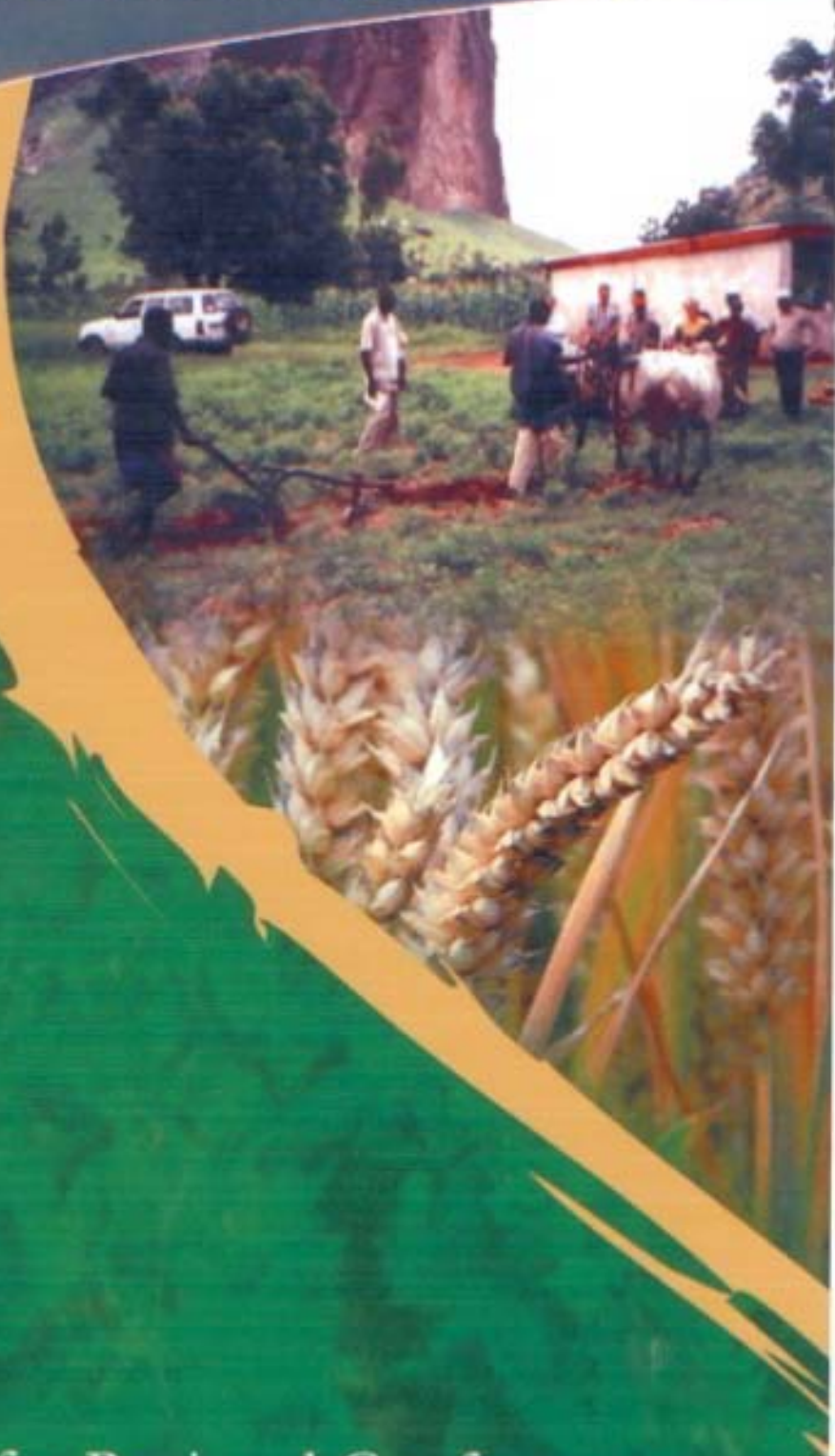


FANRPAN

Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network



Proceedings of a Regional Conference:
*Strengthening Farmer Organisations in
the SADC Region.*

www.fanrpan.org

Section 1

Introduction and background

FANRPAN is a stakeholder driven policy network in the SADC region that works closely with public and private sector institutions in promoting policy research, analysis on key specific strategic themes affecting food security, agriculture and natural resources. FANRPAN activities include policy studies, dialogue, networking with policy research institutes, disseminating results to stakeholders through workshops/seminars, newsletters, internet, capacity building/training, and collaborating with other SADC programmes and initiatives.

In line with the FANRPAN communication strategy that seeks to facilitate access to information to target audiences through effective networking, FANRPAN/CTA partnership contributes towards:

- Raising awareness of policies through the promotion of public dialogue and meetings with Ministries of Agriculture and other stakeholders in the region
- Improving stakeholder capacities for information and communication management
- Facilitating the provision of information on policy across the region through newsletters, policy briefs, policy papers, stakeholder conferences, tracking systems and monitoring the implementation of policy recommendations.

During the 2003 FANRPAN Stakeholders Conference held in Gaborone, Botswana, there was seen a need to strengthen farmer based organisations (FOs). The majority of FOs in the SADC region are faced with a myriad of challenges and constraints ranging from:

- Lack of agricultural and trade policy analysis skills
- Ineffective advocacy skills to influence national and regional agricultural policies and trade practices
- Poor membership representation
- Weak governance structures; and
- Inadequate leadership skills among others
- Poor service delivery mechanisms
- Unsound institutional financial base.

