



## USAID ADVANCE NEWSLETTER

### US Congress Delegation Visits USAID ADVANCE Project



Congress delegation and community members in a durbar

### USAID ADVANCE Celebrates Women On International Women's Day

On March 8, 2018, in Tamale in the Northern Region, USAID ADVANCE joined thousands around the world to celebrate women on the International Women's Day (IWD). Under the theme, "Press for progress for women's participation in agribusiness", the event recognized and appreciated achievements made by female smallholder farmers and outgrower business (OB) owners supported by the project in the maize, rice and soya value chains. In attendance were the USAID ADVANCE Deputy Chief of Party, Christel Tshikudi and USAID Agriculture Specialist Grace Sebugah, who delivered speeches on behalf of the project and USAID, respectively. Over 70 women farmers including OBs, lead farmers, and leaders of farmer based organizations were present.

The event featured knowledge sharing, and networking sessions involving key women agribusiness entrepreneurs who shared the impact of the project's interventions. Esther Akabsah, an OB from Dua Community in the Upper East Region and mother of three, mentioned that through USAID ADVANCE's support since 2015, she currently supports 250 smallholder farmers from an initial five in 2013. In 2017, the project assisted her to complete the registration process for her agro-chemical enterprise and linked her to two agro-product companies, Simple Prince Enterprise and Petasgo Enterprise, for reliable supply of agro-chemicals. She makes an average profit of GHC500 (US\$112) a week from this new business. Besides the profit, her smallholder farmers easily access production inputs such as seeds and fertilizer.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Global Food Security Project led a congressional staff delegation on a research trip to assess the impact of USAID Feed the Future ADVANCE project's (USAID ADVANCE) interventions on February 21, 2018. The project took the delegation to Zinindo in Gushegu District in the Northern Region where over 210 smallholder farmers (including 52 males and 158 females), five nucleus farmers, and private sector leaders within the maize, rice and soy bean value chains gathered.

Upon arrival in Zinindo, the farmers welcomed the delegation with cultural drums and dances. After introducing the participants, the USAID ADVANCE's Northern Regional Coordinator and Chief of Party explained the project's outgrower business (OB) model and the importance of the SmartCard, which is an effective monitoring and management tool within the project's Monitoring, Evaluation, Report and Learning (MERL) system.

#### Impact of USAID ADVANCE

The farmers took turns in testifying to the impact of USAID ADVANCE's

interventions such as trainings on good agronomic practices (GAPs), soybean utilization for nutritional benefits, equipment grants, access to inputs and finance, and linkages to end-markets. They asserted that they could sustain the gains made from the project's interventions when the project ends.

#### GAPs have contributed to increase in farm yields:

Most farmers affirmed that the adoption of USAID ADVANCE's GAPs such as row planting, fertilizer application and use of certified seeds have contributed to an increase in their yields. Alhaji Abdulai Ziblim, Chairman of the nucleus farmers network in Zinindo, testified that the project's introduction to Agricare's improved varieties of maize seeds and training on good land preparation and fertilizer application methods enabled him to harvest 7.4 metric tons of maize on a 1.6 hectare of land, while within the same period, he used to harvest only 1.2 metric tons when he did not adopt what he learned from the project.

#### VSLAs have improved family relationships:

By facilitating Village Savings and Loans Associations' (VSLAs) schemes, USAID ADVANCE has empowered women and

...cont'd on page 3

...cont'd on page 2

## Meet USAID ADVANCE's Policy and Advocacy Specialist



**ERNEST BEYUO AAYEL**  
USAID ADVANCE's Policy & Advocacy Specialist

**E**rnest Beyuo Aayel joined USAID ADVANCE in October 2016 as the Policy and Advocacy Specialist. Prior to that, he worked with CARE International in Ghana as a Zonal Project Officer under the USAID funded Ghana's Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms (GSAM) Project from 2015 to 2016. He also served as an Advocacy Consultant and Trainer under the Business Sector Advocacy Challenged Fund (BUSAC) funded by DANIDA, USAID and EU from 2011-2015. He previously worked for TRAX Ghana from 2005-2011 as the Community Empowerment Programme Officer, and later as a Program Coordinator.

Ernest holds a Master of Philosophy (Mphil) degree in Development Studies and Bachelor of Arts (BA. Hons) degree in Integrated Development Studies from the University for Development Studies. He has a Certificate in Democratic Governance and Development, Theories & Approaches of Community

Development and International Development Policies & Strategies from the University of Applied Science, Fachhochschule Dusseldorf, Germany.

