



Proceedings of the First Regional Agricultural Information Management System Technical Committee Meeting

Volume I: SUMMARY REPORT

10 – 12 MARCH, 2010

**THE LAKES HOTEL
JOHANNESBURG
SOUTH AFRICA**

***Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Directorate
SADC Secretariat***



Food, Agriculture and Natural
Resources (FANR) Directorate,
SADC Secretariat

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIMS	Agricultural Information Management System
AR&D	Agricultural Research and Development
BOS	Bureau of Statistics
CSO	Central Statistical Office
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
EWS	Early Warning System (for Food Security)
FANR	Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation (of the UN)
ICPs	International Cooperating Partners
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LIMS	Livestock Information Management System
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NSO	National Statistical Office
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TC	Technical Committee
ToRs	Terms of References
UN	United Nations

SADC MEMBER STATES April, 2010



SADC Headquarters: SADC Secretariat, Gaborone, Botswana.

PREFACE

The SADC Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Directorate's major intervention area is sustainable Food Security. In order to achieve this, the Directorate focuses on programmes and projects that would ensure food availability and access, improved safety and nutritional value of food and ensure disaster preparedness for food security. As the Extra-Ordinary Summit on Agriculture and Food Security (Dar-es-Salaam, 15 May 2004) indicated, the achievement of sustainable Food Security depends to a large degree on policy decisions based upon quality information.

Currently, however, the status of agricultural information system in the Region is not conducive to providing this support for a sustainable food security. There are various agricultural information sub-systems, each normally supporting a sub-sector of the agricultural sector and not linked to other sub-systems. This has led to duplication of efforts, waste of resources as well as difficulties in analysing information stored in different databases and mostly using different computer soft wares. This situation led Council, at its meeting in Luanda, Angola in 2003, to direct the SADC Secretariat to facilitate integration of agricultural information at both Regional and National levels. This was reiterated at the Dar-es-Salaam Extra-Ordinary Summit meeting on Agriculture and Food Security in May 2004.

The Agricultural Information Management Systems (AIMS) is a new programme that aims at consolidating agricultural information systems of the FANR Directorate and SADC Member States. The integrated system's overall objective is to improve agriculture and food security information for the formulation of improved agriculture and food security strategies, policies and programmes. The System is currently at conceptual level while some of its components, such as livestock Information Management System (LIMS), Land and Water Management System and the Regional Early Warning System for Food Security have reached significant levels of development.

SADC Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Food Security, at their meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa in May 2009, approved the formation of the AIMS Technical Committee. The main objective of the AIMS Technical Committee is to provide guidance towards the establishment of an integrated agricultural information management system at both regional and national levels. The development of the overall AIMS programme will require significant amount of financial resources. The support from donors would be greatly appreciated.

This Report provides the Summary of the main outcomes of the First Regional AIMS Technical Committee.

FANR Directorate
SADC Secretariat
April, 2010

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The meeting of the SADC Agricultural Information Management System Technical Committee took place in Johannesburg, South Africa between 10 and 12 March 2009 following the approval of its formation by Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Food Security in May 2009 (Box 1). Representatives from Member States included Senior Officers responsible for Agricultural Information from Ministries of Agriculture and Food Security and those responsible for Agricultural Statistics from National Statistical Offices. Eleven Member States were represented at the meeting. Absent from the meeting were participants from Angola, South Africa and Tanzania while Madagascar was at time under suspension from all SADC activities.

As some activities in AIMS were already underway in Member States, invitations to the meeting were also extended to some experts from Member States who were already involved in some AIMS related activities, especially in the area of agricultural information networks to make presentations to the Committee.

Box 1: Ministerial Decision on formation of AIMS Technical Committee- May 2009:

5.3.1.4 Ministers considered and approved the establishment of the AIMS Technical Committee comprising Officials responsible for agricultural information at national level.

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Robert Nsakala Ngonde from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who outlined the objectives of the meeting as follows:

- (i) To clarify/revise the objectives of the AIMS programme;
- (ii) To discuss pertinent issues of Member States with regard to the Regional and National AIMS;
- (iii) To formulate a road map for the development of AIMS in Member States; and
- (iv) To make recommendations that could facilitate the development of AIMS for approval by Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Food Security at their next meeting in May/June 2010.

