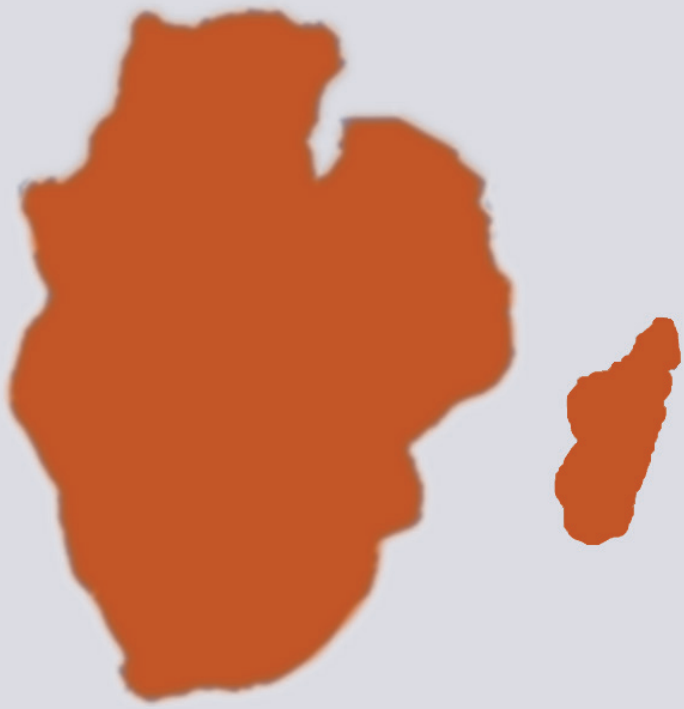
MALABO MONTPELLIER PANEL

SADC

TRADING UP:

Policy innovations to expand food and agriculture trade in Africa



The Southern African Development Community (SADC) was formally launched in 1992 by nine heads of state. It is one of the eight regional economic communities (RECs) recognized by the African Union that facilitate regional economic integration among member states. By 2019, SADC membership included 16 countries,[1] representing nearly 354 million people, over 40 percent of whom were employed in the agriculture sector. The region's total GDP amounted to more than US$721 billion, growing at an average of 3.8 percent from 2011 to 2019, with agriculture contributing more than 11 percent.[1]

Intraregional trade within SADC is among the largest on the continent.[2] In 2019, intra-SADC trade was valued at US$16.5 billion, about 45 percent of which went through South Africa alone.[3] Almost 85 percent of SADC's trade within Africa took place within the REC itself, signifying a deep level of integration.[4] Intra-SADC trade is largely in petroleum, agricultural products, electricity, and some textile products. The agricultural products most commonly traded within

1 Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

SADC are sugar, live animals, vegetables and fruits, and cereals, and intraregional trade in staples such as maize has effectively replaced imports from the rest of the world. Intra-SADC agricultural and food imports account for 19 percent of total agricultural and food imports to the region. Yet, high-value products like coffee, tea, cocoa, spices, processed foods, and vegetables as well as dairy products and eggs continue to face the highest tariffs within the REC.[5] At the same time, trade in other agricultural and food products such as beef have benefitted those countries with a greater comparative advantage. In 2016, South Africa's meat exports were valued at ZAR 3.6 billion (US$244 million), of which nearly half went to regional SADC neighbors: Mozambique (17 percent), Lesotho (14 percent), Namibia (10 percent), Eswatini and Botswana (4 percent each).[6]

Beyond SADC's borders, trade with the Asia–Pacific markets is highest, followed by the European Union. Extra-SADC trade consists mainly of natural resources such as coal, manganese, precious metals and diamonds, manufactured goods that are high in resources, some textiles, and from the agriculture sector, tobacco.

The flourishing intraregional trade and regional integration in SADC has been supported by a robust institutional set up, holistic policymaking, and effective programs.

