

**The Forum for sustainable agriculture in Africa: Genesis, operations and future prospects**

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**Abstract**

The slow rate of agricultural development in Africa can largely be blamed on lack of functional relationships between technology/innovation generation centers, local farming communities, financial institutions and markets. The result has been low penetration of promising innovations/technologies thus, low adoption levels and/ or partial adoption; and limited or no access to markets and financial services by farmers. In general, most of the innovation/technologies developed have not been extensively out-scaled; some of which are not even packaged in user friendly formats. The Forum for Sustainable Agriculture in Africa (FOSAA) believes that scientific and/or technological innovations have a greater chance of going to scale and achieving global impact if they are developed from the onset with appropriate social and business innovations—an approach that we call integrated growth. Therefore, FOSAA intends to establish and manage innovation/technology incubation centers in collaboration with knowledge institutions (Universities/ colleges; research institutions; farmer organisations and the private sector) as a mechanism for enhancing agricultural intensification. To emphasise the requisite business innovation, FOSSA will liaise with other stakeholders to reduce agricultural production and price risks caused by climatic changes (weather index insurers) and market distortions (guarantee schemes), respectively. Further, these incubation centers will also act as agribusiness training/resource centers where a multi-structured programme that includes farm enterprise selection, resource mobilisation and utilisation, routine market assessment and business negotiation skills, record keeping and financial management, risk prediction and management, value addition, carbon foot- printing and team building will be managed.

Key words: Agricultural intensification, FOSSA, innovations, integrated growth

**Résumé**

La lenteur du développement agricole en Afrique peut être largement attribuée à l'absence de relations fonctionnelles entre les centres de production de technologie / innovation, les

communautés agricoles locales, les institutions financières et les marchés. Le résultat a été la faible pénétration des innovations/technologies prometteuses, ainsi donc, les niveaux d'adoption faibles et / ou l'adoption partielle, et l'accès limité ou inexistant aux marchés et aux services financiers par les agriculteurs. En général, la plupart des innovations / technologies développées n'ont pas été largement d'envergure; certaines d'entre elles ne sont même pas emballées dans des formats conviviaux. Le Forum pour une Agriculture Durable en Afrique (FOSAA) estime que les innovations scientifiques et / ou technologiques ont plus de chance d'aller plus loin et d'obtenir un impact global si elles sont développées dès le début avec des innovations sociales et commerciales appropriées - une approche que nous appelons la croissance intégrée. Par conséquent, FOSAA a l'intention de créer et de gérer des centres d'incubation d'innovation / technologie en collaboration avec les institutions du savoir (universités / collèges, institutions de recherche, organisations paysannes et secteur privé) en tant que mécanisme de renforcement d'intensification agricole. Pour souligner l'innovation commerciale nécessaire, FOSSA assurera la liaison avec les autres parties prenantes afin de réduire la production agricole et les risques de prix causés par les changements climatiques (assureurs d'indices météorologiques) et les distorsions du marché (systèmes de garantie), respectivement. En outre, ces centres d'incubation agiront également comme des centres de formation/ressources agro-industriels où un programme multi-structuré qui comprend la sélection des entreprises agricoles, la mobilisation et l'utilisation des ressources, l'évaluation du marché de routine et les techniques de négociation en matière commerciale, la tenue des dossiers et la gestion financière, la prédiction et la gestion du risque, la valeur ajoutée, l'impression en bilan carbone et la constitution de l'équipe sera géré.

Mots clés: Intensification agricole, FOSSA, innovations, croissance intégrée

## **Background**

**Genesis.** As part of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) core principles, University researchers (Principal Investigators) develop linkages with NGOs and other Universities. These linkages are intended to act as a window through which RUFORUM funded students are given opportunity for hands-on problem solving. Under the same arrangement, as graduate students, we (the two authors) were given opportunity to participate in an action learning

trajectory focused on “Best Farming Practices in Uganda”. This was coordinated by the National Union for Coffee Agribusinesses and Farm Enterprises (NUCAFE) in partnership with Agriterro and Makerere University with backstopping from Wageningen University. The learning trajectory highlighted a number of key bottlenecks one of which was lack of a functional relationship between farmers, financial services (Banks and Insurance firms), markets and innovation/technology generation centers (Universities and Research Organisation), which greatly hinder attainment of agricultural intensification.

Attendance of RUFORUM Biennial and Ministerial Conferences in 2010 gave us an opportunity to network and share experiences/best practices with students/researchers and Technology Transfer Agents in the Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) continuum. This helped us identify continental wide development challenges (limited access to agricultural finance and markets, youth unemployment, disjointed efforts between agricultural research and extension services and lack of agricultural production risk mitigation facilities) where immediate attention is imperative. These insights and experiences formed the core inspiration for the initiation of an agency (FOSAA) that has a long term potential to cover the entire continent.

FOSAA adopts an integrated innovations approach (coordinated application of scientific/technological, social and business innovation to develop solutions to complex challenges) in its operations. The aim is to engage for-profit companies (private sector) and not-for-profit organisations in a manner that aligns their ongoing success with the success of the proposed solutions. The advantage is that, this model:

- Enables the rapid prototyping of new innovations,
- Supports rigorous evaluation that allows for the rapid termination of those innovations that fail to deliver on their promise of significant benefits, and
- Provides mechanisms to bring those innovations that succeed to scale.

