

POLICY BRIEF

Strengthening CSA Alliances: Towards Resilient Agricultural Transformation in the SADC Region



Background: Strengthening Climate Smart Agriculture Alliances for Resilience

Climate change poses a significant threat to Southern Africa's agricultural systems, which are vital for the region's food and nutrition security and economic stability.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is experiencing increased frequency and intensity of droughts, floods, and temperature extremes, leading to reduced crop yields and heightened food insecurity. For instance, between 2010 and 2019, the region recorded over 540 extreme weather events, a substantial rise from the 85 events in the 1970s¹. These climatic challenges have caused significant declines in staple crop production, with projections indicating that cereal yields could decrease by over 20% by 2030².

Key Messages

- **CSA is a Game-Changer:** Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) is pivotal for boosting productivity, enhancing resilience to climate shocks, and achieving food security in SADC.
- **Stronger Together:** National and regional CSA alliances are the engines of transformation, driving collaboration, alignment, and resource mobilization.
- **Bridging Capacity Gaps:** Addressing capacity gaps through targeted training, stakeholder organisation, robust governance, and effective monitoring is critical for alliance success.
- **Equity for Impact:** Prioritizing women, youth, and marginalized groups in CSA initiatives ensures inclusive growth and equity.
- **Act Now:** Urgent, coordinated action from policymakers, private sectors, and development partners is essential to institutionalize CSA and secure a sustainable agricultural future for SADC.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/topics/9715/climate-change-in-africa/?utm>

² <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s44279-024-00026-1?utm>



In response to these challenges, the African Union (AU) introduced the Africa Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) Vision 25x25 during the 31st AU Summit in Malabo in 2014. This initiative aims to ensure that at least 25 million farm households adopt CSA practices by 2025, thereby enhancing resilience and productivity in the face of changing climate³. CSA practices focus on sustainably increasing agricultural productivity, adapting and building resilience to climate change, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions where possible.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that agricultural productivity growth in Africa has declined by 34% since 1961 due to climate change, marking the most significant reduction compared to other regions⁴. This decline underscores the urgent need for robust CSA alliances to facilitate knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and policy advocacy. Strengthening CSA alliances is crucial for unlocking Southern Africa's potential for resilience, sustainability, and food security. By fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration that includes governments, private sector, and civil society, broad-based alliances can drive the widespread adoption of CSA practices, aligning with the AU's Vision 25x25 and contributing to the region's climate resilience and agricultural transformation.

SADC Region at the Crossroads: Why Climate-Smart Agriculture Matters

Southern Africa's agricultural systems stand at a critical juncture. The worsening climatic conditions place immense pressure on the national economies and food systems in the SADC region, further exacerbating vulnerabilities in a region already burdened by high poverty rates and food insecurity. With 70% of the SADC region's population being reliant on agriculture, the persistent climatic disruptions are eroding livelihoods, diminishing crop yields, and placing immense pressure on national economies and food systems.

The current underperformance of the region's agriculture stems from outdated practices, limited adoption of sustainable innovations, and fragmented stakeholder efforts. CSA offers a transformative solution by integrating productivity enhancement, climate resilience, and sustainability into farming systems. However, CSA adoption has been constrained by weak institutional capacities, limited technical knowledge, and insufficient financial support.

There is an urgent need to act, given projections that cereal yields in the region could decline by over 20% by 2030 due to climate change, further threatening food and nutrition security. The SADC regions needs to harness the potential of CSA to transform agriculture into a driver of resilience and sustainable development by deliberately promoting the formation and strengthening of CSA alliances, thus creating a basis for collaboration among governments, private sector, and the civil society.

Mapping CSA Alliances: Laying the Foundations for Transformation

A structured and collaborative approach was employed to map and strengthen CSA alliances across 14 SADC member states. The process involved the collection of data using standardized tools to document alliances, their structures, capacity gaps, and national priorities. Consultations were conducted to identify national challenges and opportunities, with insights being consolidated into a regional CSA dataset and strategic roadmap to advance the AU's CSA 25x25 vision. The process climaxed with a regional workshop to validate the findings from the mapping exercise, as well as generating actionable recommendations. This participatory and evidence-based approach ensured

³ <https://www.nepad.org/publication/africa-csa-vision-25x25-africas-strategic-approach-food-security-and-nutrition?utm>

⁴ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/chapter-9/?utm>



that the proposed solutions address the unique needs and challenges of the region, laying the groundwork for transformative action in SADC’s agricultural sector in the face of a changing climate.

Key Findings: A Systematic Overview

The summary below highlights the strengths, challenges, and opportunities within CSA alliances, presenting a clear pathway to strengthen their impact and scale transformative agricultural practices across the SADC region.

