

Voices from the Field

Throughout 2018, the Sasakawa Africa Association has continued working to empower Africa's smallholder farmers. Through crop productivity enhancement, improved postharvest and agro-processing training and establishing access to markets, SAA works to strengthen the agriculture value-chain.

In 2017 the Chair of SAA, Hon Professor Ruth Oniang'o, was awarded the Africa Food Prize. Her vast knowledge and experience of nutrition and farming practices shines through in all our programmes. We will continue to support women and keep the smallholder farmer at the centre of everything we do. Learning from the past, we will work together for a better future.

Supporting farmers to produce quality seed

Dr Fousseyni Cissé is a veteran scientist and rice breeder at the Malian Institute of Rural Economy (IER).

SAA works in collaboration with IER to produce quality seed for farmers. At the demonstration sites for seed production in the Sikasso region, SG 2000 Mali supports an IER-led project to promote two quality seed varieties.

The IER Lowland Rice Unit, based in the Sikasso Cercle at Lokorola village, is among the different agricultural research stations (Lowland and Upland) for different crops, and serves as an education platform where farmers can learn to produce good quality seed.

"We have mainly rice, sorghum, maize, and cotton", explains Dr Cissé. "All research here is supported and financed by Sasakawa. I lead a team of three research assistants – a breeder, an agronomist, and a phytopathologist – as well as an entomologist."

Another project supported by SAA is the community seed demonstration plots, each comprising 2500m², and showcasing different seed varieties: DK-P17, DK-P28, and Nerica 4. According to Dr Cissé, many farmers have now become better acquainted with rice technologies and agricultural practices as a result of these demonstration plots, and understand the potential of new seed varieties such as DK-P17 and DK-P28 (with a yield of 4 and 4.5 tonnes per hectare respectively). Dr Cissé explains that efforts are in place to understand and benefit from the production cycle of these new varieties.

"In terms of research, IER develops many varieties for all ecologies of rice, like deep water, upland, lowland, rain-fed lowland, and so on", he says. "But the farmers have problems accessing these varieties because of the issues around multiplying the breeder and foundation seeds. For that, Sasakawa has intervened to multiply these varieties, in order to produce increased quantities of quality seed for farmers."



Dr Fousseyni Cissé (third from left) and his team of researchers visit a demonstration plot

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