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’s (FANRPAN) editorial team hosted the high level regional food security policy dialogue in Swaziland to review policies that could address the challenges facing food insecurity.

Dr Lindena Ndema, CEO of FANRPAN, said 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 inhibits 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 fertilisers means many farmers in Africa can’t afford pesticides and fertilisers, which brings the yield down. Dryland farmers should be getting at least 3t/ha of maize, but most only manage 2000kg/ha.”

Sibanda said that climate change has also played a role in reducing yields. “Recurrent 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.”

Stimela Ndema, programme manager: Women Accessing Realigned Markets (WARM) agreed and said that subsidies have a role to play in food security. “Agricultural subsidies that farmers in Malawi receive ensure that those farmers harvest a bumper crop. This means that the next season they don’t need subsidies because they made enough profit the previous season to buy their own inputs.”

Ndema said that the policy environment limits food security and governments do not involve all the stakeholders when they formulate policies around agriculture. “A partnership is needed between civil society and government to formulate policies that would benefit everyone.”

The theme for this year’s dialogue is centred on involving the youth in agriculture in order to ensure the future success of the sector.

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 25 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.
Happy Shongwe, one of the most shining examples of the Harmonized Seed Security Project (HaSSP) in Swaziland, says it is not too late to involve the youth in agriculture.

To support her assertion, the 45 year old woman from Siteki who started cultivating legume seeds six years ago, has to date spent $500 in seeds. She said she has seen this first hand. She has successfully roped in her four children into this type of farming.

She says it was a bit difficult at first to make them realise that agriculture was a worthwhile venture in which one can make a good living.

However, the more they observed how determined she was to make it work, the more they became interested in helping her. This made them grow fond of agriculture and see it from a positive perspective.

Besides, it was also natural that each member of her family had to contribute one way or the other to her agricultural endeavours for a better standard of living.

Four years ago as an indicator that she was fully going into this type of farming. Just two years into it she had realised that agriculture was a serious livelihood.

She has been able to pay her bills, bought a van and generally raised the standard of living for her children.

“I was pushed by the drought situation in the country some years ago to do farming experiences. I was advised by the Ministry of Agriculture to plant drought tolerant or indigenous crops. The idea to produce seeds began at that time,” says Shongwe.

She did it twice and realised that there was life in legumes farming other than normal maize farming. Through the Agriculture Ministry, she was assisted by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) to secure markets for her produce. Shongwe’s success is quickly making her stand out in her community. Other farmers want to emulate her.

“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 company 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.

Happy Shongwe, one of the most shining examples of the Harmonized Seed Security Project (HaSSP) in Swaziland, says it is not too late to involve the youth in agriculture.

To support her assertion, the 45 year old woman from Siteki who started cultivating legume seeds six years ago, has to date spent $500 in seeds. She said she has seen this first hand. She has successfully roped in her four children into this type of farming.

She says it was a bit difficult at first to make them realise that agriculture was a worthwhile venture in which one can make a good living.

However, the more they observed how determined she was to make it work, the more they became interested in helping her. This made them grow fond of agriculture and see it from a positive perspective.

Besides, it was also natural that each member of her family had to contribute one way or the other to her agricultural endeavours for a better standard of living.

Four years ago as an indicator that she was fully going into this type of farming. Just two years into it she had realised that agriculture was a serious livelihood.

She has been able to pay her bills, bought a van and generally raised the standard of living for her children.

“I was pushed by the drought situation in the country some years ago to do farming experiences. I was advised by the Ministry of Agriculture to plant drought tolerant or indigenous crops. The idea to produce seeds began at that time,” says Shongwe.

She did it twice and realised that there was life in legumes farming other than normal maize farming. Through the Agriculture Ministry, she was assisted by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) to secure markets for her produce. Shongwe’s success is quickly making her stand out in her community. Other farmers want to emulate her.

“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 company 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.
Political commitment key in CAADP implementation
Grace Musimami

Eight years down the road the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) far is from meeting its set objectives, still facing great challenges of implementation. This is in large part attributed 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 on their main agenda.

“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 leaders 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 efforts worth to emulate.

