



CONCEPT NOTE

53RD PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM TO BE HOSTED BY THE PARLIAMENT OF TANZANIA, ARUSHA, TANZANIA 2ND – 8TH JULY, 2023

THEME: “MODERNIZING AGRICULTURE TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE SADC REGION: ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENTS”

I. BACKGROUND ON MODERNIZING AGRICULTURE, FOOD INSECURITY AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

1. In 2023, agriculture continues to remain the dependable backbone of most of the economies in Africa particularly Southern African countries. Agricultural production and associated processing industries, also commonly called agrobusiness, constitute a prominent economic pillar for the region. According to the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the contribution of agriculture, forestry and fishing from Africa, in terms of value addition to the global economy, more than doubled in the period 2020 to 2022, rising from USD 167 Billion to USD 413 Billion. Agriculture is also a consistent source of food for the growing population. Figures from the Oxford Business Group provide that smallholder farmers account for around 80% of the food produced in Sub-Saharan Africa. Agricultural products also constitute one of the main intra-SADC trade exports, thus demonstrating the innate potential of this sector to cure regional issues such as hunger and malnourishment. In some SADC countries, the contribution of agriculture to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is currently still as high as 40%, thus turning agro-industry into a springboard sector with emerging benefits that can absorb significant employment. At the same time, the region's population is expected to more than double in the next 30 years, making Sub-Saharan Africa a region with high agricultural consumption status and a place to be vested with a thriving youth workforce. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) predicts that by 2050, the global food production would need to rise by 50% over 2012 levels to meet the rising demand from a population that is escalating in numbers and appetite.
2. However, recent times have indicated that strategies to modernize the agricultural sector in SADC remains weak, fragmented and lack of sustainability. The recent COVID 19 outbreak and Russia-Ukraine crisis have put to the fore the fragility of the agricultural sector across SADC, with

climate change disasters such as cyclones Idai in 2019 and Freddy in 2023 annihilating gains made in the sector in general areas. More than ever, Parliaments are to be preoccupied of the modernization of the agricultural sector and should reinforce policies and laws to ensure that the sector remains a viable economic pillar which can sustain Africa's rising expectations in the decades to come.

3. According to the OECD, Sub-Saharan Africa is an agro-ecologically diverse, land abundant region that accounts for 15% of global cropland and 20% of pasture worldwide. Despite its plethora of agricultural resources, the region is nonetheless prone to the worst food insecurity problem in the world. One of the crucial issues to consider in modernization of agriculture is the registration and management of land resources. Whereas about 95% of arable land is registered in Western Europe, the figures are significantly lower for Sub-Saharan Africa where around two-third of land resources are owned by communities under customary or informal arrangements. This creates a lack of predictability on crop renewals and disincentives investment in agro-farming or agro-tech equipment to heighten crop rendition.
4. On the other hand, the Africa Wealth Report 2023 has revealed that agriculture can be a sector where impact investing can bring influential results. There are several gains to be made in investing in commercial partnerships which can enhance agricultural value chains and upscale African agricultural products through eco or bio (fertilizer-free) labels that can heighten attractiveness and marketability of agricultural products, thereby increasing demand. In addition, the agro-industry has the potential to generate side enterprises which use agricultural by-products to create handcraft, soap or other artisanal items which have a premium sale value. Parliaments are directly concerned to ensure that schemes exist to motivate the creation of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) or even micro-enterprises to bolster investment and provide agricultural solutions to consumers. A heightening in agricultural production will also decrease imports, provide groceries at lower and more competitive prices, and also reduce the existing trade deficit.
5. It is often opined by observers that Africa can be self-sufficient in food, especially staple foods such as wheat, maize and cereals. Currently food accessibility for many people in the region remains closely tied to local food production through subsistence farming. This undermines division of labor and the ability of regions and communities to produce in masses, test new crops that are more weather or pest-resistant, and develop agricultural specialties that can be the harbinger of agro-innovation. Without a critical mass in agricultural output, there will be no possibility of the region leveraging on agriculture as a sector to break through the glass ceiling of poverty and social inequalities. The importance of economic growth in agriculture to increase incomes and reduce poverty as well as address food insecurity in SADC countries remains vital. Efforts to improve agricultural productivity that will increase farmer incomes can drive demand in other important economic sectors, thus creating a snowball effect that can generate wealth and propel economic prosperity. This multi-sectoral dynamism has the

potential to contribute to economic growth while providing the opportunity to simultaneously lift millions of people out of poverty.

