

Communication strategy Africa Soil Health Consortium

improving soil fertility, improving food production, improving livelihoods

Overview

The ASHC has strong partners across Africa and it has clear objectives and an itemised delivery plan. These are strong assets in building the communications strategy.

Given the centrality of the role of communications in the ASHC vision – this strategy and plan both serve and deliver ASHC desired outcomes.

A Project vision of success:

The project's vision of success was set out in the original application to the Gates Foundation.

Decision makers (*policy makers in governments, regional bodies, government agencies and international development agencies*) acknowledge the broad set of principles on which Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM) is based, including the judicious use of mineral fertilizer in the right form and amount to increase farm production, as scientifically sound, appropriate and pragmatic approaches to improving soil fertility and support ISFM implementation

Change agents (*extension workers and agro-dealers*) use adapted, high quality extension materials that impact directly on their ability to effect improvements to cropping systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

Fertilizer use efficiency and effectiveness is optimised and smallholder livelihoods improved as a result of improved knowledge of ISFM delivered in on-going initiatives led by consortium partners.

B Project objectives

1. Define and describe the ISFM framework and prepare generic core reference content (Level 1 content) that applies across different cropping systems.
2. Prepare core cropping systems reference content (Level 2 content) that incorporates ISFM.
3. Build capacity of National product preparation teams to develop customized site-specific material (Level 3 content) for on-going development initiatives in the identified cropping systems and contribute to impact on livelihoods.
4. Learn and share lessons related to the process of knowledge synthesis and communication and how this contributes to change.
5. Communication of mechanisms for application and use of ISFM framework and of the value of using ISFM.

Project countries

	Western Africa	Southern Africa	East Africa
ASHC focus countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Ghana○ Mali	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Mozambique	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Tanzania
Other countries with some activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Burkina Faso○ Chad○ Niger○ Nigeria○ Senegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Malawi○ Rwanda○ Zambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Burundi○ DRC○ Kenya○ Uganda

C Target audiences

Please see Annex 1 for a more detailed analysis of the target audiences.

Government/civil service:

- Policy makers – members of parliament, senators, governors, heads of departments and other senior officials in Ministries of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance
- National Extension Services (including NGOs where they are working in the same capacity)
- National Agricultural Research Institutes including: KARI, SARI, Ari-Uyole, ARI-Maruku, IIAM, ZARI, NARO

Private sector:

- Fertilizer companies, seed companies and other agricultural input wholesalers and manufacturing
- Agro-input dealers

Education:

- Tutors and university departments

Other:

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and AGRA
- Smallholder farmers (indirectly through the production of extension materials in conjunction with and used by partners and therefore not covered in Annex 1)
- Media (a channel for raising awareness)

D Key messages

There are a number of key messages that the ASHC would like to get across to the audiences it is targeting, about what Integrated Soil Fertility Management is, its principles, why it is important and how it can make a difference to harvests, income and livelihoods. We need to express these messages in the simplest way possible at the highest level, to advocate for ISFM.

But more specifically the project needs to develop targeted messages that are relevant to, for example - a country, a group of stakeholders or a group of farmers. These messages will be relevant for the group in question – what are the local conditions, what is being grown, how is it being grown, what fertiliser is available, what policy is in place for fertiliser etc. Developing these targeted materials is very much at the heart of the project.

This project is advocates the use of ISFM principles and tries to disseminate these messages but ultimately the project communicates with a range of partners and stakeholders to develop these messages together, to

ensure that they are locally appropriate, scientifically sound, beneficial to the end recipient and therefore, effective.

At the highest level the key messages the ASHC project will communicate are the answers to these questions:

- What is ISFM?

We use the definition of Vanlauwe (2010) who defines integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) as 'a set of soil fertility management practices that necessarily include the use of fertilizer, organic inputs and improved germplasm, combined with the knowledge of how to adapt these practices to local conditions, aimed at maximizing agronomic use efficiency of the applied nutrients and improving crop productivity. All inputs need to be managed following sound agronomic principles'

Vanlauwe, B., Bationo, A., Chianu, J., Giller, K., Merckx, R., Mokwunye, U., Ohiokpehai, O., Pypers, P., Tabo, R., Shepherd, K., Smaling, E., P, W. and Sanginga, N. (2010) Integrated soil fertility management. Operational definition and consequences for implementation and dissemination. *Outlook on Agriculture*, 39, 17-24.

