



Press Release

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### **Farmers put trade under the spotlight**

The Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU)<sup>1</sup> recently held its Annual Conference under the theme, “Trade as a driver for agricultural transformation in southern Africa”. The Conference, which was held in Victoria Falls on 14 and 15 May, 2018, was officially opened by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, His Excellency Cde. Emmerson D. Mnangagwa. The event attracted about 100 delegates drawn from the leadership of national farmers’ unions/associations from most southern African countries, the government of Zimbabwe, representatives of intergovernmental agencies, international development agencies, the private sector, research and development agencies and trade experts. Hon. Perence Shiri: Air Chief Marshall (retired), Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement; Hon. Cain Mathema, Minister of State for Provincial Affairs Matebeleland North; Eng. Ringson Chitsiko, Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement, and Mr George Charamba, PS of the Ministry of Information, Communication Technology and Cyber Security were also present.

Addressing the conference, His Excellency called for African governments to invest in agriculture, against the background that the continent is spending too much on food imports annually. “It is regrettable that African countries spend between \$30bn and \$50bn annually on imports of agricultural products, instead of developing the productive capacities necessary for trade. This reality gives greater impetus for us all, governments, unions, farmers and the private sector alike, to invest in agriculture to produce for our own needs within the continent as well as for export outside Africa”, he observed. On a related matter, the conference heard the continent was importing basic food which it was capable of producing itself.

Dr Sinare Sinare, the Vice President of SACAU, noted with concern that developing countries have reduced themselves to suppliers of cheap raw materials and consumers of imported processed/manufactured products. “This is tantamount to exporting jobs, income, and wealth”, he further remarked.

Mr Ishmael Sunga, the CEO of SACAU, observed that whilst trade was a critical link between markets and production, its performance in transforming the agricultural sector in southern Africa had been less than satisfactory. “In fact, Africa’s share of global trade is less than 2%”, he remarked. The high import bill and low share in global trade means that there is significant scope for a trade-driven agricultural transformation”, he added.

Following rich presentations, panel discussions and plenary sessions, the conference agreed on a number several key messages covering critical areas such as production and productivity, trade

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<sup>1</sup> The Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) is a membership based regional farmers’ organisation representing the common interests of farmers in southern Africa. Its core membership is drawn from general interest apex national farmers’ unions in southern African countries and it currently has 18 members from 12 countries. For further details, please visit [www.sacau.org](http://www.sacau.org).

agreements and related processes, unfair trade practices, market access, standards, policies, capacity development, and the essentials for a trade-driven agricultural transformation agenda.

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