Institutional innovations

SADC aims to build a more prosperous, sustainable, open, equitable, safe and secure future for the people of southern Africa. To realize this vision, SADC seeks to achieve greater co-operation and integration across borders combined with good governance and lasting peace and security, as well as efficient production systems. These overarching ambitions provide the foundation for thematic areas of co-operation and are reflected in formal structures. Five strategies guide the harmonization of political and socioeconomic policies, mobilize resources, facilitate the free movement of capital, labor, and goods and services, and accelerate the development, transfer and adoption of technology. In addition, a robust and synchronized institutional framework has been established to guide and implement these goals in a transparent and inclusive manner, and to ensure that the core principles are preserved. As a result of the inclusion of more economically advanced countries in the REC, SADC benefits from greater access to domestic funds to support institutional development. At the same time, its institutions have also garnered support from international partners to continue refining their operations.

Top-down coordination with inclusive engagement

SADC's institutional framework includes both a top-down approach for smooth coordination and an inclusive approach that empowers stakeholders within member countries to engage in the formulation of regional policies and strategies. In this respect, the overall policy direction and control of functions of the REC are overseen by the Summit of Heads of State or Government, in turn managed by a troika comprised of the former, current, and forthcoming (current deputy) chairpersons, who rotate on an annual basis.[7] A Council of Ministers representing every member country, and drawn from the respective ministries of foreign affairs, economic planning, or finance, ensures effective domestic implementation.[8] A Secretariat provides strategic planning, management and administrative support for executing, monitoring and evaluating SADC's policies. It also designs harmonized policies and programs for adoption by the Council of Ministers. [9]

To ensure that the development of regional policies and strategies is inclusive and reflects the priorities of member states, the National Committees serve as a platform for government, private sector and civil society stakeholders to provide inputs and guide the implementation of programs domestically. The National Committees are a key link between member states and the Secretariat, as they marshal national consensus on regional initiatives and channel the inputs of domestic stakeholders into the SADC institutions via the Secretariat.[10]

Institutional reform and quality standards

In 2012, the SADC Secretariat was officially recognized for having achieved international standards in accounting, audit, internal controls and procurement. A comprehensive reform process spearheaded by the Council of Ministers and managed by the Secretariat ensured that institutional compliance was achieved. Financial and technical assistance from the European Union (EU) and Germany through GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) was critical to facilitate the process and build capacity within the Secretariat. In addition, a Secretariat Institutional Reforms Coordinating Committee was formed to coordinate the process and implement the recommended changes, while Technical Working Groups enabled external parties to support the redesign of policies and frameworks. The accreditation signals the adoption of international best-practices to enhance governance and accountability. It also contributes to improved efficiency and effectiveness, hence greater impact. Most importantly, this process qualified the Secretariat to access significant funds from Contribution Agreements from the EU. Following the achievement of international standards, the EU committed EUR 84 million (US$109 million) for regional political co-operation, regional economic integration support, and project preparation and development facilities. In addition, the EU extended a further EUR 12 million (nearly US$16 million) to support continued institutional compliance processes over 2013–2105. GIZ offered a further EUR 4 million (US$5 million) to boost policy dialogue among regional stakeholders and strengthen collaboration between the Secretariat and the member states over the period 2013 to 2016.[11, 12]

Cross-sectoral coordination

Regional integration in SADC is organized through six Sectoral and Cluster Ministerial Committees comprised of ministers from each member state for:

- Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment (TIFI)
- Infrastructure and Services
- Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment (FANR)
- Social and Human Development and Special Programmes
- Politics, Defense and Security
- Legal Affairs and Judicial Matters

Drawing on their expertise, ministers provide input and advice into the formulation and implementation of regional plans.[13]

Approximately mirroring the Sectoral and Cluster Ministerial Committees, five directorates situated in the Secretariat coordinate the implementation of policies and programs. The mandates of each directorate, outlined in individual protocols, are linked with the overarching aim expediting integration and unlocking trade opportunities.[14] To enhance agricultural trade specifically, the TIFI directorate is responsible for the development of regional value chains and increased value addition for agricultural products as well as greater compliance with international standards and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures.[15] The FANR directorate manages the production and protection of crops through intensification, irrigation, mechanization, sustainable use of fertilizers, and better seed quality and distribution (including through seed trade); and increased livestock trade supported by improved animal disease control and health services and development and dissemination of a SADC Livestock Information Management System.[16]