- Why is soil important?
- What practical methods can be used to improve soil fertility?
- What are the benefits of using these approaches?
- Which approaches could be used in my country, my farm, for my crop?
- What are the potential costs and benefits of using these approaches? And what does a farmer or extension agent need to know to estimate the costs versus benefits for a particular situation?
- What examples are there of where ISFM approaches have been successful?

Summary of the need for ISFM

Soil fertility management includes timely and judicious utilization of pre-plant and top-dressed mineral fertilizers, but also the generation, collection, storage, enrichment and application of available organic resources and the maintenance and enhancement of beneficial soil organisms and biological processes.

Poor soil fertility is a major barrier towards improving the incomes and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. Over the past decades, soils have been degraded through erosion by wind and water, and through unsustainable agricultural practices. As a result the soils have been depleted of valuable soil nutrients particularly nitrogen and phosphorous, as well as vital organic matter.

After decades of reliance on biological approaches to soil fertility improvement, partly because fertilizer has not been easily available, agriculture experts now agree on the need to integrate fertilizer use with other aspects of soil fertility management such as the application of sound agronomic practices and the use of improved seeds that are essential for improving yields.

E Communications strategy

The ASHC will develop a range of materials about ISFM to inform and influence the target audiences listed above. These materials will either be commissioned by the project or be developed by project staff in collaboration with partners, whose objective it is to get ISFM messages into use by farmers and extension workers.

Production of ISFM materials is just the first step. The ASHC will then work to promote these materials to ensure the target audiences are aware of them, understand their purpose, use them and give feedback on how they can be improved. The ASHC will use a range of channels and campaigns to promote and disseminate the information including: website, promotions at conferences, meetings to advise policy makers, newsletter and social media.

The project will work with researchers to help them develop effective communications materials. Through this process and the interactions the researchers have with graphic designers, the media and the private sector, researchers will gain an understanding of how to plan communications activities and best practice for creating outreach materials.

To add to these capacity development activities, the project is exploring the effectiveness of innovative communications approaches in reaching smallholder farmers. One such example is the sponsorship of 'Shamba Shape Up' a farm makeover TV programme aired in Kenya – research is being done to assess the changes in agricultural practices by viewers following the first series. The lessons learned from these communications experiments will be shared with the research community.

The communications objectives as they relate to the project results framework with strategies for achieving them are as follows:

1. To increase awareness of ISFM among priority audiences
[Link to results framework: 1.5, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 5.4, 5.6, 5.8 and 5.9](#)
 - a. To produce and promote smallholder-focussed ISFM materials
[Link to results framework: 1.4, 2.6, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 5.7](#)
 - b. To provide lecturers with high quality ISFM curriculum support materials
[Link to results framework: 1.7,1,8, 4.4 and 5.1](#)
 - c. To provide extension workers and input providers/agro dealers with access to high quality ISFM information
[Link to results framework: 5.6 and 5.8](#)
 - d. To make policy makers (Ministry of Agriculture/Finance representatives/Regulators) aware of the benefits of ISFM practices and understand the implications for policy that supports implementation
[Link to results framework: 5.5 and 5.8](#)
 - e. To encourage the seed and fertiliser sectors to provide better/more ISFM messages
[Link to results framework: 5.8](#)
2. To test the effectiveness of innovative approaches for communicating ISFM to smallholder farmers and share the results
[Link to results framework: 1.10, 3.6, 4.4, 5.1 and 5.8](#)
3. To collect feedback on the ISFM materials produced through the project
[Link to results framework: 1.4, 2.1, 3.1, 4.3, 4.4, 5.4, 5.6, 5.8 and 5.9](#)
4. To encourage researchers (and others implementing scale up activities) to collaborate with graphic designers, media and the private sector to produce effective outreach materials
[Link to results framework: 3.5 and 5.1](#)
5. To report incremental progress against the project plan and monitoring framework
[Link to results framework: 5.1](#)

F Communications Channels / Tools

More detail on the tools we will use to achieve the objectives and the channels we will go through.

1 Direct communications (meetings, postal, email communications)

The materials produced through the project will be developed in conjunction with partners, so communications by email and meetings in person will be essential to ensure the materials are developed effectively and meet the needs of the end users.

