

ECA-SA SEMINAR ON “ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FOOD SECURITY INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN THE SADC SUB-REGION”

Report

Johannesburg, South Africa
14 - 15 September 2011



Economic Commission for Africa
Subregional Office for Southern Africa



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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACTESA:	Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa
AFAMIH:	African Food and Agricultural Market Information Hub
AIMS:	Agricultural Information Management System
BCA:	Botswana College of Agriculture
CAADP:	Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme
COMESA:	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
EAC:	East African Community
ECA-SA:	Economic Commission for Africa-Southern Africa Office
FANR:	Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources
FAO:	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FEWS NET:	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FSIS:	Food Security Information Systems
FSSDD:	Food Security and Sustainable Development Division
FTA:	Free Trade Area
HIV-AIDS:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus – Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICOSAMP:	Information Core in Southern Africa Migratory Pests
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
LIMS:	Livestock Information Management System
NEPAD:	New Partnership for Africa`s Development
OCHA:	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RFBS:	Regional Food Balance Sheets
RSU:	Remote Sensing Unit
SADC:	Southern African Development Community
SSSN:	SADC Seed Security Network
UN:	United Nations
UNAIDS:	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNECA:	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNICEF:	United Nations Children`s Fund
VAC:	Vulnerability Assessment Committee
ZLA:	Zambia Land Alliance

Executive Summary

This is the report of the Seminar on “Enhancing the Effectiveness of Food Security Information Systems in the SADC Sub-Region” held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 14 - 15 November 2011.

The main objective of the Seminar was to discuss issues, challenges and constraints faced by FSIS in the sub-region and provide a forum through which different stakeholders will make recommendations aimed at strengthening the food security information value chain in the sub-region. The ultimate objective of the Seminar was to facilitate food security planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation through the systematic collection, organization, management, analysis and dissemination of food security data and information.

The Seminar, which was organized through a collaborative effort between the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the SADC Secretariat and the Food Security Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) – Southern Africa, reviewed issues and challenges faced by member States and other stakeholders in developing FSIS and made recommendations to strengthen the production, delivery and consumption of quality agricultural and food security information in the SADC region.

The Seminar noted that the sub-region as a whole faces many challenges in developing FSIS including data paucity at the national and sub-regional levels, inadequate and limited coordination between and among components and institutions, main focus on agriculture early warning systems, inadequate internal funding and high reliance on external donors, institutional deficiencies and lack of human capacity and low appreciation of the critical role that FSIS play in informing programmes and policies.

The Seminar called for strengthening of the funding mechanism for FSIS and enhancing their dissemination and communication strategies in order to meet the needs of end users and support the timely decision-making process. It was further recommended to strengthen the capacity of national institutions and the media in collecting, analysing, reporting and disseminating food security information.

Lessons Learned from the SADC FSIS development activities emphasized the importance of stakeholders working together, strengthening resource mobilization and methodological development projects; avoidance of duplication of efforts and promoting wide acceptability of the outputs.

The Seminar urged member States and other stakeholders to embark on harmonizing data collection methodologies and tools for purposes of generating comparable food security data and information

and to take into account cross-cutting issues such as rapid urbanization, rising food prices, HIV/AIDS, climate change and population growth while strengthening FSIS in Southern Africa.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The recurrence and magnitude of food crises in Southern Africa underscore the need to improve prevention and response mechanisms in order to address the determinants and the dynamic nature of food insecurity, at both national and regional levels. The strong upward trends and increased variability in global food prices over the past two years have led to concern about the lack of sufficient information to gauge the likely effects of global food crises in the SADC countries and to identify, design, and implement policy actions that can best avoid risks and take advantage of opportunities.

The SADC Food Security Summit held in Dar es Salaam in 2004 emphasized the need to strengthen national early warning systems; enhance vulnerability monitoring capabilities; and develop a Regional Integrated Agricultural Information System to enhance agricultural development and sustainable food security in the sub-region.

Food security information is provided through a myriad of sources operated by governments, donors, multi-laterals and NGOs in Southern Africa. Designers and implementers of FSIS need to enhance the credibility of the information through a process of consultation and coordination. A clear communication strategy and capacity-building will allow policymakers to understand how the information is derived and analysis undertaken.

