

## **New Priorities and Directions for SAA**

Over the past 23 years, the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) and its partner, the Global 2000 program of the Carter Center, have worked – under the name SG 2000 – with tens of thousands of frontline extension workers and several million farmers in 14 sub-Saharan Africa countries. The main focus of that work was to test and promote higher-yielding technology for maize, wheat, rice, grain legumes, and roots and tubers. SG 2000's role has been a catalytic one, working primarily with national ministries of agriculture to mount dynamic field demonstration programs so that farmers can evaluate for themselves the value of these improved technologies. That catalytic role is not changing, but our objectives and activities – and especially the scale at which we operate in our partner countries – are changing dramatically.

During the past two decades, much has been accomplished by our SG 2000 country programs and their many partners, and important lessons have been learned. First and foremost, we have amply demonstrated that there are many modern food crop technologies available in Africa that can at least double, and sometimes triple, yields in farmers' fields. It is also now abundantly clear that farmers are not only willing and able to intensify production – they are, in fact, eager to do so.

Still, there are formidable constraints to the broad-based adoption of improved technologies that must be overcome if Africa is to realize its own Green Revolution. Inputs are increasingly expensive and difficult for many farmers to obtain in the quantities they need, when they need them. Prices for farm outputs are often highly variable and unpredictable, which notably increases the risks associated with using expensive inputs. These risks are aggravated by inadequate development of water resources throughout sub-Saharan Africa, which has left most farmers at the mercy of highly irregular rainfall. Moreover, market linkages between smallholder producers and consumers are weak, making the use of input-intensive, high-yield technologies more risky.

In order for a vibrant smallholder commercial agricultural sector to emerge in Africa, food supply chains must become more fully integrated. Production and post-production quality standards must be raised to meet consumer expectations. And smallholder producers must become more attuned to changing market demands. These and other factors have figured prominently in SAA's recent decisions about its priorities and future directions.

### **Where We Work**

SG 2000 efforts are currently focused on four agronomically and socio-economically diverse countries – Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda. Together, these countries hold a quarter of the SSA region's 400 million rural poor. At least half of these people are food insecure and endure severe hunger periods each year. While the remaining households in these countries are financially and nutritionally better off, most have yet to achieve significant improvements in either the productivity of their farming operations or their livelihoods. These realities have kept the agricultural sectors of these countries from realizing their true potential as engines of wider economic growth and development.

With funding from the Nippon Foundation and other new financial partners we hope will be coming on line in 2009 (including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Nairobi-based Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa), SAA is about to embark on a significant scaling up of its work in Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda. And as we learn how to more effectively take our extension work to scale, we will seek to

capitalize on that new knowledge and re-establish SG 2000 programs in some of our former project countries (pending the availability of funding).

### **Responding to Changes in Extension**

Traditional agricultural extension in Africa has focused on increasing production by improving yields, training farmers, and transferring new technology. Extension activities have been largely supply driven and usually commodity based. Most government extension efforts have tended to favor smallholder farmers who, under normal weather conditions, are food secure and, as a result, better able to adopt new productivity-enhancing technologies. Historically, governments have provided the bulk of smallholder extension services. Still, the coverage of these public organizations has been limited, reaching no more than 10-15% of the smallholders in most countries.

In the early days of the SAA initiative, efforts focused on supporting the traditional work of national extension services in host countries. Project activities centered on helping extension professionals demonstrate new agricultural technologies to farmers, and on strengthening their abilities to work with farmers. Over time, however, the traditional role of extension slowly changed in response to better understanding of the constraints to improving smallholder productivity in Africa. During the past 10 years in particular, agricultural extension services have evolved. Extension professionals have become much more involved in helping farmers organize themselves into cooperative farmers' groups. They have also responded to the need for farmers to become more engaged in marketing issues, and they now partner with a broader range of service providers and agencies. Today's extension professionals are likely to find themselves involved with:

- Traditional public systems drawing on a large pool of government-employed staff, the effectiveness of which is all too often severely diminished by limited budgets;
- Public/private partnerships that rest on using public funds to hire private service providers to deliver demand-driven advisory services;
- Private extension services operated by commercial firms that address single-commodity cash crops and provide technical and production services to contract farmers; and
- Various NGOs that provide a variety of training opportunities to farmers, but that are very focused on specific locations and groups and, as a result, supply services that are relatively costly on a per-farmer-served basis.

To varying degrees, all of these extension models are present in the four countries in which we are working today. In all four countries, government and non-government extension service providers operate independently of one another and suffer from weak inter-organization coordination. Essential linkages between public research entities and the various extension service providers are also weak. Virtually no services are provided to the extremely poor, who face a number of resource constraints – financial, physical, environmental, health and educational. Moreover, government extension organizations in the focus countries are not well-equipped to support market-led smallholder agricultural development, which requires effective farmer associations, market intelligence information systems, and advisory services in post-production technology and quality control.

## **Implementing New Objectives through a New Organizational Structure**

In order to achieve impact in this more complex operating environment, SAA is reinventing itself, adopting a new organizational structure that will enable us to focus our work more effectively on four key objectives. We see these objectives as the critical constraints to improving smallholder productivity and livelihoods through extension, and achieving them at scale will, we believe, have a transformative effect on the lives and livelihoods of millions of smallholder farm households in our focus countries. In addition, and very importantly, we believe that success at scale with these objectives will help to revitalize the delivery of extension services in our target areas. Together, these objectives comprise SAA's operational strategy for the foreseeable future.

