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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Tracking the African Cassava Agronomy Initiative Project Theory of Change to Establish the Actual Change

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Abstract

The African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) seeks to improve benefits of cassava farmers through generation of knowledge and development of decision support tools (DST), packaged in formats suitable for extension agents and farmers to apply site specific recommendations in Tanzania and Nigeria. To enable the measurement, the integration of feedback, and to overcome the common MEL approach of focusing on outputs and the time lag between measuring outputs and impacts, a well-structured, gender-inclusive monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system has been developed. The MEL system has two components: i) routine data collection to obtain the necessary information to support steering the project, and ii) impact evaluation, focusing on changes effected by project activities. To ensure attribution of results, a baseline study was conducted in Tanzania and Nigeria, in which unique ID cards were given to participating households in the project target areas. These ID cards enabled easy identification of the households for subsequent panel data collection, serving to identify critical entry points to achieve impact before the end of the project. In Nigeria and Tanzania, a total of 2113 households (40% female) were given the unique ID card. A Knowledge, Attitude, Behaviour and Practices (KABP) survey was conducted among 334 extension agents (EAs) to identify their current knowledge status regarding the DST's recommendations and relationships with farmers. Data collection focuses on five issues; i) awareness creation, ii) insights gained by farmers, iii) uptake-use of the DSTs, iv) adoption-changes in practices and behaviour and v) ultimate benefits/impacts). Data collection is done routinely on awareness creation (reach) and feedback on insights gained, while the panel survey is bi-annual, focusing on uptake and adoption. To have quick feedback from users (farmers and EAs) on understanding of the recommendations, quick feedback questions have been integrated in the various formats of the DSTs (paper-based and electronic). All MEL data are collected using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) with programmed data collection tools directly linked to an approved ICT platform. This system already established reference points for project indicators, provides data for reporting and follow up systems on beneficiaries.

Keywords: African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI), attribution, baseline, feedback, MEL