



FG/IFAD's \$60m Project in N/Delta Gives Lifeline to 38,000 Women, Youths



Some youths beneficiaries of LIFE-ND Project telling their success stories

The Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprises project in Niger Delta, LIFE-ND, says it has a target of empowering 38,250 youth and women in nine states of the region and 900 incubators/ enterprises. Speaking at a Media Roundtable in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, the National Project Coordinator of LIFE-ND, Engr Sanni Abiodun, said the primary target group are unemployed and underemployed youth, aged 18-35 years, as well as women-headed households with children under the age of 15. Abiodun noted that LIFE-ND was designed by the Federal Government, in conjunction with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as well as co-funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD, States Governments and the Niger-Delta with overall goal of realizing a transformed rural economy in the Niger Delta from which the rural population can derive prosperity and equal benefit as well as enhance job creation and food security through the development of agribusiness enterprises for beneficiaries in the Niger Delta region. He said the project is designed to be implemented over a period of 12 years and is divided into two phases of six years each. Abiodun said the first phase entered into force on 21 February 2019, while the completion date is 31

March, 2025, and financial closure scheduled for 30 September, 2025.

He disclosed that the project which commenced in 2019 is expected to terminate 2025, and is being implemented in 10 local government areas, LGA, per state and 10 communities per LGA, based on poverty level, youth unemployment, community involvement, conflict-free nature, level of agricultural activities



and private sector involvement. On funding of the project, he said IFAD, which is funding six states, provided a credit facility of \$60 million, while the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, which is funding three states is to provide \$30 million and the beneficiary states and federal government are providing \$3.76 million and \$4.91 million respectively. He noted that IFAD is funding 25,500 beneficiaries from Abia, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Ondo while NDDC is funding 12,750 beneficiaries from Akwa Ibom, Imo and Rivers states.

Abiodun disclosed that the project is in its mid-term, adding that as at December 31, 2022, the project had disbursed 53 per cent of the fund, representing \$30,944,576 to beneficiaries. According to him, the project focuses on empowering beneficiaries on seven selected crops namely: cassava, rice, palm oil, fishery, poultry, cocoa and plantain.

"We have had two years plus in implementation, and for now, we have been able to provide close to 5,200 jobs across the six states of the Niger Delta where we are working, while we have enlisted over 7,000 entrepreneurs that are currently undergoing training in their various incubation centres," he said.

Abiodun, who said that the goal is to transform the rural economy in the Niger Delta, through the development of agribusiness and agro-entrepreneurs, noted that the level of acceptance of the LIFE-ND project in the region has been quite huge. There is so much enthusiasm on the part of the youths who have decided to hold their destinies in their own hands, to demonstrate that relatively the youths of the region are hardworking and are ready to embrace agriculture."

Speaking on some of the achievements recorded by the project so far, he said it provided Feeder Farm Roads and Production and Processing facilities "On Rural Market Infrastructures, the project promoted the development of environmentally friendly production cluster facilities for the enterprise commodities promoted across the six states as follows: "Developed (construction/upgrade) over 38 poultry production cluster facilities in six participating states; Developed (construction/upgrade) over 54 fishery production cluster facilities in five participating states." The project has supported a total of 100 Incubatees with over 250 collapsible tarpaulin Ponds in five States; constructed over 3 Oil Palm Processing and 6 Cassava Processing Facilities in the five states; Constructed 7 Blocks of open/closed market store facilities in three States; Constructed 3nos. Cold Room and 1 no. Farm House in two States and Constructed 2 landing jetties in one State," he said.

The project coordinator also said the project is contributing to Nigeria's strategic objective on food security, household and job creation as it has "Recorded production output of over 2,176.06 MT of agricultural produce (450 MT for Cassava production; 219.74 MT for Rice seed multiplication; 230 MT of paddy rice production; 21.23 MT for cocoa production; 660 MT Poultry broiler production; 594.63 MT of fish production). "The project has also injected an

approximate gross income value of over N1,877,820,583 into the national economy; reached out to over 6,964 smallholder farmers as at December 2022 ending and hope to attain over 13,000 beneficiaries by 2023 ending with plan addition of over 6000 beneficiaries by year 2023. With this level of outreach, LIFE-ND will significantly be contributing to Nigeria's strategic objective of food security through its contribution to both the national food security and national economy.

