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Women Driving Feed and Fodder Innovation in Cameroon: AWARFA-N's Success Story

Preamble

The African Women in Animal Resources Farming and Agribusiness Network (AWARFA-N) Cameroon (CM) is pioneering a sustainable approach to fodder production, to address critical challenges in the livestock sector. The organization is doing this through harvesting, baling, and storing fodder during the wet seasons for sale during the drier periods, to ensure a consistent supply of quality feed for livestock owners. This initiative helps mitigate seasonal fluctuations in fodder availability while also providing a reliable source of income for its members and local farmers—particularly women and youth—through direct sales and contracts with aggregators. Supported by the Ministry of Livestock and other partners, the project leverages modern animal feed production techniques and storage solutions to maintain high-quality fodder year-round. AWARFA-N Cameroon's business model is designed to optimize the utilization of pasture lands, enhance the profitability of pasture owners, and meet the needs of livestock farmers. The project focuses on community engagement, sustainable practices, and strategic partnerships to drive economic growth and improve food security in the target regions. AWARFA-N (CM) aims to transform the livestock sector and increase the participation of empowered women at its forefront, and significantly contribute to Cameroon's GDP and improve the livelihoods of its rural population.

Keywords: *AWARFA-N, Cameroon; Feed and Fodder Production; Women Empowerment; Fodder storage; Sustainable feed and fodder, Women Entrepreneurship Agriculture*

Introduction:

AWARFA-N Cameroon was established in December 2023 as a network of Cameroonian women working in the livestock and agribusiness sector. The organization's mission is to become the leading provider of baled fodder in Cameroon, recognized for quality, sustainability, and community impact. AWARFA-N Cameroon aims to address the critical issue of seasonal fodder shortages, which significantly impact livestock productivity and the livelihoods of many rural families.

The Need for Improved Fodder Production:

The livestock sector contributes approximately 13% to Cameroon's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs more than 30% of the rural population. The cattle population is estimated at over 10 million heads, with a further 11 million small ruminants. The dominant pastoral livestock production system faces constraints, including limited access to inputs, degraded pasture lands, limited feed resources, and insufficient water points, all worsened by climate change. Transhumance, a common adaptation strategy, faces challenges due to climate change and resource conflicts. AWARFA-N (CM) recognizes the importance of improving pasture and fodder resources and is dedicated to enhancing livestock productivity, ensuring food security, and supporting rural livelihoods.

AWARFA-N Cameroon's Production Model:

AWARFA-N (CM) business model is designed to optimize pasture land utilization through a structured approach to fodder harvesting, storage, and distribution. The initiative enhances the profitability of pasture owners and addresses the needs of livestock farmers and requires reliable access to quality fodder. The business collaborates with smallholders and large-scale farmers in targeted regions. The organization sources fodder from cultivated or natural pasture fields, then harvests, bales, and stores it for distribution within and outside the region. Initially, fodder is harvested by experienced harvesters using appropriate materials during the wet season and treated and stored safely in warehouses.

Integrated Fodder Production and Distribution Model

AWARFA-N Cameroon's production model is designed to optimize pasture land use through a structured approach to fodder harvesting, storage, and distribution. The organization identifies and contracts with pasture owners such as pastoralists, commercial livestock farmers, cooperatives, and feed retailers, to ensure they are compensated for their resources while providing AWARFA-N (CM) with access to raw materials. The harvested fodder then undergoes treatment to enhance its nutritional value and shelf life, which may include drying, baling, and adding preservatives or nutrients. Proper storage is essential to prevent spoilage and maintain a steady supply, with AWARFA-N (CM) considering climate-controlled facilities and inventory management.

AWARFA-N (CM) implements a sales and pricing strategy that segments the market according to buyer categories and their fodder preferences. The organization intends to produce fodder in bales, establish contracts with aggregators to streamline sales processes and expand its market reach. The organization plans to segment the market according to the different categories

of buyers and their fodder preferences to tailor their sales approach. AWARFA-N aims to provide financial stability for itself and its aggregator partners, through establishing these contracts, to ensure a consistent market for stored fodder. The contracts with aggregators, who consist of cattle farmers associations and cooperatives, are accompanied by continued sensitization and promotion in the target regions to widen the market when sales activities begin and accelerate during drier months when demand surges. The organization's business model aims to leverage existing animal feed resources through strategic partnerships with pasture owners and address market demands from livestock farmers for high-quality fodder.

