

A Suggested Low-Cost Poverty Eradication Program for Rural Communities in Sub-Saharan Africa

Poverty levels have been falling in countries all over the world, except for countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This sad trend is happening at a time when governments in the region are faced with the challenges of post COVID19 recovery, and very hard pressed for funds with which they could have undertaken some intervention.

With over 59% of the region's population living in rural areas, and farming being the major occupation of the rural population, the intervention would be primarily seeking to increase agricultural productivity, and ensuring that farmers and their communities get equitable reward for their labour.

Given the paucity of funds by the government in the region, the emphasis would be on low-cost community-driven initiatives that can help lift a significant number of the rural poor out of poverty. It is expected that a reduction in rural poverty would contribute significantly to shifting the poverty indicator for the entire region.

The program would involve state/regional governments (possibly with the support of their international development partners) encouraging young professionals, retiring public service officers or other interested individuals to return to their villages or other rural communities, as community mobilizers.

The community mobilizers would be charged with getting the farmers in the village to form cooperatives. These cooperatives would adopt a policy of trucking the greater part of their produce directly to markets in the major towns/cities, as against selling them to middlemen. This might entail acquiring their own truck (if need be, on hire purchase).



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A kilogram of produce that the middlemen would have bought for about N100 in the village could easily sell for N300 when sold directly to the end consumer in the major town/city. The simple step of taking their produce to the urban market would have in effect tripled the farmer's collective earning as a community.

The cooperative would buy produce from the farmers at a price that is slightly higher than the middleman would pay, say N140 as against the N100 that the middleman would

ordinarily pay, the cooperative would then sell the produce at a discounted price of about N280 in the city. The differential would be dedicated to a community development fund that will be used to undertake various community development projects that would help transform the community.

The development fund would be used to finance empowerment projects such as the following:

- Sponsoring young people in the community to centers like the Songhai Center in Benin Republic <http://www.songhai.org/index.php/en/> for training as agriculture extension officers. Such trainings would equip the young people with the knowledge and skills required to bring everyone back in their villages up-to-date with modern farming techniques.
- Acquiring community-owned small farming machineries of different types, and making them available on hire to members of the cooperative. This would be a marked improvement over the hoes and cutlasses that most rural farmers in the region currently use, it would help reduce the drudgery of farm labor, lead to increased productivity and make it possible to cultivate larger acreage of land. It is also expected to make farming more attractive to the youth and help check the aging population of African farmers.
- Undertake bulk purchases of farming inputs such as fertilizer, hybrid seeds and others at a discount, for onward sales to members.
- Acquire mini drip irrigation kits for onwards sales to farmers. This would enable them to undertake year-round farming; as against the rain feed cultivation of about 7 months (March – September) in a year that farmer in most countries in the region practice. Repayment for the kits can be spread over an agreeable period.
- Institute community-driven watershed management and drought prevention initiatives like the Paani Foundation Water Cup <https://www.paanifoundation.in/watercup/> that helps check rain run-off, reduce soil erosion, replenish aquifers and promote climate resilience and biodiversity.

These are all aimed at increasing farm productivity and bringing even more funds into the coffers of the cooperative.

In addition to the farming interventions above, the development fund would also be deployed to execute infrastructural and social projects like the following:

- Construction of solar-powered boreholes to provide safe drinking water for the people water, and water for irrigation. The provision of water would facilitate the implementation of a WASH program; medical health statistics in the region show that over 60% of the outpatient cases in most hospitals pertain to malaria and preventable sanitation-related diseases.
- Construction and staffing of a rudimentary health center to provide basic primary health care to the people.
- Acquisition and sale of small solar powered light and other products to cooperative members on credit <https://www.lightingafrica.org/about/> these bring about marked improvements in the home life of the parents and children.
- Undertake labor-intensive road construction projects to improve access to market for their farm products.



- Refurbishment/construction of primary schools where the teachers are provided proper training and undertake to ensure that the pupils achieve clear learning outcomes at every stage of their academic journey and that all graduating pupils gain admission into top-quality secondary schools around the country, with scholarships available for needy student
- Acquisition of solar powered industrial size refrigeration facilities to help preserve their produce.
- Set up simple agro processing operations to add value to their produce and provide off-farm employment for youths in the community. In some cases, this could also help reduce post-harvest wastage, which can sometimes be quite significant.
- Acquisition and sale of bicycles to cooperative members on credit <https://bit.ly/34oA9wt>; to provide their families with basic mobility; impacting very positively on their health, educational, gender equity and economic outcomes.



The above list can go on and on, once the funds keep coming in.

International development partners active in the respective countries could support the above efforts by rolling out this low budget municipal councils capacity building and empowerment initiative - <https://bit.ly/2ZKoCpw>

The municipal councils are the closest tier of government to the citizenry and are responsible for the delivery of several of the services that impact the daily lives of the people and that are critical to the attainment of the SDGs. The municipal councils' capacity building and empowerment initiative encourages the sharing of best practices in municipal council governance by pairing municipal councils in the sponsoring donor country with their counterparts in the beneficiary country. It helps strengthen the Council's social contract with the people by encouraging greater transparency in its affairs and promoting open communication between the Council officials and the citizenry, and also helps mobilize the diaspora population of the municipal council, to support it with their technical skills, financial resources, and personal business contacts.

All the above are largely beneficiary driven initiatives that would take very little from government's coffers but have the potential of checking poverty and bringing about transformative change in rural communities across the continent.

It would be great to get enthusiastic support for them, from within and outside Africa.

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