FSIS outputs have been characterized by the continued primacy of a food response despite their dual expected role in informing both relief and developmental actions. The paucity of data on costs of FSIS and their various components constitutes a severe constraint on financial planning and sustainability. While mainly focusing on food supply, FSIS in the SADC region lack information about underlying livelihoods and assets, longer-term vulnerability analysis and poverty monitoring. They are still weak in terms of collecting, packaging and disseminating information about people's ability to gain access to food, as well as the availability of food. There are concerns about the accuracy and reliability of some data. Linkages of FSIS to trade policy and private sector decision makers are poor. This limits the potential for private sector mitigation activities and response to disasters.

The Food Security Early Warning Systems (FEWS), a major component of FSIS in the SADC, do not monitor the existence and potential effects of HIV/AIDS. Heavily dependent on external resources and orientated to climatic shocks, they are almost always aimed at monitoring rural populations despite rapidly increasing urban poverty and vulnerability.

It is against this background that the ECA-SA, in collaboration with the SADC Secretariat and FEWS NET Southern Africa, organized a Seminar on “Enhancing the Effectiveness of Food Security Information Systems in the SADC Sub-Region”. The Seminar, which took place at the Birchwood Hotel-OR Tambo Conference Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa, aimed at reviewing issues and challenges faced by member States and other stakeholders in developing Food Security Information Systems and make policy recommendations to strengthen production, delivery and consumption of quality agricultural and food security information in the SADC region.

1.2 Objectives and Scope of the Seminar

The ultimate objective of the Seminar was to facilitate food security planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in the SADC region through the systematic collection, organization, management, analysis and dissemination of food security data and information.

Using the findings of the Issues ECA-SA Paper on “Enhancing the Effectiveness of Food Security Information Systems in the SADC Sub-region”, the Seminar:

- » Assessed national and sub-regional FSIS efficiency in terms of their credibility, sustainability, institutional management and communication strategies and considered possible solutions to strengthen the information system at the level of the consumer and across value chains.
- » Assessed and harmonized stakeholders’ approaches to strengthen the links between food security information, market information and early warning systems and the development of effective response strategies; and highlighted good practices in linking food security information to decision makers.
- » Identified key capacity-building needs at the sub-regional and national levels to not only enable decision makers and other stakeholders to access and apply available information but also to integrate FSIS with poverty and vulnerability monitoring mechanisms and adapt elements of the FSIS to their local situation.
- » Promoted food market transparency through efficient, sustainable and cost-effective Food Market Information System collecting, analysing, and disseminating information about food prices, deliveries, and stocks and making sure the information reaches decision makers in a way that is appropriate for their necessary action.
- » Identified methodological, institutional, technological and political issues to consider in defining the strategy aimed at improving the technical quality and the scope of the analysis provided by the FSIS and evaluating the impact of their interventions.

2. Attendance

ECA-SA collaborated with the SADC Secretariat through its Agricultural Information Management System (AIMS) and Remote Sensing Unit (RSU), the FEWS NET Southern Africa, the Food Security and Sustainable Development Division (FSSDD) at the ECA Headquarters and member States in organizing the Seminar.

Participants in the Seminar included agriculture and food security experts from government institutions and ministries, the private sector, SADC institutions, academia, civil society organizations and other development partners.

Representatives from the following member States attended the meeting: Malawi, Namibia, DR Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The following intergovernmental, United Nations and development partner organizations participated in the meeting: FEWS NET Southern Africa, COMESA-ACTESA, MISA Southern Africa, Botswana College of Agriculture, Zambia Food Security Research Project-MSU, Zambia Land Alliance, Malawi-Liverpool Wellcome Trust Research Programme, FANR-SADC, and SADC - Climate Services Centre among others.

3. Opening Session (Agenda Item 1)

3.1 Opening Remarks

Opening statements were delivered by Mr. Bentry Chaura, Senior Programme Officer – Food Security from the SADC Agriculture Information Management Systems (AIMS) and Mr. Sizo D. Mhlanga, the ECA-SA Acting Director.

