

# Sisal board targets 100,000 tonnes production by 2010

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The Tanzania Sisal Board (TSB) plans to raise the country's sisal production to reach 100,000 tonnes in 2010 in an effort to capture the benefits of the expanding world market.

The TSB Director General, Odhiambo Wilson has said here that sisal production is expected to rise to reach 45,000 tonnes this year from 30,934 tonnes last year. Tanzania was once the leading sisal producer in the world, topping 250,000 tonnes mark in the 1970s. He was presenting a report on Revival and Development of Sisal in Tanzania`` at a one-day Sisal Stakeholders Meeting at Mkonge Hotel in Tanga over the weekend.

Production had declined after 1970 reaching 19,700 tonnes in 1997, but it began to rise from 1998 from 23,247 tonnes that year to 30,934, last year. He attributed the rise to efforts made by the Board to support production, privatization and research on production of alternative products from sisal.

``Our Target is to reach productivity level of at least 3.0 tonnes per hectare from the current 0.8-1.0 tonnes per hectare. China, which started sisal production in recent years has reached a productivity level of 4 to 5 tonnes per hectare.

Detailing the production trends, Wilson pointed out that Tanzania sisal farmers produced 85,685 tonnes of sisal fibre in a three-year period between 2004 and 2006, which was 95 per cent of the 90,000 tonnes target set for the period. The trend also shows that a total of 22,834 tonnes of sisal products were produced in the three-year period while the sale of fibre in the external markets in the period under review amounted to 36,057 tonnes worth USD27.3m. The sale of fibre in the internal market during the period was 6,019 tonnes worth 18.9bn/-.

Speaking on the sale of sisal products in the three-year period, Wilson said that Tanzania sold 8,251 tonnes of sisal products worth USD10.1m in the external market while the internal market absorbed 14,261 tonnes of sisal products worth 13.61bn/-. ``We aim at increasing external sales for the normal products and new ones from 14 per cent to 30 in five years and attract small holder farmers to enter the sisal sector and take up sisal farming,`` he said.

The TSB Chief Executive said, however, that unless measures to eliminate nagging problems of the industry are taken, the growth would continue to be slow. He said the problems include lack of financial institutions to cater for sisal farmers, high power tariffs and a chain of taxes by district council authorities.

Wilson revealed that the Sisal Association of Tanzania (SAT) is currently liaising with the government on the possibility of convincing the power utility firm (Tanesco) to reduce tariffs levied on sisal producers in a bid to give them relief. He said that electricity accounted for 40 per cent of the total production costs and a reduction would help them to work profitably.

Wilson said that the Board was also liaising with the government to ensure that it completes the process of establishing an Agricultural and Industrial Bank to give investors an opportunity to get capital that would enable players in those sectors to expand investment. He said that the Board would encourage farmers in the central zone regions of Dodoma, Singida and Tabora and those in drought-prone areas of Same, Handeni and Pangani to engage in sisal farming to expand the production scope.

- **SOURCE:** *Guardian*