



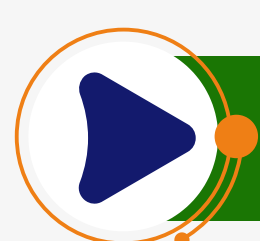
**FARMERS'  
VOICES:**

# **URGENT CALL FOR NEW SADC AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICE STRATEGY AND FRAMEWORK**

**What can the new SADC Strategy learn from existing Member States' Policies and Strategies?**

**ESAFF, Policy Brief No. 4, August 2024**

Developed by ESAFF within the framework of the Public Social Accountability (PSA) Alliance



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AAES</b>	Agriculture Advisory and Extension Services
<b>AgGDP</b>	Agriculture Gross Development Product
<b>BRR</b>	Biennial Review Report
<b>CAADP</b>	Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>ESAFF</b>	Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers Forum
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN
<b>FANR</b>	Food Agriculture and Natural Resources
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>HLPE</b>	High Level Panel of Experts
<b>ICT</b>	Information, Communication and Technology
<b>MAPP</b>	Multi-country Agricultural Productivity Programme
<b>MEL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
<b>M &amp; E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organisation
<b>PSA</b>	Public Social Accountability
<b>PSAM</b>	Public Social Accountability Monitor
<b>RAP</b>	Regional Agriculture Plan
<b>RAIP</b>	Regional Agriculture Investment Plan
<b>RISDP</b>	Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan
<b>R &amp; D</b>	Research and Development
<b>SAfAIDS</b>	Southern Africa HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination Service
<b>SADC</b>	Southern Africa Development Community
<b>SADC PF</b>	Southern Africa Development Community Parliamentary Forum
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Development Cooperation
<b>TGs</b>	Traditional Grains
<b>USD</b>	United States Dollar

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## SADC need a robust Agriculture Advisory and Extension Service Strategy



Smallholder farmers are the backbone of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region's agriculture. However, we face numerous challenges due to inadequate agricultural advisory and extension services. This results to limited access to vital information, technologies, and best practices, hindering production, productivity and efficiency. Without proper guidance, smallholders struggle to connect with markets and access to market information leading to lower incomes, economic instability, reduced crop yields, and increased food insecurity.

Recognizing this critical need, smallholder farmers across the SADC region have identified a robust Agricultural Extension and Advisory Service (AAES) Strategy as a priority. This strategy would coordinate regional efforts and significantly improve access to essential extension services.

This policy brief is intended for SADC policymakers, particularly the food, agriculture, and natural resources directorate (FANR), ministries of agriculture, departments, and agencies in SADC member states, the private sector, farmer organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, donors, academia, and all stakeholders interested in agricultural extension services.

This brief outlines the agricultural context of the SADC region, the critical importance of Agricultural Advisory and Extension Services (AAES), key findings on the current state of agricultural extension in SADC, the benefits and positive impacts of a regional AAES strategy, and recommendations from smallholder farmers.

On behalf of Smallholder Farmers in the region, I invite SADC policy makers to utilize this information to drive the transformation of agricultural sector in the region and align agricultural extension collective efforts with the African agricultural agenda, AU policy frameworks to enhance sustainable growth, productivity, and livelihoods for smallholder farmers.

Sincerely,

**Hakim Baliraine**

**ESAFF Chairperson and a Small-Scale Farmer**

Smallholder farmers need the new SADC agricultural extension and advisory services strategy to harmonise and coordinate regional efforts. This strategy will improve their access to vital information, technologies, and markets, leading to enhanced food security, increased agricultural productivity, and sustainable rural development across the region.

### Importance of Agriculture Advisory and Extension Services (AAES)

- AAES is crucial for the agricultural sector and rural transformation, providing necessary information and services to farmers and other rural actors to develop technical, organisational, and management skills.
- These services facilitate innovation, empower marginalized groups (women, youth, and poor men), and link farmers with markets.

### Current State of AAES in SADC

- Many SADC member states need standalone policies on agriculture advisory and extension services.
- There is a significant need for a regional strategy to govern extension development, as SADC currently lacks coordination and harmonization of existing policies.
- Low access to agriculture extension services is a common issue, with an insufficient ratio of extension officers to farmers in many member states.

### Benefits of a Regional AAES Strategy

- A well-coordinated regional policy will provide a yardstick for member states to evaluate their performance in agriculture advisory and extension services.
- It will enhance farmers' access to knowledge, information, and technologies, contributing to improved agricultural productivity and food security.
- The strategy will support regional integration, reduce food insecurity, improve agricultural GDP share, and enhance intra-SADC agricultural trade.

### Key Findings from the Desk Study

- Eight SADC member states have standalone agriculture advisory and extension services policies/strategies.
- South Africa and Malawi have the most comprehensive policies, focusing on smallholder farmers' needs, gender economic empowerment, and an implementation plan.
- The study highlighted the pluralistic nature of AAES delivery in SADC member states and the need for systematic assessment and performance measurement of national extension systems.

### Positive Implications of the Strategy

- Increasing food security and reducing undernourishment across the region.
- Enhancing the agricultural share of GDP and increasing agricultural trade within SADC.
- Reducing inflation rates for food and increasing agricultural value addition.
- Jointedness in planning and delivery of agriculture advisory and extension services, leading to coordinated levels of staffing, implementation, and reporting.

### Recommendations for the New Strategy

- Develop a regional strategy that mirrors member state extension policies and strategies.
- Standardize regional and member state agriculture advisory and extension services policies to create a systematic assessment and performance measurement framework.
- Recognize the role of various agricultural sector players and focus on integrated institutional structures.
- Embrace ICT-based innovations and ensure smallholder farmers have access to agriculture advisory and extension services via multiple platforms (radio, TV, mobile applications, computers).
- Establish a SADC regional agriculture extension forum with public, private sectors, and farmer organizations.
- Promote local viable technologies and indigenous knowledge systems by producers.
- Mainstream FAO agroecology principles and ensure multilingual information dissemination

### Conclusion

- The current state of SADC regional agriculture advisory and extension services strategy needs better coordination and support.
- A strategy can overcome current challenges, fully realizing the potential of extension services in driving farm growth and transformation.
- SADC must develop its strategy for harmonizing & coordinating the planning, implementation, and reporting of the AAES in the region to accelerate regional integration and sustainable development

### 3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agriculture Advisory and Extension Services (AAES) is a social component in the agriculture sector and rural transformation. Many SADC member states have, in one way or another, standalone policies on agriculture advisory and extension services or extension as a component embedded in agriculture policy.

