



Sorghum growing, a solution to food security & Poverty

Changing weather patterns are calling on farmers around the world to consider shifting crops particularly to varieties that are resistant to worsening droughts and high temperatures. This has led to sorghum growing, gaining adherents.

Sorghum is not a new crop to mention, it is a well renowned crop

especially with the generation of 1950s, 60s and 70s. But it almost disappeared from most of the farms due to lack of market and notion that it is a 'poor man's crop', with many opting for other crops such as maize and beans.

Today desperate, persistent drought in the semi-arid areas of the country, is calling

on farmers to return to this green gold, together with other traditional crops such as millet and cassava.

Sorghum is drought-resistant and requires only 30 per cent of the water that maize needs, matures in two to three months and the output is high.

The returns are good, given the low input

costs associated with it. Furthermore there is a ready market for the crop.

It is a better crop compared to maize because of its hardiness and ability to tolerate low moisture, flooding and fertility conditions.

East African Breweries Limited (EABL) is contracting farmers to produce sorghum for its

use in beer manufacture in place of barley which has proved expensive in their production of non-malted beer. This has compelled the company to source for sorghum in large quantities that the supply cannot meet in near future.

"Malting companies have come to the conclusion that barley is no longer readily available for brewing and is extremely expensive, and that sorghum provides an excellent substitute," Said Silim, eastern and southern Africa director of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

Pan African Agribusiness & agro-industry Consortium (Panaac), has partnered with EABL malting to sensitize and train farmers on the novelty of sorghum as a cash crop. They have a project in Eastern Province and

they are spreading to other counties in the country. They are training farmers on using sorghum as staple food for making ugali, bread, mandazi chapatti cake pilau and also as energy drink.

The programme will help reduce food insecurity and poverty in the areas, by supporting the production of the crop as a cash crop; since the areas depend on rain fed agriculture thus their agricultural production and productivity is highly influenced by rainfall availability and distribution. Frequent droughts in the area often lead to widespread crop failure particularly of non-traditional food crops thus this crop is standing out as an adaptation crop for managing climate change and at the

same time as a solution to food security.

Globally sorghum is the world's fourth major cereal and fifth in acreage as well as a staple food crop of millions of poor habitants in semi-arid terrains. It is grown as a subsistence dry land crop by resource limited farmers. Its potential is enormous to drive the economy of these regions.

PanAAC has mobilized more than 5000 small-scale farmers to adopt the new variety of high yielding, drought tolerant sorghum, called gadam which is an improved variety. It is early maturing, cream-white grain, high

yielding and good for malting. The seeds have been developed by KASAL, the Kenya Arid and Semi-Arid Land programme of the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), although their origins are traced to South Sudan.

The major problem the organisation has been facing is trying to convince farmers to plant sorghum but with educational campaigns on sorghum they are hoping that many will witness from their friends and join the wagon.

