The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) has announced a four-year Project to help domesticate the SADC HARMONISED SEED REGULATORY SYSTEM. The project is supported by a US$4.1 million grant from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Liberalisation of seed trade is set to benefit African smallholder farmers by improving seed availability, access and affordability. SADC Ministers of Agriculture and Food Security in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (5 February 2010), signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of the SADC Harmonized Seed Regulatory System. The system aims at improving seed trade and increasing the availability of high quality seed to farmers in the region. The Harmonised Seed Regulatory System will facilitate easier movement of seed between SADC countries and will make more varieties of seed available throughout the region. It will also integrate small isolated national seed markets into one large SADC market. This system has been developed through a consultative process and represents a direct response of the Member States to the low availability and limited access by farmers in the Region, to key agricultural inputs. Special attention in this regard is on small scale farmers who have limited resources and face challenges in sourcing seed of high quality.

The FANRPAN Project is a follow up to the SADC Seed Security Network Project. This seeks to:

1. Implement the SADC approved variety release policies as per the new seed regulatory system;
2. Implement the SADC approved seed certification policies and ensure establishment of seed quality certification facilities as per the new seed regulatory system;
3. Implement the SADC approved phytosanitary policies as per the new seed regulatory system;
4. Assess and address capacity needs at institutional levels;
5. Assess and address capacity needs at farmer and private sector levels; and
6. Develop a database of seed varieties and other variables necessary as a knowledge resource to enhance the movement and accessibility of seeds among players in the region, as an outcome of this policy implementation process.

FANRPAN is piloting the second phase of this project in four countries - Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Disparities in seed laws have led to trade barriers, delays in the release of new varieties and high seed costs leading to low crop yields. Harmonised seed regulations will help farming communities benefit from high yielding and locally adapted crop varieties creating the ability to maximize food production per unit of labour and other inputs. The target groups are stakeholders in the seed value chain and they include government departments of agriculture, national agricultural research institutes (NARIs), the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), seed breeders, universities, early warning systems, policy networks, farmer groups, women's groups, international seed research organizations and agents involved in the marketing of seed.

The overall objective of the project is to contribute to improved food security and poverty reduction through increased seed security and better disaster preparedness in the SADC region. The project will focus more on country level implementation. FANRPAN will leverage on its partnerships and scale up the project region-wide (SADC, COMESA and EAC) and continent-wide through the African Union-NEPAD.
About FANRPAN:
FANRPAN is a multi-stakeholder, multi-national network that supports the development of better food, agriculture and natural resources (FANR) policies in southern Africa. The thriving multi-tiered network consists of more than 670 members (a diverse group of organisations including universities, farmer organisations, businesses, government agencies and civil society organisations that have a stake in the FANR policy process) organised into national nodes in 13 Southern African countries.

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