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The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



OUTGROWER BUSINESS NETWORKS CAPACITY ASSESSMENT REPORT:

PATHWAY FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF FTF ADVANCE II OUTGROWER BUSINESS
MODEL

March 2020



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



FTF ADVANCE II PROJECT

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADVANCE	Agriculture Development and Value Chain Enhancement
DADFA	District Assemblies' Departments of Food and Agriculture
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FTF	Feed the Future
GFSS	Global Food Security Strategy
GCX	Ghana Commodity Exchange
KIIs	Key informant interviews
MOFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
NABCO	Nation Builders Corps
NBSSI	National Board for Small Scale Industries
NOBA	Northern Outgrower Business Association
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
OB	Outgrower business
OGs	Outgrowers
PFJ	Planting for Food and Jobs
RGD	Registrar General's Department
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats analysis
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USAID-funded Feed the Future Agricultural Development and Value Chain Enhancement (FTF ADVANCE II) project developed the Outgrower Business (OB) model toward the end of the first phase of the project in 2013. The thrust of the project's approach to implementation is supporting outgrower businesses (OBs) (mainly commercial farmers and aggregators) and linking them to formal markets (large buyers and processors). As part of the project's strategy to sustain its achievements beyond project's closure, the project facilitated the formation of OB networks and currently works with 10 zonal OB networks and three regional OB networks. These networks serve as business associations for the OBs and provide business linkages and advocacy for their members.

This evaluation seeks to assist FTF ADVANCE II to assess the capacity of OB networks for advocacy and activity implementation and access to markets and trade. The results of this evaluation will also provide FTF ADVANCE II and USAID with learning to plan exit strategies that will sustain such interventions and guide the design of future interventions.

A mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data was used for the evaluation. Quantitative data was collected from 100 OBs (92 men and eight women) across the 10 zones. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with network leaders and members. In addition, FGDs were held with outgrowers (OGs) of some selected OBs. The study covered all 10 OB network zones spread across the Northern, Upper East, Upper West, and North East regions in the northern part of Ghana. The nature and spread of the networks must be noted. Members of the networks included some non-Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) districts.

Key Findings

FTF ADVANCE II support to OB networks has contributed positively to the networks' operations. OB networks have formalized their operations, and this has enhanced their opportunity to access finance, enter contracts with buyers, and engage with key stakeholders and other value chain actors. Network leaders have developed the capacity to support OBs to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to OGs. The key findings are outlined as follows:

- **All OB networks are formalized, functional, and well set up.** The networks have a well-defined leadership structure, have elected executive members, hold regular monthly meetings (and call for emergency meetings when necessary), pay monthly dues, have offices, and are formally registered with the Registrar General's Department (RGD).
- **A higher proportion of OBs (94 percent) have registered their business. Of those who have done so, seven are women representing 7.4 percent and 92.6 percent are men (n=87).** Most of the OBs attributed this high rate of registration to business advisory support received from FTF ADVANCE II.
- **Network leaders have acquired the capacity to develop and implement medium-term plans; all OB networks have received training in strategic planning.** It was observed that most networks have developed plans that had an

average period of two years. Within the plan period, key activities listed for implementation included: to register networks with the RGD, prepare a constitution to guide the networks' operations, network with other OB networks, look for international markets for their produce, train OBs and OGs on financial and business management, and build partnerships for capacity building of networks.