SADC with 16 member countries, intends to put in place a regional agriculture advisory extension strategy.

According to the SADC RISDP 2030 document, SADC will develop a regional agriculture advisory and extension strategy to govern matters of extension development. The strategy will be a yardstick for member states to evaluate their performance regarding agriculture advisory and extension services. The strategy will facilitate farmers', their groups', organisations', and other market actors' access to knowledge, information, and technologies

AAES are vital in facilitating innovation processes, empowering marginalised groups (women, youth and poor men) through capacity development, and linking farmers with markets with a widened scope to include other issues in rural areas beyond agriculture

The Eastern and Southern African Farmers' Forum (ESAFF) and the Partnership for Social Accountability Alliance (PSA) conducted a desk study with the objective of understanding the agriculture advisory and extension services policy situation at both SADC member state and regional levels. Despite the critical role that extension plays in the socio-economic sphere of SADC member states, the study revealed that there is clearly a lack of agriculture extension policies/strategies in many SADC member states. It revealed the region's lack of coordination and harmonisation of existing extension policies as well as the understanding of a regional agriculture advisory and extension services policy at the SADC level. The findings also show that, there is low access to agriculture extension services in almost all SADC member states, which translates to a low ratio of extension officers to farmers in some SADC member states

The study indicates that eight (8) SADC member states have stand-alone agriculture advisory and extension services policies/strategies.

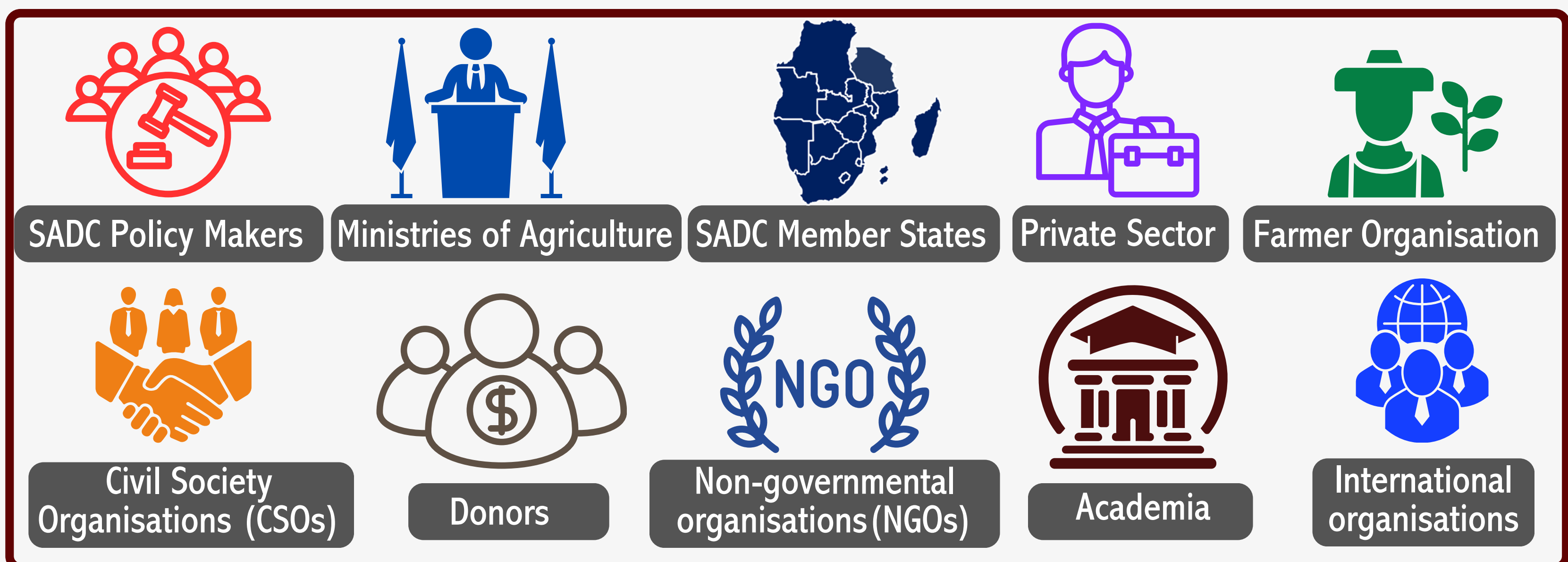
Two countries, South Africa and Malawi, were found to have the most comprehensive agriculture advisory and extension services policies

The study recognised the pluralistic nature of AAES delivery in SADC member states

The study also revealed that FAO has developed guidelines and tools for systematic assessment and performance measurement of national extension and advisory systems

The lack of a well-coordinated regional agriculture advisory and extension services policy has an impact on member states' smallholder farmers' access to, and member states' delivery of agriculture extension services, with an implication on regional integration, including food insecurity, prevalence of undernourishment, low agricultural share of GDP; low volumes of agricultural trade; high inflation rate for food; low agricultural value addition; agricultural loss to disasters; disjointedness in planning and delivery; varied and uncoordinated levels of staffing, poor implementation and reporting; and failure to harmonise and reach the SADC mission and goals.

