

Ineffective policies stunt agricultural growth

Africa is well positioned to help relieve global food shortages considering the 100 million hectares of land under cultivation. However, ineffective agricultural policies hamper the sector's growth, according to numerous speakers at the Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN's) food security policy dialogue in Swaziland.

Cecilia Khupe, senior regional agriculture programme manager for the United States Agency for International Development, said that excessive policies hamper trade.

"Many farmers can't sell their produce to neighbouring countries because of trade barriers. Botswana can export to Europe, but trade policies prevent it from exporting to South Africa. We are not doing our farmers justice with these policies," explained Khupe.

Dr Lindiwe Sibanda, CEO of FANRPAN, said: "Our current policies are not adequate to ensure food

security. These policies are not formulated using relevant research, but rather research that has been done in other countries with different circumstances."

Acting prime minister of Swaziland, Macford Sibandze, said that agriculture in Africa is not performing as it should, given its wealth of arable land. "Africa's agricultural output is only 10% of the total global output, yet Africa has 60% of the world's remaining uncultivated land."

Dr Sibanda lamented that only 10 African countries had honoured previous commitments to spend 10% of their budgets on agriculture. – *Lindi van Rooyen*



BELOW LEFT: Dr Lindiwe Sibanda, CEO of FANRPAN.

BELOW: Acting prime minister of Swaziland, Macford Sibandze.

Africa must get youth involved in agriculture

Speaking at this year's Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN's) food security policy dialogue in Swaziland, that country's acting prime minister, Macford Sibandze, said that the success of agriculture depends on continuity and the transfer of knowledge to the youth. "The youth are conspicuously absent from the agricultural sector. They have moved towards western values and equate a career in agriculture with hard work and no reward."

Sibandze explained that lack of support to improve productivity and bring innovation into the agricultural sector has, in many ways, pushed young people away from this sector and into more attractive sectors such as information and communication technology. "Negative

perceptions about agriculture must change so that we can win the war against poverty and hunger," he said.

Dr Lindiwe Sibanda, CEO of FANRPAN, said Africa has the highest population of people under 25. "Who will feed the nation in the next 30 years if today's youth don't get involved in the agricultural sector?" she asked.

Sitembile Ndema, programme manager: Women Accessing Realigned Markets, added that the youth are innovative and pick up on new technologies faster than older generations. "We need them to be involved in agriculture to implement these new technologies and help grow the sector. They must also get involved in agriculture at an earlier age so that they can take the industry forward," said Ndema. – *Lindi van Rooyen*

Lack of government commitment responsible for food insecurity

Climate change and a lack of government commitment to agriculture has increased food insecurity of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region. The region is now more undernourished than ever before, according to Dr Lindiwe Sibanda, CEO of the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN).

"Agriculture is the backbone of the economy, but governments have not yet realised its potential," she said at FANRPAN's food security policy dialogue in Swaziland.

Dr Sibanda said that HIV/Aids also contribute to food insecurity because it inhibits the labour force. But the biggest factor inhibiting food security is the low level of food production in the region.

"Around 70% of the population is rural and rely on the food they produce themselves. If their yields are low it means they have to rely on food aid that is not always available.

"Farmers in the SADC region produce on average one-tenth of the harvest potential of maize seed. This is because they use poor

quality seed that is recycled every year."

Dr Sibanda said that targeted subsidies can fight food insecurity.

"Lack of financing means many farmers in Africa can't afford pesticides and fertilisers, which decreases the yield. Dryland farmers in the SADC region should be getting at least 3t/ha of maize, but most only manage 200kg/ha. "Subsidies in Malawi have resulted in

bigger maize yields because farmers are now using fertiliser and quality seed.

"Food aid creates dependency whereas subsidies don't."

Sitembile Ndema, programme manager: Women Accessing Realigned Markets, said that after a bumper crop, Malawian farmers don't need subsidies the following season as they made enough profit to buy their own inputs. – *Lindi van Rooyen*