El Niño continues to bite in the SADC region

The Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) has warned that the ongoing drought in the region is continuing to exact a heavy socio-economic toll on farmers despite recent rains.

Large income losses, defaulting on loans, crop losses, failure to plant due to poor rains, not enough drinking water, livestock deaths due to poor grazing and compromised crop quality are some of the noted effects farmers have had to deal with due to the El Niño induced drought.

Media reports show that seven SADC countries are at greater risk of food insecurity. Countries hit the hardest in the SADC region are Malawi, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Mozambique, Angola, Lesotho and Swaziland.

“The drought has led to an erosion of farmers’ production base, a loss of hope, dignity and confidence about the future.”

The ongoing drought in the region is continuing to exact a heavy socio-economic toll on farmers of inadequate investment in necessary infrastructure in the past. We risk being trapped in continuously dealing with these challenges. We must consolidate our effort to ensure a more forward-looking view,” said Mr Sunga.
SACAU YEAR IN REVIEW 2016
CEO’s Letter

by Ishmael Sunga

SACAU members have been hard hit by the ongoing drought. Early in 2016, members from 12 SADC countries responded to an urgent survey to assess the impact of the drought in the region. The survey results - which showed a potential devastating impact - led us to call for a co-ordinated regional response. This is important in tackling challenges to galvanise long term solutions, investments and strategies for disaster preparedness in the future.

SACAU continues to grow. In April we officially opened our offices in Pretoria, South Africa, with our three past presidents, Mr Ajay Vashee, Mr Douglas Taylor-Freeme and the Honourable, Felix Jumbe in attendance. Their ongoing commitment reflects the value placed on the organisation on the continent. The past presidents also shared some of their memories during their tenure at SACAU.

We continue to reach out to women and young farmers. Our 2016 Annual Conference - themed “Youth, Technology and Agricultural Transformation” - brought together farmers from across the SADC region. It coincided with SACAU’s Young Farmers’ Forum consultation meeting which brings together young farmers from each of SACAU’s members to provide them with an opportunity to network and share knowledge and experiences in their agricultural enterprises. Later in the year, some young farmers from the Young Farmers’ Forum participated in the Pan African Agribusiness Incubators Conference and Expo in Accra, Ghana, under the theme “Turning science into business - inclusive agribusiness incubation for vibrant economies in Africa.”

We continue to support members through various means to ensure that they are better equipped to meet the needs of their members. SACAU’s core membership consists of national general interest apex farmers’ organisations. Our members come from 12 countries in southern Africa. They are Botswana Agricultural Union (BAU); Lesotho National Farmers’ Union (LENAFU); Coalition Paysanne de Madagascar (CPM); Confédération des Agriculteurs Malagasy (FEKRITAMA) (Madagascar); Farmers Union of Malawi (FUM); National Smallholder Farmers’ Association of Malawi (NFAMSA); Uniao Nacional de Camponeses (UNAC) (Mozambique); Namibia Agricultural Union (NAU); Namibia National Farmers’ Union (NNFU); Seychelles Farmers’ Association (SEYFA); Agri South Africa (AgriSA); African Farmers’ Association of South Africa (AFASA); Swaziland National Agricultural Union (SNAU); Agricultural Council of Tanzania (ACT); Zambia National Farmers’ Union (ZNUF); Commercial Farmers’ Union (CFU) (Zimbabwe); and, Zimbabwe Farmers’ Union (ZFU).

Each of these voluntary organisations work hard to ensure that their members - farmers - are well represented at relevant fora and that they receive the necessary services so that they are able to contribute to feeding this great continent.

We look forward to working with them and the regional agricultural community as well as all our partners to ensure that Africa’s farmers can meet the challenges of the future.

The Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions
(SACAU) envisages a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable farming sector that ensures food security and contributes to economic growth in southern Africa.

To achieve this requires effective advocacy at a regional, continental and global stage as well as promoting and ensuring strong and effective farmers/producers’ organisations in all countries in southern Africa.