This policy brief is intended for all stakeholders interested in extension services, amongst includes;



The brief is intended to inform decisions and actions to improve the state of agriculture advisory and extension services, which need more support to transform the agriculture sector and rural development in SADC. According to the SADC RISDP 2020-2030, developing a regional agriculture advisory and extension services strategy to govern extension development would improve agricultural extension services at the regional and national levels. It is, therefore, recommended that SADC must;

- Hasten to develop a regional strategy on agriculture advisory and extension services, which should mirror member state extension policies and strategies;
- Standardise regional and member state-level agriculture advisory and extension services policies or strategies to create a standard yardstick for systematic assessment and performance measurement of regional and national agriculture extension systems and
- Recognise the new SADC agriculture advisory and extension services strategy and the role of other agricultural sector players and focus on integrated institutional structures that bring together regional and national institutions.



## 4

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF AGRICULTURE IN SADC

The Southern African Development Community (SADC), established in 1992, is an economic bloc of 16 member countries. Agriculture is a cornerstone of the region. Most SADC's farmers are smallholders, particularly women, youth, and those residing in rural areas

This agricultural sector, encompassing crops, livestock, fisheries, and forestry, significantly contributes to food security in the region.

**70** % of **345** million  
rely on agriculture for  
their livelihoods

**20%** agriculture  
contribution to the  
SADC region GDP

SADC GDP is  
**\$ 721**  
billion

Effective agricultural development hinges on well-structured government interventions, including robust agricultural advisory services. The Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Biennial Review Reports (BRR) show quite low access to agriculture advisory and extension services in 16 SADC member states, with only two countries, **Zimbabwe and Seychelles**, being consistently on track in the biennial review reports between 2017-2023<sup>1</sup>.

Other literature sources show a low Extension Officer-to-Farmer ratio in the SADC member states. For example, in **Zambia 1: 2000**<sup>2</sup>, **South Africa 1: 1034**, **eSwatini 1: 1000**, **Lesotho 1: 750** and **Malawi 1: 900**.

## 5

## OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE FOR AGRICULTURE ADVISORY AND EXTENSION STRATEGY (AAES) IN SADC

Agriculture Advisory and Extension Services (AAES) are a social component in the agricultural sector and rural transformation. Also called rural advisory services or extension services, agriculture advisory and extension services are “all the different activities that provide the information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural settings to assist them in developing their own technical, organisational, and management skills and practices to improve their livelihoods and wellbeing” (Christoplos, 2010). Agriculture advisory and extension services imply all the activities facilitating access to knowledge, information, and technologies for farmers, their groups, organisations, and other market actors

Agriculture advisory and extension services are fundamental to enhancing regional agricultural productivity and food security. The SADC Regional Agricultural Policy (RAP 2014) and the SADC Multi-country Agricultural Productivity Programme (SADC MAPP) recognised this importance. Delivery of these services in SADC member states is pluralistic in nature

The SADC RAP acknowledges the role of different institutions that provide AAES, including indigenous knowledge systems. Such institutions include farmer organisations, research and development (R&D) institutions, centres of excellence, commodities associations, and sub-sector institutions.

**FAO recognises agriculture advisory extension services** to be vital in facilitating innovation processes, empowering marginalised groups through capacity development, and linking farmers with markets<sup>3</sup>, with a widened scope to include other issues in rural areas that go beyond agriculture and may include services such as;

- (i) **Training, dissemination and provision of information** for individual farmers, local entrepreneurs, groups of farmers, farmer organisations, cooperatives and other agribusinesses about technologies, new research, markets, input, financial services, and climate/weather, entrepreneurship, management skills, nutrition food security, home science, conflict management and legal matters. This would also include facilitating access to non-extension government support (such as weather-related insurance, phytosanitary and certification services) and subsidy programmes, such as environmental services and other schemes related to carbon credits;

<sup>1</sup> Zimbabwe and Seychelles

<sup>2</sup> National Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services Strategy, 2017



- (ii) **Facilitating linkages among market actors**, including financial and non-financial inputs, processing, trading, brokering collaboration and promoting social learning;
- (iii) **Linking smallholder farmers, rural entrepreneurs and other agricultural community members** with institutions offering training and education in fields relevant to the agricultural sector
- (iv) **Facilitating linkages** between farmers, their organisations and the public sector;
- (v) **Supporting institutional development processes** and social, institutional and organisational innovations;
- (vi) **Developing informal and formal farmer organisations** and rural youth & women organisations and helping them articulate their demands;
- (vii) **Supporting implementation of government policies and programmes** through information, awareness, and advice on technological options, including land stewardship, food safety, and animal welfare;
- (viii) **Contributing to developing more appropriate policies and programmes** by facilitating feedback from farmers and local entrepreneurs;
- (ix) **Increasing awareness** of new opportunities for certification of ‘green,’ fair trade and other production methods.

The Eastern and Southern African Farmers’ Forum (ESAFF) and the Public Social Accountability (PSA) Alliance conducted a desk study to understand the agriculture advisory and extension services policy situation at both SADC member state and regional level. The study revealed a lack of a well-coordinated and harmonised regional agriculture advisory and extension services policy, as well as in SADC member states. It also revealed that, although some member states had policies, their national agriculture advisory and extension services policies did not speak to regional integration<sup>4</sup>

Despite the fact that the key role agriculture advisory and extension services play in the socio-economic sphere of SADC member states, there is a clear lack of well-coordinated policies in many SADC member states, regional coordination and harmonisation of existing policies, and a regional agriculture advisory and extension services strategy at the SADC level.

The lack of a well-coordinated regional agriculture advisory and extension services strategy impacts member states’ smallholder farmers’ access to extension services and member states’ delivery of extension services, which impacts regional integration. Without the regional agriculture advisory and extension services policy, SADC lacks a yardstick for itself and member states to evaluate performance regarding delivery and access to agriculture extension.

This situation affects smallholder farmers’ access to information and technology and participation in improving their livelihoods. It also affects SADC member states’ delivery of extension services and SADC’s efforts to accelerate regional integration, end hunger, end poverty, and ensure sustainable development.



<sup>3</sup> FAO (2010), Mobilising the potential of rural and agricultural extension

<sup>4</sup> At the core of SADC policies is “promoting sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development that will ensure poverty alleviation with the ultimate objective of its eradication, enhance the standard and quality of life of the people of Southern Africa and support the socially disadvantaged through regional integration.”

