Governments urged to support seed policy

By Dr Vincent Gwarazimba

Seed policy is usually defined in terms of the legislation and regulations put in place by government to guide and control seed production and distribution. The national seed policy hinges on the national food security strategies. In many cases there is no willingness to put the policy in writing and executives of the legislation and regulations often erroneously refer to government policy when they actually refer to an existing law. In fact by definition, a policy should define government position and intention with regard to a particular production or service sector. Thus from a seed policy perspective, the policy expresses the government’s desire for all farmers to have access to seed of improved varieties. The aim of the policy should be to improve the quantity and quality of agricultural production that in turn drives food security. The key words in a policy statement would be “improved varieties”, “quality seed” and “from whatever source”. Few government seed policies would be inclusive of these key words.

The inclusion of “from whatever source” would occur in a country where seed markets are completely liberalized. This is probably the case in most SADC countries where donor funding has insisted in technology dissemination through efficient and reliable seed systems. The desire to liberalize seed markets led to complete or partial privatization of state owned seed enterprises. In Malawi for example, the government privatized the National Seed Company, which is now owned by a multinational seed company. In Mozambique, the government sold 80% of the National Seed Company SEMOC. Similar developments are taking place elsewhere in countries such as Tanzania and Uganda where the government is attempting to sell off Tanzania Seed Company (Tanseed) and Uganda Seed Project respectively. Such developments demonstrate government commitment to facilitating seed provision from whatever source. As a result of liberalization, there has been an increase in foreign investment in the seed sector thus increasing farmer access to a wider range of crop varieties.

On “improved varieties”, the policy obliges government to commit itself to crop improvement, thus ensuring that farmers have a continuous supply of new seed varieties. Such commitment has prompted governments to establish crop improvement programs and subsequent legislation to protect the programs from competition from the private sector. Unfortunately, most public research and development programs are inefficient due to inadequate funding and technical capacity from government. Some governments invited the participation of the International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCs) in crop improvement, making these significant sources of new crop varieties. Unfortunately, there are salient policies in place, which define IARCs products as public property. In some cases, the varieties are exclusive to state owned seed enterprises for multiplication and distribution. A viable private sector now exists in a few countries in Africa and this has positively resulted in competition for seed markets, more choice for farmers and sustainability of seed delivery.

The concept of “quality seed” as may be included in the policy statement commits government to ensuring that farmers are provided with quality seed of improved varieties. Thus government established state owned seed enterprises to facilitate delivery of such improved seed varieties. Few state owned seed enterprises have fulfilled government policy desires. Delivery of quality seed remains a dream, as involvement of government is characterized with poor quality seed, untimely delivery of seed and inadequate quantities of seed. In Uganda, for example the supply of poor quality seed by the state-owned seed project created a negative response as farmers felt that seed from their own varieties was more reliable.

The Legal Status of a Policy

Since a policy is just a statement, it cannot be enforced unless backed by an Act of Parliament. The act makes the policy a law.
Urbanization is one of the major challenges facing mankind today and the next century. Urbanization rates in the SADC region are between 3 and 8% per annum. Most cities in sub-Saharan Africa are growing at an exceptional rate of 5% or more annually and by 2020, it is estimated that half of the population in this region will be urban. In 1988, about 25% of the developing world's absolute poor were living in urban areas and yet in 2000, 56% of the absolute poor were living in urban areas and estimates show that the population of urban areas will surpass that of rural areas by 2055 (FAO, 1998). This rapid growth and issues of food supply and distribution in cities have brought in major consequences for urban food security. There is competition between demands for land needed for housing and industry and the land needed for agricultural production within cities. As a result of this scenario, the FANRPAN Mozambique node housed in the Faculty of Agronomy and Engineering at the University of Eduardo Mondlane, conducted a study on vulnerability and food security in urban Maputo funded by the World Food Programme (WFP).

The study consisted of a series of consultative meetings with urban communities, municipal authorities, non-governmental organizations and community leaders, to identify the main problems that cause urban vulnerability, particularly those problems of food security and other limitations to the urban population's well being. A questionnaire was designed to diagnose the vulnerability of Maputo's urban population and visits were made to several neighbourhoods so as to assess living conditions as well as the state of the social infrastructures. The study was conducted in 17 urban neighbourhoods in Maputo, namely 25 Junho A, Alto Maé A, Alto Maé B, Chambanculo A, Chambanculo B, Xipamanine, Costa de Sol, George Dimitrov, Inhagôia A, Hulene A, Hulene B, Leulane, Mafalala, Mangoanine Novo, Maxaquene B, Mhuana and Polana Canico.