In his welcoming remarks, Mr. Bentry Chaura thanked ECA-SA for partnering with the SADC in organizing such an important Seminar and stated that food security is one of the priorities of the SADC as re-emphasized by the SADC Food Security Extraordinary Summit held in Dar es Salaam in 2004. He explained that as early as 1986, SADC put in place the Regional Early Warning System for Food Security. He further informed the meeting that the SADC Council of Ministers, which was held in Luanda, Angola, in 2003 emphasized the urgent need to integrate the information systems in food security, agriculture and natural resources management to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

Mr. Chaura noted that a number of challenges existed in SADC FSIS including the manner in which food security and agricultural data and statistics were currently collected by different Ministries, programmes or projects, making it difficult to access them. He emphasized that SADC's Agriculture Information Management System is "to develop an integrated database at both Secretariat and member State levels, with national databases linked to the regional database." He expressed hope that the market information system will make it easier for policymakers, planners, researchers and other stakeholders to have a one-stop access to information on food security. Other challenges related to food security and information systems (FSIS) in the sub-region include data paucity at national and sub-regional levels, less coordination between and among institutions and poor funding for projects and activities.

In concluding, he called upon the participants to come up with innovative recommendations to allow the sub-region to address these constraints and challenges in order to be able to expedite the attainment of the MDGs, especially these related to food security in Southern Africa.

Mr. Sizo D. Mhlanga, the Acting Head of the ECA Southern Africa Office, officially opened the Seminar. In his remarks, Mr. Mhlanga thanked the SADC Secretariat for its support to the Multi-year programme with ECA from which the Seminar was derived. He concurred with the SADC Secretariat by expressing the need to strengthen early warning systems and market information systems, enhance vulnerability monitoring capabilities and develop a Regionally Integrated Information System to en-

hance food security. Mr. Mhlanga emphasized that early warning systems needed to “establish sufficient credibility before decision makers gain confidence to utilize their information.”

In concluding, Mr. Mhlanga appreciated the rich mix of experts attending the Seminar and expressed optimism that the deliberations over the two days would yield the desired goals, which included generating strategies and actions that would enhance the capacity of the sub-region to manage and coordinate food security and early warning systems, improve vulnerability assessments and market information systems. He hoped that the recommendations “would ultimately promote food security in Southern Africa through enhanced quality of food security information and reinforced capacity of different stakeholders in the food security value chain” and declared the Seminar officially opened.

3.2 Organizational Matters

Election of the bureau, adoption of the agenda and programme of work (Agenda Item 2)

The meeting unanimously elected the following people to constitute the bureau with the sole purpose of guiding the deliberations:

Professor Elemino B. Nkhonga from the Botswana College of Agriculture (BCA) as Chairperson and Ms Sharon Chileshe from the Zambia Land Alliance (ZLA) as Rapporteur.

The bureau was supported and backstopped by the ECA Secretariat in capturing the salient points arising from the discussions.

Adoption of the agenda and programme of work (Agenda Item 3)

The meeting adopted the proposed agenda as follows:

- » Opening session
- » Introduction/Election of the bureau
- » Adoption of the agenda and programme of work and scene setting
- » Presentation and discussion of the Draft Report on “Enhancing the Effectiveness of Food Security Information Systems in the SADC Sub-region”.
- » Presentation and discussions on “Linking Food Security Information to Action: Issues, Challenges, Opportunities and Lessons Based on Past Food Crises in Southern Africa – the SADC Experience”.
- » Presentation and discussions on “The African Food and Agricultural Market Information Hub (AFAMIH): A Platform for Strengthening Collaboration between Regional Market Information Systems in Africa”.
- » Presentation by the panelists:

1. Integrating different components of FSIS towards a comprehensive approach (FEWS)
 2. FSIS communication strategy and the critical role of the media (MISA)
 3. The COMESA Regional Food Balance Sheet Project : issues, challenges and contribution to the Food Security Information Systems in Southern Africa (AMIS/COMESA)
- » Group work
 - » Discussion and adoption of the recommendations of the Seminar
 - » Closure of the Seminar

4. Presentation of the Draft Issues Paper on “Enhancing the Effectiveness of Food Security Information Systems in the SADC Sub-region” (ECA-SA) (Agenda Item 4)

Ms. Sithabiso Gandure presented the ECA-SA Issues Paper on “Enhancing the Effectiveness of FSIS in the SADC Sub-region”. She highlighted food security as a complex and multi-dimensional subject that cuts across a diversity of sectors and issues and noted that, for this reason, several diverse information systems contribute data for building a composite understanding of food security.

