Yield increases needed to fight food insecurity

Lindi van Rooyen, Patience Magagula

Low production levels and inadequate agricultural policies are hampering food security in southern Africa and as a result the region is more undernourished than ever before.

With this in mind the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) hosted the high level regional food security policy dialogue in Swaziland to review policies that could address the challenges facing food insecurity.

Dr Lindiwe Sibanda, CEO of FANRPAN, said that unfortunately the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region is becoming more food insecure due to climate change and a lack of government investment in agriculture. “Agriculture is the backbone of the economy, but governments have not yet realised its potential.”

In explaining issues surrounding food security, Sibanda said that a country’s food security status goes further than just agriculture. “It is about whether that country produces enough food for its people, whether those people have access to the food and whether that food contains the right mix of vitamins and minerals to keep the population nourished. In this regard the SADC region is food insecure.”

She said that the biggest factor inhibiting food security is the low level of food production in the SADC region. “Around 70 percent of the population is rural and rely on the food they produce themselves. If their yields are low it means they have to rely on food aid to feed themselves and this is not always available.

“Farmers in the SADC region produce on average one tenth of the harvest potential of the maize seed. This is because they use poor quality seed that is recycled every year. The harvest potential then deteriorates every year that the seed is recycled.”

“HIV and Aids also contributes to food insecurity because it reduces the labour force. When people are weak they cannot spend time in the fields tending to the crops and as a result the crop is drowned by weeds. The high death rate also means that people have to help out in households where there are no longer any adults, which means they have less time to produce food.

“Lack of financing means many farmers in Africa can’t afford pesticides and fertilisers, which brings the yield down. Dryland farmers should be getting at least 37ha of maize, but most only manage 20kg/ha.”

Sibanda said that climate change has also played a role in reducing yields. “Reservoir droughts as a result of climate change are hampering food production. The changing climate has also brought with it disease and pest prevalence. Planting times are not the same anymore and it has become a guessing game. More research is needed to determine when the correct planting seasons are, but not enough money is made available for this research.”

She commented that the majority of people in the SADC region earn less than $1 a day and 80 percent of their income is spent on food. “This food is of an inferior quality and mostly consists of maize meal and a few vegetables. People are therefore not getting the right amount of nutrients and they become malnourished.”

Asked whether agricultural subsidies could enhance food security, Sibanda answered that she believed that targeted subsidies can fight food insecurity.

“Subsidies in Malawi have resulted in bigger maize yields because now the farmers are using fertiliser and better quality seed, which was not the case before. If the government does not provide the farmers with an agricultural subsidy of $100 to produce food, then it would cost them $1 000 in food aid. Besides being less economical, food aid creates dependency whereas subsidies don’t.”

Ndema Ndima, programme manager: Women Advocating for the active Engagement of the Youth in the Agricultural Value Chain

Sibanda explained that the youth can play a bigger role in fighting food insecurity. “Africa has the highest population of people under the age of 20 worldwide. Who will feed the nation in the next 30 years if today’s youth does not get involved in the agricultural sector?”

Ndema said that youth are innovative and pick up on new technologies faster than older generations. “We need the youth to be involved in agriculture so that they can implement these new technologies and help grow the sector.

“We are also focusing on the youth because we need them to get involved in agriculture at an earlier age so that they can take the industry forward. Currently the average age of people in the agricultural industry is quite high,” said Ndema.

The Queen Mother was awarded for, among others, her leadership with various agricultural innovations in Swaziland. These include the mushroom farming project which was originated on her request and was run by TICA in cooperation with Thailand’s Phahonyothinakorn University and Swaziland’s Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. The project addresses food security and generates income for the country’s farmers and creates jobs for local women. She also secured a goat market for Swazis in the Seychelles. As part of this initiative, Swazi goat breeders export their goats to the Seychelles.

The Swazi indigenous products project produces the Swazi Secrets range of products under the patronage of the Queen Mother. It helps poor, rural Swazi women to generate income from natural products. It is now owned by member groups of rural suppliers and also assists with social development by supporting self-help groups and a rural livelihoods programme.

The Queen Mother also initiated a project for the further use of Marula fruit seed. These are crushed and the nuts harvested. Oil is then extracted from these, packaged in Swaziland and exported as cosmetic products.

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"I speak to a lot of farmers and their families and it feels good that I've inspired them. I don't want to remain stagnant, so I'm planning to also specialise in distributing seeds through my com-pany and even do some research," she says.

The farmer sees herself becoming a key player in seed production - not just in Swaziland but beyond, in a few years time.