- ***The networks have developed the capacity to initiate and implement advocacy actions on issues that affect them and their members.*** During the various interviews and FGDs, network leaders emphasized that they have received training in leadership and policy advocacy. This has enhanced their capacity to identify issues of interest to their business operations and implement advocacy actions.
- ***Network leaders reported that they have strengthened their capacity to support their members. The networks have also established strong relationships with key stakeholders and service providers.*** About 70 percent of the OBs interviewed confirmed they had received some support from their networks to ensure service delivery to smallholder farmers.
- ***Land preparation was the most important service provided by the OBs to the OGs. The OGs confirmed that tractor services were crucial, particularly for land preparation.*** OBs deliver these services mainly on credit and OGs pay either in kind or cash per agreed terms. Most of these agreements are written documents that are endorsed by the OBs and the beneficiary OGs.
- ***The networks have an established relationship with a wide range of value chain actors and stakeholders, ranging from agro-input dealers, distributors/wholesalers, buyers, financial institutions, mechanization service providers, government agencies, other OB networks, and NGOs.*** OB networks have developed the capacity to engage various stakeholders at the district, regional, and national levels.
- ***There is evidence that all network members are targeting women and youths in their service provision.*** At the network level, although there was no documented evidence of affirmative action on reaching women and youths, network leaders reported they were intentionally implementing actions that will motivate more women and youths to join the networks; some networks are using their female members to woo their peers.
- ***The network leaders were confident of their capacity to assemble, use, and share relevant data and information with their members.*** They indicated that their networks have been trained on data and information gathering, use, and sharing, as well as incorporating digitization in their business operations.
- ***All the network leaders and members expressed optimism that their networks will thrive and grow.*** Networks were confident that by holding regular monthly meetings, as they do now, they would be able to keep members together and ensure the networks' sustainability.

Conclusion

The results and key observations from the survey have shown that OB networks have formalized their operations. This has enhanced their opportunity to access finance, enter contracts with buyers, and engage with key stakeholders and other value chain actors. Network leaders have developed the capacity to identify issues of interest to their business operations and are conversant with how to leverage their networks, institutional ties, and relationships to address value chain constraints. The study also concludes that OBs and their network leaders have high levels of optimism that the networks will continue to provide support for OBs to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to their OGs when FTF ADVANCE II support ceases in April 2020. However, some capacity gaps (such as team management, problem solving, monitoring, and performance benchmarking) and operational challenges (such as mobility constraints, poor mobile network connectivity, and lack of cooperation from some members) were identified.

Recommendations

- **Transparency**

The networks must be encouraged to adopt best organizational management practices to promote transparency and accountability, vital attributes for their survival. The networks must, therefore, be supported to prepare and use Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The SOPs must contain basic rules and regulations, and ethics that members themselves believe will hold them accountable to each other. The SOPs should also include details on rights, responsibilities, and benefits of members, as well as sanctions for noncompliance. In this regard, the network secretariats must invest in record keeping and information sharing capacity building so that members can be frequently updated.

- **Deliberate efforts to attract young businessmen and women into the OB networks**

The purpose of this effort should be to increase membership and to mobilize funds to run the networks. This effort should include members engaging with youth associations and women's groups in their respective zones. The networks can also partner with local institutions, especially churches and mosques, to promote the networks especially among women and youths. The networks should also sustain their outreach programs targeted at women and youths. It is further recommended that the established OBs should adopt and mentor women and youths to enable them to transition to become full-fledged OBs.

- **Transportation**

One of the major challenges mentioned by the networks' secretariats was their inability to monitor members and their respective OGs. Options to deal with this challenge may include the networks investing in motorbikes for their monitoring teams. The networks could also partner with their respective District Assemblies' Departments of Food and Agriculture (DADFA) so that they can join their extension team on their rounds. It is also recommended that FTF ADVANCE II allocate some of its vehicles to DADFA to benefit the partnership mentioned above when the project ends.

- **Capacity building**

The capacity gaps identified were mainly in the areas of team management, problem solving, monitoring, and performance benchmarking. The networks need sustained training and capacity building in these areas, and others that may come up as they grow. In this respect, it is recommended that the networks appeal to local institutions, including NGOs and government departments and agencies, for support. The networks can leverage their links with local members of parliament and DADFA to support them to access training and capacity building offered by relevant local institutions.

- **Reward high-performing OBs**

The networks must design and implement annual award schemes for OBs that have performed extraordinary well. This will introduce healthy competition among the OBs and enhance the overall viability of the OBs and the networks.

- **Performance benchmarking**

The networks must be supported to design a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system that will help them establish key indicators they can use to track the performance (i.e., effectiveness and efficiency) of their network's members. The networks can partner with the relevant local NGOs that have M&E capacity and are working in the commodity value chains in which the networks are also participating. The benchmarking will, among other things, help the networks assess how effectively and efficiently they are delivering to their respective OGs and intervene to draw up improvement plans for underperforming OBs. Indeed, this assessment will support the process of rewarding high-performing OBs indicated above.