The project will visit each of the focus countries a number of times - initially to identify partners to work with and learn about the stakeholders they are trying to reach, then a second visit will be made to hold workshops to begin developing the outreach materials. The team will then follow up on the production of the materials and test their appropriateness for their intended audiences – usually farmers or extension workers. In one of the focus countries, Mali, a staff member is being retained to implement some of the project activities in West Africa.

The project will collect contact information from partners and stakeholders so that it can build a network of professionals interested in ISFM, giving them access to a range of ISFM materials for them to comment on and use in their work.

A newsletter will be produced 3 times per year filled with information on good ISFM practice and the project's progress. This will serve the purpose of raising awareness of the project's activities amongst its target audiences. All materials produced through the project will adhere to ASHC stylistic guidelines, to create a uniform look and feel which is instantly recognisable as a quality ASHC product.

The project will be conscious of the needs of audiences which struggle to access materials via the internet and find effective distribution strategies for printed materials.

2 Web-based activities

ASHC website

The project will develop and manage a website which acts as a focal point for stakeholders in ISFM. It will be a place where visitors can find out what is happening in the project, access ISFM materials and give comment and feedback. The URL for the website is www.cabi.org/ashc

Content types to be featured:

- Posting of information resources – i.e. presentations, leaflets, posters etc – where possible in editable format so they can be customised by users. This will include discrete areas for materials in different languages
- Links to ISFM information resources from other organisations
- Plans for and reports of events on ISFM inside the project and more generally being held in or concerning sub-Saharan Africa
- News items from the project and more generally about ISFM
- Blog about ISFM linking to latest research and thinking on topic (Facebook to mirror content)
- Case studies which demonstrate how materials have been developed (i.e. the ICI process)
- Feedback on materials produced through the project

Measures of success:

- Web statistics from Google analytics (to be measured monthly)
- Number of partner organisations linking to the ASHC website from their sites
- Response to survey of usability from target stakeholders at regional meetings
- Number of people signed up to newsletter from website
- Survey monkey results on quality of information

Facebook

The project will use Facebook to communicate messages about ISFM, promote the materials produced through the project and gather feedback on them. Twitter will be used to push out the same information through another channel and to encourage dialogue on ISFM.

3 PR activities and advertising/paid editorial

The ASHC will identify whether the projects' whose results it is aiming to scale up have information/stories which could be appropriate for a public audience and link them with the relevant media organisations. It will also work with the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to the project to see whether there are any scientific news stories on soil which could be publicized to the press.

The ASHC is experimenting with using a number of different channels to get ISFM information out to smallholder farmers. Some of these experiments involve paying for content to be featured as with 'Shamba Shape Up' in Kenya.

4 Conferences / events

The ASHC will raise awareness of its activities and the materials it has produced by utilising the TAG team who attend a number of conferences around the world each year. The project will develop promotional materials (presentation, poster, leaflet, memory sticks) specifically for this purpose.

The project will also hold in-country workshops to develop materials with partners as mentioned above.

Where appropriate the project will hold its own events – for example it may hold a launch event for its ISFM manual. And the project holds a meeting of the technical advisory group once a year (in person and one e-meeting)

