupied with food security needs."

The latest UN Country Team (UNCT) Flood Preparedness and Response report, released on 23 March, said "the government had sent an official request for food assistance for 100,000 people in the four most affected districts: Mutarara [and] Mopeia [near the Zambezi River], Morrumbala [on the floodplain] and Chinde [in the Zambezi Delta] ... Food assistance will need to be given in the form of food-for-work, to rebuild."

Pakkala noted that some areas not affected by floods also needed assistance due to months of poor rainfall. Preliminary estimates by the Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition in Mozambique indicated that some 475,000 households in seven of Mozambique's 10 provinces were suffering the effects of the drought.

She said access to clean drinking water was priority; continued support would be provided to rehabilitate water points, and water committees and maintenance groups in affected areas would be revived.

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"Sanitation and hygiene activities ... have been prioritized", the UNCT report said. The distribution of emergency water, sanitation and hygiene supplies was ongoing, and chlorine, soap, certeza - a disinfectant solution for purifying water - jerrycans and buckets were being sent to families in affected areas.

"Around 25,000 people have been reached by messages on promotion of good hygiene practices and malaria prevention as a result of training. Community and provincial radios are disseminating daily messages ... in coordination with District Directorates of Health, with a capacity to reach up to 800,000 people in Zambezia, Sofala and Tete provinces," the report said.

In a country as poor and vulnerable as Mozambique, extreme climatic events can push entire communities beyond their ability to cope or recover from the multiple impacts of floods, cyclones and drought, and they often descend into a spiral of poverty.

The country is more frequently and severely affected by natural disasters than almost any other in Africa: flooding occurs nearly every year - in the past three decades alone, Mozambique has been hit by 35 hydro-meteorological disasters, affecting nearly 16 million people. In response, the Mozambican government, mainly through its disaster management agency, INGC, and its international aid and development partners, have invested heavily in preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) measures.

All that paid off this year. "The response was well organized. DRR and preparedness [programmes] are starting to show results. The response was much better than previous years," Pakkala said.

She noted that lessons had been learnt from previous emergencies: capacity was built in disaster management agencies, partnerships were stronger, stocks were prepositioned, and annual emergency simulation exercises had resulted in an "adequate, appropriate and timely response".

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AR4D?

AR4D?

The Green Revolution has a new avatar: transformed Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D), and food experts hope it will provide the panacea for hunger.

In the 1970s, when half the world's population was hungry, governments, global institutions and agricultural experts brought about the Green Revolution with the help of technology that provided high-yielding varieties of rice and wheat. Within four years, countries like India moved from being food-aid dependent to food secure.

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"We are facing a crisis of a similar scale and the world needs to come together again to take action [with the help of biotechnology]," said Uma Lele, a retired senior adviser to the World Bank and the lead author of a comprehensive assessment report on AR4D, which will provide the backdrop to a critical three-day meeting on agriculture starting on 28 March in France.

The report, Transforming Agricultural Research for Development, will be presented at the first Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD), requested by the G8 group of industrialized countries to identify future food production needs and a course of action.

During the assessment 2,000 experts were consulted, including national research organizations across the world. The report hopes to focus attention on the critical need to revive agriculture. "Everyone [in agriculture and food security] has been talking about AR4D as the way forward. We [Lele and three other agriculture experts] were asked to unpack it for the meeting."



Food demand has high increasing levels each year.

The aim of AR4D is to achieve sustainable food and income security for all food producers and consumers, especially the poor, using the same resources - land, labour, water - available within the constraints of climate change and an expanding population.

The sustainable system will seek to reduce negative environmental impacts, but cannot be "defined by silver bullets" like a particular technology or practice, because "there are no standard blueprints" and many of the options used in the last five decades did not work.

"We need to produce food for a growing population on the same piece of land," said Eugene Terry, one of the authors and a plant pathologist who was the first director-general of the West Africa Rice Development Association.

The answer lies in sustainable intensification. AR4D calls for a broader approach and departs from the traditional methods where scientists were kept away from the process that delivered the new technology to farmers. "The focus is on developing technology and adapting it to the local conditions," said Lele.

AR4D research needs to happen where it will be used - such as in national research institutions - with a focus on innovative scientific breakthroughs appropriate to local or even regional conditions. At the local level it will devise methods to assess how new technologies were being implemented.

It will adopt a bottom-up approach involving the poor and disenfranchised, and use a combination of traditional knowledge and practices gleaned from farmers, conventional technologies and modern biotechnology. Partners will be sought in the public and private sectors, and in civil society.

The report emphasized that AR4D was not itself development, but "contributes to it through greater sensitivity ... vigorous commitment to building the capacity of partners, including particularly the beneficiaries and increased accountability, for more and better results on all fronts: poverty reduction, productivity growth and environmental sustainability."

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Lele acknowledged that many small countries lacked the capacity and resources for research, or were caught up in conflicts that prevented beefing up agriculture. "You need political will to bring about change," she said.

One of the aims of the global meeting in France would be to set up a bigger umbrella of food security players, including the private sector and larger developing countries, to share expertise or help build capacity.

"We submit that substantial investments would be needed in the development of infrastructure, markets and human capital, among other things, which are not covered under R&D [research and development]," Terry said. "Many activities that can be rightly carried out at the national or local level by stakeholders are financed and carried out by international organizations in the name of providing international public goods, whereas there is underinvestment in building the national capacity of countries."

Terry said governments' "neglect of their own rural areas has often compounded the problems. Donors keen to show quick impacts of the uses of their funds are tempted to allocate them to achieve quick short-term results."