"The project has enhanced Promotion of ICT 4 development through the application and deployment of Digital technology to support small-holders' farmers. This is in line with the Federal Government's Agricultural Transformation Policy (NATIP). "The project development objective is to enhance income, food security and job creation for rural youth and women through agri- enterprise development on a sustainable basis in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria," he said.

Engr. Abiodun Sanni however regretted that the project has not really commenced in three oil states of Akwa Ibom, Imo and Rivers State because the NDDC is yet to provide its counterpart funding. He said 'Even though we have put the preliminary structures on ground in these states there is barely nothing more we can do except the NDDC contributes its own share of the counterpart funds that is required to commence proper implementation.

Also, while Speaking LIFE-ND's Rural Institution, Gender & Youth coordinator, Dr Clement Uwem, said that the programme is not restricted to the male gender alone, but is "gender transformative," and seeks to empower as many females as it can to become agro-entrepreneurs. He said the measure of females to males recruited into the programme is in a ratio of 50:50, adding that about 5% of those engaged are physically challenged, while 25 percent are persons of female-headed households.

LIFE-ND's project coordinator for Abia State, Dr. Uchenna Onyeizu, described the state as being in the forefront of the six active states, in terms of performance, when compared to the five other states currently active in the programme. This he attributed mostly to Abia State being the first to pay its counterpart fund, adding that this helped the state project team to "begin from day one." Dr. Onyeizu said that Abia State is "working in four agro-commodities – rice, oil palm, poultry and cassava production. We have about 1,250 beneficiaries amongst which are physically



A panel of Media Executives at the round table



challenged, women- headed households and young persons between the ages of 18 and 35."

A Strategic aspect of the Roundtable was the constitution of a Panel of Media Executives who engaged the Management of LIFE-ND on the best ways to foster a better understanding with the Media to ensure they get maximum coverage of their activities. A member of the panel Dr. Iyobosa Uwugiaren who is an Editor in Thisday Newspaper while making his contribution advised the Management of LIFE-ND to always ensure that in the process of its budget preparation effort should be made to make good and adequate provision for Media and Communication. He pointed out that the Media budget is extremely important for every Organisation because no matter their success or achievements, if the information is not properly coordinated and disseminated the beneficiaries and of course the entire country will not be able to acknowledge such efforts. This according to him is why the role of the Media is very important to an organization that want the citizens to kept abreast of its activities, projects and successes. He encouraged the Management of LIFE-ND to ensure that from time to time journalists and media personalities are taken on a guided tour round their projects in the Nine Oil producing states so as to help them tell the story from their own perspective. While also making her contribution another member of the panel Mrs Olu - Akerele Remi the Head of Station AIT Portharcourt encouraged the Management of LIFE-ND to seek to partner with the Media particularly the electronics media through participating in some special programmes that are development oriented. According to her for instance in her station the African Independent Television "We run series of programmes that promotes the activities of development intervention Agencies and Organisations like LIFE-ND. She said, 'Such development programmes are people oriented and could be aired on Network services as it gives opportunity to Organisations to showcase their projects across the different states. It could be for 15, 30 minutes or even one or two hours. During such special programmes the essence of the project is highlighted, the various segments are spotlighted and even beneficiaries use the opportunity to tell their success stories. She emphasized that most of the electronic or Television



Stations are always willing to partner in such programmes by offering very reasonable discount since the projects impact the generality of the people.

Also while making his contribution, Dr. Rex Ogeri who is the General Manager of WAVE 91FM Radio Station another member of the panel advised the participants at the Round table that one of the ways the LIFE-ND can partner with the Media for effective result is to create a consistent forum or avenue through which they can always keep the Media abreast of what they are doing across the nine Niger -Delta states. According to him' whoever may have initiated the idea of this roundtable is very visionary because this is the kind of interaction needed by

LIFE-ND and other development intervention Agencies to help get the masses know and understand what they are doing with the funds allocated to them. In his word' You can not approach a lady in the dark because if you do you will not be able to assess her in full. LIFE-ND should come out more often to engage the Media so we can see them in full disclosure as to be able to carry their message across.

There was also a question and answer session and the National Project Coordinator Engr. Sanni Abiodun and other Members of the Management provided answers to the various questions posed by the Media men

One of the beneficiaries of the programme, also called incubatees, Michael Stanley, from Delta State, commended LIFE-ND for changing the lives of Niger Delta youths for the better. "I have been able to start my own poultry farm, which I built with the support of LIFE-ND. I got some facilities before they (LIFE-ND) eventually gave me the start-up capital. As it stands now, I am looking for more hands, I want to employ more persons to assist me because the work is already growing," he said.