Annex 1: Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholders	Power and interest	Future status: What do we want them to know, feel and do about ISFM?	Current status: What do they currently know, feel and do about ISFM?	Potential barriers, triggers and contradictory messages	Messages
Government/civil service					
Policy makers – members of parliament, senators, governors, heads of departments and other senior officials in Ministries of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance	High power – Low interest	<p>Know: Understand principles and practices of ISFM and how this can improve agricultural productivity</p> <p>ISFM adaption will increase farm input sales as farmers become more affluent</p> <p>What institutional changes are needed to embed ISFM in their region and what these changes will cost/what the benefits will be</p> <p>Feel: Enthusiastic about solutions that will benefit those they represent</p> <p>Do: Put in place policies and funding to support the implementation of ISFM (with Maputo Protocol in mind)</p> <p>Adopt ISFM principles into soil policy</p> <p>Invest in building effective agricultural extension services as channel for farmers to understand and apply ISFM practices</p>	<p>Know: Approximately what ISFM is – but lack detail</p> <p>Some harbour some misapprehensions – such as ‘mineral fertiliser poisons the soil’ or that ‘increased fertilizer use alone (encouraged by subsidies) will solve Africa’s agricultural productivity problems.</p> <p>Feel: That solutions are found in application of one particular technology (like fertilizer, or improved germplasm)</p> <p>Do: Plan fertilizer subsidy programs that don’t integrate ISFM into them.</p>	<p>Too many topics vying for their attention</p> <p>ISFM sounds complicated and confusing</p> <p>Will be lobbied with contradictory or competing technologies</p>	<p>ISFM is a good thing because... and here is the evidence</p> <p>How ISFM can be implemented</p> <p>Costs/benefits</p>
KARI, SARI, IIAM, NARO, and other National Agricultural Research Institutes AGRA grantees and other agricultural/ISFM research and	High power, high interest	<p>Know: How to translate research into use and results when influence is the tool they have on hand and behaviour change on the part of farmers is the goal</p> <p>Feel: An essential part of the information value chain for translation of ISFM practices into practice</p> <p>Do: Share new ISFM approaches and methods via</p>	<p>Know: How to conduct world class research on controlled, experimental plots</p> <p>Feel: A commitment to producing excellent research</p> <p>Do: Publish excellent research papers in journals</p>	<p>May feel that they do this already</p>	<p>Here is a new way of working which will help you get the results of your work out to the people who need it</p> <p>Here are some ISFM materials which can help you</p> <p>Here is a way of</p>

development projects		ASHC database Use the ASHC multi-disciplinary approach to creating new ISFM information Produce research that results in fundamental changes to practice at farm level			working that will help you develop materials that will help your scale-up activities to be more effective
Extension staff (including Agricultural NGOs where they are operating in the same capacity)	Low power, high interest	<p>Know: Understand principles and practices of ISFM How ISFM can be implemented Where ISFM information can be found Understand best practice for communicating to farmers</p> <p>Feel: Supported That ISFM is practical, pragmatic and effective way to increase/sustain agricultural productivity in the long run They understand ISFM practices They have appropriate solutions in their toolbox to give to farmers They are making a difference</p> <p>Do: Train farmers in ISFM practices Develop new ISFM materials and update old ones, sharing them with ASHC Feed back to ASHC impact data Advocate ISFM at a policy level Benefit from a programme of capacity building to help them to produce better information on ISFM issues Collaborate effectively with farm in-put suppliers to ensure farmers can implement ISFM Include ISFM in their continuing professional development</p>	<p>Know: Levels of knowledge will vary – most will understand the component parts of ISFM – but may not know how to bring the elements together</p> <p>Feel: Like they are struggling to access up to date information Overwhelmed (less of them now in many countries)</p> <p>Do: The best they can with the resources and challenges they face</p>	<p>May be hard to persuade farmers to take risks of new approaches</p> <p>May be competition for resources (use of organic matter)</p>	<p>Here are some approaches which can benefit the farmers you work with – and there are some simple materials and methods for implementing them.</p> <p>How did the materials work? Can they be improved?</p>
National Extension Service	<p>High power We need their buy in and to develop appropriate materials.</p> <p>Expect programme</p>	<p>Know: Where to go to find ISFM information resources</p> <p>Feel: Part of an ISFM community of practice</p> <p>Do: Disseminate clear up to date information on ISFM to national extension services Act as a channel to reach farmers with the</p>	<p>Know: Understand principles and practices of ISFM Understand best practice for communicating to farmers</p> <p>Feel: That they can only promote technologies that are proven and well documented</p>		<p>Share ISFM evidence and messages with ASHC</p> <p>Use ASHC technique of using multidisciplinary teams to create new materials</p>

