



Media release
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Boosting Smallholder Farming is Key to Easing Hunger at Household Level in Southern Africa

If countries in the southern Africa region are to achieve food security at household level amongst the rural poor, there is need for a broad range of interrelated policies and strategies that include infrastructure development, anticipating climate shocks, structural reforms to strengthen the resource base of poor smallholder farmers, promoting smallholder farmers organizations, increased government support in providing access to inputs such as fertilizer and seeds, and the establishment of strong partnerships between the different social sectors.

A policy brief just released by the Southern Africa Trust entitled ***Seeds of Plenty: How Boosting Smallholder Farming Can Ease Hunger and Reduce Poverty at the Household Level in Southern Africa***, proposes that increased agricultural production for food security in poor households, should focus on smallholder farmers. Investments in improving smallholder farming usually result in greater poverty reduction and economic growth.

The policy brief highlights that although agricultural production is central to the southern African region's development, it has not yet achieved the levels of production necessary to ensure food security for all, particularly for the poorest who make up about 40% of the region's 249 million people.

The reasons that smallholder farming remains underdeveloped are identified in the policy brief as lack of access to land, inefficient agricultural management systems, lack of technological advancement, lack of adequate inputs for food production, and poor infrastructure, among others.

The policy brief recommends that the many challenges relating to the agricultural sector can be addressed through policies that enhance the role of the state in strengthening agricultural systems, with a focus on poverty.

Jennifer Chiriga, coordinator for civil society capability at the Southern Africa Trust said: "Malawi is a great example of how government intervention prioritized smallholder farmers to overcome chronic hunger and achieve national food security. The government introduced a new agricultural growth policy focused on giving subsidized inputs to smallholder farmers. The subsidies have led to a significant boost in production to the extent that Malawi has been exporting surplus staple grains to countries facing a deficit within the southern Africa region."

The policy brief further recommends developing transport networks that link production in rural areas with markets in urban areas to support smallholder farmers to become more productive by having easier access to bigger markets and facilitating better access to farming inputs such as fertilizer and seeds.

The policy brief calls on governments in southern Africa to invest in the management and development of water resources, including irrigation infrastructure and technologies. As smallholder farmers rely on rain-fed agriculture, the policy brief stresses the significance of an early warning system to proactively anticipate rainfall decline and to feed this information to smallholder farmers. This could include information on input markets, pricing and food availability.

Only 5% of the land area of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is classified as arable land, but just 45% of the arable land is cultivated. And only 4.48% of the cultivated land is irrigated, according to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) statistics.

The Southern Africa Trust is an independent non-profit agency that supports deeper and wider regional engagement to overcome poverty in southern Africa.

[Click here](#) for the full version of the policy brief.

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