

**ENHANCING SMALL-HOLDER FARMERS POLICY ENGAGEMENT
THROUGH GREATER INVOLVEMENT OF FARMERS' ORGANIZATIONS
IN POLICY PROCESSES**

Benito ELIASI¹, Stéphanie AUBIN², and Ishmael SUNGA³

Southern Africa Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU)
Unit 11, Central Office Park,
257 Jean Avenue, Centurion, 0157
P O Box 10480, Centurion

Tel: + 27 12 644 0808

Email: info@sacau.org

Website: www.sacau.org

Paper presented at the IDASA/ Economic Governance Programme conference on
'Governance and Small-scale Agriculture in Southern Africa'
November, 9th – 11th, 2009 - Indaba Hotel, Johannesburg, South Africa

(For more information on the conference: www.idasa.org.za)

¹ SACAU Farmers' Organizations Capacity Development Officer

² SACAU Policy Development Officer

³ SACAU Chief Executive Officer

1.0. Introduction

Agriculture remains the mainstay of most economies in African countries. It provides employment to more than 60% of the population and accounts for about one third of the continent's GDP. It also plays an important role in addressing food insecurity and poverty challenges. The 2008 World Development Report (WDR) of the World Bank stated that growth in GDP attributable to agriculture is at least twice as much in reducing poverty as compared to that from non-agricultural sector. Besides, the recent food price crisis has highlighted the critical importance, for African countries, of targeting food self-sufficiency. Given that most production (especially staples) comes from small-scale and low income farmers, those are particularly well positioned in assisting to achieve this endeavour. Moreover, as the agricultural sector has important backward and forward linkages with other sectors, agricultural growth has a potentially high multiplier effect on the rest of the economy.

In the short and medium term, agriculture is likely to keep its central role in African economies considering the fact that no other sector seems to be in a position to absorb the high population growth prevailing on the continent. Projections in Africa indicate that population will double by 2050 to 1.7 billion. This will translate into huge pressure in terms of feeding and sustaining the livelihoods of this growing population, while the African regime of industrialisation is still low and will all the more have to increasingly confront world champions on the global markets.⁴

Beyond Africa, satisfying the agricultural needs- both in terms of food and energy- of the growing global population is re-becoming a strategic challenge, often exacerbated by circumstances such as natural disasters, the recent food price crisis and climate change impact projections. Agriculture is again one of the world top priorities, as demonstrated by the renewed interest shown internationally in the past decade. The first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to halve poverty and hunger before 2015 is clearly agriculture-related as 70 % of world poor live in rural areas and rely on agriculture as a livelihood. The WDR 2008 named 'Agriculture for Development' provided another momentum for a new focus and a new perspective on agriculture by strongly restating it as a main sector of economic activity in most developing countries. In spite of the very volatile global environment, the international community is reengaging with coordinated efforts (e.g. the UN high level task force launched in April 2008) and new commitments (e.g. the pledge made by the G8 countries at their July 2009 meeting to mobilize

⁴ RuralStruc,2009, Structural Dimensions of Liberalization on Agriculture and Rural Development, Synthesis Report.

USD 20 billion to boost food security in developing countries). Furthermore, there has also been the emergence of new participants in worldwide philanthropy, and notably the B&M Gates foundation, in promoting agriculture alongside health as important areas of support to the poorest countries. As far as African governments are concerned, the strategic role of agriculture has been permanently reaffirmed through the development and implementation of the NEPAD/CAADP (Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program) and the Maputo commitment to annually devote 10% of national budget to the agricultural sector, and achieve 6% of agricultural growth by 2015.

Looking at the past though, billions of United States Dollars have been invested in agriculture in Africa since independence period, yet Africa has become a permanent food importer, agricultural productivity has decreased, poverty and hunger have increased and migration to cities or overseas has been exacerbated. This is happening amidst the fact that vast land areas with agricultural potential are still unexploited⁵; and large areas of exploited land could still be upgraded, notably through irrigation and enhanced inputs utilisation to improve their productivity⁶. It is critical that the new commitments made in favour of African agriculture are optimised by learning from the past experiences in order to reverse this situation and unlock the potential of African agriculture.

