2014: a year of great achievements for AU-SAFGRAD!

AU-SAFGRAD, one of the specialized technical offices within the department of rural economy and agriculture of the African Union Commission, has significantly contributed to the achievements done by the commission in the occasion of 2014 year of Agriculture and Food Security towards Africa's agenda 2063.

In 2014, the office has started to implement its new strategic plan (2014-2017). Amongst many achievement done by the office in 2014 I would like to highlight the following activities:

♦ **In East Africa Region:** The office has studied the agriculture commodities value chain in IGAD region, the study ranked the agriculture commodities at national and regional levels. Two of the agriculture commodities (one is stable crop and the second is cash crop) have been selected to be analyzed in details.

♦ **In West Africa Region:** The office has reviewed the CAADP-National Agriculture and Food Security Investment Plans (NAFSIPs) in four Countries namely, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal, the study was focusing on the areas of climate change, and desertification.

In the Central Region of Africa, the office organized the 2nd Dryland Week with the CCDU in Chad where many stakeholders and development partners participated and exchanged the views on the matter of combating desertification in Africa.

Further responding to the specific and persistent challenge of desertification, the office has been mandated with the CCDU by the AU Assembly through Decision; Assembly/AU/Dec.492 (XXII) of January 2014, to serve as an effective platform to provide the necessary guidance, and promote experience sharing and coordination among the existing African Centres of Excellence on Desertification.

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Together to build resilience in Semi Arid Zones of Africa

The major challenge remains to be improving the productivity of agriculture, diversify activities to emerging and rewarding markets, and open opportunities for non-farm work and migration pathways to lead rural populations out of poverty, while adapting and mitigating the impacts of climate change and desertification.

AU-SAFGRAD is one of the specialized technical offices within the department of rural economy and agriculture of the African Union Commission. Its vision falls within the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development (CAADP) framework which is at the heart of efforts by African governments to accelerate growth and eliminate poverty across the continent. AU-SAFGRAD has been designated as the institutional focal point of UNCCD for coordinating the Thematic Program Network for the Promotion of Sustainable Agricultural Farming Systems to Combat Desertification in Africa (TPN6) activities. The office also plays an important role at continental level in translating formal decisions taken at AU level into policies and strategies that should be adopted by Member States. Moreover, in the ministerial resolutions of the Conference of African Ministers of Agriculture (CAMA), 26-29 October 2010, Lilongwe, Malawi. Excellences Ministers of Agriculture requested AU-SAFGRAD to work with the six priorities areas (Access to and management of land and water resources; Productivity, technology, and innovation; Adaptation to and mitigation of impacts of climate change and desertification; Exploitation of national, regional and global market opportunities; Global, regional and national policies and institutions; and Strengthening local capacities) and lead formulation of appropriate programmes to improve livelihoods in semi-arid Africa. The new strategic plan (2014-2017) identifies two strategic goals with four programmes focusing on major sectors or sub-sectors to meet the above mentioned priorities areas.

**Strategic Goal 1** To strengthen policies, institutions and strategies that help enhance the resilience of rural livelihoods in semi-arid zones of Africa. It is envisaged that this goal will be attained through implementation of capacity building support for policy development and resilience programming semi-arid zones. Besides, a programme on strengthening agricultural livelihood-based producer organizations in semi-arid zones will be implemented under this goal. Also, This programme will focus on supporting institutional development of agricultural livelihood-based producer organizations and their engagement with CAADP; and promotion of strategic agricultural value chains in semi-arid zones.

**Strategic Goal 2** To enhance African capacities in research, technology dissemination and knowledge management for building the resilience of rural livelihoods in semi-arid zones of Africa; will be attained through implementation of a programme on facilitation of agricultural extension, research and transfer of technologies and innovations in the context of semi-arid zones. This programme will focus on supporting technology generation to strengthen resilience in semi-arid zones through capacity strengthening of research institutions; and, dissemination of technologies to enhance resilience and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. A programme on Knowledge management, networking and communication will also be implemented towards attainment of the goal. This programme will focus on documentation and sharing of success stories and lessons learnt; Coordination of UNCCD’s TPN6 activities for the Promotion of Sustainable Agricultural Farming Systems to Combat Desertification; and supporting ‘resilience-oriented’ networks under the CAADP Knowledge, Information and Skills support system. The six priorities areas as well as the four programmes represent cross cutting sectors and within the four CAADP pillars. These priorities and programs are highly relevant to the countries, regional, and continental levels.

