SACAU represented at WEF

At the World Economic Forum’s 46th Annual Meeting in Davos-Klosters, SACAU CEO Ishmael Sunga pushed for greater global attention for the world’s farmers and in particular smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa.

This year’s theme is “Mastering the Fourth Industrial Revolution” and Sunga emphasises that farmers need to master the new technologies the world has to offer. “Indeed, digital technology presents perhaps the greatest prospects to revolutionise smallholder agriculture on the widest scale, within the shortest period of time and at the lowest cost,” he said.

But Sunga argues that it’s also the duty of farmer’s organisations to develop digital technological capabilities in order for them to continue to remain relevant to farmers.

Sunga shared examples of how SACAU is using digital technology to overcome farmer fragmentation. SACAU has successfully piloted a digital aggregation platform, which it is now preparing to roll out.

“This platform has been designed by farmers, for farmers,” Sunga added.

The power of information is becoming a crucial source of competitiveness noted Sunga. “It is at the core of investment decisions and planning around what to produce, in what quantities, for whom, when, how, and at what cost, as well as effective operations management such as when to irrigate and when to apply fertilizers,” he said.

“The future belongs to those who are able to harness the potential of ICTs,” Sunga said. “Smallholder farmers are increasingly connected through their mobile phones, presenting us with an opportunity to empower them with information.”

SACAU CEO to be published

In a special edition of Foreign Affairs, CEO of SACAU Ishmael Sunga will be published alongside Bill Gates (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), Dr Akinwumi Adesina (President, African Development Bank) and Kofi Annan (former Secretary General of the United Nations).

Foreign Affairs is a magazine published by the NGO the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). This special edition was commissioned by the Digital Thinking Initiative, who are calling for African leaders to take up the unprecedented opportunity to create food systems that fight poverty, improve nutrition, and promote stability and growth on the continent.

Sunga’s article is entitled ‘Organising for the Future: Overcoming Fragmentation with Digital Technology’ and discusses the scope and potential of digital technology for farmers and farmers’ organisations.

This magazine will be launched on February 15 2016.
I write this note as southern Africa is being ravaged by the worst drought in decades. A dismal rain season with record-breaking temperatures has pushed farmers to the brink. The crisis will have long-term consequences on, among others, farmers’ livelihoods, food prices, social and economic stability.

SACAU is therefore leading an urgent regional assessment in order to develop an appropriate response. If you have not already done so, particularly SACAU member organisations, may I urge you to complete the assessment in order to help us galvanise support.

On a different matter, there are indications that the next industrial revolution is fast approaching, if not already upon us!

I have returned from Davos-Klosters which hosted the World Economic Forum’s 46th Annual Meeting in Switzerland under the theme “Mastering the fourth industrial revolution”.

I couldn’t help but think that in Africa, this 4th industrial revolution will be agro-based and technology driven. Agriculture is the mainstay of most African economies and digital technology is particularly proving that it has capabilities to revolutionise agriculture on the widest scale, within the shortest period of time, at the fastest speed, as well as at the lowest cost. This time around, farmers need not be left behind by this revolution. Indeed, farmers need to embrace this revolution.

What will it take for an agriculturally driven and digitally centered industrial revolution to happen? We need bold leadership that is systems driven and capable of engineering the agricultural future; farmers’ awareness, understanding and mastering of this future; the development of a new generation of farmers and farmers’ organisations, as well as deliberate and massive investment in connectivity and energy infrastructure on an intensive scale.

Information is power and is a crucial source of competitiveness. It is at the core of investment decisions and planning around what to produce, in what quantities, for whom, when, how, and at what cost, as well as effective operations management such as when to irrigate and when to apply fertilizers.

Fundamentally, it is at the core of risk management, including climate change related risks.

The current drought underscores the need to deploy ICTs and other digital solutions.

SACAU to take up southern African drought

Continuing drought in southern Africa is forcing farmers into a crisis.

SACAU is spearheading a regional assessment of the extent of the problem and the responses needed.

The coordinator of the regional study, Dr Manyewu Mutamba said that all SACAU member countries (except Seychelles) are experiencing severe to extremely severe drought conditions. “Large income losses among farmers are anticipated,” he said. “In almost all countries, the majority of farmers are expected to default on their loan repayments unless these loans are restructured or governments chip in with drought relief measures.”

He added that many countries in the region believe their governments will struggle to import enough grain to plug the anticipated deficit due to either financial constraints, transport and logistical bottlenecks.