She emphasized that the analysis of food security in the region was informed by information systems operating at basically three levels: global, regional and national in response to the socio-economic and environmental challenges and noted that while SADC countries have diverse information systems that contribute to the understanding of food security, their effectiveness in informing decision-making is not adequately understood.

On the relevance in terms of thematic focus and data disaggregation, the presenter noted that most existing information systems are responsive to natural events affecting food security but not so much on the effects of economic crises, household coping strategies and long-term trends such as climate change. In terms of geographic coverage, she stigmatized the current focus of FSIS on rural areas and yet the rapid population growth in the SADC region has brought urban development challenges.

The presenter noted the need to integrate and coordinate the existing information at both regional and national levels and to come up with a more holistic picture of food security conditions while strengthening data accuracy and credibility. She noted that the level of networking and partnerships among stakeholders in many countries is improving, although much needs to be done, particularly in terms of sharing of data. She underscored the need to strengthen the institutional arrangements for FSIS and clarify the mandate of the different and multiple institutions dealing with food security activities bearing in mind the imperative need to bring on board all public and private actors involved in vulnerability and food security concerns at national levels while addressing the methodological limitations that exist.

Ms. Sithabiso called for strengthening of the funding mechanism for FSIS to address their heavy dependence on external funding and enhance their dissemination and communication strategies in or-

der to meet the needs of the users and support the timely decision-making process. She further noted that national institutions have limited capacity at the central and decentralized levels in collecting, analysing, reporting and disseminating food security information and raised the important need to build and strengthen the capacity for food security information management.

5. Presentation on “Linking Food Security Information to Action: Issues, Challenges, Opportunities and Lessons Based on Past Food Crises in Southern Africa, the SADC Experience” (SADC) (Agenda Item 5)

Mr. Bentry P. Chaura, Senior Programme Officer – Food Security from the SADC Agriculture Information Management Systems (AIMS) – made a presentation on “Linking Food Security Information to Action: Issues, Challenges, Opportunities and Lessons Based on Past Food Crises in Southern Africa – the SADC Experience”.

He presented the background to Information Systems development in the SADC region and raised the SADC political commitment towards FSIS development. He underscored the call from the Extraordinary Summit on Agriculture and Food Security held in Dar es Salaam on 15 May 2004, which recognized that “sustainable food security depends to a large extent on policy decisions based upon quality information” and further highlighted the importance of reliable food security information in supporting policy, plans and project formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. He stated that reliable information is the backbone for improved food security in the sub-region and major food insecurity situations may have been averted, especially the major crisis in 1991/92, if data had been gathered and managed properly.

He presented the structure of the SADC FANR Information Systems with its key components including the Regional Early Warning System for Food Security; Data Management and Analytical Project; Regional Remote Sensing Project; Integrated Crop Pests Surveillance Programme; Information Core in Southern Africa Migratory Pests (ICOSAMP); SADC Seed Security Network Project (SSSN); Regional Vulnerability Analytical Information System; Regional Fisheries Information Systems; Livestock Information Management System (LIMS); Regional Information and Management Programme for Agricultural Research and Training; and Forestry Information Management System.

He highlighted the outcomes of the SADC FSIS restructuring process in terms of locating most of these information systems at the SADC Headquarters and within the FANR Directorate; rationalizing their operations in order to enhance effectiveness and efficiency and incorporating and linking various existing information systems under various projects and networks into one Agricultural Information Management System (AIMS). The activities in this information system include data collection,

analysis and assessment, archiving and dissemination. He underlined the main challenges faced by regional information systems including human and financial resource constraints, methodological challenges – especially in data collection; reliability of the information, comparability of results, storage of data and information; compatibility of data formats and software used – and overlapping and duplication of efforts.

He noted, however, existent opportunities in developing FSIS in the region as SADC member States have embarked in promoting food security early warning systems; vulnerability assessments; livestock information management system towards an integrated AIMS with the technical and financial support from other stakeholders including UN agencies (FAO, WFP, UNICEF), FEWS NET and Save the Children among others.

He underscored the Lessons Learned from the SADC FSIS development activities emphasizing the importance of stakeholders working together, strengthening resource mobilization and methodological development projects; avoidance of duplication of efforts and promoting wide acceptability of the outputs.

