

Customized Agriculture Extension System (CAES)

Increasing Rwanda's agricultural productivity is key to improving food security, improving livelihoods, and reducing poverty. Rwanda's estimated population of 12,96 million¹ is projected to increase by more than 50% by 2050² and agriculture plays a huge role in people's livelihoods. The sector employs more than two-thirds of the population³ including more than 95% of rural households who rely directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods⁴. Rwanda has put in place the National Agriculture Policy (MINAGRI 2017) and is currently implementing the Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation PSTA 4 (MINAGRI 2018). Both recognize the importance of agricultural extension in closing the gap between current and potential productivity levels. The SEAD project contributed to the implementation of this Agricultural Policy and Strategy through promoting outreach and extension services by engaging education and research institutions, agribusinesses and the community, including farmers & cooperatives. In 2020 Rwanda adopted the new Customized Agriculture Extension System (CAES), which promotes a more demand-led, value chain based, participatory approach to agricultural extension that is underpinned by the involvement of the private sector, youth and education institutions.

This briefing paper highlights the findings from SEAD's activities with providers and recipients of extension services and outreach in Rwanda's agricultural sector and serves as an example of good practice for the new Customized Agriculture Extension System (CAES). It draws on SEAD's work involving education institutions in the training of farmers, farmers cooperatives and agribusinesses; its support given to the development and validation of the Customized Agricultural Extension System document, and discussions with the SEAD implementing team – including key stakeholders involved in the development of the CAES.

Key findings

Building on good practice and increased capacity to close gaps in efficiency of decentralised extension services

The CAES aims to improve the impact of earlier extension service initiatives such as Twigire Muhinzi and the Crop Intensification Programme (CIP). It recognises the need for frontline extension service providers, such as farmer promoters and agronomists – who are under the supervision of local government – to acquire relevant skills and improve the quality of delivering extension services, building on SEAD experience.

Rwanda needs a demand-led, value chain based, participatory approach to agricultural extension for its growing population of 12,96 million, projected to grow over 50% by 2050.

SEAD promoted involvement of education institutions in CAES, alongside private sector, local government and youth.

Higher learning institutions and the private sector have a clear role in extension services

SEAD promoted collaboration between higher learning institutions, the private sector and other value chain actors through a triple helix model called the Service Training & Innovation Centres (STIC). Involving all actors in the value chains, including communities, ensures that both research and education are relevant to real needs, include the latest in agricultural innovation and are focused on transforming knowledge into practical skills and adaptable practice. Greater involvement of the private sector makes the extension services less reliant on funding from the government or development partners.

The CAES is informed by good practice from overseas

SEAD organised visits to the Netherlands for decision-makers and champions from across Rwanda's agricultural sector to study the Dutch experience of agricultural transformation and collaboration with private agribusinesses and education institutions to shift from public extension services system to public-private cooperation.

“The Netherlands has chosen an approach that focused on good collaboration between institutions across sectors. In their system, institutions and people have specializations and every entity knows what they are doing, respects each other’s mandates to prevent duplication and labour allocation is done systematically. There is a high reliance of each sector on academia and science...”

Alfred R. Bizoza (PhD), professor at the University of Rwanda College for Agriculture College of Agriculture, Animal Sciences and Veterinary Medicine

Recommendations

The momentum of the participatory development process of the CAES must be harnessed through a continued focus on its implementation. Besides the clear formulation of roles and responsibilities in the new extension system, some key priorities, based on SEAD experience may include:

Use training packages developed by SEAD to continue building capacity

The training packages for crops and livestock developed by SEAD in support of outreach should continue to be provided to frontline extension service and education providers and address all actors across the agricultural value chains.

Mobilise private sector funding for extension services

Key private sector partners in SEAD can help improve the quality standards of produce and support the training of extension professionals and young people. Partners may include: Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum (RYAF), Horticulture in Reality Corporation (HoReCo), Holland GreenTech, Youth Engagement in Agriculture Network (YEAN), and others.

Ensure better government coordination to ensure greater collaboration with higher learning institutions

MINAGRI should build on SEAD experience in leading the way in coordinating inter-ministry collaboration with local government and involving the higher learning institutions in both research and implementation.

Regulate the new system to focus on quality as well as delivery

The Secretariat of CAES and the Rwanda Agricultural Board (RAB), the implementing agency of the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), should guide quality assurance and set standards for accrediting private extension service providers, based on practical experience developed by SEAD.

Prioritise technology developments which respond to farmers’ needs

RAB, jointly with higher learning institutions, partnering in SEAD, should help to shape the research and development agenda, in consultation with farmers, extension agents and others, to ensure cross-cutting and emerging issues are integrated into research planning.

Provide district-level oversight of delivery

The Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) should support the coordination of the extension service provision at district level, in collaboration with MINAGRI and the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), and help mobilise district directors and staff to organise activities and effectively manage allocated funds.

Use findings emerging from extension services to inform education and research

Education institutions partnering in SEAD should help to address pressing issues affecting local communities by reinforcing technology transfer and developing outreach programmes which more systematically engage local communities.

Contribute to the system’s feedback loops

Farmers (and the private sector) should use their sector knowledge and experience gained through SEAD to identify needs which extension services should address. Farmers can also provide feedback on their experience of service providers and extension officers as part of quality assurance processes.

Play a key role in taking extension services from strength to strength

Extension professionals should form an association that can give a boost to commercial farming, help collate experiences and promote continuous professional development and peer learning.

SEAD’s contribution to CAES

14 Training booklets for farmers and other value chain players in the SEAD value chains

160 lecturers from higher learning institutions trained to roll out outreach and extension services

28 Applied research projects informed the development of the extension service sector

Over 100 district/sector agronomists and veterinarians trained

100 Farmer Field School (FFS) Facilitators/ promoters under Twigire Muhinzi trained

Over 50,000 farmers/cooperatives in the four value chains benefited from SEAD training

1 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (2021)

2 MINECOFIN, Vision 2050

3 Rwanda Labour Force Survey (NISR) 47.6% of the working age population is engaged in agriculture

4 MINAGRI, PSTA 4, 2017