One of the reasons for the past failures encountered in the support of African agriculture lies in the top-down nature that characterised the policy making and implementation processes. These rarely included effective consultations with farmers, particularly small-holder farmers, despite the fact that they constitute the majority of stakeholders. As 'end users' of agricultural policies, small-holder farmers are best placed to provide relevant inputs in the policy formulation and monitoring processes. However for their contributions to be effective, it is important that they speak with one legitimate and recognised voice. They also need to have appropriate policy development and advocacy capacities. This paper argues that both can be performed by professional farmers' organizations that are well structured, representative, well governed, accountable and well capacitated.

⁵ FAO, 2009. The special challenge for sub-Saharan Africa. Issues Brief for the High-Level Expert Forum on how to feed the world in 2050, Rome 12-13 October 2009. (N.B. It is estimated in the brief that less than a quarter of the total land area of sub-Saharan Africa suitable for rain-fed crop production is so used, specifying that the potential additional land area available for cultivation amounts to more than 700 million ha.)

⁶ Ibid. Footnote 5. (N.B. According to the FAO brief only 3 % of food crop land are under irrigation on the African continent, against 20 % worldwide. Input utilisation only reaches 13kg/ha input, against 73 kg on the middle- east and 190kg in South East Asia.)

2.0. The policy-making environment in the agricultural sector in sub-Saharan Africa: a complex landscape where small-holder farmers are largely absent

The “raison d’être” of policies is to realize the concrete implementation of political commitments towards goals, objectives and strategies decided by leaders. Policies are ideally aimed at ensuring an enabling operating environment for the various players to be able to undertake their respective responsibilities towards the set goals. In the public domain, it is the responsibility of public authorities to determine appropriate ‘rules of the game’ that will fulfil these functions. In particular, it can only be public decision making institutions, be they at global, continental, regional, national or local levels that can establish and maintain the fundamental conditions of macro-economic stability, political stability, security and rule of law, which are a prerequisite for the viable and sustainable development of the society. Public policies however may be initiated either from within or outside the public sector realm.

Creating public policies is a complex undertaking that requires balancing and harmonizing the needs and aspirations of various actors and stakeholders whose expected outcomes from the final policies might be divergent. Given the central role of African agriculture in poverty alleviation and economic transition, the formulation and implementation of agricultural policies are all the more complex since they must be carefully coordinated with those of other sectors and must deal with different scales. In the globalised world, there is also need to ensure compatibility with various international commitments and constraints, which adds another layer of complexity.

For decades in Africa, public institutions regarded policy making as their sole domain. Extensive consultation with all the players concerned, particularly the end-users, was minimal. The trend has changed recently mainly due to new practices promoted by the international development community coupled with the realization by African national governments that policies that are formulated without consultations rarely succeed in addressing the targeted challenges. For example, the Cotonou Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations made the participation of non-state actors mandatory, which compelled government negotiators to involve the other actors in the process (including farmers). Likewise, within the framework of the formulation of the SADC-Regional Agricultural Policy (RAP), consultation with all stakeholders in the agriculture sector, including farmers, was a requirement put in the terms of reference of the consultants hired to conduct preliminary national and regional reviews. Civil society organizations and researchers in particular have emphasized the importance of multi-stakeholder approaches to ensure ownership and demand driven processes as sound basis for any sustainable development initiative. Recent

initiatives of devolution and decentralisation are also mechanisms that are making popular participation in policy formulation more and more systematic.