In the discussions that followed the two presentations, the participants underscored the need to revisit the definition of food security to make it broader and adequate rather than just going by the conventional definition, which restricts itself to issues of availability, access and utilization only and urged to put more emphasis on the nutritional aspects of food security. The meeting was also informed that SADC has a clear definition of food security, which uses availability, access and utilization as main pillars.

Experts urged policymakers in SADC member States to support and value the benefits offered by the early warning systems as an important component of policymaking. The meeting recommended that policymakers should be targeted and sensitized so that they can begin to use the FSIS to inform their policymaking processes.

The meeting was informed that SADC member States have taken a position on the source of official data to inform policymaking, noting that member States were reluctant in using data from international organizations, their preference being for information from national statistical offices and government agencies only.

It was further noted that although there are special units at the SADC Secretariat charged with the responsibility of collecting data on behalf of the member States, the SADC Council does not recognize them and these units are seriously under capacitated and poorly funded. In dealing with the capacity constraints at the SADC Secretariat, the experts recommended that capacity (human and financial) should be built and enhanced to strengthen the FSIS development in the sub-region.

Experts underscored that HIV/AIDS was a critical factor in food security given its adverse impact on human resources and recommended that the linkages between HIV/AIDS and food security be captured by the FSIS in the SADC region. It was also noted that FSIS are strongly biased towards agriculture to the exclusion of other sectors; the participants emphasized the urgent need to broaden the scope of FSIS in the region. Participants emphasized the instrumental role of trade in moving food from a region of surplus to that of deficit and called on FSIS to support intra-regional food and agricultural trade.

Member States and FSIS actors were encouraged to harmonize data collecting methodologies and tools for purposes of generating comparable data and information in the sub-region. The SADC Secretariat was urged to explore how they can pilot information-gathering in different countries using common software for purposes of consistency.

FSIS were advised to define a clear marketing approach and adapt their outputs to the needs of the end users. They should show concern about how the information produced would get through to the primary targets or end users. It was noted that primary targets of the Southern African FSIS are small-scale farmers who are the main producers of food in the region.

6. Presentation on “the African Food and Agricultural Market Information Hub (AFAMIH): A Platform for Strengthening Collaboration between Regional Market Information Systems in Africa” (FSSDD-UNECA) (Agenda Item 6)

In his presentation, Mr. Maurice Tankou, Chief, Agriculture Marketing and Support Services, Food Security and Sustainable Development Division (FSSDD), explained that transforming African agriculture from a highly diversified and subsistence-oriented sector to a capitalized productive sector is needed to cut over US\$33 billion of Africa’s food imports bill annually. He explained that agricultural transformation will be required to trigger specialized market-oriented production, taking advantage of economies of complementarities, increased integration of agriculture with other sectors of the domestic and international economies through development of regional value chains, development of agribusiness and agro-industries and creating an enabling environment for private investment in agriculture in order to meet the US\$150 billion market potential for food market in Africa. He underscored the strategic role of market information systems in supporting agricultural transformation in Africa and highlighted major features of the AFAMIH-Forum as an ECA initiative aimed at strengthening agricultural and food market systems in the African region.

Mr. Tankou discussed the evolution of Market Information Systems in Africa, including developments after the dismantling of international stocks and price management mechanisms and reform of national marketing systems following the abolishment of marketing boards. He explained that a new generation of MIS has been triggered by developments in ICT, proliferation of web and mobile applications, strengthening of farmer organizations and development agenda frameworks within NEPAD (CAADP).

He highlighted the challenges of implementing the AFAMIH-Forum that builds on supply-driven rather than demand-driven requirements. He emphasized the need for ECA to know the Forum’s clients and their needs, to avoid building a regional market information system on the basis of weak national, sub-national and sub-regional systems, ignoring networks that already exist and building centralized systems rather than a support service to more decentralized systems. He concluded by explaining how ECA is going to implement an African Agricultural and Food Information Hub (AFAMIH) -Forum around four axes: mapping, learning, events and advocacy.

In the discussions that followed the presentation, the meeting observed that the idea of the AFAMIH-Forum was good at the macro level and needed to make sure small-scale farmers gain access to the information it will be disseminating. It was noted that small-scale farmers with access to the database could benefit from commercial farming and weaning them from reliance on government support as farming becomes a business.