Dispute settlement

In 2005, a Protocol on the Tribunal established a SADC Tribunal, composed of appointed judges from member states. The Tribunal's key role is to ensure accurate interpretation of the provisions of the SADC Treaty – the founding declaration and treaty that led to the establishment of SADC – and subsidiary instruments and protocols, including the Protocol on Trade. It is an independent forum and has the authority to make rulings on the correct interpretation and application of the legal instruments available in SADC. The Tribunal thus performs the function of a court and a judicial organ. For each dispute brought to the Tribunal, a panel of nominated and selected representatives are assembled.[17]

In the case of the Republic of Zimbabwe v. Mike Campbell (Pvt) Ltd and Others[18] regarding the loss of farmland, the Tribunal concluded that 78 white Zimbabwean farmers could keep their farms because Zimbabwe's land reform program had discriminated against them. The Zimbabwean government rejected this ruling. It questioned the legality of the decision and persuaded the Summit to suspend the Tribunal in 2010 while an independent review of its role, functions and terms of reference was carried out.[19] Following several delays, a new Tribunal was convened in 2014. However, its mandate was restricted to disputes between member states only, as opposed cases brought by any natural and legal persons against member states. Since African governments are unlikely prosecute each other, the new Tribunal has little potential impact. Worse, it also limits the degree to which the rights of private parties are protected by SADC's legal framework.[20]

However, a further twist occurred in December 2018 when the South African Constitutional Court invalidated the withdrawal of South Africa from the original Tribunal and its subsequent signing up to the new one. Similarly, the Tanzanian government also concluded that the disbanding of the original Tribunal undermined the Rule of Law, in itself a founding principle of SADC. Consequently, at the time of writing, SADC remains without a functional Tribunal, especially as the new one, although convened, had not been deployed.[21]

Budget and financing

The coordination function of SADC is primarily funded by member states, proportionate to the share of their GDP in the combined SADC GDP. In addition, development activities are funded by International Cooperating Partners (ICPs), of which the EU, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the Commonwealth, the World Health

Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria are leading partners. In addition, regional institutions such as the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa and the Southern African Trust also provide technical and financial support.[22]

SADC's institutions are relatively well funded, although not consistently. For instance, the budget for the 2014/15 fiscal year stood at US$88 million, of which US$34 million was funded from member states' contributions and US$54 million from ICPs.[23] However, following an economic downturn in several member states, the budget for the fiscal year 2016/17 shrank to approximately US$72 million.[24] Nevertheless, in 2017, SADC launched a long-awaited SADC Regional Development Fund (RDF) to provide seed funding and mobilize additional and new resources for infrastructure development in the region.[25] Although not yet operational, the RDF will include a share for disaster preparedness and response, and one for agricultural development.[26]

Gender mainstreaming

In addition to the roles outlined above, the Secretariat is also responsible for gender mainstreaming in all SADC policies, programs and activities. A Gender Unit within the Secretariat, accountable directly to the Executive Secretary, was established in 1998 to facilitate, coordinate and monitor the implementation of SADC's gender commitments – as outlined in a Protocol on Gender and Development – within SADC institutions; regional integration priorities, including on agriculture and trade; politics and decision-making; and access to and control of productive and economic resources.[27] The Protocol on Gender and Development explicitly calls for national trade and entrepreneurship policies to be made gender-responsive by 2015. It also requires that the economic value of persons engaged in agricultural and domestic work be recognized and remunerated appropriately.[28] Moreover, member states are also required to develop subsidized training programs to develop women's entrepreneurial skills and provide opportunities to enhance the production, marketing and export of quality products (including across agricultural value chains) by women. Regional women's networks are required to be included in trade policy structures and gender quotas have to be created for all trade missions.[29]

A 2010 study by the UN Economic Commission of Africa showed that there is an elaborate enabling environment as well as clear institutional frameworks across Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia for dealing with gender-related issues in general terms. Although little progress had been made in directly addressing gender within trade frameworks, the implementation of strategies within the Protocol on Trade, such as elimination of nontariff barriers, had indirectly benefitted women by empowering them to participate in intraregional trade activities.[30]

