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UNDP supports green house farming in Jozani

CORRESPONDENT
Zanzibar

SMALL-SCALE farmers around Jozani National Park in Zanzibar have started to realize benefits from new

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The Guardian

farming methods that defy the uncertainty of weather. Now the farmers who work under the umbrella of UWEMAJO (Umoja wa Wenye Mashamba Jozani) have learned conducting green house farming-



-which allows them to produce vegetables throughout the year and so raise their incomes.

"We have built two units of green houses with funding from UNDP through its Small Grants Programme. In October we harvested the first crop of tomatoes and green papers. These fetched good prices in the market," explained Rajab Omar Khatib, the Secretary of UWEMAJO.

He was speaking to members of the National Steering Committee for Small Grants Programme (SGP) who visited Zanzibar recently to inspect various projects funded by SGP. The Programme offered 75m/- for the construction of two units of green houses.

According to Khatib, after learning the new farming method farmers have been inspired to construct their own green houses so that they can raise their incomes from agriculture particularly through horticulture. "We have yet to share the money (12m/-) from sale of tomatoes and green paper because we want to expand build more units but farmers have realized the importance of greenhouses and are willing to construct more of these," said the Secretary.

There are 102 farmers who work under the umbrella of UWEMAJO but a total of 3000 people benefit directly and indirectly from the activities of the Association.

Speaking about the benefits of the green house project, the Chairman of UWEMAJO Suleiman Kweleza explained that after running the project for one year green house farming is becoming popular in Zanzibar because it provides opportunity for self employment that yields benefits.

"But there are challenges that we have to deal with. One is the timing of harvesting our products. If we harvest tomatoes when the supply in the market is big, then we are set to lose because the price will be low," he said, adding that there are also plant diseases and pests that affect the crops.

While appreciating the support given by UNDP, he expressed the association's desire to expand the green house farming project and other activities through their own efforts because the SGP had provided the capital.

One beneficiary of the project, Alli Masauni, said the green house farming project and other activities implemented by UWEMAJO have provided farmers with alternative income generating activities. Instead of cutting trees from Jozani forest and selling firewood and charcoal, families can participate in green house farming and irrigation of small farms using drip irrigation method.

"Green houses are expensive but the association could build say one at a time for two or three farmers and eventually the members would reduce poverty from sale of the products. Other projects conducted by UWEMAJO, including farming using drip irrigation, also provide new avenues for raising the income of families," he explained.

Commenting on the implementation of the projects, the Secretary of the National Steering Committee for Small Grants Programme, Nehemiah Murusuri who was part of the team that visited Zanzibar said that he was impressed by the quality of implementation of the projects as they reflected value for money. "But you must move a step further and focus on value for many. Strive to make sure that more people, beyond the number targeted by the project, can benefit from these projects without affecting the quality of

implementation. Inclusive implementation of the projects will provide alternative opportunities for more people to earn more income and so improve their lives," he said.

Besides the greenhouse projects, UWEMAJO trains farmers in conservation of the environment with the aim of reducing pressure on Jozani forest. It also trains farmers on entrepreneurship skills for poverty alleviation without having to rely on sale of firewood or charcoal both of which are sources mainly from Jozani Forest.