



Eritrea: Commemoration of World Food Day and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

The 16th of October 2023 witnessed joint commemoration of World Food Day and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in Eritrea, under the respective themes: “Water is Life; Water is Food. Leave No One Behind” and “Dignity in Practice for All”. Early in the morning of the day, more than 250 participants of both events graced the well-embellished traditional hall of the Undicesimo Recreational Center in Emba-Derho, a village located about 12 kilometers north of Asmara. The distinguished participants included senior government officials; heads of United Nations’ (UN) agencies in Eritrea; and especially the joint organizers like –The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); United Nations Development Program (UNDP); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); members of the diplomatic corps in Eritrea; religious leaders; representatives of exemplary farmers and invited guests, among others.

Representing Ms. Esther N. Lusepani, the Representative of the FAO in Eritrea, Dr. Martins Ovberedjo, Representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Eritrea, gave a briefing on the two-extreme global scenarios of water-related problems, and the coordinated international interventions necessary to ensure solutions to the



Dr. Martins Ovberedjo

problems. The speech further elaborated the relevance of the theme, “Water is Life; Water is Food” in Eritrean context, and the holistic approach the country is pursuing towards ensuring a resilient future. “In recognizing the government’s efforts in water action, I call upon all to support Eritrea in achieving the 2030 agenda... In the spirit of unity, let us drive water action by transforming our



agri-food systems, striving for the 'Four Betters': Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment, and ultimately, a Better Life; ensuring no one is left behind," Dr. Martin wrapped up the speech.

Subsequently, a video speech on World Food Day 2023 by Mr. Qu Dongyu, the Director General of the FAO in the UN, was displayed, where Mr. Qu said, "Rapid population growth, urbanization, industrialization, economic development and climatic crisis have all taken a toll on global water resources, while increasing floods and droughts further impacted agri-food systems – jeopardizing the livelihoods of millions of farmers." Stating that there is a hope for producing more and better with less water consumption, the Director General of FAO indicated the possibility of reducing water use through prudent utilization and recycling of water. Mr. Qu concluded his virtual message as follows: "We can reduce agriculture's water footprint by adopting a holistic and integrated approach to water management."

On the other hand, Ms. Nashida Sattar, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Eritrea, stated that poverty is a complex and multi-dimensional issue with no clear solution, and referred the major global factors of its prevalence. Pointing out that dignity is a key principle upon which Eritrea is built, Ms. Nashida went on saying, "As we are gathered here, it is also pivotal that we reflect and testify on the transformative vision, resilience, and commitment of this country to tackle poverty and achieve progress. In line with this, we are pleased to note efforts by Eritrea to put people and sustainable prosperity at the center of developmental programmes and policies." Furthermore, she emphasized that stepped-up efforts needs to be exerted in terms of achieving the goals of poverty eradication and enhancing food systems, and promoting climate resilience initiatives, as well as clean water and energy programs. Ms. Nashida finally reiterated



Ms. Nashida Sattar

the UNDP's readiness to remain committed in the endeavours thereof.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Aeneas C. Chuma, UN Resident Coordinator in Eritrea, commended the



Mr. Aeneas C. Chuma,

Government of Eritrea's commitment vis-à-vis the growing partnership with the UN system, and expressed appreciation for the accomplishments registered with regards to ensuring sustainable water resource management and poverty eradication by Eritrea. "However", he said, "This beautiful nation is not without its challenges. We are aware of the prevalent water scarcity that Eritrea is facing. [And] it is our shared responsibility to work together to overcome these challenges." Taking into account that agriculture constitutes the largest freshwater-utilizing sector in Eritrea, Mr. Chuma pointed out the imperatives of transforming Eritrea's agri-food systems to a more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable level in light of effective means of addressing water scarcity. In this connection, he explained that Eritrea, as a nation recognising the fundamental role of global water security in achieving the 2030 Agenda and standing united with the global community in this endeavour, can take water action to the next level and ensure food security for all Eritreans on the basis of the Four Betters. Concerning poverty eradication, Mr. Chuma asserted that, for Eritrea, fighting different forms of deprivation is just about restoring dignity to every citizen. "I am glad to note that Eritrea has a strong social protection strategy and is making appreciable progress. However, much more could be done, and the UN development system stands ready to accompany the country in these efforts," he added.

