

**ASSURING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA BY 2020:  
Prioritizing Action, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships**  
April 1–3, 2004, Kampala, Uganda

**SUMMARY NOTE**

**Parallel Session:**     **Priorities for Action: Perspectives from Southern Africa**

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To find solutions to “how”, we are dealing with strategy. To change from one state to the desired future state requires a course of action. This IFPRI conference is well timed to add to the growing chorus of voices agitating for a new deal for African agriculture.

We just completed a milestone event for farmer organizations in Africa — articulating a continental position on CAADP, the NEPAD plan for agriculture. We submitted a statement on behalf of all farmers in Africa, at the FAO Regional Ministerial deliberations. Many of the insights and views are drawn from the work done during the event.

Farming is inherently a rural activity impacting rural economies. We have an important role to play as producers but we caution that to look to us, as the panacea will be ignoring the contribution and role that non-farming rural enterprises could make to alleviate the challenges of rural economies.

Accordingly, farmer organizations in Southern Africa believe that two complimentary strategies can be pursued:

1. Optimizing the agriculture output by farmers — this has a national and regional dimension; and
2. Ensuring that rural development policies and practices lead to the growth of rural areas – this is the most likely impact of successful farming.

**Regarding optimization**

In Southern Africa 2000, people face food shortages in a region that technically has sufficient intrinsic agriculture potential to feed itself and produce net surpluses. Such anomaly demands urgent attention.

Large historical disparities between white and black farmers are prevalent in South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. These call for actions that will redress the unequal access to land. This is a political process that needs to be implemented in a way that benefits all farmers without negatively impacting the agriculture output and investor confidence of the region.

Improving the technical ability of farmers is an imperative that needs no further justification.

Access to international markets is an absolute requirement for this region to reap the benefits of improved technologies and infrastructure upgrading. We cannot simply trade with each other as we produce similar products. Empirically, it appears that SADAC Trade Agreement could result in a 10% improvement in Trade volumes for Southern African farmers.

Therefore, the capacities to negotiate International Trade must be improved to harness potential benefits. But given the volatility of global commodity prices, coupled with large currency swings, a price support mechanism ought to be developed as well, for farmers.

Infrastructure for farming has been neglected in many countries as Governments looked at supporting other economic priorities: the urgency of rapid urbanization. It is well documented that public expenditure for agriculture has declined drastically over time.

The casualty is rural infrastructure: roads, storage, electricity, communications, schools, and hospitals, with the concomitant knock on for production.

### **Rural development has to be a multifaceted planned program**

Even if farmers have ideal circumstances to produce, the impact on the rural economy could be marginal if other complementary strategies are ignored. We have to think of the entire rural supply chain as an opportunity. We also have to invest time and money into researching the linkages that could be exploited to the benefit of the rural economy. Small manufacturing concerns, that add value through Agro Processing, have a big role to play in solving rural poverty.

Although food security is expected of good government, this ideal often results in a paranoia that results in governments making interventions that impact negatively on producers. Instances where food imports or food aid, impacts by collapsing local commodity prices, are common. This not only leads to an inadvertent transfer of rural wealth to the urban areas. But erodes sustainable productive capacities, rendering rural farmers worse off than they were. Therefore, the need to balance the enhancement of sustainable agriculture against food security is important. We have to **DE POLITICISE** the food issue and allow farmers a reasonable return for their efforts.

Once again, we highlight the important role that government, donors and other supporters have to contribute to this rural revival.

### **Some of the programs, which we believe need strengthening are noted below**

Health and welfare programs in rural environments are poorly resourced. HIV/AIDS has impacted agriculture disproportionately to other sectors. Few safety nets exist which tends to burden the rural producers with unnecessary social costs. Schooling, care for the aged, proper health services are services that the public sector have neglected and have to become better at providing.

Rural enterprise support in this context is about putting in place the enabling environment that can result in entrepreneurial development, these should not just be confined to farming. But this growth is also dependent on stable macro economic fundamentals, where inflation, the rate of exchange are reasonable and with that credit interest rates.

## **What could farmer organizations possibly contribute to solving these challenges?**

Farmer organizations can contribute at policy, strategy and operational level to programs and projects aimed at rural poverty alleviation. Provided there is acceptance that for poverty programs in agriculture to be sustainable and successful, they have to use the market. This means they have to be business oriented.

The caveat is that few national organizations have the institutional capacity and would need organizational strengthening to take up the challenge. Assuming this is done, and there is every likelihood that it could happen, farmer organizations are well placed in a few areas.

Starting at the operational level, farmer organizations are best suited to offer development services to existing and potential members. Training, business services, technical support, are not uncommon to most FO's services. This role can be extended to project managing larger infrastructure investments.

National agriculture policy is firmly in the hands of national governments. FO's are important stakeholders and rely on government to fight for benefits for agriculture. We desire to be contributing stakeholders and are able to be a bridge between our members and government. As we develop capacity as FO's, we become more skilled at presenting technically sound views and sophisticated arguments. At the very least, an inclusive approach is a minimum we expect from any party planning initiatives that are aimed at farmers or impact farmers in some way.

**Our voice as farmers must be heard as we all grapple with creating a viable agriculture sector in Africa.**

*Note: This note has not been edited. The views expressed in this summary note are those of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by or representative of IFPRI or of the cosponsoring or supporting organizations.*