In addition, a study in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe showed that these concerted efforts at the regional level have resulted in agricultural and trade policies across SADC that consider gender equality and

empowerment. The countries have also acceded to international conventions that address gender equality. However, the application of these is not always consistent or coordinated within government departments nor among policy tools. In addition, efforts are more readily implemented through agriculture sector interventions than trade. Hence it is urgent to mainstream gender issues into trade policy, which in turn will initiate the collection and management of gendered trade data. Comprehensive data will form the basis of policymaking, while closer collaboration between sectoral policymakers will ensure that there is coherence between gender responsiveness in agriculture and trade.[31]

Policy innovations

Since its formation, SADC's institutions have designed, evaluated and refined an array of long-term plans and protocols to harness the economic and social potential of the region. The Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) forms the core guiding framework upon which the regional integration agenda is constructed, and through which policy harmonization is initiated. In addition, the Regional Agricultural Policy and the Regional Trade Protocol provide further impetus toward expanding intra-SADC agricultural trade.

An evolving Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan

The Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) is a 15-year roadmap providing a comprehensive outline of policies, strategies, principles and specific targets that provide a regionwide impetus to deepen integration, accelerate poverty eradication, and meet economic and social goals. RISDP was adopted by the SADC Summit in 2003 and implemented beginning in 2005 over three 5-year phases. Although RISDP does not specify sources of funding for the implementation of all activities, it does present a broad menu of conventional and alternative pools of capital, as well as mechanisms through which they can be mobilized. Importantly, RISDP also outlines a comprehensive plan to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the actions at political and policy level, operational and technical level, and stakeholder level.[32]

The original RISDP identified 12 priority action areas, composed of 4 sectoral and 8 cross-sectoral intervention areas. In this context, RISDP included sustainable food security as a priority intervention area within the first group and outlined five strategies to promote (fair) trade in agricultural products, in addition to strategies to raise productivity, transform subsistence agriculture, improve food safety, and reduce the impact of food-related disasters. These include strategies to: improve rural infrastructure, eliminate trade barriers on agricultural products, mobilize public and private investments in the sector, bolster farmer support systems, and foster partnerships between commercial and smallholder farmers. In addition, RISDP also called for the completion of the annex to the Trade Protocol on Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures, and set two targets to unlock trade: (1) reduce the prevalence of transboundary animal diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease by half in 2015, with the aim of ultimately eliminating them, and (2) meet SPS measures and standards as per WTO Agreements – both of which would improve the trade of food and animal-sourced products.[33]

Two evaluations of RISDP have taken place to date. The Secretariat conducted a desk assessment covering the period 2005 to 2010, and an independent mid-term review was carried out for the period 2005 to 2012. The former concluded that implementation of RISDP over the first phase had been satisfactory and progress had been made toward the targets. Specifically, for agricultural trade, achievements include:

- **Marketing**: initial grants had been made for research for improving marketing of livestock (from small-scale producers) and commodities.
- **Migratory pests and phytosanitary measures**: strategies for managing migrant pests in crops had been developed and approved, along with a plan to assist member states in implementing the measures. Advocacy efforts on phytosanitary measures had resulted in more member states adhering to international treaties on plant protection.
- **Food safety**: a project on harmonizing food safety guidelines and processes had been launched to foster greater regional trade and facilitate access to EU and world markets, and the Secretariat mobilized EUR 7.5 million (US$10 million) toward these efforts.
- **Transport infrastructure**: guidelines on rural accessibility had been developed.[34]

The independent review of the RISDP, completed in 2014, also recorded moderate progress toward enhancing SADC intraregional trade and economic diversification. The review recommended a consolidation and realignment of priorities, bringing forward strategies for industrialization, accelerating market integration, and infrastructure development. Maintaining the original vision and mission, a revised