“The most reported impacts so far are related to crop losses and failure to plant due to poor rains. Livestock deaths due to poor grazing or lack of water, and decreasing water quality”. Social impacts such as depression, anxiety and suicidal tendencies have also been reported among farmers.

Dr Mutamba is still in the process of collecting responses from SACAU members and associated commodity platforms in the region. “The responses have been great, by end of day two, close to 20% of the respondents had sent in their feedback. We expect to reach up to 60% by end of the week,” he said.

The next step is to produce a high level report from the survey highlighting the extent of the drought. This will culminate in an information session and media briefing planned for the 1st of March. Results will be shared with government officials, embassy representatives and members of the donor community. “This will elevate the profile of this problem among key stakeholders and galvanize support for both a short and long-term response to the drought,” Dr Mutamba said.
Southern Africa’s dairy farms were one of the hotly talked about subjects at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Awareness Creation workshop on Food Safety Sanitary issues.

Held in Lusaka, the workshop ran from 20 to 21 January 2016. Victor Ng’andu, a Dairy Development Officer from the Dairy Association of Zambia gave a presentation at the event. He was presenting on behalf of SACAU as part of its work to facilitate collaboration amongst national dairy associations in southern Africa.

Ng’andu believed that the event proved important in allowing other states to share information especially around the issue of Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures or SPS.

“What SACAU learnt is the magnitude of the SPS issues affecting farmers and industry in the region, their impact and challenges on production and trade among members in the sub-region,” he said.

Ng’andu made the presentation during the case study session on the SPS challenges SADC farmers are facing with regards to market access of dairy products.

In retrospect, Ng’andu believes that the presentation was a success. During the session many recommendations were given by other SADC members. There was a suggestion that more awareness was required on SPS issues throughout the value chain.

But in terms of general food sanitary issues, there were recommendations that more quality checks are required at production level to prevent unsafe foods passing through the value chain. This included the construction of local labs at milk collection points to check for unsafe contents in dairy products.

Ng’andu noted the suggestion given for “stakeholder support to reduce the cost of laboratory analysis at local levels”.

Representatives from Angola, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Namibia, Botswana, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe were also in attendance. The event, as part of the European Union funded initiative ‘the SADC Regional Economic Integration Support (REIS) programme’, aimed to broaden the understanding of food safety issues by stakeholders to enhance their participation in the identification, formulation and implementation of harmonised food safety standards for improved trade in the SADC region and internationally.

Ng’andu believed that “the SPS awareness workshop was an eye opener and more information needs to be shared to all member organisations and eventually the farmers”.
Farmers from around the globe will be gathering in Rome later this month to review their collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and share their experiences and knowledge.

The Farmers Forum runs between the 15 and 16 February 2016 with leaders from Farmers Organisations (FOs) around the world will be in attendance. SACAU will be one of these FOs.

The Farmers Forum was started in 2005 as a way to strengthen ties between FOs and IFAD.

IFAD is a specialised agency within the United Nations. The 2016 Farmers’ Forum will enable IFAD to take into account the needs of the farmers into IFAD’s new Strategic Framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

SACAU will be sending six delegates - SACAU president, SACAU CEO, Presidents of Seychelles Farmers’ Association, and Lesotho National Farmers’ Union, the vice president of Swaziland National Agricultural Union and the SACAU Capacity Development Advisor, Benito Eliasi.

Eliasi noted that one of the issues that SACAU was most interested in discussing was that of the southern African drought. “It is expected that leaders of FOs will discuss the issue and share strategies on how best to address the current situation and how to prepare and avert similar situations in future,” he said.

He also noted that prior to the forum, FOs are going to share effective models and mechanisms of delivering economic services to farmers. “SACAU delegates will be keen to share its experiences and also learn one or two things from other regional farmers’ organisations,” he said.

SACAU’s delegation will share their experiences and status of agriculture in their respective countries. Eliasi notes that prior to the forum, SACAU will also share with other participants the strides it has made in strengthening farmers’ organisations in the region through an IFAD funded program.

The forum will be preceded by a special session on pastoralism on 12 February and followed by a number of side events on 18 February.

“It is an opportune time for IFAD and representatives of FOs to discuss how support could be provided direct to farmers through organised agriculture,” said Eliasi.

“This might result into direct impact of IFAD’s support. The expectation is that direct technical and financial collaboration between farmers’ organisations and IFAD will be strengthened.”