

## S. Sudan: French gov't and FAO to reduce reliance on imported seeds

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November 19, 2012 (YEI) - The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), in collaboration with the French government and South Sudan's Agriculture Ministry last week launched a seed project, aimed at enhancing food security and improving livelihoods.

The initiative, officials told *Sudan Tribune*, will target more than 5,000 vulnerable households and an estimated 30,000 vulnerable people, 50% of whom are women, over the next one year.

At least 400 seed producers are also to benefit from the Euro500,000 project, which will be implemented in South Sudan's Central and Western Equatoria, Lakes, Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal states.

At least 4.7 million people, United Nations estimates show, remain at risk of food security in South Sudan, with up to one million people likely to be severely affected.

However, with the need to increase agricultural productivity seen as key in ensuring food security, the 12-month project reportedly aims at improving household income and livelihoods, through provision of quality seeds for major staple crops in these regions.

In his remarks at the project launch, Michael Roberto Kenyi, Central Equatoria's Agriculture and Forestry Minister said the newly launched initiative would, not only boost South Sudan's underdeveloped seed sector, but also reduce over dependency on imported seeds from neighbouring countries.

The community-based seed production project, he added, was designed to improve food security and livelihoods by increasing the availability of and access to locally produced, quality seed and planting materials.

The project, according to the minister, aimed at building the capacities of over 300 seed growers in quality seed production, strengthen seed extension services in the target location as well increase access to market channels.

"The outcome of this initiative is that it leads us to have quality seed production. It is a beautiful result that comes very timely for our farmers' needs," Kenyi emphasized.

Sue Lautze, FAO's Head of South Sudan office, said seed, a "key to life" is inextricably linked to agricultural productivity.

"Good quality seed is a determinant for levels of agricultural productivity. Good quality seed will germinate more effectively and will also grow into a healthy, productive plant, which in turn translate into food and livelihood security," she said.

Currently, over 90% of farming households in South Sudan reportedly rely on the informal seed sector, while the formal seed sector remains largely underdeveloped. In addition, nearly 100% of the certified seed supplies, according to FAO, originate from neighbouring Uganda, Kenya and Sudan.

In the recent past, however, officials and farmers have raised concerns over the quality, availability and access to these imported seeds from neighbouring nations.

"These challenges, coupled with the near lack of formal seed sector actors, call for concerted efforts by all the key stakeholders to support the development of seed sector in South Sudan," emphasized the FAO Head of office.

Laetitia Tremel, a Programme Officer for development and humanitarian affairs at the French embassy further pledged continued support from her government for South Sudan agricultural sector, on which over 80% of the country's rural population remain dependent.

The French government, she said, has since 2005 reportedly donated nearly Euro11m to support various project in the world's youngest nation.

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