The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) concluded its supervision mission of the Support to Farmers’ Organisations in Africa Programme (SFOAP) main phase to the southern African region on 24th August 2016. The main phase of SFOAP is implemented by the five Regional Farmers’ Organisations (RFOs) in Africa namely; Eastern African Farmers’ Federation (EAFF); the Plateforme Sous-Regionale des Organisations Paysannes d’Afrique Centrale (PROPAC), Reseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs agricoles de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (ROPPA), and the Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) and Union Maghrébine des Agriculteurs (UMNAGRI), as well as the Pan African Farmers’ Organisation (PAFO). The overall goal of the program is to improve the livelihoods and food security situation of African smallholder farmers and rural producers. The purpose of the programme is to enable farmers’ organisations (FOs) evolve into stable, well-performing and accountable organisations that are able to effectively represent their members and advise farmers in their farming enterprises.

At regional level, the mission met with the SACAU President and the Secretariat. The mission also visited Namibia where consultations were held with the Namibia National Farmers’ Union (NNFU) Secretariat, the Ministries of Agriculture Water and Forestry, and of Land Reform, the Namibia Agronomic Board (NAB), the Agro-Marketing and Trade Agency (AMTA), Agribank, and the European Union delegation, amongst others.

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Namibian farmers intensify engagement with stakeholders

A recent visit by Mr Benito Eliasi, SACAU’s Capacity Development Advisor, to Namibia has revealed that mutual collaboration and coordination among stakeholders in the agricultural sector brings more benefits to farmers than a more confrontational approach. The Namibian National Farmers’ Union (NNFU) has gone through transformation over the past two years.

The union has taken a collaborative approach with government and other stakeholders whereby they invite these players collectively or individually to a round tables and discuss issues affecting farmers and providing a chance for the stakeholders to present their views to farmers and provide information to them.

Mr Eliasi attended one of these forums and was impressed with the level of debate and openness exhibited by all the stakeholders. A number of issues from the implementation of the land resettlement policy, the impact of drought to communal farmers; high input costs, inadequate livestock markets, lack of infrastructure and financing of communal livestock farmers were discussed.

Parties at this particular forum were in agreement that communal farmers are not getting adequate feedback from government on the implementation of government programs. On the other hand, the government officials and individuals from private sector institutions were able to inform farmers on the various programs, initiatives and interventions they are implementing in the communal areas. Most leaders were not aware of these programs. Government also bemoaned the lack of support from the leadership of NNFU in the implementation of government programs. The government indicated that the extension worker to farmers ratio is very high, making it difficult for all farmers to be reached with extension support. Thus working together with NNFU could partially address this challenge.

In addition, government and other private sector players including the Agribank of Namibia committed to work with farmers in improving the marketing of their livestock through establishment of community cooperatives. These cooperatives will assist farmers in ensuring that the superiority of Namibian meat in the international market is maintained and that standards and food safety measures are adhered to by all farmers.

The NNFU CEO, Mr Musho Mwilima, informed Mr Eliasi that the attitude of other stakeholders towards NNFU has tremendously changed because of their approach and he advised other farmers’ organisations to collaborate with stakeholders including their respective governments. However, his advice was that farmers need to be aware of what they want and that they should have undiscutable evidence and facts backing their views and positions. This will make other stakeholders listen and respect their views.
Forests vital for improving agricultural productivity and food security

Global increase for food demand will require highly productive landscapes that are managed sustainably, says the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). FAO states that it is possible to achieve agricultural productivity and food security while halting deforestation.

According to FAO, agriculture remains the most significant driver of global deforestation, and there is an urgent need to promote more positive interactions between agriculture and forestry. Forests play a major role in agriculture through various aspects such as water cycle, soil conversion, carbon sequestration and habitat protection.

FAO’s report titled State of the World’s Forests 2016, shows that some countries have been able to increase agricultural productivity and food security of their populations while also halting and even reversing deforestation. The report also states that in the tropics and subtropics large-scale commercial agriculture and local subsistence agriculture are responsible for about 40 percent and 33 percent of forest, and 27 percent of deforestation happens due to urban growth, infrastructure expansion and mining.

Decisive action needs to be taken in order to improve agriculture and food security in the face of the deforestation challenge. Although, improvements in technology can increase productivity, there needs to be a strategic approach to agriculture, forestry and other natural-resource policies.

There is also a need for policies on land use management between forests and agriculture in light of recent international agreements, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, says FAO.

— Source FAO
Celebrating women in Agriculture

Women farmers across the southern African region are preparing for the annual gathering of women in agriculture organised by SACAU. The annual gathering in South Africa from the 27th to 29th September will bring together women farmers from the region. The gathering is aimed at strengthening the entrepreneurial capacity of women in the agriculture sector.

SACAU CEO Mr Ishmael Sunga has urged women to escalate their aspirations in agriculture. “We need to have ambitious dreams. Then we need to translate these dreams into reality. The sad truth is that many dreams are never realised due to poor execution of plans. As such, SACAU is focused on helping all farmers get the skills, knowledge and access to resources to turn their ambitions into reality,” said Sunga.

