FANRPAN

Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network

Strengthening the Capacity of the Nodes and Revamping FANRPAN Node Structures

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FANRPAN Regional Secretariat and Node Coordinators, Maputo, Mozambique

With population growth far exceeding growth in staple food production, and climate change beginning to take its toll, does Africa have the time to rectify the situation?

In many Southern African countries population growth has been slowed by HIV and AIDS related mortality, but so has productivity in agriculture. Poverty and malnutrition continue unabated yet these at the same time hold back agricultural productivity improvements and broader economic recovery, thus condemning the sub-region to a perpetual cycle of poverty, under-development and social and economic deprivation.

For decades a key barrier to the achievement of a green revolution in Africa, and Southern Africa especially, has remained and still is the unsupportive policy environment. What is urgently needed to break this barrier is known; these are inclusive and broad-based policy reforms that create and provide incentives at every stage of the food value chain to encourage higher investment into the food sector. Yet, the policy formulation culture in many countries remains inhibitive, typically top-down, populist and dominated by the governments and the few literate. Policies are often recycled without sufficient learning from previous policy failures (or successes). **This raises the question whether we know how to learn from our own experiences?**

National and regional platforms for broad-based policy formulation are often absent, neither is there sufficient documented evidence on what works (and what does not) to inform policy choices. Think tanks are unfortunately too few. Policy research is irregular and not credible due to poor funding and lack of skills to package high quality research outputs. National universities for example are generally poorly funded and fail to attract and retain top-notch researchers. Whilst farmers know what works and what does not, they are often excluded in policy formulation. At best they are engaged when it is too late, often creating the impression they are needed to rubber stamp policy decisions already finalised at higher political levels.

One of the critical barriers affecting the policy input from farmers in Southern Africa is the disconnect between farmers and researchers. In addition, most farmers are small scale, illiterate, not well organised and usually not well informed. The voice of many involved in small scale farming is weak and hardly heard especially in regional and global policy dialogue.

The Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Network (FANRPAN) was set up in 1997 with a specific mandate from the FANR Ministers in Eastern and Southern Africa to address capacity weaknesses in policy formulation in the region. FANRPAN has already succeeded to create a regional stakeholder platform that brings together farmers, the private sector, government, NGOs and researchers in SADC, ESA and COMESA to dialogue on critical policy issues. FANRPAN is creating the opportunities for policy dialogue and the exchange of ideas directly between farmers in the field, researchers in laboratories, think-tanks and policy makers in conference rooms and parliaments throughout Africa.

To help bring its constituency together, FANRPAN's has national nodes in 13 member states with a national secretariat hosted by an existing national institution in each country that has a mandate for increasing agricultural research and advocacy. But these institutions (nodes) have different levels of capacity. As a result, a key thrust of FANRPAN's current Strategic Business Plan (2008-15) is to strengthen the capacity of these nodes to become more effective hubs of policy research, information collection, documentation and sharing, and providing policy advice with sufficient credibility to influence policy decisions.

There are many opportunities to be exploited,

but so are the challenges that confront FANRPAN's work on capacity building of nodes. This Newsletter is dedicated to discussing these opportunities and challenges focusing on issues such as: governance and leadership, operations and management systems, human-resources management, financial management systems, capacity for programming and service delivery, and external relations and advocacy strategies.

Moving to stronger node governance and leadership

Governance structures of FANRPAN nodes vary markedly in their strength. They range from nodes with well-functioning Boards of Trustees, that are democratically appointed, abiding by the constitution, providing strategic guidance and exercising good control over activities of the nodes through well-articulated strategic plans and well laid out board procedures, to nodes whose boards are inactive and are not properly constituted. In building capacity of nodes in the area of governance, FANRPAN has the opportunity to draw from best practice among its own constituency and promote cross-learning between the boards. Boards that have the capacity to provide the necessary oversight and strategic direction on the operations of their organisations but lack a clear strategic plan will be immediately supported to develop these as vehicles for resource mobilisation. Such strategic plans should articulate clearly the vision, mission and values of the nodes, as well as key result areas and clear strategies. Each plan should have a coherent results framework and a result-oriented budget to guide resource mobilisation and monitoring and evaluation.