The World Bank estimated that some 1.4 billion people were living in poverty in 2005, and another 100 million have been pushed into hunger since the financial crisis in 2008.

Food production has stagnated in many countries, while the global population is expected to hit nine billion by 2050, mostly in developing countries. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) put growth in global agricultural production at 2.1 percent per year since 1961, but projected that this would slow to 1.5 percent annually in the next 25 years, and then to 0.9 percent annually in the succeeding 20 years to 2050.

The assessment report said the reasons for this slowdown ranged from lower population growth in some food producing areas to a drop in yields. Besides the need to invest in infrastructure, in the capacity of institutions to deliver inputs and distribute food, and in developing people, many answers lay in biotechnology.

In most developing countries crop yields were more than 30 percent lower than they could be; in the case of rice and maize in sub-Saharan Africa, the difference was as high as 100 percent, the report said.

The high-yielding crop varieties of the Green Revolution flourished in Asia, where agriculture is irrigated, but largely failed in Africa because most crops are rain-fed.

Even cereals like sorghum and millet, the staple foods in semi-arid areas, have done better in India than in Africa. "It is because India has spent on research and adapted the cereals to meet its needs," said Lele.

Investment in agricultural research and development (R&D) has been abysmally low in most developing countries. Five countries - China, India, Brazil, Thailand and South Africa - accounted for just over 53 percent of the R&D undertaken in developing countries, the assessment noted.

Donor aid to agriculture has been dismal, "but there is only so much an outsider can do to help you," said Lele. For instance, in the Green Revolution, several aid agencies helped introduce India to high-yielding rice varieties, but the country went on to develop 200 rice varieties of its own.

Food insecurity is still present in India and the population is increasing, as in other developing countries. India and other countries that benefited from the Green Revolution are living with its after-effects, but an incessant cycle of crops has depleted the fertility of soil in many areas.

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Everyone is in need of innovative solutions, and this time they want to ensure that success in food insecurity should not pass Africa by - the focus is on region-specific solutions, which it is hoped AR4D will provide.

Lele said the need to focus on investment in agricultural R&D was not new. The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and its network of 15 research centres across the world was set up by the World Bank and wealthy country donors in the 1970s to develop new crop varieties, farm management techniques, and innovations for farmers in the developing world.

When the latest food crisis struck in 2007, the CGIAR drew some criticism. "The impact of CGIAR has slowed," said Lele, because the group's research activities suffered when donor funding became focused on short-term projects tied to specific agendas. "As you know, research needs long-term investment."

The CGIAR receives only 4-5 percent of total public expenditure on agricultural research worldwide, and faces competing demands on its resources, the assessment noted. The CGIAR has recently instituted reforms.

The authors of the report called on developing country governments to increase their investment in agricultural R&D to 1.5 percent of their revenue from agriculture, but Lele commented that agricultural spending had a dismal history in many developing countries. "The situation will not change until every individual and institution starts taking responsibility. Research pays off only in 10 years or so; we have to start now."

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New method.

New method

The hapless people flooding ports and airport terminals in developed countries are occasionally seen as "environmental migrants" or even "environmentally induced migrants", fleeing natural disasters in their part of the world. Now, some countries have begun turning this displacement into a positive learning experience by providing such migrants with temporary work permits to help them earn an income and acquire skills, making them more resilient when they return home.

"Extending work visas or granting temporary visas to people from countries ... hit by natural disasters is often used in ... Europe and North America," said Koko Warner, head of the Environmental Migration, Social Vulnerability and Adaptation Section at the UN University, and such initiatives were part of a "wider trend in managing the impacts of natural hazards and migration".

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The US Immigration and Nationality Act allows Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to foreign nationals already in the US because of an environmental disaster, provided their country is unable to handle their return.

There are no international laws protecting people forced to move across borders by more intense natural disasters as a result of climate change, but Walter Kälin, Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, cited the Finnish Aliens Act, which also "provides temporary protection (up to three years) in situations of mass displacement as a result of an environmental disaster."



He suggested that in the absence of such protection, initiatives like the TPS allowed by US could provide an option to countries to draw up laws offering temporary respite to people forced to move because of climate change.

Colombia has come up with an interesting alternative: in 2006, when the Galeras volcano in southwest Colombia erupted, the government set up a programme allowing several thousand affected people temporary migration to Spain, where they earned an income, mostly through agricultural work, for a period of six months, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) noted in its recent annual report.

"Since then the programme has been expanded to include people in rural communities, where crops and land are vulnerable to floods and other natural disasters," UNFPA said. The programme is supported by the European Union.

Heavy rains, floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions in Colombia affected 1.5 million people in 2007, and at least 700,000 more in 2008, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

In Spain the Colombians acquired skills to help them diversify their income when they returned home, to "increase their resilience to environmental challenges, and offers them an alternative to permanent relocation," UNFPA commented. The six-month placement period also allowed enough time for the land affected by disaster in Colombia to recover.

Warner said such initiatives were "an important source of post-disaster rehabilitation", while UNFPA pointed out that "Mobility may therefore contribute to the adaptation of people affected by environmental change; conversely, immobility may increase people's vulnerability to environmental pressures."

Source: www.irinnews.org



Comments: I really want to distinguish the method of some developed countries, because it is something positive and give affected people a special chance to rebuild their own lives and to keep them above the problem.

I cross my fingers for the success of the AR4D project. As you read, it was presented on the meeting in France, and has a path to follow, with many prudent ideas. Hope this entire development end in a concrete thing, because as we all know some changes are requested in our world.



"Communication saves lives!"

■ For more information please contact ■

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