

CSOs root for increased agriculture financing in EAC



Left- Ms. Rhoda Sserwada Commissioner EAC Affairs, Mr. David Adama Coordinator PFA Actionaid Nigeria, Mr. Abel Rwendeire Chairperson National Planning Authority Uganda addressing the delegates at the summit held 26th May 2015 in Entebbe. | © CSBAG 2015

Civil society organisations in East African Community mobilised by Actionaid, Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) East and South African Farmers' Federation (ESAFF) have advocated for increased funding for the agricultural sector to better the lives of citizens within the region. They called on Partner States to ensure that the agriculture budget falls under the Malabo declaration which demands 10% of budget allocation.

Speaking on behalf of the CSBAG coordinator, during the opening of the Eastern African Communities summit, Ms. Sophie Kyagulanyi said there is need to galvanize partner states to invest more in agriculture since the biggest percent of the EAC population of 153 million people depend on agriculture.

The Summit was held under the theme: "walking the Talk: Increased Government Investment in agriculture sector and

empowering smallholder women farmers for shared Growth and development towards Agenda 2063." It attracted farmers, small holder farmers, government officials and Members of Parliament as well as delegates from Rwanda Tanzania, Uganda and Burundi and it aimed at interrogating the quality and quantity of public investment in agriculture in EAC Member States and its implication on ending extreme poverty.

Arthur Larok the Country Director of Actionaid Uganda emphasized the need for solidarity among CSOs to push forward the agenda of increased financing in agriculture. He also called for accountability among the CSOs especially on resources they have allocated to promote agriculture.

While presenting the state of financing agriculture in the EAC partner States, David Walakira the CSBAG Budget Specialist underscored agriculture performance as a key to uplifting the pro-poor from abject poverty. His presentation highlighted that EAC as compared to other regional blocs of ECOWAS and SADC trailed on regional expenditure on agriculture which averaged around 2.5bn US dollars compared to an average of 7bn for SADC. Another observation Walakira made was, on the 6 % annual growth in agriculture where only Rwanda and Kenya have ever realized the 6 % and beyond in the last four years though it is unstable. For example, Rwanda registered a 6.43% in 2012 but suddenly dropped to 3.3% in 2013. Uganda was noted as the worst performer in the region averaging around 2-1% annual growth in agriculture since 2010 to 2013 followed by Tanzania.

The Commissioner of Planning in the Ministry of Agriculture, Samuel Semanda who represented the Minister for Agriculture agreed with the civil society demand to increase financing on agriculture according to Malabo Declaration. He said the big chunk of money allocated to agriculture goes to small holder farmers.

During the high level panel reflection on keynote presentation, the Former Minister of Agriculture Victoria Sekitoleko advocated for agribusiness because it provides overwhelming opportunities to make money while, Kapelyebyong MP Peter Eriaku called for revisiting the private sector led economy approach so as bring to farmers on board.

Country specific action plans were generated to influence agriculture financing. Uganda's message involved calling on legislators to demand for enhanced investment in extension services, the approval of seed policy, disease control and water for agriculture production. The Rwanda delegation committed to hold public dialogues on agriculture financing and review the Sector review paper and produce a shadow report of the agriculture sector which will be submitted to their Government. The Tanzania and Burundi committed to build capacity for farmers to be able to track agriculture budgets and also enlighten farmers to ably lobby for the 10% increment on agriculture.

The State Minister of East African Community affairs Shem Bagaine was also present at the summit which was officially closed by the Commissioner of EAC Affairs, Rhona Serwadda who represented the Minister of East African Affairs. This is planned to be an annual even that will be used to take stock of annual commitments as well draw joint regional actions for increased financing for agriculture.

9 key recommendations were made by the delegates at this summit including:

Domesticating the International Agricultural declarations with a clear implementation framework and adequate resources (10%) of national budgets to achieve meaningful results in the agricultural sector.

Farmers to generate Farmers' manifestoes and demand that these become part of their governments' policies, programmes and budgets

Mutual accountability between civil society, government and its people continues to be the guiding principle of a progressive nation

Support to agricultures should go beyond production and move into productivity, postharvest handling access to credit as well price regulation.

Partner state governments find a balance between reclaiming the sector and merely giving agriculture an enabling environment while letting the sector be led by the private sector.

Harmonising country priorities so that the different arms of government, executive and parliament focus on the same priorities in the agriculture sector.

EAC governments to facilitate the access to market information through farmer networks within farmer organisations by encouraging investment in ICTs and other media.

Media to engage with the sector to highlight critical issues

Farmers continue to play the important role of food production and holding their governments in the region accountable