The results of the study indicated that an average family consists of two adults and four children, two of whom were of school going age. About 50% percent of the children in the area do not go to school due to lack of funds; or due to insufficient schools in the district to cater for all the children. 50% of the children in schools are girls. The study found out that the admission of girls in schools would help reduce women's vulnerability vis-à-vis employment opportunities.

The main factors that affect food security in urban Maputo are poverty, low family income, low availability of general alimentation at the family level, floods, family crisis, high unemployment levels, low levels of schooling and training and the absence of a social security system to alleviate the urban shocks.

The average monthly family expenditure for food is US$38 which is low in comparison to the food insecurity datum line for families, which stands at US$79. The families most affected by the floods were in Mangoanine where 98% of the families were seriously affected. From January to April the floods contributed to an increase in food prices in Maputo. On the other hand, a significant proportion of families lost their fields in the peri-urban agricultural zones. The increase in prices created general food insecurity for all families with more than 70% of the families spending more than 75% of their income on food.

The disintegration of the family unit is the source of street kids and the homeless people in most of the neighbourhoods. Many interviewed families said that poverty was directly related to the family crisis. Research showed that 24% of the heads of households were either divorced or separated. 12% were widows and widowers whilst 2% were single.

Femal work is very scarce in Maputo particularly for those who cannot read or write and those who did not go to formal school. It followed that 89% of the interviewed heads of households were involved in the informal market and their income came from informal work.

The research team was of the opinion that the WFP and other stakeholders should strengthen community service networks, and should do all this in partnership with local communities and non-governmental organizations. Efforts should be made to work together with both governmental and non-governmental institutions in the development of food security programmes such as:

- Providing basic services including water, sanitation, sewerage systems, road repair in the neighborhoods and food security;
- Providing meals in schools; and
- Providing communities with assistance in the production, processing and warehousing of basic food products.

The study also defined the role of the WFP in Maputo and other agencies in managing alimentation programmes and to assist the Government with its principal strategies to guarantee food security. This should serve as the starting point as well as a platform to analyze food security issues.

The instability of both price and food availability increases vulnerable groups' ability to access alimentary products. Agricultural policies and strategies for food donations to vulnerable groups must be formulated and these should create the conditions
The role of urban agriculture in the food supply of cities as a compliment to rural agriculture is becoming an important issue in the SADC region. Urban agriculture is increasing tremendously in countries such as Zambia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Cities such as Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and Lusaka in Zambia, produce as much as 50% of the food for markets. In SADC, the full potential of urban agriculture to contribute to significant growth of the economies of the urban centers has not been fully explored. Yet in industrialized countries, peri-urban agriculture is an important sector of the urban economy. In many cities in the region, urban and peri-urban agriculture is often typified by part-time farming.

In Dar es Salaam, farming and livestock rearing is undertaken in the backyards. According to the Urban Agriculture Magazine (1993 statistics) 18,286 dairy cattle; 1.2 million chicken layers; 565,000 broilers; 37,000 ducks; 33,000 pigs and 40,000 goats were being reared in the city of Dar es Salaam. Today, this number has increased substantially.

Urban livestock rearing is not a new phenomenon and is not confined to cities alone. There are numerous factors for and against livestock rearing in urban agriculture. Generally people feel that livestock helps augment incomes for the urban poor and assist urban dwellers to have access to fresh produce and animals are waste cleaners in terms of consuming excess garbage, etc. Negatively, people tend to think that animals smell and may cause public health problems, some stray animals cause accidents and animals tend to insight conflicts among humans for space. There are coping strategies that can be devised by the communities to ensure that livestock can be reared effectively in urban communities.

Mr. Chagula, a resident in the city of Dar es Salaam started livestock rearing in his backyard in 1975. He had only one dairy cow but now has 12 cows. He has several neighbours who are also dairy farmers. Milk is sold to the community in this southeastern suburb part of Dar es Salaam. The problem dairy farmers face in the area has been oversupply of milk, and getting enough stock-feed for their cattle. There is virtually no grazing land in this part of the city and so Mr. Chagula and his fellow dairy farmers have to buy grass from youths who have ventured into this income-generating project.