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**Political commitment key in CAADP implementation**

Grace Musimami

Eight years down the road the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) is far from meeting its set objectives, still facing great challenges of implementation. This report is contributed to the poor political commitment to the implementation of the programme, according to Professor Firmino Mucavele, the director of Eduardo Mondlane University, who says the CAADP’s current implementation status is far from its set objectives if political leaders do not put it back on track again.

“CAADP is a beautiful programme meant to deliver Africa as the promised land, but the limited political will is likely to hinder the chances for possible continental successes,” said Mucavele.

He called on various stakeholders to put political efforts to task to find out how committed they are to the process, saying in countries where political will had been exhibited, CAADP was a success story.

Speaking at the FANRPAN 2011 food security regional policy dialogue in Ezulwini, Swaziland, Mucavele said where political commitment was positive have registered successful stories with positive names.

Rwanda was one of the first countries to sign up to the CAADP process in 2007 and it has registered tremendous achievements over the years. Mucavele further hailed the president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame for being a practical president and registering success stories over the years.

Mucavele further challenged the regional communities to steer the CAADP process as this would meet their desired goal to harmonise the economic progress goes hand-in-hand with quality education.

**African agriculture can eliminate hunger**

Ben Rootman & Mbuso Titim Ntshingila

Africa must change its mindset to ensure that its wealth of natural resources and human capacity are used to eliminate hunger.

This is according to the acting Prime Minister of Swaziland, Mofetliso Siswangeru.

*Openly opening the Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network’s (FANRPAN) annual policy dialogue in Swaziland, Siswangeru said despite the fact that Africa holds 25 percent of the world’s food exports, it produces only 10 percent of the total global output. While the continent holds 60 percent of the world’s remaining uncultivated arable land, 25 million people remain chronically hungry.*

“We need to enhance knowledge to ensure that the youth in Africa who are farming are the people who do not find agriculture an attractive career proposition. They believe it only entails toiling on the land with little financial reward.”

“Role players in agriculture are older people and if we do not have a transformation of skills and knowledge to the youth, food security will be the loser. We need to mobilise Africa’s greatest asset – its young people – to ensure food stability on the continent,” he said.

Siswangeru congratulated FANRPAN for choosing such an applicable theme - advocating for the active engagement of the youth in the agriculture sector.

“We look forward to your valuable outcomes,” he said.

FANRPAN Chairman Sindiso Ngwenya said economic progress goes hand in hand with quality education.

FANRPAN has proved itself as a worthy partner by conducting research, analysis, case studies and a policy dialogue. African academics were consulted and institutions were mobilised to conduct cross-cutting research and to assist with decision-making and policy analysis.

“This did not only ensure that research was relevant and peculiar to the African context, but that it also had the foresight of empowering students with knowledge and experience. This ensured that rudimentary exercises could be extrapolated to other critical areas - ensuring that Africa becomes food secure and enable the continent to compete on a global level.”

“We play a critical role in addressing food security by engaging primary role players and multi-stakeholder involved in the policy processes. In such a dynamic environment, research and advocacy tools will yield little or no value if all the other players are isolated.”

In this regard the theme for this year is an excellent example.

“Regional bodies have a big role to play in CAADP” – Prof Firmino Mucavele

**Africa should adopt to change climate**

Basil Msongo

[Image 325x408 to 415x547]

[Image 326x370]Minister of Swaziland.

*“Climate change impacts are very localised and African farmers are very vulnerable” – Dr Sapo Hachigonta.*

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**Raising the flag on youth involvement in Africa**

Editorial team

Putting its money where its mouth is, in supporting its conference theme ‘Advocating for the active engagement of the youth in the agricultural value chain’, the FANRPAN Swaziland dialogue got off to a flying start with 16 young people participating in the official flag raising ceremony.

The 16 young people were all from the countries participating in the conference – member countries Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The two other participating countries, Kenya and Uganda, are from the Common Market for Eastern and Southern African countries. They were allowed as FANRPAN members during the dialogue.

Each bearer carried the flag of a her country and handed it to the representative of each country on the stage, where the flags were lined up. The learners are from the Waterford Kamnabi United World College of Southern Africa in Mtunzini, Swaziland. The college is part of the United World Colleges. Its student body is drawn from over 50 countries, with around 80 percent from Africa. The remainder is selected from Europe, Asia and the Americas.

