FEED THE FUTURE
The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

THE SASAKAWA AFRICA FUND FOR EXTENSION EDUCATION (SAFE)

by Deola Naibakelao, Managing Director, SAFE

MEAS HRD Case Study Series, # 1, January 2013

Background

Of sub-Saharan Africa's estimated 150,000 extension officers in the early 1990s, perhaps only one in six had completed a bachelor's or higher degree. About 70 percent held a certificate issued by an agricultural college of the Ministry of Agriculture; another 15 percent tended to hold a higher diploma degree in agriculture, usually issued by a university. Thus about 85 percent of the extension workers of the era tended to begin their careers with a weak grasp of agricultural science and limited skills in extension communication. Other problems also hindered the motivation of agricultural extension officers. For example, even if they achieved success at the field level through their firsthand experience with farmers and farming, they were seldom able to rise to supervisory positions because they lacked the minimum of a bachelor's degree, which could push them into the "professional" rank.

The need to ensure that agricultural knowledge and technology from research is effectively disseminated to farmers and end users in sub-Saharan Africa to improve profits and livelihoods cannot be overemphasized. As key actors of development tackled a myriad of agricultural production and postproduction issues, it became apparent that the extension system, especially the frontline extension agents, needed to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to effectively disseminate crucial agricultural information and technology needed for sustainable agricultural development. Sasakawa Africa Fund for Extension Education (SAFE, www.safe-africa.net, www.saa-safe.org/) has taken the lead in developing responsive, custom-made agricultural extension education and rural leadership programs that reach out to development professionals that work directly with rural people to improve their livelihoods.

SAFE Vision

Effective extension delivery systems in sub-Saharan Africa that are based on farmer needs and demands along the entire agricultural value chain, with special focus on poor and marginalized farmers, most of whom are women.

SAFE Mission

To promote more effective, demand-driven agricultural and rural development advisory services through appropriate training of mid-career advisory staff members and by strengthening agricultural education institutions in sub-Saharan Africa to develop and sustain responsive formal continuing education programs.

SAFE is a product of two development imperatives:

- To bring African agricultural universities and colleges more fully into the agricultural and rural development process through the creation of new, innovative continuing education programs.
- To expand and strengthen the knowledge and skills of frontline agricultural and rural development advisory service providers to improve their capacity to more effectively serve the needs of smallholder farm families.

SAFE is the brainchild of the late Norman E. Borlaug, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and president of the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA). SAFE is part of the Sasakawa-Global 2000 (SG 2000) agricultural initiative launched in 1986 by the late Japanese philanthropist Ryoichi Sasakawa, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Dr. Borlaug to increase food security and improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. The late B. Havener, former president of Winrock International and SAA board member, was instrumental in forging and nurturing the partnership between SAA and Winrock International through the SAFE initiative. Funding for SAFE comes from the Nippon Foundation of Japan, whose chairman is Yohei Sasakawa.

The SAFE initiative was established in 1991. The initial plan was to grant individual scholarships to outstanding extension officers of the ministries of agriculture (MoA) from countries where SG2000 agricultural programs are implemented. Very soon, however, the initial plan changed and shifted to institutional capacity building of African universities and colleges to offer in-country, demand-driven formal training programs for mid-career agricultural and rural development extension staff members. SAA teamed up with Winrock International, a U.S. non-governmental development organization and leader in human resource development, to

implement the SAFE initiative. The pilot program was launched in 1993 at the University of Cape Coast, in Ghana.

Guiding Philosophy and Curriculum

SAFE's guiding principle is that African tertiary educational institutions can offer responsive continuing education opportunities in support of agricultural and rural development. In this way, an increased number of mid-career staff members will have the opportunity to receive quality education locally to upgrade their knowledge and technical and human leadership skills.

The main pillars of the SAFE initiative are lifelong learning, demand-driven curricula, student-centered experiential learning and rural leadership development.

Figure 1. Pillars of the SAFE Initiative.

Major Steps Involved in the SAFE Curriculum Development and Reform Process

The SAFE curriculum revitalization process involves six essential steps in curriculum transformation and development (Knipscheer, Zinnah and Mutimba, 2002; Mutimba, Knipscheer and Deola, 2010). The framework is not a blueprint but rather a flexible guide to help universities and colleges in Africa that are developing their agricultural education curricula or reforming existing ones.

