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## Investing on ecosystem can boost food security

NEWS - AFRICA NEWS

Food security - A new report by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and its partners said that investing in healthy ecosystems could boost food security, improve resilience to climate change and provide economic benefits for poor communities. The report, entitled: 'An Ecosystems Approach to Water and Food Security', was launched at the just-concluded World Water Week in Stockholm, Sweden. It was produced by UNEP and the **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)**, in partnership with 19 other organizations. A statement on the report, made available to PANA in New York, on Monday stated: 'Managing and investing in the connections between ecosystems, water and food, through diversifying crops, planting trees on farmland and improving rainwater collection and other practical steps can boost agricultural production.'

'This could also help avoid water scarcity and meet the growing food demands of a global population set to reach 9 billion by 2050,' it said.

It noted that, 'one of the main challenges in boosting current levels of food production is the availability of water, which is needed for livestock, crop irrigation and fisheries and other agricultural uses.'

The statement said that groundwater levels, for example, were declining rapidly in several major breadbaskets and rice bowl regions such as the North China plains, the Indian Punjab and in Western United States.

It pointed out that, 'maintaining healthy, resilient ecosystems to ensure water availability for agriculture and other ecosystem services is essential for long-term food security.'

The report, written by over 50 contributors and using case studies from China, Guatemala, Jordan and other communities, recommended changes to three specific areas, namely environmental protection, water resources management and food production, which it said were needed to improve food security and reduce stresses on water supply.

It also sets out recommendations for dry lands, wetlands, crop systems, fisheries and livestock systems.

It stated that, 'water scarcity and land degradation are the most prominent constraints for food production in dry lands, which support one third of the world's population, up to 44 per cent of its cultivated systems and about 50 per cent of its livestock.'

'Among its recommendations for dry lands, the report suggested creating corridors to promote the movement of livestock, which can reduce overgrazing and land degradation caused when animals are confined to small areas, as well as cultivating local plants better adapted to dry conditions,' the statement said.

In addition to boosting food security, the report noted that an ecosystem services approach to agriculture could also help raise living standards and income.

'The Peruvian Amazon, for example, is home to indigenous communities that rely on forest ecosystem services for their food supply, livelihoods and cultural practices. Recently, conservation groups have been working with local people to develop agricultural and economic resources,' it said.

'Through better ecosystem management, some 600 families saw their incomes increase, mainly through revenues from more productive fish farms and agroforestry.'

'Increased food production came hand-in-hand with conservation plans, which were developed for 16 forest communities,' it added.

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