African governments must encourage small-scale farming to protect citizens from food insecurity, experts have said. They say over-reliance on large-scale farming is no longer tenable due to lack of finances and the incessant rural urban migrations for white-collar jobs.

Olivier de Schutter, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, said the long-term answer to food shortage lay in encouraging small-scale farming.

"Governments must plan the transition to more sustainable types of farming. Large industrial farms need a lot of fossil fuels, chemical fertilisers, and large machinery. In the future, those resources will simply not be available," he said.

In an interview with the BBC, he said most governments have underestimated the capacity of small-scale farming to feed the world.

"This farming can in fact be extremely productive. It is very efficient in its use of natural resources, and can be relied on to address effects of climate change," he said.

De Schutter said successive governments have made several promises to improve the sector, but most of the policies they have initiated have failed over the years.

"Wide range of climate variations in Africa allows for production of staple foods such as yams, potatoes, cassava, corn, beans and rice, which can ensure proper food supplies," he added.

To plan production

The official said extreme weather-related events like droughts and floods make it difficult for farmers to plan production, and noted that planting diverse crops protects farmers against losing everything in a disaster.

"And this is something small farms are much better at achieving — more diverse types of farming — instead of large monocultures which are generally much more fragile in the face of weather-related events," he said.

De Schutter spoke even at the Government grapples with feeding about five million Kenyans.