

USAID's ADVANCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER



Participants of the Northern Region's Stakeholders' Forum at Gariba Lodge in Tamale

USAID's ADVANCE project engages stakeholders on strategies to sustain agriculture productivity and access to markets

USAID's ADVANCE project has organized three northern regions' stakeholders' fora in Tamale, Bolgatanga and Wa, from the 17th to 21st of June 2019 as platforms to share the project's achievements and challenges and strategize on the sustainability of the project's results and impact. During the events, the project also shared findings of learning studies, which assessed the sustainability of the OB model, business case for buyer-sponsored outgrower schemes, the grants program as incentive for value chain competitiveness, impact of village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) on smallholder farmers, level of expansion of input dealer businesses for sustainability and impact of the project's pest management programs for fall armyworm (FAW).

The three fora under the theme "Enhancing and Sustaining productivity and markets with the project's end in mind: The role of outgrower business (OB) networks" were attended by 136 (54 in Tamale, 38 in Bolgatanga and 44 in Wa) stakeholders including USAID staff, some directors of the Department of Food and Agriculture, outgrower business owners and networks, farmers, financial institutions, village savings and loans associations, input and equipment dealers, buyers and processors.

Each forum aimed at taking feedback from participants on strategies to sustain agriculture productivity and inclusive markets after project has closed. According to participants, the project's models and results are sustainable because they are market-driven, show increase in project's participants' income and respond to value chain actors' needs.

John Dimah, a member of the Sissala OB network who became a project participant in 2015, attested that the knowledge he gained during the project's training sessions and business linkages he received transformed his business positively and made it resilient. "Through pre-harvest, I met Agrisolve and the rest has been success stories. Also, the project linked me to Sinapi Aba and I was able to acquire a tractor and benefited from equipment grants. This year I am producing 3,300 acres of maize and it has already been paid for because I am linked and connected to all those who matter in the value chain", he noted.

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Outgrower business networks formed to achieve sustainable results

As part of its strategy to attain sustainability, USAID's ADVANCE project facilitated the formation of outgrower business (OB) networks that serve as business associations for OBs, build their capacity, provide business linkages and advocate for their members.

Ten OB networks were formed, namely Yendi OB Network, Gushegu OB Network, Bemoni OB Network, Tamale OB Network, Sissala Area OB Network, Jirapa OB Network, Wa OB Network, Kosaug OB Network and Naawuni-sungti OB Network. These OB networks comprised of 101 OBs supporting 23,800 smallholder farmers in the three northern regions of Ghana.

The core functions of the OB networks are to influence policy process and decision makers at the local and national level, reduce cost of agricultural inputs through bulk purchases and organize collective marketing to realize economics of scale, scout for markets, organize and participate in trade missions to explore business opportunities. The networks also work to lower the risk profiles of the network and individual businesses to attract investors, provide information, mentorship, and business linkages to members and activities that will promote the interests of the networks and its members.

Since the inception of OB networks, the project has developed training needs assessment tools to enable these networks to develop short-, medium-, and long-term plans to promote their businesses, which will increase their likelihoods to access loans from financial institutions.

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AOR Mrs. Ackah-Coleman giving a word from USAID during Tamale forum (left). Participants going through publication materials and photos at the exhibition stand during Wa forum (right)

USAID's ADVANCE Project engages Stakeholders on strategies to sustain agriculture productivity and markets through outgrower business networks ...cont'd from page 1

Richard Akoka, chairman of the Upper East Regional OB Network urged all members of OB network present to commit to playing their respective role to sustain the activities of their networks. He said, "USAID's ADVANCE project made me credit worthy and now I can walk into Sinapi Aba or any bank and ask for any amount as loan and it will be honored".

Other participants, particularly women, also indicated that the village savings and loans associations (VSLAs), together with other gender mainstreaming activities such as trainings on numeracy, leadership, business management, and entrepreneurship transformed and will continue to transform women's outlook, capacity and performance in the three northern regions.

