

Agriculture, the coners stone in Achieving the SADC RISDP 2030 Goals

Background and Motivation

The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) (2020- 2030) is a regional blueprint for the development of the SADC region which outlines development priorities and strategies for the period 2020-2030. The plan guides the implementation of development programs and projects aimed at promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, and improving the quality of life for the people of southern Africa.

Agriculture is recognized as an important sector for economic growth and poverty reduction in the SADC region. Agriculture in the SADC region is the primary source of subsistence, employment and income for 61 percent of the peoples of the region. Despite a diversified natural resource base, overall agricultural growth and productivity remains low. As a result, Food and nutrition insecurity in the SADC region continues to be unacceptably high and food insecure people is estimated to be 55.7 million during the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 in the 12 Member States. Further, child malnutrition continues to be of great concern and stunting rates averaging above 25% in most Member States With a prevalence classified as very high by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Almost 18.6 million children are stunted in the region representing a third of the stunted children in Africa. About 6.4 million children under five years are estimated to be with wasted, with about 1.7 million of them being severely wasted. . A recent study by ESAFF on the impact of COVID-19 to the food systems also shows that COVID-19 has further compounded food insecurity and nutrition and supply chains actors were who are mostly smallholder producers were affected as the pandemic led to closure of business, low productivity worsening existing food insecurity and malnutrition.

To address the food insecurity and overall poverty and economic growth, the SADC RISDP (2020-2030) outlines various strategies for promoting the development of the sector through increased agricultural productivity and competitiveness and ensuring agriculture becomes a key driver of economic growth and poverty reduction in the region. Further, the SADC developed her Regional Agricultural Policy (RAP) in 2014 and two years later (2016) SADC approved the Regional Agriculture Investment and Implementation Management Plan (RAIP), 2017 – 2022 as the overarching policy and plan for the Region's agriculture sector. SADD RAP and SADC RAIP took into account the values, principles and priorities of the SADC Treaty of 1992, the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) of 2003 and now RISDP 2030, the SADC Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security of 2004, various SADC Ministerial decisions, and the African Union (AU) Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) of 2003 and Malabo Declaration 2014-2024. Despite some positive achievements in the sector, SADC as a bloc is still affected by hunger, malnutrition, poverty and diseases. Additionally, the SOFI report of 2021 highlights the critical importance of addressing food security and nutrition in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report calls for increased investment in agriculture and food systems and greater action to address the underlying causes of hunger and malnutrition, such as poverty, inequality, and conflict.

Rationale for the choice of the case study

Agriculture is the main driver of the economy and the main source of employment for the majority population of the SADC region. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), agriculture accounts for 60-80% of employment in the region with most people are employed in small-scale farming activities. Further, agriculture is a critical source of food for the region and plays a crucial role in ensuring food security for the growing population estimated to be 366 million people (2019). The sector is a significant contributor to the GDP of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region by over 10%. Despite its enormous potential, agriculture receives inadequate attention. Therefore, this case study provides an overview of the agriculture sector in the SADC region. The case study also proposes measures to be taken to improve the sector so as to contribute food security and poverty reduction in the region. In order to achieve the aim of this case study, a desk review of previous empirical work on agriculture as well as national development plans was conducted to assess the impact of the implementation of various programs and strategies on the sector.

Purpose of the case study

This case study aims assess the performance of the agriculture sector in the SADC region. Specifically, the case study will: To provide key highlights of the agriculture sector situation in the SADC region, challenges as well as lessons that can inform policy and better decision-making, Increased awareness will enable smallholder farmers and citizenry to engage decision and policy makers in discussions and debates around important issues in the agriculture sector.

To contribute to poverty eradication by providing insights into the causes and consequences of poverty by neglecting the agriculture sector as the major source of livelihoods for millions of people in the region.

To provide evidence-based statistics that can enable CSOs to engage national and regional bodies to ensure food security and accountability in the region.

Summary of findings and Challenges

The following is the summary of key findings and challenges of the case study that requires attention to spur the sector as the backbone of economy and social development in the SADC region;