- **Explore avenues to create an effective and efficient reporting system for networks**

It is suggested that networks use the data that will be gathered from the performance benchmarking process recommended above to prepare and share regular monthly reports on the networks. The reports must be shared not only at the network level, but with other relevant partners, including companies that trade with the networks or supply them inputs. This will strategically enhance the visibility of the networks and bring in more business for them.

- **Continuous monitoring of OGs' satisfaction with service deliveries by OBs**

For OBs to sustain their business operations and improve their profitability, they need to intensify engagements with OGs. It is recommended that these engagements include monitoring and assessing OGs' satisfaction with services that are being delivered to them.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

The USAID-funded Feed the Future Ghana Agricultural Development and Value Chain Enhancement (FTF ADVANCE II) project aims to increase competitiveness of agricultural value chains (including maize and soya) in northern Ghana to foster economic growth and reduce poverty among smallholder farmers and the population at large, in line with USAID Ghana's Feed the Future (FtF) strategy. The project's approach is to increase productivity, promote private enterprise development and investment, and ensure that benefits are realized by the vulnerable, i.e., women and youths. FTF ADVANCE II developed the outgrower business (OB) model towards the end of the first phase of the project in 2013 and this has become the main strategy for increasing smallholder farmers' productivity. The thrust of the project's approach to implementation is supporting OBs (mainly large commercial farmers and aggregators) and linking them to formal markets (large buyers and processors). This has resulted in incremental sales of more than \$140 million of maize and soybean for more than 131,000 smallholder farmers since 2014.

A recent study conducted by the project showed critical findings on improvements in the operation and profitability of the OB model, including a willingness of all buyers to continue the business relationships established with the OBs and the effectiveness of the model in improving smallholder farmers' access to agribusiness services. The study, however, identified gaps in the model, including trust issues and the inability to completely fulfill some contracts with buyers, which may threaten the sustainability of some of the OBs' operations. Furthermore, the study also established that the average number of services provided by OBs per smallholder farmer was two services, about 40 percent of available services.

Indeed, it is the last point which has drawn project management attention to the fact that, taking into consideration at least the five key services which OBs provide; i.e. land preparation, input credit (seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides), extension and advisory services, post-harvest processing (threshing/shelling), and aggregation and marketing; each smallholder farmer does not receive enough of the quality services from his/her OB mainly due to transportation challenges and limited data collection capacities of the OBs. This has brought to the fore the need for the project to focus on supporting networks to promote expansion of the type of services OBs provide. As part of the project's strategy to sustain its achievements beyond project's closure (April 2020), the project facilitated the formation of OB networks and currently works with 10 zonal OB networks and three regional OB networks. These networks serve as business associations for the OBs and provide business linkages and advocacy for their members.

The core functions of the networks include, but are not limited to:

- Influence policy process and decision makers, and advocate for an enabling environment to promote members' business
- Reduce cost of agricultural inputs through bulk purchases and organize collective marketing to realize economies of scale
- Scout for markets, organize and participate in trade missions to explore business opportunities

- Work to lower the risk profiles of the network and individual businesses to attract investors
- Provide information, mentorship, and business linkages to members

To ensure sustainability, the project has supported OB networks in various ways, including introducing the networks and their members to the operations of the Ghana Commodity Exchange (GCX) and encouraging them to register. FTF ADVANCE II has also provided training in proposal development, affirmative action for the participation of women and youths, effective teamwork, leadership, and effective communication with the OB networks' business associates and stakeholders. It is in this respect that the current study was commissioned.

1.2 Purpose of the Assignment

The purpose of this assignment is to assist FTF ADVANCE II to evaluate the capacity of OB networks for advocacy and activity implementation and their access to markets and trade. The assignment will also provide FTF ADVANCE II and USAID learning to plan exit strategies that will sustain such interventions and guide the design of future interventions.