*Climate change impacts are very localised and African farmers are very vulnerable” – Dr Sapo Hachigonta.*

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“The FANRPAN dialogue got off to a flag flying start.”
Women take the lead

Bonisile Mncina

A Zambian woman, Ewanes Kapemba, has taken the bull by the horns and ridden on the crest of the new Harmonised Seed Security Project. Dr. Sikhondze, also a vegetable seedlings farmer, says he is an example of this. “As women, when we realised the benefits of this project, we vowed to see it grow in leaps and bounds. As I speak there are 12 women who have come together to grow their own indigenous bean seed, which is doing exceptionally well. We are sure of its success which will see us prosper,” she says.

Two Swazi women - Mary Nthangase and her daughter Happy Shongwe - have taken up this task and have used indigenous seeds to become pioneers in their areas. They have now become role models to other women. The Swazi projects are doing very well and have changed these Hluleka women's lives for the better. They are now able to pay their children's school fees, as they have also taken into cow rearing. These projects were started with money from FANRPAN.

Kapemba says the market is restricted and products often end up being spoiled. She requested government and FANRPAN to assist in securing viable markets.

“We also urge young women to join in these projects as they will have a future and are sure to change their lives for the better,” she says.

The Harmonised Seed Security Project has helped Ewanes Kapemba to become a successful seed farmer.

Here comes the green revolution

Sifiso Sibandze

“Catch them while still young” is the adage which has to be adopted and implemented by African countries to achieve the much desired African ‘green revolution’.

The African green revolution is a status which African countries want to achieve through an increase in agricultural production which will make the whole continent food secure.

In as much as the African green revolution has to be achieved, social protecting policies for the youth have to be formulated and implemented in the region to protect the youth from being abused under the guise of youth involvement in agricultural production.

To make the youth actively participate in increased agricultural production, they have to be involved in the value chain while they are still young.

Regional representative of the International Livestock Research Institute, Dr Sikhondze Moyo says the youth has to be trained in pre and post agriculture production so to be employed and increase employment opportunities for others.

“To increase youth involvement in agriculture, knowledge and skills have to be passed from generation to generation, ‘The youth needs to be coached and mentored,’” she says.

She says, however, that parents should not force little children to work as that would be tantamount to child slavery.

One recent note Moyo says the youth has all the power to impact on the lives of those living in the rural areas through their involvement in agriculture. She says a lack of the youth are not involved in preproduction of agriculture, but more in postproduction.

That means they are involved in processing, packaging and marketing, and not in the production stages. This is caused by the fact that often the youth view agriculture as unattractive, as it doesn’t offer quick gains in terms of profit making.

Moyo says governments have to put in place policies and monitor the national programmes that target the youth. The programmes have to involve the accessibility of funding to kick-start agricultural projects and the acquisition of farm land for the youth, as well as the provision of technical skills which would make it easy for the youth to produce. Through the involvement of the youth in most enterprises like agro business in African countries, the region can be transformed to achieve the food secure level that it needs. “Even so, the youth needs protection from social issues and they have to be responsible too.

“That can be achieved through the formulation of policies that will make sure that the youth’s rights are adhered to,” says Moyo.

Among the various agricultural innovations in Swaziland for which the Queen Mother’s leadership was awarded, this project was singled out for its assistance to poor rural Swazi women to generate income from natural products. It is now owned by member groups of rural suppliers and also assists with social development by supporting self-help groups and a rural livelihoods programme.

Here comes the youth invasion on agriculture

Musab Sinemathe

Although the youth is less interested in farming, three young Swazi farmers have begun re-pioneer a youth invasion on agriculture. Emmanuel Mparoza, Abel Thwala and Mangaliso Sikhondze are seriously tiling the ground – or soil - to take advantage of untapped opportunities that exist all over the age of 35 years. Mparoza and Sikhondze are specialising in cultivating vegetable seedlings for commercial purposes while Mparoza is also into livestock farms. The youth feel there is lots of money to be made in what they do.

Mparoza started his farming company called Mr Bubu three years ago and says he believes they can outweigh the challenges. “I don’t have to worry about finding employment – I’ve hired myself and this is what I’m good at – and I’m still a small scale farmer, but the future that I see in this industry is bright,” he says.

He says young people lack the patience required in agriculture, that’s why many shun it. He believes a major challenge in the Swazi agricultural sector is that small farmers find themselves having to compete with big foreign companies that export their produce to the country. “There needs to be policies to protect us,” he says.

Sikhondze, also a vegetable seedlings farmer, says the global downturn of the economy meant that this was the time for young people to venture into agriculture without wasting time hesitating. He says agriculture is the backbone of the African and world economies.

