Conservation agriculture reaps rewards

Conservation Agriculture (CA) adoption is on the rise in some areas of Zimbabwe and Mozambique with farmers reporting increases in crop yield.

SACAU was joined by the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU) and the Mozambican farmers’ association, União Provincial de Camponeses de Manica (UCAMA) to visit farmers in Murehwa district, Zimbabwe and Sussundenga district in Mozambique in February.

The “Facilitating Farmer-led Scaling-up of Conservation Agriculture in southern Africa” project is funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and is now in its third year. The project focuses on the implementation and scaling up of CA in both countries and farmers have since adopted various innovative CA practices on their pieces of land. These include minimum tillage, intercropping, crop rotation and maintaining soil cover to retain water by mulching or the use of cover crops. Many farmers reported significant improvements in their yields where CA was practiced as compared to the conventional plots. However, the impact of the drought was prevalent in both areas.

In Zimbabwe, the project is being implemented in six districts; Goromonzi, Murehwa, and Hwedza in Mashonaland East province as well as Mutare, Mutasa and Makoni in Manicaland province. In Mozambique, three districts in the Manica Province were selected; Manica, Barue and Sussundenga.

Farmers in the two districts in each country spoke vividly about their planting methods, explaining the purpose of each of the steps in ensuring that they followed CA principles in their fields. They shared the different adaptations which they took up with resources they had available to substitute those they didn’t. Different types of crop cover were used by farmers, such as tree leaves and crop residue from the previous season. This demonstrates the level of innovative thinking inspired by the project.

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An organisation looking forward

SACAU believes, understands and considers the practice of good corporate governance as one of the key pillars of a vibrant and sustainable organisation, and it is thus a key performance area. As usual, our Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be the climax of our annual governance programme. This year all roads lead to Swaziland. Preparations for this event, which will be held on 26th May 2016 in Manzini, are in full swing.

The external audit has already been completed, a call for nominations for candidates for the two board positions that will become vacant, has been made. The board has approved the proposed agenda for the AGM and other related aspects. A few loose ends still need to be tied up, and all procedural requirements will be met within the time periods prescribed by our Memorandum of Incorporation (MOI). Further updates on the preparations will be provided in the next issue.

Meanwhile, in keeping with its value on consultation, the board and secretariat will be hosting a consultative meeting of presidents and heads of secretariats of SACAU members, from 21st to 22nd April 2016, to consult and update each other on various and heads of secretariats of SACAU members, from 21st to 22nd April 2016, to consult and update each other on various administrative and secretariat matters. This meeting will culminate in the official opening of the new permanent SACAU office on 22nd April 2016. The occasion will also be graced by all past presidents of SACAU who will take us down memory lane. It’s going to be an exciting, memorable and emotional event.

More on this in the next issue.

Ishmael Sunga

MARCH 2016

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Adoption of conservation agriculture soars

In Zimbabwe, the project uses schools as demonstration and learning hubs, with scholars and farmers from the surrounding community playing an active role. Scholars are organised into Young Farmers Clubs (YFCs), under the guidance of an agriculture teacher who is supported by the ZFU district and provincial project staff. The Mozambique component is rolled out through farmer groups which are headed by lead farmers who provide support to their respective groups, with the guidance of the in-country project team.

Aside from better quality crops and higher yields, farmers cited positive changes from their involvement in the project. Farmers have been able to build better houses and, in a few cases, to buy cars, using increased income from selling more crops. These are just some of the tangible benefits as a result of farmers adopting CA in their fields.

With legumes such as pigeon pea being encouraged for intercropping with maize, there has been a significant increase in production, stimulating a thriving export market, mainly to India. This has now prompted the Mozambican government to insist on local processing of the crop to add value before exports. Within the last year, two pigeon pea collection centres were established in two districts covered by the project, with another planned for a third district. Since the establishment of the centre, there has been a growing demand for pigeon peas with prices reported to be as high as MT 1 000/ kg. Farmers have been especially creative in their choice of crops for intercropping with maize, using groundnuts, cowpeas, sunflower as well as sorghum.

