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INCLUSIVE AGRICULTURE EXTENSION SERVICES: ESCALATING THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH

The Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) - Uganda convened here at Fairway Hotel Kampala on this 22nd day of May 2023, appreciate the role government and partners in the agricultural sector are playing but feel that more can be done in terms of supporting greater participation of women, youth and People with disabilities(PwDs) in the agriculture sector.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to address global challenges including poverty, hunger, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. For example, one of the targets of SDG 2 is about creating a world free of hunger by 2030 by doubling the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists, and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and quality inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment. However, a recent report by FAO and other UN agencies shows that in 2021 between 702 million and 828 million persons worldwide were suffering from hunger; with 46 million more people affected by hunger compared to 2020.

In Uganda, agriculture accounts for about 24.1% (Budget Speech FY 2022-23) of the GDP and is the backbone of the economy, employing 68% of the working population (**UBOS Statistical Abstract 2021**). Between FY 2016/17 to FY 2019/20, there was an increase in the proportion of working persons in purely subsistence agriculture from 39% and about 48% respectively. Over the years, the proportion of females working in purely subsistence agriculture has remained higher than males that is 56.1% of the women engaged in subsistence agriculture as compared to only 39.1% of their male counterparts.

Table 2.3 A: Working age, working, employed and subsistence agriculture only populations (14 - 64 years), 2019/20

	Working age	Working population		Population in Employment		Subsistence agriculture only	
	No. ('000)	No. ('000)	%	No. ('000)	%	No. ('000)	%
Sex							
Male	10,236	7,991	78.1	4,835	54.7	3,125	39.1
Female	11,136	7,913	71.1	3,447	35.1	4,442	56.1
Residence							
Rural	15,189	11,768	77.5	5,342	39.7	6,388	54.3
Urban	6,183	4,136	66.9	2,940	56.8	1,179	28.5

Source: UBOS statistical abstract 2021

Beyond the basic survival needs it serves for food security against hunger and malnutrition, agriculture can contribute more to household incomes, increased tax revenue, higher foreign exchange, and economic transformation. Appropriate technology / Mechanization, irrigation, quality farm inputs, and an efficient and effective, climate-smart agribusiness extension service system are a few strategies to pursue this goal. In a nutshell, treating it as a key budget priority area – no wonder the Maputo declaration to which Uganda was party prescribed at least 10% of annual budget allocation to Agriculture.

The government of Uganda has taken tremendous strides in working towards revamping smallholder farmers into modern Agriculture this cause through various programs like NAADs, Operation Wealth

Creation, Parish Development Model, Youth Fund, and Agricultural Extension Credit Facility among others. Despite the various interventions, the practice of modern Agriculture remains not fully tapped into evidenced by a significant part (56.1% of women, 39.1% of men, 46.6% of youth aged 18-30) of the population engaging in subsistence farming.

One way to accomplish this goal of Modern Agriculture is to ensure farmers can access effective extension and advisory services. Furthermore, a large proportion of the agricultural land cultivated by the majority of the smallholders has lost fertility to over-cultivation or long monoculture practices. To restore the productivity of such land, farmers ought to apply fertilizers to restore its fertility and increase yields and productivity.

Given the key roles of women in ensuring food and nutrition security among their households and the high youth unemployment rates women and youth must be put at the forefront of the agricultural transformation in Uganda by involving them in the effective utilization of available productive resources (such as land, and labor). The limited capabilities of Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (AEAS), which are meant to be the bridges connecting smallholders to the knowledge, technology, and innovations they require, is one of the issues preventing the realization of these results.

Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) – Playing Our Part to Keep Agriculture High On the Development Agenda.

Given the limited national treasury purse in efforts to meet food, nutrition, and income security expectations, SAA comes in to complement the efforts of national governments including Uganda in these grand aspirations.

The Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA), a not-for-profit organization, works with smallholder farmers in Africa to develop resilient and sustainable food systems that would ultimately improve the accessibility of food, nutrition, and income for the local people. SAA works closely with national agricultural extension services in Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, and Uganda to support smallholder farmers throughout the agricultural value chain. This is done by improving the skills of Extension Agents and farmers and advancing regenerative, nutrition-sensitive, and market-oriented agriculture. SAA appreciates the support from the Government of Uganda, the Government of Japan- people of Japan, Funding from the Nippon Foundation, the World Food Programme – Agriculture Markets Support (Karamoja and Central Uganda regions) aBi Trust Private Sector Partners – input suppliers, off-takers, machine fabricators etc MAAIF, NARO and CGIAR Centers

Digitalization of extension and advisory services

Sasakawa Africa Association is using E-extension to enhance farmer access to extension and advisory services. Extension agents are equipped with knowledge and skills to use the e-Extension platforms to register farmers, conduct farm planning, keep records, analyze income, and access services (such as soil testing, Input purchase, market information, and weather information). The youth (such as those under the Nokia model) have embraced the intervention and are using it in solving farmers' production challenges.

Capacity building

SAA's capacity-building program, formerly known as the Sasakawa Africa Fund for Extension Education (SAFE) initiative, aims to improve the capacities of extension practitioners. Since its inception, the SAA's capacity building /SAFE initiative expanded from one pilot program in Ghana to 31 fully functioning programs dispersed throughout African universities and agricultural colleges that offer responsive training programs in value chain-oriented agricultural extension. The program has generated qualified extension agents, and they are currently contributing to the development of the agricultural sector in various African countries including Uganda.