Another incubatee, Diepreye Awara, from Bayelsa State, said he was "unemployed, with no hope. But LIFE-ND changed my life." Awara noted that formerly he didn't know where the next meal was going to come from before he came into contact with LIFE-ND, adding that now he has diversified into other businesses, and "all because of LIFE-ND."

European businesses and EU collaborate to grow Nigeria's human capital development

EU opens portal for young Nigerians to apply for its 2022 Erasmus+ scholarship programme for access to quality higher education. European businesses operating in the country and the European Union Delegation to Nigeria are stepping up collaboration towards helping to address the skills gap in the employment sector and leveraging Nigeria's huge population of young people to drive economic prosperity. At a Stakeholders Conference hosted by European Business Chambers in Nigeria (Eurocham) in Lagos, participants sought ways to raise the country's stock of human capital and enhance employability and economic growth.

At the conference themed: "Youths, Education, Employment and Skills," the European Union Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Ms Samuela Isopi, said Youth, Education, Employability and Skills (YEES!) were also a top concern and top priority for the European Union, both internally and in its cooperation with partner countries. Isopi, who is also the Honorary President of Eurocham Nigeria, described human capital as key to Nigeria's development, and said the EU, its Members States and EU businesses recognised this in their engagements with the country. Both the European Union and Eurocham Nigeria are playing leading roles in the Nigeria Jubilee Fellowship Programme (NJFP), a collaborative initiative between the Nigerian Government and key stakeholders to build a reservoir of innovative and employable skills in the country, by placing smart young graduates in paid 1-year internships in companies across the country. The programme targets 100,000 youths over a five-year period.

Isopi said: "Demography has indeed the potential to help transform Nigeria; but it also poses challenges in terms of demand for quality education, skill development and employment." EU in a statement said with young people making up 70% of Nigeria's population, the EU has prioritised the youth across all areas of its cooperation with the country. Under the Team Europe Initiative "Investing in Young Businesses in Africa" (IYBA) launched in Nigeria last year, the EU is rolling out a number of regional and national projects aimed at enhancing job creation for the youth, enhance their employability and entrepreneurship.

The statement also added that the number of young Nigerians awarded scholarships under Erasmus+, the EU's flagship programme for education, training and youth development, has quadrupled in the last four years, rising to over 200 in 2022, and making Nigeria the country with the second highest number of Erasmus scholarships worldwide. Also recognising that youth empowerment is critical in the perspective of coming general elections, the EU has put the youth and their role in democratic



Ms Samuela Isopi
EU Amb. to Nigeria/ECOWAS

governance first, through programmes aimed at mobilizing Nigerian youth to register and vote in the elections. Nigeria's former Minister of Education and ex-Vice President of the World Bank, Ms Obiageli Ezekwesili, who chairs The School of Politics, Policy and Governance (SPPG.org) was keynote speaker at the event. Lagos State Commissioner for Education, Ms Folashade Adefisayo; the CEO of Teach for Nigeria, Ms Folawe Omikunle; CEO of Siemens Energy, Mr Seun Suleiman; and the CEO of Spie Nigeria, Mr Guillaume Niarfeix; participated in a panel session on "Human Capital, a key factor of Success for Companies: How to Recruit, Train and Retain Talent to Secure Business Growth in a Challenging Environment". European companies have continued to play leading roles in Nigeria's economy, providing jobs, creating values and contributing to the country's economy in a positive, sustainable manner. While the European Union is the leading contributor to the Jubilee Fellowship fund, Eurocham member companies are notable destinations for the interns, with 16 of them already participating in the innovative programme. All Eurocham member companies also have dedicated Management Trainees Programmes; participate actively in the NYSC scheme; and globally impact thousands of young Nigerian through their in-house development programmes. The European Union is Nigeria's biggest trading partner, with trade valued at about 29 billion euros a year and a balance, which is significantly in favour of Nigeria. The 27 Member States of the EU are also Nigeria's largest foreign investor with total Foreign Direct Investments stock estimated at 23 billion euros. Eurocham Nigeria was formed in 2018 to give a common voice to European businesses and together with the EU Delegation, serve as a platform for engaging with the Nigeria authorities on issues that impact on businesses. From 18 companies at