Our year has been packed with opportunities to ensure that we speak out for our members. From the World Economic Forum’s 46th Annual Meeting in Davos-Klosters in January - where I called for greater global attention for the world’s farmers - to COP21 in Morocco where Africa lobbied for effective climate change financing, 2016 has been a critical year for the world’s farmers.

Food security needs a modern farmer who can master new technologies as well as harness the potential of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). We have met with a range of agricultural leaders in our quest to support farmers in our region. Our partners include the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), AgriCord, Agriterra, the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), and We Effect to name a few. We also collaborated with the Access to Seeds Foundation (ATSF) in the development of a methodology for a regional Seed Index.
El Niño continues to bite in the SADC region

According to a recent report published by Oxfam International, 41 million people are estimated to require food aid before the next harvest in March-April 2017. The report, The Longest Lean Season, reveals that 28 million people require urgent aid now.

Mr Sunga noted that some of the effects would form part of programmatic interventions in the new year while other interventions would be more long-term.

“Dealing with the severe results of climate change requires a holistic approach; more youth coming into the industry and further technological developments alongside established agricultural methods will help drive a climate change resilient globe,” added Sunga.

SACAU acknowledges the desperate need for long term and short term solutions. Despite the ending of the weather phenomenon’s cycle, its effects continue to be severely felt.

“While food aid is welcomed, there are potential negative impacts not only on local prices for food but also on local production and investment. “We cannot continue with a business as usual attitude. History may repeat itself and millions could starve and our efforts towards food security irreparably harmed,” said Mr Sunga.

To avoid this, Mr Sunga suggested that agricultural stakeholders take a regional comprehensive approach that is multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder in nature.

“We need to establish a coordination centre - an Agricultural Development Fund with risk management capacity - that will support a strategic and long-term approach that encourages investment in production and trade-related infrastructure,” he said.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT: PROGRAMME OFFICER – POLICY

The Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) is a regional membership-based organisation representing the common interests of farmers in southern Africa. Its Secretariat is based in Centurion, Pretoria, South Africa. The organisation is seeking to recruit a Programme Officer: Policy from the SADC region.

Key performance areas:

Reporting to the CEO, he/she will be responsible for developing and implementing the policy programme of the organisation and its related parties focusing on regional and global levels as well as supporting members on policy activities. Key duties include: conceptualising, planning and hosting policy-related events; development of position papers, conference papers, policy briefs etc.; facilitating the development and communication of the organisation’s policy positions; advocacy; analysing existing and proposed policies and programmes, as well as other relevant developments; keeping members abreast of key developments; monitoring and evaluating the impact of the organisation’s policy activities on various stakeholders and on agriculture in general; providing direct inputs, and coordinating members’ inputs into regional and global policy processes; representing the organisation at policy and other relevant fora; providing input into SACAU’s other programmes; discerning policy messages from SACAU’s work; assisting members to develop and implement their policy-related work; developing partnerships with relevant policy-related institutions; resource mobilisation; preparing internal and external reports, and project management.

Requirements: At least a post graduate qualification in agricultural economics, economics or related fields; at least 10 years’ relevant practical experience in the development and private sectors, particularly in economic or policy analysis/research, policy advocacy, advisory services and M&E; familiarity with regional and global agricultural policy developments; exceptional communication and presentational skills (oral and written) in English; report writing; proposal development; good interpersonal skills; experience in working in multi-cultural and multi-sectoral environments; willingness to travel extensively in the region and globally, and ability to work with limited supervision. Knowledge of French and Portuguese will be an added advantage.

This is a senior position initially offered on a 2-year contract and a competitive remuneration package which is dependent on qualifications and experience. The application should provide 3 contactable references. All applications should be by e-mail to recruitment@sacau.org, copied to info@sacau.org (Attention CEO) by 31st January, 2017. Candidate expected to start as soon as possible. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted. Women candidates are encouraged to apply.

