

## Roundtable on Sustainable African Agriculture and CAADP 2014 review

Brussels, 28 November 2013

### **SUMMARY OF THE MAIN MESSAGES**

*On November 28, APRODEV and ECDPM jointly held a roundtable bringing together key stakeholders to discuss issues that are central to sustainable agricultural development and their implication for the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), notably focusing on (i) land and water management, (ii) seeds, (iii) participatory research and (iv) family and women farming. At the start of both the UN International Year of Family Farming and the AU Year of Agriculture and Food Security the timing is right to highlight issues that are fundamental to the large majority of African people engaged in farming as their main livelihood. Through highly interactive exchanges, seminar participants discussed and exchanged ideas about their experiences in the field and about new policies and instruments. This note presents a summary of the key messages resulting from this roundtable and proposed follow-up activities.*

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) is one of the first comprehensive frameworks that focuses specifically on small scale and traditional farmers in rural areas, which represents the main source of livelihood for over 60% of the African population. However considerable debate remains whether the policies implemented under this framework achieve this in practice. A certain divide between supporting commercially viable farmers (more than 10 hectares of land) and smallholder farmers (less than 2 hectares of land) is apparent in agricultural policies. Below we outline some of the main points brought out of the presentations and discussions of the day.

### **Land and water resource management**

The fundamental natural resources for agriculture are rapidly degrading: land, soil and water above all. Competition is increasing for access to land and water and existing policies are failing to safeguard smallholder farmer's access to these resources. Reversing this trend by moving from an overexploitation of land and water resources to holistic approaches that provide land rehabilitation will be crucial to develop a sustainable future.

Actions under the first pillar of the CAADP framework on land and water management have largely focused on large-scale irrigation and infrastructure projects, mainly for roads and dams, while the issue of land rights and tenure have been neglected. Research has pointed to a number of legal systems that can act as the interface between private and public law to protect land user rights (e.g. customary, collective and community land tenure agreements).

As from January 2014, following requests from Member states, the AUC-ECA-AfDB Land Policy Initiative (LPI)<sup>1</sup> will be piloted in a number of African countries. This initiative supports the development of a framework to enable the use of land to lend impetus to the process of African Development, particularly through evidence for mainstreaming land policy and governance for future CAADP work.

Ongoing land grabs are an increasing threat to family farming, at a time when large tracts of prime agricultural land are acquired for intensive commercial farming.

Participants discussed the urgent need for agricultural practices to sustain and care for the environmental resources on which they rely. Most African countries face a two-fold challenge, to increase production (ensuring food security for an increasing population) and to prevent resource degradation. Often, social deprivation and land degradation go hand in hand, but so do social empowerment and land rehabilitation. A renewed focus on smallholder intensification, by combining indigenous knowledge, traditional farming practices and scientific insights, could lead the way. Examples of participatory approaches to water and land management at the local level were also discussed; however the question remains on how to integrate these alternative visions into policy processes.

Organisations in the field increasingly perceive a gap between policies that support the 20% of commercially-viable farmers (controlling plots of more than 10 hectares) and smallholder farmers representing the overwhelming majority of farmers. Participants called for a reorientation of the CAADP framework towards policies that supported both groups of farmers instead of disproportionately focusing on the former.

## **Seeds from a legal and practical perspective**

Seeds are a crucial part to any farming practice and agricultural policy. Seeds are also vital for safeguarding diversity, improving resilience and providing sustainable agricultural options for the future. From a legal perspective, seed regulation and intellectual property rights are intertwined and complex issues. Participants expressed concern at possible detrimental effects of new seed laws on small holder farmers by for example forcing smallholders to purchase costly seed varieties (and synthetic fertilizers) to meet requirements for uniformity of produce. Seed laws also hold the risk to undermine farmers rights' relying on home-saved seeds to use and exchange own seeds. But participants also recognised the need to safeguard and protect the production and trade of seeds for commercial usage. Current seed regulation regimes tend to focus mainly on the trade of seeds and plant-breeders rights while neglecting the rights of farmers who have nurtured seed and freely provided access to this seed and for centuries relied on the informal trade of seed and plant varieties.

