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Optimizing Agricultural Resources to Achieve Nutritional Outcomes: Pigeon Pea Case Study

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Background

Your agency is implementing a 5-year program in the country of The Beltway to sustainably reduce hunger and poverty through improved equitable growth in the agriculture sector and improved nutritional status. The following is a summary of the project site within The Beltway:

- It is located in a semi-arid region with up-land and low land production sites, periodic droughts, and a single rainy season.
- 85% of the households are engaged in agricultural activities, and 66% are considered primarily subsistence farmers undertaking limited commercial farm activities.
- There are high levels of under nutrition. Stunting rates are 35% for children under 5, and iron-deficiency anemia is 75% for both mothers and children.

Your agency is tasked with designing and implementing an integrated agriculture and nutrition strategy, where agricultural interventions affect availability and access that will directly impact specific nutritional outcomes for at-risk household members (mothers and children under 2).

Following a market analysis, your agency has targeted pigeon peas (*Cajanus cajan*) for value chain development based on its potential for income growth combined with its potential to address nutritional status. Specifically, the market analysis showed the following:

- Familiarity: The local populations produce and consume pigeon peas. It is part of their food system
- Market demand: Locally there is a steady demand for pigeon peas throughout the year, and a niche market for one month when imports into the local market are unavailable.
- Nutrition: Pigeon peas are a source of vegetable protein and iron and low cost compared with animal sourced protein.
- Production and storage: Pigeon peas are leguminous. They are viewed as a low input crop, drought tolerant, pest tolerant, intercrop well with grains, root crops and other legumes, improve soil fertility and store well.

The challenge is that although people are familiar with pigeon pea, they are unaware of the important nutritional benefits it has in contributing to iron anemia and protein energy malnutrition (PEM), therefore demand, although existing, could be much higher once awareness is raised.

The Pigeon Pea Project has just undergone a Year 2 review showing under performance on relevant agriculture and nutrition indicators.

The review found the following key problems:

- Some farmers are resistant to produce pigeon pea in greater quantities. The team assumes it is because they prefer to grow staple crops, but no assessment has been completed.
- Target households are not consuming pigeon pea in the amount nor frequency to impact their documented dietary gaps, even though messaging activities are on-going.
- Outreach messaging activities are designed and implemented separately:
 - women are the sole targets of nutrition messaging which focuses on presenting all the seven essential nutrition actions (ENA);
 - men are the sole targets of information on increasing production of pigeon pea. They are unaware of specific market demand, such as when dietary gaps occur or local market requirements, especially quantity and timing.

Your Aim

Your team has been sent to The Beltway to conduct a field review of the project, and determine what corrective actions can be taken in the delivery of services to improve project results going into Year 3. Your task is to describe the top actions (minimum 2 actions) the project could take to make a midcourse correction.

In your groups go around the table and (1) identify key issues that need addressing in the nutrition and agriculture components independently and (2) note why they are a priority and then (3) discuss the main points of integration.

Consider the following:

1. How will you ensure project resources and outreach activities are mutually reinforcing so that both income and nutritional outcomes improve?
2. How might the combination of social marketing and behavior change messages be aligned between pigeon pea production (agriculture) and dietary diversity (nutrition)?
3. How might activities within the pigeon pea value chain be used to leverage increases in demand thus impacting production and market access?
4. Which Feed the Future indicators are applicable to both agriculture led and nutrition led activities so as to gauge if both agriculture growth and nutrition improvement are being achieved?