## 6 APPROACH AND KEY FINDINGS

### 5.1 Approach

Following the intention of SADC to put in place a regional extension services strategy, ESAFF and the PSA Alliance conducted a desk study to analyse the agricultural advisory and extension services (AAES) status in the SADC region, looking at agricultural policies and extension policies and strategies of 13 member states<sup>5</sup>. A limitation of the desk review was that the study team needed to access extension policy documents from three (3) SADC member states: Angola, Comoro and Mauritius.

Using secondary data, this policy document draws from various relevant publications, which include extension policies and strategies of 13 SADC member states, the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Biennial Review Reports (BRRs), Southern African Development Community Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (SADC RISDP) 2020–2030, SADC Food and Nutrition Strategy 2015–2025 and FAO-2022 Indicator Framework for National Extension and Advisory System - Metrics for performance and outcome measures. Other documents include ESAFF Fact Sheets (financing, extension, seed and research) and Feed the Future - Extension and Advisory Services

### 5.2 Key findings

At the regional level, SADC lacks an agriculture advisory and extension services (AAES) policy that should act as a yardstick for member states to evaluate their performance regarding extension. Neither does SADC have a strategy for the delivery of AAES. However, in its Regional Agricultural Policy, SADC provides for (i) policy guidance for the region's agricultural Research and Development (R&D); and (ii) Informing strategies and instruments to effectively promote increased adoption rates of appropriate technologies by farmers, such as through research, capacity building and exchanges and dissemination of experiences. Under the RISDP 2020 – 2030, SADC plans to implement agriculture advisory and extension services.

The CAADP measures farmers' access to agriculture advisory services in its Biennial Review Report. According to the 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2023 reports, only Zimbabwe and Seychelles were on track in this indicator.

#### SADC Members on track on access to agriculture advisory services in CAADP Biennial Review Reports



#### The 1st CAADP Biennial Review Report of 2017

Countries on track were **Angola, Seychelles, and Zimbabwe.**

#### The 2nd CAADP Biennial Review Report of 2019

SADC member states on track for access to Agriculture advisory services were **eSwatini, Mauritius, Seychelles and Zimbabwe,**

#### The 3rd CAADP Biennial Review Report of 2021

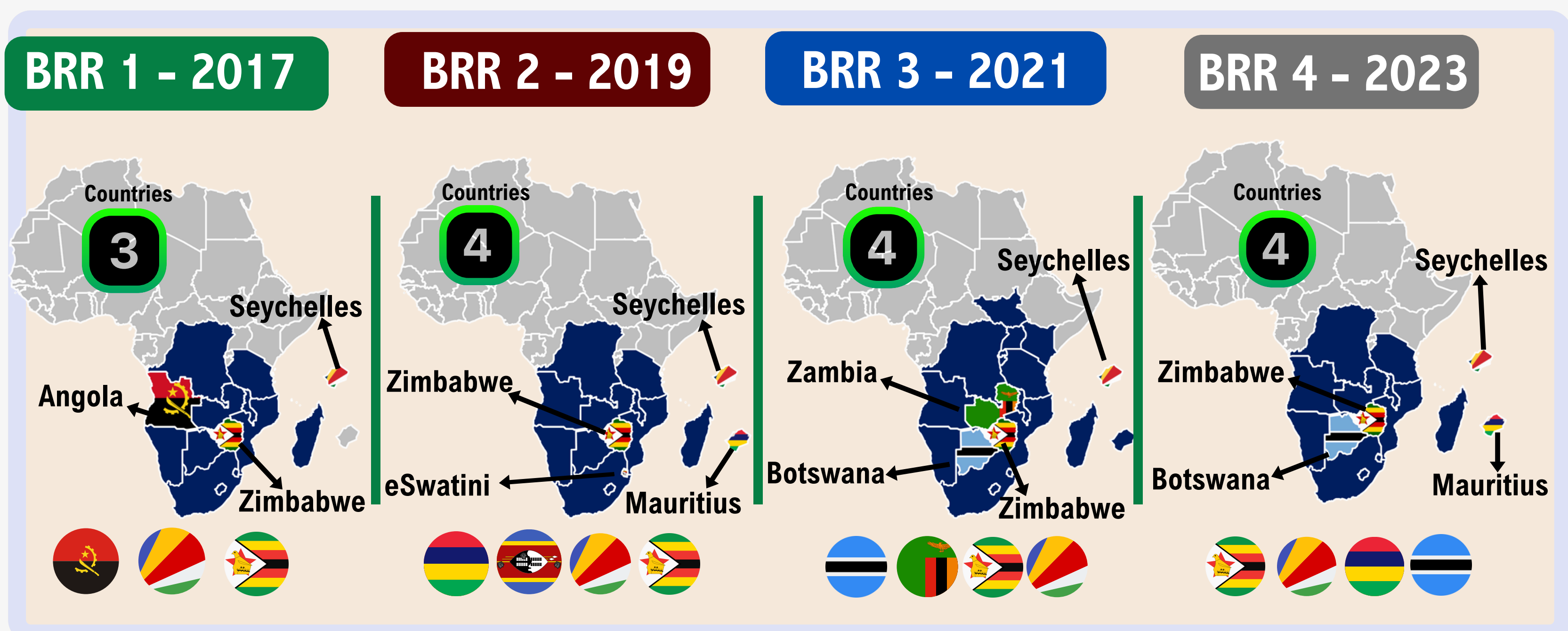
Countries on track include; shows that **Botswana, Seychelles, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.**

#### The 4th CAADP Biennial Review Report 2023

Shows that only four countries in SADC were on track for farmers to access Agriculture advisory services: **Botswana, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Zimbabwe.**

<sup>5</sup>Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania (URT), Zambia and Zimbabwe

SADC countries on track in Advisory Services performance indicator: as per Malabo Biennial Review Reports



Out of the 13 SADC member states targeted for this study, eight (8) had standalone agriculture advisory and extension services policies/strategies. On the other hand, despite the good performance in farmers' access to extension services, some countries like Botswana, Seychelles, and the United Republic of Tanzania indicated that they did not have stand-alone Agriculture advisory and extension services strategies or policies<sup>6</sup>.

