

Speech by the Deputy Resident Director of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation,

The SDC Investment in Seed and Food Security in the Region

Representatives of governments, COMESA and SADC

Honourable Chairman of FANRPAN

Partners, donors and friends

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have been requested to speak about our investment in the seed sector; I will not go into much detail but will give you a brief on where we are and why we are there.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is Switzerland's international cooperation agency within the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), so we are extremely official. The goal of development cooperation is that of reducing poverty. It is notably meant to foster economic self-reliance and state autonomy, to contribute to the improvement of production conditions, to help in finding solutions to environmental problems, and to provide better access to education and basic healthcare services.

In Southern Africa, our regional programme aims at supporting reforms addressing social, economic, political and environmental vulnerabilities within the SADC region. Besides Governance and HIV and AIDS, SDC is active in the Food Security sector and has specifically focused on Seed Security.

Looking at the regional context, we see that 60 to 80% of the population depend in a way or another on the agricultural sector. The food sufficiency levels ranges only between 35 to 75%. In 2008, 14 million people faced starvation. In 2009, Africa imported food products worth 21 billion USD. Under those circumstances saying that food security is a top priority is almost an understatement.

Repeated food crisis and the consequences of climate change have brought the agricultural issue on the fore again. It is its support to regional efforts. Our interventions will always follow policies and protocols defined by SADC and its member states. Documents such as the SADC regional indicative strategic development plan for the Dar es Salaam Declaration are our guidelines.

The regional food security strategy of SDC could be summarised in the following way: From seed research to market.

Research is necessary to develop new seed varieties adapted to local conditions and having an improved yield (because of climate change and of the necessity to increase productivity). Linkages with the private sector are compulsory, only professionals can guarantee multiplication and dissemination in a sustainable way but for this to happen it is necessary to have a conducive policy environment (e.g. allowing seeds to move from one country to another). There is a need to train small scale farmers on how to use new seeds.

They have to be introduced to other agricultural techniques such as conservations farming. Better storage combined with an improved productivity will allow them to sell surpluses on the market and buy new seeds for the next season.

Our strategy was designed to respond to issues of quality, availability and accessibility and projects are chosen accordingly.

HIV and AIDS has a huge economic impact on agriculture through the loss of labour force and knowledge. The SWISS Agency for Development and Cooperation is therefore considering this dimension in its projects. Most of the labour burden is borne by women and women are also those taking care of the vulnerable.

On the policy level, we are still discussing our possible involvement in continental and regional initiatives such as CAADP or CARDESA.

Since 2004, SDC in Southern Africa was funding projects in the seed sector. One of them, the SADC Seed Security Network, was aimed at harmonising the seed certification process in the region and to facilitate the movements of seeds across borders. The protocol was signed last year and accepted by SADC member states. This is a very important achievement. Allow me at this point to mention that this would not have been possible without the continuous and tireless involvement of SADC's Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Directorate.

As mentioned earlier, the 1st Phase of this project was at SADC level seeking regional harmonisation. The 2nd Phase will happen at country level. To allow the domestication of the SAD seed protocol SDC and FANRPAN have decided to partner. This project will support selected countries in their endeavour to achieve the translation of the regional protocol into their national legislation hence improving the situation of farmers.

It took SDC and FANRPAN some energy and time before this project could be finalised because both organisations have high quality standards. These long discussions, the numerous e-mails and phone calls, the busy weekends, all this allowed us to strengthen our relationship and to develop mutual trust. FANRPAN is a solid and professional partner and this is recognised by other donors such as USAID and CIDA Canada.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation proves its confidence and commitment by making a substantial investment, equivalent to USD4 million over 4 years. It is also our way to say we believe in African organisations.

Thank you for your attention.