

Addressing Land Degradation Risks on Livelihood Activities in Usar Rural Community of Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

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Introduction

The Gender and Environmental Risk Reduction Initiative (GERI), a non-governmental organization with UN ECOSOC Consultative Status, implemented a project titled "Addressing Climate Change and Land Degradation Risks on Livelihood Activities in Usar Rural Community of Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria." Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (GEF-SGP), this initiative seeks to enhance the resilience of vulnerable farmers in Usar community by tackling the adverse effects of climate variability and land degradation on food security and livelihoods. Through capacity-building in sustainable farming, afforestation, livestock feed production, compost manure application, fuel-efficient stove use, and women-led soap-making enterprises, the project empowered 200 direct beneficiaries (with a ripple effect reaching 400+ individuals) to adopt eco-friendly practices that mitigate environmental risks while improving economic stability.

Objectives

- ✓ Improve knowledge and capacity of local farmers to reduce risks associated with rainfall variability, unsustainable land use and their impact on community livelihoods and food security.
- ✓ Cut CO2 emissions and loss of natural vegetation due to fuel wood extraction in the community by the production and adoption of fuel wood efficiency stove.
- ✓ Provide alternative income generating activities to community dwellers to diversify their economic livelihood activities as means of addressing vulnerability to climate change.



Fig. 1: Map of Benue State showing Kwande LGA

Methodology

Gender and Environmental Risk Reduction Initiative (GERI) employed a participatory approach to engage with beneficiaries and stakeholders throughout the project implementation. The participatory evaluation was conducted with the aim of assessing the effectiveness of the project in achieving its objectives and identifying areas for improvement. The modalities of participation used in the evaluation included training workshops, focus group discussions, individual interviews, and surveys. The evaluation team consisted of representatives from GERI and members of Usar community in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The team worked closely with project participants and other stakeholders to design and implement the evaluation. Individual and collective voices were given equal importance in the evaluation process. The individual voices of project participants were collected through individual interviews, where participants were asked to share their experiences with the project, including what they learned, what worked well, and what could have been done better.

Results and Discussions

The GEF-SGP UNDP project, implemented by GERI, introduced sustainable solutions to mitigate land degradation and enhance livelihoods. Key activities included training 200 beneficiaries (129 women, 71 men) in sustainable farming, compost production, and fuel-efficient stoves, with 400 additional persons retrained. The project planted 3,146 improved palm seedlings across 22 hectares to restore degraded land. Beneficiaries produced 12,000 kg of compost manure, adopted for higher crop yields, and crafted 1,200 fuel-efficient stoves, reducing deforestation and indoor air pollution. Women were trained in soap/bead-making, creating alternative income streams. A women's cooperative society was formed to sustain these efforts, fostering women economic empowerment.

Conclusion and Future Work

The project achieved transformative outcomes: compost manure improved crop yields by 30–50% compared to inorganic fertilizers, as reported by beneficiaries like Jennifer Er and Hembadoon Uwua. Fuel-efficient stoves cut firewood use by 40%, reducing deforestation and household health risks. The women's cooperative generated income through soap/bead sales, uplifting 400+ households. Unplanned successes included replication in 3 neighboring communities (Mbaza, Uchi, Gbinde) and advocacy for local climate policies. Challenges like post-COVID inflation were mitigated through adaptive budgeting. The project exemplifies locally led adaptation, combining ecological restoration, gender inclusion, and economic resilience, with potential for scaling across Nigeria's vulnerable regions.

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