Step1: Informal dialogue among key stakeholders.
Key stakeholders and actors in educational and development organizations include representatives of the universities or colleges, ministries of agriculture, civil services, SAFE, Winrock International, the private sector, NGOs and farmer organizations. The aim of involving them in informal dialogue is to assist employers and agricultural education institutions to reflect on their existing agricultural education programs, assess their effectiveness at meeting the training needs of students and the agriculture sector, and to determine whether change is necessary.

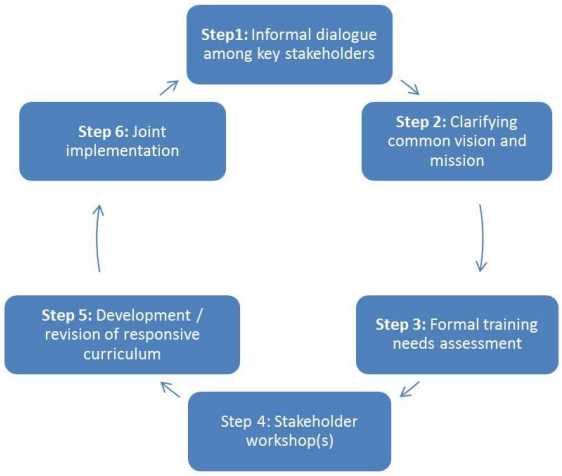


Figure 2. Major steps involved in the SAFE curriculum transformation and development.

Step 2: Clarifying common vision and mission.
A precondition for innovative thinking about curricula is stakeholders' agreement, and action, on common vision and mission. An important aspect of the SAFE initiative is that the curriculum development and revitalization process be demand-driven. This step involves clarifying the vision and mission for a more responsive extension training program and confirming the stakeholders' belief that it is needed.

Step 3: Formal training needs assessment.
To provide information to guide the development of a curriculum, a formal extension training needs assessment is carried out by the host university/college in collaboration with representatives from stakeholder organizations -- including ministries of agriculture/rural development, NGOs, farmer organizations, SAA/SAFE and Winrock International. Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected. Among other things, the needs assessment usually considers the following factors: the number of extension staff members in both the public and private sectors, their academic qualifications and work experience, their job descriptions, the capacity of the host university or college to run the program (i.e., academic staff members and their qualifications, lecture rooms, library facilities, instructional materials and dormitory facilities), the extension staff members' self-perceived training needs, and the possible challenges and constraints in launching and sustaining the program.

Step 4: Workshop for stakeholders.
A workshop involving key stakeholders is held to discuss the findings of the needs assessment and to work out strategies for initiating and sustaining the program. The workshop provides an opportunity for the stakeholders to engage in dialogue; work toward consensus on the vision for the program, courses and their contents; develop criteria for the selection and admission of students; and establish program

linkages. The workshop also facilitates the development of partnerships between the stakeholders. These partnerships are vital for resource mobilization and the sustainability of such a demand-driven program.

Step 5: Development of responsive curricula or reform of existing ones.
The development of a curriculum is guided by four important criteria: it must deal with the pragmatic needs of mid-career agricultural extension staff members, including the acquisition of knowledge and skills in communication, problem solving, critical thinking and learning with others; it must be closely related to the participants' actual work environment; it must provide a dynamic interplay between theoretical and practical components; and it must expose participants to issues of food security, climate change, the role of women in agriculture, the agricultural value chain, the relationship between population and food production, and rural leadership development.

Step 6: Joint implementation.
All the stakeholders jointly implement the developed or revised curricula. This is in conformity with the nature of the SAFE initiative, which is in essence *partnership*.

Uniqueness of the SAFE initiative

The SAFE initiative is special in two ways. Firstly, the programs are designed to run as partnerships between employers and agricultural education institutions -- employers release their staff members on full salary and pay tuition, and agricultural training institutions provide suitable accommodations and teaching staffs. This approach ensures mainstreaming and sustainability of the programs. In addition, the employers reabsorb their staff members upon completion of their studies.

Secondly, the programs are demand-driven and based on identified needs. The curricula are streamlined to focus on the needs identified. The programs provide practical, hands-on laboratories, problem-focused courses and field-based enterprises. Experiential learning -- learning by doing -- is at the foundation of the programs.

As part of their training, the students -- together with their employers, their lecturers and farmers -- develop "supervised enterprise project" (SEP) proposals relevant to their jobs as extension officers that they go back and implement in their workplaces. The projects run for six to nine months. The students implement the SEPs under the direct supervision of the universities and their employers. The projects provide unique and rare opportunities for academic staff members to assess the relevance and effectiveness of their teaching and to identify other opportunities for learning from real-life situations.

The SEPs also provide a forum for bringing together the students, employers, farmers and educational institutions.

