SACAU Young Agripreneurs’ Ambassadors visit AGCO Future Farm in Zambia

A delegation of 22 SACAU's Young Agripreneurs' Ambassadors from 11 countries visited AGCO Future Farm in Lusaka, Zambia from 10th to 12th July where they were taken through a programme looking at farm mechanisation and the business of agriculture. The AGCO Future Farm was established to demonstrate to farmers and other stakeholders the value of mechanisation, technology systems and best agronomic practices through real-life experience. The training and tour was organised as part of SACAU’s transformative agenda to agricultural development, and the establishment of a new generation of farmers who will be able to profitably and sustainably produce food and fibre with increased utilisation of advanced technology. This follows the realisation that current and future challenges in the agriculture sector require a new calibre of farmers, farming technologies and skills.

The training covered a range of topics including agronomic practices of maize for maximising yields, AGCO equipment distribution and cutting edge technology and machinery. Delegates appreciated the role that technology is playing in modern farming and its implications for the type of skills a farmer needs to possess. They were also given a brief of AGCO and its core brands. In addition, the agripreneurs toured the facility and drove some of the Massey Ferguson equipment.

In AGCO’s news release on the visit which was published in July, AGCO Vice President Nuradin Osman expressed their delight for hosting the SACAU delegation. “This is exactly the kind of educational role the farm was set up for.

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Ever wondered what would happen if the speed of innovation outpaces that of learning and regulation? Scary, isn’t it?

I recently participated in a workshop on inclusive bio-innovation in food and agriculture at the World Economic Forum Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Among others, the workshop explored the impact of technology democratisation as well as the decreasing costs of biotechnology development and adoption. Quite obviously therefore, democratisation of technology enhances inclusiveness, and is likely to have the same disruptive effects as digitisation.

Placing biotechnology innovations in the hands of many presents opportunities for both producers and consumers. For instance, on the producer side, such innovations can help mitigate the effects of climate change or respond to specific needs around local soil conditions or plant diseases, whilst on the consumer side it offers greater prospects for meeting a growing demand for more customised solutions that meet consumers’ nutritional needs.

However, the stakes are definitely much higher, particularly when it comes to democratisation of biotechnological innovations in food systems. Key concerns include the speed of policy/regulation which is not keeping up with rapid increase in technology or innovation; the speed of change that was not keeping up with the speed of knowledge acquisition and understanding; and issues relating to bio-safety measures and self-regulation.

Modelling future scenarios for the role of biotechnology in food and agriculture; building trust among the various stakeholder groups; concept development on the needs of future governance and business models; stepping up risk analysis, as well as multi-stakeholder collaboration were among the conclusions of workshop.

Change has become a permanent condition in many aspects of life and business, and farming and agriculture have not been spared. This change is happening with increasing speed, intensity and complexity. Thus, technology and innovation have become so critical in change management.

Now, back to July – the year is moving by very fast and we have already passed the halfway mark. The Secretariat has been busy taking stock of its work. In this regard, we conducted external evaluations of some of our initiatives and reviewed the performance of the organisation for the first half of the year. In addition, we kept ourselves busy with resource mobilisation and programme development, and working with the group of our young farmer ambassadors. Finally, we have a few critical events lined up for August, including a Board meeting and reviewing the business plan of our agri-agency, and very soon the agriculture season beckons.

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Now more than ever, it is vital to encourage the new generation of farmers in Africa who are crucial to the future and advancement of agriculture, “he said.

The Vice President also stated that mechanisation and technology affect farmers no matter where they are in terms of development. It applies to those who are just starting to mechanise for the first time, to professional agribusiness seeking to raise their game and to entrepreneurs wanting to develop farmer services like mechanised contracting.

Most participants indicated that the training widened their knowledge on available technologies and innovations in the agricultural sector. One of the agripreneurs’ ambassadors from Namibia, Mr Christoph Knye, expressed his appreciation of the training and the opportunity availed to young agripreneurs in the region to experience how technology is changing the agricultural landscape in Africa. “In my humble opinion, most of Namibian young commercial farmers are very much set in our ways and stuck in our comfort zone regarding our farming operations. We lack the entrepreneurial skills and creative talent with which most of the SACAU youth have started their agribusinesses and this training and tour was an eye opener to me”, said Knye.