1.3 Objectives of the Assignment

The overall objective of the assignment is to evaluate how OB networks have strengthened capacity for advocacy and activity implementation and assess the capacity of OB networks to address identified value chain-specific enabling environment constraints. Specific tasks of the assignment are:

- Assess the capacity of OB networks to undertake long-term strategic planning and implementation.
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to plan and undertake advocacy activities.
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to support OBs to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to smallholder farmers.
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to deliver or procure services on behalf of its members.
- Assess relationship between OB networks and key value chain actors, especially buyers who sponsor/finance OG schemes.
- Assess the extent to which youths and women are reached depending on the gender of an OB (including capacity on affirmative action on women and youths).
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to assemble, use, and share data and information.
- Assess the capacity of OB network leaders to engage with other stakeholders, including new buyers.
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to make market information and intelligence available to their members.

The following hypotheses were tested:

- OB networks are well set up and adequately registered and operational.
- OB networks have developed the capacity to develop and implement strategic plans.
- OB networks have improved capacity to engage various stakeholders at the district, regional, and national levels.

- The leaders of OB networks have improved skills to engage and to successfully access various government programs in the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), the Ministry of Trade, and other agencies.
- Most OB networks and other actor groups are promoting performance benchmarking.
- Most OB networks have incorporated a benchmarking system into their network activities, assemble data, and use the results to mentor their members.
- Most OB networks have the capacity to support members to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to smallholder farmers.
- Most OB networks have developed strong linkages with MOFA to enable access to government subsidized production inputs.
- Most FTF ADVANCE II OB networks have formal contracts with buyers.
- Most OB networks have developed capacity to assemble, use, and share data and information (including capacity on digitization).
- Most OB network members are intentionally targeting women and youths in service provision depending on the gender of the OBs.

I.4 Organization of the Report

This report constitutes the draft final report and is organized into five sections. Section 1 has dealt with the introduction, which includes the background of the assignment. Section 2 presents study methodology and data collection techniques. The main findings are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 presents key observations. Section 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations.

2.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The approach and methods used to carry out planning and tool development, data collection, and data analysis are based on the study's objectives, and guided by the hypotheses (see Section 1.3). The data collection instruments were prepared based on the study's objectives and hypotheses. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for the assessment. The consultant (P&H) worked in close collaboration with the client's technical staff. The methods adopted comprised the following:

- Development of data gathering tools
- Sampling and sample size determination
- Enumerator selection and training
- Data gathering
- Data cleaning and analysis
- Ethical considerations

2.1 Development of Data Gathering Tools

The data gathering protocols comprised both quantitative and qualitative instruments. The quantitative instruments targeted the sampled OBs and was developed based on the general purpose, objectives, and hypothesis of the assignment. The qualitative instruments comprised interview guidelines developed for in-depth interviews, and this targeted leaders of OB networks and OBs. An FGD guide was prepared to solicit information from OGs of selected OBs. As part of the inception phase of the assignment, the draft data collection instruments were shared with the client for their input. The consultant reviewed the draft instruments based on the feedback from the client. The revised quantitative instrument was then uploaded to the KoBoToolbox platform and this was used for the enumerators' training. The questionnaire was finalized after the training, incorporating comments from the training to ensure appropriateness of the questionnaire's format, wording of questions, skip patterns, and that all points of interest had been well captured by the instrument.

2.2 Sampling and Sample Size Determination

The sampling frame for the quantitative survey included OBs in the 10 OB network zones spread across the Northern, Upper East, Upper West, and North East regions. The consultant worked closely with the client's M&E officers to arrive at a representative sample for the study. For the quantitative component of the data collection, a census survey was used in this assessment, and this included all OBs who participated in the project in 2019 (and are considered universal project participants). A total of 100 OBs spread across the Northern, Upper East, Upper West, and North East regions were surveyed and interviewed. Table 1 presents the distribution of OBs sampled across the zones.

