Twenty-five years ago, Winrock International and the Sasakawa Africa Association launched a small agriculture education pilot project in Ghana. Called the Sasakawa Africa Fund for Extension Education (SAFE), it was designed to address two pressing issues in rural development in sub-Saharan Africa: how to best equip frontline extension agents with the skills to teach farmers new skills, and how to integrate African agricultural universities into the effort to improve the lives of those same farmers. Since then, 24 institutions in nine countries have graduated over 4,000 mid-career extension agents who have returned to their positions able to better understand and address the needs of the farmers they serve.

SAFE originated out of the belief that many technologies exist that could improve the productivity of small farmers in Africa. However, extension agents, those employed by agriculture ministries as well as by the private sector, lacked the education and skills to communicate effectively with rural populations. Simple scholarships were not enough. Agricultural universities also needed to refocus their existing programs to better meet the needs of students and the agriculture sector in each country.

To implement these changes, SAFE convenes stakeholders including agricultural schools, farmer organizations, ministries of higher learning, and the private sector to identify a shared vision of a more responsive extension education. From
FROM A GRADUATE:

“Working with farmers on the field in real life situations was life changing. You become tenacious and confident... you are able to think out of the box and refine your project as you move along. [SAFE] gives you the opportunity while in the field to draw from within yourself potential and unconventional ideas to achieve your goal.”

- DR. PEARL ADDO-TEYE, SAFE ALUMNA

More about Winrock’s role:
SAFE emerged out of conversations between Norman Borlaug, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Winrock board member; Japanese philanthropist Ryoichi Sasakawa; and former President Jimmy Carter. They tapped Winrock International to lead the partnership and provide technical guidance. In the intervening 25 years, Winrock has staffed SAFE with highly respected African agricultural educators who have expanded the organization to include 24 institutes of higher learning. For the last 10 years the Winrock field advisory team consists of three senior Ph.D. educators, one in East Africa, one for Francophone West Africa and one for Anglophone West Africa. Funding for this work has been provided by the Nippon Foundation.