Zimbabwe and Seychelles performed well in 4 CAADP biennial review results; the country has a current strategy called Zimbabwe Agricultural Education, Extension, Research and Modernisation Plan (2022 -2027); the plan also has a budget of 7 years 2021-2027 and its uniqueness compared to other strategies in SADC member states is that it focuses on the commercialisation of traditional grains (TGs) and modernising Pfumvudza (a crop production intensification approach under which farmers ensure the efficient use of resources (inputs and labour) on a small area of land to optimise its management). On the other hand, the Mozambique Agrarian Extension Master Plan 2007 – 2016 strategy is anchored on rural development.



<sup>6</sup> Malawi, South Africa, Lesotho, eSwatini, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana

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# WHAT THE NEW SADC AGRICULTURE ADVISORY AND EXTENSION STRATEGY CAN LEARN FROM EXISTING STRATEGIES (SOUTH AFRICA, MALAWI)

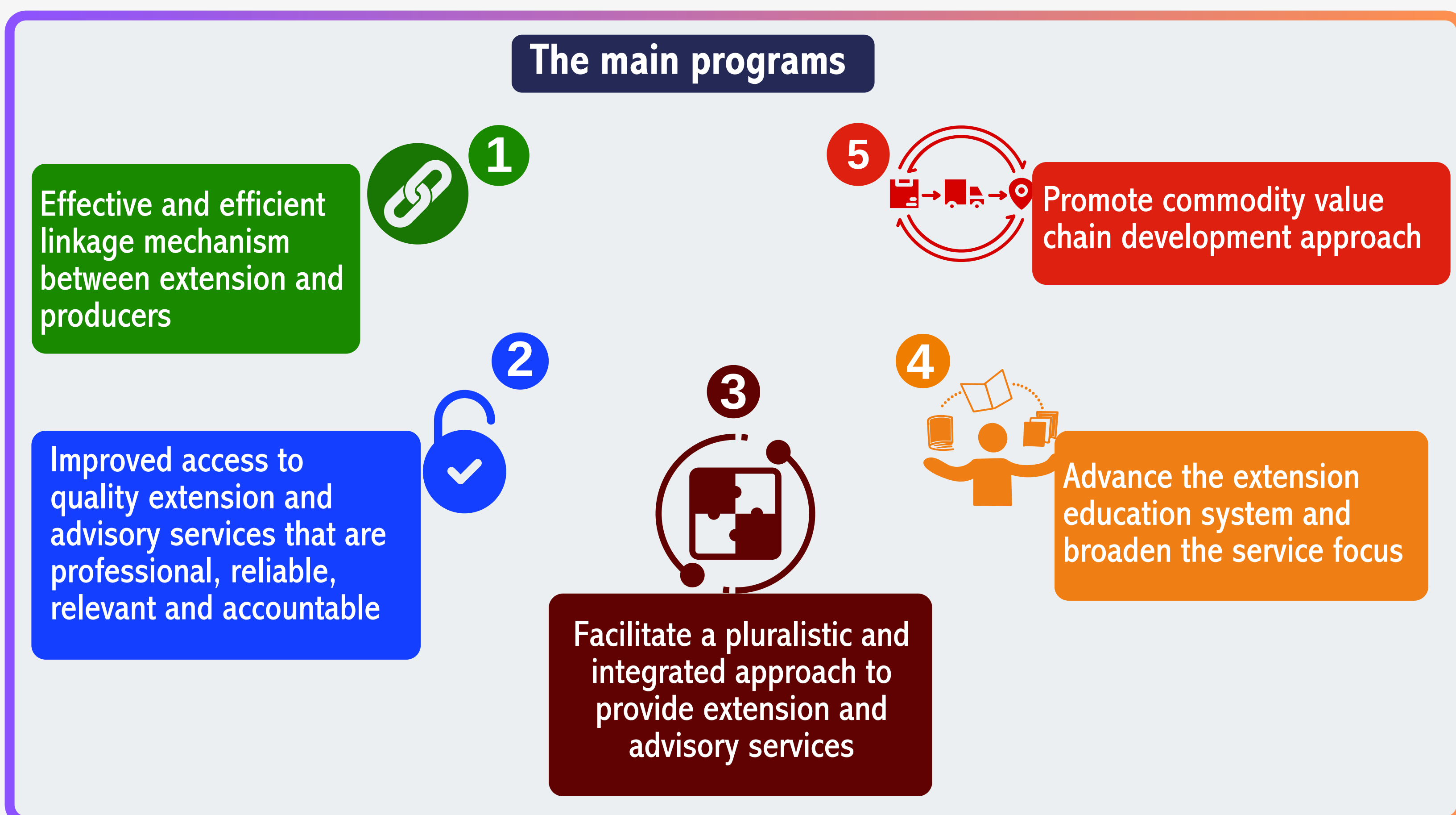
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The countries that performed well in all 4 CAADP biennial review reports are Seychelles and Zimbabwe, however, according to the analysis, Mozambique, Malawi and South Africa are the countries with the most comprehensive agriculture extension policy and strategy.