Participants observed that such a market information system will require cross-border collaboration and urged ECA to involve governments at the highest levels within the framework of the COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite arrangement. The meeting also noted that it was important for ECA to team up with FAO and other partners, including research institutions, who have been assisting member States in strengthening Market Information Systems.

7. Panel Presentations and Discussions (Agenda Item 7)

Presentations by the panelists were made on pertinent issues related to FSIS development, mainly:

- » Integrating different components of FSIS towards a comprehensive approach: the FEWS approach.
- » The COMESA Regional Food Balance Sheet Project: issues, challenges and contribution to the Food Security Information Systems in Southern Africa.
- » The FSIS communication strategy and the critical role of the media.

(a) Presentation on “Integrating different components of FSIS towards a comprehensive approach: the FEWS approach”.

Ms. Phumzile Mdladla, the Regional Representative – FEWS NET Southern Africa, made a presentation on “FEWS NET systems and analysis – an integrated approach to Food Security Information Systems”. She presented FEWS NET as a global Famine Early Warning System working in close collaboration and coordination with “network” partners including the World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization and other UN agencies (UNICEF, OCHA, UNAIDS), government departments (Agriculture, DRR Units, Health), Regional Economic Communities, Market Information Systems, Meteorological Services and Centres, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

She highlighted FEWS NET activities comprising monitoring and analysis of food security, disseminating early warning and food security analysis, working with decision makers on food security projects, and developing national and regional capacity for FEWS NET processes, vulnerability and needs assessments, emergency early warning, preparedness, contingency planning and response.

The presenter underscored multi-agency technical consensus-building approach as one of the innovative and successful ways FEWS NET is dealing with food security issues while timely access to the network and partners` data remain a challenge.

(b) Presentation on “The COMESA Regional Food Balance Sheet Project: issues, challenges and contribution to the Food Security Information Systems in Southern Africa”.

Mr. Simon Dandri, the representative from ACTESA-COMESA, highlighted the vision and mission of the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), a specialized agency

of COMESA established in 2009 in order to realize a robust, modern and prosperous regional agricultural sector and contribute towards the implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) at the regional level.

He underscored that the COMESA Regional Food Balance Sheet (RFBS) was designed in 2010/2011 in line with ACTESA's core objectives and approved by the COMESA Ministers of Agriculture and Environment in July 2011. The RFBS is focusing on mapping the pattern of the region's food supply and demand as a basis for sound policy analysis and decision-making, information exchange to address food security at the regional level and enhancing private sector contribution to food security through promoting growth in production of staples and increasing intra-regional food trade.

Mr. Dandri highlighted underlying challenges faced by the RFBS, including poor information on the status of the region's food supply and demand, lack of timely and comprehensive regional food status reports for sound decision-making, unreliable available information on food production and consumption, lack of sound institutional structures at the national level for the construction of reliable food balance sheets, limited availability and accessibility of national food status reports to inform private and public sector decisions (food aid, production and trade) and the high government propensity to use National Food Balance Sheets to control exports and imports. Other challenges are related to data availability, reliability and variation in seasons, technical capacity and funding availability and sustainability.

He further noted that the COMESA RFBS was relevant to the SADC region as it highlights trade as an important element of food security information systems and involves eight SADC countries; namely, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, DR Congo, Seychelles, Mozambique and Tanzania, and underscored the opportunity brought by the COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite negotiations towards promoting a larger FTA in leading to the extension of RFBS.

(c) FSIS communication strategy and the critical role of the media

Mrs. Karen Malone, Media Law Policy and Advocacy Specialist from the Media Institute of Southern Africa, made a presentation on "FSIS communication strategy and the critical role of the media". She highlighted the instrumental role of the media in raising awareness on food security issues and supporting the related action in the sub-region.

She highlighted the capacity gaps within the media to decrypt and analyze food security information, calling for media actors' training on food security issues in partnership with institutions offering communication skills towards effective communication on the subject. The need to reflect on innovative ways of funding food security issues publication in newspapers was underscored as food security issues seem not to be hot issues in the sub-region.

In the discussions that followed the panelists' presentations, participants urged COMESA to explore the linkages between the SADC similar initiative started in 1986 and the RFBS to avoid duplication and reinforce synergies. The Seminar was educated on the clear differences between the SADC FBS and the COMESA RFBS. While the former is focused on early warning information systems, the latter is mainly anchored on trade promotion between and among member States and regional integration.