2015–2020 RISDP condenses 12 priorities to 4, with a focus on regional value chains and value addition for agricultural and non-agricultural products, and on intraregional and intra-African trade. Although the priority for sustainable food security is no longer specified, productivity, competitiveness and market access for agricultural products feature within special programs for the region. In this context, the revised RISDP specifies interventions in access to and use of land, inputs, capital, and entrepreneurship skills, as outlined in the Regional Agricultural Policy.[35] As RISDP comes to an end in 2020, a review of its implementation is on-going, parallel to the formulation of the new 10-year framework for 2021–2030.[36]

Regional Agricultural Policy

The SADC Regional Agricultural Policy (RAP) was approved by the SADC Council in 2014 as the overarching framework for the region's agriculture sector. Like the Protocol on Trade (see below), the RAP is founded on the direction set in the RISDP and implemented in five-year cycles. In addition to setting out priorities and proposed interventions for enhancing productivity, increasing investments in the sector, and addressing vulnerabilities posed by climate change, gender inequalities, HIV/AIDS, migration, and youth unemployment, the RAP also outlines **comprehensive, innovative and inclusive** avenues for improving trade and access to markets for farmers in SADC. Specifically, policy guidance focuses on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of input and output markets, transforming the regional and international trade environment, and upgrading relevant infrastructure. Key measures facilitating greater agricultural trade in the RAP include:

- **Input and output markets**: supporting the development of national and regional commodity exchanges; extending and harmonizing the use of commodity grades and standards (including for grains), quality specifications, traceability, and environmental norms for trade; and facilitating the participation of informal traders, small and medium enterprises, and marginalized groups such as women and youth.
- **Infrastructure**: in addition to investing in infrastructure and designing infrastructure in a way that takes agriculture into account, improving agriculture's utilization of existing infrastructure such as intercountry transport corridors, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) facilities, and shared water resources for agriculture such as cross-border irrigation schemes.
- **Price management and stabilization**: investing in storage and related infrastructure; boosting contract farming with more robust value chain governance; and designing market-friendly food emergency policies.
- **Reduction of barriers to trade**: promoting mutual recognition of member states' SPS certificates and simplifying Rules of Origin (RoO).
- **Sustainability**: reducing external tariffs on selected production factors such as green technologies.

Across the board, the approach of the RAP is to support and complement member states to achieve related national goals. Where national goals require updating to align with regional plans, the RAP proposes support for their development, as well as financial and technical assistance toward their implementation.[37] To drive implementation of the RAP forward, the Council of Ministers approved a corresponding Regional Agricultural Investment Plan in July 2016, with a total budget of US$1.3 billion.[38] The RAIP and national agricultural investments plans (NAIPS) are thus mutually aligned such that NAIPs form the basis for disbursements of resources under the RAP.[39]

Protocol on Trade: pragmatic and flexible

Building on the direction provided in the RISDP, SADC's Protocol on Trade (PoT) is the founding legal instrument guiding trade liberalization in the region, with the goal of establishing a free trade area by 2008, a customs union by 2010, and eventually a common market and monetary union. Signed in 1996, implemented from 2000 and amended in 2010, the PoT obliges member states to (gradually) reduce customs duties and other intra-SADC trade barriers on goods and services, create an attractive environment for investments, and drive diversification and industrialization. By 2008, about 85 percent of goods traded in the region had attained zero duty, and a Free Trade Area was launched by 12 of 15 member states on schedule.[2] Furthermore, a tariff phase-down process for sensitive products was completed by 2012, which marked maximum tariff liberalization. However, due to capacity constraints, the formation of a customs union, and hence the common market and monetary union, have been delayed.[40] Nevertheless, to further facilitate intra-SADC trade, the PoT proposes adoption of common rules of origin, streamlining and harmonization of customs rules and procedures, including SPS measures, and elimination of nontariff

2 Angola, DRC and Seychelles are being assisted by the Secretariat to accede.

barriers, as well as recourse and avenues for dispute settlement.[41] The PoT adopts a pragmatic approach to addressing nontariff barriers by excluding more sensitive measures such as local content requirements, levies, and other border charges and import and export licensing arrangements, as long as the trade-distorting effects are minimal. While this approach may have expedited the transition to a free trade area, it has also led to a multiplicity of nontariff barriers which, in turn, have had a debilitating effect on intraregional trade.[42,43]

