Agricultural production and productivity needs to increase in order to enhance economic growth but environmental impacts and social conflicts need to be taken into account. The concept of sustainable agricultural intensification which takes account of these complexities is needed. The Sustainable Agricultural Intensification Research and Learning in Africa (SAIRLA) programme is achieving this through commissioned research and facilitating learning at many levels in selected African countries.

Sub-Saharan Africa’s population is growing. Everyone needs enough nutritious food, so agricultural production and productivity needs to increase. Different approaches and methods to achieve this also need to be assessed on how much they can reduce environmental impacts and social conflicts while enhancing economic growth.

Developing equitable sustainable agricultural intensification in Africa is a complex challenge. Several factors need to be taken into account including rising inequality, chronic poverty, diverse values and interests. Major environmental challenges for global agriculture, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, also have to be addressed.

Against this backdrop, the concept of sustainable agricultural intensification aims to increase agricultural productivity while maintaining or improving environmental quality and social cohesion in a sustainable way.
Any sustainable agricultural intensification requires innovative approaches. This led to the introduction of the Sustainable Agricultural Intensification Research and Learning in Africa (SAIRLA) programme. The programme has commissioned research projects to look into issues such as equity, policy processes, risk factors for smallholder farmers, access to and use of market and agronomic information, and sustainability strategies. With outputs from these research projects and from other sources, SAIRLA is facilitating learning at many levels in order to understand different ways of achieving sustainable agricultural intensification and their developmental implications. The participating countries include Burkina Faso, Ghana, Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia.

The programme is funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) and managed by WYG and Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich. CABI is responsible for implementing the National Learning Alliance in Ghana in collaboration with the Science and Technology Policy Research Institute (CSIR-STEPRI). The National Learning Alliance in Ghana is facilitating and giving guidance to a process which will co-generate, share and facilitate the use of knowledge by decision makers (policy makers and investors) to develop sustainable agricultural intensification in ways that enable poorer smallholder farmers in Africa, particularly women and youth, to participate in and benefit from agricultural development. The project ultimately seeks to enhance the wellbeing of all smallholder agricultural value chain actors through effective policies and investments in sustainable agriculture.

As with the other participating countries, Ghana’s National Learning Alliance works with partners in the public and private sectors, civil society groups, media, SAIRLA research projects and national research and teaching institutions to seek an outcome where decision makers (policy makers and investors) at national and local levels have access and the opportunity to engage with evidence on what works and what is unlikely to work to enable poorer smallholders, especially women and youth, to benefit from sustainable agricultural intensification in Ghana.

The goal of the National Learning Alliance in Ghana is to make research evidence on sustainable agricultural intensification available and utilised by decision makers. These include government, investors and other key stakeholders who need to deliver more effective policies and investments in sustainable agricultural intensification that strengthens the capacity of poorer farmers to access and benefit from agricultural development programmes in Ghana.

The project has four strategic objectives which are:

- To facilitate co-generation of research evidence that addresses equitable access to sustainable agricultural intensification processes by smallholders particularly women and youth
- To develop stakeholder engagement plan and facilitate sustainable agricultural intensification research evidence use by policy makers, investors and implementers in decision making processes
- To jointly identify means of achieving effective implementation of policy and business strategies that improve the capacity of poorer smallholder farmers, especially women and youth to achieve sustainable agricultural intensification
- To network with local and external organisations to facilitate sustainable agricultural intensification, social learning and knowledge management

The Ghana National Learning Alliance is supported by three of SAIRLA’s research projects based in Ghana namely:

- Improving the use of tools to make sustainable Agricultural Intensification more equitable (Tools & Metrics)
- Gender and Legume Alliance (GALA)
- Managing trade-offs and synergies for sustainable intensification (SITAM)
### Results so far

So far, we have set up and officially launched the National Learning Alliance in Ghana and identified and engaged key stakeholders (boundary partners). We have also jointly developed and validated ‘project outcome mapping’ and agreed on progress markers with these boundary partners.

We have also organised one policy symposium, issued two policy briefs, and conducted a survey on the capacity needs of stakeholders to effectively access and use research evidence. The Ghana National Learning Alliance has also organised a stakeholders’ workshop to validate the findings of the capacity needs assessment survey.

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<td>Solomon Duah</td>
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