

Rwanda: Minister Urges Citizens to Sustain Food Security

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Kigali — As the country joins the rest of the world to celebrate the World Food Day and the World Food week, Rwandans have been urged to sustain steady food production if they are to consolidate food security levels registered in the last two years. In an interview with The New Times, Agriculture Minister Dr Agnes Kalibata said that the recent achievement in the sector 'is just a starting point.'

"The message is simple and clear, what we have done in the last two years is just a start-it is not only about making Rwanda food secure, but also sustaining and consolidating food security for many years to come," Kalibata said. According to Kalibata, Rwanda will celebrate the day under the theme "achieving food security in times of crisis" on October 16, in Nyaruguru district, but prior to that there will be different events, press conferences and radio talk shows on food security. According to FAO, this year's theme reflects on the recent global economic crisis that has rendered millions of people victims of hunger.

"Crisis or no crisis, we have the know-how to do something about hunger. We also have the ability to find money to solve problems when we consider them important let us work together to make sure hunger is recognized as a critical problem, and solve it," reads a statement from FAO.

A major backbone of the economy, Rwanda's Agriculture sector has been praised as one of the fastest growing sectors in the country and was responsible for propelling the country to an economic growth rate of 11.2 percent registered last year. For the last 15 years, the government with the support from the World Bank, has taken drastic measures to improve the sector on which over 90 percent of the population depend. Consequently, improved performance of the agricultural sector boosted Rwanda's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 7.9 percent in 2007 to 11.2 percent in 2008.

According to Kalibata, the Government has for the last two or three years increased the budget of the sector over three-fold and this financial year, the sector's budget constitutes 6.6 percent of the total budget. Last week, the US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton hailed Rwanda for its proper use of agriculture resources and funds to make the sector one of the most productive and a backbone of the country's fast growth. She pledged more support by the US to African economies like Rwanda that have shown the will and determination to take the right path to development by implementing the right policies.

An EDPRS report by the Ministry of Finance indicates that the strong performance of the agriculture sector is a result of four consecutive years of drastic measure to improve agricultural production. According to the report, from 2004 to 2007, agriculture only contributed to 0.1%, 4.8%, 1.1% and 0.7% of the GDP respectively, but improved farming methods and animal husbandry practices, have led to a tremendous increase in agricultural production. In 2008 however, the sector contributed a whopping 15 percent to the GDP growth.