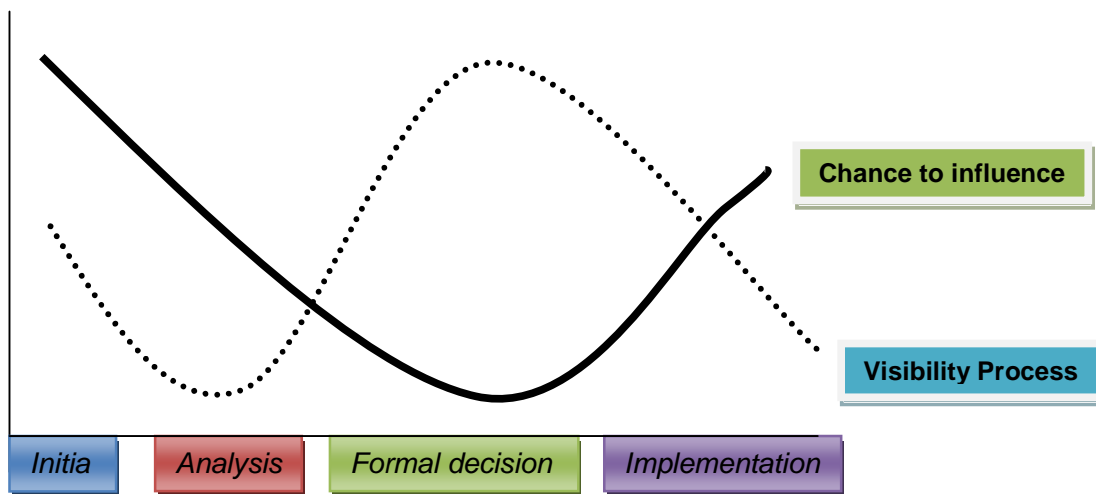
However, though policy making and review processes in Africa have become more open to different players, a lot still needs to be done if effective participation of small-holder farmers is to be fully realized across-the-board. The Southern African policy making landscape abounds of examples where farmers are still not involved in the agricultural policy processes. For example, in the area of standard setting processes for agriculture production and marketing, up until recently, there was no structure that existed to allow for dialogue and consultation between the public institutions and the private sector, including producers, who are yet expected to apply these standards in the region⁷. Another illustration is provided within the framework of the implementation of the Aid for Trade agenda, a 2005 initiative of the World Trade Organization. Aiming at providing additional aid funding for fostering trade as a growth and development engine, Aid for Trade is crucial for the agricultural sector in Southern Africa. One of the elements of the initiative was to constitute national committees comprising of recipient country government, donors, and other relevant stakeholders such as the private sector in order to ensure matching of resources with needs, including in the agricultural sector. The reality is that such committees still do not exist in most Southern Africa countries⁸. On the international scene, the fact that there are no representatives of African small-holder farmers in the food aid committee of the Food Aid Convention, whereas food aid has major impacts on their production, also adds on the demonstration.

Besides, when consultations are eventually implemented by public authorities, their effectiveness is often waned by inappropriate timing. Participants either join in too early or too late to have any impact. The diagram below depicts the comparative chance to influence policy makers at the different stages of the policy formulation process.

⁷ SACAU-DFID/Commark Trust- Regional Standards Program Project reports, 2007-2008.

⁸ SACAU, Aid for Trade discussion paper, December 2008.

Figure 1: Decision making process and chance of influence



Source: SACAU Lobby Guide, pp 42⁹

Chances of influence are higher in the initial phase of the decision making process than in any other phases. The least chance is in the formal decision making phase, when much thought, time and money have already gone into the decision and it has hence become almost impossible to convince the decision makers to take into account other views. Yet, it is often just before a policy is presented to the last executive level that farmers’ representatives are consulted. In those conditions, consultations rather seek endorsement than concrete contributions. The recent case of the Zambian CAADP compact gives a good illustration of this propensity of government to consult farmers only for formalities sake. Within the CAADP framework, consultations with stakeholders are compulsory. However, the Zambian farmers were consulted at the very last stage of the Compact formulation process: to give their endorsement to the document before presentation to government for final signature. In protestation against this ‘fait accompli’, the Zambian National Farmers’ Union (ZNFU) refused to endorse the document and requested to be given the necessary time to undertake a thorough analysis of the document and provide its own inputs. As a result, the signing of the endorsed document was delayed for several months, until farmers gave their inputs.

The graph above also illustrates that chance to influence increases again in the implementation phase. Indeed, the changing operational environment might necessitate adaptations or revisions, and the decision makers will be searching for alternatives. It is important that farmers are also involved in the monitoring and review processes of policy implementation. Again, this feature rarely happens in the policy landscape of Southern Africa.

⁹ SACAU, 2008. Lobby guide for Farmers’ Organizations.

Thus the wide absence of African small-holder farmers in policy making processes is notable at national, regional, continental and global levels. While small-holder farmers represent about two third of the continent's population and have a significant economic weight, the fact that policy makers can still afford to ignore them poses questions.

3.0. Why should small-holder farmers be involved in policy processes?

Even if their appellation specifically refers to the size of land holdings, small-holder farmers in Africa are also often associated with small-scale farming, which is characterized by a main orientation towards subsistence, dependence on family labour for most activities and operation in resource-poor conditions. Those conditions include low utilisation of purchased inputs, low access to technology, limited resources in terms of capital, skills and risk management, and limited capacity in terms of marketing, storage and processing¹⁰. More than half of the African population amongst the poorest depends on the small holding agricultural sector for their livelihoods¹¹; moreover small-holder farmers produce the bulk of the continent's food supply and significantly contribute to African economies through employment and GDP. Thus the poor conditions in which African small-holder farmers operate represent a major constraint not only for the livelihoods of the majority of Africans but also for the contribution of the sector to national/regional food security and economic growth.

