

Nigeria mitigates the effects of COVID-19 using creative and interactive platforms

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As of 21 December, Nigeria has recorded 78,434 positive cases of COVID-19 and registered 1,221 deaths. In mid-April this year, the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) conducted a rapid assessment to identify the impact of COVID-19 across its focus countries in Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda. The study highlighted key challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak and put forward recommendations to mitigate the effects whilst continuing to ensure basic agricultural extension services to smallholder farmers. The study found that the initial lockdown measures imposed by governments across the focus countries led to the restriction of mobility, and also limited extension agents' routine contact with farmers. Input and output dealers observed a sharp decline in the supply of materials needed by farmers. Agro-processors and private service providers reported low patronage, low demand for grain milling, lack of access to grain products for processing and new input stocks, and limited access to necessary raw materials for agro-processing. Financial institutions also observed a decline in the number of customers servicing their loans, which depleted their capital investment.

In response to this, SAA is implementing several projects to alleviate these challenges. Primarily, SAA is turning to e-Extension platforms – which rely on efficient and affordable Information Technology (IT) – for the dissemination of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials. SAA is also working closely with key actors in the supply chain system to effectively address some of the constraints caused by the pandemic.

One of the ways in which SAA continues to ensure the transfer of knowledge is through the adoption and establishment of communication platforms, such as WhatsApp and bulk SMS services, in order to enhance and facilitate information sharing among Commodity Association Traders (CATs), farmers and other value-chain actors. In partnership with the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), SAA has distributed 50 smartphones to extension agents. Additionally, SAA in



A smallholder farmer demonstrating a manual she has produced outlining self-protective measures in the Bunkure Local Government Area

partnership with Rural Farmers Hub (RFH) has initiated the ICT-driven agricultural advisory and extension software services in order to address challenges concerning pest attacks and soil nutrient deficiencies, among others.

SAA also continues to provide fertilizers, agro-chemicals, and sanitisers, as well as making arrangements for the delivery of protective equipment, such as face masks. Furthermore, in order to mitigate the challenges currently facing input supply chains, SAA has supported a total of 12 farmer groups that are engaged in Maize Community Savings for Investment in Agribusiness (CSIA) and the production of Soybean.

SAA has actively engaged in the dissemination of television and radio programs focusing on preventative measures against COVID-19, as well as farmer trainings on good agronomic and postharvest handling, and improved storage practices. Programs broadcast through radio stations secure wide coverage across the Kano, Jigawa and Gombe States, and farmers have been able to use this platform as a way of addressing their questions in relation to agricultural activities.

Moreover, SAA has produced 12,000 copies of COVID-19 communication materials, which raise awareness and inform readers of preventive measures. The material has been distributed to smallholder farmers and other stakeholders across Nigeria.

Looking to the future, SAA will continue to implement activities to alleviate the negative effects of COVID-19. Upcoming initiatives include uploading online training tools to YouTube and Facebook in collaboration with the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS), continuing to produce and deliver television and radio programs on good agricultural practices, as well as training extension agents on the use of e-Extension platforms.



Extension agents receive MERC training at the Kano State Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (KNARDA) office following the successful distribution of Samsung tablets for data collection



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