Equally worth mentioning is that, Mr. Michael Yosief, in a speech he delivered representing Mr. Mebrahtu Iyassu; the Director General of the Water Resource Department in the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment; elucidated the National Water Resource Policy, and gave explanation on the achievements made with regards to ensuring potable water outreach and sanitation.

The Policy promotes the principles of integrated water resources management as a means of ensuring sustainable management of national water resources, and emphasizes the recognition of water as being both a social and economic good whose allocation gives maximum priority to domestic and agricultural use. The key role players in all water management and development activities are well defined in the national water policy, which also addresses gender issues, particularly women's roles in this context.



Mr. Michael Yosief

Mr. Michael additionally explained that Eritrea, which has been exerting stepped-up efforts in surface and ground water development since 1992, is gradually tackling the challenge of having ground water as the main option of meeting domestic, irrigation and industrial water demand both in arid and semi-arid areas. "In the future, irrigated agriculture is expected to dominate the other forms of water demand in this country, taking into account the growing trend in the number of irrigated projects, coupled with the government's sound policy and resolute commitment towards ensuring food security," he added. He also emphasized the need that communities should stop taking water for granted and manage it wisely.

Succeedingly, H.E. Mr. Arefaine Berhe, the Minister of Agriculture, delivered a key note address, where he expressed a heart-felt gratitude to all those who honoured the invitation to take part on the occasion. He then shed light on the calamitous trend of global water shortage, in contrast with its reality in Eritrea, and went on remarking: "It is precisely for this reason that the government has been launching serious programs on soil and water conversation in general, and building different sizes of dams in particular. The number of reservoirs constructed since independence have grown by eight times. As a result, crop production has increased by two times while that of vegetables and fruits increased by six times and seventy-one times respectively." Before he concluded his speech, H.E. Mr. Arefaine announced that Eritrean date

varieties, packaged in a specially designed one-kilogram box, are being displayed and tasted for the first time on the joint event. He also disclosed that the crop is due to have an upward trend in the next few years. In this regard, it is to be noted that Eritrea has been acknowledged as a date-producing country during the 7th International Date Palm Conference in Abu Dhabi, UAE. ***(Full content of H.E. Mr. Arefaine's key note address on the concurrently commemorated international events constitutes the last portion of this newsletter).***

Moreover, a brief video show titled, "Eritrea: Towards Achieving Safe and Nutritious Food" prepared by the Public Relations Division of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) was displayed, followed by a video piece produced by the UNDP depicting date production activities in Eritrea.

On the occasion, a total of six exemplary farmers from five different administrative regions, received certificates of appreciation and monetary award (five thousand Nakfa each) from the MoA and FAO. A certificate of recognition by the ministry was also handed to another farmer, while three winners of date packaging design contest were awarded monetarily.

Posters, various domestic food products, and locally produced machines for food preservation and processing were showcased through the exhibition at the joint commemoration of the events. Among the other commodities displayed, date, in several varieties, had added visibility. Appliances for cost-effective and energy-saving cooling system; more viable small incubator; as



H.E. Mr. Arefaine Berhe

well as crop threshing machine and combiner, all locally developed; were also put on show on the day. Lunch, accompanied by traditional coffee ceremony, was the conclusive session of the event, but also served as a basis for demonstrating the great taste of cassava stew and cake.