**5.1 The South Africa National Policy on Extension and Advisory Services** is comprehensive and has focus on smallholder farmers’ needs, details its goals, objectives, anticipated ratios, an implementation plan, and gender economic empowerment, which includes involvement in agriculture, forestry, food security, property, access to credit, markets, and production. The policy provides roles and responsibilities of different players in the implementation plan and institutional arrangements, including public sector institutions, private sector, producer organisations, commodity groups, NGOs, academia and agricultural development institutions



South Africa Agriculture Advisory extension policy



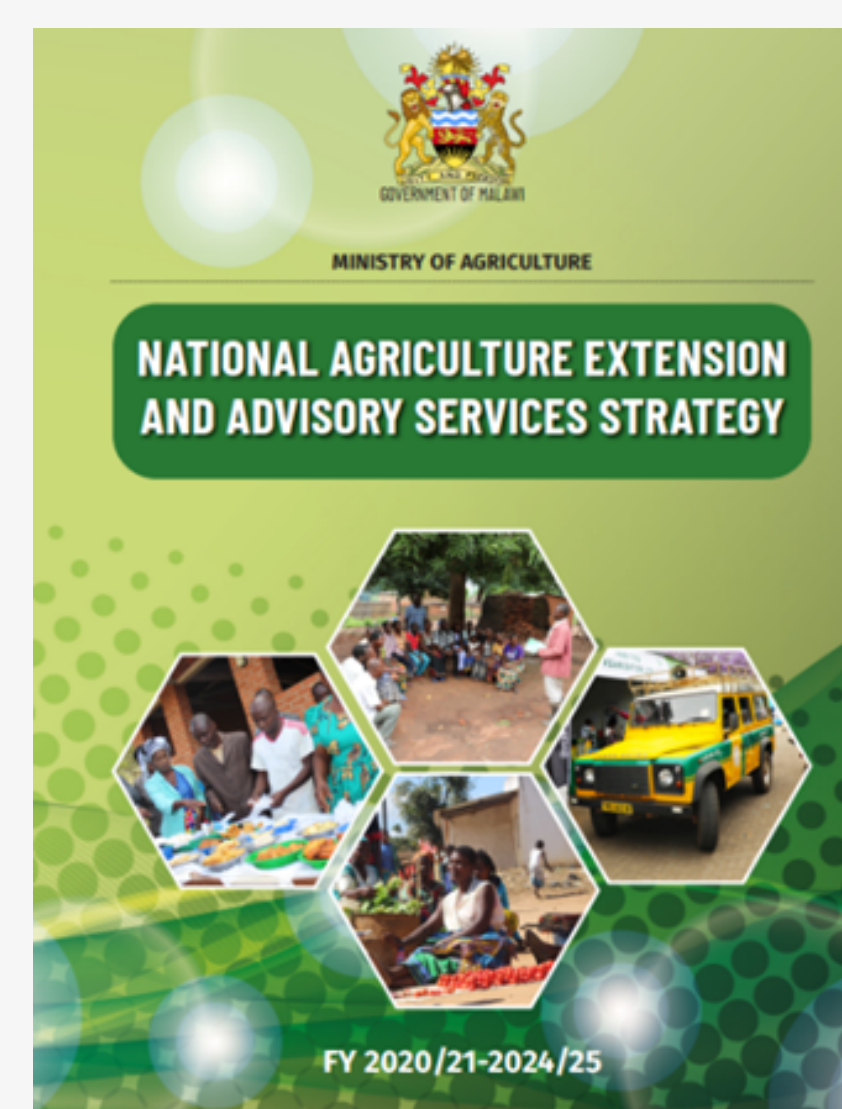
The South Africa agriculture extension strategy offers to the SADC new extension strategy a focus on smallholder farmers’ needs, an implementation plan and gender economic empowerment with various programs involved in agriculture, forestry, food security, access to credit, markets and production while recognising the roles of different players.

<sup>5</sup> Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania (URT), Zambia and Zimbabwe

<sup>6</sup> Malawi, South Africa, Lesotho, eSwatini, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana

**5.2 The Malawi National Agriculture Extension and Advisory Services Strategy** drew lessons and experiences from extension services policies and strategies from Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Uganda and Rwanda. The policy was also drawn from specific national strategies directly influencing agriculture advisory and extension services. It has a specific budget, and monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, as well as an information management system.

The Malawi National Agriculture Extension and Advisory Services Strategy has four main pillars: human and institutional, decentralised and standardised planning and monitoring, innovation and learning, and financing extension. The details of the pillars are as follows:



**Pillar 1:**

Human, Institutional and Agriculture Extension Organizational Capacity (capacity of state and non-state actors, improved productivity for gender categories, improved working and living conditions of officers, training institutions, farmer organisations and youth clubs).

**Pillar 2:**

Decentralized agriculture extension, advisory and support services (Enforce Standards, inclusive planning, monitoring and feedback, mainstreaming of Gender, including Youth and Women, participation of Youth, Women and people with disabilities, Gender, HIV and AIDS interventions, mainstreaming Nutrition, HIV and AIDS, and Climate Change, Promote Diversified production and Utilization of nutritious and safe foods, Strengthen Farmer decision-making in the face of Climate change).

**Pillar 3:**

Innovation and Learning for Agriculture Transformation (ICT, M&E), and

**Pillar 4:**

Sustainable Financing of Agriculture Extension and Advisory Services (Public Sector, Development Partners and Private sector).

The new SADC agriculture extension strategy can learn from the Malawi strategy, which has four main pillars: human and institutional, involving state and non-state actors (including the private sector); decentralised and standardised planning and monitoring; gender mainstreaming; and inclusion of youth, women, and people with disabilities while addressing nutrition, HIV, climate change, innovation, and ICT as well as financing.

**5.3 The FAO Assessment and Performance Indicators**

The new SADC agriculture advisory extension strategy could exploit guidelines and tools from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) that developed systematic assessment and performance measurement of national extension and advisory systems. These guidelines and tools comprise an assessment guide, scoring tool an indicator framework and indicator framework. The indicator framework traces performance from input to input and uses participatory data collection methods, including quantitative and qualitative data. The indicators are divided into two: core indicators and complementary indicators.

**There are ten (FAO) core indicators:**

(i) Farmers accessing Extension Advisory Services in-person visit or through virtual/ mobile assistance	(ii) Farmers are organised into groups or associations	(iii) Organised learning events	(iv) Farmers use ICTs to access extension services	(v) Investments in extension services by public, private, and civil society actors
(vi) Public investments in advisory extension services as a percentage of AgGDP	(vii) Extension personnel human resources	(viii) Rural population access to mobile phones	(ix) National coordination mechanism for agriculture extension services providers	(x) Monitoring, public investments in advisory extension services as a percentage of AgGDP, and national, evaluation, and learning (MEL) for agriculture advisory extension services.