Table 1. Distribution of sampled respondents by zones

Zone	Male	Female	Total
Yendi	10	1	11
Gushegu	13	0	13
Karaga	9	1	10
Bawku	5	2	7
Tumu	31	2	33
Jirapa	3	1	4
Wa	7	0	7
Yagaba	6	0	6
Nalerigu	8	1	9
Total	92	8	100

The qualitative component of the survey covered all 10 zonal OB networks and the three regional OB networks. Additionally, 10 OBs (five men and five women) were intentionally selected for in-depth interviews. Also, a total of six FGDs were organized with smallholder farmers. Three of these FGDs were with female farmers and three FGDs with youths (29 years old and below). The consultant adopted the maximum variation purposive sampling technique to select respondents within the zonal and regional networks for the qualitative interviews. The use of this approach ensured diversity of participants' views, opinions, and experiences. Wherever possible, we also ensured female and youth representation in the selection of the respondents for the qualitative interviews. A detailed list of persons who participated in the qualitative interviews is presented in Annex 2.

2.3 Enumerator Selection and Training

The client carefully identified and recruited seven enumerators who were familiar with the terrain and could speak and understand the local languages in the targeted districts to ensure effective communication during data gathering. The enumerators were also literate in English and could read and interpret the questions to illiterate respondents. A one-day training was organized at FTF ADVANCE II's regional office in Tamale. The training was aimed at giving the field enumerators the skills to collect quantitative data by administering structured questionnaires to selected OBs. Formal methods were used for the training. These included PowerPoint presentations that focused on the background of the study, the objectives, methodology, and the questionnaire, followed by question and answer sessions. Enumerators were also trained on ethics, survey techniques, and community entry. The training involved simulation of real field situations aimed at improving their understanding of the questionnaires and enhancing their capacity to administer the questionnaires. This was followed by selected field pretesting. As part of the fieldwork training, we placed emphasis on the quality assurance procedures and the general conduct of the enumerators during data collection.

2.4 Data Gathering

Data gathering was conducted from January 13-18, 2020. During the data collection, the enumerators were divided into groups in such a way that one group was assigned to an enumeration area at a time. Each team was accompanied by members of the consultant's team. The consultants were available to oversee compliance with the research methodologies, monitor data collection procedures, and solve any problems that may arise from the fieldwork.

The study adopted the paperless questionnaire administration approach. As such, the questionnaires were administered and entered electronically, using mobile devices (Android tablets) through Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI). Specifically, the study deployed KoBo collect software to collect data from the targeted OBs. The quantitative data were gathered by the trained enumerators using tablets. The enumerators administered the questionnaire by reading the questions from the tablet and entered the responses into the computer program. Qualitative data gathering was facilitated by the consultant through in-depth interviews and FGDs. The discussions were held with zonal and regional OB network leaders, OBs, and OGs, and the information gathered helped contextualize the quantitative data. Learning questions were answered as a group during the FGDs and key informant interviews (KKIs). In addition, some important observations and informal discussions were documented and have been used as anecdotes in the report. Wherever possible, the consultants ensured the participation of women and youths in all the interviews.

2.5 Data Cleaning and Analysis

The quantitative data was collected on tablets in real time and uploaded to a server hosted by the consultant. The quantitative data entered onto the KoBo collect platform was exported, processed, and cleaned in Microsoft Excel. The data was then exported to the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS Version 22.0) for analysis. Disaggregation of data was done to bring out gender, age (including youths, i.e., 29 years and below), regional, and district comparisons. The consultant also ensured that the disaggregation of data was done to reflect key variables as appropriate, and as required by the client. The consultant was guided by inputs from the client through a series of correspondence and verbal communications via phone calls as part of the initial data analysis. The main findings from the quantitative analysis were summarized using descriptive statistics, which include summary tables and charts. Where necessary, inferential statistics were employed to bring out the differences among various categories.

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to identify relevant constructs, concepts, and categories across transcripts. Qualitative data analysis was then done alongside, and synthesized with, quantitative survey data for robust and comprehensive analysis. Where appropriate, verbatim qualitative statements are provided to summarize responses. We also used informal discussions to probe issues and concerns and made relevant observations all of which provided additional anecdotal data for the interpretation of the quantitative data and recommendations for the design and implementation of future interventions.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The consultant ensured that the study was implemented in an ethical manner. Respect for privacy, confidentiality, and rights to anonymity were observed during this study. The researchers negotiated informed verbal consent with all participants before commencing individual interviews, FGDs, and KIs. Participants' right to withdraw at any time was emphasized and confidentiality was assured.