Brief Profiles of Awarded Farmers and Date Palm Packaging Design Award Winners

- Mr. Yemane Teklezghi Tekle, from Asmara, Administration of the Central Region, is a versatile farmer who is engaged in farming since 2009, and recognized for producing vegetables and Taff, besides multiplication of improved varieties of potato, wheat and maize (hybrid)



Mr. Yemane Teklezghi

- Mr. Abdella Osman Ahmed, from Hiebo, Segeneyti Sub-zone of the Southern Administrative Region, now on his late thirties, is a farmer who started beekeeping at an age of fourteen years. Currently, he owns a total of 166 hives (100 traditional hives, 60 frame hives, and 6 top-bar hives). His average harvest rate is 30 Kgs per hive per year



Mr. Abdella Osman

- Mr. Teferi Tesfay Mrach, from Keren, Administration of Anseba Region, is a farmer who launched a small farming business based on four cows in 1998. Currently, he owns 42 cows, 23 of which are milking. Mr. Teferi is in a position to own genetically upgraded cows through artificial insemination, and equally base his dairy farm on forage harvest from 1.5 hectares of land. He produces 170 litres of milk a day



Mr. Teferi Tesfay

- Ms. Nigisti Habte Araya, from Afhimbol, Dige Sub-zone of Gash-Barka Administrative Region, is a farmer who started farming in 2012. From nine hectares of land, which is known for production of vegetables and taff, she attained harvest rates of thirteen quintals per hectare and six quintals per hectare for pepper and taff respectively



Ms. Nigisti Habte

- Mr. Abdella Sweyleh, from She'ib Sub-zone, Northern Red Sea Region, is a farmer who started date production in 1996 based on direct seeding. Three years later, he planted date seedlings he got from the MoA's National Agricultural Research



Mr. Abdella Sweyleh

Institute (NARI). Presently, Mr. Abdella is in a position to secure around 700 fruiting and young date palms in five hectares of land, and thus harvesting 50 quintals per year in average. He was rendered several opportunities for exposure visits abroad

- Ms. Nigisti Awalom Weldeselassie, from Adi-Segudo, Administration of the Central Region, is a farmer who was never left behind due to blindness, but rather emerged successfully by proving herself active in overall agricultural development. Ms. Nigisti has been actively engaged in poultry and plant production, besides agricultural food value addition



Ms. Nigisti Awalom

- Mr. Daniel Kahsay Tsige, from Debarwa town, Administrative of the Southern Region, is a farmer who has been working in the development and introduction of an old Emmer Seed (“Ales” in Tigrinya) in Eritrea since 2003, when he ideated to bring forth a rich breakfast food (18% protein content of the Emmer variety was confirmed later by the National Animal and Plant Health Laboratory) out of just five seeds, three of which were even consumed by his backyard chicken. Then he multiplied the two Emmer seeds, coming up with two Kgs of seed. He took quarter a kilo of his petty seed harvest to NARI for technical assistance, and eventually he was able



Mr. Daniel Kahsay

to secure ten quintals as a result of it. In connection with this, he was given opportunities to represent his early produce at exhibitions in national festivals in Asmara and Dekemhare at different times. He was further provided with a land plot to produce Emmer, thanks to a collaboration between the MoA and the Administration of Debarwa Sub-zone thereof. Furthermore, pursuant to joint work by the MoA and the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) in 2015, he took part in Milano International Farm Food Expo in Italy. Therefore, he was given certificate of recognition for his longstanding and exceptional contribution. He was granted a husking machine for Emmer processing too.

- Mr. Abel Ghebray, first winner of the Date Palm Packaging Design Award (Eight thousand Nakfa)



Mr. Abel Gehebray

- Ms. Saron Habtom, second winner of Date Palm Packaging Design Award (Five thousand Nakfa)
- Mr. Naod Goitom, third winner of Date Palm Packaging Design Award (Three thousand Nakfa)



Mr. Naod Goitom

Personal Impressions of Some Key Participants of the Occasion

Mr. Asgedom Teklemariam



My name is Asgedom Teklemariam. I work as an Assistant to the FAO Representative in Eritrea. I work in the Programs Section. We carry out projects and programs, and closely work with the implementing partners. We do things according to the UNSDG's, particularly in line with the objectives and programs of the government.