In strengthening node governance structures, FANRPAN will also work with nodes to effectively widen the representation by increasing participation of civil society and the private sector. Some boards are dominated by government players, and this hinders effective engagement of other sectors in the activities of the nodes. As new board members are incorporated, nodes will be supported to develop board procedures and train board members and induct them on FANRPAN activities.

Although some nodes have all the governance structures in place, they lack financial support to strengthen the operations of these structures, especially for the board to be able to meet regularly and exercise its leadership functions. FANRPAN seeks to provide such nodes with technical support to develop effective resource mobilisation strategies built upon their strategic plans, and also provide direct budgetary support for such node level activities. Nodes will be encouraged to incorporate their Board meetings if necessary into their cost estimated annual work plans.

FANRPAN Partners Meeting, Pretoria, South Africa

FANRPAN nodes that are hosted by government structures do not have the autonomy which could allow them to create their own governance and management tools. They are not free from vertical subordination to government structures and thus remain circumscribed to focus and scope of the broader government system when it comes to strategic envisioning. However, their strategic planning process and capacities will still be enhanced to maximise on the complementarities between the missions of the government and of FANRPAN.

Strengthening FANRPAN node operations and management systems

The cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation usually lacks adequate support and capacity among many nodes. Although all nodes undertake planning around their missions, for some nodes, there is a clear need for greater involvement of their constituencies in planning and review. Planning and review need to be systematised, internalised and well funded. Most node strategic plans are implemented without a clear participatory monitoring and evaluation system. Few nodes actually evaluate the impact of their work. Hence results for their constituencies are not documented nor published. This practice often ricochets as nodes fail to mobilise resources from their constituencies for reason of non-visibility and failure to demonstrate the value of such investment. The current FANRPAN business plan seeks to offer concrete support to nodes in this area of developing sound M&E systems and institutionalising technically sound planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Some nodes have outstanding administrative procedures including security systems for their assets, but others clearly need some strengthening. Policies on replacement of aged equipment are often absent, resulting in many nodes keeping equipment that is beyond its economic life.

Many nodes urgently need support to modernise their information management systems, including ICTs. Almost all need to improve internet connectivity, secure new open system software and develop an effective management information system.

As ICTs are at the centre of information communication strategies that FANRPAN requires for effective networking, this area is being given increasing attention, including not just assisting nodes to purchase ICTs but to interface the node e-resource platforms with those of the Regional Secretariat to enable nodes to upload and disseminate strategic outputs and information through the FANRPAN Regional Secretariat website and database.

Attracting and retaining top-talent through strengthened human resources management systems

Nodes are working hard to improve staff conditions of service and morale but achievements differ across them with some being quite satisfactory while others would be further improved once strategic planning is concluded and the plans are funded and implemented. Many nodes still need to improve on spelling out clearly staff roles (job descriptions) in contracts, clarifying policy and strategy on staff development and developing manuals on disciplinary and grievance procedures to manage potential conflict. FANRPAN will offer technical support to overhaul HR management systems of its nodes, including hands-on support to enable nodes to come up with staff development plans.

Impartation of skills in results-based management would greatly improve staff performance. Staff capacity and performance management are major gaps almost across the board. With the exception of a few nodes that have adequate staff capacity (in terms of numbers of appropriately qualified personnel in post) and are well equipped with modern technology, low staff capacity and resources to coordinate and support thematic activities and to provide analytical review of the work done or commissioned by the nodes still haunts FANRPAN's nodes. Many nodes are failing to fill (or retain staff in) established posts largely due to funding constraints and this is limiting their ability to fulfil their missions.