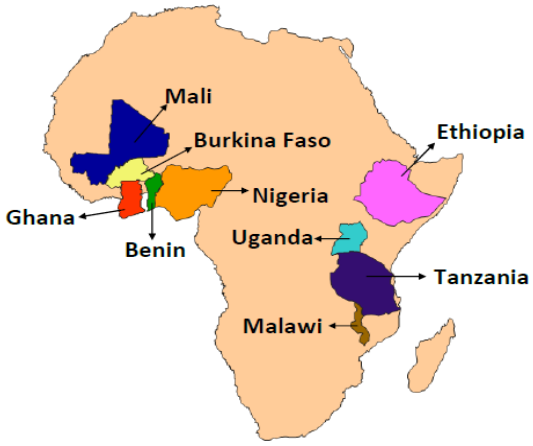
Photo 1. Abdi Azaz (far right), a mid-career student at Hawassa University (Ethiopia), discussing his carrot project with farmers and his supervisors.

Photo 2. Esther Koranteng (right), a mid-career student at Kwadaso Agricultural College (Ghana), discussing her cocoa project with Lois Mensah (left), her lecturer and supervisor at KAC. Behind are some farmers from Tafo district of the Eastern Region of Ghana, who are admiring the healthy cocoa hybrid seedlings being promoted by the student.

Right from the very beginning, gender was an important consideration. Twenty-five percent of the total enrollment was required to be women. The admission requirement of a certificate or diploma in agriculture is a huge challenge, however. Agricultural studies do not attract women. Very few girls show interest in agriculture. As a result, very few women hold a certificate or diploma in agriculture. This makes it difficult to reach the 25 percent of the total intake reserved for female candidates.

Achievements/Impact

SAFE began as a modest pilot program in Ghana in 1993 and had expanded to 17 institutions in nine countries by2012. (See map below as well as table on last page.)



As of April 2012, 3,661 mid-career extension staff members had benefited from the SAFE initiative, including 2,528 graduates (Figure 3). Twenty percent of the beneficiaries are females.

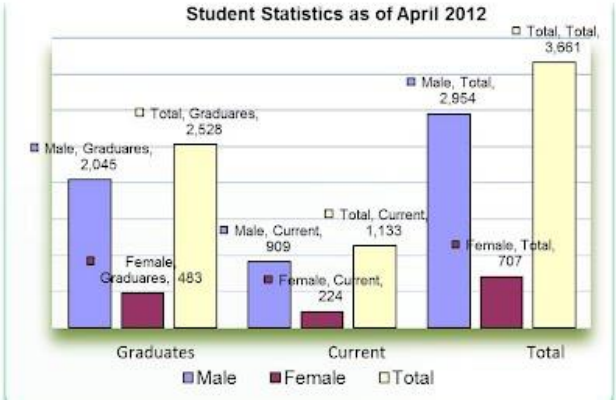


Figure 3. SAFE student statistics as of April 2012.

Graduates of the programs now occupy higher positions of responsibility in the agricultural systems of their respective countries. They constitute a pool of true agents of change and are providing the needed leadership to move agriculture forward.

- The practical field orientation and demand-driven nature of the program have greatly transformed the previous teaching approach of the participating universities and colleges. Participating institutions have learned to become more flexible in designing their training programs.
- Female students have made visible impact with income-generating projects (SEPs) that have improved the welfare of farming families. The female student projects also broadened utilization of farm products by introducing alternative methods of processing, preservation and food preparation, thereby minimizing losses due to wastage.
- On the basis of lessons drawn from the SAFE initiative, several partner universities have embraced the philosophy of lifelong learning and have come up with new programs in other fields of study designed along the SAFE model.
- SAFE alumni associations have been established in participating countries. Alumni associations are playing a crucial role in forging and strengthening networks among graduates.
- SAFE has facilitated the establishment of memoranda of understanding (MoU) between training institutions and employers that create a strong basis for sustainable and demand-driven programs.

New Perspectives

Broadening accessibility

The majority of current programs at the universities and colleges are based on full-time residential instruction. This model has several limitations: Intakes are limited by available space in dormitories, classrooms, and library and computer facilities. These programs also require that those who are in full-time employment get study leave to attend. In addition, employers find it difficult to release their staff members for full-time programs because of work requirements and budget. Long periods of absence mean loss of valuable service to the employers.

To address this issue, participating universities and colleges are considering the use of alternative modes of course delivery. These include part-time (evening and/or weekend) courses, summer vacation courses, and distance education. This new direction will allow larger numbers of candidates to enroll in the programs.

