The future of smallholder farmers belongs to the organised

The National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM) is a citizen-owned non-governmental organization that provides business services to smallholder farmers. NASFAM was founded on the principles of collective action and self-reliance and seeks to empower farmers at the grass-root level by encouraging them to form cohesive village based agri-business clubs and Associations to increase farm incomes and contribute towards the economic development of the country. NASFAM was established in 1997. At the time of its formation, there were 14 farmer organizations representing over 24,000 farmers. Currently NASFAM has a membership of 31 associations representing over 80,000 smallholder farmer families. "If an average family has six members we therefore have an impact as an association on over 480,000 people! NASFAM is governed by a Board of Trustees who are appointed by members of the association. We pride ourselves in NASFAM as it is 100% owned and controlled by farmers who actively participate in the affairs and operations of the Association as we are neither political nor governmental," said Mr. Aaron Likupe, the Skills Development Unit Manager for NASFAM.

In Malawi, 92% of the population is rural-based and predominantly smallholder. These farmers grow mostly food crops and are generally marginalized in policy making and design. "Our farmers know only of praise and lack advocacy skills needed when interacting with policy makers. It is the aim of NASFAM to capacity build farmers so that they can continue to advocate for services even without the presence of NASFAM."

"Our farmers are engaged mostly in the production of coffee, cotton, spices, groundnuts, chillies (hot peppers) and other food crops. We are having our farmers also venturing into paprika, rice, soyabeans and we have discovered markets for these products. Through organizing, we have seen the need to represent the needs of our constituents." NASFAM also introduced a skills development unit in which smallholder farmers are trained so that they can receive more money from their farming enterprises and learn to operate farming as a business. "We believe that this special training program has elevated

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Land reform in Southern Africa on Policy Agenda

Land reform is perhaps the greatest challenge to some SADC member states after the HIV/AIDS crisis. While it is politically a sensitive issue, land has direct implications for regional food security and poverty reduction in the subregion. "Land is important to SADC in that nearly 70% of rural dwellers depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Therefore the question of how the land is held and utilized as a productive asset has a direct impact on rural poverty and livelihoods," noted Dr Rudolph Polson, the Director of the SADC Hub for Food Security and Rural Development.

Many SADC member states are currently at various stages of land reform (notably Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia) and many others are contemplating initiating some types of land reform, policy formulation or land tenure changes. "These countries however, do not have access to a regional source of technical expertise and financial resources to assist them to carry out these programmes and policies. In countries undertaking land reform, there is an urgent need to provide analytical support and to strengthen the capacity of national agencies that are involved in the implementation of these programmes. There is also no formal mechanism for member states involved in land reform activities to share experiences and to learn from each other. The purpose of this technical support programme to national land reform initiatives is to assist member states implementing land reform policies with technical and financial resources. Its focus will be to assist states in implementing their individual agreed policies and priorities," Dr Polson explained.

"It is important to note though, that the programme will not be involved with the following:
- It is not a vehicle for setting national land reform policies but simply to assist member states in implementing their own activities
- Its purpose is not to set up a regional land reform programme, but simply a resource facility that provides member states with a regional option
- It will not replace existing bilateral activities agreed with donors but instead complement such programmes."

The land reform programme will be financed through the SADC Multi-donor Hub that is located within the SADC Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR). "We envisage the following key elements of the program:
- Establishing a critical mass of regional expertise that will provide policy and technical support to SADC countries on issues of land reform
- Developing a regional information network on land reform issues accessible to the member states, regional institutions and civil society institutions
- Providing a mechanism for exchange of information and experience between the national officials and institutions involved in land reform
- Providing direct technical support to national agencies involved in land reform programmes including training and capacity building.

"With the assistance of the policy network, FANRPAN, we hope to undertake analytical work to provide decision makers with various policy options and technical and policy impacts," Dr Polson said. At the last
The Performance of agriculture and natural resources sectors in both SADC and sub-Saharan Africa has been mixed. The World Bank Development report of 2000/2001 shows that for SADC countries, almost 59% of the population live below the poverty datum line. It is against this background of less policy prescription to transform the mainly agricultural and natural resource based economies, which a long term strategic plan on policy analysis, design, implementation and review is needed. "For FANRPAN to undertake its mandate and fulfill the aspirations of its various stakeholders i.e. government, private sector, NGO's, farmers, academics, etc the network must position itself strategically to respond timeously to the domestic, regional and international policy challenges in the FANR sector," Mr Howard K. Sigwele, Network Coordinator explained.

"These challenges for the SADC FANR sector include global capital market, trade and service liberalization under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), regional economic integration through the SADC Trade Protocol and the need to develop diversified and competitive economies to improve the standard of living of the people. Currently almost half of the SADC population is poor and cannot sustain meaningful food security initiatives without public assistance. Equally, the increasing demand by SADC trading partners for safe food and environmentally sound FANR development strategies constitute additional challenges for FANRPAN policy research mandate," noted Mr Sigwele.