Given the current low productivity levels that are prevailing in the small-holder sector as well as the significant amount of additional land that could be exploited for agricultural purposes on the continent¹², the development potential of the African small-holder sector is significantly huge. Nevertheless to unleash this potential, there is need for policy makers to ensure that small-holder farmers fully participate in the policy making processes. In many instances policy makers have failed to understand the complexity of the environment under which these farmers operate, which has often led into poor policies. Due to natural factors of endowment, the characteristics of the agrarian systems in Africa, related distribution of assets among rural households and the type of linkages to markets are indeed heterogeneous. The situation of small-holder farmers in terms of availability and access to appropriate enhancing technologies is also very diverse across the continent. This leads to different configurations of opportunities and constraints and hence requires targeted approaches and tailor-made policy design. As recently emphasised by FAO, these

¹⁰ Syngenta Foundation, 2009: <http://www.syngentafoundation.org/index.cfm?pageID=297> –accesses on 31/10/2009.

¹¹ FAO 2009, *ibid.* footnote 5.

¹² FAO 2009, *ibid.* footnote 5.

required specific solutions can only derive through participatory processes¹³. Consultation is also key for ownership, which is a determining factor of later commitment to implementation. A two-way dialogue therefore needs to be established between small-holder farmers and the other players responsible for determining the political, economic, legal as well as technological framework within which farmers operate. This also applies to policy issued by private sector operators, which have an impact on farming production (e.g. supermarkets, inputs suppliers, food processors, etc.).

It is also essential that small-holder farmers are involved in the policy processes of the other sectors that are linked to agriculture. Furthermore, the multiple and interlinked layers of policy engagement imply that small-holder farmers have to be involved at all levels of policy formulation and implementation.

The challenge is how to effectively engage with small-holder farmers and how to provide the appropriate support to enable them get effectively organised at all levels for them to be genuinely represented.

4.0. Challenges faced by small-holder farmers to participate in policy processes in Southern Africa

Absence or minimum participation of Southern African small-holder farmers in policy process originates from various factors, which can either be internal or external. The following are some of these factors:

4.1 Absence of legal frameworks that ensure participation of farmers

After decades of public policy making as the reserved domain of government, habits and mindsets are well established. Prior to the 80s, small-holder farmers' organizations in Africa tended to be set up to achieve nation-building objectives, and were often considered as an operational arm of government's programmes¹⁴. After the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 90s, which led to the dismantling of public institutions, they inherited the responsibility to fulfil the value chain functions previously performed by government agencies (e.g. input provision, credit, marketing, storage, extension, etc.), leaving policy making as the sole focus of government.¹⁵ Even if the policy space is now theoretically opening up, in practice, government is still impregnated by previous long-standing types of relationships in the way it sees and relates to

¹³ FAO 2009, *ibid.* footnote 5.

¹⁴ CTA, 2003. CTA Annual Report 2003. Meeting the needs of farmers' organizations in a changing world.

¹⁵ EC-DG Development, 2007. Advancing African Agriculture. Proposal for continental and regional level cooperation on agricultural development in Africa. Discussion Paper from the Commission, January 2007.

farmers' organizations today. On the farmers' side, lack of awareness, experience, resources and confidence prevent them from taking advantage of this new opportunity to get involved in the policy space.

Furthermore, in absence of effective formal consultation spaces in the public policy environment, it is difficult for small-holder farmers to assert their positions, as their lobbying capacities as marginalised members of the society are weak. Small-holder farmers' participation in policy making processes can only be enabled by putting in place and enforcing legal frameworks that make multi-stakeholder participation mandatory in any policy processes, as benchmarks of success and acceptability of the outcome. These must include mandatory measures to be used and indicators to be deployed with regard to participation of non-state actors in policy processes.

4.2. Lack of time and resources devoted to consultation in policy processes

Even if multi-stakeholder consultation is recognised as a 'must' in policy processes, actual implementation can be hampered by lack of financial and human resources. Whereas most of sub-Saharan African states are poor in terms of available public finances and their institutions rather weak, conducting effective consultation can be protracted and demand substantial time and other resources. Particularly, consulting small-holder farmers can turn out to be a tedious and expensive exercise since on one hand they constitute a large and widespread population, and on the other they might be little aware of or educated on policy matters.