In order to effectively discuss the main issues, participants were divided into three groups, each with a mandate to discuss and come up with suggestions on each of the above objectives of the meeting. Two documents have been produced from this First AIMS Technical Committee Meeting and these are:

Volume I: Covers the present Report of the meeting and specifically contains approved points on each of the 4 objectives of the meeting as indicated above.

Volume II: Contains both the discussion points and full MS Powerpoint presentations as presented by the participants in either English, French or Portuguese.

Summaries of conclusions of the Regional AIMS TC under each of the main discussion points are given below.

2.0 GOAL, OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTPUT

2.1 Goal of AIMS

The Goal of the AIMS is to ensure availability and accessibility of agricultural information to stakeholders that will enable informed decision-making for agricultural development in the region.

2.2 Objectives of AIMS

The participants agreed on the following broad and specific objectives of AIMS:

- (i) **To facilitate the harmonization and standardization of data and information management procedures.**
 - *To support member states in their data gathering, storage, processing and analysis; and*
 - *To integrate information systems currently existing within the agricultural sector.*
- (ii) **To provide sustainable information systems infrastructure, tools and environment to support information exchange in agriculture.**
 - *To develop an integrated web-based information management system;*
 - *To facilitate member states in acquiring appropriate Information Communication Technology (ICT); and*
 - *To create and sustain a conducive environment for networking and information sharing among member states.*
- (iii) **To provide reliable, timely and complete agricultural information for decision-making including policy interventions.**
 - *Set regional standards in compliance with international standards for inter-operability of agricultural information system; and*
 - *To support member states in making their information available, accessible and exchangeable.*
- (iv) **To facilitate capacity building in information systems of the Member States**

2.3 Expected Outputs of the AIMS

It was agreed that implementation of AIMS would result into the following expected outputs:

- (i) Improved information sharing and market access;
- (ii) Information available for use by stakeholders at national and regional levels;
- (iii) Trained users and AIMS personnel to sustain the system;
- (iv) Contribution by Member States to the system on a sustainable basis;
- (v) Improved trade interventions among member states;
- (vi) Improved Early Warning Systems in agriculture; and
- (vii) Improved analysis and dissemination of information pertaining to sub-sectors such as: Crops, Livestock, Fisheries, Forestry and Wildlife.

3.0 THE REGIONAL AIMS TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

3.1 The Terms of Reference for the Regional AIMS Technical Committee

Participants discussed and agreed on the following Terms of Reference for the Regional AIMS Technical Committee:

- (i) Provide guidance on the implementation of AIMS for the SADC Region;
- (ii) Develop and provide technical expertise on key activities on the regional capacity building strategy;
- (iii) Develop and recommend strategies to harmonise and standardize information management;
- (iv) Develop strategies that improve networking amongst Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and internationally, for the purpose of sharing information and best practices on information systems;
- (v) Report annually to Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Food Security on the progress of AIMS;
- (vi) Recommend or propose interventions and strategies to improve AIMS;
- (vii) Consider appointing thematic sub-committees as necessary

3.2 Structure of the Regional AIMS Technical Committee

The Participants agreed that the Regional AIMS Technical Committee should be composed of the following:

- (i) SADC Secretariat (as facilitator);
- (ii) Two senior representatives who are responsible for information/statistics from each Member State: one representing Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and another representing the Agricultural Statistics Department of the Central Statistics Office. These two would also hold the following responsibilities:
- (iii) AIMS national chairperson (Ministry of Agriculture representative); and
- (iv) AIMS Vice chairperson (Central/National/Bureau of Statistics Office Representative)
- (v) Key partners: UN, FAO, ICPs, Academia and Private sector (who may help in funding and implementation of technical activities) will attend as observers, by invitation.

3.3 Mode of Operation of the Regional AIMS Technical Committee

The Regional AIMS TC will operate as follows:

- (i) Adopt SADC Troika system in selecting chairperson and vice chairperson. Representative from the country currently chairing SADC will chair the AIMS TC. In the absence of the chair country, the representative from the outgoing or incoming Chair country will take over. Chairperson or Vice- chairperson can be office bearer for not more than three years.
- (ii) Creation of technical sub-committees:
 - Only as and when the need arises;
 - Time bound - linked to completion of task. The sub-committee can be disbanded at the completion of its task.

