

Voices from the field

The Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) celebrates 30 years of working with Africa's smallholder farmers at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in August in Nairobi, Kenya. This sixth TICAD, held for the first time in Africa, brings together Japan and Africa's leaders in "an open and inclusive forum built on the twin principles of African ownership and international partnership."

As TICAD approaches, SAA will be featuring the voices of Africa's smallholder farmers, ensuring they are increasingly heard as they make their growing contribution to Africa's economies.

SAA currently operates in four focus countries: Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda.



“Not one bean lost – something we never thought would be possible!”

Grain storage loss to insects is a major challenge for smallholder farmers, at times estimated to be at least 20 percent for major crops such as corn and common beans. Without crop-saving bags, farmers need to sell their crops soon after harvest or use insecticides which are not necessarily effective or may not be safe due to improper use.

Ethiopian farmers, as in many other African countries, store their grains in traditional storage facilities constructed from mud, clay, dung, plant materials, or mixtures of these. Cognizant of the challenges of post-harvest losses and with the aim of addressing the problems faced by the farmers during storage, the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA), in collaboration with Development and Extension Agents of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MANR) who work directly with farmers, started implementing a program to reach 3155 villages to introduce and disseminate PICS3 bags for a year from September 2015.

Purdue University of Indiana, USA, received a \$10 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop a program that will put the crop-saving bags into the hands of more farmers in Sub-Saharan African countries to improve their food security and income. It is called PICS, Purdue Improved Crop Storage. PICS is a simple, proven technology that has helped millions of African farmers dramatically reduce their storage losses. The hermetic triple bagging – a chemical-free storage method – enables farmers to store a variety of major crops for more than one year after harvest. The technology helps improve food availability and increase the income of smallholder farmers. When using PICS bags, farmers no longer need chemicals to control grain storage pests.

In June 2016, Farmers' Field Days "Open-the-bag ceremonies" (OBC) were held in Hawassa Zuraya Woreda, Sidama Zone, SNNPR, Tigray Region, Central Zone Tahtay, Maychew Woreda, and Mayberaziyo Kebele. Several different crops were demonstrated: maize, beans, sorghum and rice were kept in PICS bags by host farmers, and no insects were found after 6 months of storage; the grains maintained their original quality.



Abadi Redahegn, a farmer from Tahtay Maychew, said he and fellow farmers are now "primarily saved from pests and we no longer apply chemicals before storage. To understand the significance of this, one had to see the losses we used to suffer when our beans and peas were attacked by pests. The loss could amount to half of the harvest. Our joy is twofold: thanks to these bags, the grains have maintained 100% of their quality, and secondly it is chemical-free. At the beginning of the trials we hesitated to adopt the technology, because we thought it was strange to use one outer sack and two inner bags to store grains! But we opened them after two months, and we had not lost one bean. The same was true after four months; something we never thought would be possible. We thank Sasakawa for their intervention in introducing us to these bags. All of us in the farmers' network here now use them."

For more information, contact:

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