Farmers celebrated the use of fertiliser and herbicides. Despite the often high cost and scarce availability of herbicides in more remote areas, farmers’ general understanding and confidence in the use of both was apparent. For instance, farmers had a thorough understanding of weeds which were more difficult to eradicate with herbicides and those that are easily controlled, which shows that farmers are sharing information on CA methods.

The use of CA in farmers’ individual fields, and not only at project demonstration sites, is indicative of the confidence which the farmers now have in the practice. For the respective project teams, this renews the success of the project, but importantly, that CA will be practiced beyond the life of the project.

SACAU co-hosted a regional meeting for members of its dairy stakeholders in Lesotho this month with the Lesotho National Farmers Union (LENAFU) and long-term development partner, We Effect. The meeting took place from 11th-13th April in Maseru.

The Lesotho dairy sector is a dynamic one with ample opportunities to showcase and as such, the decision to visit the country to expose regional stakeholders to the local industry was one which was welcomed by LENA FU CEO, Mr Motsau Khuele. Peer learning and knowledge sharing play a significant role in the provision of information and through this workshop, members of national dairy associations in the southern African region will gain first-hand experience of a well-sustained dairy market.

Milk production in sub-Saharan Africa is highly dependent on rain-fed fodder, hence fluctuations in production throughout the year. With the region currently ravaged by a devastating drought, the potential of milk shortages is looming as dairy farmers resort to either selling their livestock or their land to survive the drought.

In the three-day workshop, national dairy associations will, among other activities, deliver presentations covering last season’s challenges and successes, providing respective countries with insights into their neighbours’ industries which inevitably affect them.

The last regional meeting held for the national dairy associations was in June 2015 in Harare, Zimbabwe and it was noted that interaction among the associations would need to be intensified if the respective dairy value chains are to survive the ever-changing economic climate amidst pressure from international producers.

Dairy sector stakeholders to meet in Maseru

SACAU/We Effect Annual Review

SACAU and We Effect met on 25th February 2016 to review the progress SACAU made in 2015. This is within the framework of We Effect’s support for the implementation of SACAU’s Operational Framework. They discussed developments in the organisation, such as preparations for SACAU’s AGM and conference purchase of an office block, resource mobilisation, strategy development and staff changes.

One of the highlights of the meeting was the discussion of results of the membership satisfaction survey that We Effect administered on SACAU members in 2015. SACAU was rated highly by members. Discussions also focused on preparations for another survey to be carried out in 2016 as part of the continuous monitoring of the performance of the organisation.

We Effect expressed satisfaction with SACAU’s progress in the past year.

Staff announcements

Resignations
Dr. Manyewu Mutamba, Analyst: Policy and Economics, resigned with effect from 1st March 2016. SACAU wishes him all the best in his future endeavors.

Appointments
SACAU welcomes Mr. Roelof Boshoff who was appointed as the Accounts and Administration Manager. Mr. Boshoff joined SACAU on 29th March 2016.
Southern Africa is in the grip of a drought which has dampened all hope for farmers across the region. Results of a study conducted by SACAU show that almost all countries in southern Africa are experiencing severe to extremely severe drought conditions. Below average rainfall attributed to the most intense El Nino since 1957, and record breaking temperatures have made the 2015/16 season the driest on record.

“The most reported impacts relate to crop failure due to below normal rainfall as well as livestock deaths due to poor grazing or lack of water,” said SACAU’s CEO Mr Ishmael Sunga, speaking at a briefing in Pretoria, co-hosted by AgriSA to share the results of the study. In addition to sharing the study’s outcomes, the briefing aimed to create awareness of the long-term implications of the drought as well as bring forward innovative interventions which the sector could adopt in the current drought.

The crisis facing farmers and consequently, consumers was highlighted as a result of inadequate investment in necessary infrastructure, and while the impact is devastating for the economy at large, resource mobilisation for relief efforts was challenged and instead “production relief” was hailed as the more sustainable solution.

