

A decade of TaCRI's excellent contribution to coffee development in Tanzania

The Tanzania Coffee Research Institute, (TaCRI), was established ten years ago with a vision to contribute to the transformation of the Tanzania coffee industry to sustainable prosperity. In testimony of its direction, the institution has already launched 14 improved varieties; 10 Arabica hybrids and 4 Robusta varieties. Heckton Chuwa of the Business Times writes.

THE Tanzania Coffee Research Institute, (TaCRI), can be considered as a product of the coffee crisis of the 1990s when coffee prices in the world market were lowest in history.

To this was added the high costs of production due to high costs of inputs and especially copper fungicides for the control of Coffee Berry Disease (CBD) and Coffee Leaf Rust (CLR), for Arabica coffee. All the commercial varieties then were susceptible to these diseases which cost growers heavily in their control or heavy yield losses if not controlled. The problem for Robusta coffee was Coffee Wilt Disease, (CWD) that was recorded in Kagera for the first time in 1994. Productivity and quality suffered. This made coffee production unprofitable. Frustration set in. Farmers abandoned their coffee fields. Poverty, hitherto rare in coffee growing areas, manifested its ugly face.

Wise coffee stakeholders, including the government as a major stakeholder, decided that the time was right for change, to re-organize coffee research to make it more responsive to the needs of the industry and reverse the declining trend of the industry.

The Coffee Stakeholders' Conference held in Moshi in 2000 declared that research was the backbone of the coffee industry, (*Utafiti ndio uhai wa zao la kahawa*) and decided to re-organize coffee research by creating TaCRI as a stakeholder owned and managed coffee research institute and which would help restore eroded confidence among coffee growers.

TaCRI was incorporated in 2000 as a company limited by guarantee without share capital under the Companies Ordinance, (Cap. 212).

TaCRI became legally constituted and operational in September 2001 whereby Prof. James Teri, was appointed as its first Chief Executive Director responsible for the day-to-day management of the institute under an 8-person Board of Directors representing all coffee stakeholders.

Apart from its vision, TaCRI also has its mission and which is to increase the competitiveness of Tanzania's coffees in the world market, thereby increasing incomes, wealth and livelihoods of coffee growers with the goal of creating a profitable and sustainable coffee industry in Tanzania.

TaCRI achieves this by developing and disseminating appropriate coffee production and primary processing technologies to increase productivity (per tree or per unit area), improve quality and reduce costs of production.

According to TaCRI's mission, the increase of coffee production in the country would offer growers an economic potential income something which would improve their standards of living.

To address this, TaCRI in collaboration with coffee stakeholders outlined a comprehensive 5-year Strategic Action Plan, (SAP), 2003-2008, reviewed and revised for 2008-2013 and which aims at the revitalisation of coffee research through the establishment of a well managed, financially viable, nationally and internationally respected coffee research institute, providing essential services to farmers. The emphasis is on stakeholder-led, (and therefore demand-driven), research with emphasis on research for development, (R4D), with the motto *“Thinking Big and acting Big”*.

The incorporation of TaCRI and the development of the SAPs represent a break from past approaches, placing a new emphasis on the role of stakeholder-led demand-driven research for development, (R4D). The SAP is undertaking activities to rehabilitate and modernize coffee research facilities and infrastructure at TaCRI, re-organising the administration of research, improving scientific standards and reinforcing the linkages between TaCRI, the coffee growers and industry stakeholders.

The activities of three core R & D programmes of TaCRI, reinforced by increased financial resources, improved working facilities and culture and supported with international scientific knowledge, has resulted in; the development, evaluation, propagation and promotion of high yielding, disease resistant coffee varieties with good bean size and cup quality; research on good agricultural practices and integrated pest management for the new varieties; research on primary processing technologies; and the promotion of integrated soil fertility management systems.

A Technology Transfer and Training Programme is spearheading the packaging and dissemination of appropriate and financially viable, proven technologies to farmers and supporting agencies; to forging linkages among research, extension and farmers; and developing participatory research methodologies, including farmer managed nurseries. This is the core functions of the six TaCRI sub-stations, (Lyamungu, Maruku, Ugano, Mbimba, Sirari and Mwayaya), to support the rejuvenation and development of the coffee sub-sector in their respective zones.