## **Mission**

**FOSAA’s Mission statement.** Enhancing agricultural sustainability through capacity building, innovation, research and development initiatives. The mission for FOSAA is through the pursuit of the following principles:

- **Commitment:** transparently FOSAA is committed to inspire pro-social agricultural management, strong interpersonal skills, and to instill a great sense of hope in the future of the agricultural sector with strong emphasis on mindset change;
- **Responsibility:** The focus of FOSAA is to empower farmers in establishing goals and managing decisions that enhance their welfare;
- **Diversification:** FOSAA wants to expand the perspectives of farmers to make them aware of farming possibilities; and
- **Support:** An individual is dramatically influenced by their support system. FOSAA wants to surround farmers with a sustainable mentoring learning environment.

**Vision.** To serve farming communities for a sustainable development in all aspects of humanity irrespective of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status

## Strategic Objectives

FOSAA has five strategic objectives:

1. develop and strengthen innovation/technology incubation facilities to efficiently and effectively perform impact oriented agribusiness incubation for the nation and region;
2. develop and strengthen collaborative and mentorship centers and capacities for enhanced economies of scope and scale;
3. enhance productivity, value addition and improve access to national, regional and global markets for apiculture, mushroom, rice and maize products;
4. improve participation of women and youth in research, production and marketing across all agricultural sector's value chains; and
5. create a dynamic national/regional framework for policy advocacy, coordination and resource mobilisation for advanced adaptive learning/doing.

## Programmes

FOSAA has designed three main programmes to help foster achievement of the above goals in line with the Millennium Development goal one (Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger) and seven (ensuring environmental sustainability):

**Agribusiness Incubation and Mentorship.** This is the core programme where at-risk farmers are matched with trained mentors through a structured programme of support and agribusiness innovation/technology incubation using the Farmer Field School Methodology/ and or Participatory/Experiential (vertical and horizontal) learning/ doing. Innovations/technologies

for incubation include: improved seed, improved storage or shelflife enhancement facilities, modern hives and harvesting technologies, soil fertility management packages and value addition facilities. Farmers and their mentors participate in farm visits (for inspiration and mindset change) followed by a two weeks structured programme that covers: farm enterprise selection, resource mobilisation and utilisation, market assessment and business negotiation skills, record keeping and financial management, risk assessment and management, value addition, carbon footprinting and team building. The programme ends with a graduation (issuing of start-up grants) but the incubatee and the incubator remain in close contact for the next five years (of implementation) but the backstopping service is perpetual.

**Leveraging Internship Opportunities.** This will target especially undergraduates (and MSc students); and those planning to join agricultural colleagues and universities. The aim is give an opportunity to young graduates to try out their skills and knowledge practically at internationally reorganised agricultural/ development agencies.

**Water for Production Development Fund.** Aimed at reducing heavy reliance on rains through construction of water for production points and irrigation schemes. This will ensure constant production.

## Future Prospects

- Expansion/ rollout to other countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo);
- Evolution into an independent African think tank capable of generating scientific/technological innovations fully backed with social and business innovations;
- Evolution into a credible professional entity;
- Evolution into a strong policy advocacy platform; and
- In partnership with Kikandwa Rural Communities Organisation (KIRUCODO), FOSAA will build 20 rain-water harvesting tanks and distribute scholastic materials within the Nakasongola rural poor schools next year (2013).

**Table 1. Achievements and future prospects.**

Institutional growth	Resource mobilisation	Out reach
<p>Gained legal registration with the Uganda Non-Governmental Organisations Board (Reg. No. S. 5914/9657)</p> <p>Gained membership to Agri-Hub Uganda/ AgriProFocus (a growing network of farmers' organisations, NGOs, financial institutes, research institutes, private and public sector actors and Dutch and other international development agencies; collectively joining hands to stimulate the enhancement of farmer entrepreneurship in Uganda)</p> <p>Leadership structure developed</p> <p>Five year Operational Plan developed (2013-2018)</p> <p>Established an incubation center in Uganda whose focus is on minimum tillage; use of kitchen wood ash as a fertilizer and training on modern bee farming</p> <p>Established partnerships with Ruforum, AgriProfocus, Kikandwa Rural Communities Organisation (KIRUCODO), Evergreen International (U) Ltd</p> <p>Listed as a potential partner in the implementation of the Catalyst Project by Agriterra and IFDC</p>	<p>Secured funding from Evegreen International (U) Ltd to implement a project on conservation agriculture</p>	<p>Developed a website: <a href="http://www.sustainableagricultureafrica.webs.com">http://www.sustainableagricultureafrica.webs.com</a></p> <p>a twitter handle: @fosaaug;</p> <p>a facebook page: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/fosaa.innovations">http://www.facebook.com/fosaa.innovations</a>; and</p> <p>a blog: <a href="http://sustainableagricultureafrica.wordpress.com">http:// sustainableagricultureafrica.wordpress.com</a></p> <p>Gained membership to community 'Web2ForDev Discussion Group</p>