In general, staff performance management systems are compromised, with little or no evi-

dence of use of results-based management tools such as the balanced score card or dash-board. Time sheets to monitor staff productivity are rarely (if at all) used. Revamping staff performance management systems will require FANRPAN to adopt a staged approach, beginning with inculcation of basic concepts through training and then technological and software support to implement computerised staff performance management systems. FANRPAN will have to partner with competent HR management service providers to support the network with training and mentoring but through a node-led process.

In addition, node resource mobilisation strategies will be bolstered through technical support and linking nodes with potential funders. This would be expected to increase income streams of nodes eventually enabling them to recruit more staff and/or offer existing staff more competitive salaries that motivate and contribute to staff retention. Such a strategy will go a long way to address the acute skills deficit in some nodes in the area of coordination, policy research, documenting and sharing results of policy dialogue sessions and championing policy advocacy.

Building credible financial management systems and capacity

With the exception of nodes that are hosted by government institutions, many are in desperate need of predictable and unrestricted core funding for effective programming, a challenge also shared by the Regional Secretariat but which the network is devising strategies to address. Only a few nodes have their constituency contributing core-funding or generating revenue through cost-recovery measures. Some of the nodes which have succeeded in introducing annual subscriptions for members have only managed to secure nominal contributions which are hardly adequate monthly recurrent costs. Almost all nodes heavily rely on donor funds for

support.

Some nodes have medium-to-long term plans but these are yet to be used to adequately mobilise resources in the form of either internally generated revenue or pool funding from donors for programmatic support. As a result most nodes are implementing their strategic plans through fragmented donor funded projects, with some co-mingling the funds when disbursements for some of the projects arrive late.

FANRPAN through the Regional Secretariat plans to strengthen financial management capacities of its nodes on results-oriented budgeting, budget tracking and donor reporting, a major area of its own strength. In addition, FANRPAN will assist the nodes to develop and implement sustainable resource mobilisation strategies in the context of a strengthened system of strategic planning.

A few nodes (universities and line ministries) rely on government funding but which is usually not enough for planned activities. FANRPAN will build the capacity of these nodes to mobilise resources from outside government through both cost-recovery and strategic public-private sector partnerships.

Research institutions (universities and policy research institutes) engage in commissioned consultancies to boost their financial inflows. FANRPAN will link these institutions to international bodies that require partners for policy research in the region, as well as commission own policy research using these members of the FANRPAN network. Alongside this support the Network will promote north-south partnerships that strengthen the analytical capacities of researchers in the region.

Most of the research, documentation and publication activities of nodes are covered by donor funding, which is usually short term and unpre-

dictable. Yet this function is critical for visibility and sustainability of the nodes and thus should be funded ideally with core-funds. To address this, nodes need support to develop resource mobilization strategies that will widen their funding base, facilitate resource sustainability and promote visibility and their competitiveness in the regional and global research and publication market.

Ultimately nodes should have funding strategies that allow for some independence in programming. Reliance on donor funding hampers them from implementing their strategies with autonomy and holistically. This imposes the risk of mission creep as nodes try to respond to demands of donors and not necessary those of their constituencies. Hence FANRPAN will help nodes to speed up discussions with their constituencies on innovative self-financing mechanisms for sustainability. Some of the measures include cost-recovery, members' subscription fees and outdoor fundraising activities such as agricultural shows or market fairs where levies or gate collections can be collected.

Finally, due to poor funding and staff shortage, some nodes have weak financial management systems, with no clear segregation of duties in finance. Some do not have senior personnel in their finance units. FANRPAN will invest significantly in building financial management systems of nodes. Such systems upgrading could focus on computerisation of accounts, development of sound accounting policies and procedures, strengthening corporate governance, and recruitment of accounts personnel (on temporary or permanent basis) with the requisite qualifications and experience to ensure adherence to general accepted international accounting standards.