Rahaman Memunatu, a smallholder farmer from Disiga in the Northern Region, indicated that the VSLAs had inculcated the habit of saving among most women in her community and enabled them to financially support their households, and empowered them to partake in households' decision making. **"The small amount of money I save through VSLA makes it possible for me to get inputs to invest in my farm and this further enables me to support my family with food, health and educational needs"**, Madam Memunatu stated.

OB networks' executives committed to strengthen their capacity to collaborate with other key stakeholders and build the capacity of their members to sustain the gains from USAID's ADVANCE project.

Celebrating the Success of a Female smallholder farmer who became an Outgrower business

Fati Zakari, once a smallholder farmer of outgrower business (OB) owner, Fousseini Abubakar, in April, 2019 successfully progressed to become an OB in Nyong Yapalsi in the Karaga District of the Northern Region.

Fati, who worked with her OB for two years, adopted all the good farming practices she was taught by USAID's ADVANCE project and received production inputs (hybrid seeds, fertilizer, and agrochemicals) from Agricare through project facilitation. "Due to all the trainings I benefitted from ADVANCE and my OB, I started row planting, using certified seed,

applying appropriate fertilizer with good record keeping and can now produce and sell more for re-investment into my farm and family's upkeep", she said.



OB Fati Zakari standing in her compound.

In 2014, Madam Fati cultivated 20 acres of maize (10 acres of yellow maize and 10 acres of white maize), 10 acres of rice and soybean. She was able to increase her yield in maize from 2.0MT/ha in 2016 to 3.72MT/ha in 2018. In June 2019, Madam Fati increased her acreage by 20 acres for maize and 10 acres each for soybean and rice.

From January to May 2019, she provided 30 smallholder farmers with hybrid seeds and ploughed 30 acres of maize, 10 acres of soybean and 35 acres of rice for 45 smallholder farmers. "I was happy when I saw my farmers increased their production to 3MT/ha in 2018 from 1MT/ha previous years. I am hopeful that their yields would keep increasing due to the support I continue to give them", she indicated.

Madam Fati, who now supports 90 smallholder farmers out of which 60 are women, is also the leader of project facilitated village savings and loans association (VSLA). She organizes meetings with her outgrowers where she trains them on farming practices such as land preparation, row planting, post-harvest handling; supplies them with seeds and chemicals for pest control; and provides them with ploughing services.

In addition, she serves as a resource person on radio programs that educate smallholder farmers on good agricultural and management practices and conducts monitoring visits to their farms.

Through the project, she was linked to Opportunity International Savings and loans and negotiated a loan to buy a tractor to render ploughing services to her outgrowers. "As soon I am able access the loan to get the tractor, I would work hard to increase the acreage of soya so that I can also buy a planter in order to attain higher yields", Madam Fati noted.

Staff Corner

USAID's ADVANCE project has a business linkage team whose role is to build outgrower business (OB) networks' capacity and address the gaps in operating as full business entities without external support. This team is composed of a team lead, the business linkage specialist, and five business linkage officers (BLOs).

The responsibility of the business linkage specialist is to provide leadership to BLOs in developing strategies aimed at improving efficiency, productivity and profitability of agribusinesses and fostering end market-producer relationships across Northern, Upper East, Upper West and North East regions.



Francis Essuman
Business Linkage Specialist

Francis Essuman is the business linkage specialist based in Tamale and supports five BLOs on the implementation of project activities in the field.

Francis holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture from the University of Cape Coast and an Executive Master of Business Administration degree in Strategic and Project Management (Total Quality Management) from Paris Graduate School of Management Studies. His hobbies are reading, watching movies and news.



Esther Mahama
Business Linkage Officer



Confidence Agbeko
Business Linkages Officer



Alex Bayor
Business Linkages Officer



Beatrice Kolan
Business Service Officer



Maurice Bakang
Business Service Officer

Esther Mahama is a BLO based in Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region. She supports two OB networks, 16 OBs, 5,643 outgrowers and 39 VSLA groups located in five districts namely Bawku West, Bawku Municipal, Garu, Tempane and Mamprugu Moagduri within the Upper East Region.

Esther holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Commerce and Accounting from the University of Cape Coast and loves to read and watch movies.