“Agro-entrepreneurship is the engine that will drive agricultural growth. It is the engine that will drive the economic growth of our countries. For agro-entrepreneurship to thrive, equitable access to production resources is needed by all - including women. We must ensure access to rewarding markets to all farmers, since markets are the pulling force for production,” said Sunga.

He noted that a conducive policy environment that will lead to the transformation of the agriculture sector was essential. In this regard, it was important to monitor government implementation of commitments to global instruments including the Malabo Declaration on African Agriculture.

The Malabo commitments have specified that Africa has to address the challenges faced by women that include limited access and control of ownership of land; limited access to agricultural labour; limited access to technologies and agricultural extension services; limited access to financial services; low productivity; and lack of adequate disaggregated data and indicators.

There are already several treaties for gender empowerment including COMESA’s initiatives on Gender and Women Empowerment and CAADP’s National Agriculture Investment Plans (NAIPs) which all have a gender component.

NORAD Planning Meeting (left to right): Ms Tlale Matseke, Mr Prince Kuipa (ZFU), Mr Norberto Simbe (UCAMA) and Benito Eliasi.

Farmers’ organisations work to drive uptake of conservation agriculture

União Provincial de Camponeses de Manica (UCAMA) and Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU) have been supporting farmers to scale up Conservation Agriculture (CA) in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, respectively. As the key implementing partners of a project titled “Facilitating Farmer-led Scaling-up of Conservation Agriculture in Southern Africa” which is funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) through SACAU, small scale farmers across both countries have been exposed to various technical, socio-economic and environmental benefits of CA since the beginning of 2013 at the start of the project.

The approach followed by the project has been through a "Lead Farmer" approach, with the aim being to directly train and mentor lead farmers who will become "trainers" and advocates of CA in their neighborhoods. The project is scheduled to end in May 2017 and its past years have focused on improving the competencies of lead farmers, extension officers, teachers and school-based Young Farmer Clubs (YFCs). All lead farmers, teachers and extension officers were taken through intensive training, including a review of the previous season as part of building onto its successes and learning from past mistakes. Promotional and cross-learning activities through field days, learning visits and field evaluations by farmers and trainers were also undertaken throughout the project.

This has led to the project achieving a number of achievements, which have been celebrated, including increasing yields for CA farmers. This has been particularly notable in Mozambique, where the national average for maize production is 0.7 tons per hectare under conventional tillage, with the project achieving anything from 2 to 3 tons per hectare. This has been seen on the demonstration plots which have been established by the lead farmers, as well the farmers who they have come to mentor.

To ensure sustainability and sufficient on-going support for the farmers participating in the project, it has become increasingly important to focus on consolidating the achievements which have been attained on an annual basis. The SACAU Secretariat together with coordinators from the two project countries had a planning session which amongst others looked at activities undertaken in the previous year and on how to consolidate the gains of the past years in the remaining period of the project.

One of the key activities as concluded in the planning meeting will include ongoing efforts to identify new stakeholders who can be partnered with in an attempt to reach more farmers to ensure that they are exposed to CA. Some of the partnerships the project has made since inception include input suppliers, research institutions, training and extension services as well as government. These relationships have been crucial in affording the project the awareness it has realised and given the project’s ambition to continue reaching and training more farmers. The meeting also allowed the team to iron out any challenges which they’ve experienced in the past year to ensure that the project would move ahead smoothly.

Participants at the women’s workshop in 2015.

AUGUST 2016
Farmers Union of Malawi advocates for improvements in market access for farmers

Opening Farmers Union of Malawi (FUM) held its 12th Annual Congress and Policy Conference, Malawi’s Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, Hon. Dr. George Chaponda, MP; stressed the importance of understanding the country’s comparative advantage within the tripartite free trade area. The Minister went on to state that political will, patriotism, integrity and hard work were critical ingredients for ending hunger soon. The conference which was themed “Farming for markets and developments: partnerships for increasing farmer productivity, market access and incomes” was held in Lilongwe, Malawi on 09th and 10th August 2016. SACAU’s CEO, Mr Ishmael Sunga, also attended the conference.

The conference explored various subjects such as building resilient farming systems for commercial agriculture; enhancing productivity, production and agro-processing through mechanisation; enhancing agricultural marketing, and linkages between financial institutions and farmers as well as the impact of standards on trade. In his opening remarks, FUM’s CEO, Mr Prince Kapondamgaga, stressed the need for the country to build its export capacity, and called for a shared vision and commitment between farmers and the private sector to drive agriculture into the future. The FUM President, Mr Alfred Kapichira Banda, appreciated the excellent working relationship between the Union and the government.

Delegates shared views on what needs to happen to transform agriculture. Good leadership at all levels was said to be critical for faster transformation of the sector, and it was motivated that farmers should have title to the land on which they farm. Calls were also made for government to not intervene in the market, for farmers to act with integrity and honesty and not seek to cheat the market, and for transparency amongst all players in the market. The use of cashflow-based lending instead of collateral-based lending was applauded as a good idea. This would help with access to finance which still remains one of the greatest impediments to agricultural transformation. Finally, delegates were cautioned not to make mechanisation synonymous with tractors – “mechanisation is appropriate technology.”

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Good leadership at all levels was said to be critical for faster transformation of the sector