



Report

Validation Workshop

Strengthening the Capacity of National and Regional CSA Alliances

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1. Background

Agriculture plays a vital role in producing food and ecosystem services in the East and Southern African (ESA) region and is central to fostering regional economic growth, reducing poverty, and improving food security. Agriculture contributes between 4% and 27% of GDP and approximately 13% of overall export earnings, with about 70% of the region's population depending on agriculture for food, income, and employment. However, the region is facing numerous challenges from slow agricultural transformation, growing populations and increasing demand for food, urbanization, and climate change.

Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) has proven to be a comprehensive and effective response to climate change-related challenges, helping guide actions to transform agri-food systems towards green and climate-resilient practices, and supporting the attainment of internationally agreed developmental goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change. There is however the need to rally political, technical and financial resources and action to support the empowerment of farmers and local communities with the necessary capacity to adapt to and/or mitigate the effects of climate change. The Heads of State and Government endorsed the African Union Vision – CSA 25X25, which aims to support at least 25 million farm households to practice CSA by 2025. CSA alliances were promoted to this target at national, regional and continental levels. As a response, the Africa CSA Alliance was launched in 2015, followed by varying efforts to establish regional and national CSA alliances. For the SADC region, the Southern Africa Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance (SACSAA) was launched in November 2019, bringing together some civil society organisations.

As part of the activities of its CAADP X-P4 Programme, the Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA) commissioned the Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) to lead an initiative aimed at strengthening Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) Alliances within the member states of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region. With the overall objective of mapping CSA Alliances in SADC member states, the specific objectives were to conduct a comprehensive mapping of national CSA platforms (organisation, existing interventions/focal areas, status (registered or loose coalition of actors), representatives, and contact details); as well as establishing national CSA priorities and capacity gaps. These activities would climax with the facilitation of a regional workshop to validate the findings.

To that end, FANRPAN, in conjunction with the Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), convened a Regional Workshop, under the theme '*Strengthening the Capacity of National and Regional Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) Alliances*'.

Workshop Objectives

The primary objectives of workshop were to:

- a) Validate the findings of the CSA alliances mapping exercise conducted across 16 SADC member states.
- b) Identify and align national and regional priorities and capacity gaps to enhance cohesion and coordination.
- c) Facilitate dialogue among CSA stakeholders to foster regional collaboration and advance the AU's CSA 25x25 vision.

Further, the outcomes of the workshop served as key inputs into a regional policy brief to advocate for the implementation of recommendations for continued strengthening of the national and regional CSA alliances.

This report presents a summary of the proceedings from the regional workshop.

2. Report of Proceedings

2.1 Opening Session

The opening session featured remarks from the respective heads of FANRPAN and CCARDESA, whose remarks are summarised below.

- a) Welcome and Opening Remarks - **Dr. Tshildzi Madzivhandila**, CEO and Head of Mission of FANRPAN.



Dr. T. Madzivhandila delivers welcome remarks

Dr. Madzivhandila welcomed all the delegates to South Africa, and highlighted FANRPAN’s unwavering commitment to generating evidence-based policies aimed at transforming agriculture and enhancing climate resilience across the region. He underscored the critical role of CSA alliances as enablers of transformation, emphasizing the need to centre smallholder farmers in the development process.

Reflecting on the AU’s CSA 25x25 vision, Dr. Madzivhandila stressed the importance of targeted interventions to address the region’s capacity gaps and ensure alignment between national and regional priorities. He also called for collaboration among diverse stakeholders to unlock the potential of CSA in achieving sustainable agricultural transformation.

- b) Opening Remarks - **Professor Cliff Sibusiso Dlamini**, Executive Director and Head of Mission of CCARDESA



Prof. C. S. Dlamini delivers opening remarks

Professor Dlamini, on the other hand, brought attention to CCARDESA’s role in fostering agricultural research and innovation across SADC. He emphasized that regional collaboration is key to solving agricultural challenges exacerbated by climate change.

Professor Dlamini also outlined the importance of leveraging evidence-based decision-making to integrate climate-smart agricultural practices into food systems. Given the permanence of climate change, Professor Dlamini urged stakeholders to translate the findings from the validation meeting into practical, scalable solutions that would empower the region to adapt and thrive under changing climatic conditions.

2.2 Keynote Presentation

After the opening remarks, a keynote presentation was delivered, effectively setting the stage for a day of robust dialogue, and in the process, fostering an environment of collaboration and mutual commitment to tackling climate-related challenges in Southern Africa's agricultural sector.

Ms. **Sithembile Ndema Mwamakamba** FANRPAN's Director of Policy Research and Analysis delivered the keynote presentation for and on behalf of AUDA-NEPAD's Dr. Manyewu Mutamba. She provided an in-depth overview of the African Union's CSA 25x25 vision and its alignment with regional and global frameworks such as the Malabo Declaration and Agenda 2063.

The vision of the CSA 25x25 is to empower 25 million farm households to adopt climate-smart practices by 2025, focusing on improved productivity, enhanced resilience, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.



Ms. S. Mwamakamba delivers the Keynote Address

The five strategic pillars of the CSA 25X25 vision are:

- i. Knowledge management and evidence generation.
- ii. Policy and institutional strengthening.
- iii. Financing and investment mobilization.
- iv. Capacity building and outreach.
- v. Partnerships and collaboration.

Ms. Mwamakamba stressed the critical role of CSA alliances as facilitators of knowledge exchange, policy advocacy, and resource mobilization.