This is the most celebrated day in the UN System. It is commemorated in more than 150 countries. As the theme does remind us, nothing can be done without water. At this time, water is being misused and polluted by many people and sectors. It has been abundant, but now already on the verge of depletion due to imprudent usage. Agriculture, for example is responsible for consuming 72% of global water supply. So, I think we need to use water cleanly and efficiently, targeting more production with less water. Speaking of Eritrea's experience in this regard, the government has been exerting continued endeavours towards water harvesting since independence. Yet, putting up increased efforts is needed, particularly with regards to enhancing efficient utilization of water. Rain-fed and furrow irrigation farming methods need to be substituted by water-saving alternatives. New technologies are necessary to this effect. Primarily, promoting awareness on water management, both in the production and consumption sides, and even between the supply value-chain domains, is an unavoidable pre-requisite for bringing about higher impact by the national commitment. I presume working on the awareness part should firstly be focused in famers. Then experts at all levels need to be engaged fully in training and inspiring farmers, while the partners in project implementation should

remain highly committed. After all, that is the case why we are saying, "no one should be left behind." Everyone should know concerning how we are going to produce; where we are going to focus; how we plan to meet the demand; and what the supply is going to look like etc. Otherwise, cherished goals would be unattainable. We should broaden the scope of collective awareness, and then manage it very well.

Ms. Nashida Sattar



My name is Nashida Sattar. I am the Deputy Representative of the UNDP in Eritrea. It is good to take part in this occasion where the MoA organized a fantastic event, jointly commemorating both World Food Day, and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. We have seen many senior government officials, the diplomatic community, UN heads of agencies, and most importantly farmers and other people who work in the field to make this a reality.

We collaborate with the government in planning processes and in achieving the SDG's. But we also have projects focusing on income generation and environment. This is how our entry point into the country looks like. We are very excited about the date production initiative. We have been working jointly with the MoA and FAO in this area. Date is climate-resilient crop with the potential of export by Eritrea. So, it can be a good source of foreign currency for the country. It is a long-term initiative. We are on early days as it is only five years since the project was launched. So, we are literally enjoying the taste of the first fruits today. There will be a big focus on the part of the UNDP in providing assistance support to the government in looking at the practical green energy alternatives that Eritrean can access. And,

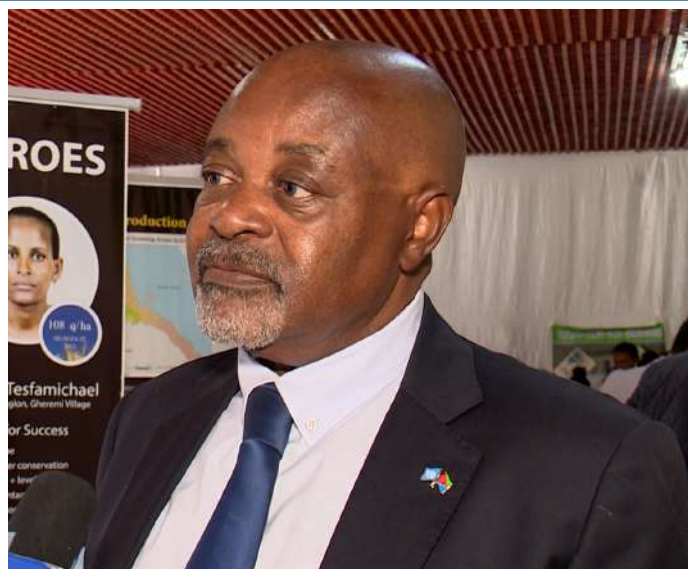
within that umbrella, the issue of augmenting clean water sources can be addressed. Finally, I'd like to indicate that we are really happy to see the UNDP's work being impactful in this country. It contributes to meeting the vision of the people and the government.