SACAU is grateful to AGCO for hosting the young agripreneurs’ ambassadors at their premises, and very soon the agriculture season beckons.

The Pan African Farmers’ Organizations (PAFO) recently met in Dakar, Senegal to discuss its participation in the designing and implementation of national Global Environmental Facility (GEF) funded projects. The meeting came at a time when GEF is in the process of formulating its 7th program (GEF7). GEF was established in 1990 to assist developing countries in the implementation of environmentally related conventions and GEF7 will provide funding through four modalities namely; full-sized projects, medium-sized projects, enabling activities and programmatic approaches. The meeting was attended by representatives of the four regional networks of farmers namely; ROPPA, PROPAC, SACAU and UMNAGRI as well as representatives from NEPAD Planning Agency, United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the West African Development Bank.

During the meeting, it was noted that most Farmers’ Organizations (FOs) at regional and national levels were not aware of the funding modalities of GEF, and thus could not validate whether FOs’ at all levels participate in GEF-funded programmes. The complexity of GEF funding mechanisms were identified as a major deterrent for FOs to access funding in any of the four funding modalities. However, FOs were informed of small grants of up to US$2,000,000 which could be accessible from the Fund. To access these funds, FOs needed to register on the GEF website.

Delegates noted that the Project Designing Framework that guides the formulation of national program does not specify the role of FOs in the entire process of GEF as is the case with other similar programs such as CAADP that specifies the role of all stakeholders in the design and implementation of projects. Consequently, PAFO requested inclusion of specific sections on how FOs can be involved in the design and implementation of GEF-funded projects. Lastly, PAFO requested the integration of GEF’s Small Grants Program (SGP) into country programs to enable them to participate in the programs. Specific mention was on the projects that are dealing with food security, sustainable land management and restoration of ecosystems. A PAFO representative is expected to attend the commissioning of a 4-year GEF7 program in Addis Ababa in September 2017.”

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SACAU reviews progress

SACAU hosted We Effect to review progress of its operations for the first half of the year. We Effect is one of SACAU's key and longest partners who has been supporting the secretariat since its establishment. Both parties were satisfied with the progress made during this period.

In addition, the meeting discussed We Effect's programme which also includes support for SACAU, planned for upcoming activities for the remainder of 2017 including those related to the Women Farmers’ Forum, regional dairy meeting and Southern African Cotton Producers Association. The programme, which is still under development, has components around organisational development, sustainable rural livelihoods, climate change resilience and land rights.

SACAU Young Agripreneurs’ Ambassadors elect their leadership

The SACAU Young Agripreneurs’ Ambassadors elected Mr Innocent Jumbe, a young farmer from Malawi, as their first leader. His deputy is Ms Ruramiso Mashumba of Zimbabwe. The two were elected after a day long discussion on the role and responsibilities of the SACAU Young Agripreneurs’ Ambassadors at a meeting during the visit to AGCO Future Farm in Zambia. The discussion was held as a follow up to the resolution taken at the SACAU Annual General Meeting (AGM) held in Cape Town, South Africa on 26th May 2017 to establish the SACAU Young Agripreneurs’ Ambassadors. The ambassadorial team comprises two young (female and male) representatives from each of the SACAU members.

Each cohort of the ambassadors will serve for a period of three years. The group is diverse; representing young agripreneurs in crops, livestock, large commercial, smallholder commercial, agro-processing and seed multiplication just to mention a few.

Members of the ambassadorial team are affiliated to SACAU members in their respective countries. These ambassadors will support and promote the SACAU agenda of developing the new generation of farmers in the region, and will be the voice and face of SACAU on issues of young agripreneurs.

Other committee members are Ms Noi Selepe (Lesotho), Ms Celiwe Sukati (Swaziland), Mr Israel Hukura (Namibia) and Mr Henimpahasoavana Ndratopanantsa (Madagascar).

Sibusiso Goodwill Gule was introduced to farming when he was only 15 years old by his father who was employed as a Senior Extension Officer at Swaziland’s Ministry of Agriculture. His father gave him inputs and deducted money for inputs from the sales of the produce, an experience that made him realise that farming could be done profitably.

After completing his O’Levels in 2001, he unfortunately could not pursue his tertiary education due to some challenges he encountered at the time. He was at that point that he decided to go into farming, armed with the grooming from his father.

