

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK



***Nnennaya Enyinna-Eneremadu***

The year 2022!

In the second year following the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the globe, and people were still sceptical about living in and/or leaving their immediate environments. Everyone alive expressed gratitude for surviving the pandemic and the challenges that it presented but were hesitant about what was next. This situation was the reality for the CARA Development Foundation, whose programs and activities engaged communities in rural, hard-to-reach locations. This report demonstrates the efforts we made in the first quarter of the year, breaking the barriers, engaging and achieving some success stories, and coming up with lessons learned. We all did it afraid. But, we did it, anyway.

In this report, we have presented how we engaged in our programs on economic development, safe motherhood, and human rights. Activities-wise, the economic development engaged in both agro-based and skills-based interventions to empower mostly women to enhance their livelihood. CARA identified new partners including agro-dealers, input companies, and farmers across the nine states of the Niger Delta. We also showcased the level of capacity building on good agronomic practices for increasing the yield of cassava. This period also saw CARA taking the giant stride in facilitating the establishment of 33 hectares of farm solely on cassava production for a cooperative group, Ukwuoma Ndigbo Farmers multi-purpose co-operative society, which came with brand new experiences, lessons, challenges, and achievements.

On safe motherhood, women were given information on managing their families and maintaining peaceful, healthy, and happy families in addition to preparing nutritious meals without breaking the bank. CARA also engaged in-school adolescents with reproductive health and rights information for making informed decisions at a young age of adolescent. As the year wound to a close, CARA also accessed more support to engage in high-level advocacy as a cluster anchor, proposing to work across three states of the southeast, asking for the increase of the agricultural budget to 5% for food security. In all, 2022 ended even with more prospects for a new year.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

#### **Cassava Outreach Intervention:**

This is a major economic development program of CARA because it is a livelihood activity that over 80% of the women that we serve are involved in as both staple food and income generation, albeit at a mostly small scale. They are regarded as the poorest of the poor and most stressed workers, who are constantly thinking of ways to make ends meet.

In partnership with PIND, we continued to scale up the cassava intervention across the nine states of the Niger Delta. Aware from the outset that the challenges have been low yield, (8-11 tons per hectare, limited access to land, inputs, finance, and markets). The intervention focused on utilizing the market systems development strategy of making markets work for the poor (M4P) to identify the key actors in the cassava value chain, create and strengthen linkages among the players, and sustain the theory of profits as incentives to drive demand and provision of relevant services. In all of these, CARA played the role of the catalyst as the facilitator.

The demonstrated theory of service providers (input companies) was identified and linked to agro-dealers and both received training on good agronomic practices (GAP) training while the input companies trained the agro-dealers on the correct application of the herbicides and fertilizers. Then, the agro-dealers mobilize cassava farmers as cooperatives or community clusters and are trained on GAP using demonstration plots that are established for the clusters or cooperatives in their communities. The result is the increased yield of cassava. Below is a summary of the engagements on cassava outreach to 12227 cassava farmers (6489 males and 5738 females) with 7 inputs companies, 196 services providers comprising agro-dealers, farm service providers, and lead farmers (163 males and 33 females):

States	Abia	Akwa Ibom	Bayelsa	Cross River	Delta	Edo	Imo	Ondo	Rivers
Input Companies	Harvest field, Golden.	Indorama, CHC Organic.	SARO, Indorama	SARO Harvest field.	SARO, CHC Organic.	Jubaili, SARO.	Golden, Harvest field, CHC Organic.	Indorama, Crop Doctor.	CHC Organic.
SPs	2	33	14	18	25	24	25	50	5
Outreach	160	1331	2117	1235	1433	1482	1412	2684	373
Demos	2	12	10	6	4	4	10	4	3

## COMMERCIAL SEEDS ENTREPRENEURS (CSE)

This is an aspect of the cassava intervention that caters to the need for improved quality planting material. Over the years, cassava farmers have been struggling to increase their yield and find themselves planting several cuttings at a point applying excessive fertilizer, and doing everything else they imagine will increase their yield. However, they had been stuck with cassava stem varieties that are old and local. The result has been a sustained low yield that continued to get worse by the year.