Mr. Aeneas C. Chuma

My name is Aeneas C. Chuma. I am the UN Resident Coordinator in Eritrea. This global event is essential in demonstrating the centrality of water to life, coupled with the importance of preservation and efficient utilization of water, especially in promoting agriculture. Water is needed for agriculture; and agricultural products for poverty reduction. Water is both a source of food and livelihoods; and hence, the importance of this day and the theme selected for this year.

Eritrea has really done commendable work in the conservation and management of its water resources, particularly in terms of ensuring water access in rural areas, i.e. both for household consumption and for economic activities. So, I think the country is well-positioned to essentially further conservation and efficient utilization of water, as well as agricultural production. Water is crucial for the entire sector, but also equally necessary for generating food security, both at national and household levels.

I can say that, for Eritrea, attaining food security vis-à-vis the SDG's by 2023 is a real pursuit. Of course, it doesn't happen by itself. We have to continuously work on it and maintain due diligence, ensuring that more investments are made and management



Mr. Aeneas C. Chuma

of water –and other natural resources– efficiently moves forward. I remain optimistic about this as long as the government continues to play key leadership role; the ministry providing the required technical work; and we, as the UN, remain supportive to the government.

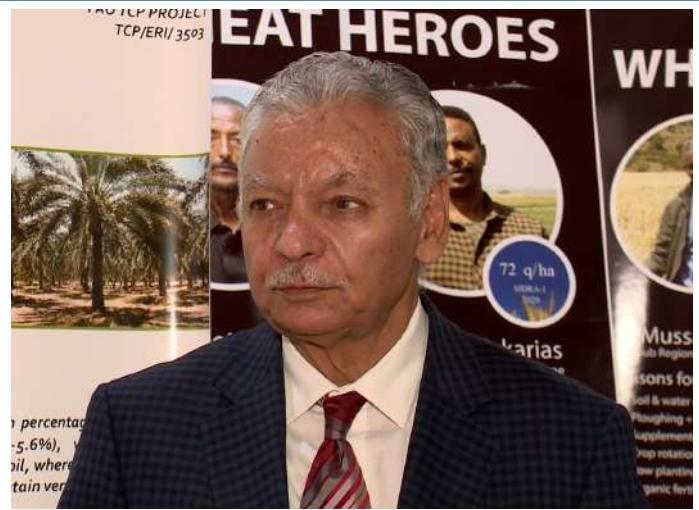
The event also served as a demonstration for what is possible and what is available. Some of the value-added agricultural products that we came across at the exhibition hall are very impressive. I think what is left is: Just bringing them to the market at large scale. If this is done, they would have an impact in improving livelihoods in general. Finally, I'd like to testify that everything went well today. It was a very successful event. I commend the MoA and the leadership for their key role in organizing it auspiciously.



Dr. Abdalla Bin Abdalla

I am Dr. Abdalla Bin Abdalla, from Tunisia. I am an International Consultant, especially for date palm. I have worked for around 18 years and in different countries with the FAO and the UNDP specializing on date palm development. In Eritrea, we started in 2017 based on the government's project in collaboration with the FAO. We imported nine international varieties and they started to bear fruits along the years 2021 and 2022. We were more than happy to see that date palm can appropriately be produced here with internationally acceptable quality standard. Our joint mission with the MoA is building date sector in Eritrea, and enabling the country to be one of the date-producing countries with remarkable capacity. We are drafting a strategy for the MoA in cooperation with the UN agencies: The UNDP, FAO and IFAD. The plan is to reach plantation of around 300 thousand date palms in the country by 2030. By then, we can talk about Eritrea as a producer country that can probably make substantial export. Date production can enhance the economy of both the Northern Red Sea and Southern Red Sea regions, which are very appropriate for production of the commodity. We were really excited by the result and its implication for feasibility of mass production. The short-term objectives are related to securing income for the local families; and then making an impact on the regions' food security. However, export production can be assumed afterwards. It can be a source of huge foreign currency. For example, Tunisia has an income of approximately USD 400 million from nearly 350 thousand tons of exported date.