SACAU ANNUAL CONFERENCE

WHEN: 22nd - 26th May 2017
WHERE: South Africa
2016 has been an extremely busy year for SACAU. Below is a summary of some of the things the organisation got up to:

**JANUARY**

We kicked off 2016 at the World Economic Forum’s 46th Annual Meeting in Davos-Klosters, where SACAU CEO Ishmael Sunga had the opportunity of addressing delegates in attendance and pushed for greater global attention for the world’s farmers – smallholder farmers in particular.

Mr Sunga highlighted the importance of farmers mastering new technologies the world has to offer and added that it’s also the duty of farmers’ organisations to develop digital technological capabilities in order for them to continue to remain relevant to farmers.

Mr Sunga concluded his address by encouraging smallholder farmers to harness the potential of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs).

**FEBRUARY**

Foreign Affairs, a magazine published by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) released a special edition anthology in February and published SACAU CEO, Ishmael Sunga’s article titled ‘Organising for the Future: Overcoming Fragmentation with Digital Technology’ in their first addition. The article discussed the scope and potential of digital technology for farmers and farmers’ organisations.

Mr Sunga’s article was published alongside the articles of world renowned leaders such as Bill Gates (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), Dr Akinwumi Adesina (President, African Development Bank) and Kofi Annan (former Secretary General of the United Nations).

**MARCH**

The SACAU CEO headed to Oslo in Norway where he joined other global leaders for the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) ‘Food Security week’ from 7th-10th March.

The objective of the gathering was to firmly put food security back on the Norwegian international cooperation agenda. Mr Sunga spoke on ‘Transforming Agriculture for a Food Secure Future’ and ‘Rural Development - A Farmer Driven Development Agenda?’

While in NORAD, Mr Sunga met 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. THE CEO of SACAU also met the Norwegian Farmers Union later in the week.

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

Dr Manyewu Mutamba, former Analyst for Economics and Policy at SACAU, advised that the survey covered 12 countries in which SACAU has members as well as commodity platform members. The results of the survey were critical in calling for a co-ordinated regional response which is important in tackling challenges to galvanise long term solutions, investments and strategies for disaster preparedness in the future.
APRIL

April was an exciting month for SACAU. The organisation officially opened its new office in Centurion, Pretoria.

SACAU’s new office building was opened by the current president, Dr Theo de Jager, in the presence of the organisation’s past three presidents, Mr Ajay Vashee, Mr Douglas Taylor-Freeme and the Honourable, Felix Jumbe and members.

This took place during a member consultative meeting in which the challenges faced by organisations were discussed. Issues to transform agriculture were also explored.

MAY-JUNE

Dr Theo de Jager was re-elected as Chairman of the Board of Directors of SACAU at its AGM which was held on 26th May 2016 in Ezulwini, Swaziland. Dr de Jager was first elected in this position in 2013 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The AGM was preceded by the annual conference and the Young Farmers’ Forum.

SACAU’s 2016 Annual Conference was themed ‘Youth, Technology and Agricultural Transformation.’

The conference is regarded as one of the biggest conferences hosted by SACAU and everyone was encouraged to seize the moment and take advantage of the vibrancy and energies of the youth to make the sector grow.

The youth’s participation is vital to the transformation and progression of agriculture.

Our Young Farmers’ Forum consultation meeting was held in Swaziland. The forum was established in 2014 and brings together young female and male farmers from each of SACAU’s members, providing them with an opportunity to network and share knowledge and experiences in their agricultural enterprises.

JULY

SACAU, in collaboration with We Effect, organised a three-day negotiations skills training for its members along with We Effect’s partners from 13th -15th July 2016 in Pretoria, South Africa.

The primary aim of the training was to equip participants with the core negotiation skills and tools that will empower them to make a meaningful difference in the outcome of their negotiation endeavours upon their return to their areas of responsibility.

Participants gained valuable negotiating skills including identifying both their and the other party’s interests as well as when to walk away from a negotiation.

