

/ AGRICULTURE

Plans set to expand irrigation development

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Government has put in motion plans to expand irrigation development to improve productivity and food security

Tendai Gukutikwa
Post Reporter

IN a bold bid to combat the adverse effects of climate change on agriculture and livelihoods, Government has put in motion plans to expand irrigation development to improve productivity and food security.

Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development's acting director of communications and advocacy, Mrs Barbra Machekano said the importance of bolstering irrigation efforts, particularly targeted at smallholder farmers, who are adversely affected by climatic uncertainties, cannot be underestimated.

Mrs Machekano said currently, the nation has 203 000 hectares of land under irrigation, which the country seeks to increase to 350 000 by end of 2025.

“Currently, we are irrigating 203 000 hectares of land, and our goal is to increase it to 350 000 hectares by 2025. We recognise the critical role of irrigation, especially for smallholder farmers who are facing reduced yields due to the adverse impacts of climate change.

“By focusing on irrigation at the smallholder level, we aim to enhance food security at the household level, benefiting approximately 1.8 million smallholder farmers,” she said.

Mrs Machekano underscored the urgency of adapting to climate change, and the importance of irrigation as a means to mitigate its negative effects.

“This year, our smallholder farmers faced significant challenges due to climate change, highlighting the need for sustainable solutions to agriculture.

“The country is expected to become drier in the decades ahead due to climate change, and an acceleration of irrigation rehabilitation and development is required to sustain production of crops, fisheries and livestock to meet local and increasing export demands,” she said.

Mrs Machekano said Government intends to construct 13 new dams across the country.

“While we continue to invest in large-scale irrigation infrastructure like Muchekeranwa and Marowanyati, we also recognise the potential of small-scale water deposits, with over 10 700 identified across the country capable of irrigating two million hectares,” she said.

She said by 2027, about 35 000 villages and 9 600 schools will have 50 000 hectares under irrigation. Mrs Machekano also said Government is in the process of transforming 460 rural irrigation schemes into viable business units under the Vision 2030 Accelerator Model.

To date, a total of 304 schemes, sitting on 19 000ha have been commercialised.

These include Bwerudza Irrigation Scheme in Chipinge, which has 456 farmers who are now shareholders.

The model helps boost agricultural productivity and income for the local community.

Bwerudza Irrigation Scheme chairperson, Mr Michael Pindeni said becoming shareholders guarantees them reliable income and good health.

“Some farmers were failing to send their children to school, but now they will be able to do so comfortably. With this model, we believe that gender based violence cases will be drastically reduced because people will be busy working on their fields and food secure,” he said.

The irrigation initiative and the Vision 2030 Accelerator Model are being funded by Government and the Food and Agriculture Organisation, United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

UNDP communications associate, Mr Anesu Freddy said the partnership between Government and his organisation has seen 195 hectares being put under irrigation across the country.

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