2.7 Study Limitations

The main limitations of the study included:

- Some respondents were difficult to reach because the prior notification sent by the client did not reach them; in these instances, the respondents were interviewed via telephone.
- There were some conflicting details of the OBs' network members with respect to their membership in specific zonal networks. In such cases, enumerators relied on the information provided by the respondents.

These limitations had no significant impact on data collection and data quality. The results were in no way affected.

3.0 MAIN FINDINGS

The findings in this report have been organized to respond to the 11 main evaluation questions (or hypothesis) that formed the basis of the assessment. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been presented and where possible key observations made in the field and personal communications with respondents have been used as anecdotal support.

3.1 Characteristics of OBs and OB Networks

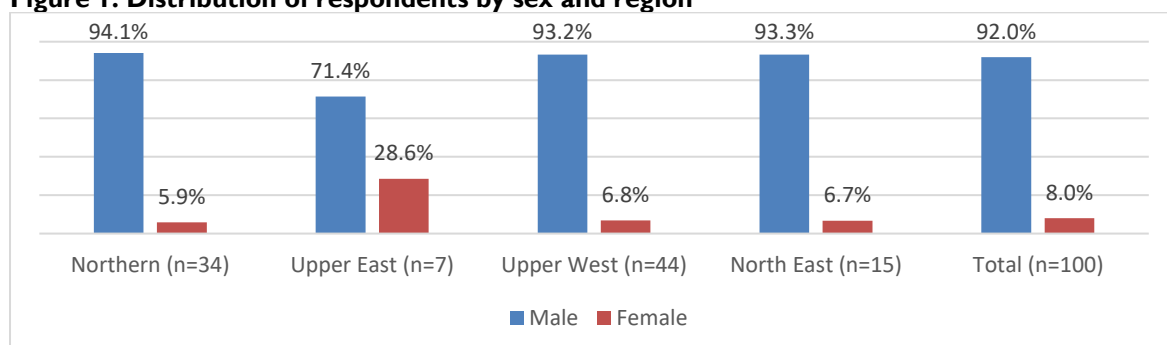
This section summarizes characteristics of individual OBs sampled in the quantitative survey. It also looks at the structure of the networks, including their set up and operation.

3.1.1 Distribution of Respondents by Sex and Region

Figure 1 shows the distribution of sampled respondents (OBs) across the four regions. A total of 100 OBs were interviewed, of which 92 percent were men and 8 percent were women. Most of the OBs interviewed (44 percent) were concentrated in the Upper West Region, 34 percent in the Northern Region, 15 percent in North East Region, and 7 percent in the Upper East Region. Female membership is limited across the zones. For example, the Biemoni OB Network in Karaga (in the Northern Region) has 20 members of which only three are women. The regional selection was influenced by two factors: active OBs, i.e., those who provided service to the OGs in the 2019 season, and OBs who operate in the Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) selected districts. Discussions during the qualitative data collection revealed that efforts by the network leaders have motivated some women to join the networks. However, it was emphasized that most of them joined recently, i.e., in 2019, while on average zonal networks were established in 2016.

Information from KILs with some female OBs and network leaders indicated that women did not initially understand the OB concept; most of them thought it was focused on offering tractor services, which they considered a “male activity.” Most women did not also meet the standard or the criteria set for joining an OB network [i.e., ability to provide the five main services to OGs, including tractor services for land preparation, input credit (seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides), extension and advisory, post-harvest processing (threshing/shelling), and marketing/aggregation]. Socio-cultural reasons, including married women associating with what is considered a male-dominated group and women projecting themselves in public discourses, were also cited as factors that inhibited the participation of women in these networks. The networks have, however, realized that female membership would make them gender sensitive particularly in responding to women’s needs, and enable them to derive feminine advantages, including female members speaking to other women to join the networks.