The devastating drought is already having far-reaching consequences on farmers’ livelihoods, food security and food prices, prompting fears of socio-economic and political unrest. While most governments in the region are scrambling to import grain to feed more than 14 million people who are expected to go hungry due to the drought, the study cautions that farmers should not be forgotten.

“Farmers are anticipating large income losses, and in some cases outright bankruptcy as a direct result of the drought,” said Mr Sunga.

“Unless farmers receive urgent support in the form of drought relief measures, it is clear that the majority of farmers will have no choice but to default on their loan repayments,” he added.

While crop producers are expected to bounce back over the next season or two, the impact on livestock producers will be felt for the next five years at least. “In the short term, farmers will need to be assisted to sustain their livestock, keep up with their loan repayments and prepare to get back on the land next season,” said Mr Sunga. “The impacts of the drought such as high food prices and job losses will be felt for a number of years even if normal rains are received in the next season, particularly for the cattle industry which typically has long cycles.

“Other impacts include decreasing water quality, dropping groundwater levels, as well as increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires,” he added.

Among its recommendations, the study emphasises that “the transition to a climate resilient agriculture is long overdue”. The use of tillage systems that preserve moisture, drought tolerant crop varieties and livestock breeds, water smart irrigation systems and diversified enterprise mixes were noted as some of the adaptations that now need to be the norm rather than the exception on farms”.

Considering some of the impacts cited in this crisis, infrastructure and innovative instruments for rolling out weather-indexed insurance for both crops and livestock were also identified as priority investment area for governments, agribusiness, development partners and farmers.

The study concludes that both farmers and governments across the region were woefully ill-prepared for a drought of this magnitude. “Although a number of countries have declared the drought a disaster, both the response time and the quantum of resources they have committed to support farmers are nowhere near what is required to adequately deal with a disaster of this scale”, Mr Sunga informed attendees. With the frequency and intensity of droughts expected to increase across southern Africa due to climate change, decisive action is urgently needed by governments, businesses and farmers to invest substantial resources into early warning systems, disaster preparedness and risk reduction.
SACAU pushes for rights of women in agriculture

Farming in sub-saharan Africa is a family affair. Yet, women continue to face serious challenges and constraints which inhibit them from effectively unlocking their full potential. March 8th was International Women’s Day and a chance to look at the impact women have on agriculture as well as the constraints they face in the sector.

These constraints include access to resources such as land, finances, markets, appropriate technology and information; limited technical and managerial capabilities; social, cultural and political prejudices; and marginalisation in decision making processes in leadership structures.

SACAU’s Capacity Development Advisor Mr Benito Eliasi, noted that these three issues of access, ownership of production of assets and representation in leadership structures of FO’s remain at the forefront. “There are a number of economic, social and cultural factors that make access and ownership more difficult for women than their male counterparts,” he said.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations notes that women play a critical role in agriculture despite many constraints. About 53.5% of people self-employed in farming are women. While women farmers work the land, women in developing countries hold only 14% of the management positions in agricultural organisations and only 30% of the delegates at the UN climate change meetings between 2000 and 2010 were women.

Mr Eliasi has been a part of a number of SACAU initiatives to address these issues. “SACAU have noted how at a local level you will find many women in leadership positions but as you go up... you find very few,” said Mr Eliasi. Access to knowledge and assets is limited for women and, for women trying to build their businesses, this can be an almost insurmountable roadblock.

Part of the reason SACAU hosts the annual Regional Women Farmers’ Forum is to address these challenges. The forum is a chance for women to come together and share experiences. This year’s theme will be ‘Entrepreneurship Development’. The focus will be on building entrepreneurial skills for women farmers. Mr Eliasi is also excited that the forum will be bringing young women and older women together.