	s like ASHC to provide investment in them	message about ISFM Give farmers the skills to implement ISFM practices Share information between countries and scientists Use and adapt the materials available from ASHC Develop their own ISFM materials	Do: Research based on ISFM principles		
Private sector					
Fertilizer companies, seed companies or other input wholesalers and manufacturing		Know: That promoting fertiliser within ISFM will lead to productivity gains at a farmer level which will lead to more fertiliser sales in the long run Feel: Confident to back ISFM messages Do: Promote soil testing to get the right fertiliser Support agro-dealers with ISFM material Promote policy changes which lead to adoption of ISFM – ensuring that no counterfeit farm inputs are sold Provide suitable pack sizes for smallholders of key farm inputs	Know: Know how to formulate fertiliser to meet the needs of farmers facing deficiencies Feel: Unconnected to the extension services Do: Promote their own products	Worried we are suggesting methods that mean less usage of their products	ISFM supports long term soil health and sustainable long-term and growing businesses selling farm inputs Here are some quality ISFM materials you can use to provide information to farmers buying your products on ISFM
Agro-input dealers (Shops that sell fertiliser, pesticides, seeds, etc to farmers)	High power- all farmers will have interaction with them. High interest	Know: Understand principles and practices of ISFM That ISFM adoption will lead to an increase farm input sales as farmers become more affluent; that the success of the farmer is intrinsically interlinked with the success of their business. Understand that there is no competition with their products; that organic and inorganic amendments can be applied together and are complementary to one another. Where to go to find ISFM materials they can use Understand best practice for communicating to farmers Feel: Pride in helping farmers to become as productive as possible Do: Offer correct ISFM advice to farmers	Know: A great deal about what their customers need product-wise Little about ISFM Feel: Proud of what they do in their areas Do: Behave in the long term business interests of their customers	Concerned that ISFM suggests less usage of their products	ISFM supports long term soil health and sustainable long-term and growing businesses selling farm inputs Here are some quality ISFM materials you can use to provide information to farmers buying your products on ISFM

		Provide ISFM advice on appropriate inputs Display materials and be involved in ASHC promotions			
Education					
Tutors and university departments	Low power, potentially high interest because we are providing information on best practice which is needed in the future	<p>Know: Understand principles and practices of ISFM How ISFM can be implemented Where ISFM information can be found Understand best practice for communicating to farmers</p> <p>Feel: Confident that the information is authoritative and coming from a trusted source</p> <p>Do: Learn about ISFM Make changes to the curriculum to focus on ISFM</p> <p>Access up-to-date information to enhance teaching and learning in integrated soil fertility management</p>	<p>Know: That techniques like ISFM are starting to make a difference</p> <p>Feel: Unsure about where to access up to date learning materials</p> <p>Do: Not necessarily have ISFM fully covered in curriculum</p>	Universities are very bureaucratic and can take a long time to change – but more pragmatic university models – such as Makerere University vet school are leading the way to universities being central to problem solving of nation's big challenges	<p>Here are some quality ISFM materials you can use in your courses.</p> <p>You need to include ISFM in your courses because it is an important set of technologies and principles which can improve soil.</p>
Channels					
Mass media National television, radio and print media, websites and blogs – in priority countries	High power low interest	<p>Know: The importance that ISFM has for their audience Understand how to package stories in ways the agricultural value chains can understand and act on Where to go to get information and case study material</p> <p>Feel: Evangelical about potential of ISFM to increase incomes and food security</p> <p>Do: Include stories about ISFM in their media – without payment Advocate institutional changes needed for ISFM to be adopted at policy level</p>	<p>Know: Little about ISFM</p> <p>Probably not very comfortable writing about science</p> <p>Feel: May feel that farming stories are 'old fashioned'</p> <p>Do: Write up ISFM when prompted</p>	<p>ASHC is poorly served with databases and address lists so need to pull together electronic press list</p> <p>Large number of papers in countries where ASHC is active</p> <p>May want paid editorial spots or advertorial</p>	<p>Soil fertility is an important issue for your readers/audience</p> <p>ISFM is an interesting story to cover</p>
Project governance					
Investors in ISFM:	High power,	Know: That the project is making incremental progress	Know: ASHC has added value and impact	Small programme in large portfolio but	Updates on the project

<p>Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation</p> <p>AGRA</p>	<p>high interest</p>	<p>against its objectives and delivery plan</p> <p>Feel: Confident in the ASHC project</p> <p>Do: Continue to engage with the project effectively Apply lessons from ASHC to other investment</p>	<p>into ongoing projects/investments (ASHC's clients)</p> <p>Feel: ASHC has made a good start</p> <p>Do: Broker partnerships with other investors</p>	<p>interacts with a large number of their grantees across all of sub-Saharan Africa</p>	<p>Open channels of communication for project improvements</p>
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