



VIWADA First General meeting of Zones A, B, & C, Benue state

NGO Support Initiative (NSI) Project in Benue State:

Visionary Women in Agricultural Development in Africa (VIWADA)

Introduction to NGO Support Initiative (NSI)

The NGO Support Initiative (NSI) was established as a rapid response to a major funding disruption that affected civil society organisations across Nigeria in early 2024. Following the withdrawal of USAID support, many NGOs faced halted programmes and operational instability. In response, the initiative attracted 837 applications under Calls one and two of NSI. A total of 28 % or 235 applicants were eligible as having lost funding from USAID. While 602 applications or 72 % that did not meet the eligibility criteria of having lost USAID funding. Applications were received from all six (6) senatorial zones of Nigeria and in addition from NGOs in Kenya, Ethiopia and the United Kingdom from which 17 organisations were selected to receive support. These organisations were women-focused and community-based, reflecting a deliberate emphasis on reaching vulnerable populations.

Between June and August 2025, a total of ₦65.60 million was disbursed to the selected grantees, enabling them to resume critical interventions and stabilise operations. Collectively, the 17 organisations reached 6,555 beneficiaries, with a strong majority being women and girls (4,291 females and 1,662 males). Their activities spanned key sectors including gender equality and GBV prevention, women's health, education and digital literacy, economic empowerment, and climate-related agriculture.

A central feature of the initiative was its structured mentorship model, which strengthened grantees' capacities in financial management, reporting, advocacy, and programme delivery. Beyond immediate outputs, the initiative contributed to restoring community trust, improving organisational systems, and positioning participating organisations for sustained impact and future funding opportunities. Within this framework, Benue State was a significant focal point, with five project applications were received from Benue State, Visionary Women in Agricultural Development in Africa (VIWADA) whose proposal addressed the intersection of gender, agriculture, climate resilience, and insecurity was selected.

Problem Statement and Rationale for the Intervention

Benue State, widely recognized as a major agricultural hub in Nigeria, continues to face complex and overlapping challenges affecting food systems. Small-scale women farmers, who constitute a substantial proportion of the agricultural workforce, operate under constraints that limit productivity and resilience. These include limited access to climate-smart agricultural knowledge, weak extension service delivery, low digital literacy, and restricted participation in organized market and policy structures.

These structural challenges are further compounded by persistent security disruptions, which have undermined farming activities, displaced communities, and reduced access to farmlands. As a result, food and nutrition insecurity has intensified, particularly among vulnerable rural households.

VIWADA's project, titled *Enhancing the Capacity of Small-Scale Women Farmers in Cash Crop Production and Digital Extension Access for Climate Resilience and Food Security in the Face of Security Challenges in Benue State*, was designed to respond directly to these constraints. The intervention focused on strengthening both the productive and institutional capacities of women farmers, while also creating platforms for collective voice and engagement.

Project Activities and Implementation Approach

The project was implemented over a three-month period and structured around three core activity streams:

First, a **Stakeholders Consultative Forum** was convened to align key actors around the project objectives. This platform facilitated dialogue among government representatives, farmer groups, civil society actors, and private sector stakeholders. It ensured that the intervention was embedded within existing institutional frameworks and responsive to local realities.

Second, the project delivered **capacity-building programmes for small-scale women farmers**, focusing on climate-smart and sustainable cash crop production techniques. This component addressed critical knowledge gaps in areas such as adaptive farming practices, resource efficiency, and risk mitigation. In parallel, participants were introduced to **digital extension tools**, enabling improved access to agricultural information, early warning systems, and market insights. This dual emphasis on agronomic skills and digital access is particularly relevant in contexts where physical extension services are limited.

Third, VIWADA implemented an **advocacy and sensitization initiative** titled *Getting the Women Voices and Bringing the Voices Together*. This activity aimed to strengthen collective agency among women farmers and amplify their engagement in policy and decision-making processes. A key outcome of this process was the **registration of the Benue Women Farmers' Cooperative Federation Limited**, with leadership representation drawn from all three senatorial districts of the state. This institutional structure provides a formal platform for coordination, advocacy, and access to resources.

