PRESS RELEASE

Sowing Hope for Agricultural Livelihoods to Grow Development in the Niger Delta

Recent research by SDN indicates a burgeoning artisanal oil industry in the Niger Delta, endangering regional environmental health and stability.

Many people are propelled into the illicit industry through a lack of alternative livelihoods. SDN, with funding from the UK Government, seeks to test and showcase viable alternative livelihoods in the Niger Delta by undertaking agricultural pilot projects. – Florence Kayemba, Programmes Manager, SDN.

One pilot project will test a variety of approaches to swamp rice farming to establish the most effective method that can be scaled-up in other creek locations. It will be implemented with ex-participants of the artisanal oil industry, building on research and engagements which indicate productive alternative livelihoods can remove actors from the industry, and deter new entrants. Another pilot project seeks to reduce the barriers of land ownership, access to capital, and low interest credit to commercially viable initiatives developing in the Niger Delta.

Testing Innovation in Agricultural Methods

SDN seeks to test a variety of approaches to swamp rice farming to establish the most effective method that can be scaled-up in other creek locations. This pilot project employs and provides training to ex-participants of the burgeoning artisanal oil industry in the region who are looking for safer and more legitimate livelihood alternatives. A team of agricultural specialists will test and compare the results of the rice grown in 12 separate plots of land across six hectares and report to inform future varieties and inputs to maximise return on investment and make this a viable livelihood alternative for communities living in the creeks of the Niger Delta.

Testing Innovation in Agricultural Models

Alongside testing what agricultural methods perform best, SDN has partnered with Alluvial, a private sector provider, to reduce the risks and barriers to 100 smallholder and unemployed farmers, using different methods to maximise crop yields over 200 hectares. Alluvial uses the Community Block Farm model that involves the provision of a full range of services to farmers, including: land preparation, project management, inputs, and market access - in exchange for an agreed percentage of the final crop sale. This arrangement means ownership of the land remains with the farmers and the, often prohibitive, investment needed for machinery and inputs is made by the private provider. The risk of fluctuating yields is reduced and shared with Alluvial in conjunction with the Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Scheme, in the event of a low crop yield.

SDN’s partnership with a private sector provider of agricultural management is intended test how the productive potential of the private sector can be harnessed for development gains by incentivising ‘social investment’. In this case, access to credit has been provided by SDN, with funding from the UK Government, to Alluvial to facilitate their engagement with youths, women, and men in a socio-economically disadvantaged community impacted by oil spills.

Potential for Livelihood Diversification and Development

The results of these pilot projects are expected to indicate the potential of these innovative approaches to deliver commercial viability, quality employment, and to alleviate some of the drivers of conflict and instability in the region. The outcomes of the pilot projects are expected to be of particular interest to civil society organisations, international agencies, and Federal Government agencies involved in development processes within the Niger Delta.

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Note to the Editor:

About the pilot projects
Both pilots are located within the Niger Delta and are at the initial stages of implementation.

About SDN
Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) supports the efforts of those affected by the extractives industry and weak governance. We work with governments, companies, communities and other stakeholders to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights. Our work currently focuses on the Niger Delta, where SDN is an established voice with a presence spanning 14 years. www.stakeholderdemocracy.org @SDNNigerDelta

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