There is concern that harmonisation of seed laws, such as recently adopted in the region of East and Southern Africa, are biased in favour of commercial seed producers over smallholders<sup>2</sup>. While initiatives under CAADP should improve seed standards, there is a pressing need to safeguard access to and free exchange of seeds among smallholder farmers. Current frameworks grant proprietary rights to private sector seed varieties, while putting at risk (or possibly criminalising) farmers who save, re-use, exchange and sell their seeds.

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<sup>1</sup> A joint programme of the tripartite consortium consisting of the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) <http://www.uneca.org/lpi>

<sup>2</sup> For more information see <http://www.acbio.org.za/images/stories/dmdocuments/AFSA-STATEMENT-COMESA-SEED-REGULATIONS.pdf>

Public breeding programmes underscoring the research and promotion of indigenous seed varieties are needed for the long-term sustainability of the seed sector<sup>3</sup>. Indigenous communities have safeguarded these seeds over centuries and must be an integral part of these initiatives.

Participants called for a plurality of legal systems that work for both, commercial seed traders as well as for African smallholder farmers.

Practically, smallholder farmers are already financially constrained to afford inputs like fertilizer to improve crop yields and they will certainly struggle to purchase improved seeds varieties. This presents further arguments in favour of greater integration of agro-ecological approaches into African agricultural frameworks such as CAADP.

The African Union's Integrated Seed Sector Development strategy<sup>4</sup> recognises the difficulty encountered by a number of African countries to adapt their legal framework to farmers' practices and realities. Pluralistic legal frameworks should support the informal seed systems, on which majority of African smallholder farmers rely, while promoting entrepreneurship in the seed sector.

## **Participatory Research - a bottom up approach to sustainable intensification through agroecology and income generation**

The challenge of real participatory research is to work side by side with local farming communities, to listen and respond to their needs and to improve and complement their own knowledge with scientific knowledge. This approach has been used in response to farmers' requests to improve the quality, productivity and uniformity of the indigenous trees producing traditionally-important products formerly gathered from forests before land clearance, by the simple and rapid development of selected cultivars. These new crops are then used to increase farm diversity and functionality and to stimulate new marketing and business in rural communities through the development of cottage industries.

Farmers want to increase and diversify their farm production with traditionally-important nutritious foods, medicines and other useful products that are becoming increasingly inaccessible from the wild. They are keen on the new marketing and business opportunities that these create and which allow them to diversify, sustain and improve their livelihoods from the processing and value-addition of these products from their fields. Increasing smallholder farmers' choices to diversify into business and cottage industries is key to developing a viable rural economy in Africa. In particular smallholders depend on better and more sustainable access to their natural resource base: on water and soil quality and hence are allies in the search for more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable agricultural production methods.

A major problem of traditional farming is the widespread occurrence of yield gaps – the difference between the yield potential of modern crop varieties and what the farmer without access to agrichemicals can achieve. Research shows<sup>5</sup> that yield improvements of 200 to 500% increase in yield can be achieved by overcoming the environmental and economic constraints that are responsible for these yield gaps. A way forward is therefore to use a 3-step approach to closing the yield gaps using existing varieties of staple

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<sup>3</sup> Such as the African Plant Breeding Academy, launched in December 2013 in Kenya:

[http://pba.ucdavis.edu/PBA\\_in\\_Africa/](http://pba.ucdavis.edu/PBA_in_Africa/)

<sup>4</sup> <http://pages.au.int/caadp/events/second-communique-integrated-seed-sector-development>

<sup>5</sup> World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) see [www.worldagroforestry.org](http://www.worldagroforestry.org)

crops, and new farmer-produced elite tree cultivars producing nutritious and marketable fruits and nuts for sale in local and regional markets.

Participants recognised that agroecological low-input research methods works best when going hand in hand with income generating possibilities and market creation that in turn motivates and brings farmers on board to invest. Underperforming crops can be rapidly improved by a 'quantum leap' in yield using applied agroforestry research based on 'fertiliser' trees for improved soil fertility, while income can be greatly enhanced by making 'quick money' from tree planting businesses and nurseries, and the processing, marketing and trading of new products and varieties which require low investment. Together this leads to greatly enhanced food and nutritional security, and improved livelihoods. Sustainable intensification methods using agroforestry can thus make a significant contribution to the MDGs and to youth employment and to job creation shared among women and men.

