

**A CALL FOR ACTION: IMPLEMENTING THE AFRICAN CERTIFIED AGRONOMY
ADVISORY PROGRAM**
#10939

*Canon Engoke Norris Savala, Ivan Adolwa, Esther Mugi, Samuel Njoroge, Kwame Frimpong,
James Mutegi, Kaushik Majumdar, Shamie Zingore
African Plant Nutrition Institute (APNI), ICIPE Compound, P.O. Box 30772-00100, Nairobi,
Kenya
*e-mail: c.engoke@apni.net

ABSTRACT

Agriculture remains the backbone of many African economies, providing livelihood for millions of people while addressing food security concerns. However, productivity often lags other world regions due to various challenges, including limited access to modern agronomic practices and advisory services. In response to the pressing need for enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainability in African countries, it is imperative to establish a standardized extension training program at the continental level. The African Certified Agronomy Advisory Program (CAAP) aims to enhance agricultural productivity, sustainability, and resilience by providing farmers with access to high quality agronomy advisory services. The CAAP initiative addresses the critical gaps in access to relevant agronomic knowledge and guidance among smallholder farmers, thereby promoting sustainable farming practices and improving livelihoods. The CAAP framework encompasses a multi-faceted approach, including the training and certification of agronomy professionals, development of strategic partnerships with private, governmental and non-governmental entities, and the utilization of innovative communication technologies for information dissemination and sharing. Through country or regional tailored advisory services, CAAP will provide farmers with practical insights into soil and crop management, pest and disease control, and climate-resilient farming techniques. Central to the success of CAAP is its emphasis on local capacity building and community engagement. By empowering agronomic advisors and farmers with the necessary skills and knowledge, the program seeks to foster a culture of self-reliance and entrepreneurship within rural communities. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will ensure the effectiveness and impact of CAAP interventions, allowing for continuous refinement and improvement. By collaborative promotion of precision nutrient management such as 4R practices and empowering smallholder farmers, CAAP has the potential to enhance food security, mitigate environmental degradation, and contribute to overall economic development in the region.

Keywords: Adoption, Capacity Development, Climate Change, Communication, Extension, Partnership, Technology, Training

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays a crucial role in the economies of many African nations, serving as a primary source of livelihood for a significant portion of the population. It contributes substantially to GDP and employment, particularly in rural regions where subsistence farming predominates. Agriculture is also vital for export earnings, with commodities such as cocoa, coffee, and tea

forming the cornerstone of international trade (Jayne et al., 2023). However, despite its importance, the sector faces a multitude of challenges that limit its full potential. One major challenge is the limited access to modern agronomic practices and advisory services, which deprives farmers off essential resources such as knowledge and utilization of high-quality seeds, fertilizers, and machinery necessary for enhancing productivity and yields (Masangano & Mthinda, 2017). Furthermore, African agriculture is highly vulnerable to climate change and variability, with extreme weather events posing significant threats to crop production and livestock rearing. Strengthened advisory services will improve mitigation techniques of smallholder farmers, who rely heavily on rain-fed agriculture and particularly susceptible to climatic shocks that lead to food insecurity and economic losses (Alston et al., 2022).

Strengthening of agronomic advisories should accompany financial services to farmers and policy amendments. Access to financial services and markets is another significant barrier, impeding farmers' ability to invest in modern inputs and technologies. Policy and regulatory constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and land tenure issues further hinder agricultural development across Africa (Bambio et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, there are emerging initiatives aimed at improving agricultural productivity through sustainable farming practices, enhanced agricultural extension services, and better access to markets and finance (Camillone et al., 2020). This paper explores the potential of, and need for the African Certified Agronomy Advisory Program (CAAP) to address these challenges by building capacity among agronomy professionals, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, and improving food security and economic resilience in Africa.

Problem Statement and Objectives

Smallholder farmers are the backbone of agricultural production in Africa, yet they often lack access to the knowledge and resources needed to improve their farming practices. This results in sub-optimal yields, increased vulnerability to pests and diseases, and heightened susceptibility to climate variability, all of which negatively impact food security and livelihoods (Alston et al., 2022). Therefore, CAAP seeks to enhance agricultural productivity, sustainability, and resilience in Africa by providing farmers with access to high-quality agronomy advisory services. The program aims to fill critical gaps in agronomic knowledge and guidance, promote the adoption of sustainable farming practices matching transforming food systems and ultimately improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