To address this challenge, agricultural institutes such as the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) all went into a research process to get the best in each of the existing varieties and produce very good quality stem varieties that are high yielding, weather and infection resistant, early maturing, reducing the time of maturity from 18 months to 12 months. These varieties are also very profitable to industrial processors and give value for money.

The challenge became a linkage to get these quality stems to the smallholder farmers who were neither informed about the improved varieties nor equipped with the skills to cultivate these stems effectively. The project therefore introduced this by mobilizing some incentivized farmers to undergo training to engage in stem multiplication for commercial purposes. In the year 2022, 30 CSEs selected across the states of the Niger Delta were trained by NRCRI Umudike-Umuahia, Abia State, and accessed improved varieties such as TME 419 and Vitamin "A" fortified stems to establish their first multiplication plots. However, the CSEs trained in previous years who had established their farms previously harvested and sold over 6000 bundles to smallholder farmers across the Niger Delta.



### Cassava Out-grower Program

PIND Foundation introduced Sombreiro Kapital, a vehicle that guaranteed access to credit at a one-digit interest rate. The cassava farmers were considered to benefit but on conditions that each participating farmer must belong to a cooperative, the cooperative will draw up their economics of production (EOP), be assessed by the Sterling Bank whose umbrella the loan was to be processed, disbursed and recovered after harvest. Most interestingly, the loan would come in the form of inputs and services, not as physical cash.

Ukwuoma Ndigbo Multi-Purpose Cooperative Farmers Society mobilized 33 of their members and applied for the loan. They identified their first farm site in a volatile community in Oguta LGA with a high level of insecurity and youth involvement in illegal oil activities close to 33 hectares of land. There were also challenges of access to water for spray activities, in addition to the river that required a compulsory walk of about five minutes. All these challenges prevented access to tractors for land preparation. CARA facilitated the cooperative member's identification of another, more secure location within the premises of the University of Environmental and Agricultural Sciences, Umuagwo, Ohaji/Egbema LGA, Imo State.

33 hectares of land were prepared, stems delivered, and started off the planting with a mechanized planter but due to a major breakdown, labour was hired to complete the planting, herbicides application for weed management, gap filling before fertilizer application, and monitoring. This project site was visited by the Sterling Bank to validate reports about the farm and were impressed because the loans would be repaid and the profit shared by the farmers.



PIND Snr. Advisor discussing with Ukwuoma Ndigbo cooperative members concerning the cassava out-grower program



Ukwuoma Ndigbo FMCS visited the VC of the University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences to request the leasing of 33 hectares in their secure school environment and he obliged

PHOTOS



Facilitator with cooperative members identified land in the University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Umuagwo



Ploughing of the 33 hectares started in December 2021



Sombreiro Kapital team visited Ukwuoma Ndigbo FMCS to discuss the project and monitor the progress after the ploughing



Cooperative engages spray services providers to apply pre-plant herbicides before the harrowing practice



Monitoring visit from PIND Snr. Sector Advisor after ploughing and pre-plant herbicides application on the 33 hectares



Harrowing commenced after 21 days after the pre-plant herbicide application and the decayed weed and soil were being mixed vigorously



Cooperative members assemble to take delivery of their stems from Ibadan



Cooperative members off-load the 2000 bundles of TME 419 stems delivered from IITA Ibadan supplied by a seed entrepreneur -Solomon Iwetan



Stems arranged to stand under a shade as a best practice to preserve stems within the time they will be planted



The planter engaged to hasten the planting across the 33 hectares in 10 days



Planter planting the cassava stems with the cooperative members excitedly serving the stems through the planting points -technology in action



The planter is being repaired for the broken parts after the second day of work. This took 3 days to complete



The tree stump hidden in the ground completely destabilized the planter leading to its withdrawal from the farm