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**Communities living and working in semi-arid areas will remain marginalized unless concerted actions are taken to reverse the situation.**

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Emerging evidences revealed that the agricultural sector offers huge potentials that African countries can exploit (based on comparative advantage) not only to fast track improved livelihoods and economic development but also enhance cooperation, collaboration and partnership. The agricultural landscape in the continent is inundated by small holders with limited means and associated high transaction costs - sector highly inefficient with uncompetitive products quality and prices. This scenario profoundly hampers the ability of Africa agriculture to furnish accelerated economic growth and rural transformation (a major thrust of the Africa Union Commission) in the continent.

As part of its mandate in conducting research aimed at achieving growth and transformation for shared prosperity and improved livelihood, through sustained agricultural growth, the AU-SAFGRAD office conducted the study on commodity value chain analysis. The study was aimed at identifying stakeholders along the strategic commodity supply chain, whose action affect the smooth functioning and impact on the transaction costs of commodities. This first study on challenges and opportunities for strategic agricultural commodities value chain development was conducted in the IGAD region of Africa.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region is comprised of eight member states (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan,) and it is a Regional Economic Community (REC) - one of the eight building blocks of the African Economic Community. A characteristic feature of the region is that most of it is classified as arid and semi-arid lands. The region is also endowed with vast, unexploited, fertile land and water bodies that can sustain intensive agriculture. Unfortunately, poorly developed commodity value chain coupled with a host of infrastructural and policy related constraints which have limited progress in achieving efficient cross border trade and investments in agriculture. Sesame and sorghum were selected as case study commodities because of their importance as key commercial and households’ food security crops respectively in five countries in the region.

The study concludes that increased sorghum and sesame chain efficiency coupled with the conducive climatic condition, the massive pool of farm families involved in production and marketing as well as the market demand in the region present huge opportunities to fast track improved livelihoods, economic growth and partnership in the region. The creation of an enabling production and marketing environment at the national level, to leverage on public private partnership models, while also encouraging opportunities for increased value addition services by primary actors are needed to catalyze the benefits. However, to achieve this landmark, some key challenges have to be overcome. There is the need to address information gaps at all levels in the value chain, encourage public private partnership through incentivized schemes and infrastructural development. To promote collaboration and cooperation in the region through trade in the agricultural commodities, the study recommends the inauguration of a high level technical advisory group to be facilitated by IGAD secretariat. The group will be responsible for charting the road map for the institutionalization and implementation of integrated commodities value chain considered key for ensuring food security and enhancing regional trade.
The African Union Heads of State and Government at its 22nd ordinary session on January 30th and 31st, 2014, adopted decision 492(XXII) relating to the strengthening of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Africa (UNCCD). As a follow-up to the implementation of African Union Heads of State and Governments, African Union Commission was requested to streamline and strengthen its specialized services (SAFGRAD and CCDU) so that they can serve as dynamic and effective platforms for guidance, experience sharing and coordination among the African centers of excellence on desertification.

The platform is to align the activities of the AUC organ on coordinating activities of Center Of Excellence on desertification.

As part of its mandate and effort to document and share success stories and lessons learnt, AU SAFGRAD has launched a process of printing and disseminating key documents among various agricultural stakeholders including Decisions makers, Farmers, Producers, Researchers, Scientists, Businessmen, NGOs, Media, Women Associations, Youth, etc.

In 2014 three books were printed. One thousand (1000) copies have been printed and delivered at AU SAFGRAD Office. Namely:

⇒ “AU-SAFGRAD Strategic (2014-2017)”;
⇒ “Biological Control of the Mango mealybug in West Africa”.

In the pipeline, six (06) documents are waiting. It is expected that those books should be printed out (or reprinted) during the first semester of year 2015.
Determining gaps in the CAADP-based National Agricultural and Food Security Investment Plans (NAFSIPs) in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) framework reflects the recognition that in Africa agriculture is central to the alleviation of poverty and hunger. Hence, the successful development of agriculture is crucial to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The African Union and New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) launched CAADP in 2003 in an effort to accelerate agricultural growth in the region. In the Maputo Declaration in 2003, Heads of State committed themselves to this goal by agreeing to allocate at least 10% of national budgets to agriculture. The aim is to achieve at least 6% annual rate of growth in the sector which is required in order to impact poverty and hunger.

Ten (10) years later, there is a need to assess progress done in order to understand the factors that have contributed to its successes, as well as to bring corrective actions that might have hindered progress. More specifically, desertification, land degradation and water resource management as well as emerging issue like climate change have not been adequately reflected in most of the NAFSIPs.

Within this context, AU/SAFGRAD facilitated a consultancy study in 2014 to assess the progress made in NAFSIPs support programme, particularly in the areas of desertification, land degradation and water resource management as well as in the emerging issue of climate change and adaptation. The focus of the study was to determine gaps in the identified areas in investments plans in four countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal). The draft reports were validated and the final reports are being prepared for onward transmission to ECOWAS secretariat and other relevant departments.

