

Climate adaptation funds sow seeds of resilience

September 2 2024, by Albert Oppong-Ansah



Climate adaptation projects like Zambia's seed banks need devolved finance.
Credit: Mzingo Ngoma Botha

Beaming with smiles, Zambian farmer Mary Dimba points to a newly harvested crop of maize on her silo. The mother-of-four from Mpande village in Zambia's Lusaka Province tells how the beginning of the last cropping season was less stressful than previous ones.

Funds that would have gone into buying seeds during the planting season paid for her youngest child's school books. This season she sourced seeds for free from the community [seed bank](#).

"Per the agreed laws governing our seed bank, any farmer that borrows two kilograms of seed must return the same quantity or more so others can call on it in the next season," Dimba told SciDev.Net as she packaged seeds in plastic containers to send to the bank.

In the past, Mary and others like her wished she could plant her local seed varieties but lacked the knowledge and skills to be able to select, process and store seeds from their harvests.

"We have different local varieties of seeds that require less fertilizer to grow, thrive in dry spells and give good yields. That is why we prefer our seeds to others," says Mary, who has more than 20 years' experience of farming.

Community seed bank

Now Mary is one of around 250 [smallholder farmers](#), dotted across three localities, who have seed banks in their [local communities](#), enabling them to loan seeds to each other.

This was made possible thanks to micro-grants issued by the Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA), a global coalition responding to the urgent challenges faced by vulnerable communities as a result of climate change.

For centuries, peasants and [small-scale farmers](#) in Africa have produced biodiverse, ecologically resilient seeds that can adapt to the changing climate and other challenges.

Modernization and government systems led to the discontinuation or limitation of this production in many countries, making way for seeds from foreign countries, which can be costly for farmers and not always suited to their needs.

The Women's Life and Wellness Foundation (WLWF), a Zambian not-for-profit organization focused on the welfare of women, has worked to facilitate the re-introduction of the seed banks under its Farmer Managed Seed Systems initiative.

Every seed bank stores 35 seed varieties and is manned by an elected executive body and farmers have a loan threshold of up to 3kg of any variety, Mzingo Ngoma Botha, a representative of the foundation, told SciDev.Net.

The initiative seeks to help farmers build resilience to climate impacts and contribute to food security and sustainability.

Botha explains how [community members](#) played a major role in suggesting the location of the seed bank, rules to govern its operations and who should lead.

"It is a joy to see farmers having a choice regarding selecting varieties they feel will serve their purpose, are dependable and withstand vulnerabilities and contribute to the global goal of adaptation," she says.

Locally led research

For Jesse DeMaria-Kinney, head of Secretariat at the Adaptation Research Alliance, mobilizing funding for local organizations to identify burning issues in their communities is one way the alliance contributes to the Global Goal on Adaptation, established under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

With about GBP 700,000 (US\$ 925,500), ARA has supported more than 55 local organizations across Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean to implement inclusive, locally led, action-oriented research projects for adapting to impacts of climate change.

Thematic areas range from climate smart agriculture and flood adaptation, to climate advisory services, nature-based solutions and disaster management.

"The micro-grantees are diverse in organization types and structures and we work with them to understand their current grant management capacity in order to link them to other funders and opportunities to scale their initiatives," says DeMaria-Kinney.

Negotiations on climate finance are on-going on at the international level, which the ARA supports.

The UN climate conference, COP 29, to be held in Baku, Azerbaijan later this year, has been billed as "the finance COP," with all eyes on commitments from the private sector.

However, DeMaria-Kinney believes that climate actions at the local level must also occur and accelerate, regardless of global decisions.

"There are still a lot of unknowns around specific [climate impacts](#) at the local level so we need more research to be done," he says.

"Micro-grants are a way for us to get this contextualized understanding while driving action now. In addition, we are able to bring up these local issues and voices into the global conversation so solutions can be tailor-made to local contexts."

Funding 'unpredictable'

Climate change manifests differently in different places, which requires localized assessment as well as bespoke solutions, says Antwi-Boasiako Amoah, acting director for climate vulnerability and adaptation at Ghana's Environmental Protection Agency and an experienced climate negotiator.

"I just witnessed a situation in the northern part of Ghana where crops on the field have not received rain in a month," he told SciDev.Net.

"This would not have happened if it was under irrigation. That would have been a proper adaptation in the lens of climate change."

Whichever adaptation actions frontline countries need to take—developing seed systems in communities, establishing sustainable irrigation, addressing the health impacts of climate change—requires money.

"Seeds are now an issue in our part of the world," says Amoah, stressing that finance for local projects is central to increasing resilience.

"The owners are depriving farmers of seeds so if you want to establish a seed bank then you need finance to mobilize the seeds, train people on the processes and find a storage facility," he adds.

Currently the lead negotiator for G77 and China on national adaptation plans, Amoah believes countries cannot implement their climate action plans without financial support from external sources.

For years, developing countries have been calling for funding, without success, says Amoah, who is also a board member of the Green Climate Fund for climate finance.

"Even if it comes, it is not predictable and is small in scale," he adds. Multiple projects at the Green Climate Fund are competing for what

small funds are available, says Amoah, adding: "We need proper funding now."

Provided by SciDev.Net

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