In a globalised world where things seem to go ever faster every day, calendars of domestic policy processes might also be dictated by international agendas and schedules, which rarely take into account the constraints that are peculiar to African countries, including poor communication and transport infrastructures, weak technical capacities in terms of policy development, poor financial resources. These constraints impose substantial time requirements for the least activity to be carried out. Effective multi-stakeholder consultations might be sacrificed upon the altar of lack of time.

4.3. Lack of recognition of the prime importance of directly involving farmers in policy making processes

Small-holder farmers might be a difficult stakeholder to involve in policy process, mainly due to their weak capacities in policy development and their lack of effective organization to speak with one voice. For policy makers, it is easier to engage with agricultural experts or organizations that

work with farmers, particularly Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These have been showing a growing propensity to speak on behalf of farmers. Rashid Pertev¹⁶ noted that the absence of farmers' voice in most of policy and programme dialogue forums has resulted into an escalation of various individuals, organizations and institutions claiming to speak for and on behalf of small-holder farmers. He pointed out that in turn, the enthusiasm with which other people are ready to speak on behalf of farmers has often made the lack of farmers' voice unnoticed. According to him, in most African countries, NGOs have now become an alternative voice of farmers. However, the legitimacy and representativeness of these organizations are questionable. They rarely put in place adequate mechanisms and structures for thorough consultations with small-holder farmers, which would yet be a minimum pre-requisite before boasting about speaking for farmers. Moreover, the assistance nature that characterised the relationship between farmers' communities and NGOs can introduce a severe bias, as farmers could tend to agree with the organization's positions in order not to compromise the support they receive from them in parallel. Finally, these organizations can take advantage of the public dialogue platforms to first and foremost present their own opinions, perceptions and ideas, which might be different from those of small-holder farmers. Regrettably, failing to check the authenticity of these organizations, public authorities often wholly accept them as the voice of farmers, locking the space for a genuine representation of small-holder farmers. As a result, ownership of the process outcomes might be missed and their relevance defective (as not demand driven).

4.4. Poor representative structures of small-holder farmers in the society

Pertev¹⁷ noted that to enable farmers engage in a meaningful dialogue with the rest of the society, they should have representative structures from grass roots to international level as their legitimate voice. When it comes to mobilising farmers into a unit that speaks with one voice beyond the village, one cannot but notice that the Southern Africa still lags behind.

In most SADC countries, there are only one national Farmers' Organization (FO) that provide forums for small-holder farmers to discuss their common wishes and aspirations and champion their views as bona-fide representatives. Up until last year, there was still no national independent structure that represented small-holder farmers in Lesotho and Swaziland. There is still none in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in Angola, the UNACA (Confederação das Associações de Camponeses e Cooperativas Agro-Pecuárias de Angola), which supposedly represents farmers, is

¹⁶ Pertev R, nd. The Role of Farmers and Farmers' Organizations. Mediterranean Committee of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), Paris (France).

¹⁷ Ibid. footnote 18.

actually a parastatal agency as opposed to a purely farmer-based organization. Furthermore, a recent internal estimation exercise conducted by SACAU found out that the membership of National FOs in the region is far less than a quarter of the total number of small-holder farmers.

The problem is compounded by the limited understanding and appreciation amongst ordinary small-holder farmers of the importance and basic concepts of Farmers' Organizations. Most of them are not conversant of the roles these organizations can play and how they (farmers) could benefit from participating and mobilizing their own resources to defend their interests. On the other hand, FOs have failed to demonstrate tangible benefits accruing to their member. Additionally, achieving fair representation across a wide spectrum of interest is very challenging whilst FOs have to represent the interests of a diverse membership. Leaders tend to be older males, commercially oriented, with larger land holdings and members of the rural elite; yet the organizations have to ensure that the interests of all their members, including smaller farmers, women and young producers, are fairly represented and their needs adequately served.

4.5. Weak understanding of policy processes within the farmers communities

Policy formulation and monitoring is a complex process, all the more in a globalising world with more sophisticated national and international rules characterised by stringent and changing requirements. Effective participation requires not only an understanding of the issues but also the understanding of different stages of policy development as well as the actors involved at each and every stage. With high levels of illiteracy and limited access to education and information in most countries in the region, this understanding is a big challenge for small-holder farmers and their organizations. At most, they are only able to react to policies when consulted, which limits their impacts in terms of influencing.