“The value chain in agriculture is a very important source of income. They use the fruits to make buganui, a potable homemade beer that is a central part of Swazi culture. After brewing, the women leave the nuts of the fruit to dry in the sun, before cracking them in the traditional way to extract the precious kernels. The fresh kernels are then sold at community buying points to Swazi Indigenous Products - their own 100 percent supplier owned company. Kernels are weighed on site and suppliers are paid immediately. The kernels are then taken to Swazi Indigenous Products’ factory at Mpodzo where they are cold pressed, using manual bridge presses. Nothing is added or removed, ensuring that the oil reaches the customer in its pure, natural state. Oil is kept in cold storage and regularly tested for acid and peroxide levels at the company’s in-house laboratory to ensure that all oil meets quality standards.

The company also produces oil from the seeds of trichilia and ximenia. All three types of oil are then used as the basis of a range of natural skin care products, which Swazi Indigenous Products manufacture themselves. The products are hand crafted to natural formulations to preserve the real qualities of marula and the other African oils. The oils are dispatched to distributors across five continents – benefiting 2,600 rural Swazi women. Customers around the world bear testimony to the efficacy of the natural oils, soaps and other products.

This project formed part of the motivation why Her Majesty, Queen Mother Ntombi Indlovukazi of Swaziland, was awarded with the Food Security Policy Leadership Award and FANRPAN delegates could view it first-hand on a field trip.

FANRPAN’S Swaziland dialogue takes to the airwaves

Ben Rootman, Yvuen Gounden

On Monday morning, 19 September just after 06:00 Swaziand’s Principal Secretary of Agriculture, Dr Robert Thwala and FANRPAN CEO Dr Lindwe Mphatsho took to the airwaves to communicate the organisation’s annual dialogue taking place in Mbabane.

Thwala said the youth needed to take over agriculture.

“They need to learn what is in agriculture for them and focus on issues that inspire society. There are many challenges and the youth needs to be involved.”

Sibandza said the time is now to ensure that the youth forms part of decisions about the future of agriculture in Africa.

“We also urge young women to join in these projects as they will have a future and are sure to change their lives for the better,” she says.

Radio Swaziland helped spread the message about the importance of engaging the youth in the agricultural value chain.

“They are the generation that will have to ensure that the continent’s growing population is fed. It is the responsibility of current leaders in agriculture to ensure the involvement of the youth in development.”

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“That can be achieved through the formulation of policies that will make sure that the youth’s rights are adhered to,” says Moyo.

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Policy issues are not political statements

Bonisile Mnicina

FANRPAN Chairman Sindiso Ngwema says policy issues should not be interpreted as political statements. He made this remark at the official opening of the FANRPAN food policy dialogue in Swaziland.

The dialogue seeks to include the youth in the agro food sector, which is instrumental to continue agricultural programmes. He said FANRPAN empowers governments and non-government organisations to have a strong agricultural voice.

He said the rural economy cannot get automatic acceptance to FANRPAN, but they need to have good relations with their governments as well.

FANRPAN’s funding growth is currently at 126 million Emalangeni per year. FANRPAN CEO Dr Lindile Sibanda said producers want their products to be sold expensively, while consumers want to buy them cheaply. “It is our vision, therefore, to make Africa food secure.”

More WARM partnerships needed

Zeddy Sambu

For Alice Antonio Nicolau, a 25-year old Mozambican university student, the drying up of a grant meant to strengthen female farmers does not mean the end of the road.

“This news could potentially lock out the university student, an actress and single mother, who is keen to start farming.”

Funding for the Women Accessing Realigned Markets (WARM) programme has for the last three years been availed by the Bill and Melinda Gates fund. The programme seeks the right agricultural projects, including access to markets and better prices.

“Our funding will expire in May 2012. Our challenge is to develop partnerships with more donors,” says Sithembile Ndoma, FANRPAN’s project manager for the region.

Nicolau hails from Mozambique’s Marracene district, one of the success stories along with Boani and Malawi’s Kasungu district, with more than 1 000 beneficiaries of the WARM project.

“Women tell us they have attained food self-sufficiency and surplus for sale. They now also have a better understanding of land rights. WARM brings concerns of female farmers into national and regional policy debates,” says Dr Marta Cumbi, the programme manager for the Marracene and Boani districts.

“Marracene is a success story. Men have also been trained as advocates along with women in the production chain,” says Cumbi.