Broadening the curriculum focus

The realization is growing that smallholder farmers do not maximize their full potential if their efforts stop at primary production. The smallholder farmers must go beyond production and add value at points along the value chain. But traditional extension service providers currently focus on production agriculture. They are not sufficiently trained to provide advice beyond production.

In light of the above, all the curricula have been revised to include the agricultural value chain. The revised curricula will ensure that extension service providers have sufficient knowledge and skills to provide advice covering a larger portion of the value chain in agriculture.

Enhancing educational delivery through the use of ICT

Educational delivery methods have evolved rapidly over the past decade and especially more recently with the advent of new information and communication technologies, ICT. The

role of ICT in training has become paramount, and SAFE now is directing its efforts toward its effective use.

Lessons learned

- Employers of mid-career students, development organizations, and resource persons from outside universities and colleges can influence the design of the curricula.
- Universities can respond to well-articulated demands, despite the "ivory tower" stigma that characterizes institutions of higher learning.
- Mid-career extension professionals represent underutilized sources of information and catalysts for rural development.
- Field experience can enrich curricula and teaching at universities and colleges by providing invaluable opportunities for faculty members and students to learn from real-life situations, and bring new benefits to farmers.

Lessons Learned

The experience of the SAFE initiative clearly indicates that the interest, enthusiasm and commitment of stakeholders can be assured if they are part of the decision-making process. Farmers, officials of the ministries of agriculture, NGOs, extension professionals, prospective students, and university administrators and lecturers should all participate in making decisions on matters affecting the programs.

A strong and committed leadership with a clear vision is the major condition for starting and successfully implementing an innovative program.

Training institutions need to be flexible in the design of the curriculum and admission criteria into university programs.

The demand-driven nature of the curricula plays an important role in the success of the programs. The curricula address the true needs and problems of extension staff members and farming communities.

The development and reform of the curricula is participatory and involves all stakeholders. This gives a great sense of ownership among stakeholders.

The SAFE initiative has demonstrated the importance of forging partnerships within the universities themselves (i.e., across faculties and departments) and with other universities, NGOs and government ministries, and with the private sector. One of the most important ingredients for the start-up and sustainability of any innovative program is partnership with other organizations that are concerned about the same problems and committed to the shared vision and mission.

References

Knipscheer, H.C., M.M. Zinnah and J.K. Mutimba. 2002. Addressing the challenges of extension services delivery through responsive extension education. Pages 66-81 in S.A. Breth (ed.), *Food security in a changing Africa*. Center for Applied Studies in International Negotiations. Geneva, Switzerland.

Mutimba, J.K., H.C. Knipscheer and N. Deola. 2010. The role of universities in food security and safety: Perspectives based on the Sasakawa Africa fund for extension education. *Journal of Development in Sustainable Agriculture 5*(1), 12-22.

Disclaimer

This Case Study was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development, USAID. The contents are the responsibility of the MEAS Consortium and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Technical editing by Leslie Johnson, Michigan State University, and production by Andrea Bohn, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Prepared by Deola Naibakelao, Managing Director, SAFE

January 2013 - MEAS Case Study Series on Human Resource Development in Agricultural Extension

All case studies are available at www.meas-extension.org/meas-offers/case-studies.

SAFE program institutions, October 1993-May 2012,

Institution	Country	Program	Initiated
University of Cape Coast	Ghana	Bachelor of science (B.Sc.)	1993
Haramaya University	Ethiopia	B.Sc.	1996
Makerere University	Uganda	B.Sc.	1997
Sokoine University of Agriculture	Tanzania	B.Sc.	1998
Kwadaso Agricultural College	Ghana	Diploma	1999
Rural Polytechnic Institute for Training and Applied Research	Mali	Maîtrise	2002
Ahmadu Bello University	Nigeria	B.Sc.	2002
Polytechnic University of Bobo-Dioulasso	Burkina Faso	Licence Professionnel en Vulgarisation-Conseil	2004
University of Abomey-Calavi	Benin	Licence Professionnel en Vulgarisation-Conseil	2004
Bunda College	Malawi	B.Sc.	2005
Hawassa University	Ethiopia	B.Sc.	2006
Samanko Agricultural Institute	Mali	Diploma	2006
Bayero University-Kano	Nigeria	B.Sc.	2007
Adamawa State University	Nigeria	B.Sc.	2011
University of Illorin	Nigeria	B.Sc.	2011
Bahir Dar University	Ethiopia	B.Sc.	2011
Mekele University	Ethiopia	B.Sc.	2012