Regarding the issue of land rights, SACAU will facilitate members of the forum to participate in the Kilimanjaro initiative that will bring together women in Africa to discuss land issues and women’s rights. The Kilimanjaro meeting is organised by the International Land Coalition (ILC) in collaboration with ActionAid, Tanzania Gender Networking Program and others.

As Mr Eliasi points out, there is still more to be done. “With the Women’s forum we hope to amassed knowledge and expertise with the aim to provide solutions. The Kilimanjaro Initiative, although not organised by SACAU, will provide a similar experience for our members.”

Transforming agriculture to boost food security

Despite making up the majority percentage of farmers self-employed through agriculture, women are still hugely underrepresented in leadership structures.

The current drought is already having severe negative effects on regional food security. South Africa, the region’s largest maize producer, is facing a 5 million tonne deficit that will need to be met through imports.

The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) organised a food security conference from 7th to 10th March in Oslo. The conference was attended by global leaders to engage in a dialogue on food security and what the role of agriculture is in contributing to national development efforts as well as local and global stability.

SACAU CEO Mr Ishmael Sunga was invited to speak on ‘Transforming Agriculture for a Food Secure Future’ and ‘Rural development - A Farmer Driven Development Agenda?’.

Mr Sunga’s presentation focused on key issues faced by farmers in southern Africa and also touched on methods that can be used to improve food security by developing the agricultural sector.

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There needs to be a more transformative agenda in agricultural development which is centred on enterprise development, and focused on growth and prosperity.”

“African leaders need to harness the power of digital technology to support sustainable food systems”

Due to the drought, regional food supplies are limited and staple food prices are higher than average. Nearly 29 million people are currently food insecure in the southern Africa region.

As Mr Sunga points out that there is still more to be done to improve the food insecure region.

“African leaders need to harness the power of digital technology to support sustainable food systems. They need to think strategically and come up with new methods that are innovative to drive development in the agricultural sector,” said Mr Sunga.

“There is limited access to factors of production such as land, finance, technology or machinery,” he added.
The 6th Global Farmers Forum (FAFO) was opened by the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). He noted and appreciated the opportunity the Forum provides to IFAD to interact with representatives of multitudes of agricultural producers in the world.

The President stated that the partnership between IFAD and producer organisations through FAFO has been instrumental in the empowering of rural people in the fight against poverty through agriculture. The Forum has also made agriculture pivotal to the rural development agenda of IFAD and various national governments. He further observed that it had bridged the gap that existed between IFAD and local producers.

The IFAD President noted that the Forum had already started showing impacts on the ground, and cited the example of national farmers’ organisations that were now actively participating in the formulation of IFAD country strategies more than before. The engagement of producer organisations through the Farmers’ Forum has also strengthened the impact and enhanced relevance of IFAD’s country programs.

The Farmers’ Forum has evolved over the years and the President encouraged producer organisations to continue taking the lead in this evolution. IFAD only facilitates the activities of the Forum and will not prescribe to its management. It suggests, catalyses, advises and supports the Forum.

FAFO has become a platform for promoting successful models in addressing rural poverty through agriculture. The undertaking of special sessions on women, youth and pastoralists along the sidelines of FAFO has enriched IFAD’s statements to the governing council, thus the interest of smallholder farmers are heard at highest level of policy making within IFAD. This is connecting policy with producers from grassroots up.

Lastly, the President indicated that IFAD was at an advanced stage of its decentralisation, to the extent that decision making in formulating country programs is at local level. Thus, FAFO needs to also start contemplating decentralising and organising regional forums closer to producers.

Here are some highlights from comments made by the steering committee members:

- FAFO has enhanced dialogue, agreements and partnerships between IFAD and producer organisations, and it has been a win-win partnership for both parties. There is however need to expand the dialogue beyond the Forum if the current challenges in a globalised economy are to be addressed.

- The alliances and partnerships have the capacity to reduce poverty, prevent deforestation and manage the environment to reduce the effects of climate change. IFAD has provided guidelines.

- Producers need to work together and be united regardless of the nature of the enterprise they are involved in, and this will benefit the small-scale farmers.