According to Beatrice Makwenda, the programme manager for the Malawi programme, there are 1 000 clubs that have benefited in the Kasungu district, thanks to collaboration between WARM and the National Small Holder Farmers Association (NASFAM).

“We deal with organised groups in commercial farming. We have built the capacity of the women to produce more tobacco, soyabean, ground nuts and maize,” she says.

The two countries were selected because of a bumper harvest recorded in Malawi and sound agricultural policies in Mozambique.

Africa not fulfilling its agricultural potential

Lind van Rooyen

A clearer picture was painted of the status of food security on the continent.

Consumers want to buy them cheaply. “It is our responsibility to make Africa food secure.”

FANRPAN Chairman Sindiso Ngwema said the organisation is committed to open media dialogue on food security.

“Although countries have expressed admiration for Malawi for becoming food secure, all other countries in the region, with the exception of South Africa, are food insecure.”

Obed Dlamini, a participant who is also a former prime minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland and a renowned farmer, said it was encouraging that Malawi used crude or simple farming implements, the hoe, to till the land while other countries in the region, like Malawi used the hoe, to till the land while other countries in the region, like South Africa, used more sophisticated systems.

He said although others would equate the term “slavery” with hard work and no value. These perceptions must change so that we can win the war against poverty and hunger.”

More WARM partnerships needed

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Malawi farmers inspire Swazi counterparts

Ackel Zwan

The success story of Malawi’s food security efforts resulting from intensive labour has inspired the newly formed Swaziland farmers association.

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A total of 16 journalists from six African countries – South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia – attended at FANRPAN’s dialogue in Swaziland for a media training workshop aimed at joining forces to spread the agricultural gospel.

Welcoming the journalists, FANRPAN CEO Dr Lindile Sibanda said the organisation is committed to open media dialogue on food security.

“This is the only way to ensure that agriculture gains it rightful position in the African economy. I believe in open communications which could lead to the more than 90 percent good news stories about the continent’s agricultural industry being communicated.”

Apart from looking into journalism technicalities and methods in providing a complete communications package – print, electronic and social media – pertinent issues like newsroom ethics, editorial independence and freedom of the media were discussed.

The role of social media channels like Facebook and Twitter and their role to uplift the profile of agriculture were discussed, as well as the importance of using these channels. However, it was emphasised that this should not be to the detriment of other more traditional channels like print and radio, which still play a major role in particularly the rural areas of Africa.

Apart from a series of sessions on getting the most out of the media, the journalists were contributors to the newswire dialogue newspaper, The Swaziland Dialogue News and FANRPAN’s dialogue webpage.

The group took a conscious decision to help portray Africa as a continent of hope and development to help counteract the many negative images of famine and war that too often dominate communications about the continent.

The group adopted a resolution to always defend freedom of the media, while practising fair and ethical journalism.

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One of the journalists from Kenya, Zeddy Sambu, into the open. “For instance we have farmers who faced by their stakeholders that need to come out what is happening, hence progress into the future,” which include farmers, researchers, government "Through your good work, our target groups is very important that these projects reach the have the tools to take issues further in a society. Journalists attending the three-day capacity training at the FANRPAN dialogue in Swaziland have hailed the organisers, saying such training is beneficial - HaSSP project not tracking backwards – Mpofu

The Harmonised Seed Security Project (HaSSP) is definitely not tracking backwards but instead there are tangible achievements already made, Dr Bella Mpofu, project coordinator, told delegates at the pre-dialogue meeting ahead of the FANRPAN food security policy dialogue in Swaziland. She noted that a number of ministers of agriculture in the region had also signed memorandums of understanding to show they have a buy-in in the whole project, thus making it move forward. Mpofu also explained that the project had been marketed at Southern African Development Community level where they were welcomed by leaders. FANRPAN also announced it was aggressively pursuing partnerships with all like-minded implementing agencies to leverage resources and technical skills. Samuel Karethi, representing the sponsors SDA Pretoria, encouraged FANRPAN to walk with the vision to move forward to more countries such as Mozambique and Tanzania who have already approached FANRPAN for assistance. “As more countries come in, a new thinking also sets in,” said Karethi. He noted that India’s success was first to demystify seed, therefore the region must get policies right and link them with the broader base of seed production, a move that can inspire even more farmers from the region. “Look at where we are stuck and then evoke the power to unstuck,” he added.