Protecting vulnerable sectors: the Sugar Agreement

On the other hand, the PoT incudes special agreements for products or industries from the region that are "sensitive" to external market forces. One such agreement is on sugar. Sugar production has significant socioeconomic impacts across several SADC countries, particularly in rural areas and small nations where it provides substantial employment, including to low-skilled workers. The sector contributes as much as 6 percent of GDP and 93 percent of agricultural GDP in some SADC member states. It also optimizes comparative advantages and contributes toward diversification (energy and bio-chemicals). However, on the global stage, sugar is a heavily subsidized product and its average world market price is consistently below the average cost of production. Hence, its separate treatment in the PoT protects regional producers from dumping and ensures that the sector continues to grow in the face of cheap extra-SADC imports. The Sugar Agreement (Annex VII of the PoT) negotiated an extended period of preferential access to the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) market, comprised of Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa. The Sugar Agreement allowed non-SACU surplus producers such as Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia to export an agreed portion of that surplus sugar to SACU member countries on a duty-free basis, thereby fostering greater competitiveness domestically. Access quotas are calculated based on the share of total SADC sugar surplus. Until 2012, access was also based on a steady increase in the volume of exports into the SACU market, to be reviewed pending a positive assessment of the state of the world sugar market. A review began in 2017.The future of the Sugar Agreement will also be impacted by reforms of the sugar regime of the EU, as the largest importer of sugar from SADC, as well as post-Brexit relationships with the United Kingdom.[44,45,46]

Programmatic interventions

Support Towards Operationalization of the SADC Regional Agricultural Policy

To operationalize the RAP, the Secretariat launched a program of support in March 2019, in partnership with the EU and FAO. The EUR 9 million (US$10 million) program titled Support Towards Operationalization of the SADC Regional Agricultural Policy (STOSAR) has three key components: evidence-based decision-making with more robust agricultural information systems; managing transboundary plant pests and

diseases to improve access to markets; and executing the Regional Food and Nutrition Security Strategy.[47] The program provides technical assistance to the Secretariat's ongoing efforts to create a regional Agricultural Information Management System (AIMS). AIMS collects, analyses, disseminates and integrates information on crop and livestock production, pests and diseases, vulnerability and other socioeconomic data, as well as national budgets, so as to enhance policy development, emergency preparedness, and decision-making. In addition, the program supports member states' efforts to solve phytosanitary issues, thus increasing productivity and exports, and preventing the entry and spread of pests. Finally, STOSAR aims to control three of the most damaging transboundary animal diseases – foot-and-mouth disease, PPR (peste des petits ruminants/sheep and goat plague), and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) – in order to improve the productivity and market access for livestock and livestock products.[48]

In 2020, STOSAR funded biopesticide trials in Tanzania against the fall armyworm, the successful completion of which paved the way for its registration in June 2020.[49] Tanzania's livestock sector is also benefitting from interventions to strengthen disease surveillance and control in the north and central zones of the country, thereby contributing to the sector's sustainable growth.[50]

Strengthening institutions for risk management of transboundary animal diseases

Livestock is a key source of food, employment and income for millions of southern Africans. Hence, the region has long focused on facilitating trade in livestock within the region. For example, from 2007 to 2012, the Secretariat, in partnership with the Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases, implemented the Transboundary Animal Diseases (TADs) project to promote livestock as a safe and tradeable commodity in Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. Funded by the African Development Bank, the project implemented five key activities to strengthen the capacity for detection, identification, monitoring and surveillance of (TADs):