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

Rwanda was one of the first countries to sign the compacts with most having the compacts with most having the main objective to end hunger.

This is according to the acting Prime Minister of Swaziland, Macford Sibandze.

According to Kululanga African leaders and policy makers are supposed to have a common voice which will ensure that the continent has strong political commitment to the process.

She said that, recently, southern African countries have been experiencing extreme events such as floods and drought, which affect crop production, hence climate change needs to be tackled now.

According to Hachigonta there are various ways of tackling the problem, such as building dams and irrigation facilities, and intercropping.

She said the CAADP’s current implementation status is far from its set objectives if political leaders do not put it on their main agenda.

“Regional bodies have a big role to play. ECO- WASH has supported the member states to achieve the CAADP objectives. All its member states have signed compacts and are supposed to have a tune of $400,000 to enable the process. COMESA is also trying to do the same,” said Mucavele.

CAADP consists of four pillars - extending the area under sustainable land management and reliable water control systems, improving road infrastructure and trade related capacities for market access, increasing food supply and reducing hunger, and agricultural research and technology dissemination. These are the areas where political commitment is lacking.

Sibandze congratulated FANRPAN for choosing the Swaziland to host their regional policy dialogue on agriculture.

Africa should adopt to climate change
Basil Msongo

African governments have been urged to put in place practical climate change adaptation resolutions to avoid future impacts which threaten the economy of most African countries.

Speaking at the FANRPAN meeting in Swaziland, climate scientists from the Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Service in Malawi, Elisa Kuluganga said Africa needs strong mitigation and adaptation measures now because climate change impacts will be very severe to most African countries.

According to Kuluganga, African leaders and policy makers are supposed to have a common voice which will ensure that the continent has strong political commitment to the process.

She said that, recently, southern African countries have been experiencing extreme events such as floods and drought, which affect crop production, hence climate change needs to be tackled now.

Speaking earlier, FANRPAN’s Climate Change Coordinator, Dr Sego Hachigonta, said climate change poses a real risk to the future of farming and food security in Africa, thus all stakeholders including policy makers, researchers, scientists, and farmers should be engaged to find solutions.

He said climate change impacts are very localised and hence some areas are more vulnerable than others.

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

“Africa must change its mindset – Macford Sibandze, acting Prime Minister of Swaziland

“Climate change impacts are very localised and African farmers are very vulnerable” - Dr Sago Hachigonta.

Raising the flag on youth involvement in Africa

Ben Rootman & Mbuso Tilman Ntshingila

Africa should adopt to climate change
Basil Msongo

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, Macford Sibandze.

Officially opening the Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network’s (FANRPAN) annual policy dialogue in Swaziland, Sibandze said despite the fact that Africa holds 25 percent of the world’s land area it produces only ten percent of the total global output. While the continent holds 60 percent of the world’s remaining uncultivated land, 265 million people remain chronically hungry.

“We need to enhance knowledge to ensure that the youth are engaged. If Africa does not turn the young people on agriculture, we will lose our brightest minds,” said Sibandze.

Sibandze congratulated FANRPAN for choosing such an applicable theme – advocating for the active engagement of the youth in the agricultural value chain - for its dialogue.

“Putting its money where its mouth is, in supporting the 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 Southern Africa and South Africa countries. They were allowed as FANRPAN members during the dialogue.

Each learner 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 Kamhlaba United World College of Southern Africa in Mbabane, 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.

FANRPAN Dialogue off to a flag flying start.

The learners are from the Waterford Kamhlaba United World College of Southern Africa in Mbabane, 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.

“Africa must change its mindset – Macford Sibandze, acting Prime Minister of Swaziland

Common Market for Southern and South Africa countries. They were allowed as FANRPAN members during the dialogue.

Each learner 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 Kamhlaba United World College of Southern Africa in Mbabane, 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.

“Africa must change its mindset – Macford Sibandze, acting Prime Minister of Swaziland

Common Market for Southern and South Africa countries. They were allowed as FANRPAN members during the dialogue.