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by sex and region



3.1.2 Structure and Operations of OB Networks

The study covered 10 zonal networks and three regional networks across the Northern, Upper East, Upper West, and North East regions. The networks have a well-defined leadership structure and various committees/working groups at the zonal and regional levels. Typically, a network will have a chairman, vice chairman, secretary, vice secretary, organizing secretary, and a treasurer. Qualitative interviews revealed that all the networks (zonal and regional) have permanent offices for their operations and are registered with the RGD. The Jirapa Outgrower Business Network and the Upper East Regional network, however, were yet to receive their certificates at the time of the interview. However, they had submitted all requirements for registration and were expecting their registration certificates.

It must also be noted that the registration of a network had a lot to do with its performance and functioning. For example, getting financial support from a bank required the provision of a certificate of registration from the RGD. It was also learnt that most trading partners required a certificate of registration before a trade agreement could be signed.



Office of the Sissala Area OB Network in Tumu

The various interviews with the networks and observations made it clear that most networks are functional. As observed above, the networks have elected executive members, hold regular monthly meetings (and call for emergency meetings when necessary), pay monthly dues, have offices, and are formally registered with the RGD. The members were also found to have developed strong relationships among themselves and work together as a team. For example, contracts for trading are co-shared and members support themselves in providing services to their respective OGs. In this regard, it may be concluded that the networks are in the performing stage (see Annex 3 for Bruce Tuckman's Five-Stage Model of Group Development¹). However, some capacity gaps were identified among the networks. These are discussed in the subsequent sections.

How It All Began: Story of the Sissala Area OBs Network

"It all began when we started as nucleus farmers and aggregators, then gradually names began to evolve. We had engagements with FTF ADVANCE II and came to know that agriculture was a business but not just a hand-to-mouth activity. So as nucleus farmers and aggregators we were more like businesses in agriculture. We were trained by FTF ADVANCE II to look at the way forward even if they are not around. So we came together as a network, and we cannot operate as a group without any legal backing so we got a certificate, we have a bank account, and have established relationships with other key stakeholders. Even if they [FTF ADVANCE II] are not around, this network should be able to do what they were doing with us and even do it better."

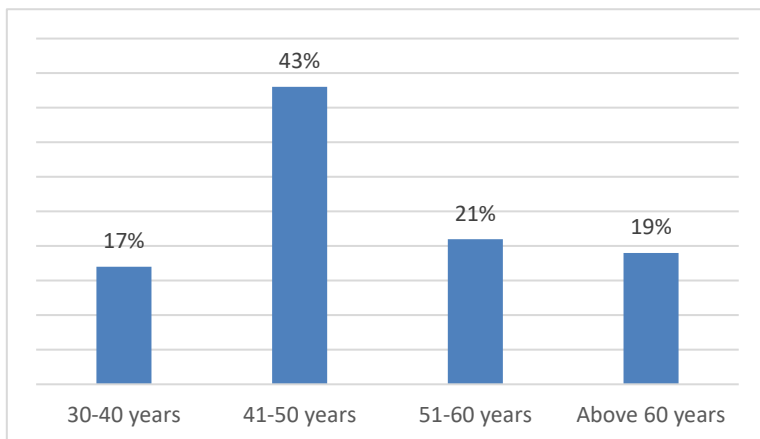
¹ Tuckman, B.W. "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups." *Psychological Bulletin* (1965).

3.1.3 Characteristics of OBs

Age of respondents

Figure 2 presents age characteristics of OBs sampled for the quantitative survey. The results show that the highest proportion of OBs (43 percent) were in the range of 41 to 50 years. The average age of all sampled respondents was estimated at about 49.7 years (an average of 49.5 years for men and 52.5 years for women). About 79 of the OBs are within the range of 30-59 years, while the remaining 21 are 60 years and above. The fact that the majority of the network members (OBs) are in the economically active population gives a positive indication of sustaining the established linkages and relationships established by the networks. The youngest survey respondent was 30 years old. There are virtually no “youths” in the age cohorts as the project defines youths persons aged 29 years and below.