- Developed a comprehensive framework for the Southern African Commission for the Control of TADs, including financing, sustainability and legal formation.
- Introduced the Digital Pen Technology and provided training on its use for efficient and rapid transmission of disease data from the field. A study conducted between September 2009 and August 2010 concluded that, although expensive, the new technology was found to improve timeliness and frequency of reporting. With regular maintenance and replacement of equipment, and better access to the appropriate forms, the technology would have a greater impact in monitoring the prevalence of disease.[51]
- Conducted training for 50 lab technicians and over 100 veterinary field staff on improved risk analysis and mapping, including a simulation exercise to strengthen the capacity of countries to respond to PPR.
- Analyzed and harmonized national TAD preparedness plans.
- Established National Virtual Centres – networking and collaboration hubs for the institutions involved in the project.[52,53]

Seed Trade Project

In 2015, USAID initiated the Feed the Future Southern Africa Seed Trade Project, in partnership with the Crop Development Unit of the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Directorate. The project aims to improve access to and availability of high-quality seeds across the region by promoting seed trade and consolidating small and marginal markets into one large regionwide market. To do so, the Seed Trade Project is engaged in efforts to provide technical assistance to align policies and regulations covering seed trade across all member states with the SADC Harmonized Seed Regulatory System (HSRS), which includes seed certification and quality assurance, quarantine and phytosanitary measures, and variety release. By 2020, the Seed Trade Project had established the SADC Seed Committee, which oversees the regional seed system and the SADC Seed Centre; worked with 13 seed companies and registered 55 seed varieties, all eligible for regional trade; facilitated the production of the first hybrid maize seed under the HSRS, which can be produced relatively easily in Zambia but not in the DRC; trained more than 1,500 technicians on HSRS and improved business management practices. The project also facilitated the transfer of new seed varieties and online seed certification systems as well as new laboratory technology.[54, 55] In addition, in 2018, Seed Co. Zambia Ltd planted the hybrid maize seeds in a pilot within the Seed Trade Project. The pilot produced over 200 tons of certified hybrid maize seed, 60 tons of which were then successfully and without incident exported to neighboring DRC in September 2019, confirming the success of the quality control, certification and assurance process.[56]

Conclusion

Intraregional trade in SADC is among the highest within the eight RECs officially recognized by the African Union. SADC is also pursuing a resolute integration agenda. A robust and inclusive institutional framework complemented by synchronized policies underpins this success. However, some challenges persist, such as the proliferation of nontariff measures, complexities in aligning national policies where countries are part of several regional trade agreements, the political economy difficulties of implementing regional directives – as seen in the case with Zimbabwean farmers – which have led to a weakening of institutions and changing dynamics with external trading partners such as the EU and United Kingdom.

With more committed implementation of SADC's protocols and policies, the region has the potential to achieve even greater success in improving agricultural trade. In the immediate term, there is an urgent need to invest in greater data collection, particularly on the impact of NTBs, so as to unblock trade, particularly in agricultural products.[57] Moreover, to build resilient regional value chains and develop a *regional* competitive advantage, SADC institutions can work with member states to identify and build regional complementarities. For instance, where Malawi and Zambia prioritize soybean production, other countries in the region can participate in up- and downstream value addition along the soybean value chain.[58] Finally, forward-looking engagement with the United Kingdom will ensure access to its markets after its departure from the EU. This is particularly vital for SADC's sugar sector for which the United Kingdom is a key market.[59]

In the medium to long term, it is also essential to revisit the composition and authority of key institutions such as the Tribunal to ensure they are able to reach and exert decisions that are beneficial to the region. The Secretariat would also be more effective with the authority to drive policymaking and implementation (rather than administer the process), as well as legislative powers to propel greater integration.[60] Similarly, given the central function of National Committees in ensuring an inclusive governance system, it is vital that they receive the requisite human, financial and technical resources for effective engagement.[61] Although SADC's institutional and policy frameworks are relatively advanced on gender mainstreaming, some key challenges persist. Including gender perspectives in the Protocol on Trade would ensure that gender mainstreaming is truly cross-cutting, rather than sidelined to specific sectors like agriculture.[62] Reinstating monitoring and evaluation frameworks, including the Gender Monitor, would also keep up the pressure to continue implementation of the Protocol on Gender and Development. Although the EU has already committed substantial support for strengthening SADC's institutional framework, it can also be – as the most influential donor of SADC and trading partner of several member states – a useful partner is designing coherent policies for the region.

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