

The coastal region in Kenya is well known for its coconuts but production remains low. Photo Credit: perabeats

Reviving coconut growing at Kenya coast

By Halima Gongo

FOR years, farmers in Kwale County on Kenya's coast have been practising subsistence farming. But the production has always been low due to lack of know-how, poor agronomic practices and use of poor quality planting materials.

More than 80 percent of coastal farming households derive their livelihood either directly or indirectly from the coconut tree. But the sector has not been doing too well over the years.

Kwale has more than 2,600 coconut growers but almost 10 million coconut trees have become less productive due to old age.

Most farmers still rely on the old coconut trees and are not planting new ones.

To address the problem, the Agriculture and Food Authority (AFA) has started the distribution of coconut seedlings to Kwale and other farmers in the coastal part of Kenya.

Former Agriculture Principal Secretary Hamadi Boga, who has roots in the county, emphasised the need for farmers to adopt high-yielding seedlings to improve production of food and cash crops in Kwale.

Prof Boga told participants at the recent Global GAP TourStop 2023 conference in Nairobi that the government was working with various stakeholders to equip coastal farmers with modern farming skills that will improve the supply of coconut to the international market.

"This is a very important conference because we are talking about national

criteria for agriculture so that we can get food that is safe for consumption. Each country has its own policies when it comes to food and we want our farmers who want to export to European and American markets to understand these policies and work hard to maintain them," he said.

The government, he said, is determined to ensure small-scale farmers are empowered to produce high-quality products and have access to better markets.

"Since agriculture in devolved [to county governments], there is need for our coastal counties to come together and have talks about agriculture and form strategies to ensure that we revive the cultivation of trees such as coconuts, cashews and mangoes and modernise our farming, and make it in line with the market," Prof Boga said.