Apart from the FAO core indicators highlighted above, the organisation also provides a set of 30 complementary indicators. <https://shorturl.at/egiKV>

## POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW SADC AGRICULTURE ADVISORY AND EXTENSION SERVICES STRATEGY

Agriculture is a cornerstone of the SADC region, with roughly 70% of the 345 million population relying on it for their livelihoods. Most SADC's farmers are smallholders, particularly women, youth, and those residing in rural areas.

The agricultural sector's contribution to SADC's GDP is 30.18%<sup>7</sup> with a GDP of USD 721 billion. Effective agricultural development hinges on well-structured government interventions, including robust agriculture advisory and extension services.

Agriculture advisory and extension services policies and strategies are a leading and important component in rural transformation for the provision of information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors to assist them in developing their own technical, organisational, and management skills and practices and actively participate in growing national and regional economies, as well as improve their livelihoods and wellbeing. Quality and quantity rural financing will result in improved **infrastructure** (Rural roads, irrigation and electricity, ICT which includes **rural telecommunications infrastructure**, construction of telecom towers and the expansion of high-speed internet through fibre-optic networks in rural areas to provide reliable digital services that support agricultural production and extension services accessible via mobile phones. Women and youth in agriculture will utilise digital platforms to gain crucial information on weather forecasts, pest control and best farming practices. **Studies by Bilali and Allahyari** assert that ICT-based innovations can improve rural livelihoods and empower smallholder farmers in developing countries by enhancing connectivity and increasing access to accurate and timely agriculture information. Another is Value addition, awareness of SPS and food safety standards, access to equitable markets, quality education, waters and health services). The presence of well-trained, motivated, equipped extension officers will result to enhanced rural democracy and inclusivity, the flourishing of well-organised gender-sensitive cooperatives and farmers associations, increased safe food and nutrition security, and reduced rural poverty.

The implications of lack of a well-coordinated and harmonised regional agriculture advisory and extension services policy and national policies that do not speak to regional integration, stand-alone Agriculture advisory and extension services policies/strategies, and low extension officer to farmer ratio in the region are dire and need attention; **if coordination and harmonisation are addressed will improve the following;**

### (i) Increasing food security:

Without appropriate information, technologies and informed participation of farmers in SADC member states, food insecurity will continue to increase. For the period 2014-2022, food insecurity has been increasing in, for example, the following SADC member states: Angola (21% to 31.2%), Botswana (18.4% to 26.7%), Malawi (47.7% to 52.2%), Namibia (28.8% to 33%) and Zambia (22.4% to 32.1%);

### (ii) Reduced prevalence of undernourishment

The SADC region has shown an increasing average prevalence of undernourishment in the period 2012-2022 from 19.1% to 23.6%;

### (iii) Improved agricultural share of GDP

The share of agricultural contribution in the SADC region has shown an average decline in the period 2010-2022 from 14.7% to 12.7%;

### (iv) Increased intra-SADC agricultural trade

The intra-SADC agricultural trade had declined from 2015-2022 from 33.5% to 30.2%. Coupled to this, was a decline in intra exports of agricultural products from 36.3% to 30.8% in the period 2011-2022

<sup>7</sup>[www.sadc.int/sadc-statistics/statstics-database](http://www.sadc.int/sadc-statistics/statstics-database), accessed on 30th May 2024

### (v) Reduced inflation rate for food

In the period 2010-2022, some SADC member states recorded an increase in average inflation rates, such as eSwatini (0.4% to 8.5%), Mauritius (3.4% to 15.1%), South Africa (0.8% to 9.5%) and Zimbabwe (4.8% to 228.2%)

### (vi) Higher agricultural value addition

In the period 2015-2022, intra-manufacture SADC trade declined from 24.1% to 22.7%;

### (vii) Reduced Direct agricultural loss to disasters

Some SADC member states have shown direct agricultural loss to natural disasters. For example, eSwatini with an increase from about USD240, 000 in 2005 to about USD9m in 2021; Malawi with a 3-year consecutive loss of UDS23m in 2018, USD29m in 2019 and USD8m in 2020; and Tanzania with rising costs in the period 2015-2017 from about USD1.6m to about USD5m;

### (viii) Jointedness in planning and delivery of agriculture advisory and extension services and Regional Research

Lack of coordinated and harmonised regional Agriculture advisory and extension services strategy may result in disjointedness in planning and delivery of Agriculture advisory and extension services across the SADC member states, affecting a population of 345 million in the SADC region whose livelihoods rely on agriculture; Extension services and research could be allowed across borders of the same ecological zones in SADC countries

### (ix) Coordinated levels of staffing, implementation and reporting

On agriculture advisory and extension services across SADC member states;

### (x) Harmonised and achieved SADC's mission goal

To provide strategic expertise and coordinate the harmonisation of policies and strategies to accelerate regional integration and sustainable development.

### (xi) Establish standardised regional and member state-level agriculture advisory and extension services policies/strategies

To create a standard yardstick for systematic periodic assessment and performance measurement of regional and national agriculture extension systems.



