

Leadership in Action (LiA) Project Report: Seeds of Change: Grassroots Mobilization for Sustainable Food Sovereignty and Security Through Women- and Youth-Led Advocacy in Northern Ghana

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Introduction

As part of the Leadership in Action (LiA) initiative, my project focused on supporting women and youth in Northern Ghana through capacity-building, policy advocacy, and grassroots development. In collaboration with the Savannah Women's Integrated Development Agency (SWIDA-GH), I facilitated workshops, conducted community consultations, and developed a policy toolkit designed to address systemic issues related to food insecurity, agriculture, and health. This report will critically examine the specific tasks I was responsible for, including policy research, grant writing, and website development. It will reflect on the impact of the project, the challenges encountered, and how the sustainability of the project will be ensured through SWIDA-GH's ongoing work. Additionally, this report will explore how my SMART goals were achieved and the growth I experienced as a leader working in a new and challenging environment.



Project Overview

SMART Goals and Achievements

At the project's outset, I established three specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals that would serve as a roadmap for my work with SWIDA-GH. These goals aligned with the core leadership attributes of ethical leadership, grassroots development, policy research, and global citizenship.

1. Deliver a 3-Part Workshop Series:

I successfully delivered a 3-part workshop series to over 100 community members consisting of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), women and youth farmers, and women and youth activists. The workshops covered the following themes:

- **Policy Analysis and Development (Week 2):** This session introduced the basics of policy analysis, helping participants understand the importance of informed decision-making in governance and advocacy.
- **Advocacy and Collective Action (Week 3):** This workshop emphasized the power of collective action and the importance of community-driven advocacy for systemic change.
- **Community Mobilization and Championing Change (Week 4):** This final session focused on equipping participants with the skills to mobilize their communities and champion change at both local and national levels.

2. Lead Two Community Consultations:

During Weeks 2 and 3, I led two community consultations that brought together local stakeholders to discuss the most pressing issues impacting the well-being of the community. The consultations were centered on food insecurity, health, and agriculture, providing a platform for community members to share their lived experiences and concerns. These consultations were crucial in gathering first-hand qualitative data that revealed policy failures in addressing food security, particularly for women and youth.

3. Develop a Policy Toolkit:

Based on the findings from the consultations and my time at SWIDA-GH, I developed a comprehensive policy toolkit. This toolkit serves as a practical resource for the community to continue advocating for sustainable infrastructure and evidence-based policy change. The toolkit addresses food insecurity, health inequities, and agricultural challenges,

offering concrete strategies for grassroots advocacy, collective action, and community mobilization.



My Role in the Project

Throughout the project, I took on three key responsibilities: policy research, grant writing, and website development.

1. Policy-Research:

As a researcher, I conducted extensive policy research to better understand the root causes of food insecurity and agricultural challenges in Northern Ghana. My research focused on the intersections of gender, food sovereignty, and local governance, highlighting how policy failures disproportionately impacted women and youth farmers. I worked closely with SWIDA-GH to ensure that my research was informed by the lived experiences of the community and that the findings would contribute to evidence-based advocacy.

2. Grant-Writing:

To support the sustainability of the project, I collaborated with SWIDA-GH to write grant proposals aimed at securing funding for future initiatives. This involved identifying potential funding sources, drafting proposals, and articulating the long-term vision of the project. Through this process, I developed a deeper understanding of the complexities of

international development funding and the importance of aligning projects with donor priorities while staying true to the needs of the community.

3. *Website*

Development:

As part of the project's sustainability plan, I assisted SWIDA-GH in enhancing its online presence by developing a website. This platform serves as a tool for disseminating information about the organization's work, sharing success stories, and attracting potential donors and collaborators. The website is designed to be a hub for community engagement and a platform for SWIDA-GH to continue its advocacy efforts beyond the duration of the LiA project.

Impact

The project's impact was significant, both in community engagement and the potential for long-term change. The workshops and consultations reached over 100 community members, including Civil Society Organization (CSOs), women and youth farmers, and activists. These interactions fostered a sense of solidarity and collective action, empowering participants to advocate for their rights and work towards systemic change.

