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SAMPLE PROPOSAL · 2010

Building Climate Resilience for Smallholder Farmers Through Integrated Agroforestry and Conservation Agriculture

A comprehensive initiative designed to empower vulnerable small-scale farmers with climate-smart agricultural techniques, soil restoration practices, and sustainable agroforestry models to enhance food security and adaptive capacity.

Executive Summary

Small-scale farmers in the target region face escalating vulnerabilities due to erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and severe soil degradation directly linked to climate change. This project, titled 'Building Climate Resilience for Smallholder Farmers Through Integrated Agroforestry and Conservation Agriculture,' addresses these interconnected crises by scaling up proven climate-smart farming techniques over a 24-month implementation period. By combining minimal soil disturbance, permanent organic soil cover, and diversified crop rotations with strategic agroforestry, the project will directly benefit 1,500 smallholder farming households—with a strong focus on women and youth. The initiative focuses on capacity building, establishing community-managed tree nurseries, and creating peer-to-peer learning networks to ensure long-term adoption and ecological restoration. With a total requested budget of \$250,000, the project aims to increase crop yields by 30%, restore 600 hectares of degraded agricultural land, and significantly improve household nutrition and income stability in the face of climatic shocks.

Background and Context

Agriculture remains the primary economic driver and source of livelihood for over 80% of the rural population in the target operational zone. However, decades of intensive conventional farming, deforestation, and overgrazing have left local agroecosystems severely depleted. Topsoil erosion and declining soil organic matter have drastically reduced the land's water retention capacity, making harvests acutely sensitive to dry spells. Concurrently, unpredictable seasonal shifts have disrupted traditional planting calendars, resulting in widespread crop failures and deepening rural poverty. While local farmers possess deep indigenous knowledge of their landscapes, they lack the technical training, quality germplasm, and agricultural inputs necessary to transition toward climate-resilient production systems. Integrating agroforestry—the deliberate incorporation of trees and shrubs into crop and animal farming systems—alongside conservation agriculture principles offers a scientifically validated pathway to reverse environmental degradation while simultaneously securing sustainable rural livelihoods.

Problem Statement

The core problem confronting smallholder farmers in the region is extreme vulnerability to climate change, driven by systemic soil degradation and a lack of adaptive agricultural technologies. Specifically, farmers struggle with three interrelated challenges: (1) severe soil erosion and moisture loss caused by conventional tillage and monocropping; (2) acute shortages of fuelwood, fodder, and timber due to rampant deforestation; and (3) limited access to drought-tolerant seeds, native tree seedlings, and extension services. These factors culminate in chronic food insecurity, declining household incomes, and heightened economic distress, disproportionately impacting women who perform the majority of farm labor yet face systemic barriers to land ownership and agricultural resources. Without targeted intervention to transform local farming practices, these communities will sink deeper into poverty and face irreversible ecological collapse.

Goal

To enhance the climate resilience, food security, and economic well-being of 1,500 small-scale farming households through the widespread adoption of agroforestry and conservation agriculture practices.

Objectives

- Train 1,500 smallholder farmers (at least 50% women) in core conservation agriculture principles, including minimum tillage, soil cover retention, and crop diversification by Month 6.
- Establish 5 community-managed agroforestry tree nurseries capable of producing and distributing 50,000 multipurpose, drought-resilient indigenous tree seedlings by Month 12.
- Facilitate the transition of 600 hectares of degraded farmland into regenerative agriculture and agroforestry systems by Month 18.
- Establish 10 farmer field schools (FFSs) to serve as ongoing decentralized hubs for peer learning, experimentation, and technical support by Month 24.

Project Description

This project employs a holistic, community-centric approach to climate change adaptation, blending ecological restoration with practical agronomic training. The intervention is structured around three mutually reinforcing pillars: capacity building, ecological infrastructure development, and economic diversification. First, local farmers will be organized into Farmer Field Schools (FFSs), where they will receive hands-on training on conservation agriculture plots managed collectively. Second, the project will construct and equip five community tree nurseries, empowering local women's cooperatives to produce native fruit, fodder, and soil-enriching trees for integration into farm boundaries and croplands. Third, the initiative will facilitate market linkages for climate-smart produce and alternative livelihood inputs, such as beekeeping within agroforestry zones. By anchoring the project in existing community structures and leveraging local leadership, the intervention ensures high levels of ownership and culturally appropriate execution.

Key Activities

- Conduct participatory community mobilization meetings and baseline vulnerability assessments across 10 target villages.
- Procure and distribute foundational agricultural toolkits, cover crop seeds, and drought-tolerant crop varieties to participating farming households.
- Construct 5 community tree nurseries and provide specialized training in nursery management, grafting, and seedling care to local management committees.
- Establish 10 Farmer Field Schools (FFSs) running seasonal demonstration plots focused on minimum tillage and mulching.
- Facilitate multi-stakeholder workshops connecting farmers with local extension officers, input suppliers, and regional produce markets.