With some money he earned working in construction, he started growing vegetables on 0.3 hectares family land. The land was not developed and he put basic irrigation infrastructure on it. Since working capital was a constraint, he initially focused on spinach and lettuce, which he found easy to produce without applying pesticides. He then gradually expanded his operations from the original hectareage and now farms on 11 hectares.

Before securing a marketing contract with a big South African supermarket chain in 2007, he sold his produce to the community and food establishments in his nearest town. It was when he secured the contract that he also registered his company, Goodwill’s Farm Fresh. Now he owns two trucks that he uses to distribute his produce to the 16 stores of the supermarket chain throughout Swaziland that he directly supplies. He also works hand-in-hand with 23 smallholder farmers from whom he also sources produce for the market, and they together supply not less than 5 tons of vegetables weekly. Sibusiso provides technical assistance and inputs to these farmers, which amongst others ensures that they meet market requirements.

In addition to farming, he runs four fresh produce shops in Mbabane, Motshane, Piggs Peak and Msumpe. Sibusiso is passionate about farming, and agriculture in general, as he considers it a viable business. He asserts that people need food and other agricultural produce, which guarantees that the business of growing food will always exist. He also sees many opportunities in the sector including processing and he is of the view that young people should take advantage of them and consider farming as a profession of choice.

Young people particularly possess the necessary energy and innovative ideas which makes them ideal candidates to drive the sector into the future.
SACAU to lead discussion on how youth can accelerate agriculture transformation at AGRF

The 2017 African Green Revolution Forum (AGRF) will be held in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire from 4th to 8th September 2017. The Southern African Confederation (SACAU), as a partner of AGRF, will be leading the Youth Thematic Working Group discussions. The discussions will be on “Creating Opportunities for Youth to Leverage Family Owned Land/Business to Accelerate Agricultural Transformation on the Continent”. This subject is important for SACAU considering that the farming population is increasingly ageing, making agricultural transformation in Africa a challenge. For SACAU, modernisation and professionalisation of the sector are key elements for the transformation and these are difficult to achieve with the current crop of smallholder farmers that dominate the sector.

New competencies and skills including inheritance of land from parents is an essential factor for farmers to be on “Creating Opportunities for Youth to Leverage Family Owned Land/Business to Accelerate Agricultural Transformation on the Continent”. The discussions will be on “Creating Opportunities for Youth to Leverage Family Owned Land/Business to Accelerate Agricultural Transformation on the Continent”. This subject is important for SACAU considering that the farming population is increasingly ageing, making agricultural transformation in Africa a challenge. For SACAU, modernisation and professionalisation of the sector are key elements for the transformation and these are difficult to achieve with the current crop of smallholder farmers that dominate the sector.

One of the focus areas of the discussion will be on youth accessing land through a number of options that include allocation from the authorities through special government and redistribution programs, inheritance from parents which is the most common and feasible to the majority of the youth in Africa, and buying land from private land owners which is almost impossible for the youth. Despite the need to inject the much-needed energy into the sector, agriculture has generally failed to attract the youth due to several economic, social and political factors.

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The 2017 Regional Dairy Meeting

The Regional Dairy meeting, which will be co-hosted with We Effect, will be held in Kenya from 22nd to 24th August. The meeting will provide insights into the development of the Kenyan dairy industry focusing on various aspects such as functioning of cooperatives and services provided to members; innovations around the smallholder sector in terms of financing, production practices, marketing etc.; the dairy hub model; zero-grazing in the smallholder sector; post-harvest losses; success drivers, particularly of urban dairy, and transformation from milk bulking groups to cooperatives. A field trip outside Nairobi is also planned as part of this. The meeting will also update delegates on the outcomes of the Steering Committee (SC) meeting and obtain their feedback on key documents for the platform, including a work plan for 2018.

The 2017 Women Farmers’ Forum

Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Union (SACAU) is organising the 2017 Women Forum in Tanzania from 21st to 25th August. The forum will focus on strengthening the capacity of women in their leadership roles with the aim of enhancing their impact to influencing as they serve as leaders in their respective organisations. SACAU is collaborating with the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD), a CGIAR centre, to offer a tailor made two-day training on women’s leadership and management. In addition, delegates will also be trained on negotiation skills. These skills will contribute towards addressing the challenges women are encountering while they serve in leadership positions in various boards and structures of their organisations. Delegates will also have an opportunity to visit businesses of their Tanzanian counterparts.