

Call for papers

Governance and Small-scale Agriculture in Southern Africa

Organisation: Idasa Economic Governance Programme,

Conference Dates: November, 9th – 11th/ Johannesburg, South Africa

From 9th to 11th November 2009, Idasa's Economic Governance Programme will host a conference on 'Governance and Small-scale Agriculture in Southern Africa'. The aim of the conference is to discuss governance and public investment processes and how these are shaping small-scale agriculture in the region. Specifically, the meeting will focus on three themes: priorities for public investment in agriculture; trends in public expenditure on small-scale agriculture; and, policy processes and stakeholder participation. The conference will provide a forum for stakeholders to identify constraints and opportunities in agriculture and draw interdisciplinary lessons and best practices.

Background and Scope:

In Africa, agriculture continues to be the linchpin of most national economies and serves as the main source of livelihood for poor rural households. For a continent facing perennial food shortages and limited financial resources, meeting the challenges of sustainable rural development and poverty reduction presents a daunting undertaking for most governments. Promoting agriculture remains crucial for meeting the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving poverty and hunger by 2015. However, a lack of concrete proposals for transforming small-scale agriculture across Africa has undermined efforts to overcome constraints and take advantage of opportunities in the sector. For example, the paradox of declining budget allocations to agriculture despite its continued high contribution to GDP in most African countries reflects some of the inconsistencies that need to be reconciled. With only 19% of African countries meeting their commitment to allocate at least 10% of their national expenditure to agriculture, it is clear that a seismic shift in thinking across the continent will be required to achieve ambitious targets such as those set out in the MDGs. This has conjured calls for a paradigm shift in thinking of appropriate ways of addressing the multiple facets of rural development interventions.

Regions, such as SADC, have taken cognizance of the role that agriculture plays in national development and have responded to emerging challenges such as drought, food shortages, increased food prices, climate change and the role of bio-fuels. In responding to such challenges, it has become increasingly important for policymakers in the SADC region to rely on regional frameworks of governance to formulate proposals and actions for agricultural development. Central to this process is the sharing of lessons and exploring best practices around key issues such as priority setting and pro-poor policy formulation.

Conference approach

The Conference will be structured as paper presentations and facilitated discussion sessions around the following three sub-themes: (i) Priorities for investment in agriculture; (ii) Trends in public expenditure on small-scale agriculture; and policy processes and stakeholder participation.

Sub- Theme 1: Priorities for investment in Agriculture:

In the last couple of years, there has been renewed focus on small-holder agriculture as a potential driver for growth and poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa. Governments and development agencies alike have expressed hope that such renewed interest will eventually fend off considerable skepticism as to whether public investment in small-holder agriculture will eventually lead to the desired growth and poverty reduction given the track record of failed agricultural investments in Africa. It is now widely acknowledged that agriculture-based investments have the potential to drive broader economic growth, and also provide the best prospects for pro-poor development outcomes as poverty is most chronic in rural parts of Africa where over 65% of the African population lives. Because of the complexity of most rural livelihood systems, details on the form of investments to prioritize under specific socio-economic conditions however remain poorly understood. These shortcomings have undermined investment efforts to reduce poverty through transformation of small-scale agriculture. This sub-theme explores lessons and best practices that are emerging from work done on prioritization and sequencing of agriculture-based investments to achieve pro-poor outcomes.

Specifically it explores the following questions:

- To what extent does small-scale agriculture provide realistic opportunities for rural populations to lift themselves out of poverty?
- What are the current trends in investment to support smallholder agriculture and how effective have they been in different African countries?
- What areas of investment in agricultural/rural development offer the best returns and how is this affected by the socio-economic context?
- What are the most effective approaches to sequencing of investments to support small-scale agriculture?

Sub- Theme 2: Trends in public expenditure and Small-scale farming

Many African governments continue to treat agriculture as a way of life for peasant families such that concrete commitments for transforming rural livelihoods are few and far between. Currently most SADC countries are allocating less than 6% of their national budgets to agriculture despite the sector contributing an average of around 18% to GDP. The lack of effective farmer organizational systems and limited support from civil society groups has undermined the ability of small-scale farmers to put pressure on governments, through sustained lobbying for adequate share of public expenditure. This sub-theme focuses on the trends in public expenditure on agriculture and the nature and magnitude of its impact on small-scale agriculture.

Specifically this theme will ask the following questions:

- What are the trends in government expenditure on small-scale agriculture and how effective are these in promoting pro-poor economic growth?

- How does government spending on agriculture compare with their stated commitments (e.g. Maputo Declaration) and what advocacy strategies are most effective in holding governments accountable to their commitments?
- How can public expenditure programs be sufficiently targeted to enable small-scale farmers to capture their full benefits?

Sub- Theme 3: Stakeholder participation in Agriculture policy

Stakeholder participation is a common practice in contemporary development policymaking. This is crucial in establishing ownership and a demand driven process from a stakeholder perspective. A key constraint is the lack of sufficient and accessible information to enable stakeholders at different levels to adequately engage in open dialogue and negotiation processes on issues that affect their welfare. This issue remains a major challenge for small-scale agricultural policy formulation processes across Africa. Farmer groups remain marginal to processes of public expenditure and priority setting, without a voice to influence political decisions that affect the sector. Often they are not sufficiently organized or informed enough to engage other more sophisticated stakeholders with concrete alternative proposals that better represent the needs and aspirations of the smallholder farmers. This theme explores models of stakeholder participation in agricultural policy making processes and distills key lessons on making these more effective. Specifically this theme tackles the following questions:

- What are the current models of stakeholder participation in agricultural policy making process, and have these improved pro-poor policy outcomes?
- What are the most pressing constraints to effective farmer representation in agricultural policy formulation processes and how can these be overcome?
- What is 'best practice' when designing models for small-scale farmer participation in policy making at nation and regional platforms?

Abstracts:

The abstract shall be self-contained and citation-free and shall not exceed 150 words, directly addressing the questions/issues raised in each sub-theme. Abstracts are also expected to contain the title of the paper, name(s) of the author(s), affiliation(s), and contact information of author(s). All abstracts should be sent to: Inyagah@idasa.org.za by September 31st for consideration.

Final papers:

The papers shall be evidence based and can be theoretical, empirical or policy oriented, and can approach the issues from a range of disciplinary perspectives. Moreover, papers shall be unpublished, present findings that fills-in critical gaps in knowledge or policy and/or analyze an emerging issue. All papers shall be submitted according to these instructions: max 6000 words or 20 pages in length, 12pt Times New Roman font and 1.5 margin spacing margins. Papers shall include the following:

- Title of the paper
- Full name(s) of the author(s)
- Full contact details of the author(s)
- Biographical note(s) of author(s) (max 100 words)

Note for presenters

Participants must be available to present findings at the conference to be held in **Johannesburg, South Africa** planned for 9- 11 November 2009. Subject to peer review selected papers will also be published in an edited conference book through a reputable publisher. For further inquiries please contact Robyn Lubbe at rlubbe@idasa.org.za.