As a point of reference, Zambia was cited as having one of the best food balance sheets in the sub-region and has been working to perfect it in the last 10 years. In going forward, the meeting called for more investments in food balance sheets to improve on the stock of information on food security in the sub-region.

Media involvement in reporting on food security information remains a challenge. The Seminar observed that there are capacity gaps hampering the media's ability to support FSIS and urged the SADC and other stakeholders to innovatively train journalists towards increased media involvement in addressing food security information dissemination.

8. Presentation of Group Work to Plenary (Agenda Item 8)

The plenary was divided into three discussion groups focusing on the following nominated discussion themes:

- (1) FSIS institutional and financial sustainability
- (2) Communication strategy and implication of the different stakeholders
- (3) Integration of the different components of FSIS

Focus of the group work was to tease out important issues and challenges pertinent to the thematic areas allocated to each of them and make detailed recommendations, provide general comments on the Issues Paper and identify areas for capacity-building for different stakeholders.

9. Adoption of Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions (Agenda Item 9)

The Seminar noted that the sub-region as a whole has serious challenges in developing its FSIS. Some of the challenges are:

- i. Data paucity at the national and sub-regional levels.
- ii. Inadequate and/or limited coordination between and among components and institutions.
- iii. Main focus on agriculture early warning systems.
- iv. Inadequate internal funding and high reliance on external donors.
- v. Institutional deficiencies and lack of human capacity for FSIS institutions.
- vi. Inadequate appreciation of the critical role that FSIS play in informing programmes and policies.

Following the group discussions and the deliberations from the plenary, the Seminar made specific recommendations on:

- » The way forward in improving the Issues Paper.
- » Integrating the different components of FSIS.
- » FSIS communication strategy and stakeholders' involvement.
- » FSIS institutional and financial sustainability and
- » Other cross-cutting issues.

9.1 General Comments and Recommendations on the Issues Paper

- » The introduction to the Issues Paper is long and should be summarized, mainly focusing on information systems, demographics, socio-economic and macroeconomic data.
- » HIV-AIDS, being a critical factor affecting food security in the sub-region, should be given due attention and recommendations drawn on how the FSIS can incorporate the phenomenon.
- » The Background Paper should clearly state how the FSIS outputs will get through to the primary targets who are mainly the small-scale farmers in the SADC region.
- » The learning process from past experiences needs further elaboration and should highlight other lessons going beyond the Devereux findings. Best practices from the VAC should be used alongside the Kenya experience.

- » The Paper should clearly highlight policy recommendations.

9.2 Integrating the Different Components of FSIS

- » FSIS should be demand-driven and built on a “marketing approach” anchored on the clear understanding of the clients and their respective needs.
- » RECs and other stakeholders should not build regional FSIS on the basis of weak national and sub-regional systems and ignore existing networks. Initiatives aimed at strengthening FSIS should also avoid promoting centralized rather than decentralized mechanisms.
- » RECs should promote a multi-agency technical consensus approach in building and strengthening FSIS, learn from existing success stories in the sub-region and elsewhere and address the challenges related to timely access to network/partners’ data.
- » FSIS should be built on a broader definition of food security, giving due consideration to the adequacy of food and nutritional aspects going beyond the conventional definition, which restricts itself to issues of availability and access only.
- » Member States, RECs and other stakeholders need to enhance capacity and use data from the early warning national units in the process of strengthening the national ownership of FSIS. They will need to address the policymakers’ reluctance to recognize early warning alerts coming from abroad.
- » RECs should build and/or strengthen multi-stakeholder committees such as the VAC in order to take into account the linkages among different components and dimensions of food security, building on existing success stories from Kenya and Zambia.
- » Member States need to have permanent Secretariats with dedicated staff working on regular assessments and monitoring of FSIS.
- » Collaborating agencies should be encouraged to continue producing their own reports on major food security issues and promoting, in special circumstances, joint reports publication.
- » International cooperating partners, including UNECA, should strengthen the capacity of FSIS in mobilizing domestic and external resources.
- » The SADC Secretariat’s financial and human capacity should be strengthened in order to promote effective FSIS.

