



To qualify as a TFRA-authorized dealer under the fertiliser subsidy programme, one must, among others, be registered and have enough space for storing the stock so as to make fertiliser distribution efficient.

Photo Credit: Zuwena Shame

Delays mar Tanzania fertiliser subsidy

By Zuwena Shame

THE Tanzanian government through its regulatory authority Tanzania Fertilizer Regulatory Authority (TFRA) has provided fertiliser subsidies to farmers to reduce the cost of the farm input and increase food production in the country.

The usage of fertilisers in Tanzania is extremely low and remains below recommended rates, and low-input and rain-fed subsistence farming dominates Tanzania's agriculture, contributing to poor crop yields, according to a 2016 AGRA report.

The Russia-Ukraine war, now in its second year, has further disrupted fertiliser supply to Tanzania, which imports over 70 percent of its fertiliser.

TFRA has introduced digital platform for providing fertilisers to farmers in Tanzania, including Urea and DAP that account for almost of 50 percent of total fertiliser usage in Tanzania.

Under the fertiliser subsidy programme, there was to be an increase usage of fertiliser in the 2022/23 agricultural season to 500,000 tonnes, from 475,000 tonnes used by farmers in the 2020/21 farming season. The usage is expected to increase to 800,000 tonnes by 2025.

By using digital platform, TFRA aims to increase the efficiency of delivery of subsidies, seal fraud loopholes and reduce administrative costs. The digital platform is also being used to register farmers, suppliers, producers, and agents and also coordinate distribution of fertilisers and payment for subsidised fertilisers.

Despite the government efforts to increase the usage of fertilisers, there are challenges regarding the availability of certain fertilisers.

Doroth Nengai, a farmer in Meru district in Arusha Region, says she has experienced difficulties getting Urea fsince February this year. When she didn't find the fertiliser at her local Kikatiti outlets, she extended her search to Arusha City but still failed.

Doroth, who grows vegetables such as green peppers, zucchini , cauliflower , broccoli and sweet lemon, attributes the problem to bureaucratic distribution channels.

When launching TFRA board , the Minister of Agriculture, Hussein Mohammed Bashe, urged those appointed to the board to make sure that usage of fertilisers in Tanzania increase from 19kg to 50kg per acre.

He also advised the board to improve supervision and registration of farmers to enable them to get the right data for decision making.

Nuru Gulila, a maize and sunflower farmer, in Ruvuma Songea Rural complains that the subsidised fertiliser from TFRA takes to long to reach farmers in his area because of its long process which one is required go through before he

or she can buy the commodity.

To purchase the fertiliser, TFRA guidelines requires one to fill a form and get registered by extension officer from his or her area. Thereafter, a farmer shall be provided with a special number which will be used when buying fertiliser from an authorised dealer within his or her area.

Gulila says after going through the long process for 3-4 days, he still got only three bags of the subsidised fertiliser from an authorised dealer.

Gulila cites DAP as an example of the fertilisers from TFRA that are hard to get.

He decided to plant crops while waiting for DAP to reach his authorised dealer but when it did, he faced another challenge of waiting for it for three days due to backlog of orders amid the high demand.

"Farmers are many in Songea region but fertiliser suppliers are few. Due to this we don't get fertilisers on time and sometimes we are restricted on how many bags we can get from dealers. For example, I wanted to buy 50 bags but due to scarcity of fertilisers, I got only 10 and was told to come again for the others. This is not right because we are spending a lot of time and energy. The government should increase the number of suppliers for this region," said Gulila.

Gulila said that he had also struggled to get CAN under the fertiliser subsidy the previous season from the local dealers and had to buy it somewhere else.

According to the TFRA guidelines, distribution of the subsidised fertiliser to farmers for 2022/2023 season was to end on June 30 this year.

Complaints from farmers about the current season suggest that the government should review and improve processes for providing fertiliser subsidies especially to rural areas where a majority of farmers are.

Mponda Sabinus, another farmer based in Ruvuma, says that the government through TFRA should increase the number of authorised dealers especially in rural areas.

Sabinus grows maize and beans. He says that in some cases it takes a farmer to travel over 300-400 km to find a dealer, something which forces them spend more to pay for accommodation and food in guest houses.

Widening the dealers' network to remote areas, he says, will see farmers avoid spending more money and resources trying to find the subsidised fertiliser.

Rashid Msita, who owns three rice farms in Mbeya region, says he lost 45 percent of his projected harvest for the previous season due to delays getting fertilisers.

By the time he managed to get fertiliser in February the time, it was too late as rice crop was already maturing.

"I applied the fertiliser at that stage but the results were not good because it was past the right stage," says Msita.

He recalls that when there was a shortage of fertilisers, some TFRA-authorised dealers brought

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three different fertilisers from other companies with low quality, strange names and no ingredients published in the bas.

He chose not to buy them and waited for the familiar one.

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"The main challenge here is some of the authorised dealers don't have enough warehouses to keep stock. There is a huge demand of fertilisers in rural areas and dealers do appear in TFRA system that they have enough stock when they don't, something which makes them provide less fertilisers to farmers. They keep a stock of 50 bags and finish, then the next day run to urban dealers and collect more stock," says Msita.

He gives the example of villages in Mbarali District in Mbeya region such as Madundasi, Utengule, Ijumbi Ruiwa, Igulusi, Mlamba, Inyala, Itewe, Ilongo and Uturo.

The Minister of Agriculture, when presenting the sector budget for 2023/2024, recently said that the government through TFRA would continue providing fertilisers subsidies until 2023/2026 so as to increase fertilisers usage from 19 kg per acre up to latest 50kg per acre, reduce production expenses and increase availability of fertilisers.

He said that 3,050,621 farmers had registered for the fertiliser subsidy programme by April this year, with 801,776 of them from 26 regions having benefited.

Bashe said the available fertiliser stock included 75,399 tons produced in the country, 617,079 imported and 126,964 remaining from 2021/2022.