Expected Outcomes

- A 30% increase in average cereal and legume yields among participating households by the end of the second harvest cycle.
- 600 hectares of farmland actively managed under combined conservation agriculture and agroforestry principles, demonstrating improved soil organic matter and water infiltration.
- 50,000 multi-purpose trees successfully planted on farms and communal lands, increasing local biodiversity and vegetative cover.
- Enhanced technical capacity and leadership among 1,500 smallholder farmers, with women holding at least 50% of management roles in FFSs and nurseries.

Timeline

The project will be executed over a 24-month period, structured into four distinct six-month phases. Months 1-6 will focus on community mobilization, baseline surveys, FFS setup, and nursery establishment. Months 7-12 will encompass the first major training cycle, initial tree planting, and rollout of conservation agriculture plots during the primary rainy season. Months 13-18 will involve mid-term monitoring, scaling up successful practices, establishing market linkages, and conducting a second planting phase. Months 19-24 will center on project consolidation, farmer-to-farmer exchanges, final evaluations, and the transition of project leadership to local community structures.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The project will utilize a robust Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework to track progress against stated objectives and ensure adaptive management. A baseline survey will be conducted in Month 1 to establish quantitative benchmarks for crop yields, soil health indicators, and household income. Quarterly monitoring visits by project agronomists will track activity outputs, such as the number of farmers trained and seedlings distributed. A mid-term review at Month 12 will evaluate early adoption rates and allow for operational adjustments. Finally, an independent end-line evaluation will be conducted in Month 24, utilizing both quantitative farm surveys and qualitative focus group discussions to measure long-term impact, cost-effectiveness, and community satisfaction.

Risks and Mitigation

Potential risks include erratic weather patterns (severe drought or unseasonal floods), resistance to changing traditional farming habits, and local pest outbreaks. To mitigate climatic risks, the project emphasizes drought-resistant crop varieties and soil moisture-retaining techniques that buffer against dry spells. To address potential resistance to new methods, the project relies on participatory Farmer Field Schools where farmers learn by doing on local demonstration plots rather than through top-down instruction. Pest risks will be mitigated by promoting biological pest control methods and crop diversification within the agroforestry systems, avoiding reliance on costly and environmentally damaging synthetic chemicals.

Sustainability

Project sustainability is engineered into its design through deep community ownership, capacity building, and economic self-reliance. By training local lead farmers and establishing community- managed tree nurseries, the project ensures that technical knowledge and input generation remain within the community long after external funding ceases. The community tree nurseries will operate as social enterprises—selling a portion of seedlings to neighboring communities to generate a revolving fund for future seed and tool procurement. Furthermore, the tangible economic benefits of increased crop yields and diversified income streams (such as fruit and timber harvesting) provide a strong, self-reinforcing incentive for farmers to maintain conservation agriculture and agroforestry practices indefinitely.

Project Management

The project will be implemented by an experienced multidisciplinary team combining field agronomists, community organizers, and financial administrators. A dedicated Project Manager will oversee daily operations, budget tracking, and donor reporting. Field activities will be executed by four local agricultural extension officers working in direct partnership with village committees and Farmer Field School facilitators. Oversight and strategic guidance will be provided by a Project Steering Committee comprising representatives from local government agricultural departments, community leaders, and NGO executive management. Financial management will adhere to strict international accounting standards, with bi-annual internal audits ensuring transparency and accountability.

Budget Overview

Personnel (Project Manager, Extension Officers, M&E Specialist)	\$95,000
Field Operations & Training (FFS setup, farmer workshops, exchange visits)	\$55,000
Nursery Construction & Agricultural Inputs (seeds, tools, tree germplasm)	\$45,000
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (baselines, mid-term, end-line audits)	\$20,000
Travel, Logistics, and Field Transport	\$20,000
Indirect Costs / Administrative Overhead (10%)	\$15,000
Total Requested Grant	\$250,000

Conclusion

Investing in climate adaptation for small-scale farmers is both an environmental imperative and a humanitarian necessity. This project offers a tested, highly cost-effective model that directly addresses the root causes of agricultural vulnerability through community-led agroforestry and conservation agriculture. By equipping 1,500 households with the tools, knowledge, and biological infrastructure needed to regenerate their lands, the initiative secures lasting improvements in food security, ecological health, and economic resilience. With multilateral support, this project will catalyze a sustainable agricultural transformation that benefits both rural livelihoods and the global climate.



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