AUGUST

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) concluded its supervision mission of the Support to Farmers’ Organisations in Africa Programme’s (SFOAP) main phase to the Southern African region on 24th August.

Its main phase of Support to Farmers’ Organisations in Africa Programme (SFOAP) is implemented by the five Regional Farmers’ Organisations (RFOs) in Africa, including SACAU.

The goal of the program is to improve the livelihoods and food security situation of African smallholder farmers and rural producers and its purpose is to enable Farmers’ Organisations (FOs) evolve into stable, well performing and accountable organisations that can effectively represent their members and advise farmers in their farming enterprises.

The mission expressed satisfaction with the progress and impact the programme has had in the region.
SEPTEMBER

SACAU kicked off the process of establishing an agri-agency unit in September 2016. From 19th to 23rd September, a team from Agriterra comprising of Dr Kees Blokland, Mr Jan Breambroek and Mr Benito Eliasi of SACAU secretariat held consultations with the Zimbabwe Farmers’ Union (ZFU) and Commercial Farmers’ Union (CFU) of Zimbabwe.

The two organisations pledged their support to SACAU as it is going through this process. They were also in support of skills exchange programmes among SACAU members and indicated that to a lesser extent, the concept is being applied in Zimbabwe.

The annual Southern African Cotton Producers Association (SACPA) meeting took place from 12th-14th September in Maputo. The meeting was co-hosted by Forum Nacional dos Productores de Algodao (FONPA) as well as SACAU development partner, We Effect.

The meeting explored methods applied to the formulation of pricing in addition to receiving country updates from members and learning about the development of the cotton sector in Mozambique.

OCTOBER

Three young agri-preneurs from SACAU participated in the Pan African Agribusiness Incubators Conference and Expo that was held in the capital city of Ghana, Accra, from 4th to 6th October. The conference, themed “turning science into business - inclusive agribusiness incubation for vibrant economies in Africa” exposed young farmers to different technologies and innovations that are likely going to change the landscape of agriculture in Africa.

The three young agri-entrepreneurs from SACAU who participated are Ms. Manes Nkhata from Malawi, Mr. Sibusiso Gule from Swaziland and Ms Magdalene Shirima from Tanzania. They were accompanied by Mr. Benito Eliasi from the SACAU secretariat.

Well done. We are proud of you.

NOVEMBER

SACAU and Access to Seeds Foundation (ATSF) hosted an Access to Seeds Index workshop on 28th-29th November in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The two-day workshop was attended by some of the member organisations from the SADC region.

During the workshop, lack of access to information, high costs of seeds and lack of seed laws were identified as some of the issues affecting the access of good quality seeds by smallholder farmers.

SACAU CEO Ishmael Sunga advised that “Access to this seed at the right time, at the right cost, at the right place and with the right quality is one of the key drivers of productivity.”

SACAU joined partners to discuss African agriculture at the COP22 meeting in Morocco from 7th-18th November. Mr Sunga was part of a panel discussion addressing the “Implementation of regional climate smart agriculture approaches: the case of East & Southern Africa” at a side event on 16th November.

The session looked at barriers preventing smallholder farmers from improving their livelihood in the face of negative climate change impact.

DECEMBER

The month started off with an organisational assessment workshop facilitated by one of our longest-standing partners, We Effect. These are carried out every two years, with this being the fourth, and involving both the Board and Secretariat staff. This exercise provided an understanding of the Board and staff’s perception of the performance of the organisation, and identified actions that could be taken to address weaknesses. These action points will be followed up in the new year to ensure that we continue to improve carrying out our mandate. A Board meeting followed this event to close off the year.

SACAU also participated at a workshop that discussed research and innovation for an interdisciplinary Big Data App for healthy wheat and maize crops that will boost the productivity and income of farmers in selected regions in Asia and Africa. This event which was organised by CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) and the Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences of the University of Copenhagen took place in Copenhagen, Denmark on 7th December 2016. SACAU’s initiative on data was shared with delegates.