As the next step, participants call for a participatory approach to research policy and agenda setting under CAADP's apex research organisation i.e. the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA). Revising existing research and development policies is often experienced as an uphill struggle. Research policies are often focussed on increasing potential yield through elite breeding for elite traders on elite markets; rather than on the much greater potential of closing the existing yield gap. In the past, research policies have neglected the rich varieties of wild species that local populations, smallholders, pastorals and indigenous people depend on for food, medicines and day-to-day use. Sustainable agriculture must be redefined as a concept that combines social, economic and environmental elements and provides new equilibrium of improved nutrition in soil and food with socio-economic benefits and income possibilities. Programmes working on integrated agricultural research models, such as the Sub Saharan Africa Challenge Programme<sup>6</sup>, are an example of possible alternatives that should garner more attention. CAADP should encourage extension services, curriculums, farming schools and research agendas to include knowledge on agroforestry. Regulatory frameworks under CAADP should protect farmers' traditional knowledge and right to tree products produced in farmers' fields.

Upscaling approaches such as agroforestry deserve more attention and need the cooperation of all stakeholders. Community based and NGO-funded programmes potentially could reach out to millions of African farmers but are currently constrained by lack of insight at the policy level on how to build on farmers' innovations and stimulate the approaches described above. CAADP could design research and funding frameworks and extension services that invite existing institutions to advice CAADP on participatory farmers' research and agroforestry. The CAADP Non State Actor consultation group could be extended to include more local farmers' organisations and participatory research institutes in the process of policy making. FARA could support initiatives and promote exchange platforms to upscale agroforestry farming models. Linking up initiatives such as INSARD<sup>7</sup> and CAADP's research community could be a way forward.

## **Family Farming to capture its due place in sustainable agriculture**

After a long neglect of agricultural development, smallholder farmers are back on the radar. However, the current emphasis of CAADP on agriculture as a driver for economic development is largely targeting the 20% of smallholder farmers in a position to stepping up production for commercial lucrative markets and to invest in input supply (mainly seeds and fertilisers) to achieve this. This approach neglects the 80% of

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.fara-africa.org/our-projects/ssa-cp/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.repaoc.org/insard>

peasants and subsistence farmers who are the custodians of our biodiversity and food security despite their destitute livelihoods. Different farming communities and schemes need different approaches. It is not viable to invest all in commercial markets. The right support strategy for small scale farmers can allow them to become sustainable and viable economic units.

Participants discussed a complete rethink away from exploiting natural resource or “mining the soil for minerals” towards the rehabilitation of degraded land, the introduction of new forms of science and technologies that build on indigenous knowledge and systems like nitrogen recycling trees, community selected water management, indigenous land use and laws, community seed banks and public breeding programmes. The focus needs to be to improve the situation of family farmers and to build upon what they have and know, helping them to remain on their land, to enlarge or to multiply existing initiatives.

Participants agree that a bottom up approach to research and markets is most beneficial to family farming approaches that provide for solutions based approaches to food security. Participants identified the need to articulate a new vision of small scale farming that shows their potential as key drivers to sustainable agriculture futures, improved livelihoods and food security. CAADP should engage policy and legal frameworks that are responsive and diversify its approaches and target groups and start to invest in family farming as a viable and sustainable economic activity on small plots of land that may range from 2 or less than 2 hectares of land, which is where the bulk of the food is produced.

## **CAADP and steps forward**

Ten years after the Maputo Declaration, CAADP is now firmly moving towards the implementation phase. The large majority of countries and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have completed or are in the last stages of finalising their compacts and investment plans. Over the past year the ‘Sustaining the CAADP momentum’ exercise has explored how the CAADP framework will enable regions and countries to translate the CAADP vision of agricultural development into reality.

2014 will see how countries will move agriculture development from mere food production to wealth and job creation, improved livelihoods and increased access to food. This will require political will and involvement of diverse and domestic actors in the private sector, especially their largest grouping the farmers themselves, at all stages. Hopefully the UN Year of Family Farming and the AU Year of Agriculture and Food Security will bring additional international momentum for more inclusive processes.

EU funding frameworks and priorities to support food security in Africa are currently defined and the challenge is to identify and support initiatives that can be implemented and scaled up. Participants suggested to: 1) set up an exchange platform involving key stakeholders and 2) organise a meeting on upscaling relevant initiatives in the context of CAADP in Addis Ababa in 2014 at the AUC and NEPAD head offices.

## **Organisers**

**APRODEV - Association of WCC-related  
Development Organisations in Europe**

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