

CCARDESA Positioned for Climate Smart Agriculture – Part 1

By Simon Mwale

Of late, the challenge of climate change has been brought to the fore, not only through journalistic reports, but rather through the self-manifestation of weather events that even a child can easily see. The floods experienced in some parts of Zambia in the 2019/2020 rain season and the devastating drought mainly in Southern Province in the 2018/19 season are good examples of the effects of climate change. At regional level, lives and livelihoods were lost in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zimbabwe when three devastating cyclones swept through the three countries during the 2018/19 rain season.

At the international level, debate is still raging on how best to deal with climate change and what actions need to be taken by countries to address two aspects: mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Year after year, the Conference of Parties for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is convened and negotiations are held. Indeed, some progress has been made under the UNFCCC but there is still a lot more ground to be covered in reducing the emission of green-house gases that cause climate change as well as getting a united front on the matter. Recently, the United States of America (USA) withdrew from an international agreement on climate change, leaving the rest of the countries bewildered but not beaten. So the global efforts continue.

Dealing with climate change is like maintaining a chain in its unbroken state. Thus, each component has to be strong and committed enough to make a small but very significant input to the overall strength. For the Southern African region, there are a number of important stakeholders, each of which makes a humble contribution based on their mandates and competitive advantages. The Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA) is among the many institutions in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region with a role to play in improving the adaptation capacity of the farming systems of Southern Africa to climate change.

In the agricultural sector, climate change has caused significant reductions in production and productivity of crops, livestock, fish and forest products. In the case of fish, drought can completely obliterate their habitat and leave them without 'a home.' Excess rain, which can result in flooding, is also

undesirable to the agricultural sector as it damages crops, can kill livestock and fish, and can significantly disturb the growth of forest products. The effects of the above factors tend to hit the core of the poor in society and they lose their livelihoods. More significant is the fact that farmers and the general populous in impoverished communities do not have the capacity to recover from effects of a single season on their farming activities and incomes.

Since its establishment in 2010, CCARDESA has taken significant steps in supporting SADC countries to implement measures that can result in mitigation or adaptation of farming systems to climate change. The first of such efforts started in 2016 when CCARDESA, in collaboration with the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), started carrying out a range of capacity building activities aimed at raising awareness of climate change among stakeholders and assisting the sector to adopt more of adaptation strategies.

The organization has provided direct training to staff in both the private and public sectors, supported the development of knowledge products that contain information on climate change, and supported the development and dissemination of technologies that contribute to good performance of the agricultural enterprises under stress conditions. Furthermore, the organisation facilitated policy reviews related to climate change and facilitated the inclusion of aspects of adaptation to climate change into the National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPS) of the SADC countries.

The wide range of activities conducted by CCARDESA in the SADC region targets different levels of the agricultural sector. Some of these activities deal with policy makers while others go down to the extension workers who are close to the farmers as technical advisors. Farmer organizations and technical people in the private and public sectors are also involved in this process. The ultimate objective is to transform the farming systems of the SADC countries to become resilient enough to maintain reasonable levels of production and productivity in conditions of weather extremes. For this to be achieved, CCARDESA works with all stakeholders, at all levels, that have a role to play in bringing about resilience of farmers' production systems.

One does not need to look far to find the perfect position that CCARDESA has taken in the quest for improving farmer resilience to climate change. The CCARDESA Strategic Plan 2020-2029 has clearly shown the importance that the organization attaches to dealing with climate change adaptation of

the farming systems in the region and their belief that this is bound to be a game changer in ensuring food and nutrition security in the SADC region. Dealing with climate change is a significant priority in the CCARDESA Strategic Plan.

But the theory of explicitly presenting one's interests and practice can be worlds apart in some instances – but not with CCARDESA. The organization is perfectly walking the talk. The expressions found in the CCARDESA Strategic Plan are being matched by actions. CCARDESA recently launched a regional project worth €5.3 million on 27-28 February in Lusaka. The project deals with capacity building of SADC countries to improve resilience of their farming systems in relation to climate change.

During the launch, CCARDESA fully acknowledged the financial support of the European Union for this project and the fiduciary role played by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). In addition, CCARDESA is in the process of developing a similar project with assistance from the SADC Secretariat and funding from the European Union. This will complement the existing projects that CCARDESA is implementing on climate change.

As a regional organization, CCARDESA respects the principles governing subsidiarity. Therefore, the operational model of CCARDESA is based on partnerships and ensuring that it does not go beyond its operating turf. In fulfilling this approach, the organization works with partners in the countries, based on clear roles and responsibilities. In Zambia, CCARDESA has had a long history of working with the Government Ministries – for example the Ministry of Agriculture - and also various private sector organizations. This year, CCARDESA is increasing its partnership base and has had talks with COMESA, RENAPRI, Mi Zed (which is run by the youths), NUFSAZ, WWF and others. Similarly, the organization is increasing its range of International Cooperating Partners (ICPs) and the technical partners at regional and continental level.

One may ask “what is the specific technical work that CCARDESA is going to do under the new project that was launched on 27-28 February, 2020?” The answer has been reserved for Part 2 of this series of articles in which the author deals with specific technical details of the CAADP-XP4 project and what this project intends to deliver for the SADC region and Zambia. Don't miss it.

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