Confidence Agbeko is a BLO based in Tumu within the Upper West Region and supports one OB network, 30 OBs, 6,447 outgrowers and 25 VSLA groups located in Sissala West and Tumu districts in the Upper West Region.

He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Post-Harvest Technology from the University of Ghana, Legon and a number of certificates from Cornell University-USA including Measuring and Improving Business Performance. He enjoys spending time with his family.

Alex Bayor is a BLO based in Wa and supports two OB networks, 433 OBs, 14,682 outgrowers and 53 VSLA groups in Wa and Jirapa within the Upper West Region.

Alex has a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and a Diploma in Integrated Community Development Studies from the University for Development Studies (UDS) - Wa Campus. He loves music and reading.

Beatrice Yola Kolan is a BLO based in Tamale and supports three OB networks, 21 OBs, 5,117 outgrowers and 75 VSLA groups all in Tamale, Karaga and Nalerigu in the Northern Region.

Beatrice holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business and Economics and a Master's degree in Business Administration both obtained from the Mälardalen University, Västerås-Sweden. She enjoys reading and baking.

Maurice Bakang is a BLO based in Tamale and supports 2 OB networks, 27 OBs and 13,622 outgrowers all located in Gushegu, Mion and Yendi in the Northern Region.

Maurice holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Agribusiness Management from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology.

He loves to read and watch movies.

Outgrower Business networks formed to achieve sustainable results

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Some executive members of outgrower business networks during a planning meeting in Tamale

Some of the trainings that OB networks received include effective teamwork, leadership, and communication with their business associates and stakeholders. In addition, network members have been empowered to advocate and negotiate the terms of contracts for buyer-sponsored outgrower scheme and equipped to access and use relevant weather analysis and prediction to reduce production risks.

Although the OB Networks are still in developmental stage, its members have already initiated engagements with MOFA to access relevant agricultural services and products introduced by government agencies. From January to June 2019, four OB networks in Bawku, Nalerigu, Mamprugu-Moadguri received 5MT of improved seeds from the Government of Ghana's Planting for Food and Jobs program.

Recently, nine OB networks set up offices to host their secretariat meetings and eight networks are operating bank accounts. According to Suleimana Ibn Alhassan, Chairman of Beimoni OB Network in the Karaga District, members of his network started engaging chiefs and queen mothers to allocate land to women to enable them to farm as their fellow men in some communities. OB networks' executives expressed their willingness to actively broaden and catalyze relationships with value chain actors in order to expand their businesses and advocate for their members' common interests.

Outgrower business networks trained on participatory data collection

USAID's ADVANCE project has adopted a market-system-oriented monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approach that deepens the sustainability of its outgrower business (OB) model by empowering private sector partners to take ownership and utilize their business data.

For its extension phase, the project developed an open data kit software (ODK) and quick response code (QR code) to facilitate data collection by outgrower

businesses on their services to smallholder farmers.

The QR code which contains basic data on smallholder farmers is a two-dimensional barcode that is a user-friendly ICT based intelligence tools combined with online and offline mobile data collection analysis which can be read optically, using an android mobile phone. The software's data management tools are tailored to OBs' and OB networks' constraints and abilities and therefore provide the Networks, OBs, and their agents with hands-on trainings as well as constant mentoring.

In the week of the 24th of June 2019, USAID's ADVANCE project's MEL team trained OB networks and key field agents on the use of the open data kit software (ODK) to facilitate data collection and data management process by OBs on their services to smallholder farmers by enabling OB networks and OBs collect routine monitoring data directly from the smallholders in order to accurately and timely monitor the state of their businesses and to track progress and results on project.

The training provided 65 OBs including two women and 51 male OB agents from all 11 zonal networks with hands on practice on the ODK platform, by setting up the application on their android phones and tablets and completing electronic data forms including service provision forms, sales form and repayment form among others.

Participants expressed their willingness to use the data management system citing its user-friendly interface, and data protected and confidentiality feature. Issahaku Abdulai, an OB who applauded the initiative made some concerns, he said, "This system is very good, however, it does not make provision for ploughing services which an OB may provide to walk-in farmers" This the facilitating team assured participants would be resolved.



A snapshot of barcode for project participant (left) and an ODK data collection interface (right)

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