

Kenya: Treasury sets aside Sh15 billion for food projects

Kenyan finance minister, Uhuru Kenyatta announced yesterday, 3 August 2011, in addition to the Sh10.5 billion approved by the cabinet last month to deal with the drought situation in the country, a further Sh15.6 billion has been set aside at enhancing food security.

The minister said that while priority was on combating drought, that has put more than four million people at risk of starvation especially in northern Kenya, the government was putting in place long-term measure to avert similar scenarios in the future.

"We are also planning and initiating programs for the longer term in order to assure food security and transform our country into a food surplus economy where people live with dignity.

"First, this year's budget marks a beginning of a long journey to address food insecurity once and for all," said Mr Kenyatta in a statement.

Other ministries also benefitting

Last week, the treasury released Sh2 billion to ministries that are involved in the current response initiative. The Ministry of Special Programmes has received Sh1 billion for relief food, while the Emergency School Feeding Programme, under the Education Ministry, has received Sh400 million.

The Finance Ministry also released Sh400 million for water trucking, Sh100 million for emergency livestock off-take and another Sh100 million for emergency health interventions. The minister also said that the government has allocated Sh2.4 billion for water harvesting programs countrywide, of which Sh1.1 billion is for arid and semi arid areas.

"We cannot overemphasise the need for irrigated food production as opposed to the current rain-fed agriculture.

"It is in this regard that this year's budget provides resources to the tune of Sh8.5 billion for implementation of ambitious irrigation program countrywide to ensure food security," Mr Kenyatta said.

New projects

The minister commented that the provision is drawn from the success achieved under the Irrigation Component of the Economic Stimulus Package initiated last year in which the Sh1.4 billion allocated produced a total of 318 720 bags of maize and 1 627 500 bags of rice by May, 2011.

The new projects will arid and semi-arid areas with potential for irrigation particularly North Eastern and Turkana regions. Other areas covered include the drier parts of Nyanza, South Rift and Lower Eastern.

The allocation, Mr Kenyatta explained will be used to irrigate 59 000 acres and prepare designs for development of an additional 80 000 acres countrywide by the end of the current financial year. Another Sh1 billion shillings has been set aside to enhance agribusiness where farmers will get essential financial assistance for tools, seeds and fertilisers.

"We are not just allocating budget resources to address these challenges we are also taking appropriate actions to assure sustainable food availability in the country, while also fast tracking relief efforts to save lives from hunger," Mr Kenyatta said.

He added, "While we recognise that our current efforts will not bear fruits immediately, there is need to seize the opportunity to remain focus on breaking the cycle of food insecurity by zealously implementing the programs we have started in this financial year."

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