4.6. Inadequate human and financial capacities of small-holders' organizations

Effectively participating in policy processes requires technical capacities in a wide range of activities, including researching updated facts and evidence about the issue under consideration, consulting with relevant people and institutions, analyzing existing policies, developing own sound policy positions, formulating parameters for negotiations, establishing networks and alliances, and finally concretely engaging policy makers. Moreover, in a globalised economy, policy formulation and monitoring have become more and more demanding, requiring highly specialised knowledge and extensive time. Performing these activities requires substantial funds. The protracted nature of most policies processes, which requires adequate staying power, also adds on the financial burden.

All these requirements are most of the time far beyond the capacities of small-holder farmers and their organizations, as they mostly rely on the fees from their members (which are few in number and with limited incomes) and a few little funding bound to project activities. There has also been a tendency amongst southern African small-holder farmers' organizations to underestimate the importance of investing in policy development and monitoring. Priority is always given to their function of production and marketing of agricultural products, the underlying argument being that 'one does not eat policy'. Without facts and figures and sound analysis to back up their policy positions, the participation of small-holder farmers remains mere rhetoric though, susceptible to be driven away by emotions, which eventually often undermines their credibility in the policy process.

4.7. Poor image of small-holder farmers' organizations

Farmers have also failed to get adequate representation in policy processes due to poor image and perception that policy makers have on their organizations and representatives. Farmers in most Southern Africa countries have not managed to build representative organizations that are legitimate, credible and accountable. As such policy makers are reluctant to engage with them. Since farmers' leaders often fail to consolidate their power base, in the eyes of policy makers they seem to represent their own interest and not those of farmers. A reputation based on trust, transparency and the capacity to co-operate with other organizations as well as proper accountability to entail that the outcomes of the policy intervention comply with the demands of member farmers are also paramount to policy makers. Lastly, in some cases, small-holders representative structures have failed to establish alliances with other organizations whereas such alliances could help them strengthening their position and image.

Despite the structural challenges they are facing, African small-holder farmers need to reclaim their space in the policy arena and take their rightful role in policy dialogue process. It is promising that more and more institutions (both public and private) have now acknowledged this necessity for allowing sustainable development in the agricultural sector. Its realisation however has to first materialise in the establishment of legitimate, accountable, and capable representative organizations, which would require concrete commitment and support.

5.0. Role of professional Farmers' Organizations in enhancing small-holder farmers' participation in policy process

Farmers' Organizations (FOs) can be defined as entities created to organize the relationships between the concerned group of farmers and the outside world, playing a 'bridging' function between farmers and other actors, such as input suppliers, financial institutions, produce retailers or processors and policy makers¹⁸. A further categorization differentiates FOs on the basis of their functions, such as commodity-based groups or general interest groups¹⁹. Commodity-based are mainly concerned with organizing farmers to produce and market a specific commodity while general interest groups are mainly concerned with defending and protecting the interests of all farmers through policy lobbying and advocacy. The latter are the most relevant to policy processes. They may operate at local, national, regional and continental levels.

Professional Farmers' Organizations have the potential to play a pivotal role in transforming the weak position of individual small-holder farmers in the society into strong legal entities that contribute positively to the social and economic advancement of the farming community, which eventually will have positive consequences in terms of poverty alleviation and economic growth on the continent.

5.1. Characteristics of a professional Farmers' Organization

It is the prime role of a Farmers' Organization to consolidate the different views of many farmers into one united voice and making it heard by bringing it to the policy arenas. Moreover, in terms of mandate and legitimacy, it must be the sole responsibility of FOs as bona-fide voice of farmers to perform effective representation of farmers.

An important feature in any FO that is striving to be an efficient representative organization is its ability to identify and consolidate its power base. The power of an organization is derived from a combination of legitimacy and credibility as well as financial capacities, and the three are closely linked. The legitimacy of an FO comes from the extension and composition of its membership such as gender ratio, age ratio, holding size and crop types. The more the members the organization has across the diversified spectrum of farmers, the more the power to influence it would be credited. Decision makers always look for optimum public opinion; as such any

¹⁸ Mercoiret, M.R. 1999. Contribution to the Workshop on Producer Organizations Empowerment, Washington: Workshop Proceedings.

¹⁹ Wennink B, Heemskerk W and Nederlof S, 2008. Strengthening the Role of Farmers' Organizations in Agricultural Innovations Systems: Case Studies from Benin, Rwanda and Tanzania.

advocacy activity that has support from the majority is likely to receive attention and action from them. As this requires the mobilisation of a large and loyal base of supporters, a difficult challenge for apex FOs participating in global discussions is that they must remain true to local members' interests, which may be widely varied. Maintaining open channels of communication with their memberships at the local, regional, and national levels is imperative to overcome this challenge.