6. Youth unemployment is a global challenge; however it has most disparaging effects for Africa than for other geographical regions of the world. This is primarily due to the rapid population growth in Africa, slow economic progress, poor access to social and health services compounded with the inflationary rise in consumer prices which altogether make youth unemployment a fatality. An unemployed adult youth, especially women, are likely to face pressure to raise children even they are not physically and mentally ready to do so. Unemployment can also be a driveway to other social illness such as addictive gambling or drug abuse. For the growth of a nation's economy, youth participation and buy-in into the agricultural sector is essential. With urbanization trends and about 50% of the population moving to African cities by 2050, rural farming areas must remain attractive for youth employment. The agricultural sector thus needs to offer smart employment where mechanization of agriculture meets with smart technologies to alleviate labour intensiveness and promote youth interest to become agro-professionals. At the same time, universities must teach leading-edge courses that are relevant to modern agricultural needs and the eco-friendliness expected to achieve the Global Agenda 2030.
7. In the SADC region, the importance of investing in youth empowerment in agriculture is unavoidable. In many countries, the main challenges towards youth development in agriculture are inadequate belief in the output of the sector, idiosyncrasies that agriculture equates to unskilled labour, and lack of structured agro-education. There are also engrained societal taboos that agricultural work is necessarily associated with poverty and lack of formal education. There is new need for an exclusive framework such as that of Dar Es Salaam Declaration, especially on involvement of youth in agro-business sector for the development of the region, due to the fact that youth are main beneficiaries of what the projected 'agricultural development' will yield, and due to its value chain in creating employment opportunities as well as curbing food security in the region.
8. Youths who are already involved in agriculture through participation or exposure to training programs are more likely to have future aspirations related to agriculture than those who are not. Socio-economic factors such as the youth's marital status, education levels, access to resources' and information, and perceptions of community resource 'gatekeepers' about youth influences how youths perceive agriculture and their interest in participating.

II. THE 53RD PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FORUM: THE NEED TO DISCUSS THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS TO MODERNIZE AGRICULTURE IN ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE SADC REGION

9. Agriculture is one of the economic sectors that can employ millions of young people, reduce youth unemployment and enhance food security in the SADC

region. Undoubtedly, the region's agricultural sector is expanding slowly, a trend that may hinder availability of food for almost 400 million residents of the region if the sector does not grow at a more reliable rate. The sector has been recurrently affected due to insufficient budgetary resources within the annual budgets of member countries, as well as inadequate investment in modern agriculture's enabling infrastructure such as irrigation systems and smart technologies in agriculture sector development in the SADC region. Lack of reliable markets for crops grown by small farmers; and poor or absence of infrastructure for transporting agricultural products, particularly from rural areas to desirable markets also affects the sector negatively.