- Expiration of the SADC Regional Agriculture Investment Plan (RAIP) (2017 – 2022) which calls to development of a new plan that reflects the evolving needs and priorities of the region, the RAIP is an essential tool that provides a framework for developing the agriculture sector.
- SADC RISDP has no implementing structures and reporting starting from grassroots to national to regional level; Without clear implementation structures and reporting, there may be a lack of accountability and coordination in implementing the RISDP, this poses challenges in ensuring that the plan is effectively implemented and that its goals are achieved.
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- Lack of factional SADC National Committees (SNC) at member states level -non existence of the SADC national Committees limits limited coordination and collaboration among state and non-state actors within the country. According to SADC Treaty of 1992 articles Article 23 & Article 5 (2b) and Article 16 A 'SADC must in pursuit of its objectives, seek to involve fully, the people of the region and key stakeholders', and that 'it shall cooperate with and support their initiatives, 'in order to foster closer relations among communities, associations and peoples of the region'.
- Inadequate funding; Lack of realization and operationalization of the SADC Development Fund (DF) as enshrined in the SADC treaty of 1992 and delay in the operationalisation of the SADC Agriculture Development Fund (ADF) are the stumbling blocks towards realization of the agriculture transformation goals.. The ADF is aimed at providing financial support for projects and programs aimed at improving the living standards of people in African countries, it is within the SADC Treaty 1992 under Article 8 of the Agreement on the Operationalisation of the SADC Regional DF - based on Ministerial decision in 2017. No country has yet contributed.
- Poor synergy between member states on the AU Malabo Commitments and domestication of the RISDP; Poor synergy among African Union (AU) member states in implementing the Malabo commitments hinders progress in achieving the AU's Malabo commitments which were set by African leaders to accelerate the implementation of the AU's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). Lack of synergy has led to split efforts and limited progress which slows the progress in addressing key challenges in the agricultural sector such as food insecurity, poverty, and low productivity.

Opportunities and best practices

Importance of Agriculture; agriculture is an important sector for the SADC region and its implementation of the RISDP. By investing in agriculture, the SADC can support economic growth, reduce poverty, improve food security, and promote national and regional integration and cooperation among member states. Through agriculture cross-border trade can fostered and promote regional stability and security.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD); this is a financial instrument created by the European Union (EU) established in 2005 to support the development of rural areas within member states. In the agriculture sector the funds aims to promote sustainable agriculture, rural development, and the protection of the environment. Each EU member state is responsible for contributing to the EAFRD through a combination of national and EU-level funding.

The EAFRD operates on a co-financing principle, which means that both the EU and the member states contribute to the fund. The EU provides a basic amount of funding, which is then topped up by the member state's national budget. The specific ratio of EU and national funding can vary depending on the country's economic situation, with less developed regions receiving a higher proportion of EU funding.

In addition to financial contributions, member states also play an important role in the management and implementation of the EAFRD. They are responsible for ensuring that the funding is allocated in line with the EU's strategic priorities and guidelines, and that projects are implemented effectively and efficiently.

Smallholder farmers benefit from the EAFRD in a number of ways through financial support to promote sustainable rural development in the European Union (EU), and as part of this effort, it offers a range of programs and initiatives that can help smallholder farmers improve their operations, increase their productivity, and enhance the quality and sustainability of their products. Other programs include investment in farm infrastructure such as irrigation systems, support for agri-environmental measures to adopt environmentally friendly farming practices (reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and protect biodiversity, enhanced access to training and advisory services.

Inclusion of smallholder farmers in the development of a Regional Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services Strategy; this is crucial for the success of the strategy because smallholder farmers are key players in the implementation of the strategy and play a vital role in the agricultural sector hence the backbone of the rural economy in the SADC region. However, they face several challenges, including limited access to extension and advisory services, lack of technical knowledge and inadequate tools/infrastructure. Involving smallholder farmers will ensure that their needs and concerns are taken into account which will mark the success of the strategy. Inclusion could be done through consultations, stakeholder engagements, where the smallholder farmers will be given opportunities to express their concerns about the strategy and specific needs to be addressed.

Development of a regional repository on indigenous and underutilized nutritious food; this is will be a significant step towards promoting food security and nutrition in the region. The repository would serve as a center for information on indigenous and underutilized nutritious foods, including their nutritional value, cultivation practices, and preparation methods. The repository will enhance diversification of the region's food systems and provide a platform for knowledge-sharing and collaboration among researchers, smallholder farmers, and the government in the region.

Review of the 2017-2022 Regional Agricultural Investment Plan (RAIP) which was approved by SADC Council of Ministers in April 2017 and expired in 2022. There is a need to review and renew the plan in order to foster increased Investments in agriculture with the objective to support national efforts in promoting agri-business value chains which will lead to improved food and nutrition security for the SADC Region

Increased participation of smallholder farmers in implementing and monitoring SADC RISDP; smallholder farmers play a crucial role in the implementation and monitoring of the SADC RISDP. Their participation will ensure that the plan addresses their needs and concerns, and that it is implemented in a way that benefits them. Among significant regional flagship programs, SADC RISDP-2030 expects to provide increased spaces for SADC

citizens to be aware, participate, monitor and benefit from this regional strategic plan. In addition, the establishment of the SADC National Committees in all Member States will definitely increase the participation of farmers, NGOs, and the private sector in planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Improved extension services; which will improve their agricultural practices and increase their yields. According to the SADC RISDP, SADC will develop a Regional Agricultural Development Advisory and Extension Strategy to govern matters of extension development. Improved agricultural extension services at regional and national levels would directly benefit women in agriculture who face challenges accessing information and finances to improve crop production.