KEY STUDIES IN 2014

VISIT OF AUC DEPUTY CHAIPERSON TO AU SAFGRAD OFFICE

HE Eratus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of African Union Commission travelled to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 14 to 15 July 2014. Taking opportunity of his stay in Ouagadougou, HE Mwencha paid a significant visit to the Bureau of AU SAFGRAD.

During his visit, HE Mwencha met the Coordinator with the presence all the staff. After a presentation the programmes and achievements of the Office by the Coordinator Dr. Ahmed Elmekass and a video showing the important activities undertaken during the 50th AU/OAU anniversary, AU Deputy Chairperson held a long discussion with AU-SAFGRAD staff. He recalled the importance of Agenda 2063 and the necessity of all the staff to play their entire role in order to achieve the AU goals as already indicated in the current 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. Taking the allegoric example of the USA in the early 1960’s and their succeeded challenge “TO PUT A MAN IN THE MOON”, HE Eratus Mwencha urged every staff member, regardless of his position, to be an AUC Ambassador in order to attain the AU vision as stated in the strategic documents notably Agenda 2063. He also pleaded the necessity to rationalize the available resources of the AUC. In this regards he stressed the role that have to play the regional/technical AU offices in terms of coordination during important events held in hosting countries.
The Regional Steering Committee of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI) held its second meeting from 10 to 12 November 2014 in Dakar, Senegal. The objective of the two-day meeting is to make an inclusive stocktaking of the implementation, evaluate the achievements and explore the way forward in order to ameliorate the progress in the implementation of the GGWSSI.

Participants were coming from national and international organizations including AUC, NEPAD, FAO, UNCCD, World Bank, ICRAF, SOS SAHEL, ENDA etc. Also attending the meeting various national focal points coming from countries involved in the initiative among which Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. AU SAFGRAD Office was represented by two senior officers namely: Mr. KOUTOU Mamadou, Programme Officer and Mr. MBENGUE Youssoupha, Information and Outreach Officer.

In his welcome remarks, Mr. Elvis Paul TANGEM, GGWSSI Coordinator, thanked the government of Senegal for accepting to hold this meeting. “We are very grateful of the Republic of Senegal because this meeting was previously scheduled to take place in Ouaga-dougou, Burkina Faso but finally moved to Dakar, Senegal, in a very short notice, due to the Burkinabe current political situation” he stated. He also extended his appreciation to all the organizations that are contributing to the activities of the initiative, namely EU Delegation to the AU, FAO, Global mechanism of UNCCD, the World Bank, OSS and representatives of civil society and local communities. In his part, Mr. Almamy DAMPHA, also from AUC, has explained the context as well as expected outcomes of this meeting.

Chairing the opening ceremony, Mrs Ramatoulaye DIENG NDIAYE, Permanent Secretary of Senegalese Ministry of Environment, has in her opening remarks thanked the African Union Commission for selecting Senegal, “the Country of Hospitality”, to host this important meeting. She highlighted the importance of the GGWSSI notably its interest for the concerned countries that are challenging desertification and climate change. “We think that the outcomes of this Steering Committee will substantively increase the coordination mechanisms of this initiative between countries”, she added.

It is expected that the participants will discuss during two days the terms of reference and membership of the Regional Steering Committee (RSC); the Status of implementation of the GGWSSI; the way forward for enhancing the implementation initiative. The possible joint activities on capacity development and advocacy as well as the results framework will be also examined by the experts and members of the RSC.

The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative was endorsed in 2007 by African Union. This initiative is aiming at tackling the detrimental social, economic and environmental impacts of land degradation and desertification in the Sahel and the Sahara region. The initiative is seeking to improve food security and livelihood of the people, while contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation.
AU-SAFGRAD took part in the 4th Special Session of the Committee on Science and Technology and the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference

The fourth special session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST S-4) was held in Cancun, Mexico, from 9 to 12 March 2015. Representing AUC, AU SAFGRAD took part to this important event during which eight meetings have been held by the committee.

The Committee on Science and Technology (CST) is established as a subsidiary body of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to provide it with information and advice on scientific and technological matters relating to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought.

The CST meets in conjunction with the ordinary sessions of the COP. It is meant to be multidisciplinary, open to the participation of all Parties, and composed of government representatives competent in the relevant fields of expertise. The CST is assigned various advisory functions, data and information functions, research and review function, functions related to technology, and evaluation functions. It makes recommendations to the COP on ways and means to facilitate and strengthen networking at all levels. The role and responsibilities of the Committee are actively supported by the delegations to know the work of the CST Bureau.

The UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference aimed at producing sound scientific outputs that could inform policy formulation and dialogue at the Conference of the Parties (COP).

