Livestock research and development practitioners in the region welcomed the opening up of ILRI’s regional office in southern Africa five years ago. ILRI identified two areas as possible entry points: a) enhancing the market participation of smallholder farmers, and b) reducing the vulnerability and increasing the resilience of communities who derive the bulk of their livelihoods from livestock.

Since then, ILRI has made progress with the theme on enhancing market opportunities, as is shown by ongoing work on value chain analysis and innovations systems approaches with a focus on cattle and goats in selected countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). However, there is still a visible gap on the reducing vulnerability theme. This is one area that ILRI still needs to do more in this region.

This region has been identified as one of the hotspots for climate change with most model projections to 2050 indicating a largely dry region. There is no doubt that management of feeding resources for livestock, including water, will become an area where we need innovations focused on mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

As we look to the future, we need to address the role of livestock, particularly small stock, in the livelihoods of poor farmers. History will judge us by our ability to feed vulnerable members of society in a climate-challenged world. There is opportunity for ILRI to strengthen its collaboration with existing partners and create new ones in order to meaningfully contribute to this agenda.

We look forward to continued engagement with ILRI in advancing the livestock agenda for sustainable natural resources in the face of global climate change. As an ILRI champion in this region, I am grateful to have worked under the guidance of former ILRI director general Carlos Seré and have no doubt that ILRI and the partners benefited from his great leadership. I had the pleasure of meeting Carlos and listening and reading his work. His passion was evident and inspirational.
I wish Carlos well in his new endeavors and look forward to working with ILRI’s new director general, Jimmy Smith.

Agriculture remains the cornerstone of the society we live in and together we can do more!

Contributed by Sikhulazo Dube, senior scientist, rangeland ecology and management, with the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) of South Africa and ILRI ‘champion’ in the region.

On 9 and 10 November 2011, the ILRI Board of Trustees hosted a 2-day ‘liveSTOCK Exchange’ to discuss and reflect on livestock research for development.