Ernest plays a lead role in the initiation and coordination of many advocacy interventions linked to the various components of USAID ADVANCE. Ernest facilitates the project's collaboration with local NGOs and associations such as Coalition for the Development of Western Corridor of Northern Region (NORTHCODE); URBANET; Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana (YHFG); Community Development Alliance, Community Resource Management Areas (CREMAs); and Traders Associations to engage traditional leaders, and decentralized government agencies including Regional Coordinating Councils on issues pertaining to limited women's access to productive land, limited Agriculture Extension Agents' (AEAs) support to farmers, limited farmers' access to government subsidized fertilizer, non-gazettement of CREMA bye laws to control bush fires, poor market infrastructure, among others. Some advocacy interventions have resulted in the allocation and demarcation of 1,600 acres of land for use by women in four districts and also increased awareness of local associations to demand services from government institutions at the local level.



A female OB sharing the impact of USAID ADVANCE on her farming business during the IWD celebration

Mary Azongo, an OB with 333 smallholder farmers in Nkoranza in the Brong Ahafo Region, appreciated USAID ADVANCE for introducing her to input dealers such as Dizengoff and John Deere and to the model farm concept which gave her over 23.38 metric tons of maize on 4.65 hectares in 2017. "I have now become a role model in my community and district", a beaming Mary asserted.

Lucilla Dayour, founder of the Tuna Women Development Association in Ghana in the Upper West Region, won the Sodexo's 2017 Women Stop Hunger Awards in France for her key role in improving livelihood of female farmers in Upper West Region because of USAID ADVANCE's support. Lucilla works with 300 smallholder female farmers who have been trained on good agronomic practices such as using the right seed, fertilizer application, and use of shellers to improve their productivity.

With inclusion of 47% of women beneficiaries (127,050 women) in the project as of January 2018, USAID ADVANCE succeeded in showing at the IWD event the need to consolidate gains made by the female OBs (32 women) and increase the participation of female farmers in the agribusiness sector. The project's Deputy Chief of Party, Christel Tshikudi, shared "as a value chain enhancement project, we have the strongest conviction that if equitable and sustainable opportunities are created for women, they will contribute to achieve food security among rural and urban populations in the three northern regions of Ghana while increasing the profits of maize, rice, and soya in the market". USAID ADVANCE will continue to integrate gender in its implementation and ensure equitable distribution of resources to female farmers.

## USAID ADVANCE Celebrates Women On International Women's Day ...cont'd from page 1



A section of participants at the IWD event

## USAID ADVANCE Connects Farmers to Agricultural Input Companies for the Upcoming Farming Season



USAID ADVANCE Chief of Party, Dr. Emmanuel Dormon, addressing participants at the Pre-Season Event

the event, there were exhibitions by over 50 companies mainly on improved seeds, agro inputs production and processing equipment and services, weather information and financing opportunities.

USAID ADVANCE's actors stressed the importance of the pre-season events, "It was at the 2017 pre-season event I first heard about ripper and its use. Although I don't have one on my own yet, I appreciate its use, and am currently saving to procure one", a female beneficiary shared. Isaiah Nsiah also proudly shared: "Attending the previous pre-harvest agribusiness event offered me the opportunity to link up with an agrochemical dealer. After using it effectively, I arranged with the dealer to visit my community at the request of the community members, who also patronized his agro-chemicals and testified to their effectiveness."

Other OBs purchased oil and filters, irrigation equipment, hose and pipes and motor bikes among others from equipment dealers like John Deere and Motor King. The project will continue to work with the OBs to facilitate access to agricultural input for the coming season while extending OBs' services to their respective smallholder farmers.

USAID ADVANCE collaborated with the USAID Agriculture Technology Transfer (ATT) project to organize the eighth annual pre-season and networking event in Tamale on March 21, 2018. Under the theme, "Quality Seed, Necessity for Food and Jobs", the event was attended by about 800 stakeholders including private enterprise actors, outgrower businesses (OBs) and smallholder farmers in the maize, rice and soy value chains for networking and planning the planting season. Two hundred

and ninety three (293) actors were sponsored by USAID ADVANCE. The event featured speeches from the Deputy Minister for Food and Agriculture, USAID Agriculture Team Lead, and Chiefs of Party for the USAID ATT and ADVANCE projects.

USAID ADVANCE's Chief of Party, Dr. Emmanuel Dormon, also encouraged participants to use the opportunities provided by the forum to dialogue with sector stakeholders on new agriculture innovations and technologies. As part of

## US Congress Delegation Visits USAID ADVANCE Project ...cont'd from page 1

improved family relationships. Nasika Nagtogmah, a female smallholder farmer, said that "VSLA has made the women of Zinindo financially sound and more confident. I am now able to support my husband financially and, because of that, he now shares bed with me more frequently". Further, Mariama Abdul-Asiru, another female beneficiary and mother of three expressed her happiness about how she accessed and paid for land preparation services using her VSLA savings.