In summary, in terms of policy representation, a professional farmers' organization should at a minimum demonstrate the following:

- **Representativity:** The organization should have a significant number of members, with all segments represented, ideally in same proportions as present in the sector, including in the leadership (e.g. women, youth, per commodity).
- **Functional Structures:** Organizational structures should be functional at all levels, from grass-root to highest level. Structures should operate according to good governance principles, with consultative internal decision making processes, and application of the subsidiarity principle especially for apex organizations.
- **Efficient communication channels:** The organization should have communication channels that enable extensive consultation internally and within coalitions/alliances, from the grass root to the international level. These channels also need to reach out to policy makers. At stake is to help farmers to understand the views of policy makers and at the same time to enable policy makers understand the views of farmers.
- **Evidence based policy intervention:** The organization should have strong evidence-based policy analysis and development capacities, including for collecting relevant qualitative and quantitative information to elaborate sound policy positions and proposals.
- **Strong advocacy capacity:** The organization should be able to strategise its advocacy by identifying the objectives of the advocacy, possible alliances, targets, and most appropriate and cost-effective means to implement the strategy. Then it needs to be able to concretely engage in policy dialogue.
- **Pro-activeness:** The organization should analyze situations in advance and engage spontaneously in the policy dialogue instead of being reactive. It should also make farmers' voice heard through targeted campaigns.

- **Accountability:** The organization should ensure transparent management and accountability to both members and partners.
- **Autonomous:** The organization should be independent from any external influence, such as government and donors/development agencies, and make decisions based on facts at disposal and own analysis. Moreover it should also strive for ultimate financial autonomy, and in the meantime ensure diversification of financing sources.

These principles are important in allowing FOs to build credibility, from both farmers and policy makers, but also from financial partners. In turn, a strong credibility will allow the mobilization of more small-holder farmers to become member, hence offering representation to a broader population and strengthening the FO's basis and legitimacy. Credibility is also essential to becoming an influential stakeholder and leveraging more finance for pursuing the organization's advocacy activities. The end-result of this iterative and exponential process is increased influence of genuine small-holder farmers' views on agricultural matters as well as enhanced ownership of policy outcomes, which are both essential to put in place and implement relevant and efficient policies aiming at fostering rural development and growth.

5.2. Best practices in Southern Africa

There are best practices and promising experiences in Southern Africa with regard to professional Farmers' Organizations that successfully represent small-holder farmers' positions in agricultural policy processes. The two following examples from Malawi and Zambia are some of the success stories where small-holder farmers have been able to influence policies.

In Malawi, the National Small-holder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM) is the largest independent, small-holder owned membership organization. It operates throughout Malawi with field based operations and organizational structures from the grass root level up to the national level. NASFAM recently conducted an advocacy campaign for changing a fiscal policy that was imposing a withholding tax from small-holder farmers' proceeds. This policy was seen by farmers as discriminatory. The campaign adopted varied approaches. They carried out an in-depth study on the issue, which was used to pressurise public authorities from different angles, including parliamentary committee on agriculture, participation in key national policy formulation forums and various government instated task forces, dialogue engagement with the Malawi Revenue Authority and other relevant government departments. In parallel, they organized a policy platform

and a national policy symposium to discuss the issue among its members and with other stakeholders. They also extensively participated in radio panel discussions and radio presentations where they raised the contentious issue. As a result, NASFAM was able to achieve a total exemption from withholding tax on the small-holder farmers.²⁰ The success of the intervention by NASFAM could be attributed to several factors, including a well-recognised organization that has a well-defined membership, a well-structured organization that enables adequate consultation and support from the grass root basis, the use of accurate facts to support the intervention, the identification of appropriate advocacy targets and associated approach used, the setting of a clear policy agenda, and the use of relevant media houses.

In Zambia, since the legal and policy frameworks allowed to transform FOs from State-supported rural enterprises into independent farmer-run businesses, the Zambia National Farmers' Union (ZNFU) has grown as an exemplary national FO. With a broad based membership drawn from small-holder farmers and large-scale farmers, but also corporate members, commodity or specialized associations, the national agribusiness chamber and associate members, the organization is well structured, has substantial capacities and enjoys good image, to the extent that it is recognized as a key partner by the government, is a key member in President's committees and has managed to influence policies in many instances. In 2009 for example, ZNFU succeeded in lobbying the Zambian government for a wheat importation ban to protect the local wheat industry against cheap imports, which would have resulted in weakening the economic situation of thousands of farmers due to non profitable sales. Government responded positively and issued a statutory instrument banning the importation of wheat and wheat products into the country. As a result, local producers managed to sell around 40,000 MT of unsold wheat²¹ at acceptable price.