Finally, as part of the process of the establishment of an agri-agency unit, the organisation attended Agriterra’s 2016 Crash Course and Agriterra/Acodea Year Summit from 5th to 16th December 2016 in the Netherlands. Participation in these events helped increased SACAU’s appreciation of Agriterra, more specifically their history and approaches in agricultural development. Other highlights of this were how Dutch agriculture evolved over the years and the role of the cooperatives in this process, a feature which still prominently features in the country’s agriculture.
SACAU shares plans for 2017 at the 2016 We Effect Annual Coordination Meeting

We Effect, SACAU’s longest serving development partner; annually convenes coordination meetings for their partners in southern Africa. This year, the coordination meeting took place in Lusaka, Zambia from the 22nd – 24th November. SACAU and some of its members from Malawi and Zimbabwe were also part of this convening, which among other things allowed partners to share on results achieved during the year, lessons learnt and challenges faced in the implementation of their programmes. Best practices on how to achieve equal gender representation within decision-making structures of partner organisations were shared, while also exploring how the youth could be supported to take up farming as a career of choice and actively participate in business.

Lastly, the meeting aimed to plan the We Effect technical support for the year 2017 in the areas of result monitoring, study circles and gender mainstreaming. The 2017 plan for the regional collaboration between SACAU and We Effect on cotton and dairy which has been going on for the past few years was shared with partner organisations. This will be communicated with the respective organisations in due course to ensure that like 2016, the 2017 support year is a prosperous one for all involved.

Given the devastating effects which the El Nino-induced drought has had on the region, more so in Malawi and Zimbabwe; the meeting also identified strategies to build resilience to climate variability and discuss the formulation of joint country programmes. Partners were also exposed to the Rights Based Approach (RBA) and the application of rights-based principles among partner organisations. This method will be embedded in all of We Effect’s programmes going forward.

We Effect was previously known as the Swedish Cooperative Centre, and works in 25 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

Time for a farmers’ convention on climate change

Dr Theo de Jager

Farmers are, in every sense, the main characters in the story of climate change. No one is more vulnerable than farmers to the effects of climate change. And no sector can do as much as agriculture, in as short a time, to address the causes, to mitigate the effects and to adapt to the change.

During the first week of negotiations at COP22 in Marrakech, there was raised excitement and new hope that agriculture would be allowed to take up its rightful place in the global climate debate. These hopes were crushed before the start of the second week.

The time has now come for farmers to plan a reduction of emissions in agriculture, to make the adaptations relevant to a changing climate, and to present their proposals to the UNFCCC, and to COP 23 in Bonn in 2017.

Farmers as change architects

For far too long farmers have pleaded for the inclusion of agriculture in a global agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol, and to allow for a SBSTA on agriculture.

For far too long the farmers’ constituency has relied on parties and governments to come up with, and agree on, a climate change plan that fits agriculture.

After 22 years, nothing has happened. So, it’s time to put our heads, our experience and our expertise together, and design an agricultural plan by farmers for farmers, that allows us to take control of our own destiny.

This plan could be a real game-changer if it were mandated by the world’s largest representative farmers’ organisations like the WFO, the Pan African Farmers’ Organisation (PAFO), the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the Asian Farmers Association (AFA).

It is the only logical vehicle for a broad-based solution, unless there is someone out there with the capacity to travel the world from farmgate to farmgate.

Let global organised agriculture secure the sustainability and profitability of the sector, and establish a reliable food supply in the face of rapidly changing climatic conditions, through a farmer-to-farmer planning session.

Here, we could tackle the most urgent questions about sectoral emissions, and engage on issues like strengthening the resilience and adaptability of farmers, from the giant industrial producers to the smallholder farmers in the world’s forgotten rural corners.

