Overview of the Policy Dialogue

FANRPAN hosted a policy dialogue in Gaborone, Botswana from 26-27 March, 2003 to discuss agricultural recovery, food security and trade policies in Southern Africa. The policy dialogue stimulated and informed a regional debate on progressive food security and economic growth for the region. Keynote presentations gave an international perspective on agricultural recovery and long term food policy and highlighted findings from two studies, a short term food study and a trade policy study commissioned by FANRPAN. The invited professionals identified and examined key and immediate policy strategies that need to be addressed to ensure the permanent recovery of the agricultural sector and promotion of regional trade.

The Nature and Dimensions of the 2002 Drought Induced Food Security and Humanitarian Crisis facing the SADC Region

The food security situation in the region is NOT the same as it was ten years ago. Vulnerability has been aggravated by poverty. There was no significant decline in regional levels of maize production relative to other years but the region entered 2001/2002 with low strategic grain reserves. The level of preparedness was low in the countries hardest hit (Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi). There were no contingency plans in place coupled with low levels of strategic reserves and low levels of financial resources with which to import food. The absence of emergency response and a management plan at SADC level limited the quality of response and capacity of SADC as a whole in managing the 2002 regional food crisis. In Angola prospects for peace have renewed the hope that previously inaccessible areas may be opened up to humanitarian aid. The food crisis in Zimbabwe was exacerbated by severe economic downturn and government policies that inhibited production, importation and distribution of basic commodities. The situation remains dire for a large number of rural households. Household food insecurity varies widely in Mozambique, with particular concern in the southern and some central areas expected to have another poor harvest and thus the need for increased food assistance. Zambia was able to reduce the national cereal gap by 60% by including cassava in the food balance analysis. Continued informal cross-border trade was expected to partially meet the current outstanding food gap. The national level food gap in Malawi has been reduced considerably through informal cross-border trade. Production prospects in Malawi are also favourable due to good rainfall and programs that provide input supply support. In Lesotho and Swaziland the estimated number of people in need of food assistance increased due to production shortfalls induced by the drought. Efforts to alleviate the 2002 food shortages by National Governments, the international community and civil society averted a major crisis.

Key Policy Constraints to Agricultural Recovery, Improved Trade and Food Security

- Adoption of policies restricting regional trade,
- Inadequate input supplies,
- Pricing policy and consumer subsidies,
- Lack of progressive policies towards the private sector,
- Adoption of policies restricting donor responses,
- Size of strategic grain reserves and alternatives,
- State participation in domestic food markets,
- Absence of market incentives for farmers,
- Stakeholders have poor institutional capacities,
- Communication barriers between and among stakeholder groups,
- Problems of how results of research conducted reach policy decision makers.
Lessons Learnt
Priority setting of strategies was the major issue coming out of the dialogue. The policy dialogue emphasized the need to set priorities, on which African nations must focus and achieve sustained growth. Increases in food security can be achieved through increases in agricultural trade that lead to direct benefit for smallholders (at-risk rural populations). The key regional trends identified through the regional vulnerability assessments showed that the cereal gap for six countries (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique and Malawi) had been reduced by more than 50% through formal commercial and food imports. Informal trade helped to reduce the cereal gap and malnutrition due to food shortages appeared to have been kept in check.

The following lessons have been learnt from international experience: (i) agricultural growth requires enabling policy and economic environment, (ii) agricultural research plays an important role in generating technology change and (iii) the public sector must allow, encourage and facilitate the entry of the private sector in food trade.

Key Issues and Policy Recommendations Arising
The dialogue came up with specific policy areas that needed to be addressed by various key actors:

- **Promote financially viable and sustainable irrigation.** Responsibility: NGOs, National Governments, Public-Private Partnerships, Regional Organisations and other stakeholders
- **Promote Crop Diversification.** Responsibility: National Governments, Private Sector, NGOs and researchers
- **Make available at the farm level adequate quantities of inputs, including fertilizers and seeds.** Responsibility: National Governments, NGOs, Private Sector and Donors
- **Re-establish a regional and integrated approach to agricultural research including modern and gender-sensitive technologies.** Responsibility: FANRPAN, Private/Public Partnerships, Donors, Ministries of Agriculture and Trade and SADC/FANR with NARIs, IARCs and Universities
- **Improve and widen the types of information needed for food security analysis.** Responsibility: National Governments with technical support from NARs, CGIAR centres, FAO and regional support from SADC
- **Allow markets and trade to solve most food security problems in Southern Africa.** Responsibility: SSSN, FANRPAN, CGIAR centres, FAO, Trade Hub, SADC working Group
- **Improve Market Access (local, regional and international).** Responsibility: National Governments and the SADC
- **Invest in improving production base (infrastructure, human resources, inputs).** Responsibility: The SADC, National Governments, Ministries of Agriculture, Farmers, NGOs
- **Harmonize of Seed Policies.** Responsibility: SSSN, FANRPAN, CGIAR centres, FAO, Trade Hub, SADC working Group
- **Promote Good Governance** Responsibility: The SADC, Governments and NGOs
- **Encourage Political Commitment for Regional Integration.** Responsibility: The SADC, National Governments and the Private Sector

Source(s):

Contributor(s): Chiedza Muchopa, Agricultural Economic, University of Zimbabwe

FANRPAN
12th Floor, Social Security Centre, Cnr J/Nyerere and 2nd Streets, Harare, Zimbabwe
Tel: +263 4 792348/50
Fax: +263 4 792408
E-mail: policy@fanrpan.org
Website: www.fanrpan.org

Copyright July 2003