Climate resilience Implement the activities planned for enhancing people's adaptation to climate change, especially among smallholder farmers within RISDP by 2030. It provides climate change proof technologies at a country level and invests in upscaling smallholder farmers' skills.

Early warning system that provides valuable information and support to smallholder farmers, enabling them to make informed decisions and improving their agriculture activities, the system will enhance improved crop planning through real-time information on weather conditions, allowing farmers to plan their planting and harvesting activities more effectively. Other benefits include reduced crop loss, increased productivity, improved food security:

Operationalisation of the Agricultural Development Fund (ADF) will be an opportunity to smallholder farmers that will enhance access to financing and investment opportunities which will allow the improvement in agriculture activities and increase productivity. SADC plans to mobilise funding through the Regional Resource Mobilisation Framework and the ADF as a unique facility under the SADC Development Fund (SADC DF). It is within the SADC Treaty 1992 under Article 8 of the Agreement on the Operationalisation of the SADC Regional DF - based on Ministerial decision in 2017. These funding mechanisms would be beneficial as a source of capital for smallholder farmers' engagement at various value chain points. By providing farmers with access to capital, the ADF will help to create a more favorable environment for agricultural development and growth in the SADC region

Farmer Managed Seed System (FMSS); The SADC RISDP promotes the participation of smallholder farmers in creating farmer-managed seed systems as an effective strategy for climate change resilience and adaptation. Including smallholder farmers at the centre of seed system management is essential because they are the custodians of local genetic materials. FMSS are pests and disease resistant and resilient to climate change shocks. Therefore, the plans outlined in the SADC RISDP (Pillar 1, Strategic Objective 2) promote conservation of such material in gene-banks at the SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre (SPGRC) in Lusaka, Zambia.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Practical solutions identified to address the issues and detail how the identified suggestions can be better implemented

Fully implementation of the Malabo Biennial Review goals by all countries

- Looking at the performance since 2015, 2017, 2020 SADC region continue to lose momentum to achieve Malabo goals, in the first Malabo report a total of 8 countries were on track while in the second and third report no country was on track to achieve the Malabo goals. In the Malabo report of 2021 only 5 countries had shown good progress in achieving the Malabo goals. Among the factors leading to poor progress among the member states include lack of political will, limited funding to agricultural programs, existence of conflicts and political instability. Therefore, there is need to: Promote good governance, accountability and transparency in the agricultural sector to ensure effective implementation of policies and programs.
- Increase investment in agriculture and rural development to drive economic growth and reduce poverty.
- Increase agricultural productivity through sustainable and climate-smart agricultural practices, better access to technology, inputs, and markets.
- Strengthen data collection and management systems for improved consistency, reliability, data sharing and data security
- Address the impact of climate change on agriculture and build resilience in the sector through adaptation and mitigation measures
- Promote gender equality and empower women in the agricultural sector, including improving their access to land, credit, technology, and markets

Existence of the Joint Agriculture Sector Review (JASR); This is an important process for improving agriculture and food security in the SADC region. The JASR provides an opportunity for countries to assess their progress in implementing the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and to identify areas for improvement. The SADC should approve and operationalise the Joint Agriculture Sector Review (JASR) mechanism and the SADC Non-State Actor Regional Engagement Mechanism to enhance the participation of farmers and non-state actors in policy processes, implementation and monitoring.

Functional and Effective SADC National Committees (SNC) – The National Committees are the key mechanisms to facilitate coordination between the SADC Secretariat and national governments in order to ensure the implementation of regional policies. Establishment of SADC National Committees will ensure the state to participate in the decision-making process and to express its views and concerns on regional issues.

The region to increase research and development funding; which will improve production through innovation, reduce production costs, increasing Food Security, supporting economic growth and contributing to the overall economic development of the region. Research will help to tackle issues like climate change through adaptation mechanisms. This will help improve the standard of living for farmers and create more jobs. Funding in R&D remains below the AU's 1% of GDP target (2006 Khartoum Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology). However, without research – and against the backdrop of climate change and massive population growth – the future of African agriculture is not guaranteed

Synergy among member states in domestication of the RISDP; there is a need to enhance and increase collaboration in domestication of the RISDP to promote cooperation. This will lead to a more effective and efficient use of resources and better outcomes, synergy among member states can help to improve integration and harmonization of policies and regulations across the region, reducing barriers to trade and investment and promoting economic growth through agriculture.

Women and youth; through the implementation of RISDP, SADC should develop gender-sensitive agriculture programs that take into account the specific needs and challenges faced by women and youth in the sector. This is to accelerate equal participation in socio-economic and political processes.

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