Through its specific engagement with the Ministry of Finance and National Planning on national budgets, ZNFU was also able to influence government to remove the Value Added Tax (VAT) on agricultural equipment for small-holder farmers, which constituted a significant financial burden to them. Recently, they have also lobbied for the formation of a committee to specifically look at ways and means of attracting financial institutions to continue lending to agriculture. Such a committee is now established, headed by the Secretary to the national Treasury and with ZNFU as a member, and it could have major impacts on supporting small-holder farming in Zambia.²² ZNFU has been able to achieve these results thanks to among other things, their capacity to

²⁰ SACAU, 2008; Lobby Guide for Farmers' Organizations, page 54-55

²¹ http://www.znfu.org.zm/index.php?option=com_content&view=article

²² ZNFU, 2009, 104th Congress Report; pages 14-15

effectively contribute and demonstrate their importance to the authority, the recognition by the authority that they are a mouth piece of farmers, wide representativeness of their structure that gives them political clout, and their ability to gather relevant data and provide sound analysis for their lobby activities.

At regional level, the Southern Africa Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) was formed to give a voice to Southern African farmers in a context of regional integration and globalisation. Its membership is opened to national farmers unions and regional commodity associations. The prime mandate of SACAU is to engage with policy makers at regional, continental and global levels to defend the interest of the agricultural sector in the region. SACAU is already recognised by many stakeholders in the policy making processes as a main dialogue partner, including the Regional Economic Communities, African Union (AU)/NEPAD, as well as research and development agencies. It actively participates in all the policy processes that deal with agriculture in the region, directly or indirectly (particularly trade), notably by sitting in technical committees, commenting on draft documents, and attending public meetings. These include CAADP, SADC-RAP, COMESA strategic plan for agriculture, COMESA Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) programme, WTO standards setting processes, AU land policy framework and the World Development Report of 2008. SACAU has also initiated a policy development programme aimed at elaborating evidence-based positions on agricultural issues that are of concerns to Southern African farmers, as expressed through SACAU's AGM. To date, it has issued three positions paper on Aid for Trade, Food Aid and Climate Change, and both background discussion papers and positions are widely disseminated to farmers, via SACAU members, and other stakeholders. In terms of alliance, SACAU is a co-founding member of the Pan-African Farmers Platform that was created in May 2008 by the four regional farmers' networks of sub-Saharan Africa. The platform aims at joining forces to promote the resurgence of African agriculture so that the sector can fulfil its essential functions. SACAU is also very active in promoting effective representative structures and approaches amongst its members. Furthermore, the emergence of this regional structure has facilitated the mobilisation of financial resources from bilateral and multilateral aid agencies for national FOs in the region, allowing the improvement of their organizational capacities and their technical resources.

6.0. Conclusion

The importance of small-holder farmers' participation in agriculture-related policy processes can not be overemphasized in the objective of achieving successful agricultural outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa. The evidence of willingness on part of governments and other stakeholders to involve them in policy formulation and monitoring can be observed, which is promising. However, African small-holder farmers are yet to take advantage of the opportunities that are availed to them to participate, mainly due to weak representative structures.

As a means of pursuing farmers' economic, social and political objectives, professional Farmers' Organizations could potentially be a significant force in driving agricultural and rural development in the continent. They must be recognized as the legitimate voice of small-holder farmers, and it is critical to promote them and support the strengthening of their capacities if full participation of farmers in agri-policy processes is to be realized. However realizing their potential will take not only an enormous effort on their part, in terms of commitment to organizational development and pro-active policy engagement. It will also need a determined drive by donors and international agencies to help them meet the many challenges they are still facing, including those to do with representativeness, governance, skills, and communication means, without however compromising their effective empowerment. A strong and proactive legal and political commitment from African governments will also be required to redress a situation where the majority has been kept voiceless for decades.

At stake, there is the unlocking of the enormous potential of sub-Saharan agriculture in terms of food security, economic growth and social justice, not only for the continent but for the entire planet in a context of population growth and climate change.