There is a high turnover of skilled personnel due to non-competitive salary levels, poor leadership and lack of management skills. These challenges have been compounded by poor membership. As a result, most farmer organizations have limited capacity to retain skilled personnel needed for policy analysis and are not taken seriously by many policy makers in most countries. Thus SACAU will need to help build the image of the farmer as being a critical contributor to social and economic transformation of the region.

This problem has also resulted in farmer-based organizations' failure to collect and disseminate data and information on critical trade policy issues in a timely manner. Ultimately, this has resulted in a situation where these FOs are characterized by limited institutional capacities to influence national and regional agricultural policies and trade practices. From the foregoing it becomes clear that the communications strategy, and resulting social marketing strategies, as well as the marketing objectives of an organization provide support to that organization to achieve its strategic objectives. All communications and social marketing activities therefore need to be aligned to the strategic objectives of the organization, in order to support the achievement of the overall vision.

Farmer-based organizations need a strategic partnership to augment their efforts at the regional level in order to attain their goals. This will require an inventory of the key stakeholders of the different FOs and compilation of a database of these stakeholders from the different farmer organizations in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses, capacity needs, and communication needs of the different farmer-based organizations.

As a follow-up to the Gaborone Conference, FANRPAN initiated consultations with the already existing Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU). The Confederation was formed in 1992 and its current members are farmers groups Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. SACAU

has provided farmers with stronger lobbying and negotiating skills with regional, international and national bodies and has also allowed a forum for national organizations to meet, access information and exchange views. SACAU represents the starting point for improved institutional collaboration between farmers within the SADC region.

The issue of capacity building farmer organizations has been on the agenda of SADC and NEPAD as well as other developmental organizations in the region. The key issues to the development of SACAU include:

- Strengthening the understanding of regional and international trade
- Supporting the formation of national and regional trade fora
- Building a shared market information system
- Promoting regional and international agricultural trade
- Developing a common approach towards trade liberalisation

SACAU has set itself the following strategic objectives:

- Strengthen the voice of agriculture in the region
- Promote common understanding of approaches to matters of common concern among member organizations
- Facilitate information sharing
- Interact with SACAU members through a forum of discussion
- Promote a common approach to relevant authorities on matters of concern
- Strengthen national farmers organization
- Cooperate to promote agriculture in Southern Africa vis-à-vis the rest of the world
- Develop and implement a regional market information system thus stimulating trade
- Establish effective program and evaluation systems
- Establish the institutional governance and management structure to drive the programme.

From its inception, SACAU has made the following achievements:

- Providing farmers with a platform for stronger lobbying and negotiating skills with national, regional and international bodies
- Establishing a forum for national organisations to meet, receive information and exchange views
- Setting up the starting point for improved development-oriented institutional collaboration within the SADC region.

From a communication perspective, SACAU faces a number of challenges. These include:

- i) The need to mobilize Southern African farmer organisations to build sustainable member organisations using the bottom-up approaches.
- ii) Linking farmers to markets.

During the 2003 to 2004 period, CTA supported SACAU through FANRPAN by funding the development of a communication strategy with the specific objective of improving SACAU's capabilities to generate, disseminate and use policy related information. Thus CTA's technical assistance project, through FANRPAN, supported farming unions and commodity associations in information and communication management for policy purposes.

The above activities are consistent with the mandate and core-business of FANRPAN. CTA's support to FANRPAN to-date has enabled the production of a bi-monthly newsletter, annual stakeholder directory, policy paper publications, national stakeholder dialogue meetings and annual regional conferences.

As a follow-up to the 2004 Workshop on strengthening policy analysis and representation capacity of farmer based organisations in the SADC region, the 2005 regional dialogue brought together over twenty five participants representing FANRPAN, SACAU and farmer based organisations from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Mauritius, Botswana and Tanzania to attend regional conference to Johannesburg for a three day conference 5 to 7 October 2005 during which mechanisms for the implementation of SACAU transformation strategic objectives to solve food security and poverty problems facing African countries through appropriate communication interventions were defined.

Workshop Objectives

- Strengthen institutional capacity through stronger advocacy by farmer organisations and civil society through use of evidence-based information in developing policies.
- Enhance the use of research outputs in the development of regional agricultural policies through stronger and strategic institutional alliances and partnerships.

Strengthen the FANRPAN regional multi-stakeholder public policy dialogue platform as a Forum for policy debate.

Conduct of Workshop

Keynote addresses focused on:

- Strengthening the Capacity of Farmer Organisations in the SADC region
- Characteristics of Farmer Organisation Engagement At Regional Level
- Co-operating partner, namely SACAU was given an opportunity to make presentations on areas of focus and possible collaboration with FANRPAN.

Expected Outputs

The following were expected outputs from the workshop:

- A Joint conference Declaration statement to take to SADC Council of Ministers.
- A knowledge and information management system – a set of strategies and alliances for moving knowledge and information forward from researchers to policy makers and practitioners.
- Institutional alliances
- Strengthened dialogue among stakeholders.

Participants

The participants to the multi-stakeholder dialogue were drawn from the FANRPAN node countries. These represented farmers from farming unions, SACAU secretariat, ministries of agriculture for the respective countries, members of civil society organisations involved in agriculture. A total of 25 people represented the group.