Smallholder farmers recommend a draft framework for the new SADC agriculture advisory and extension services strategy to consider the following;

- (i) It is recommended that the new SADC extension advisory services strategy to include pillars (4);
  - **Pillar 1:** Human, Institutional and Agriculture Extension Organizational Capacity
  - **Pillar 2:** Decentralized and cross border agriculture extension, advisory and support services
  - **Pillar 3:** Innovation, ICT, Mechanisation and Learning for Agriculture Transformation
  - **Pillar 4:** Sustainable Financing of Agriculture Extension and Advisory Service
- (ii) The new SADC extension strategy should focus on **participatory and integrated institutional structures** (Regional - National coordination) that bring together research institutions, extension, and producers.
- (iii) The SADC's extension strategy should establish a **regional agriculture extension forum** with public, private, and farmer organisations linking up with national public-private—farmer organisation Forum.
- (iv) The new SADC extension strategy should consider **clustering agroecological zones** in the region, organising smallholder producers into commodities groups, and linking up research centres, processing centres, and value chains/markets across member countries to leverage **cross-border extension services and cross-border trade** to maximise the benefits of regional integration.
- (v) The new SADC strategy should **standardise training, recruitment and certification** of senior extension officers to ensure the competence of extension professionals working across agroecological zones
- (vi) The SADC agriculture advisory and extension services strategy should consider **inclusive components** such as crops, livestock, fisheries, forestry, horticulture, research, ICT, mechanisation, demand-driven production, marketing, savings and credit, natural resource management, nutrition, climate Change adaptation, women, youth, poor men, and gender-responsive budgeting.
- (vii) The new SADC agriculture advisory and extension services strategy may **mainstream FAO agroecology ten elements and the 13 principles of the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE)** as an integral part of the approach as the science of applying ecological concepts and principles to manage interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment for food security and nutrition. (FAO Agroecology knowledge hub - <https://bit.ly/3yctlf5>) and the Zimbabwe Pfumvudza.
- (viii) The new SADC agriculture advisory and extension services strategy should encourage producers to **adopt local viable technologies and document and share indigenous knowledge systems**.
- (ix) The SADC's new agriculture advisory and extension services strategy should embrace a **multilingual approach**, in line with information dissemination processes, to enable open access to information by all actors across the value chain. It should also elaborate on the scientific jargon.
- (x) The SADC's new strategy should **ensure smallholder farmers use ICTs to access agriculture advisory and extension services**. This could include different ICT avenues, such as national and local radio, TV, mobile phone applications, and computers.
- (xi) The SADC's new strategy should include an **indicator of public investments in agriculture advisory and extension services** as a percentage of agricultural growth domestic product (AgGDP) to help place the level of investment in the context of the size of a member state's agriculture sector.
- (xii) The new SADC agriculture advisory and extension services strategy could **establish an extension unit within the SADC FANR** to support the coordination, implementation, monitoring, learning, and periodic evaluation of the strategy
- (xiii) SADC should domesticate or ratify AU Digital Agriculture Strategy\_ (DAS), The AU Sustainable Agriculture Mechanism Framework for Africa (SAMA), The African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralization, Local Governance and Local Development (June 2014), and the AU Blueprint for the implementation of Rural Transformation Policies in Africa (2019).

<sup>8</sup> A crop production intensification approach under which farmers ensure the efficient use of resources (inputs and labour) on a small area of land in order to optimize its management



The current state of the SADC Regional Agriculture Advisory and Extension Services Strategy (AAES) needs better coordination and support. According to the SADC RISDP 2020-2030, developing a regional strategy to govern extension development would improve extension service delivery at regional and national levels. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the new strategy across the region could be more consistent, with systemic weaknesses in some member states hindering agricultural development.

The proposed comprehensive SADC regional agriculture advisory and extension strategy could hold promise for overcoming current challenges and fully realising the potential of extension services in driving farm growth and transformation.

Therefore, it is concluded that, by the power vested in it, through its mission and goal, SADC must immediately provide strategic expertise and coordinate for, concluded that, by the power vested in it, through its mission and goal, SADC must with immediate effect, provide strategic expertise and co-ordinate the harmonisation of regional and member state agriculture extension policies and strategies to accelerate regional integration and sustainable development.

SADC, too, must henceforth develop its own strategy for harmonisation and coordination of planning, implementation and reporting of the agriculture advisory and extension services strategy (AAES) in the region with the following considerations;

- **Harmonised and coordinated planning and delivery of agriculture advisory and extension services strategies in the region.** SADC must hasten to develop a regional strategy that mirrors member states' policies and strategies on agriculture advisory services.
- **Standardisation of SADC and member state level agriculture advisory and extension services strategies or policies:** For consistency and harmonisation, both the SADC level and national level AAES strategies should be aligned to FAO guidelines and tools, taking into account the strengths of the comprehensive Malawi and South Africa agriculture extension policies and lessons from other SADC member states, such as lessons and experiences from Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Uganda and Rwanda that fed into the Malawi National Agriculture Extension and Advisory Services Strategy. This will be important to create a standard yardstick for systematic assessment and performance measurement of regional and national agriculture extension systems.
- **Recognition of other agricultural sector players in agriculture advisory and extension services strategies:** The FAO guidelines, the SADC RAP and agriculture extension policies of Malawi and South Africa recognise the pluralistic nature of extension services delivery. In developing the new SADC agriculture advisory and extension services strategy, it is imperative to strengthen the role of other agricultural sector players to promote higher degrees of knowledge and information sharing and provide appropriate, tailored effective and efficient farm support systems. The new SADC strategy should also focus on integrated institutional structures that bring together regional and national institutions and
- **Linking financing for rural transformation with quality agriculture advisory and extension services;** The new SADC agriculture extension strategy should go hand in hand with rural transformation with information technology adoption and digital literacy and innovation. Improved agriculture extension services should go hand in hand with financing for rural transformation that embraces investment towards **infrastructure** (rural energy, rural roads, irrigation schemes, telecommunications, agro-processing centres) and **quality social services** (rural health care, education and vocational skills) as well as **participatory gender responsive governance**.

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**The Partnership for Social Accountability (PSA) Alliance** is a consortium of organisations working to strengthen social accountability in health and agriculture across Southern Africa. The consortium comprises ActionAid, PSAM– Public Service Accountability Monitor of Rhodes University; SAfAIDS; and ESAFF – Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers’ Forum.



The Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF) is as a network of grassroots organizations of small-scale farmers with a membership of 5.5 million smallholder farmers, operating across 17 nations of Eastern and Southern Africa

(Botswana, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, eSwatini, Lesotho, Mozambique South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Madagascar, Seychelles).

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