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UN working on ways to mitigate climate change's impact on African agriculture



Farmers in Ethiopia observe an FAO-EU project aimed at preventing flooding during rains

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The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) said today it is working with African leaders to help the continent adapt agricultural approaches that are more resilient to the impact of the climate change and scarcity of natural resources.

“Africa needs increased productivity in its agriculture and higher incomes in its rural areas, and rural communities and the agro-ecosystems on which they depend have to adapt to climate change and become more resilient to its impacts,” [said](#) Alexander Mueller, FAO’s Assistant-Director General for Natural Resources.

“FAO together with its partners has developed the concept of ‘climate-smart agriculture,’ which offers a way to deal with these multiple challenges in a coherent and integrated way,” said Mr. Mueller at the end of a two-day conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, whose theme was Climate Smart Agriculture: Africa – A Call to Action.

The FAO approach to agriculture in Africa aims to increase agricultural productivity and build resilience to environmental pressures, helping farmers adapt to climate change, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

That objective can be achieved through climate-smart practices that increase the organic soil matter and improve water-holding capacity, according to FAO. It also makes yields more resilient and reduces erosion, helping to mitigate climate change.

“Climate-smart agriculture includes proven practical techniques and approaches that can help achieve food security, climate change adaptation, and climate change mitigation,” said Mr. Mueller.

“We need further piloting and scaling-up of early action programmes, we need to bring together finance and investment opportunities and make them available for developing countries. Agriculture and climate finance need to be addressed together,” he added.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economies of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, employing about 60 per cent of the region’s workforce and accounting for some 30 per cent of gross domestic product.

However, climate change may reduce crop yields substantially in sub-Saharan Africa by the 2050s. Some 650 million people in Africa are dependent on rain-fed agriculture in fragile environments that are vulnerable to water scarcity and environmental degradation.

A paper for the Johannesburg meeting prepared by the South African agriculture ministry in collaboration with FAO and the World Bank argues that without measures to adapt food production to the challenges posed by climate change – and the financing to support those measures – Africa’s poverty alleviation and food security goals will not be reached.

In a related development, African negotiators on climate change and high-level experts from about 50 countries across the continent are gathered in the Malian capital, Bamako, to discuss how Africa can consolidate its position on climate change, the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) reported.

The experts’ segment of the fourth special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) has brought together about 200 delegates representing countries, international organizations, research institutes and civil society.

The need to stabilize global average temperatures at levels that are safe for developing countries, particularly in Africa, is one of the pressing issues that require urgent attention. The UNEP Emission Gap Report has confirmed that current mitigation pledges, if not strengthened, will set the world on course for global warming of between 2.5 and 5 degrees Celsius.

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