The meeting deliberations focused on various areas including: Combating desertification/land degradation and drought for poverty reduction and sustainable development; the contribution of science, technology, traditional knowledge and practices. The deliberations were focusing in the key scientific findings and policy-oriented implications with mentioning (a) Diagnosis of constraints; (b) Responses and (c) Monitoring and assessment.

With this event, some issues have been observed including the following: (i) Lack of participation of the African Member States in this meeting (about 16 member states have participated); (ii) Lack of publication of the scientific paper from African Scientist, and (iii) Lack of coordination among African Member States.

AUC team members had participated in the plenary sessions and contributed to the discussion in the different side events such as GEF, the local, national and other OSS etc. In addition, The UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference aimed at production of various findings and their implications to the policy making and decisions.
The Second edition of the Africa Drylands Week in N'djamena, Chad from August 25-29, 2014

In June 2011, FAO and a range of partners organized in Dakar, Senegal, the first Africa Drylands week to launch a process of inclusive dialogue on the way forward for Africa Arid zones development. Taking opportunity of the 2014 year of Agriculture and food security, the CAADP’s ten years anniversary of, as well as building on the lessons learnt from the first Africa Dryland week, the African Union Commission and its specialized agency on Drylands (SAFGRAD) organized the second edition of the Africa Drylands Week in N’Djamena, Chad from August 25-29, 2014.

The purpose of this week was to raise awareness of Drylands Challenges and also opportunities that occur in those regions. The week also meant to provide a forum for the different development institutions and countries to learn from each other as well as to develop clear plans for collective actions. The event consisted of: (i) Sessions on solutions to drought related issues in Dry land zones the and funding opportunities; (ii) Presentations by key actors including local community representatives and civil society organizations on their experiences and challenges and (iii) Field trips to share experiences on improving local communities and ecosystems resilience to climate change.

The main objectives of this mission include notably: (i) To take part as organizers to good planning and organizations of all the activities and tasks during the event; (ii) To actively represent SAFGRAD in this international forum addressing desertification/land degradation and drought-related issues in Africa; (iii) To advocate and popularize SAFGRAD mandate and programmes through exhibition and presentation; (iv) To enhance collaboration and synergies between SAFGRAD and partners; (v) To identify and discuss long term solutions to drought-related issues; (vi) To share and discuss the lessons and experiences among other actors in building resilience and (vii) To participate in policy Review on key issues affecting the resilience in Dry Land Zones of Africa.

SAFGRAD as co-organizer of this event along with the division of Environment and Natural resources at Headquarter/DREA had to actively participate to the success of this 2nd Drylands week. Moreover, as AU institution responsible for semi-arid zones, attending this forum has been very rewarding as there were vital debates and deliberations on the Africa agenda on Desertification and Land Management themes.

SAFGRAD, in addition to organizing session on resource Partnership, resource mobilization and knowledge management exposed posters on the different programmes that the office is undertaken. Those highlighted the goals, programmes and activities that SAFGRAD planned for the period 2014-2017.

SAFGRAD team also participated in a TV show on the subject of Desertification and Land degradation in Dryland areas. The profile of semi-arid zones challenges and opportunities were raised with AUC interventions in the region.

In addition AU-SAFGRAD in liaison with the Directorate of Information and Communication (DIC) of the Commission has prepared the press releases concerning the week. The office also moderated the press conference at the closing ceremony. A dozens of journalists have faced VIPs among those the Chad Minister of agriculture, CILSS executive Secretary, FAO representative.

In addition, The week provided the opportunity for discussions with some potential partners. Those include UNEP, UNCCD, GM and many national focal points of Great Green Wall (Chad, Mauritania and Senegal) and also changing views with donors. It has also given room to meet with TerAFRICA coordinator to discuss possible ways of mobilizing resources for programs that might be of common interest. Resource persons like the UNCCD Drylands Ambassador and ICRAF former Director General, Dr Denis Garrity, the representative of FAO have also been key people with whom we have discussed. Ambassador proposed a Skype session with SAFGRAD team to discuss and identify areas of collaboration.

The main recommendation would be to continue dynamic and strong advocacy engagement toward both stakeholders and donors. There was an attempt of launching the Africa working group on Desertification without prior consultation with SAFGRAD. With SAFGRAD being the focal institution of UNCCD dealing with desertification, this needs to be raised at higher level for corrective measures. This will go along with harmonization and coordination between units at DREA level.

As follow-up actions, the final declaration of the week highlighted the need for more concrete and coordinated actions to stop the desertification in the Dryland areas in Africa. In this regards SAFGRAD in consultation with ENR division in DREA and other relevant partners (CILSS, IGAD, and UNCCD etc) should work closely and come up programmes at grassroot level. More importantly, SAFGRAD should get to be more engaged and involved in the Africa working group on Desertification as requested in Malabo by African Heads of States and Government.