Mr. Chagula and the farmers visited by FANRPAN are part-time urban farmers and use their project to raise funds for school fees, food, etc. They have not left their full-time jobs as civil servants as they consider urban farming "too risky". But then we acknowledge that salaries are just not enough anymore and in order to ensure that our families are well looked after, we need to get extra income from other activities other than our jobs," explained the farmers. Mr. Chagula and many farmers in the area receive extension services from government and are fortunate to have Veterinary services in their neighborhoods. The Dar es Salaam City Council charges an annual levy of about TSh 20,000 (US$24) to all livestock farmers.

Peri-urban and urban agriculture should be looked at as a long-term strategy for poverty reduction especially in SADC urban areas. What is needed in the SADC region is to provide a legal and enabling framework for the policy to prosper. Fortunately, FANRPAN is working closely with the Municipal Development Programme (MDP), a non-governmental organization based in Zimbabwe and the Regional Food Agriculture Organisation in Harare, to mobilize funds for SADC member states to come up with policy position papers on Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture. It is expected that a regional programme on urban and peri-urban agriculture will be developed following these initiatives.

For more details on urban agriculture, please visit: www.ruaf.org or contact MDP at 263-4-774385 or fax: 263-4-774387. Website: www.mdpesa.org
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Following the establishment of a seed policy, government promulgates laws to enforce the policy. In most cases policy enforcement is enshrined in the "Seed Act" or "Seed Statute". The act establishes the legality of all seed practices and its stakeholders. It legalizes the various legislative instruments on regulations, procedures and standards and designed to promote the multiplication and distribution of quality seed.

Seed Legislation Implications on Policy Components

Seed legislation according to government and legal experts is a legal instrument intended to protect the quality of seed in use, and improve the supply available to customers. Generally the legislation falls into three parts.

The first part is intended to protect the plant breeder, who is the source of new varieties on which quality seed may be based. The existence of such legislation will attract more investment in crop improvement. Few countries have such legislation. Currently only South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Egypt and perhaps Tunisia have legislation protecting the plant breeder in Africa. When government states in the policy that farmers should access improved varieties "from wherever source", it has to put in place a mechanism that grants plant breeders rights over their varieties. The relevant legislation is normally referred to as Plant Breeders Rights, an act of Parliament that enforces intellectual property rights. Recent developments in world trade are forcing countries to provide plant variety protection according to the WTO/TRIPS Agreement (World Trade Organization /Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) agreements on intellectual property. The essence of the plant variety protection law is to reward plant breeders for their efforts through royalty payments.

The second part of the legislation supported by the Seed Act is designed to protect the farmer who buys seed to ensure that the quality is satisfactory. The supporting statutory instruments of the Seed Act include the variety release process, the seed certification scheme and the seed regulations (standards).

The third part of the legislation protects the national agricultural system against the importation of pests, diseases and weeds from other countries. The legislation is enforced by an act of parliament on quarantine pest, diseases and weeds. The law is variously referred to either as the Plant Pest and Diseases Act or the Plant Quarantine Pest and Diseases Act. The aim of the legislation is to exclude from the country, pests, diseases and weeds that do not exist in the country and may be injurious to agricultural production.

Conclusion

The development of a competitive and efficient national seed industry depends on government policy on food security. The national food security strategies determine the national input policy to support the development of the agricultural sector. The productivity of the crop sector is determined by, among many factors, the timely supply of quality seed of improved varieties from different sources. Hence government must establish and support a seed policy that promotes the development of a sustainable seed industry.

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Mozambique node study

necessary to ensure the stability of food prices. The management of the implementation of these policies requires capable human resources that, oftentimes, the government does not have. The study recommended that the Mozambican government needed partners in facilitating the assessment of the impact of these agricultural policies.

There was a need to maintain a certain level of family health that would create the conditions necessary for families to undertake production activities. Government needed to commit itself to the provision of potable water. However, both the government and other partner agencies were urged to undertake integrated activities to ensure that potable water became an integral part of the food security equation. As a strategy, the government and other institutions should avoid policies that increase uncertainty or disturb the harmony of the city's production systems. Any policy or strategy introduced must be integrated with other policies and it must reach the vulnerable people living in other urban parts of Maputo.

Professor Firmino Macavele is the FANRPAN Node Coordinator for Mozambique and was team leader in the Vulnerability Study of Maputo.

Upcoming Events

9th Symposium of the International Agricultural Research Association (IRAA): A Call for Papers. The symposium will be held in Florida, USA from 17th to 20th May 2009. The theme is "Small farmers in an ever-changing world: Meeting the challenges of sustainable livelihoods and food security in diverse landscapes.

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