Leaders of farmers’ organisations from across the world gathered in Rome this month to engage in dialogue and to exchange experiences during the sixth meeting of the Farmers’ Forum organised by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The Farmers’ Forum has been in existence since 2005 and the meetings are held every two years.

SACAU was one of the Farmers’ Organisations which attended with CEO Ishmael Sunga and President, Dr Theo de Jager as the organisation’s leadership representation.

In attendance as technical support was Benito Eliasi who said that the forum proved successful because IFAD renewed its commitment to continue its collaboration with farmers of the world through organised agriculture.

“A number of models that are deployed by Farmers’ Organisations globally in providing services to their members were shared and they were enriching,” he said. “Personally, I enjoyed the session that discussed issues regarding organising smallholder farmers to enable them to participate in and benefit from lucrative agricultural markets amidst competition due to globalisation and changes in the production environment.”

SACAU took the lead in a number of discussions as well as shared its experiences on a number of areas.

Planning for the future: IFAD President Kanayo F. Nwanze on the last day of a series of events on agricultural challenges which SACAU participated in. Photo: © IFAD/Giulio Napolitano

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SACAU CEO to present at food security conference

What needs to be done to transform agriculture in our search for food security? SACAU CEO Ishmael Sunga will join other global leaders gathering in Oslo from the 7th to the 10th of March for the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) ‘Food Security week’. The objective of this gathering is to firmly put food security back on the Norwegian International cooperation agenda. Mr Sunga will speak on Transforming Agriculture for a Food Secure Future and ‘Rural Development - A Farmer Driven Development Agenda’.

While at NORAD Mr Sunga will also meet the CEO of NORAD as well as the head and deputy head of the civil society department that is responsible for handling funding support to SACAU. Later in the week he will also meet the Norwegian Farmers’ society department that is a lead organisation in contributing to food security in the Norwegian region, and the head of the civil society department that is responsible for handling funding support to SACAU. Later in the week he will also meet the Norwegian Farmers’ Union.

Climate change, food security and conflict are already contributing to migration and social upheaval that challenge the stability of political regimes, note the organisers. Participants will be asking what the role of agriculture is in contributing to national development efforts as well as local and global stability.

The 6th global Farmers’ Forum

A special edition anthology, published in partnership with Foreign Affairs, brings together the views of twenty leading thinkers on all aspects of food systems, smallholder farming, and the transformative opportunity presented by digital technology. The authors include SACAU CEO Ishmael Sunga who wrote an essay called “Organising for the Future: Overcoming Fragmentation with Digital Technology”, Co-curators Kofi Annan, Sir Gordon Conway, and Sam Dryden assert that “The combination of digital technology and human creativity in deploying it will revolutionise life for Africa’s farmers by overcoming isolation, speeding up change, and taking advantage of new opportunities.”

One of the biggest contributors and a great supporter of this initiative is Bill Gates, who believes that the way human beings use the power of technology can make a significant difference. “Digital technology can act almost like a secret decoder ring that links the formal and informal sectors.” The authors have also shared their personal experience at the end of each essay.

View and download the Foreign Affairs anthology here.

Updated drought survey to spur regional action

SACAU members from 12 SADC countries have responded to an urgent call for information on the impact of the drought in the region to help the confederation plan a way forward.

Coordinated by Dr Manyewu Mutamba, the survey evaluates the impact of drought in each country and also identifies the major challenges faced by farmers. “The survey covered 12 countries in which SACAU has members as well as commodity platform members,” says Dr Manyewu Mutamba.

“The responses were good, almost all SACAU members responded. Overall about 50% of those invited to give feedback responded despite the short time window.” The results are critical to ensure a co-ordinated regional response. “It has become clear that farmers across Southern Africa are in the clutches of an unrelenting drought,” says Dr Mutamba, adding that all SACAU members are affected. “It’s already clear that transport and infrastructural bottlenecks will be a constraint to an effective drought response. A regional approach to tackling these challenges is better placed to galvanise long term solutions, investments and strategies for disaster preparedness in the future,” says Dr Mutamba.

The second step will be a high level report based on the survey which will highlight the extent of the drought and the major impacts as well as some of the possible actions to help farmers manage the impacts of the drought. “We are finalising a report that will summarise the responses and capture the key outcomes of the survey,” says Dr Mutamba. “This report will be the basis of an information session and media briefing with various stakeholders, partners and media,” he adds.

SACAU released full results at a press conference on Tuesday, 01 March, 2016.

A regional approach to tackling these challenges is better placed to galvanise long term solutions

Organising for the future

What role can digital technology play in transforming the agricultural sector? This is the major question being tackled in a special edition anthology published in partnership with Foreign Affairs. As you will have read elsewhere in this newsletter, co-curators Kofi Annan, Sir Gordon Conway and Sam Dryden view the combination of digital technology and human creativity as being able to revolutionise life for Africa’s farmers.

Annan put it best when he said: “It is time to change the way we think. Farmers are not the causes of Africa’s poverty; they are a potential solution. They are key to creating the future envisioned by the SDGs.”

The anthology is the product of an effort known as the Digital Thinking Initiative, which grew out of a dialogue started by Kofi Annan and Strive Masiyiwa in Addis Ababa in 2013.

In September 2014, when Bill and Melinda Gates encouraged Sam Dryden to pursue his interest in ensuring that digital technology would truly serve smallholder farmers in Africa better and more inclusively, he saw an opportunity to carry the conversation forward.

The anthology makes it clear that it’s not a question of “if” digital technology will transform African food system but “when” and “how.”

It is well worth investing time in following the conversation. View and download the Foreign Affairs anthology here.
Engaging youth to drive agricultural transformation

Agriculture will need a “new generation” of farmers to produce food, fiber and fuel across the African continent in a way that deals with the changes in climate, economic, technology and consumer preferences. For this reason, SACAU is focusing on youth, technology and agricultural transformation in southern Africa at its upcoming AGM.

“SACAU believes that the future of agriculture will need a new generation of farmers that will be able to produce food more efficiently amid great challenges,” said SACAU CEO Ishmael Sunga. “With current climate changes and a tough economic environment, farmers will need to harness technology as a key driver of growth in the sector.”

SACAU delegates will gather at the upcoming annual conference on 23 & 24 May 2016 in Mbabane, Swaziland. The meeting will begin with a youth gathering, followed by the two-day conference. Delegates will also visit farms in the area and end off with an annual general meeting which is closed to SACAU members. The key speakers will include prominent leaders of Farmers’ Organisations, leaders in agricultural technology and innovations as well as policy makers.

The aim of the conference is to envision the future of agriculture and the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in meeting the demands of the future consumer amidst changes in the production environment. Delegates will be exposed to cutting edge technologies that are likely to change the future outlook of agriculture globally and in Africa. Advanced technology in agriculture cannot be divorced from a future farmer and African farmers need to prepare and harness ICT in agriculture.

The conference will bring together leaders of Farmers’ Organisations in the region, policy makers, young farmers and other stakeholders such as agribusiness and development partners to share practical experiences and expertise.