*Soybean utilization has improved nutrition and provided jobs and income for women:*

The female farmers mentioned that the project trained them on different ways of using soybean for meals. As a result, they not only prepare variety of nutritious meals at home, but have also set up soybean kebab businesses. According to Sanatu Toyibu, she makes an average of

GHC45 (US\$10) each week as additional income from the sale of soybean kebabs.

### *Tour of the Zinindo Community*

The delegation took a short tour of the community where they observed how maize is aggregated, bagged and weighed using a standard weighing scale before transporting it to the buyers. They also looked at how maize is shelled.

### *Final remarks from the delegation*

The delegation said that the visit offered them an opportunity to better understand how the Feed the Future program is impacting lives in Ghana. They were particularly happy about how VSLAs are fostering better relationships in families. They were impressed with women's income generating activities and improvement in household nutrition as a result of the soybean utilization trainings.

They encouraged the VSLA groups to continue their good work and sustain it after the project. The delegation applauded USAID ADVANCE for its interventions to improve livelihood.

### *The visiting team*

The bi-partisan congressional delegation comprised Libby Foley, Reyn Archer, Anna Yelverton, Grant Mullins, Will Green, and Marie Spear. They were hosted by Kimberly Flowers, Jennifer Cooke, and Gillian Locke from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Global Food Security Project.

The USAID ADVANCE team included Dr. Emmanuel Dormon, Chief of Party; Francis Essuman, Northern Regional Coordinator; Francis Kwamena Aino, Public Relations and Communications Specialist; Sumaila Mohammed, Trade And Marketing Officer; and Isaac Conduah, Senior Agronomist.

# The Mystery of Slate and Chalk

**USAID ADVANCE's Numeracy Training Beneficiaries Break Reading and Writing Barriers**



A smallholder farmer in West Mamprusi District of the Northern Region proudly displays her chalkboard after writing down her phone number.

One of USAID ADVANCE's main objectives is to increase farmers' productivity, and one strategy to achieve this goal, is to train smallholder farmers to acquire numeracy skills. In 2015, the project began training smallholder farmers to acquire numeracy skills. As of December 2017, the project trained 31,727 farmers (18,156 or 57.23 percent women) on numeracy skills across USAID ADVANCE's four zones of influence (ZOI).

The numeracy trainings do not only educate individuals on how to count and calculate income, they also show them how to keep records, which improves the quality of management and decision making for farming, and help increase productivity and profitability. For example, as smallholder farmers can identify expiry dates of inputs and the chemical composition of fertilizer, they are able to make informed decisions

about what input to buy.

Learning to hold a pen in their hands and move it to form a number was very challenging at the beginning, but the trainees remained committed. Salifu Zalia, a smallholder farmer in the West Mamprusi District of the Northern Region, shared: "It was so hard at first. I was sweating as I tried to write the numbers, but now it feels so easy." After all the demanding work and dedication to learning a new skill, the farmers are proud and grateful to USAID ADVANCE for supporting and facilitating the training for them. Majority of them not only can read and write numbers from one to thousand, but also identify the various denominations of the Ghanaian currency, the Cedi.

Issa Colubu, a male beneficiary of the training in Loagri community in the Northern Region, said that during previous farming seasons, he did not

know the total costs of the seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and more, because he did not know how to read numbers and keep records. After attending USAID ADVANCE's numeracy training, he could record how much he spent and determine if he made a profit or loss at the end of the season.

Amina Yakobo, a female beneficiary who attended the numeracy training in the Northern Region, explained how useful her new numeracy skills was to her, especially in respect of knowing the expiration dates on bottles of agrochemicals. In 2016, she purchased pesticides at a local shop and after using them on her crops, all the crops died. She purchased expired pesticides, but was not aware of it until she took the numeracy training in the latter part of the year. In early 2017, she purchased non-expired pesticides, which helped her crops to grow with good yields at the end of the season.

Another beneficiary in Sombo community in the Upper West Region, Yaama, alluded that after receiving training on how to identify the different denominations of the Ghana cedi, she could determine that a GHC 50 note given to her by a vendor did not have the security features and raised the issue. Later, they verified that the currency was indeed a counterfeit.

Seeing the results of the numeracy training, USAID ADVANCE will continue to measure how numeracy training is supporting beneficiaries to increase agricultural productivity. The project will also train over 11,000 smallholder farmers in 2018.

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