To achieve this, FANRPAN needs a Strategic and Business Plan that will:

- Define a Mission Statement and chart a vision for a long-term strategic goal of enhancing capacity in policy formulation and analysis in the SADC region;
- Define the core business of the Network including a set of key priorities for the medium term;
- Facilitate the development of operational programmes (such as communication, stakeholder participation, capacity building and policy analysis) for stakeholders and sustainable SADC FANR policies to improve food security;
- The strategic plan will also lend out the operating principles and policies of the network, clarify the institutional and governance arrangements and identify core partnerships and a sustainable financing plan;
- Develop operating mechanisms through the Communications Strategy to maximize stakeholder participation in all SADC countries in policy research agenda.
- Contribute towards regional economic and trade integration through well articulated and cost effective FANR policies.

It is hoped that the FANRPAN draft strategic and business plan will be tabled for approval at the Stakeholder conference to be held in March next year.

Committee of Ministers of Agriculture and Natural Resources held in Swaziland in June, 2001, it was resolved that with assistance from the SADC Hub, FANRPAN would undertake analytical work in land reform for the region. The FANR Ministers also agreed that land reform/policy is a regional challenge and as such almost all SADC countries in one way or the other are affected by land related policy issues (land access and gender dimensions, land tenure, land valuation, definition of property rights, land use planning, development of maps based on suitability, etc).

"We would like to ensure that SADC and its member states maintain the capacity within the responsible agencies to deal effectively with land reform issues," Dr Polson further noted.

Subsequently, the first meeting of Ministers of Land and Land Reform in SADC states was held in September in Windhoek, Namibia. At the meeting, the Ministers recognized the complexity of the land question which in some member states emanated from historically determined unequal and race-based patterns of land ownership. The Ministers emphasized the importance of addressing these problems in accordance with national policies and programmes in order to ensure equitable access to land resources. The Ministers recommended that land reform/policy should not only be treated as a regional policy matter but a core business programme for the FANR sector.
Why communicate in a network?

We often take Communications for granted at work or in our everyday lives. Communications is important as it aims to establish mutual understanding in order to persuade, inform, influence attitudes and behaviour and bring about action. Organisational communication takes place downwards, upwards and horizontally and is concerned with the flow of messages within a network of interdependent relationships. This type of communication usually holds the organization structure together by providing a basis for coordinating relationships between individuals. Communications is a central aspect to a network such as FANRPN as it allows interaction within the organisation’s target audiences through tools such as speeches, newsletters, websites, press releases, seminars, interviews and policy briefs.

FANRPN needs communication to:
- Create awareness
- Disseminate information and knowledge
- Motivate or shift attitudes, practices and behaviours
- Support the FANRPN strategic and business plan
- Increase stakeholder participation in the FANRPN activities

"Against this background, FANRPN will develop a stakeholder-driven communications strategy which will take into consideration the dynamics of the network so that we create maximum exchange of information," Mabel Hungwe, Communications Specialist informed. The envisioned FANRPN Strategic and Business Plan will benefit immensely from the Communication Strategy.

The future of smallholder farmers

NASFAM to greater heights," Mr. Likupe further elaborated. "We have found out that when farmers learn tricks into the business they want to go more into entrepreneurship. We also are careful not to go on a full promotion of all crops at once, as we have to ensure that there is a guaranteed market and production. Our promotion of crops has lead to chillies (hot peppers) being now among the biggest foreign currency earner for Malawi smallholder farmers. Regionally, we believe that the aromatic Malawi rice such a kilombo and super rice need to be promoted since Malawi has a comparative advantage on this type of rice."

Members of NASFAM pay fees and are entitled to relevant information, training, representation at important policy fora as well as benefiting from bigger market transactions due to economies of scale, increased access to various suppliers of commodities and inputs, on-site field assistance and publications. Some NASFAM Associations have been able to build bridges, pre-schools, health clinics, schools and even carried out some rural electrification. "We have seen the need to train our associations on accountability, a necessary component when people have to deal with public funds. We have had to limit membership sometimes because we lack capacity to handle big expansions despite knowing that we have not been able to reach all the farmers in Malawi. Our success as a union has resulted in us gaining donor confidence. We know what is good for Malawi smallholder farmers and believe that Malawi can be self-sustaining in food and that is only possible through organization," Mr. Likupe concluded.

The establishment of farmer driven institutions such as NASFAM augurs well for FANRPN as the network aims to promote stakeholder participation in policy by disseminating information successes and challenges facing in particular, small farmers within SADC. As a regional policy analysis network, FANRPN will explore ways of promoting active stakeholder involvement in policy dialogue and implementation to fulfil the long-term goal of regional integration. FANRPN therefore urges other nodes and countries to help promote and disseminate interesting developments such as NASFAM initiatives.

Upcoming Events

- FANRPN Strategic and Business Plan and Communication Strategy Workshop, Johannesburg
  October 28
  November 2, 2001
- Regional CTA/FANRPN Course on Web Page Design and the Use of Electronic Networks, Harare,
  5-16 November, 2001
- Workshop on Impact of HIV/AIDS on Agriculture in the SADC FANR Sector
  November, 2001
- WTO Conference, Doha, Qatar
  November 9-13, 2001