Stories from the Global Call on Agricultural Innovation

Empowering Communities and Advancing Sustainability: The SCL Project Juriya's Approach to Nigeria's Agricultural and Food Security Challenges

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Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The agricultural and food security situation in Nigeria faces challenges such as limited resources, security issues, rural-urban migration, oil dependency, and infrastructure inadequacies. These problems are worsened by high inflation, reaching 25.8% in August 2023, largely due to fuel subsidy removal, currency devaluation, and security concerns in food-producing regions.

The SCL Project Juriya has emerged as a comprehensive initiative aimed at addressing these challenges. The project focuses on breaking poverty cycles and establishing sustainable livelihoods, specifically targeting youth and women-led households in rural and peri-urban areas. It promotes Regenerative Agriculture (RA) using the Integrated Crops, Trees, and Livestock (ICTL) approach, seeking to improve economic, social, and environmental conditions.

The project aims to create over 500,000 dignified work and entrepreneurship opportunities, empowering community members and contributing to environmental sustainability. A key feature of the initiative is its mentorship model, where each participating household mentors another, ensuring widespread adoption of regenerative agriculture practices.

In summary, the SCL Project Juriya seeks to create lasting impact by addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges, benefiting 72,000 smallholder farming households and offering a model for global food security and sustainable development.

TAPipedia Tags
food security, sustainability, innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainable development

Other keywords
Nigeria, Agriculture, Food security, Regenerative Agriculture (RA

Context

Nigeria faces significant challenges in agriculture and food security, including limited access to resources, security issues, rural-urban migration, and economic instability. These problems are exacerbated by inflation and increasing food prices. The government has declared a food security emergency in response, prompting relief efforts.

The SCL Project Juriya aims to address these issues by promoting sustainable agriculture through Regenerative Agriculture (RA) or Carbon Farming, targeting impoverished youth and women-led households in rural areas. By adopting the Integrated Crops, Trees, and Livestock (ICTL) approach, the project empowers communities to engage in climate-smart practices, improving soil health and boosting productivity. The project focuses on creating dignified work and entrepreneurship opportunities within agricultural value chains, emphasizing the role of smallholder farmer households, particularly women and youth. It aims to reduce dependence on harmful agricultural practices and introduce sustainable alternatives that are resilient to climate change. In Phase 1, the project targets 72,000 smallholder households, with a strong focus on youth and women, and aims to address youth unemployment by promoting agriculture as a dignified livelihood.

Additionally, the project sets up cooperatives to support financial inclusion and access to markets. Ultimately, the SCL Project Juriya seeks to transform the agricultural landscape in Nigeria, breaking cycles of poverty and creating lasting economic, social, and environmental benefits. The initiative also has the potential to serve as a model for other regions facing similar challenges.

Key problems

Missed Environmental Benefits:

Problem: Farmers lack awareness of regenerative agriculture's positive impact on soil health, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and land use efficiency.

Approach: Education programs on soil health (e.g., cover cropping, reduced tillage), biodiversity conservation (e.g., agroforestry), carbon sequestration, and integrated land use to promote sustainability.

Food Security:

Problem: Limited knowledge of regenerative agriculture threatens food security, leading to reduced productivity, higher dependency on external inputs, and increased vulnerability to food price volatility.

Approach: Implement regenerative techniques to enhance soil fertility, reduce dependency on external inputs, promote diversified cropping systems, and foster resilient food production to improve food security and livelihoods.

Health Risks from Agrochemicals:

Problem: Health risks from agrochemicals due to a lack of understanding of their dangers and improper use.

Approach: Educational initiatives on the health risks of agrochemicals, occupational safety, community outreach, and adoption of agroecological practices to reduce pollution and improve food safety.

Adoption of Regenerative Agriculture Practices: Focuses on practices like cover cropping, crop rotation, and agroforestry to improve soil health, biodiversity, and climate resilience, while reducing reliance on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Integrated Crop, Trees, and Livestock (ICTL): An ecosystem-based approach combining crops, trees, and livestock to enhance biodiversity, soil health, and climate resilience, while providing multiple income streams for farmers.

Demonstration Plots for Training: Setting up demonstration plots across states and local governments to provide hands-on training for smallholder farmers, emphasizing Regenerative Agriculture practices.

Outreach Strategy: Involves reaching 72,000 smallholder farmer households, where farmers not only adopt regenerative practices but also mentor others, creating a ripple effect of knowledge transfer within communities.

