

ZAMBIAN IMPRESSIONS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE VIDEO CONFERENCES

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Zambia's participation in the video conferences so far (VC2, VC3 and VC4) brought to the fore the extent to which the development of the horticultural sector in the country was lagging behind in comparison to that of other countries in the region. The participation from various stakeholders was very good. There was a lot of interest from our Ministry in charge of Agriculture and Horticultural issues. The research institutions such as the University of Zambia and the Food Security Research Project attended all the VCs. Farmers in the horticultural business both for export and national trade also attended the same. The participation by COMESA staff based in Lusaka added flavour to the VCs. Whilst other participating countries had at least two or more formal associations or institutions involved in the horticultural industry participating, we only had Zambia Export Growers Association (ZEGA) that participated once.

It was important to note that most participating countries advised that they had already formulated horticultural development strategies or policies while Zambia had none save for a small inclusion in the Zambia National Agricultural Policy document. Further, most countries talked about strong collaboration between the private and public institutions supporting the sectors' supply chains which has also been absent in Zambia. We think that we need to put the same in place in order to have a vibrant and sustainable horticultural industry in the country.

Admittedly, a lot has been learnt from the video conferences by the Zambian participants. The underlying lesson was that the lack of an appropriate institutional framework to develop the sector has led largely to lack of a sector development strategy, lack of information on production, marketing and regional trade which are important for its development. Stakeholders had previously identified the need to form a national horticultural task force to spearhead the articulation of issues related to the sector and participation in these conferences has indeed intensified the need for the same.

In view of the aforementioned, a small working group has since been put in place to work out the mechanics/ modalities which would later lead to the formation of a Zambia Horticultural Association.

To sum it all, the Zambian participants have learnt a lot in the VC discussions especially on issues related to the organisational structure of the horticultural sector and its value chains, grades and standards, sanitary and phytosanitary issues, regional trade and integration and the importance of quality data availability.