In total, the project directly reached **304 participants** across its activities.

Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Linkages

A notable feature of the project was its deliberate engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across governance levels. VIWADA facilitated interactions with:

- The Deputy Speaker of the Benue State House of Assembly
- The PDP Women Leader in Benue State
- Representatives of farmer associations such as AFAN and SWOFON
- The Gender Desk Officer, Ministry of Women Affairs
- Officials from the Benue State Agricultural Development Programme (ADP)
- Local government representatives and community leaders
- Directors within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
- The Ministry of Rural Development and Cooperative Society

These engagements were not merely consultative but instrumental in advancing specific outcomes, particularly the formal registration of the cooperative. The involvement of the Ministry of Rural Development and Cooperative Society culminated in the issuance of a certificate and approved byelaws for the cooperative federation, providing it with legal recognition and operational legitimacy.

dRPC Support to the Grantee

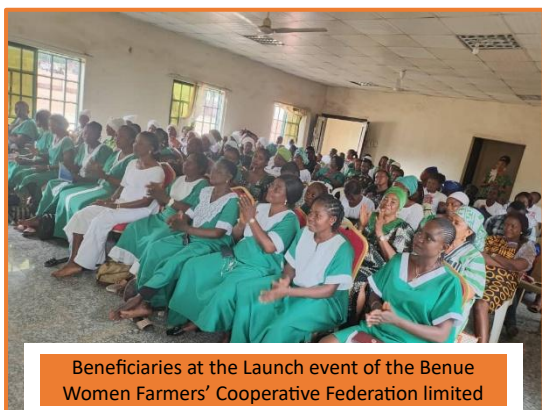
The development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC) provided both financial and technical support to VIWADA under the NSI framework. This support enabled the organization to operationalize its proposal within a defined timeframe while maintaining alignment with programme standards.

Beyond funding, dRPC's role included guidance on project structuring, monitoring expectations, and results-oriented implementation. This contributed to strengthening VIWADA's institutional capacity, particularly in managing multi-stakeholder processes and delivering integrated interventions that combine service delivery with advocacy.

Results, Outcomes, and Impact

The project achieved several measurable and strategic outcomes within its short implementation period:

At the **individual level**, 304 women farmers gained knowledge in climate-smart agriculture and digital extension utilization. This has immediate implications for improved farming practices, productivity, and resilience to climate variability and security disruptions.



Beneficiaries at the Launch event of the Benue Women Farmers' Cooperative Federation limited

At the **institutional level**, the successful registration of the Benue Women Farmers' Cooperative Federation Limited represents a significant structural achievement. The cooperative provides a platform for aggregation, collective bargaining, and sustained engagement with government and development partners. Its cross-senatorial leadership structure enhances inclusivity and statewide relevance.

At the **policy and advocacy level**, the project succeeded in creating direct linkages between women farmers and decision-makers. Engagements with state-level actors, including legislative and executive representatives, contributed to increased visibility of women's agricultural challenges and priorities.

The **impact of working with local government structures** was particularly evident in facilitating access, legitimacy, and sustainability. Local government representatives played a role in mobilization, coordination, and contextual adaptation of activities. Their involvement also increases the likelihood that project outcomes, especially the cooperative structure, will be integrated into ongoing local development initiatives.



Zone C (Makurdi, Benue South & Otukpo LGAs) Stakeholders Consultative Forum

More broadly, the project demonstrates how targeted, short-duration interventions can generate both immediate capacity gains and longer-term institutional outcomes when designed with a systems perspective.

Conclusion



The NSI-supported intervention by VIWADA in Benue State provides a concise but effective model of integrated programming. By combining capacity building, digital inclusion, stakeholder engagement, and institutional development, the project addressed multiple dimensions of vulnerability faced by small-scale women farmers.

While the scale of the intervention was modest, its design and outcomes suggest strong potential for replication and scaling. Continued support to the cooperative structure, alongside

sustained engagement with state and local institutions, will be critical to consolidating and extending these gains.

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drpc

info@drpcngr.org