Enhancing capacity for programming and service delivery

Many nodes, even with just a little support, are able to develop comprehensive strategic frameworks which they need to guide medium term programming, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment. This is a critical area where FANRPAN will assist with technical and financial support to enable each node to formulate its own robust five-year strategic plan, operational plan and project proposals for possible funding. The strategic plans should spell out how the nodes will address staffing requirements. Nodes will be sensitised on the need to develop long term staff development plans and supported to implement them covering all categories of staff. FANRPAN will specifically assist nodes in identifying potential donors and lobbying for support.

Some research-oriented nodes have outstanding research competencies, but results from research activities remain within the confines of the institution because they are viewed as an academic exercise, and not action-oriented.

FANRPAN will enhance capacities for demand-driven research including linking its nodes to organisations that may need operational research services.

To take on and successfully deliver the activities of FANRAN while the node continues with its regular mandate, skilled personnel dedicated specifically to FARPAN work are needed. Once in place such personnel can also strengthen the capacity of the node for its core mandate, for example with skills and financial resources to effectively market the work of the nodes as a whole rather than just FANRPAN-related. Many nodes already hold stakeholder platforms for dialogue, but resources are too few to follow-through resolutions or hold any follow-up meetings so as to continuously engage their constituency. Additional support to them would see

nodes able to continue to organise needed debates, bring on board the voiceless, and generate or provide the evidence needed for effective policy advocacy.

To reach the voiceless, at times, policy dialogues have to be convened at the grassroots level, and cascade all the way up to national but due to limited resources dialogue starts and stays at the higher levels. The process is not a once off meeting, but a series of consultations and good tracking of key issues and main points of consensus. Such a capacity has to be resident in the node or outsourced by the node. Such multi-level process of engagement is critical for strong ownership first of the debates and secondly of their outcomes by the node's constituency. Indirectly, the node will have marketed its services, strengthened ownership of its programmes at all relevant levels and built a stronger base for support in resource mobilisa-

tion. These capacities will be strengthened by helping the nodes to come up with effective networking and information communication systems and procedures to improve ownership of their country programmes by their members.

FANRPAN Regional Secretariat will work with nodes to develop and implement effective monitoring and impact measurement systems. The aim also is to have all nodes use state-of-the-art communication facilities (reliable broad-band internet access). All nodes should ultimately have well populated, functional and up-to-date websites and teleconferencing facilities, with upgraded information sources and services, possessing the necessary capacity in their information centres to use new technologies, and offering information literacy training. This provides FANRPAN with many opportunities for strengthening node ICT and information dissemination capacities.

Strengthening external relations and advocacy strategies of FANRPAN nodes

Nodes continue to register growing successes in establishing forums for engagement of their constituencies as well as other critical stakeholders like the media and the private sector briefing them on node activities, various policy issues and mobilising a critical mass of voice for lobbying and advocacy. Nonetheless, many nodes need to improve packaging and dissemination of policy research results. Many are yet to develop media and public relations strategies, linking their work to regional and international policy dialogue, and strengthening and formalising collaboration with non-members of their constituency. FANRPAN Secretariat has been working on this, bringing on board media personnel to participate in Annual Dialogue Meetings and training them on to report appropriately on policy issues concerning the food, agriculture and natural resources sector. The lessons learned from this work will be filtered into the nodes to assist them in crafting media strategies.

There is also evidence that some nodes have succeeded to engage in a wider range of internal and external networks and institutional collaborative activities to inform and sharpen their research agendas, better coordinate with others and pool the available resources. FANRPAN will complement these efforts by promoting their research collaboration and networking objectives, and negotiating space and resources for their involvement in policy-dialogue.

Namibia and Mauritius Node Delegates
Maputo, Mozambique

Mozambique Node Delegates
Maputo, Mozambique

About FANRPAN

The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) is an autonomous regional stakeholder driven policy research, analysis and implementation network that was formally established in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) in 1997. FANRPAN was borne out of the need by SADC governments who felt that comprehensive policies and strategies were required to resuscitate agriculture. FANRPAN is mandated to work in all SADC countries and currently has activities in 13 Southern African countries namely Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.