Lira leaders lobby for fish farming funds

LIRA

By Prossy Nandudu

Local leaders in Lira district have asked development partners to increase funding towards aquaculture or fish farming to create employment for the youth.

The call was made by the district vice-chairperson, George Okello, during a visit by a team from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), who were in the region to monitor the impact of the Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF) on the communities. The ASTF is an innovative Africa-led fund to support the continent's development initiatives.

The fund came into force during the 38th session of the FAO conference in June 2013, with funding totalling over $40m from Equatorial Guinea, Angola and a group of civil society organisations in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Its goal is to strengthen food security across the continent by assisting countries to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, eliminate rural poverty and manage natural resources in a sustainable manner.

In Uganda, the funds were channelled through the project dubbed, "Promoting Sensitive Agricultural Diversification to Fight Malnutrition and Enhance Youth Employment in Eastern Africa". It has been working in eight districts. About 490 youth have so far benefited from the project.

In Lira, the project trained youth in making fish feeds and fish seed (fingerlings), which has been the main obstacle to fish farming in Lira and other districts, according to Okello.



FAO officials and some of the youth who benefited from the new project. Photo by Prossy Nandudu

"The local people who were interested in fish farming did not know where to find the fingerlings and fish feeds. They also did not have any idea on how to identify the right feeds, water quality or even preparing the ponds," Okello added.

Using funds from the project, youth have also been given equipment such as smoking gear to increase the shelf life of fish.

Okello, however, asked the project implementers — FAO — to extend the project for the next two years so as to engage a bigger number of youth who have realised that they can improve their livelihoods through fish farming.

"We now have many youth going into fish farming. They have even started constructing their own fish ponds. It shows that they have embraced the project," Okello added.

The head of the delegation, Florencio de Almeida, also Angola's permanent representative at the FAO in Rome, explained that their visit was to find out if the funds released were being put to proper.

He said they also wanted to know if the district leadership and the Government had a sustainability plan in place to carry on the project once funding comes to an end.

While visiting Amon Mixed Farm that is being run by a group of 20 youth, FAO's country representative, Alhaji Jallow, asked the youth to shun the temptations of going abroad in search of better jobs, focus on agriculture and earn peacefully.

"Young people want quick money but everyone has their own time of making money. Work hard and enjoy the sweet benefits. Don't run too fast. Through farming projects such as fish farming, one is able to earn without being harassed and even more when you concentrate," Jallow said.

Sustainability plan

At the district level, Okello said they would organise the youth into groups to benefit from government programmes such as the Youth Livelihood Fund and Women Fund to sustain the projects.

Andrew Alio, the assistant commissioner of aquaculture under the directorate of fisheries, added that those already in fish farming with support from FAO will be considered for funding from the European Union.

"We now have many youth going into fish farming. They even construct their own ponds." Okello

He explained that the Government has received 10m Euros from the EU to support aquaculture for the next five years, adding that some of the money will support the youth already into fish farming.

Alio said the Government was negotiating with financial institutions like Centenary Bank, Stanbic Bank and dfcu Bank to extend loans to youth in fisheries at a lower interest rate of 18%, which will be paid back at the time of harvest.

Nic Obot, one of the beneficiaries, said they are facing the challenge of prolonged drought.

Solomon Olwa, another beneficiary, said: "I have just ventured into fish farming after being trained at Amon Mixed Farm. I hope to harvest the fish and pay school fees for my siblings."

CamScanner