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“Development on the margin”

Extension Services and Research Demands – A NGO Perspective from four African Countries

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Abstract

Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) is an international NGO, working in agricultural extension and advisory services in more than 15 African countries for the last 25 years. Presently, SAA operates in Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda through the respective national agricultural extension services (NAES) providing training to extension agents and operational funds for the implementation of Farmer Learning Platforms, demonstrations of agro-processing equipment, and supporting value-chain development by linking farmers to markets. Hence SAA aims at developing farming communities with a holistic approach by using scalable and cost-effective approaches.

Nevertheless, agricultural productivity remains low, for example, cereal crops still yield only 1 to 2 t ha⁻¹ on average with top yields of 3 to 4 t ha⁻¹ in high potential, mainly highland production zones. SAA has shown in field demonstrations that these yields can be improved considerably with simple agronomic technologies.

Despite these potential increments in productivity there are still research questions regarding the efficiency and sustainability of input use, the interactions of the different components of technology packages, which are often considered too basic by international and/or advanced research institutions but which cannot be tackled by the national research systems because of lack of funds or capacities. For example, there are mainly blanket recommendation rates for fertilisers for most crops, while there is little information on fertiliser placement, on timing, splitting or mode of fertiliser applications, possible interactions with plant population density, row planting or organic fertilisers. More precise information could increase input use efficiency, reduce costs and improve profitability, which in turn would result in greater adoption rates by farmers and a more sustainable agricultural production system.

SAA has therefore increased its training efforts with extension agents and farmers, emphasising agronomic concepts instead of specific crop agronomy and is seeking actively support from research either for new adaptable technologies or to respond to farmers' needs. This partnership could be mutually beneficial as SAA has the capacity and the direct connection to farmers and NAES to test and verify research results while research institutions could demonstrate impact of their technologies and guide their resource allocation according to farmers' needs and priorities.

Keywords: Input use efficiency, research institutions, Sasakawa Africa Association