More than four of the nine imported varieties have performed very well in Eritrea. Among these is Majul, which is the best variety in the world. It has different categories such as the standard, large and jumbo,



Dr. Abdalla Bin Abdalla

based on its fruit size. What we are producing now constitute medium to large fruit sizes. With more expertise and technical assistance, we can quickly and easily move to jumbo-size production. This is our goal. Barhi, which is among the fresh fruit varieties, is also performing very well. It is recognized by the international market as an expensive one like Majul. Khalas, Saudi's variety, too has demonstrated very good results in Eritrea. We are working with special focus on three to four varieties in particular, expanding plantation more and more, till the number date palms reaches the set goal of 300 thousand.

I have worked in many countries: Namibia, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Burkina Faso, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq etc. I can say that Eritreans are very hard working and highly dedicated. With them, I think it is very easy to realize the cherished goal. We are working with the MoA's research and extension staff at different levels, farmers, and households, in training equipping them with the necessary technical capacity for date palm production. The mission is not very difficult but requires thorough work.



Exhibition Highlights and Photo Tour

Tsin'at Berhane



My name is Tsin'at Berhane. I am tasked with the coordination of this exhibition. With regards to the items staged for exhibition, date has occupied a front area in this exhibition, and we can say that it has shined in this year's World Food Day. As we have already been informed, date production by Eritrean exemplary farmers has already started. The date varieties displayed here comprise samples of their produce, and we have received reassuring feedbacks concerning them. Dairy-producing agri-businesses make up another category of the exhibitors, in addition to women who displayed sweet potato, pumpkin and top-bar hive representing the Eritrean

Women in Agri-business Association (EWAA). Products from national ministries related to the food sector were also incorporated in the exhibition. In this connection, the MoA has been working to introduce cassava in Eritrea, and some of the food items it displayed are demonstrative to the undertaking; of course, in addition to sweet potato and millet products, as well as medicinal herbs.

The Ministry of Marine Resources (MoMR) and the Ministry of Education (MoE), on their part, included dry fish-based food items and granules, as well as complementary food for children respectively.

Likewise, as part of their research projects, some students from Hamelmalo Agricultural College (HAC) presented processed cactus pear products, and Abrehe, a soft drink made from pearl sorghum and millet. Another integral corner of this exhibition introduced innovative and adapted design of agriculture-related appliances. So, ultimately, we are in a position to note down many constructive and encouraging feedbacks. I am hopeful that we will keep the merits of this exhibition, as a stepping stone to better work ahead.

Yonas Mengisteab

My name is Yonas Mengisteab. I am a member of a crew that made this project a reality. The other members of my team are Henok Habteselassie and Amanuel Michael. Our project is called SMART,



meaning Synchronized Multipurpose Automatic Refrigeration Technique. In the onset, our motivation in developing a project of this type was based on an aspiration to bring about a solution on cold storage in Eritrea. There is a global reality that around one-third of the global agricultural produce is wasted. Pursuant to the fact that cold storage is necessary for agricultural products, starting from their harvest all the way to their consumption, we ended up planning to come up with something that encourages post-harvest management. So, what we did is: Synchronizing all the cooling components to a central condenser. The cooling components include refrigeration appliances for solid products, liquids and cold store. All of them can depend on a single compressor. This is a key factor for reducing both cost of machines and electricity consumption. According to our calculation, there is a decline of cost by 70% and 30% respectively.