FANRPAN CEO Dr Lindwe Sibanda said the 2011 meeting was to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to review the current status of youth engagement in agriculture value chains, and to share lessons and experience, challenges and opportunities in that regard. The policy dialogue was to also showcase best practices from across the continent in line with five FANRPAN thematic thrusts - food systems, agriculture productivity and markets, natural resources and environment, social protection and livelihoods, institutional strengthening and capacity building.

Showcasing FANRPAN’s brainchild – the household vulnerability index

A statistical tool – the household vulnerability index – assesses a household’s external vulnerability that results from shocks and internal vulnerability or inability to withstand shocks. It then classifies the household as low, moderate and highly vulnerable, depending on its ability to prevail. Low vulnerability classifies a household as in a vulnerable situation but still able to cope. Moderate vulnerability states that a household has been hit so hard that it needs urgent but temporary assistance to recover. High vulnerability states that the household is in a situation of almost a point of no return – but could be restituted with the best possible expertise.

To identify and measure household vulnerability and to strengthen the capabilities of households to adapt to external hazards, FANRPAN, in partnership with the University of Venda and World Vision Swaziland researched the community of Mpolonjeni – a stop on the FANRPAN field trip. The research team mapped out the various needs to tailor aid according to the needs of households. The documented research maps out the different households in the Mpolonjeni community, across the three household vulnerability index categories – low, medium and high – and the differentiations.

Vulnerability mapping will go a long way in informing how interventions should be targeted to alleviate poverty and address food security issues.

In line with FANRPAN’s commitment to journalism training, the FANRPAN Swaziland Dialogue News is produced with the assistance of the journalists who underwent training at the dialogue.

Various external influences like HIV/AIDS and climate change have a marked influence on poverty. They manifest themselves in rural households were over 70 percent of people in sub-Saharan Africa live. These people rely on rain-fed agriculture and chronic food insecurity is common among them. The majority of these households lack the necessary capacity to adapt to the negative impacts of these external vulnerabilities. The problem recently has been engaging youth in agriculture. The problem has been engaging them because of their creative mind, their ability to pick new technologies faster and that there is a niche for them, especially in the social networking sites and other information technology fields.

“Journalists have the tools to take issues further in a society” – FANRPAN CEO Dr Lindwe Sibanda

I liked what the trainders did. They did not assume about what we knew, but gave and taught us everything, it was like we were in school again. Honestly, I think this is what we need. You see, if agricultural issues are to be reported more and gain the impact that is needed, there is a need for journalists to be trained. You simply cannot run away from that fact,” she said. Another participant from Uganda, Grace Musimami added: “It was a great and a new opportunity to have an in-depth understanding of what is going on – hence an even better platform to increase advocacy on food security in the region.”

Paida Mpaso

Editors and journalists attending the three-day capacity training at the FANRPAN dialogue in Swaziland have hailed the organisers, saying such training is crucial for the development of their journalistic skills in agricultural reporting.

The training, which was organised by FANRPAN, was aimed at building capacity for journalists and engaging them as advocacy partners in disseminating key messages in a professional and factual manner. Speaking during the opening session, the CEO of FANRPAN, Dr Lindwe Sibanda said journalists have the tools to take issues further in a society. She said FANRPAN has a lot of projects and it is very important that these projects reach the intended beneficiaries.

“Through your good work, our target groups which include farmers, researchers, government officials and the private sector will be able to know what is happening, hence progress into the future,” she said. According to Sibanda there are many issues being faced by their stakeholders that need to come out into the open. “For instance we have farmers who are being robbed of a platform to express their views. As journalists, if such issues are brought out, things begin to change and this is why you are important,” she said. One of the journalists from Kenya, Zeddy Sambu, said the training was very interactive and exciting. She noted that a number of ministers of agriculture in the region had also signed memorandums of understanding to show they have a buy-in in the whole project, thus making it move forward. Mpofu also explained that the project had been marketed at Southern African Development Community level where they were welcomed by leaders.

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Shemboile Nidema, who coordinates Women Accessing Realigned Markets (WARM) said it was important to pay particular attention to the youth because of their creative mind, their ability to pick new technologies faster and that there is a niche for them, especially in the social networking sites and other information technology fields.

“The problem recently has been engaging youth in agriculture. The problem has been engaging them at a very late stage, after college. But we must catch them before they reach the decision making stage on what to pursue in college,” she said.

In line with FANRPAN’s commitment to journalism training, the FANRPAN Swaziland Dialogue News is produced with the assistance of the journalists who underwent training at the dialogue. They are credited for their articles that were also submitted to the various news channels of the media houses they represent. The training was conducted by Dunnet Communications.