

SAA INNOVATIONS TO MITIGATE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FOOD SYSTEMS IN UGANDA

Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) is a Non-Government Organization working with Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) to support smallholder farmers with a major goal of improving food security, nutrition and household incomes. SAA has worked in partnership with Nippon Foundation of Japan since 1997 and other development partners such as aBi Trust, K+S Kali GmbH- Germany, CIMMYT, WFP, European Cooperative for Rural Development (EUCORD), National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), HarvestPlus and agricultural institutions such as Makerere University has reached 1,500,000 farmer households in 64 districts. Smallholder farmers and extension agents have been supported through building their capacity to manage value chain of the focus crops (cereals and legumes) and equipping them with knowledge and skills for value chain management. SAA has registered tremendous success in its districts of operation, however the operations have been affected by COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted on the food value chain system limiting farmers' productivity. In Uganda, the Government instituted measures to control the spread of the pandemic, which include but



MAAIF Officials handing over a bicycle to a farmer during the launch of the Extension Measures to sustain agricultural productivity to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on food systems at Fairway Hotel

not limited to; instituting a nationwide lockdown that affected the movement of resources and agricultural value chain actors. It was against this background that SAA conducted a rapid impact assessment to establish the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on food systems in Uganda. Using structured data collection tools, information was collected from several stakeholders who included farmers, MAAIF officials, local government officials, Extension workers, Private Service providers, traders, agro-input dealers and financial institutions.

Key findings indicated that due to travel restrictions, farmers experienced limited access to markets, agricultural inputs, limited sales as a result of ban on weekly markets, increased transaction costs, reduced food rations, reduced savings, reduced number of meals and low uptake of nutritious foods as well as limited access to face-to-face extension advisory services including trainings. The lockdown also led to the closure of educational institutions.

Accordingly, SAA Uganda with support from SAA management in Japan launched a project, "Emergency project to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on food systems" to support

smallholder farmers cope with the impact of the pandemic. In this project, SAA has implemented several strategies and supported 800 farmer groups with 1,563 farmers to cope with the effects of the pandemic.

SAA is collaborating with IT companies like, M-Omulimisa and Akorion which provide innovative mobile-based extension services to support farmers' access to extension advisory services. Through these e-extension platforms (M-Omulimisa and Ezy Agric applications) extension agents are able to share knowledge through question-and-answer interactions with farmers and facilitate linkages of farmers to value chain support services such as credit access, access to agricultural inputs, agricultural insurance, access to produce markets, farmer profiling and garden mapping. Farmers and Extension agents' interactions can be done in the local languages for easier and quicker understanding. SAA is building the capacity of Commodity Association Traders (CATs), Village Agents, Community Based Facilitators (CBFs) and agro-input dealers on using e-extension platforms. A total of 91 CBFs have been availed smart phones to enable them upload and use the e-extension platforms to provide services to farmers. Through this approach, EAs can reach many farmers without face-to-face meetings which is also a strategy to prevent transmission of COVID-19. During the project period, 200 farmers have been



Sewakiryanga Joseph a Commodity Association Trader (CAT) in Kiboga District at his agro-input shop. He uses EzyAgric application to purchase inputs and provide extension advice to farmers

registered and their gardens mapped. To promote record keeping among saving groups, SAA is partnering with Akaboxi company limited to pilot a digital saving platform (akaboxi) that allows saving groups to keep their records as well save their money digitally as opposed to the metallic box. The platform allows farmers to calculate their credit score which they can use to apply for loans from financial institutions.

To increase farmer's access to seed and improve household food security and nutrition and income during the pandemic, SAA has provided 1,024 bags of cassava cuttings, 196 bags of sweet potato vines in its program districts. SAA is also promoting production and consumption of vegetables, among farming communities. SAA distributed vegetable seed (138 tins of Nakati, 326 tins of amaranth, 188 tins of kale and 326 tins of cabbage) to 800 farmer groups with 1,563 farming households in the districts of Otuke, Kole, Rakai, Isingiro, Mubende, Kiboga, Bugiri, Kibuku, Kamwenge, Kamuli, Buikwe, Lira, Tororo, Nakaseke and Oyam. In collaboration with HarvestPlus, production and consumption of high iron beans and orange sweet potatoes (rich in vitamin A) have been promoted among 191 farming households. Each host farmer is expected to act as a seed multiplier so that other farmers can benefit. During the project period, farmers have received training on production, basic nutrition and value addition such as nutritious food combinations for improved nutrition status for instance making composite flours that are rich in nutrients for example composite flour of Millet, Soybean, Amaranthus.

SAA has strengthened trainings and sensitization on labour and time saving technologies that also reduce drudgery especially for women through promoting production and post-harvest handling equipment. SAA identifies individuals and or groups especially the youth and women to acquire equipment and provide services to other farmers at a cost thus earning income. During the period of the pandemic, SAA equipped 226 farmers with production and post-harvest handling equipment

to reduce costs, drudgery and post-harvest losses. These include planters, weeders, ox-ploughs shellers, threshers, line markers, sieves, tarpaulins, PICS bags for hermetic storage and aflatoxin kits. This will go a long way to increase acreage, production, quality produce that will fetch more money for farmers.

SAA has collaborated with the Department of Agriculture of Makerere University to digitize training materials.

SAA is extensively conducting radio talk shows to sensitize farmers on use of climate resilient technologies, use of hermetic storage, promoting food safety, hygiene and sensitization on dangers of aflatoxin. SAA partnered with HarvestPlus to air talk shows and sensitize farmers on good nutrition sessions specifically on the benefits of high iron beans as well as control of COVID 19.

Together we shall end hunger in Uganda and improve livelihoods of smallholder farmers.



A child enjoying a meal of orange sweet potatoes with high iron beans with sukumawiki that was prepared during the meal preparation trainings in Bugiri District.



Country Director (third from the left) with SAA staff during the launch of the Extension Measures to sustain agricultural productivity to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on food systems at Fairway Hotel