One of the elements of the project is fast refrigerator, which is also adaptable as heater, just by shifting the switch. It can exceptionally be valuable for making yoghurt. Another component is the appliance for cold store. This is highly demanded by farmers who produce fruits and vegetables, and big hotels for storage of fish and other perishable food commodities. The third part of the cooling system constitutes liquid refrigerator, which can be specifically more important for farmers to keep their milk and yoghurt well for a longer time. Another merit of this project is flexibility



Yonas Mengisteab

with power alternatives. It can feasibly depend on solar energy and biogas, a creative solution that we managed to incorporate recently. The latter alternative is more ideal for milk producers. They need refrigerators to keep their milk and they have their animals' droppings as a by-product, which can in turn be a source of good biogas supply.

We have displayed an incubator that has a capacity of accommodating 50 eggs too. It has an equal standard if compared to the modern ones. This incubator demands only 300 Watt of electricity, which is not greater than that of household refrigerators or televisions. So, people can use it in rural setting based on solar energy. And our hope is that it encourages home-based incubation practice in our society.





Ministry of Education,
Team of Nutrition Experts



HAC, Food Technology Department



HAC, Food Technology Department



Ministry Of Marine Resources, Team



SMAP, Dairy products



Asmara, Meat and Milk Processing



EWAA, Zac Milk And Milk Processing Plant



EWAA, Pumpkin Value Addition



EWAA, Honey Products



EWAA, Processed Food



EWAA, Sweet Potato Group



EWAA, Top-bar Hive Honey Production

H.E. Mr. Arefaine Berhe's Key Note Address on the Occasion of Joint Commemoration of World Food Day and International Day for the- Eradication Poverty

Ms. Moderator!
Excellencies Ministers and Governors
High Government, PFDJ and Army Officials!
Dr. Martin Ovberedjo, Representing Ms. Esther Lusepani, FAO Representative!
Mr. Pa Lamin Beyai, UNDP Representative!
Ambassadors, Senior Embassy Officials and Honorary consuls!
Heads of UN Agencies!
Religious Leaders!
Representative Farmers Present!
Ladies and Gentlemen!

To Begin with I would like to express my heart felt gratitude to you all for honoring our invitation.

This year's World Food Day theme is, "Water is life. Water is food"

As we address this important topic, we are touching the fundamental aspect of our existence; a resource so precious and essential that it sustains all life on this planet. Water is not merely a basic necessity. It is the very foundation of our existence. It is a source of life and a symbol of purity, bringing both growth, rejuvenation and vitality.

We often take water for granted assuming that it will always be readily available for us. However, the reality is far from this. Our world is facing environmental water crises, and it is our collective responsibility to take action.

Distinguished participants
Water scarcity is not limited to a few remote regions anymore. It is a global issue. Drought is becoming more pronounced; rivers are drying up; and water resources are depleting at an alarming rate. As population continue to grow so does the demand for water. Agriculture, Industry and our daily activities are placing an unprecedented strain on water resources. If we continue on this path, it won't be long before we face a severe shortage of water, jeopardizing our very survival.

Distinguished participants
The trend that I have described above is also true in Eritrea. Because of deforestation and climate change our rivers, lakes and rainfall are constantly declining. It is precisely for this reasons that the government has been launching serious programs on soil and water conversation in general and building different sizes of dams in particular. The number of reservoirs constructed since independence have grown by eight times.

As a result crop production has increased by two times while vegetables and fruits have increased by 06 times and 71 times respectively. The correlation between the increase in water holding capacity and production clearly demonstrates that water is also food.

Distinguished participants
Before I conclude I would like to announce that Eritrean dates packaged in a specially designed one Kg. box will be displayed and tasted for the first time. This crop will be on upward trend the next few years.

Considering the preciousness of water and its scarcity, the world is going through "drop per crop" philosophy in order to utilize water judiciously. We are also following this trend by constantly shifting from furrow irrigation to pressurized irrigation.

In conclusion let me congratulate our partners and especially the FAO and UNDP for working together to make the World Food Day and the World poverty Eradication Day a success.

I also commend the organizing committee and the management of this facility for a job extremely well done!

I thank you for your attention!

16/10/2023

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