9.3 Communication Strategy and Stakeholders’ Involvement

- » A holistic and integrated communication strategy, including databases development, web and publications, should be made an essential component of strengthening FSIS. Data and information on food security must be packaged in a more simplified manner.

- » Communication activities, awareness-building and advocacy should be conducted for policymakers, governments, the media and other key stakeholders.
- » There should be a link between the FSIS communication strategy and funding mechanisms/modalities for purposes of sustainability.
- » The communication strategy should encompass capacity-building activities and training opportunities for different stakeholders involved in the collection, packaging, delivery and utilization of food security information at national and sub-regional levels.
- » The linkages between the media and the researchers on food security need to be strengthened for effective coverage of the pertinent issues.
- » The interaction between the collection of global data and national data systems should be reinforced to render credence to the FSIS at all levels.
- » There is need for efficient communication between national and regional levels for accurate information to be collected frequently and regularly.
- » It is imperative to secure government involvement at the highest levels of FSIS through advocacy and awareness-building programmes. This could be done within the framework of the COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite processes.
- » Media involvement in reporting of food security information should be enhanced and combined with capacity-building activities. Dissemination of food security information should be implemented through innovative but cost-effective means. Training editors and buying newspaper space and media slots should be part of such means.
- » RECs, member States and other stakeholders are urged to take the opportunity provided by latest developments in ICT, e.g. proliferation of web and mobile applications and the CAADP development agenda to enhance the effectiveness of FSIS.

9.4 FSIS Institutional and Financial Sustainability

- » The issues of food security information should be handled by an institution, which has political clout and enjoys respect and authority over other Ministries or Statutory Boards or agencies. Such an institution should be headed by a senior government appointee e.g. Permanent Secretary or presidential appointee.
- » The issue of food security information, especially the early warning system should be a standing agenda item at SADC Ministerial/Council/Summit levels as well as national levels.
- » SADC should take a leading role in coordinating national systems as well as donors and partners.
- » Governments should put in place adequate operational and training budgetary allocations for FSIS.
- » Stakeholders need to explore innovative financing mechanisms, including, where necessary, user fees and lobbying cooperating partners for sustainable funding.

9.5 Cross-cutting Issues

- » FSIS should serve as a tool in promoting intra- and extra-regional trade, especially in moving food from regions of surplus to those in deficit and also strengthening the linkages between food markets and other sectors of the economy.
- » Member States and other stakeholders should embark on harmonizing data collecting methodologies and tools for purposes of generating comparable data and information in the sub-region.
- » There is need to cultivate deep collaboration between SADC and COMESA crop forecast reports, food balance sheets and other early warning initiatives.
- » FSIS should harness indigenous knowledge to supplement the conventional information tools and integrated livestock dimension.
- » Cross-cutting issues such as rapid urbanization, rising food prices, HIV/AIDS, climate change and population growth should be taken into account while strengthening FSIS.

10. Any Other Business (Agenda Item 10)

The Seminar was informed of the coming session of the SADC Vulnerability Assessment Committee and ECA-SA was encouraged to be part of the committee, which is an instrumental institutional arrangement in strengthening FSIS in the sub-region.

11. Closure of the Seminar (Agenda Item 11)

Mr. Bentry Chaura, Senior Programme Officer – Food Security from the SADC Agriculture Information Management Systems (AIMS) – expressed his gratitude to the ECA for organizing the Seminar, which was timely given the issues and challenges faced by the sub-region in promoting food security for all. He also acknowledged, with great appreciation, the active participation and high level of interaction during the deliberations, which contributed to the successful outcome of the Seminar. He challenged the participants to bring the recommendations from the Seminar into implementation at the national and sub-regional levels and wished them safe passage to their respective homes.

Mr. Chance Kabaghe, the representative from the Zambia Food Security Research Project, gave, on behalf of the participants, a vote of thanks to the organizers for a successful seminar, which provided a learning opportunity and a call for action to all.

Mr. Sizo D. Mhlanga, the ECA-SA Acting Director, extended his appreciation to the participants for meeting the objectives of the Seminar and ensured them about the ECA-SA office's commitment to implement some of the recommendations of the meeting through its the upcoming biennium work programme. He appreciated the commitment of the participants, which showed the importance of the issue discussed and expressed special thanks to the Chair and the Rapporteur for their contribution to the success of the meeting and officially closed the Seminar.

Annex

The list of the participants

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