Case Study: Development of Agro-Villages Network initiative to promote food security and create sustainable agriculture-related jobs in West Africa

Bringing socio-economic development in rural communities through the development of a network of ADC (Agriculture Development Centers) across West Africa to promote food security and to create sustainable agriculture-related jobs.
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I. Problems

As Sub-Saharan Africa’s workforce becomes larger and better educated, there is an overwhelming potential for economic growth and development. Each year Millions of young Africans are entering the workforce, and …..NO JOBS!

Youth unemployment remains a barrier to the region’s development. One of the reasons young people are having trouble finding employment is a limited number of jobs. This challenge causes young people to settle for less-than-ideal employment, such as jobs that are low-paying, temporary, or unsafe, for which they are overqualified. Some enter the informal economy to make ends meet. Others stop looking for jobs altogether. We all know that Farming is the primary source of food and income for Africans and provides up to 60 percent of all jobs on the continent.

II. Needs

Food production in sub-Saharan Africa needs to increase by 60 percent over the next 15 years to feed a growing population. The continent is bursting with potential: At 200 million hectares, sub-Saharan Africa is home to nearly half of the world’s uncultivated land that can be brought into production. As countries across sub-Saharan Africa grapple with the challenges of sustaining high levels of economic growth, revitalizing agriculture must become a priority on the continent. A vibrant, sustainable and resilient agriculture sector is vital for sub-Saharan Africa’s economic future. Together with abundant resources, including a resourceful, enterprising youth population, strategic investments in agriculture can unleash virtuous growth cycles.

III. Objectives

The main objective of an agro-village is to bring socio-economic development in targeted communities through these following goals:

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<th>Goal 1: Opportunities for youth not only in agriculture, but also in other formal or informal activities such as nursing, carpenter, masonry... Consequently, the reduction of unemployment among young people will be significant with the creation of such agricultural enterprises.</th>
<th>Goal 3: Reduction of the rural exodus because young people will end a professional and lucrative activity that they will hardly find in the city.</th>
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<td>Goal 2: Social and economic change in a positive way through the implementation of community projects creation or improvement of education infrastructure (schools, libraries) or medical facilities (health center), clean and sanitation.</td>
<td>Goal 4: The acquisition of knowledge in agriculture and business management through training workshops for these young people and other knowledge such as literacy.</td>
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IV. Outcomes

The Agro-villages project will have major beneficial effects which are:

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<th>Outcome 1: Improving rural and regional development sustainability by enhancing the quality of life on communities.</th>
<th>Outcome 4: Stopping the plague of land grabbing.</th>
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<td>Outcome 2: Lessening youth unemployment by bringing permanent employment not only in the villages where the project is taking place, but also in transportation, logistics and distribution elds, and in the transformation.</td>
<td>Outcome 5: Enhancing productivity by bringing technology and mechanization of farms. Enhancing human capital through education and health.</td>
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<td>Outcome 3: Bringing Food security and good nutrition.</td>
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V. Agro-Villages Network


Figure: Agro-Villages Network Incubation & Production Framework
The framework includes infrastructures building, machinery, training and working capital, and the development of 350 smallholders farms.

Our method is to recruit field agents to train participants in phase 1. We plan to train 10 young men and women originally from the province with a fair knowledge in agriculture as field agents and they will coach the 100 first participants.

Each field agent will coach 10 women during the acceleration processes which are: training, production, harvesting and marketing. In addition, we'll also recruit 01 supervisor to monitor field agents.

The training of field agents will be theoretical and practical and will last 30 days. After the theoretical phase, Agents will be in the field with to train women and will ensure a weekly basic training on agricultural SMEs management, on financial education and literacy to participants.

The practical part of the training is the coaching of participants. This will involve production of cassava and its processing into a variety of innovative and quality by-products to add values and improve sales prices.

By participating in the program, women (and all future participants) will be integrated into the digital platform of Agro-Villages Network, a Fin-Tech system to connect participants via a mobile App. This will provide them with integrated management solutions, access to farming inputs, monitoring and e-Banking to enable them to open a bank account and to access working capital. This Hi-Tech's approach is the backbone of the Agro-Villages Network initiative.

Finally, participants will be connected to domestic and global distribution network through the mobile App. This operating framework will lead to the establishment and consolidation of Agro-villages in other countries in West Africa.
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**Leveraging local partnership and expertise**

The involvement of government entities technically related to such initiative is important. The ministries concerned are: The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of National Education, Technical Education and Vocational Training.

At the local level, in addition to the partnership with the woman-led cooperative ALLIE AHIN and the youth associations, the initiative works with the Regional Council of Moronou and the association of the native leaders of the province.

For trainers, the initiative develops a partnership with the National Agency for Rural Development or Agence Nationale pour le Developpement Rural (ANADER) for the training and entrepreneurship education. The initiative also develops a partnership with COOPEC, a financial cooperative credit union to provide financial education to participants.

**VI. Sustainability**

All program activities are centered around building the technical and organizational capacity of farmers' organizations and their members to participate in the Agro-Villages Network initiative. This will work towards improving their members' resiliency. Through training of trainers, Agro-Villages Network will maximize the number of women and youth participants who in turn will be equipped to enhance land use and productivity, and increase their financial sustainability.

The initiative’s sustainability approach is focused around introducing a methodology and modern technology in a way to build entrepreneurship capabilities and skills, to build a coordinated network of young entrepreneurs, to leverage local expertise and to build financial sustainability of participants.

It will emphasize careful monitoring and evaluating in order to facilitate replication in others provinces.

**GET INVOLVED**

Here are some ways to contribute to the initiative: Microfinance education and resources; Modern technology equipment for training in farming; Entrepreneurship education; Public-Private Partnerships.

**About AFAI**

**Act for Africa International, Inc. (AFAI)** is a non-profit organization created in 2007 to positively and constructively impact the lives of rural communities in Sub-Saharan Africa through the development of agribusiness opportunities for farmers, women cooperatives and the youth to help them drive economic activities, improving food security, and promoting sustainability.