Farmers, more than anyone else, bear the brunt of climate change and very few farmers will question its existence, impact or urgency. Some may question agriculture’s role in mitigation and adaptation, but never before have primary producers worldwide convened for an open debate on climate change.

But this is not enough. We need action.

Agriculture is, after the energy sector, the second biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions and responsible for 24% of all emissions. Farmers cannot shy away from their responsibility and accountability with regards to emissions. And they don’t need to. Climate-smart agriculture does not have to be a burden to the sector; on the contrary, it can increase the profitability and sustainability of farming operations across the board from grass roots level to large swathes of corporate precision-farmed land.

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High tech innovations, no-till cropping, nature friendly and awareness-driven agricultural practices all have the potential to produce more, on less, with less. **Wiser ways**

For farmers in Africa and Asia, climate-smart farming brings with it a whole new paradigm.

For the poorest in our sector, those farming on less than a hectare, planting unimproved seed, using a hand hoe to cultivate, and driving annual expansion through deforestation, ‘climate-smart’ can mean mechanisation, modernisation and commercialisation.

Poverty is a major driver of climate change. If climate-smart agriculture does not offer a real and concrete prospect of slaying the dragon of poverty and hunger, it has no chance of winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the vast majority of the world’s farmers, for whom household food security is a daily issue.

There is no silver bullet for emissions in agriculture, and no one-size-fits-all solution that is sustainable. However, different targets for different places on the earth, pursued differently, could help reduce emissions, and encourage commitment to nature-friendly practices.

For the highly industrialised North it would mostly revolve around high tech innovation.

In the smallholder environment, the first fruits to be plucked could be a step as simple as stopping the fires that burn down more than half of the area of Central-, West- and East Africa every dry season. These fires put the worst kind of black carbon into the atmosphere and strip the soil of vital nutrients.

Since they make a living from the land, farmers are the primary custodians of nature’s resources in the modern world. But farmers do not make their living from nature. On the contrary; they manipulate nature to earn a living from her. Nature has no surpluses, but surplus production is the very essence of commercial farming. Efficient farmers must eliminate competition, predators and diversity, and constrain the very elements through which nature restores balance to the system.

This is the complex, imperative tension between farming and nature. Because of this, farmers owe nature their best, and their most diligent efforts to ensure the continued health of the natural system. More than anyone, farmers realise and appreciate this.

**Experts inform, farmers implement**

It makes absolute sense then, that there is no multi-national institution, government, NGO or random interest group, that could dish up a plan on how to deal with climate change, and serve it to the global agricultural sector. Were any such groups to try this, it would probably not raise broad-based buy-in or committed execution by the farming fraternity.

No circle of experts, or exclusive group of influential farmers, can design a road map for climate-wise agriculture either; the sector’s diversity would never allow for that. We need an intense workshop; informed by experts, populated by farmer leaders, to map out a strategy. A process of internalisation, in which farmers have the opportunity to contribute, question principles and endorse or reject the strategy, should follow.

Without going through this process, farmers will never take ownership or give that firm mandate, reach consensus and commit to change.

We need it, though it may be cumbersome and consume time and resources, because the alternative is too ghastly to contemplate.

There is no reassuring signal that the petty politics, which have kept agriculture out of its rightful place in the climate debates, and at COP agreements for the last 22 years, will disappear in the next 22 years.

In the long term, global food security is threatened. In the much shorter term, farmers’ livelihoods are. There is too much at stake to risk taking shortcuts or going for discounts.

**And we can do it.**

I am calling for a comprehensive workshop of farmers’ leaders, world-wide, to develop a plan for agriculture; a plan as practical and sensible as only farmers can make it.

And I am calling for the global sector to change tack in its approach to the UNFCCC and COP.

A united sector, ready to engage COP with a tailor-made plan, mandated by the most representative farmer’s organisations on earth, would be difficult to refuse.

Of course, we can always wait and see what outcomes the current process generates. But, it has been said, that bad things happen because good people do nothing.

This article first appeared in the WFO newsletter for COP22.