

Concept Note for a Side Event at the 9th Africa Agriculture Science Week 2026

Abuja, Nigeria, July 2026

Title: Farmer-centered Action Research and Innovation

Background and Justification

Farmer-centred research and development (R&D) places farmers at the heart of innovation systems and as co-creators of knowledge, solutions, and sustainable agricultural transformation. By combining scientific research with farmers' indigenous knowledge, lived experience, and practical experimentation, this approach generates innovations that are locally adapted, economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally resilient. Farmer-centred R&D strengthens the relevance and uptake of agricultural innovations, accelerates climate adaptation, enhances food and nutrition security, and empowers producer organizations to shape policies and markets that affect their livelihoods. In Africa, where smallholder farmers are central to food systems and rural economies, investing in farmer-led innovation is essential for building resilient, productive, and sustainable agriculture capable of addressing the interconnected challenges of climate change, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and rural poverty.

The 9th Africa Agriculture Science Week (AASW 2026), organized under the leadership of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and hosted by the Government of Nigeria, will convene leading African and international stakeholders in agricultural research, innovation, policy, agribusiness, and development from 27–30 July 2026 in Abuja, Nigeria. The event represents Africa's premier continental platform for shaping the future of agricultural science, food systems transformation, and innovation partnerships. In this context, a joint Side Event convened by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), AgriCord (a global alliance of agri-agencies mandated by farmers' organizations), FARA, the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOAI-Africa), the Network of Organic Agriculture Researchers in Africa (NOARA) and African Organic Agriculture Network (AfrONet) aims to provide a highly strategic opportunity to elevate farmer-centred agroecological innovation, strengthen science-to-practice linkages, and promote inclusive agricultural transformation pathways across Africa.

Purpose of the Side Event: why a Side Event on Farmer-centered Action Research and Innovation for Sustainable Food Systems is timely and necessary

African agriculture faces mounting pressures from climate change, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, rising input costs, and food insecurity. Agroecology is increasingly recognized by African and international stakeholders as a viable pathway towards resilient and sustainable food systems. The Side

Event, being organized under the AASW Conference Theme of '**Innovations and Partnerships for Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa**' aligns with the Conference's sub-theme on '**Climate Resilient Agrifood Systems: Improving Productivity, Resilience and Sustainability**'.

The Side Event will serve to:

1. Bridge science, practice (including farmers), and policy to the advancement of agroecology and climate resilience in Africa

The AASW is fundamentally designed to connect agricultural science with development outcomes. However, there remains a persistent gap between scientific research, policy frameworks, and farmer realities on the ground. The Side Event on Farmer-centred Action Research and Innovation creates a practical platform to:

- showcase evidence-based agroecological innovations - present successful examples of farmer-research collaboration
- amplify farmer voices in agricultural science discussions while encouraging investment in extension, advisory services, and farmer knowledge platforms;
- connect researchers with producer organizations and policymakers;
- promote participatory innovation systems and highlight scalable solutions emerging from African contexts.
- strengthen partnerships between research institutions and farmer organizations - the Africa Agriculture Science Week attracts governments, donors, research institutions, civil society organizations, private sector actors, and regional bodies. Such partnerships are increasingly necessary to mobilize investment, coordinate action, and scale innovations across African food systems.

2. Contributing to Continental and Global Agendas

The Side Event on Farmer-centred Action Research and Innovation will highlight and strengthen **Farmer-Led Innovation Systems and ensure that**, in African agricultural transformation, farmers are not passive recipients of innovation, but active co-creators of knowledge and solutions. This is highly relevant to the broader objectives of the co-organizers and of the AASW around inclusive innovation systems and science-driven agricultural transformation. The Side Event offers a highly complementary and strategic contribution to the continent's premier agricultural science gathering. It strongly contributes to key continental and global priorities, including the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) agenda. Farmer-Led Innovation Systems contribute to sustainable food systems transformation, climate adaptation and resilience, biodiversity conservation, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2, 13, and 15 and to strengthening local innovation ecosystems. The Side Event will create an important platform for dialogue, evidence sharing, policy engagement, and partnership building. The visibility of farmer-led agroecological innovations in Africa will be enhanced to promote inclusive, and science-based food systems transformation across the continent.