10. In the SADC region, the incidence of hunger is still high, especially among rural households. High youth unemployment rates, inadequate social welfare systems and high HIV/AIDS infection rates contribute to food in- security in the region. Food security challenges in SADC countries are partly due to historical injustices regarding access to land, resources and policies that fail to promote smallholder agriculture and rural development. On the other hand, a traditional farming system has also been a hindrance factor on competitive agricultural productivity.
11. Food insecurity has been a cause of increasing poverty to the communities in the SADC Member States. Food imports and rising food prices undeniably burden the consumer purse, pushing more people into poverty. Improved food security is an essential element of household well-being and a sustainable livelihood. Vulnerability to food insecurity situation in SADC poses mixed challenges to policy makers and parliamentarians as livelihoods of a number of households within the region continue to be threatened, coupled with malnutrition and other nutritional disorders.
12. Southern Africa countries experiences one of the highest climate variability in the world that negatively impacts on food security. Integrated modern farming systems are essential in overcoming food insecurity and ensuring agricultural productivity. Systems that promote recycling and reuse of farm products have to be encouraged. Similarly, responsible mariculture farming systems that include filter-feeders and seaweeds are excellent production systems as they require little external inputs and can thus be practiced by low income communities. Moreover, seaweeds can be used for feed, food and cosmetic products, and have the potential for bio-fuel production. There is therefore a need for immediate measures to contain food demand by a rapidly increasing population (majority being the youth) that climbs to 400 million in the region and is projected to escalate in the next decades.
13. As the representative of citizens and constituencies, Parliamentarians are powerful agents of change, who should be capacitated to encourage and modernize agriculture in view of addressing food insecurity and youth unemployment. There is a need for Parliamentarians to strengthen their constitutional mandate to set the machinery of modernizing agriculture reform into motion. Modernizing land tenure systems and providing conducive

financing and low interest rates for agriculture loans, will increase agricultural productivity, food supply chain and youth employment creation.

14. Parliament as an institution which is at the apex of the State, has the mandate to enact enabling legislation, exercise consistent oversight, and scrutinize agricultural budgets to ensure that food security and youth unemployment are addressed. Parliamentarians may call for regional policies, protocols and strategic frameworks to encourage innovations that reduce poverty, through broad-based economic growth which includes eco-friendly farming that is resilient to climate disasters, enhanced food security and youth employment creation.
15. Parliament as an influential body has the capacity to ensure that agriculture provides the lifestyle and status that young people desire and expect. This is in addition to addressing challenges faced by youth farmers including, for example, modernizing land tenure systems and providing conducive financing and low interest rates for agriculture loans. At the same time, there is a need for Parliaments to fill the gender gaps in agriculture, and ensure that both men and women have equal chances and opportunities to benefit from investments, educate themselves, and subscribe to land tenures for farming.
16. In that regards, it is essential for the SADC-PF 53rd Plenary Assembly to deliberate on the theme “**MODERNIZING AGRICULTURE TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE SADC REGION: ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENTS**”. The theme will aim to bring into the parliamentary attention the issue of food insecurity and the youth unemployment crisis, hence the need to offer immediate solutions that can be implemented by SADC member states. It is clear that, most of the SADC countries economic growth rely on agriculture productivity.

III. OBJECTIVE AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE 53RD PLENARY ASSEMBLY

17. The Plenary Assembly of the Forum is held by each of its Member Parliament on a rotational basis in accordance with Article 11 of the Forum’s Constitution and the Rules 5-7 of the Rules of Procedure.
18. The objectives and expected outcomes of the 53rd Plenary Assembly are:-
 - (a) To continue promoting inter-parliamentary cooperation, diplomacy and solidarity amongst SADC Member Parliaments;
 - (b) To evaluate and showcase strategies of modernizing agriculture that will benefit SADC Member Parliaments;
 - (c) To deliberate on prompt implementable measures on food insecurity and youth unemployment in line with climate change impacts towards agriculture;

- (d) To consider avenues for parliamentary interventions to modernize smart agricultural production whilst ensuring that gender gaps are duly filled, and that opportunities in agriculture are available to all, without discrimination.
- (e) To consider adaptation strategies that can be achieved by SADC Member Parliaments on substantial gains to sustainable agriculture that can influence food security and youth employment creation;
- (f) To consider motions and statements by regional MPs which are in line with the theme of the Plenary Assembly; and
- (g) To continue promoting inter-parliamentary policy among SADC Member Parliaments with respect to shared values and common agendas.

IV. VENUE

19. The 53rd Plenary Assembly will be hosted by the National Assembly of Tanzania, in Arusha, Tanzania from 2nd – 8th July, 2023.