

STRENGTHENING FARMER ORGANISATIONS' ENGAGEMENT AT REGIONAL LEVEL

Presentation 1: Characteristics of current and potential SACAU's members – I. Shunga

Mr. Shunga presented the preliminary results of regional research study. The purpose of study was to compile database for farmer organizations.

The objectives of the study were:

- Identify main national farmer organizations
- Develop a profile for these organizations
- Understanding challenges they face

The data is based on 48 questionnaires that were analysed, but it was indicated that currently they have received other 32 questionnaires, which are pending analysis.

The major observations from the study

a. Coverage

Commodity associations account for 65% of the respondents, 8% for cooperatives and 27% for Unions.

b. Characteristics of farmer organizations

- Very few organizations are old and well-established; and these tend to be biased towards large-scale commercial farming.
- Majority are new and weaker in capacity, focusing on small-scale farmers.

c. The key objectives of farmer organizations (ranked)

1. Technical skills provision (48%)
2. Mouthpiece for members
3. Protect members interests
4. Lobbying for policies – *though lobbying is important it is not prominent*
5. Facilitating marketing of products – *though important prominence is low*

d. Constraints & challenges

Poor access to inputs & high costs of production

Unfavourable political and economic environment

Lack of technical training & extension on production – *though FOs were established to provide technical skills though they do not have capacity*

e. Conclusions

1. Too many farmer organizations
2. Inadequate linkages at regional level – *low networking*
3. Predominance of commodity associations
4. There is a pool of skilled human resources but there is little sharing of these experiences
5. Communications is still very weak
6. Level of commercialisations is related to strength of farmer organization – *thus the need to speed up commercialization*

Questions and comments time

Q1. *Why didn't farmers indicate commodity pricing as an issue, since it is a major issue in as far as prices are concerned?*

A1. The issue of pricing came in indirectly as the issue of high costs of production was mentioned.

Q2. *Why is HIV/AIDS not a major issue?*

A2. The issue did not come out explicitly since the questionnaire went to apex bodies but if the survey was meant for their members it could have been clearly outlined. On the other note, the survey also checked if the FOs have HIV/AIDS policies, it was found out that most of these do not have them.

Issue: There is need to work on mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS in farmer organizations.

Q3. *Did the survey differentiate between cash-crop and food crop-based commodity groups and those that do value-adding?*

A3. The survey did not directly look at the issue but it can be done later by re-looking at the data set to sift out the specifics.

Q4. *How can the farmer organizations be better supported, since the strongest ones were historically supported by Government?*

A4. Members agreed that as long as members feel that Government support would not jeopardize their independence it is fine, but other felt that there was no need for Government to fund CSOs.

In terms of SACAU, members agreed that there was need for fostering capacity building programs to strengthen farmer organizations.

Presentation 2: Strengthening communications for effective management in trade – Mr. A. Vashee

Challenges faced in effective management in trade

1. Lack of information on trade
 - Cause lack of policy advice on trade to make judgement
 - Lack of coordination mechanisms to coordinate farmers positions
 - Inadequate communications and high cost of communications for trade partners – the issue is connectivity/length of time to access information through telecommunication means
2. Lack of comprehensive coordinated market information systems for use by farmers
3. Low understanding of farmers on trade related issues such as trade protocols or trade issues. There is need for:
 - Training farmer leadership in trade
 - Involve farmers to participate in trade forums or negotiations
 - Identify people with trade negotiation skills and form a regional database
 - Develop a regional agricultural trade information focal point – “one-stop shop for SADC trade issues”

Comment: It is difficult for consistency in trade policy since there is conflict between sector e.g. livestock farmers versus crop farmers. So if there is need for common positions, there is need to look at win-win situations.

Q1. Can SACAU find funding for regional capacity building on trade issues?

A1. SACAU has sourced funding for trade negotiations training which will commence in the 1st quarter of 2006.

Q2. There is need to establish agricultural trade forums where the members can share experiences and draw up advocacy initiatives.

ATFs are available in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, but members cautioned that before we start establishing new ones there is need to check if these forums are already available.

Policy issues

1. There is need to strengthen regional forums such as SACAU and FANRPAN, in form of:
 - SADC to formalize agreement (partnership) with FANRPAN & SACAU
2. SADC member states should develop common positions on trade issues i.e. WTO, EU trading blocs etc.
3. SADC member states should endeavour to improve communications systems to facilitate trade access. This is so since telephone as utility companies are mostly under public domain.

4. Improve and harmonise national and regional market information systems for easy access to farmers
5. Need for regional capacity building programme for farmer organizations to understand trade issues and develop a database for SADC trade negotiators and capacity building institutions on trade.