Mutual Trust Groups (MTGs): Aimed at financially including farmers by providing access to banking services, enabling them to engage in financial transactions and eventually access loans and insurance.

Digitalizing Juriya: The use of the KOBOWEB application to manage farm and farmer records, track activities, and engage with farmers through scheduling, profiling, and data capturing.

Hajara Mohammed, 27, is a young mother of 3 in Adamawa state who joined SCL Project Juriya in 2023. She says she has found a new job and a new life because of the new practices she has learnt from Project Juriya. Just like her, over 11,000 female farmers have been trained and continue to practice RA

> *At first, we all thought it was a joke, but going to the demonstration farm every week, I learned new things about farming that I didn't know before. I now know that this farming practice is cheaper than how my family used to do it. I want to become a full-time farmer using regenerative agriculture practices because I see that I can make good income from it. I used to sit at home and wait for my husband to provide but now I see that without spending so much money I can grow crops on my farm and feed my family. I hope my friends can join the program this year..*

Hajara continues to participate in Project Juriya at the demo plot at Modire, community of Girei Local Government Area in Adamawa State.

Project Juriya has trained over 11,000 female farmers like Hajara, equipping them with RA skills that improve nutrition, food security, and environmental sustainability. By July 2023, the project validated 17,157 farmers, surpassing its target of 14,400. Of the validated farmers, 68% are female, and 50% are youth. The project also engaged vulnerable populations, including disabled farmers (2.4%) and internally displaced persons (6.9%).

The project has implemented various strategies, including:

Community Champions/Influencers: Identified 546 leaders to help sustain the program.

Demonstration Farms: Established 70 demonstration plots for hands-on training, with 88 individuals trained as RA trainers.

Bootcamp Training: Trained 88 individuals, including field agents and state coordinators, on RA and Integrated Crops, Trees, and Livestock (ICTL) models.

Farmer Training: 11,551 farmers (80% female) attended training on RA, financial inclusion, water conservation, and marketing by the end of Quarter 3.

Monitoring and Evaluation: A baseline survey interviewed 1,274 households to gather data for evaluating the project's success.

These efforts aim to increase RA adoption, improve livelihoods, and create a sustainable, community-driven agricultural future.

CHALLENGES ADDRESSED

- *Climate change and disaster risks*
- *Erosion of natural resource base, loss of biodiversity*

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

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Community Engagement: While enthusiasm for the project existed, there was a gap in comprehending the project's intricacies and aligning expectations. The project faced challenges in this aspect initially, but deliberate efforts were made to enhance community engagement through increased involvement of field agents. This proactive approach significantly contributed to a better understanding of the project among community members and helped align their expectations, thereby mitigating challenges.

Manpower: Certain departments, such as finance, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), and programs, faced shortages in manpower. This deficit impacted operational efficiency. Recognizing this, the project acknowledged the need for additional human resources in these crucial areas to streamline processes and ensure effective implementation.

Technology: The utilization of the indigenous app, Kobo Collect, presented initial challenges as it was a novel and untested tool, proving somewhat complex for users. In response, the project took a strategic step in mitigating this challenge by transitioning to Com Care in the second year. This shift to a more established and user-friendly technology platform aimed to improve overall efficiency and user experience, ensuring a smoother integration of technology into project activities.

Factors for Success

Community Engagement: The success in establishing the 70 demonstration plots is a clear testament to the effectiveness of community engagement efforts. Notably, none of these plots were acquired through paid contracts spanning 5-10 years; instead, they were secured through collaborative efforts fostered by strong community engagement. Some community members generously contributed hectares of land, ranging from 17 hectares, to support landless households in adopting Regenerative Agriculture (RA). This highlights a community-driven approach that goes beyond financial transactions, emphasizing shared goals and mutual support.

Strategic Partnerships: The project's strategic partnership with private sectors has proven instrumental in enhancing program coordination. This collaboration has facilitated smoother interactions and alignment of objectives, showcasing the added value that private sector engagement can bring to community development initiatives.

The establishment of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) in one of the implementing states has notably streamlined the implementation process. The signed MoU has played a pivotal role in creating a conducive environment for project activities, illustrating the positive impact that formal agreements can have on program implementation within specific regions. This emphasizes the significance of fostering community relationships and formalizing partnerships to ensure successful and harmonious project execution.