Each learner 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 Kamhlaba United World College of Southern Africa in Mbabane, 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.
**Women take the lead**

Boniswe Mncina

A Zambian woman, Evanes Kapambwa, has taken the bull by the horns and ridden on the crest of the new Harmonised Seed Security Project.

Dr Evanes Kapambwa, a rural farmer, in a recent interview with Africa wide project, says it has given women the opportunity to make a better life for themselves.

Kapambwa says her success story was a first in Zambia.

“Even though we are being assisted by FANRPAN, it also calls on us to be creative and take initiatives to ensure that this dream prosper and grows within the region.”

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 Ntshangase 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 Hlomela 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.

Kapambwa 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.

**Here comes the green revolution**

Silvio 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 Siibomiso Moyo says the youth has to be trained in pre and post area production so that they are unemployed 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.

On one 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 lot of the youth are not involved in preproduction of agriculture, but more in post production.

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 business as unattractive, as it doesn’t offer quick gains in terms of profit making.

Moyo says governments have to put in place policies and 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.

**A youth invasion on agriculture**

Musa Simelane

Although the youth is less interested in farming, three young Swazi farmers have begun re-pioneering a youth invasion on agriculture.

Emmanuel Mpanza, Abat Thwala and Mangaliso Sihlonzhe are seriously tilling the ground – or soil – to take advantage of untapped opportunities that are all below the age of 35 years. Mpanza and Sihlonzhe are specialising in cultivating vegetable seedlings for commercial purposes and are positive that there is lots of money to be made in what they do.

Mpanza started his farming company called Mr Best few years ago and says he believes this outweighs the challenges. “I don’t have to worry about finding employment – I’ve hired myself and this is work that 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 shut it. He believes a major challenge in the Swazi agricultural sector is the belief by young people to venture into agriculture without wasting time hesitating. He says agriculture is the backbone of the African and world economies.

“Look, the clothes you wear and the food you eat everyday are linked to agriculture whether you like it or not. So why not venture into it because even in the next hundred years there still will be demand for them? I have a natural passion for agriculture and it’s my life.”

He says the youth’s negative perception of agriculture is a result of being too status conscious. They would consider offers on seat classes, and then careers that demand one to wear coveralls and use your hands as third class.

He says government and young farmers like him have a role to play in changing this perception.

“A major downfall for the youth is that their want for quick results. When you are a farmer you must understand that your till and patience brings untold rewards. ‘Yes, you must stay positive and smart.”

Sihlonzhe runs a company called Zampombo Nursery. Meanwhile, Thwala is a thriving producer of essential oils using an indigenous plant called Rosace Geranium. This plant has a distinct smell and its oil is used for aroma therapy natural body lotions.

**FANRPANc’s Swaziland dialogue takes to the airwaves**

Ben Rootman, Yuven Gounden

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

Through the involvement of the youth in the agricultural value chain.

“Through the involvement of 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.”

**Swazi secrets – What is of choice**

Editorial Team

Marula has long been known as the King of African trees for its many magical properties, whether medicinal, alcoholic or skincare.

Around February each year, its fruit is gathered by rural women as an important source of income. They use the fruits to make bukani, 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 taken to Swazi Indigenous Products’ factory at Mtsweni, where they are cold pressed, using manual bridge presses. Nothing is added or removed, ensuring that the oils reach the consumer in its pure, natural state.

Oil is kept in cold storage and regularly tested for aroma therapy natural body lotions.

The company also produces oils from the seeds of trichila and xenimia. All three types of oils 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. Citizens 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.

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.
Policy issues are not political statements

Bonisile Mncina

FANRPAN Chairman Sindiso Ngwenya 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 empowering governments and non-government organisations to have a strong agricultural voice.

He said a total of 16 journalists from six African countries – South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi and Lesotho – 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 Lindiwe Sibanda said the organisation is committed to open media participation about the continent’s agricultural industry being communicated.

“*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 particular the rural areas of Africa.

Apart from filing articles for their respective media houses, the journalists were contributors to the 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.

Negotiations are on the way to establish an association of regional and continental agricultural writers which could cooperate with the established association in South Africa.

Africa not fulfilling its agricultural potential

Lind van Rooyen

A clearer picture was painted of the status of food production at the second day of the FANRPAN policy dialogue on food security.