In addition, a new Livelihoods and Income Security Programme, (changed into a Special Projects Unit), was set up to describe and understand the diverse farming and livelihood systems in the coffee growing areas of Tanzania, to evaluate the constraints to productivity and profitability and identify appropriate research responses including coffee value chain analysis.

Ten improved Arabica hybrids and four improved Robusta coffee varieties have been officially released since the inception of the institution a decade ago and are now under accelerated multiplication and distribution to growers where demand is very high indeed. It is estimated that about 15 percent of the area under coffee has been replanted with 32 million seedlings of the new varieties since their first release in 2005. This is a big achievement within such a short period and which Tanzanians should be proud of.

These new improved coffee varieties and accompanying good agricultural practices are the foundation or spring board for a coffee green revolution in Tanzania.

TaCRI's scientists have also produced 34 scientific papers or reports that have been compiled into one publication to be launched during the 10th Anniversary

celebrations later this year, to show the coffee professional community the excellent job done by TaCRI over the past decade.

Prof. Teri address the great achievements of TaCRI to the teamwork at all levels under very supportive environment and commitment of the institution's values, reinforced by increased financial resources, improved working facilities and culture supported with international scientific knowledge.

According to Prof. Teri, apart from all these achievements, TaCRI also faces some challenges which include how to meet the promises of its, (TaCRI), stakeholders and their, (stakeholders), expectations from the institute.

Coffee growers all over the country are now aware of the economic benefits of the new technologies developed and packaged by TaCRI and especially seedlings of the new hybrid coffee varieties leading to a very high demand for seedlings of the improved varieties; Prof. Teri continues to say that the demand is not a challenge for TaCRI alone but a national challenge.

He says during the climax of its tenth anniversary scheduled for September, this year, TaCRI would launch a programme to produce and distribute 200 million seedlings of the improved varieties to cover at least 80 percent of the coffee area with the new varieties in the next 10 years as a way of addressing the challenge.

Another challenge explains Prof. Teri, is the local coffee consumption and which is too low for a country so renowned for the quality of its coffees.

“Promoting local coffee consumption is a serious challenge for the industry considering the benefits of moderate coffee consumption”, he explains, adding, Tanzanians and visitors to Tanzania need to enjoy Tanzanian coffee more than they are doing now.

It is encouraging that good coffee shops are now opening up in some urban areas like Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam, Arusha and Moshi in Kilimanjaro region, where one can enjoy a refreshing good cup of Tanzanian coffee.

TaCRI has, as one of its core values, to continuously monitor and review progress and achievements and taking appropriate corrective measures. That been the case, the institution should continue to monitor progress in the implementation of its Strategic Action Plan.

TaCRI should use its 10th anniversary as an opportunity to reflect its vision and mission. It is glad to here that TaCRI has more varieties in the pipeline than the new 14 varieties. Five of these varieties according to Prof. Teri, are expected to be released by the end of this year and some compact varieties that have yield potential of 3-5 tons per hectare by 2013.

TaCRI are also working to develop new varieties tolerant to drought to address the challenge of climate change; these drought seedlings, according to Prof. Teri, are aimed to reduce risks brought by drought as far as coffee cultivation is concerned.

He says that the varieties are the spring board for a coffee green revolution in Tanzania, increasing productivity and quality, reducing costs of production and contributing to a profitable and sustainable coffee industry in Tanzania.

Prof. Teri further says, “Our promise to our stakeholders remains the same - commitment to our values and to continue working closely with them to create a shared vision of what can realistically be achieved and address this with diligence”.

While TaCRI celebrates its tenth anniversary, is time for Tanzanians to benefit from the current high coffee prices by investing in the production and processing of good quality coffee. TaCRI’s promise is to continue to make a contribution to this effort; they need a big support from the government and all coffee stakeholders so as to achieve their goal for the prosperity of coffee production in the country.

ENDS.