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## FEATURES

# Local, foreign experts push for food self-sufficiency

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FOR this entire week 90 professionals from Germany, Kenya, the United States of America (USA) and Tanzania have been attending a conference in Morogoro town for the sole purpose of looking for ways to strengthen the local food security situation.

This project comes under the supervision of Trans-SEC, which stands for "innovating pro-poor strategies to safeguard food security using technology and knowledge transfer."

The project started last May with a budget of 7.5 million Euros, which has been provided by two sections of the German government: The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

These funds are to be used over a period of five years, with head of the German department at the Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), Dr Stefan Sieber, holding the post of Project Manager.

It is as a result of having had several previous projects in the country before Trans-SEC, which were funded by the BMZ that they have managed to build close cooperation with Tanzania and local institutions, such as the Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), which is located in Morogoro Region.

In conversation with Sieber, at the opening of the five-day conference in Morogoro town last Monday, he told the 'Daily News' that it can be seen throughout the country, in which this region is one example, that climate change is taking its toll, while the situation around food security is deteriorating.

Added to the problem, he maintains, such regions are highly affected by drought, which leads to the reasons behind why the Trans-SEC team says the local farmers need assistance with regards to new knowledge gathered in this area.

However, he warned that this assistance must not be misunderstood. "It is very important to understand that we have not come to re-invent the wheel. We are gathering the knowledge that already exist at country and regional levels for small-scale farmers and then we try to up-scale this local knowledge. We would like to have this innovation of better combined good practices, which already exist in most cases.

If we find complete new innovations we are more than happy, but we would like to stabilise the region itself with a regional explicit concept for food security," Sieber added. According to the Project Manager, the German government has taken such steps in acknowledgement that food security has become a global problem.



Project Manager of the Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), Dr Stefan Sieber. (Photo by Iman Mani)

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They feel they have to play a part in solving this situation by setting-up this research programme, based in Morogoro and Dodoma regions. In practice, they have four pilot villages, two in Morogoro and two in Dodoma regions respectively. These two regions have been chosen because of their climatic difference, with Morogoro being wetter, while Dodoma is relatively dryer.

This gives the team, he maintains, an ideal ground from which to compare villages and the regions. First they collect innovations at the national level. Then they have to identify the most adequate upgrading strategies with the rural population, using a common approach.

It must be remembered that these are pilot studies, which if proven to have been successful, will be up-scaled to other regions at national level on the ground and ministry level, where policy is concerned. According to Sieber, their biggest hurdle to date is logistic, which means they have to set-up whole infrastructure and assigned responsibilities at institutional level.

Their biggest progress to-date is that it is more than a Trans-SEC amongst the African partners with their German counterpart. An example he gave is of his institution, ZALF, having built close collaboration with SUA, which has taken years to build such trust.

In this particular case this has come about after the two bodies have been working together on research projects for the last six years. "We are using a people centred approach because it's very important to have a demand driven approach, which means the local people say what their needs are.

Then, according to their needs at village level, we can set this emphasis with regard to different topics. If the four thousand households that we would like to reach tell us they would like to have more emphasis on health issues for example then we would shift it towards this issue," Sieber said.

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