**Objective 1:** Establish large-scale (i.e., extensive) hands-on crop technology learning platforms designed to involve directly 2.6 million smallholder households (about 16 million people), including 1.2 million female farmers, in our focus countries, and introduce productivity-enhancing food crop technologies (improved seed, better agronomic practices and relevant knowledge and information). The major activities that will be undertaken here include:

- Designing and implementing participatory farmer learning platforms to support effective and efficient crop training and demonstration programs;
- Strengthening systems to identify appropriate crop technology options for different farmer recommendation domains; and
- Involving substantially more women farmers and very poor smallholders in farmer learning platforms.

**Objective 2:** Establish farmer learning platforms to demonstrate the economic viability of selected post-production technologies to improve smallholder commercial competitiveness and livelihoods. With respect to this objective, four major activities will be launched:

- Working with farmers to identify promising value chains in targeted crops around which post-harvest and agroprocessing activities can be established;
- Strengthening extension service capacity to establish farmer learning platforms in post-production technologies for training and demonstration to farmer groups and individuals that are willing to establish post-harvest and agroprocessing enterprises;
- Identifying, designing and/or modifying prototypes of efficient and effective value chain post-harvest equipment and structures for training and demonstration purposes; and
- Strengthening the capacity of local manufacturers to build recommended smallholder post-harvest/agroprocessing machinery and equipment.

**Objective 3:** Help government extension organizations to partner with private agribusinesses and non-governmental organizations to broaden the scope and impact of extension service provision and strengthen capacity for collective action of farmer associations in commercial markets. Several key activities will be pursued under this objective:

- Building extension service capacity to assist in the strengthening of farmers groups to deal with marketing issues, provide extension advisory services, and partner with a broader range of stakeholders;
- Building the capacity of private agribusinesses to engage in smallholder crop extension services;
- Supporting community-based seed production activities to supply crop farmer learning platforms and build linkages with formal seed industry systems;

- Strengthening research-extension-farmer-input supplier institutional coordination linkages to improve smallholder service delivery; and
- Supporting national extension forums to improve agricultural advisory service knowledge sharing, integration and policy advocacy.

**Objective 4:** Strengthen agricultural extension systems by building capacity of extension professionals to serve a broader scope of smallholder farmers, accelerate agricultural productivity, and create more competitive value chains. This amounts to expanding the Sasakawa Africa Fund for Extension Education (SAFE) – an autonomous, Swiss-registered NGO funded by Nippon Foundation ([www.safe-africa.com](http://www.safe-africa.com)) – and linking its work more closely to that of SAA. Major activities here include:

- Expanding university training programs to support human resource development of mid-career extension officers and achieve greater gender balance;
- Engaging collaborating universities to develop and offer distance education short courses leading to B.Sc. degrees in extension-related subjects;
- Developing new extension training materials to support project objectives and activities; and
- Developing and/or improving cost-recovery from continuing education activities at participating universities/colleges.

Delivering on these objectives, especially at scale, requires a new organizational structure for SAA (see diagram). A number of positions are being redefined and a few new ones created. The Executive Directors for Programs and Management are assuming new responsibilities, devolving the day-to-day management and oversight responsibilities to a new position – the Managing Director (MD). The MD will serve as the organization’s chief operating officer, and all Africa-based senior staff will report to the MD (with the exception of the Director for Strategic Opportunities, who will report to the Executive Directors).

We will continue to have directors in each focus country that will be responsible for all programmatic and administrative activities in their respective countries. They will work closely with the four regional directors that are responsible for ensuring that each of our four objectives is being implemented according to strategy. The regional directors are subject matter specialists who will bring the latest knowledge and information to bear in the implementation of each objective. The Country Directors and Regional Directors will operate as a team in a matrix management system that is overseen by the MD.

In addition, we will be investing heavily in monitoring, evaluation and learning. The work we are undertaking has never before been done in Africa at the scale we envision, and we believe that a vibrant ME&L function will be critical to our success. We will need constant monitoring and feedback from the field as to what is working and what is not, so that we can adjust our operations as we go. We will also need independent evaluation activities to help us gauge the impacts of our efforts and to draw the many lessons we need to learn about implementing such a program at scale. The external evaluation work will be subcontracted to the international Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), which has been engaged in a similar activity for SAA over the past two years. Internal monitoring and feedback will be handled by SAA staff hired for that purpose.

SAA is reinventing and restructuring itself to meet the challenges presented by a more complex operating environment for extension and for agricultural development in its four focus countries and, indeed, throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa. At its heart, however, SAA is not changing. It remains committed to working with public and private extension providers to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of much needed technologies, knowledge and information to those who need them most – Africa’s resource poor smallholder farmers. However, we will be giving much greater emphasis than in the past to reaching women farmers and the very poor producers that have been bypassed in traditional extension systems. And we will be giving emphasis to value-adding post-harvest and agroprocessing enterprise development, and to linking farmers more effectively to markets. We will strive to strengthen the critical linkages between agricultural researchers, extension professionals, farmers, and input supply dealers – those whose combined efforts will lead to a Green Revolution in Africa. And through SAFE, we will continue to invest in strengthening the skills of mid-career extension professionals so that they can advance within their organizations and contribute to improving the delivery of extension services and the longer term sustainability of our initiative.