The capacity building /SAFE Program under the Sasakawa Africa Association closely collaborated with academic institutions, particularly Makerere University from 1997 – 2008. The University's key role was to equip mid-career front-line extension agents and ensure that the entire food production value chain was well-oiled with the knowledge and abilities required to maintain a steady supply of nutritious food. The Programme offered full scholarships to diploma holders and certificate holders to join Makerere University to grow their careers and build the capacity for students to become better practical extension workers.

To date over 605 students with 40% female have qualified with degrees in either agricultural extension education or agriculture and rural innovation from Makerere University as a result of the initiative in Uganda. A learning platform for student interns has been made available by SAA in addition to supporting degree programs. SAA has also made contributions to the creation of the Makerere University innovations center Kabanyoro, the development of strategies and curriculum, and the digitization of training materials. Over 1,500,000, 60% being women in smallholder farming households in the nation are impacted by 4180 front-line agriculture extension agents and SAA Uganda.

Mentoring the next generation

70% of Uganda's population is made up of youth, between the ages of 18 and 35, and they play an essential role in the country's economic development and food security system. Unfortunately, many young people lack employment and have few opportunities to improve their life. Agriculture is one industry where we have not yet completely realized the potential of young people. To make the agricultural model more inclusive of young people, we need to integrate our youth into the agriculture value chain.

SAA promotes youth involvement in agribusiness to create opportunities for employment for youth in rural areas, as one way of reducing aging on-farm and off-farm population. This is done through building their entrepreneurial minds and engaging them as producers and support services providers which has become the driving force for youth's employment, contribution to sociality, and self-sustainability to meet basic needs by leading to the modernization of agriculture that is strategically positioned to the realization of the national development plan II and the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This is achieved through the "Youth Business Clinics" which is a brand name for an event on agribusiness mentorship in which a full package of practical aspects on agribusiness management is provided with the aim to ignite business acumen in the mentees, shape one's business dreams to reality through support and follow-up coaching on sustainable business modeling and entrepreneurial marketing. In this event, expert advice is offered to young entrepreneurs on business strategic planning, business modeling, pitching, and managing business risks and bottlenecks. Since the inception of the Youth Business Clinic in 2018, 388 youths have been mentored in agribusiness of whom 40% are female, and 58 youths have won financial awards worth \$12,540 to improve their agribusinesses.

Integrating nutrition in agriculture interventions

One of the main causes of widespread misery in Uganda is still the limited access to adequate food and nourishment. The issue of food security and hunger in Uganda has never been more crucial than it is today. As the economic climate continues to waver in uncertainty, many low-income Ugandan communities are finding it more and more difficult to feed themselves. On top of this, poor education on the topic of nutrition has created numerous Public Health Concerns such as diabetes, chronic heart disease, vitamin A deficiency, undernourishment, and (Protein-energy malnutrition) PEM. These issues not only stem from poverty but also from poor nutritional awareness.

As the number of households headed by women rises, their families become more susceptible to natural disasters and socioeconomic hardships as a result of women's lack of nutrition literacy and overall lack of empowerment. The Ugandan government and its development partners have a lot they can do on many different levels to assure and facilitate its citizens' access to the resources they need to meet their nutritional and food needs. SAA along with its partners promotes the cultivation and consumption of nutrient-dense foods such as High Iron rich Beans and Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potatoes (OFSP) to eliminate Vitamin A and iron deficiencies. High Iron Rich beans and OFSP are made accessible to malnourished, wasting-away children and women of reproductive age through seed multiplication and distribution to the communities. The group leaders, particularly women are taught good practices during child-feeding and caregiving including meal planning, food preparation, preservation, and processing into confectioneries and composite flours for business.

Recommendations

- Government, together with development partners should aspire to make the Maputo declaration of a 10% minimum annual budget allocation to agriculture a reality.
- Affirmative action in agriculture has been done in most government programs including agriculture, notably the incoming Parish Development Model, but the bottlenecks of women and youth need to be addressed for expected results to be realized.
- Technology is a moving target and Uganda's agriculture cannot afford to be left behind, given emerging trends of climate change, weather vagaries, resistant pests and diseases, demographic trends, post-harvest losses, and many other challenges. Uganda will need to find her place amidst these dynamics, and appropriate technology is part of the answer.
- Youths are the most adaptable section of the population, and ICT is their current domain. Their potential can be harnessed to interest them more in mainstreaming modern ICT into agriculture, both as a hobby and as a business to mitigate the challenges of unemployment, crime, and destitution.
- While Western inputs and innovations may provide a quick fix outlet, Uganda's Agricultural development model should seek a balance without negating the time-proven best practices of indigenous knowledge, traditional practices, cultures, crops, and animals, and unique identities – a brand we should not miss when it comes to international arenas.
- It is important to manage food safety problems while addressing the nutritional needs of specific groups and vulnerable members of the households (e.g. infants and young children, pregnant and lactating women, disabled and elderly people).

Conclusion:

Escalating skills, voices, and opportunities for women and youth in a climate-smart, efficient, effective, better-funded agricultural extension service delivery system is the way to go.

Sasakawa Africa Association “Walking with the farmer”