Speakers said that although there is a decline in the vulnerability towards food insecurity in the SADC region, malnutrition is still high.

Cereal production in most SADC member states has risen with five percent in the last year, but it is still not enough to meet domestic food requirements. Currently the cerealORAGE stands at five million tons.

Dr Lindiwe Sibanda, CEO of FANRPAN said that only ten African countries have honoured their commitment to spend ten percent of their budgets on agriculture. “We are struggling to get countries to commit to this and yet want to ensure that the agricultural sector grows with six percent per annum. At this point we can’t even talk about growth.”

Acting Prime Minister of Swaziland, Macford Sibonzokhwe said that agriculture in Africa is not performing as it should, given its wealth of arable land. “Africa’s agricultural output is only ten percent of the total global output, yet Africa has 60 percent of the world’s remaining uncultivated land. Africa must consider how to make this work for them to eliminate hunger.”

He added that the success of agriculture depends on continuity and the transfer of knowledge to the youth. “The youth is conspicuously absent from the agricultural sector. They have moved towards western values and equate a career in agriculture with hard work and no value. These perceptions must change so that we can win the war against poverty and hunger.”

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

“Our success incited by experts on the Harmonised Seed Security Project (Hasssp), organised by the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), the farmers 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 hoes, to till the land while other countries in the region were battling to use mechanised methods.

Dlamini said although others would equate the conditions under which Malawi farmers work to slavery, “it is the right kind of slavery, if it is slavery at all.” He was specifically reacting to a presentation by Dr Bella Mpho who coordinated the Hasssp and the Women Accessing Realigned Markets (WARM) projects.

Dlamini is among the Swazi farmers who benefitted from the Hasssp exchange programme. He visited Malawi and Zambia and on return shared his experiences with local farmers who, he said, are moving fast especially in the use of human resources.

He added that it was in their original programme to include exchange visits and the feedback is that there is further need to engage donors to upscale the visit exchange visits beyond the four pilot countries Swaziland, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Presenting the case of Swaziland on Hasssp, Christopher Msheva announced that three Hasssp producing communities had been established in the Shewula, Siphotaneni and Tubungu districts where two open pollinated seed maize varieties, SM 811 and SM 909, were produced on seven hectares by 22 farmers. He said a community seed training workshop was conducted at the Irishaid-trained Constituency Centres in Lomabasha.

The main objective of the training was to equip the Bumbeni Farmers’ Association members with seed production and seed business management skills.

Malawi farmers inspired by Swazi counterparts

Ackel Zwane

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

Negotiations are on the way to establish an association of regional and continental agricultural writers which could cooperate with the established association in South Africa.

More WARM partnerships needed

Zeddy Sambu

For Alice Antonio Nicolau, a 25 year old Mozambican university student, the dying 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 Foundation. 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 Silhembe Redona, FANRPAN’s project manager for WARM.

Nicolau hails from Mozambique’s Marracane 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 Marracane and Boani districts.

“Marracane is a success story. Men have also been trained as advocates doing work with the community,” says Cumbi.

According to Beatrice Makwenda, the 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, soybeans, 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.
Journalists attending the three-day capacity training at the FANRPAN dialogue in Swaziland have hailed the organizers, saying such training is vital for the development of their journalistic skills in agricultural reporting.

The training, which was organized 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.

“If 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 into the open, 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.

“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 into the open, 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.

The Harmony Seed Security Project (HaSSP) is definitely not tracking backwards but instead there are tangible achievements already made, Dr Bella Mmpu, 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. Mmpu 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 Karelithi, 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 Karelithi.

He noted that India’s success was first to demand 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 players 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.

Shembiile Nidema, who coordinates Women Accessing Realigned Markets (WARN) said it was important to pay particular attention to the youth because of their creative mind, their ability to pick up 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 Jumoon Communications.

www.fanrpan.org   ·   Tel +27 12 804 2966

Showcasing FANRPAN’s brainchild – the household vulnerability index

Various external influences like HIV/AIDS and climate change have a marked influence on poverty. They mainly 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.

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 in 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 differentiators.

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