Highlighting success stories from Zambia and Kenya, she called for stronger alignment of national efforts with regional and global strategies. Her presentation underscored the importance of monitoring and accountability in tracking progress toward CSA adoption and adaptation goals.

2.3 Presentation of Key Findings

Mr. Suwlanji Sinyangwe, FANRPAN's Programmes Officer, presented the key findings of the assignment. His presentation covered the following:

- i. A regional database of national CSA actors, which was an amalgamation of the findings from the 16 SADC member states
- ii. National CSA priorities and capacity gaps for the 16 SADC member states
- iii. National CSA platforms and their linkages to regional, continental, and global CSA Alliances.

After the presentation of findings, Professor Simba Sibanda of FANRPAN facilitated a discussion with the delegates.

3. Key Discussions

3.1 Mapping Results Validation

The key issues emerging from the discussion on the mapping of CSA alliances include the following:

- i. There are 14 national CSA alliances in 14 SADC member states, with two still undergoing organisation towards establishment.
- ii. Of the 14 alliances, 9 are formally registered. Delegates emphasised and agreed that the registration of alliances was a critical enabler for accessing resources, engaging with policymakers, and establishing legitimacy. Delegates also highlighted that alliances lacking formal registration were likely to face significant challenges in garnering institutional and financial support.
- iii. On governance and operational efficiency, many alliances lack functional secretariats. Delegates identified this as a gap that would hamper the alliances' ability to coordinate activities, mobilize resources, and effectively advocate for climate-smart agricultural practices. It was agreed that functional governance structures are essential to ensure the sustainability and impact of CSA alliances.

3.2 National and Regional CSA Priorities

The discussions highlighted the urgent need to align national CSA priorities with regional frameworks such as the African Union's CSA 25x25 vision and the Malabo Declaration. Key priorities identified included:

- i. Enhancing sustainable water use through irrigation efficiency and rainwater harvesting techniques.
- ii. Improving soil health via sustainable land management practices and conservation agriculture.
- iii. Promoting renewable energy technologies, such as solar-powered irrigation systems, to reduce agriculture's carbon footprint.
- iv. Strengthening local input production – this brought into focus the significant challenge that Seychelles is facing, having to import over 95% of its seeds from external sources. Delegates agreed that this was a major barrier to agricultural sustainability and resilience. They called for increased investment in local seed production systems, improved access to high-quality seeds, and the development of regionally harmonized seed policies to reduce dependency on imports.

3.3 Capacity Gaps and Proposed Solutions

The discussions shed light on critical capacity gaps that hinder the effectiveness of CSA alliances.

- **Identified Gaps:**
 - **Technical Expertise:** A lack of knowledge in advanced CSA technologies and practices among alliance members.
 - **Governance:** Weak coordination and leadership structures within alliances, leading to fragmented activities.
 - **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Inadequate frameworks to measure the effectiveness and progress of CSA interventions.
- **Proposed Solutions:**
 - **Capacity-Building Programs:** Participants recommended the implementation of train-the-trainer initiatives to empower alliance members and extension officers with the necessary skills and knowledge.

- **Business Case Development:** To attract private sector engagement, alliances need to articulate the economic benefits of CSA interventions through compelling business cases.
- **Robust M&E Frameworks:** Strengthening data collection and evaluation mechanisms was emphasized to ensure accountability and informed decision-making.

3.4 Regional Collaboration

Participants highlighted that stronger regional collaboration is essential for addressing cross-border challenges and amplifying the impact of CSA initiatives.

- **Intra-Regional Trade:** Discussions focused on reducing reliance on external imports by enhancing intra-regional trade of agricultural inputs, including seeds, fertilizers, and technologies.
- **Knowledge Platforms:** The need for shared platforms to disseminate success stories, innovations, and best practices was emphasized. These platforms would foster cross-learning among alliances and promote the scalability of successful CSA interventions.

The consensus amongst the delegates was that regional collaboration should be institutionalized through formal agreements among alliances and supported by regional bodies like CCARDESA and FANRPAN to ensure long-term sustainability.

4. Recommendations for Policy Action

From the discussions, the following emerged as key recommendations that delegates felt would impact policy and practice.

- Align CSA Alliances with Regional Frameworks:** Integrate CSA priorities with the AU's CSA 25x25 vision and Malabo Declaration to ensure strategic coherence.
- Strengthen Governance and Capacity:** Establish functional secretariats and robust governance structures while implementing targeted capacity-building initiatives.
- Inspire Investment in Agriculture:** Develop business cases to attract private sector investment and mobilize resources from governments and donors.
- Foster Regional Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Create digital platforms to centralize data and innovations and organize regional forums for cross-learning.
- Put Inclusion at the Heart of CSA:** Prioritize women, youth, and marginalized groups in CSA initiatives and address systemic barriers like land tenure insecurity.

5. Closing Remarks

The workshop concluded with a call to action for policymakers, private sector stakeholders, and development partners to prioritize CSA as a cornerstone of climate resilience. Participants committed to leveraging the momentum generated by the CCARDESA/FANRPAN initiative and the recommendations from the validation workshop to drive agricultural transformation in the SADC region. The collaborative approach promoted by the initiative will unlock the potential of CSA alliances and ensure regional agriculture that is resilient and sustainable in the face of a changing climate.

Photos:



Delegates engage in group discussions



Prof Simba Sibanda facilitates group discussions