

ECO-PALM FUND PROJECT: PROMOTING THE ADOPTION OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES BY SMALLHOLDER OIL PALM FARMERS IN NIGERIA

Presented by:

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Overview:

The Eco-Palm Fund Project is a market-based initiative to drive the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices by smallholder oil palm farmers in Nigeria. The Eco-Palm Fund serves as an incentive for farmers that need a loan for personal and farming purposes and are willing to adopt sustainable palm oil production. Farmers pledge a hectare of their palm plantation and sign an MOU with the processor, giving the right for sustainable agriculture practices to be carried out on the plantation during the term of the loan. The farmer also commits to attend at least two training sessions on sustainable agricultural practices. The goal is to ensure that the farmer is taken through the journey of implementing sustainable practices and sees the benefits of implementing this new practice and therefore will serve as an agent of change rather than things to be changed, according to Bennett et al. (2019).

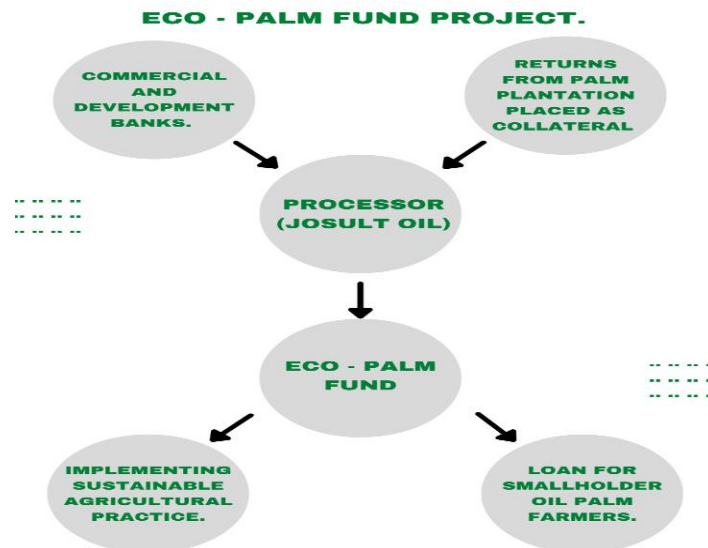


Fig 2: A schematic diagram showing the flow of funds in the Eco-Palm Fund Project

Actors and Beneficiaries:

The implementation of this project will require actors from both the private and public sectors and for this pilot phase, the major actors are the financial institution (commercial or development bank) that will provide initial funding for the Eco-Palm project, the processor (private business) that has adequate documentation to access funding from a financial institution and serve as an off-taker, and the smallholder farmers that will directly benefit from the Eco-Palm fund.

Project Implementation and Evaluation:

This project will be implemented and evaluated using the transformative adaptation cycle framework that was described by Vermeulen et al. (2018); as a tool to analyze farmers' transformative adaptation to sustainable agricultural practices. The framework looks at transformative adaptation in the following order:

1. Problem analysis to gain knowledge of who and what needs to adapt and why it is important.
2. Vision and pathway identification to know the economic and social benefits of adaptation.
3. Considering best approaches to take and their corresponding drawbacks or incentives.
4. Monitoring and evaluating to know if the project is addressing the problems effectively.

Discussion

In designing the project, I made sure I considered the needs and voices of the people this solution was meant for as recommended by Bennett et al. (2019) in their article about just transformations to sustainability. Through the survey and focused group discussion, I got a deeper understanding of the needs of the farmers, with most of them pushing towards the desire to meet the personal demands (housing, education, etc.) of their family. They considered these demands as capital intensive but find it difficult to access funding as farmers to meet the fulfillment of living in a good home or sending their children to good schools because their income comes in bits which is often used for feeding.

Having the article by Grenni et al., (2020) in mind while trying to introduce the sustainable agricultural practices like (reduced deforestation, zero burning, inter-cropping to promote biodiversity etc) that was proposed by Roundtable for sustainable palm, I had to take the concept

of “place-shaping” by considering the already existing norms and culture and using them as a gateway to drive sustainable practices. An example of such a norm was the tradition of farmers using their farmlands as a pledge to get funding from people who are well to do in their community, and such a pledge could stay for as long as 6 months to 20 years before the farmer or their family redeems the pledge. The Eco-Fund project leverages this norm and culture to drive the integration of sustainable agricultural practices amongst smallholder farmers.

Conclusion

The Eco-Palm fund project shows how the different needs of several actors can be considered while championing transformation towards sustainability. In this case, the financial institutions need documentation that can be provided by businesses that serve as processors, the processors need raw materials for their facilities, which they can achieve by supporting small holder farmers to increase their yield and the farmers need access to non-conventional funding which the processors can provide.

The Eco-Palm fund project if successfully implemented will have a positive impact on the livelihood of farmers, the adoption of sustainable practices will ensure food security and reduce the adverse impact of agriculture on climate change.

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