Framework Overview

CAAP is to be built on a comprehensive framework that includes the training and certification of agronomy professionals, the development of strategic partnerships, the use of innovative communication technologies, and the provision of tailored advisory services to farmers. A cornerstone of CAAP is the rigorous training and certification of agronomy professionals. These individuals will be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to provide high-quality advisory services that help farmers improve their food systems productivity and adopt sustainable practices (Jayne et al., 2023). CAAP seeks to collaborate with a diverse array of partners, including private companies, government agencies, research institutions (national and international) and non-governmental organizations, to leverage resources and expertise. These partnerships are crucial for knowledge development, policy alignment and effective delivery of agronomy advisory services and for ensuring the sustainability of CAAP interventions (Masangano & Mthinda, 2017). The program will utilize innovative communication technologies, such as mobile phones and the

internet, to train agronomists and disseminate agronomic information to farmers. These technologies facilitate real-time communication and information sharing, allowing agronomy advisors and farmers to access timely knowledge, guidance and in turn share feedback for improvement (Camillone et al., 2020). CAAP will provide tailored advisory services based on the specific needs and contexts of farmers. These services will include practical insights into soil and crop management, pest and disease control strategies, and climate-resilient farming techniques (Bambio et al., 2022).

Case Studies from Africa

In Kenya, extension has worked with smallholder farmers to enhance soil fertility through the adoption of sustainable soil and crop management practices. By promoting practices such as conservation agriculture and organic farming, the program helped farmers increase yields while preserving soil health (Jayne et al., 2023). In Ghana, extension has implemented integrated pest and disease management strategies to combat common agricultural pests and diseases. Using biological control methods, crop rotation, and resistant crop varieties, extension reduced reliance on chemical pesticides while effectively managing pest and disease outbreaks (Masangano & Mthinda, 2017). In Ethiopia, extension has introduced climate-resilient farming techniques to help farmers adapt to the challenges posed by climate change. These techniques include the use of drought-tolerant crop varieties, water harvesting and conservation practices, and agroforestry systems, enabling farmers to maintain productivity despite changing climatic conditions (Alston et al., 2022).

Empowerment of Farmers

CAAP emphasizes the empowerment of farmers by providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to improve their farming practices. By fostering a culture of self-reliance and entrepreneurship within rural communities, the program aims to enhance agricultural sustainability and food systems productivity (Bambio et al., 2022). Implementation of the program will also promote entrepreneurship among farmers by supporting the development of agribusinesses and value-added enterprises through supply of raw materials. By diversifying income streams and creating market linkages, CAAP will help farmers improve their economic resilience and livelihoods (Camillone et al., 2020). CAAP will actively involve local communities in the design and implementation of its interventions, ensuring that they are culturally appropriate and contextually relevant. Through activities such as farmer field schools, 'living labs initiative' and participatory research initiatives, CAAP will strengthen social cohesion and ownership of agricultural development initiatives (Jayne et al., 2023).

Potential Impact of CAAP

Through continuous monitoring and evaluation, CAAP will ensure the effectiveness and impact of technology and strengthened advisory interventions. These mechanisms allow for the assessment of progress towards program objectives, identification of challenges and bottlenecks, and adjustment of strategies as needed (Alston et al., 2022). This strategy will allow CAAP to refine and improve its approaches over time. With an iterative process approach of learning and adaptation, CAAP will remain responsive to the evolving needs and priorities of smallholder farmers in Africa (Masangano & Mthinda, 2017). CAAP will promote sustainable farming practices and improve agricultural productivity thereby enhancing food security in Africa. Increased yields and diversified crop production can help ensure a stable and nutritious food supply

for rural communities (Bambio et al., 2022). CAAP will contribute to environmental conservation by promoting practices that reduce the use of excessive chemical inputs, conserve soil and water resources, and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. The adoption of climate-resilient farming techniques also helps farmers contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts (Camillone et al., 2020). Through the promotion of entrepreneurship and the creation of market linkages, CAAP will stimulate economic development in rural areas. Also, the program will promote economic growth and poverty reduction in the region when additional income opportunities and enhanced agricultural value chains will be created (Jayne et al., 2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The African Certified Agronomy Advisory Program (CAAP) represents a comprehensive approach to enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainability in Africa. CAAP will provide farmers with access to high-quality agronomy advisory services, promote sustainable farming practices, and foster community engagement. Therefore, CAAP has the potential to significantly improve livelihoods and food security across the continent. Further research is needed to assess the long-term impacts of CAAP interventions and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, studies on the scalability and replicability of CAAP models across different contexts and regions would be valuable for informing future program expansion efforts. CAAP offers a promising solution to the challenges facing smallholder farmers in Africa. By leveraging strategic partnerships, innovative technologies, and community participation, the program has the potential to catalyze transformative change in the agricultural food systems sector, leading to more resilient and sustainable food systems across the continent.

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