Market Analysis and Opportunities:

The potential fodder buyers are categorized into smallholder cattle farmers, cooperatives/associations of livestock producers, and dairy farmers. Buying trends reflect economic factors, market availability, and seasonal variations, with demand peaking during the dry season. There is growing awareness among buyers about the importance of quality fodder. Fodder buyers typically source their products from local markets, livestock cooperatives/associations, and fodder mills and middlemen. A demand gap analysis indicates that less than half of the fodder needed during the dry season is currently met by available markets. AWARFA-N Cameroon aims to reduce this demand gap by at least fifty percent.

Initial Markets for Expansion:

AWARFA-N (CM) has identified five initial markets for its operations based on specific regional needs and opportunities. The Far North region is targeted due to frequent climatic hazards that lead to fodder shortages. The Adamawa region is seen as ideal due to its diverse agricultural landscape and existing dairy activities. The Centre region, specifically the capital city of Yaoundé, presents a market for supporting beef cattle suppliers. The West region offers opportunities due to the migration of cattle farmers from crisis-hit areas. Lastly, the South region is an important transit zone for cattle leaving Cameroon, creating a demand for fodder to feed the animals in transit.

Marketing and Sales Strategies:

AWARFA-N (CM) aims to establish a strong presence in key livestock markets through comprehensive marketing strategies, that would include a product strategy focused on offering high-quality fodder tailored to different livestock needs. A pricing strategy involves implementing competitive pricing based on market rates, with potential discounts for bulk purchases or loyalty programs. The promotion strategy utilizes local radio, community bulletin boards, social media campaigns, demonstrations, and workshops to highlight the benefits of AWARFA-N (CM) fodder. Finally, the distribution strategy focuses on establishing distribution points within each target market and collaborating with local transport agencies to ensure timely deliveries to customers.

Impact and Sustainability:

AWARFA-N Cameroon's impact and sustainability lie in its ability to provide reliable access to quality fodder, enhance the income of local farmers (especially women and youth), promote sustainable practices, and contribute to food security. The project supports the broader community by creating jobs, improving livestock productivity, and fostering economic growth in rural areas.

Addressing Potential Risks:

AWARFA-N Cameroon has identified potential risks and developed corresponding mitigation strategies to ensure business continuity and success. To address limited knowledge and low adoption rates, AWARFA-N Cameroon plans to collaborate with the Ministry of Livestock to raise awareness and conduct training for pastoralists and livestock farmers. To mitigate price fluctuation risks, the organization will introduce differentiated pricing strategies, secure contracts with key buyers, and invest in regional warehouses and pasture lands. In response to potential interruptions in delivery, AWARFA-N Cameroon aims to decentralize sales points in key markets and establish logistics partnerships with local transportation services. To counter insufficient start-up capital, a phased approach will be adopted, scaling operations in accordance with available funds and diversifying funding sources. Finally, to address climate variability, AWARFA-N Cameroon will prioritize resilient grass species and integrate local weather forecasting tools into its planning processes.

Conclusion:

AWARFA-N Cameroon's outlines a strategic approach to fodder production and distribution, with the goal of establishing a strong presence in key livestock markets. The organization aims to optimize pasture land use through integrated processes that include contracting with pasture owners, treating harvested fodder, and implementing effective storage and sales strategies. AWARFA-N Cameroon seeks to maximize profits for women and youths while ensuring a consistent supply of high-quality fodder for livestock farmers through addressing the specific needs of various regions and implementing mitigation strategies for potential risks such as climate variability and market fluctuations.

List of Abbreviations:

- AWARFA-N: African Women In Animal Resources Farming and Agribusiness Network
- GDP: Gross Domestic Product
- MINEPIA: Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries
- FCFA: Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine (currency)
- AU-IBAR: African Union Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources
- EAC: East African Community