3.4 Frequency and Funding of the Regional AIMS TC Meetings

The AIMS Technical Committee agreed:

- (i) to meet at least once a year;
- (ii) that Technical Committee meetings should be held prior to annual meetings of SADC Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Food Security; and
- (iii) that Member States should budget for the annual meeting. Once the AIMS project becomes operational, the Secretariat will have to include funding of this meeting in the project's operational budget.

4.0 NATIONAL AIMS TECHNICAL COMMITTEES

The Regional AIMS Technical Committee recommended the establishment of a National AIMS Committee in each Member State.

4.1 Terms of Reference of the National AIMS Committees

The Terms of Reference for the National AIMS Technical Committee will be:

- (i) Coordinate and monitor activities and compliance with commitments of the National AIMS programme;
- (ii) Offer technical assistance for the implementation of activities of national AIMS;
- (iii) Identify appropriate subject-matter specialists for implementation of the National AIMS programme;
- (iv) Participate in policy formulation on agriculture information management;
- (v) Recommend strategies for information dissemination; and
- (vi) Meet at least quarterly.

4.2 Composition of the National AIMS Technical Committee

The formation of the Committee was left to each of the TC Representatives. However, the Regional AIMS TC provided guidelines suggesting that an effective national committee should be composed of the following:

- (i) Ministry of Agriculture - Information Office or Agricultural Statistics Unit;
- (ii) CSO/NSO/BOS (Department of Agricultural Statistics);
- (iii) Relevant line Ministries (other Ministries relevant to FANR);
- (iv) NGOs;
- (v) Donor Agencies & Development partners;
- (vi) Farmers' representatives;
- (vii) Universities & Agricultural Research institutes;
- (viii) Statutory boards; and
- (ix) Stakeholders (Users and Producers)

5.0 WAY FORWARD

The TC discussed and came up with the following activities as way forward for the implementation of AIMS. Most of these activities are principally to be implemented at National level:

- (i) Constitute National AIMS Committee in each Member State;
- (ii) National Committee to meet quarterly.
- (iii) Create awareness of the AIMS programme to stakeholders at both national and regional levels;
- (iv) Carry out inventory of existing Information Systems;
- (v) Identify areas for strengthening capacity at National level, including training needs assessment;
- (vi) Contribute information to update AIMS portal;
- (vii) Prepare and submit progress reports to the Regional TC-yearly
- (viii) Advocate for improvement of information exchange at National and Regional levels.
- (xi) Design and develop training programme for AIMS stakeholders.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Regional AIMS Technical Committee identified a number challenges affecting the implementation of the integrated Agricultural Information Management System at both Regional and National levels. The major challenges and recommendations reached to address them were as follows:

(i) Inadequate provision of resources for Information Systems in Agriculture

In spite of the need for evidence based decision-making, information systems are inadequately funded in most Member States. The current poor state of National Early Warning Systems for Food Security in a number of Member States provides a good example of this.

Recommendation 1: Member States are urged to provide adequate financial and human resources for an effective agricultural information system at national level.

(ii) Inadequate ICT infrastructure and facilities targeting agriculture in rural areas

Stakeholders of the agriculture sector are generally not adequately capacitated with ICT in rural areas, especially because their unattractiveness to commercial ICT investment.

Recommendation 2: Member States should improve ICT in rural areas so that information in agriculture is widely shared to improve production and productivity.

(iii) Absence of relevant and effective ICT policy for agriculture.

Absence of effective ICT policy addressing the needs of the agricultural sector limits the harmonisation of agro-information management at national level. Consequently, stakeholders are not able to access information that already exists.

Recommendation 3: Member States should develop ICT and Information Management Policy addressing the needs of the agricultural sector.

The Technical Committee requested that the FANR Directorate present these challenges and the corresponding recommendations to the Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Food Security at their next meeting in May/June 2010 for their consideration and approval.