LESSONS LEARNED

A key lesson from the Regenerative Agriculture project, which is primarily rain-fed, is the importance of starting early. Recognizing the timing of the rainy season and the planting calendar is critical for success.

The project adjusted its approach by starting earlier in Year 2, around six months before the first rains, which typically begin in March in Nigeria. This shift is especially important for rain-fed agriculture, where timing is crucial. Regions like Kaduna, with an earlier rainy season, were prioritized.

The project also emphasizes the importance of gender sensitivity, particularly for young mothers, by providing child care arrangements to support their participation in training programs, preventing marginalization.

Critical capacities

Adaptive Planning and Scheduling: The ability to adaptively plan and schedule activities based on the rain and planting calendar is fundamental. Recognizing the need for a flexible timeline, especially in rain-fed agriculture, has allowed the project to optimize its operations according to the unique timing of rains in different regions.

Regional Understanding and Tailoring: A crucial capacity lies in understanding the distinct characteristics of each region, particularly in terms of rainfall patterns. Tailoring activities to align with the specific timing of rains in Kaduna, Nasarawa and Adamawa showcases the project's regional awareness, ensuring that agricultural practices are synchronized with the local climate.

Weather Forecasting and Monitoring: The successful use of the innovation is closely tied to the capacity to monitor and predict weather conditions accurately. Being equipped with reliable weather forecasting tools enables the project to make informed decisions, plan activities, and mitigate potential risks associated with adverse weather events.

Collaborative Partnerships: Engaging private partners such as Ikore, Blue Brains, CITA etc has been critical. These partnerships contribute additional capacities for effective project management, monitoring, and evaluation. Leveraging external expertise ensures that the project benefits from specialized knowledge and resources, enhancing overall efficiency.

Community Engagement and Local Knowledge: The capacity to actively engage with local communities and tap into their indigenous knowledge has been instrumental. Understanding the nuances of each community's agricultural practices, preferences, and challenges has fostered a collaborative approach, gaining community support for the project's innovative methods.

Strategic Timing: Starting activities early in the second year, beginning with Kaduna, demonstrates a capacity for strategic timing. This approach acknowledges the need to synchronize activities with the regional variations in the onset of rainfall, showcasing the project's foresight and adaptability.

Effective Communication Channels: Establishing effective communication channels between the steering committee, state-level staff, and private partners ensures seamless coordination. Transparent and efficient communication is essential for aligning efforts, sharing insights, and promptly addressing any emerging challenges, contributing to the overall success of the innovation.

Data Management and Analysis: The capacity for robust data management and analysis is crucial for monitoring and evaluating the project's progress. Utilizing tools like Kobo Collect and later transitioning to Com Care in the second year demonstrates a commitment to employing innovative technologies for efficient data collection, analysis, and decision-making.

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Contact information

DAbiola Oreka Aisha Ebohen,
CEO/Project Manager
Sa'I'Anwara'I'Jumai Consultaire Limited (SCL)
Mobile: +234 (0) 808 470 7383

Links to additional materials

WWW.SCLNG.COM

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State-Level Staff: The state-level staff members, actively engaged in the development and implementation phases, significantly contributed to ensuring the project's success on the ground. Their commitment and local expertise played a pivotal role in navigating challenges and facilitating the smooth execution of project activities.

Private Partners: Collaborations with esteemed partners like Ikore, Blue Brains, CITA among others were integral to the project's overall management, monitoring, and evaluation processes. These partnerships exemplify a strategic approach to leveraging external expertise, emphasizing the importance of engaging with private partners to enhance project efficiency and effectiveness. The involvement of such partners underscores the project's commitment to robust management and evaluation practices

THE TROPICAL AGRICULTURE PLATFORM

The Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP) is a G-20 initiative launched in 2012 to promote agricultural innovation in the tropics. TAP has formed a coalition of more than 50 partners, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and generously supported by the European Union (EU). The main goal of TAP is to strengthen agricultural innovation systems (AIS) in developing countries through coordinated multi-stakeholder interventions.

CONTACTS

Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP) Secretariat,
Office of Innovation
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy
tropagplatform@fao.org

MORE INFORMATION

www.fao.org/in-action/tropical-agriculture-platform
www.fao.org/in-action/tap-ais
TropicalAgriculturePlatform
@TAP_G20

Global Call for Agrifood System Innovations and Stories of Capacity Development for Innovation

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