Aspect	Findings	Implications
Building Blocks in Place	Fourteen (14) CSA alliances mapped, but only 9 are formally registered.	Registration enhances legitimacy, enabling access to funding and engagement with policymakers, yet gaps persist.
Struggling to Scale	Many alliances lack functional secretariats, robust governance, and adequate funding.	Operational inefficiencies hinder implementation of CSA programs and limit alliances' ability to mobilize resources.
Gaps to Bridge	Weak networks among stakeholders and inadequate technical capacity are major barriers.	Poor connectivity between farmers, researchers, and policymakers undermines knowledge sharing and collaborative action.
Unified Priorities	Alliances aim to build resilience, promote sustainability, and empower marginalized groups.	Shared priorities offer a strong foundation for regional coordination and alignment with global frameworks like AU CSA 25x25.

Unlocking Potential: The Power of Stronger Alliances

The validation meeting and group discussions highlighted both the achievements and challenges of CSA alliances across the SADC region. These platforms have proven instrumental in addressing critical issues such as sustainable water management, soil health improvement, and promoting equity by empowering women and youth. Yet, their broader potential remains untapped due to persistent barriers.

Key Insights from the Validation Meeting

1. Achievements:

- **Water Management and Soil Health:** Alliances have initiated programs on efficient irrigation systems, rainwater harvesting, and soil fertility enhancement. These efforts align with CSA goals to improve productivity and resilience.
- **Capacity Building:** Some alliances have successfully conducted farmer training workshops, fostering knowledge on climate-smart practices and linking farmers to CSA technologies.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Alliances are working to integrate underrepresented groups, particularly women and youth, into CSA programs, ensuring broad-based participation.



2. Challenges:

- **Weak Coordination:** Stakeholders across different sectors often operate in silos, limiting collaboration and the sharing of best practices.
- **Resource Deficits:** Most alliances lack sufficient financial and technical resources to sustain their activities or scale up CSA interventions.
- **Limited Policy Advocacy:** Alliances struggle to influence national governments to prioritize CSA within policy and budget frameworks.

Bridging the Gaps

From the group discussions during the validation workshop, participants emphasized several strategies to overcome these challenges:

- **Strengthening Governance:** Establishing functional secretariats and governance structures was identified as critical to improving coordination and operational efficiency. There is need to formally align the alliances to the appropriate line ministries.
- **Enhancing Policy Advocacy:** Alliances need targeted strategies to engage governments and secure commitments for CSA implementation. This includes leveraging evidence-based success stories to demonstrate impact.
- **Resource Mobilization:** There was consensus around the need to build viable business cases to attract private sector investment and engage donors to address funding gaps.
- **Improving Knowledge Sharing:** Creating and promoting regional platforms for cross-learning and experience sharing was proposed as a way to foster collaboration and innovation.

Unlocking the Potential

Stronger alliances have the power to transform agriculture in the SADC region by acting as catalysts for change. By addressing weak coordination, resource gaps, and limited government support, these platforms can accelerate progress toward achieving CSA and food and nutrition security goals. Collective action through alliances ensures that smallholder farmers, governments, and other stakeholders work together to drive resilience, sustainability, and equity in agriculture.

Shaping the Future: Policy Recommendations That Work

- **Create a Regional Blueprint for CSA Success:** Align CSA alliances with the African Union's CSA 25x25 vision and the Malabo Declaration, while institutionalizing CSA frameworks within national policies and securing dedicated budgets for implementation.
- **Build Capacity for Resilience:** Establish train-the-trainer programs to empower local experts and strengthen support and secretariat structures within alliances for enhanced governance and coordination.
- **Inspire Investment in Agriculture:** Develop viable business cases to attract private sector investment and mobilize funding from governments and donors to address resource and financial gaps in CSA initiatives.
- **Foster Regional Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Create or promote a centralized digital platform for CSA data and insights, and organize regional forums to share best practices, success stories, and innovations.
- **Position 'Inclusion' at the Heart of CSA:** Promote active participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in CSA initiatives and address systemic barriers like land tenure insecurity to enhance equity and social impact

Call to Action for Resilient Agriculture



Southern Africa stands at a critical juncture where action to strengthen CSA alliances can secure food systems, enhance resilience, and catalyse sustainable economic growth. The challenges of climate change demand a collective and urgent response, leveraging the strengths of both state and non-state actors to drive transformative agricultural practices. CSA alliances will allow the smallholder farmer to participate, and contribute to ensuring regional resilience to climate change.

By addressing gaps in capacity, governance, and resource mobilization, CSA alliances will serve as catalysts for change, aligning local actions with regional frameworks, including the AU's CSA 25x25 vision. A coordinated approach to policy advocacy, inclusion, and innovation will unlock the region's potential for sustainable development.

The time to act is now. Governments, the private sector, and civil society must unite to invest in and empower CSA alliances to enable them to contribute to a resilient, inclusive, and food-secure Southern Africa.

Acknowledgments/disclaimer

Any illegal reproduction without CCARDESA and FANRPAN's consent of this content will result in immediate legal action.

