Launch Of £9m Research Programme To Transform Agriculture and Food Systems in Africa

A £9.2 million research programme focused on improving evidence-based policy making to develop sustainable, productive, agricultural systems, resilient to climate change has been launched in Pretoria this week.

The programme, called Agricultural and Food-system Resilience: Increasing Capacity and Advising Policy (AFRICAP), will conduct its research activities in Africa (South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi) and the UK.

AFRICAP is led by the University of Leeds, a leading Russell Group university in the north of England, in partnership with the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network, a pan African multi-stakeholder policy network whose regional secretariat is in Pretoria, South Africa.

AFRICAP is focused on generating evidence-based policy to transform agriculture and food systems in Africa. The programme aims to improve productivity of farming systems, and their resilience to shocks emanating from climate change impacts. This is critical, given agriculture’s the key role in Africa’s economy; contributing about 15% of continental GDP, with smallholder farms constituting approximately 80% of all farms in SSA employing about 175 million people directly and having significant impact on the environment.

AFRICAP will advise on the development of climate-smart agri-food system pathways and create ‘special agricultural zones’ where research can be turned into evidence, leading to policy that is capable of influencing practices. AFRICAP will further assess how food, agriculture and natural resources policies can be developed so that they support the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.

Lead researcher Professor Tim Benton, from the University of Leeds, who is the UK’s former Global Food Security Champion, said: “This is about weather, climate, agriculture, economic growth, sustainability, livelihoods; with the end-game being how best to design policy for African growth that is climate smart and sustainable. We will review what can be done better, given what we know now, and what challenges will we face in the future, and consider how we should prepare for them. Working with experienced practitioners based across the continent will ensure we keep our focus on improving livelihoods by proposing practical evidence-based policy in support of future development.”

FANRPAN Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Tobias Takavarasha said: “AFRICAP presents a unique opportunity for African and UK institutions to collaboratively build the capacities required across research and policy to tackle the multi-faceted challenge of achieving sustainable and resilient transformation of agriculture and food systems in Africa. What is exciting for FANRPAN is that AFRICAP will work across all levels, from local to global to develop a pathway for agricultural development in Africa”.

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The funding for the programme is from the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), a £1.5billion UK Government programme to support research that addresses critical problems in developing countries across the world. It is administered by the UK’s Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

Dr Amanda Collis, BBSRC Executive Director of Science and GCRF Champion said: “The GCRF provides real opportunities for the UK’s world-leading bioscience research community to meaningfully contribute to the economic and societal wellbeing of developing countries.

“With collaborations such as this one led by Professor Benton, long-term partnerships with in-country experts will provide a platform for sustainable, resilient transformations in agriculture and food production, benefiting those most in need.”

The launch has seen key programme partners from the UK and Africa meeting to examine the programme’s aims and embark on the research and information gathering process.

As well as the University of Leeds and FANRPAN, other partners in the programme include from the UK – the University of Aberdeen, the UK Met Office and Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET), Malawi; National Agriculture Marketing Council (NAMC), South Africa; economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF), Tanzania and the Agriculture Consultative Forum (Zambia).

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