Conveners to the Side Event

The Side Event on Farmer-centred Action Research and Innovation will be jointly convened by:

1. The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)
2. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in partnership with the Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa (KCOA) project
3. AGRICORD
4. Network of Organic Agriculture Researchers in Africa (NOARA)
5. Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOAI-Africa), and
6. African Organic Agriculture Network (AfrONet)

Expected participants and speakers

The Side Event is expected to be attended by up to 50 participants comprising:

1. Farmers and Farmer Organisations
2. Extension agents and NGOs
3. Academic and non-academic researchers, students
4. Development partners and donors
5. Policy and decision makers
6. Private sector

Expected Outcomes and Outputs

The Side Event is expected to strengthen science-to-practice and policy linkages while enhancing networks and partnerships among the organisers, participants and stakeholders.

The key outputs from the Side Event are:

1. A synthesis of key messages on farmer centered research and agri-business approaches and lessons in smallholder agroecological settings.
2. A knowledge product on farmer centered research methodologies and approaches and their integration into agroecology scaling in smallholder farming.
3. Social media articles on farmer centered research methodologies and approaches in smallholder farming.

Programme

Session Moderator: Dr. Irene Kadzere, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL and KCOA & RAENS Projects)

Date: Monday 27 July 2026

Time: 16:30 to 18:30 hours

Venue: XXXX

Rapporteurs: Francis Nsanga (KCOA-KHEA), Alpha Kane (KCOA-KHWA); AGRICORD

Time	Activity	Who
5 mins	Opening and welcome remarks	Dr. Kwaku Antwi - FARA
25 mins	Keynote presentations on Farmer-Centred Innovations	
	Participatory research in organic and agroecology – insights from Sustain Sahel and SysCom (Mother-Baby-Trials) projects	Dr. Harun Cicek and Dr. Milka Kiboi - FiBL
	Applied research for biofertilizer applications in agroecology	Patrick Mwizero – CAPAD (Burundi)
50 mins	Panel discussion involving the following topics and moderated by AGRICORD (Katja Vuori)	
	Action research in and commercialising of agroforestry initiatives	Kastory Timbula (TTGAU - Tanzania) - FORI Project
	Farmer Field Schools as innovation platforms on sustainable agriculture and farmer managed seed systems	Community Technology Development Organization (CTDO) and MASAP Project, Zimbabwe
	The policy environment on sustainable agri-food systems in Africa – drivers, enablers, inhibitors and implementation across Africa	Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN)
	Action research and value addition / processing in agroecology – the case of sunflower value chain in Tanzania	Damian Sulumo/Frank Ademba - (MWIWAARUSHA-We Effect) – FORI Project
	How to scale agroecology and organic messages through Multipliers – experiences from the KCOA project (micro & meso-interventions, communication, limitations and opportunities)	Khaoula Mokrani (KCOA-KHNA) <i>(with insights from Francis Nsanga (KCOA-KHEA), Georges Tadjoto Ngougni (KCOA-KHCA)) and Alpha Kane - KHWA</i>
10 mins	Plenary discussion	Facilitated by Network of Organic Agriculture Research in Africa (NOARA)
10 mins	Organic and agroecology data, statistics, and knowledge management – the African context	Markus Arbenz – FiBL and KCOA; Jude Obi – Oyo University, Nigeria, and KCOA-KHWA
10 mins	Implications of farmer-centred research approaches and outcomes to PAFO and AfrONet members – some reflections including key research questions to be answered.	PAFO and AfrONet
5 mins	Closing Remarks	Ishmael Sunga - SACAU