

CLIMATE CHANGE AND LIVELIHOODS; A CALL TO ACTION

Climate is the average weather conditions of a locality such as rainfall and temperatures. The Earth's climate has changed over the last century. Increases in average temperatures have been seen around the world and there is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed in the last 50 years is due to human activities such as greenhouse gases emissions. Hundreds of articles have been written about it, thousands of theories formulated around it, and millions of shillings spent studying it. And now the evidence is out: the glaciers on the roofs of East Africa's highest mountains are melting, drought is killing people in vulnerable communities, and flood waters are sweeping people/properties while destroying economies and the livelihoods of thousands of people over vast areas all over the world.

Since climate change is a global issue, it will affect us all. Climate change has the potential to adversely affect our environment; our communities and our economy unless we take action now to reduce our greenhouse emissions and prepare for the impacts.

Current research indicates that it will be people living in developing countries that will bear the brunt of climate change. If climate change continues unchecked there will be huge implications on our way of life, especially on livelihoods. Nearly half of the world's populations live in developing countries –over 2.5 billion people; many of them depend on agriculture to make a living, which means that climate change will have a huge impact on their livelihoods.

A range of direct and indirect climate change impacts may affect Meru communities ranging from famine/ drought and floods. Therefore, climate change adaptation is possible if a common understanding of the concepts of adaptation, vulnerability, resilience, security, poverty and livelihoods, as well as an understanding of the gaps in current adaptation approaches is explored. "We are convinced that the more educated people are about climate change, the more we can save our communities from its impacts"

The poor are more heavily dependent on ecosystem goods/services and therefore most severely affected by deteriorating environmental conditions and factors limiting resource access. While climate change is not the only threat to natural resources and livelihoods, climate-induced changes to resource flows will affect the viability of livelihoods unless effective measures are taken to protect and diversify them through adaptation and other strategies.

For the poorest and most vulnerable, these strategies should include ecosystem management and restoration activities such as watershed restoration, conservation agriculture, natural resources (land, forests, water) protection, rangeland rehabilitation, pollution reduction, investing in green technologies, planting drought resistance crops e.g. cassava, diversification of farming to other income generating projects like fish farming.

Always remember that "you may not be interested in climate change, but climate change impacts will not spare you"



Figure 1 Fish farming could be an alternative to crop farming (Muthomi's Farm at Ngusishi); an adaptation to climate change effects



Figure 2 Cassava Grown by the Kithoka Twanjai climate change adaptation project - Improving livelihoods