

# SAA launches pilot project focusing on e-Extension and e-Learning services to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 in Mali

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As of 20 January, Mali has recorded 7,880 positive cases of COVID-19 and registered 317 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, including Mali. The study found that smallholder farmers reported disruption to the provision of agricultural extension and advisory services, which resulted in limited access to training and capacity building opportunities, as well as agricultural technologies. Respondents also projected delays in the procurement and supply of agro-inputs, which led to delays in the execution of agricultural activities – such consequences can cause a significant reduction in productivity. Additionally, agro-processors reported that the performance of their businesses has been negatively affected, while stakeholders in financial institutions reported a reduction in the numbers of farmers servicing their financial loans. Restrictions on movement imposed by the government also led to the closure of training institutions – from pre-school to universities. As a result of the restrictions, over 3,000 students from the Sasakawa Africa Fund for Extension Education (SAFE) program partner universities were denied the benefits of face-to-face lectures. Having identified the scope and impact of COVID-19 on the agricultural sector in Mali, SAA's survey proposed several recommendations to effectively mitigate the effects on smallholder farmers.

In August 2020, SAA hosted a workshop in the presence of key partners, staff members, extension agents, smallholder farmers and stakeholders. During the event, smartphones intended for information sharing were distributed to extension agents to allow for real time information exchange with SAA. Participants were also briefed on good agricultural practices, including inspection of seed production fields, improved postharvest handling, and farmer business management – each of these modules were also pre-recorded in video format in French and Bambara, and were uploaded onto the smartphones which extension agents received. Additionally, the videos have been uploaded to YouTube to maximize outreach and ensure continued access.

The training modules were also converted into audio files as SAA intends to launch a series of radio programs that will be broadcast in French and Bambara. There are currently 112 rural radio talk shows in progress which are expected to reach over 10,000 farmers across



The Country Director of SAA Mali, Dr. Sokona assists with the distribution of smartphones for extension agents as a way of enhancing e-Extension services

project intervention areas. Furthermore, SAA has briefed the public on its COVID-19 mitigation plan through ORTM-1, a national television station, in which the SAA Country Director featured.

To strengthen e-Learning platforms, SAA equipped the University of Ségou with some of the latest Information Communication Technology (ICT) equipment, as well as facilitating access to an online platform allowing trainers and learners to access information. Such measures also offer resources to support and enhance the delivery and management of educational programs. Lecturers and students received training on the interactive online platforms which enabled the provision of virtual lectures and consultations. So far, 12 modules have been digitized and a total of ten courses have been delivered online as part of the pilot project.

SAA will continue to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 in Mali wherever possible. Future plans include updating the online platforms established at the University of Ségou, continuing monitoring and tutoring of the e-Learning project activities, and conducting follow-up visits and meetings at the university.



Click here to download the full SAA Covid-19 Impact Assessment report

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