

Story Workshop debates on agricultural policies

Malawi's economy depends highly on agriculture and if there are any problems in the agricultural industry, development becomes questionable and one thing which remains a fact is that a well-trained farmer is capable of assisting in development in the country.

Recently the Story Workshop conducted a radio debate aiming at promoting dialogue on controversial issues which affect farmers, field workers and policy makers as a means of finding possible solutions to address some of the problems.

For one to get sea shells, one has to get to the sea shore first. Story Workshop's Media Producer and Managing Director, Marvin Hanke said these debates are targeted to get realistic information from grassroots level in the farming industry, which is the village.

Speaking at the debate, Patrick Zuze, Agroforestry Development Facilitator for International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), said farmers experience a lot of environmental problems such that efforts used to do not match the outcome.

"Farmers also are frustrated by agricultural advisors from different agricultural sectors who impart different and contradictory policies," Zuze said.

"Agricultural advisors from different organisations in Malawi need to work together to develop the best policies that will suit the current environmental changes Malawi is facing in this era of decentralisation," he added.

Supporting the idea was Planning and Advocacy Manager for Churches and Relief Development (CARD) Milton Luhanga, said farmers should also be involved when



A successful maize garden needs a well-trained farmer to care for it

formulating policies since they are the ones to implement them."

"We need to encourage farmer-to-farmer approach where farmers can learn from each other for better results," said Luhanga.

Representing the farmers' fraternity, Thomas Mlangeni, a farmer from Mwanza, commented that despite all the conflicting advice from different agricultural advisors, they are able to have abundant harvests.

He however said the only problem that needs advisors' attention is the marketing strategy.

"We are usually taught by these advisors how to take care of our crops throughout the growing season, yet they don't assist us in marketing our products," he complained.

Turning to the other side of the coin, the advisors also have their own grievances on the problems they face when conducting their duties.

One of the agricultural advisors from Machinga Agricultural Development Division (ADD) Donnex Chakoma cited a lack of knowledge and shortage of advisors as some of the

hiccups affecting their job.

"The ratio of advisor to farmer is impropotional in most areas, therefore farmers are not given the best attention throughout," Chakoma said. He added "as advisors we do not have knowledge on marketing farm produce and we can't even educate farmers on how to market their produce."

Adding to this, Programme Manager for Blantyre ADD Wilfred Lipita emphasised that the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation only assists farmers in fieldwork.

"We only assist on field work, and not including marketing strategies," said Lipita.

The debate, which is the fifth in the series and was aired on MBC Radio One, was produced by the Story Workshop with support from the European Commission Food Security Programme and attracted participants from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Non-Governmental Organisations and local farmers.