Farmers became demoralized and abandoned the farm for over one month because they could not plant by themselves and laborers were not available. This allowed weed to begin to grow again when the farmers came to share the farm -one hectare per farmer



Keke engaged to haul the stems from the point of storage and preservation to the farm for planting



Pre-emergence spraying going on at the planted areas



The initial effect of the pre-plant herbicides applied after planting – weeds withered gradually



Effect of the pre-plant herbicides that dried up the weeds to allow the cassava seeds to sprout in a clean environment



Cassava seeds sprouting after the application of pre-emergence herbicides



The cassava plants continued to grow



The look of the farm after the manual weeding



Gap-filling on portions where stems did not sprout



Gap-filling



Ikechukwu Arisa visits the Ukwuoma Ndigbo out-grower project



Ikechukwu Arisa of Sterling Bank on the monitoring visit with some beneficiaries of the project



Current status of the cassava farm

### Engagement with in-school Adolescent Girls on Valentine's Day

CARA partnered with Whispers to Humanity Foundation to organize an outreach with the theme "Valentine's Reels". This outreach was held at Imerienwe Girls' Secondary School, Ngor Okpala on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February. The outreach was organized to change the mindset of young girls of adolescent age on the misconception about love and relationships and to educate them about their sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHRs). The school teachers were engaged in this training as well.



The students aired their views about their understanding of the term 'lovers' day and its significance'. Their answers revolved around it being a day to express love by giving gifts to their friends and loved ones. They were all correct but the conversation made them understand that they can express love, for example to their parents: not only by buying them gifts, but by obeying them as well, they can also love their friends and those around them, while ensuring that they abstain from sexual activities to prevent adolescent pregnancy with its attendant challenges.

The discussions also covered menstrual hygiene and understanding and exercise of adolescent reproductive health and rights which protect them from unsafe abortions, STIs/HIV AIDS. Life skills were discussed to create awareness on how to manage one's life to manage per pressure and not engage in drug and alcohol abuse and addiction, set goals, refuse, negotiate, clarify values, effective communication, and build self-esteem. Further questions and answers provided the required clarity and CARA sees this as an opportunity to help nurture young girls into informed and responsible adults in the near future. They are also less vulnerable to gender-based violence because they are informed.



### CAPACITY BUILDING

#### Intervention Guide for PIND Co-Facilitators

CARA staff participated in the 3-day physical training for co-facilitators, hosted by PIND officers at the PIND office in Warri. The theme of the training is "the use of intervention guide/reporting". The participants are the Executive Directors and the Monitoring and Evaluation Officers from the co-facilitating organizations partnering with PIND. The objective was to enlighten the participants on the use of the intervention guide to actualize results because reporting is a way to present proof of activities engaged in. It is often said that if it is not recorded then it is assumed it did not happen. Reports bring to reality the evidence of what we are doing and it can also be further consulted as a guide to subsequent programs and activities.



An authentic report must have quality and integrity, and the process of collating information for a report must be monitored to ensure that data collected from service providers is valid, complete, accurate, timely, and consistent. Data obtained must be in line with the objectives of the program. At the end of the 3-day training, participants were able to share their understanding of the intervention guide and also utilize the intervention guide to produce accurate reporting

### Market Systems Development (MSD) Strategy

PIND organized a 3-day Market System Development (MSD) service provider's capacity building, planning, and learning workshop. This training was held in the month of June at Warri and Uyo with a total of nine (9) service providers in the cassava sector (2 females and 7 males). The training was to equip the service providers to get better in what they are doing, expand the scope of their business to make more income; in addition to identifying their target market and continuously providing market to them, and knowing their roles and work how to achieve them with or without external support to ensure sustainability.

The service providers were equipped to uphold the MDS model, stimulate behavioral change in farmers that will lead to increased productivity, ensure that farmers have access to agro in-puts through them, monitor the rate of adoption of the cassava GAP, and reduce poverty by building systems that enable an increase in income and job creation and lastly working through the co-facilitators.

