

Climate change to seriously threaten African farming

A recent report produced by researchers has given a timescale for climate change with respect to crops and agriculture.

Climate change has been predicted many times to have negative effects on farming, as temperatures become more extreme. But this report has given definite times specifying when farming of certain crops will become untenable if no adaptation measures are taken. This report has serious implications for Sub-Saharan agriculture.

The destabilising effects of climate change on food production are expected to hit the poor and the undernourished hardest, but the entire world will be affected if farming does not undergo some major changes, and soon. Beans are expected to be the biggest casualty, with an estimated 60% of the current area used to grow them becoming unusable (after a fairly large rise of about 3°C).

It's not all bad news, however. Six of the nine major crops assessed were "stable in respect to transformation and adaptation," according to Doctor Ramirez-Villlegas, the co-author of the study. But it's the other three, maize, bananas and beans, which pose problems. They are deemed "unstable" and are predicted to have large areas becoming unfit for cultivation.

There are solutions, though. One option is 'climate-smart' crops; one example is a species of bean found last year to have significant heat-resisting properties. Another option is to use alternative crops; this may prove unpopular with farmers but in the long term may be unavoidable when all else fails.

The best solution, ultimately, is to attempt to abate climate change as much as possible. If that is not possible, we should prepare for the aftereffects.

- Aoife