Strengthen pest surveillance to ensure Kenya’s food security

The agricultural sector plays a major role in Kenya’s economy.

Data from the Kenya National Bureau of statistics indicates that the sector contributes 32.6 per cent of the GDP and another 27 per cent of GDP indirectly through links with other sectors.

Agricultural products contributed to more than 56.7 per cent of total domestic exports in Kenya. The Jubilee administration recently unveiled the 'Big Four' agenda for the country.

Among them is guaranteeing food security and nutrition for all Kenyans by 2022 through the expansion of food production, reduction of food prices and support for value addition.

FOOD HANDLING

However, following the invasion of the fall armyworm, which is classified as a transboundary plant pest, Kenya faces a major food crisis with the possibility of losing up to 50 per cent of its maize crop in 2018. One of the most common ways for the spread of transboundary pests and diseases is the globalisation of trade and transport.

The WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement provides for countries to apply SPS measures to ensure the protection of animal health, plant health and human health.

SPS measures refer to regulations on the safe handling and production of food, plant and animal products. Although Kenya has made several commitments on the application of SPS by ratifying the EAC SPS protocol, currently, the application of SPS measures is characterised by unclear and conflicting mandates of institutions, inadequate laboratory capacity, and inadequate funding.

Establishment of a National Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee will rectify this.

PARTICIPATION

In Kenya currently, different institutions have different mandates that only partially empower them to enforce SPS measures. The responsibility for plant health is under the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service whereas the Pest Control Products Board is concerned with pesticides.

Animal health is the mandate of the Department of Veterinary Services, and food safety is with the Department of Public Health. The responsibility for food safety standards is with the Kenya Bureau of Standards. Kenya has a National SPS Committee, which acts as the point of convergence of all government institutions who are players in the plant health, animal health and food safety.

However, the Committee is not anchored on law. Majority of Kenyans and stakeholders in agriculture and trade matters are not conversant with SPS measures. The devolution system in Kenya is a big opportunity to involve all value chain actors a ensure full benefits realization with regard to SPS measures.