Annex 1: Meeting Programme

Tuesday, 09 March – Arrival of participants

DAY 1	
Wednesday, March 10	
Opening Session	ITEM
08:00 – 08:30	Registration
08:30 – 08:45	Welcoming remarks from SADC Chair and SADC Secretariat
08:45 – 09:00	Introduction of participants Adoption of the Agenda
09:00 – 09:40	Presentation on the Background of the AIMS and the SADC-AIMS development process – <i>Bentry Chaura</i>
10:00 – 10:30	Tea Break
Session 1	Presentation of the AIMS portal
10:30 – 12:45	The AIMS Portal, its current components & Networking tools on the AIMS (Dgroups, Wiki, News and Events) – <i>Krishan Bheenick</i>
12:45 – 14:00	Lunch Break
Session 2	Introduction to Web 2.0 tools on the AIMS portal
14:00 – 15:30	Introduction to Web 2.0 tools (Wiki, Blog, RSSfeeds, Tags and Social bookmarking); Hands-on sessions: Dgroups, Wiki, News and Events – <i>Krishan Bheenick & Technical Network Representatives</i>
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee/Tea Break
Session 3	Presentations by Technical Network representatives
15:45 – 17:15	Technical briefs on networking activities - <i>Krishan Bheenick (facilitator)</i> (i) Coordination of Multiple Agricultural Information Management Initiatives at National Level – Case study from Zambia - <i>Mr Davy Simumba</i> . (ii) The use of Radio for Agricultural Technology Dissemination: implications for Agricultural Information Management – Case study from Malawi – <i>Mr Jerome Nkhoma</i> . (iii) Networking and Information Exchange in the SADC Livestock sector – <i>Dr Sihle Mdluli</i> , (iv) Establishment and coordination of a national 'Learning Team' on Agricultural Research and Development information management – Case study from Seychelles – <i>Ms Sandra Sinon</i> . (v) Use of RSS feeds as a tool for sharing News and Events in the Agricultural Sector in the SADC region" – <i>Mr Sanjay Sembhoo</i> .
17:15 – 17:30	Clarification and Discussions
17:30 – 17:45	De-briefing/ Announcements
Evening Session – After Dinner	
20:00 – 21:30	Demonstration of web tools by network representatives / Tech-Talk sessions

DAY 2	
Thursday, March 11	
Session 4	Presentation of Country status reports
0830 – 09:00	Summary of Day 1 and plenary discussions on presentations by Networks
09:00 – 10:00	Brief presentations of country reports on status of National Agricultural Information Management Systems & connectivity of institutions to the web
10:00 – 10:30	Tea Break
Session 4 ctd.	Presentation of Country status reports (contd.)
10:30 – 11:15	Brief presentations of country reports on status of National Agricultural Information Management Systems & connectivity of institutions to the web
11:15 – 12:00	Discussions on Country Reports and overview of background reports
Session 5	Terms of Reference of the AIMS Technical Committee
12:15 – 12:45	Plenary Discussions on TOR - <i>BD Hulman</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Composition of the AIMS TC (membership, co-opted, observer) ▪ Objectives of the AIMS TC ▪ Main areas of activities
12:45 – 14:00	Lunch Break

Session 6	Activities of the AIMS Technical Committee at national level
14:00 – 15.45	Group discussions on proposed activities at national level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who needs to be involved? ▪ How will a National Committee function? ▪ Activities to be carried out ▪ How do we get the support of the policy makers?
14:00 – 15:00	Presentation of the group discussions on Activity Areas
14:20 – 15.45	Plenary discussion and refinement of activities
15:45 – 16:00	Coffee/Tea Break
Session 7	Regional AIMS Technical Committee - National plans
16:00 – 17:30	Elaboration of proposed national activities
17:30 – 17:45	Announcements of Evening Activities
20:00 – 21:30	Evening Session – After Dinner
	Demonstration of web tools (<i>Technical Network Representatives</i>)

DAY 3	
Friday, March 12	
Session 8	Plenary presentation of group work
08:30 – 10:00	Plenary session on group work presentations and discussions
10:00 – 10:30	Tea Break
Session 9	Group work to refine results of discussions
10:30 – 12:00	Group work on Objectives of AIMS, TORs of Regional and National Committees and Proposed activities
12:00 – 12.45	Presentation of refined results of discussions Discussions on planning the implementation of the AIMS programme under 10 th EDF – Preparation phase.
12:45 – 14:00	Lunch Break
Session 8	Final Plenary discussions & conclusions
14:00 – 15.00	Plenary discussions and conclusions on the AIMS Technical Committee; Communication; Coordination; Information Sharing; Next steps; Way forward and recommendations of Technical Committee
15:00 – 15:45	Concluding remarks from Member states
15:45 – 16:00	Closing remarks by SADC Secretariat and Chair
16:00 – 16:15	Coffee/Tea Break

Saturday 13th March: Departure of participants

Photo of Participants



Annex 2: List of Participants

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