CARA team supported this training and also helped the service providers to, come up with a clear work plan, a proper statement of their achievements before and while working with PIND, and as well the challenges they face in their various locations.

### Outcome Monitoring of the Cassava Intervention

In the month of September, CARA carried out the outcome monitoring assessment for direct (those we have trained in GAP) and control (those we have not trained in GAP) farmers to compare the difference in practices, yield and level of adoption while creating an opportunity to train the control farmers on GAP. This assessment was conducted in the 8 states of the Niger Delta with a total of 95 direct farmers and 50 control farmers.





### SKILL ACQUISITION PROGRAM (NBC EMPOWERHER)

CARA partnered with Karis and Eleos Hand of Hope Foundation, from Lagos to deliver the project titled EmpowerHer with support from Nigeria Bottling Company (NBC) as a part of their corporate social responsibility to give back to the society during their 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In this partnership, CARA mobilized the trainers including 5 business skills facilitators and specific skills facilitators in household cleaning agent production, bead making, tie and dye, paint making, and confectionery making. CARA equally mobilized the beneficiaries of this training and engaged with the media to produce a jingle to create awareness of the program and visibility for NBC. The event was conducted at St. Peters Anglican Church Irete, Owerri west LGA, Imo State

CARA team mobilized, registered, and followed up with over 250 women and girls in Imo state who eventually participated in the training. The target beneficiaries were young women between 18 and 50 years who were vulnerable including orphans, widows, and people with disability. This program was intended to reduce their vulnerability to abuse and poverty by empowering them with income-generating skills and business management. The training took five days and was completed with the closing ceremony that provided start-up kits for 25 of the 250 beneficiaries who performed exceptionally based on certain criteria.





### CLUSTER COACHING ON ADVOCACY

CARA had been recently awarded a project by USAID Strengthening Civic Advocacy and Local Engagement (SCALE) being implemented by Palladium. CARA being the anchor of a cluster of five organizations organized the cluster coaching for the member organizations, facilitated by Palladium team members for two days. It was an opportunity to create a shared and deeper understanding of concepts that support successful advocacy engagements including Political Economy Analysis (PEA) in the area of interest, gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), conflict sensitivity, and other cross-cutting issues.

CARA is facilitating the advocacy process demanding an increase of agric budget to 5% in Imo, Abia, and Ebonyi States; with the cluster organizations including Neighbourhood Initiative for Women Advancement (NIWA) in Ebonyi State, Vicar Hope Foundation (VHF) in Abia State and Community and Youth Development Initiative (CYDI) in Imo State. The fifth cluster member Cad Consulting is an IT specialist organization providing services to agric-based enterprises. The cluster coaching was an opportunity to bond as a cluster, agree and focus on the advocacy priorities, and work seamlessly to mobilize key stakeholders as pressure groups and form allies with the state actors responsible for actualizing the “ask”.



### APPRECIATION


We are grateful to all our partners who supported our programs in the year 2022, especially the PIND Foundation which has remained our partner since 2017. We will remain true to our promise to continue to reach the vulnerable and reduce poverty through agricultural development, especially engaging the market systems development strategy.

We appreciate Karis and Eleos Hand of Hope Foundation, which found us all the way from Lagos State and extended a hand of fellowship to enable us to empower with them over 250 women and girls, those that CARA is passionate about; with income-generating skills. These women have overcome vulnerability through this program and for this we are grateful.

Over the years, engaging the farmers has exposed the level of gap that exists between the government and their responsibilities towards food security. USAID SCALE project has given CARA the opportunity to engage directly where it matters, mobilizing the key stakeholders, building their capacity, and providing the necessary backstopping support to demand an increase in agric budget in 3 southeast states. This will tremendously impact the lives of women, over 70% of whom are smallholder farmers in rural communities. We are poised to deliver this mandate and we will remain grateful for this support.

To our indefatigable Board of Trustees providing guidance, direction, human and materials resources support. We remain grateful and promise to continue to put in our very best to achieve the reason for which this noble organization was founded.





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