The policy toolkit I developed is a key component of the project's sustainability. SWIDA-GH has committed to utilizing the toolkit in its ongoing advocacy efforts and sharing it with other stakeholders across Northern Ghana. This will ensure that the knowledge and skills gained during the workshops continue to be applied in future initiatives, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

Challenges and Solutions

Despite the successes of the project, there were several challenges that threatened to derail the achievement of my SMART goals. One of the most significant challenges was coordinating with community collaborators. Due to the decentralized nature of the community and the logistical difficulties of bringing together stakeholders from different regions, it was difficult to ensure consistent participation in the workshops and consultations.

Another challenge was the unexpected impact of weather conditions. Northern Ghana's unpredictable climate made it difficult to plan outdoor workshops and consultations, and heavy rainfall during Week 2 forced us to reschedule key activities. However, I overcame these challenges through strategic and quick problem-solving, with the support of my host organization.

SWIDA-GH played a critical role in helping me adapt to the changing circumstances, and we were able to reschedule the workshops and consultations without significantly impacting the project timeline.

Sustainability and Future Impact

The sustainability of this project will be ensured through SWIDA-GH's continued commitment to utilizing and sharing the policy toolkit. The toolkit was a product of collaboration between me, SWIDA-GH, and community members, including women and youth farmers, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and local activists. Together, we co-created a resource that is tailored to the unique challenges faced by the community, particularly around food insecurity, health, and agricultural policies. This collaborative approach ensured that the toolkit was not only evidence-based but also context-specific, making it a powerful tool for advocacy and systemic change.

The policy toolkit contains practical strategies for engaging policymakers, conducting advocacy campaigns, and mobilizing community action. It also includes a roadmap for future projects that SWIDA-GH can implement, ensuring that the work we started continues to evolve and adapt to changing conditions. The toolkit will serve as a living document, with SWIDA-GH committed to updating and refining its content based on ongoing consultations with the community.

In addition to the toolkit, the website I developed for SWIDA-GH will serve as a central hub for future advocacy efforts. This digital platform allows the organization to disseminate the toolkit, share success stories, and attract new collaborators and donors. The website is going to also feature resources for community members to stay informed about upcoming workshops and advocacy initiatives, enabling them to remain actively engaged in systemic change.

I look forward to seeing how SWIDA-GH, alongside its community collaborators and I will continue to build on this work. The toolkit and digital infrastructure provide a sustainable framework for ongoing advocacy, and I am excited to witness the long-term impact that these resources will have on advancing gender-responsive solutions and driving change in food security, health, and agriculture. The foundation laid by this collaborative effort is poised to generate lasting, evidence-based outcomes that empower local communities and amplify their voices in policy discussions.

Reflections and Lessons Learned

Working with the women and youth of Northern Ghana was a transformative experience that deepened my understanding of ethical leadership, grassroots development, and global citizenship. Immersing myself in a new and challenging environment taught me the importance of perseverance and the growth that emerges from stepping outside of my comfort zone.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned was the importance of acknowledging my privilege and positionality as a first-generation Tamil-Canadian from a post-secondary institution. Recognizing this allowed me to approach the project with care and consciousness, ensuring that I contributed meaningfully to the community without undermining or undervaluing the knowledge and expertise of my local collaborators.

By working in partnership with SWIDA-GH, I was able to navigate the cultural nuances of the region and develop a deeper appreciation for the power of community-driven advocacy. The experience challenged me to think critically about how to balance my role as an external researcher and advocate.

Conclusion

This Leadership in Action project was an invaluable opportunity for me to apply my skills in policy research, grant writing, and grassroots development in a real-world context. The impact of the project—reaching over 100 community members, developing a policy toolkit, and enhancing SWIDA-GH's capacity for future advocacy—demonstrates the power of collective action and evidence-based policy solutions. While the challenges were significant, they provided opportunities for growth and learning, reinforcing the importance of ethical leadership and global citizenship in my work.

Moving forward, I am confident that the foundation laid by this project will continue to drive positive change in Northern Ghana, and I look forward to seeing how SWIDA-GH, the community and I will build upon the work we started together.