Figure 2. Age distribution of respondents



The average age of all sampled respondents was estimated at about 49.7 years (an average of 49.5 years for men and 52.5 years for women). About 79 of the OBs are within the range of 30-59 years, while the remaining 21 are 60 years and above. The fact that the majority of the network members (OBs) are in the economically active population gives a positive indication of sustaining the established linkages and relationships established by the networks. The youngest survey respondent was 30 years old. There are virtually no “youths” in the age cohorts as the project defines youths persons aged 29 years and below.

Table 2 presents the educational attainment of OBs by their age categories. The results show that educational attainment is highest among the younger OBs. Just about 5.9 percent of OBs in the 30-40-year age cohort did not have any form of education, while the remaining 94.1 percent had attained a basic education (MSLC/JSS) or higher.

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Table 2. Educational attainment by age categories

Educational level	30-40 years (n=17)	41-50 years (n=43)	51-60 years (n=21)	60+ years (n=19)	Total (n=100)
None	5.9	25.6	23.8	36.7	24.0
Arabic education	0.0	9.3	4.8	5.3	6.0
Non-formal education	0.0	2.3	9.5	5.3	4.0
MSLC	29.4	23.3	4.8	0.0	16.0
Vocational/training	5.9	2.3	0.0	0.0	2.0
GCE O Level	5.9	2.3	14.2	26.3	10.0
SSCE/WASSCE	11.7	18.6	9.5	0.0	12.0
Tech/professional certificate	0.0	2.3	0.0	5.3	2.0
Tech/professional diploma	5.9	0.0	4.8	0.0	2.0
HND	11.8	4.7	9.5	0.0	6.0
Bachelor's	17.6	9.3	14.3	15.8	13.0
Master's	5.9	0.0	4.8	5.3	3.0

Educational Attainment of Respondents

Nearly one-fourth of all respondents (24 percent) had no formal education. About 66 percent of all OBs had attained some form of formal education. Of this, five are women representing 7.4 percent, and men represent 92.4 percent (n=61). All female OBs with

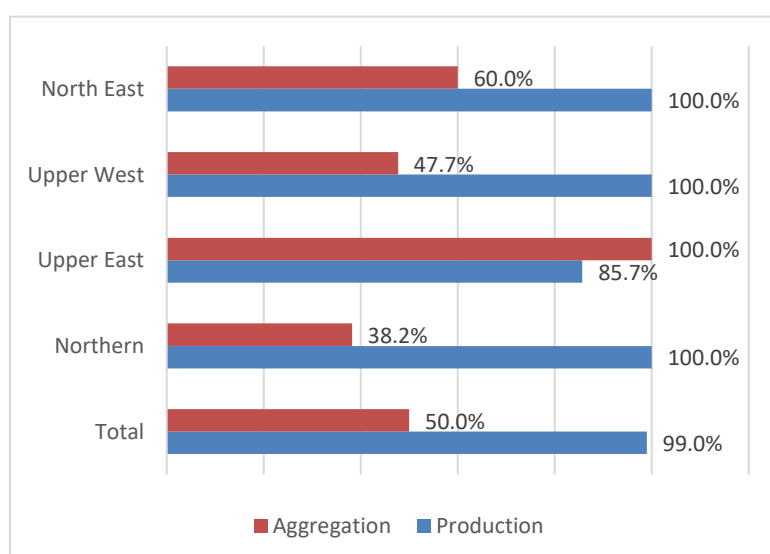
some form of formal education had attained secondary education or higher (see Table 3). In the Northern Region, 47.1 percent of the OBs interviewed had no formal education, compared to 28.6 percent in Upper East, 20 percent in North East, and 6.8 percent in Upper West. Also, 26 out of the 100 OBs interviewed had attained some form of post-secondary education, including those with bachelor's and master's degrees. The good representation of members with tertiary education was a positive finding. Table 3 summarizes the educational attainment of the surveyed OBs.

Table 3. Educational levels of respondents

Education level	Northern (n=34)	Upper East (n=7)	Upper West (n=44)	North East (n=15)	Male (n=98)	Female (n=8)	Total (n=100)
None	47.1	28.6	6.8	20.0	22.8	37.5	24.0
Arabic education	0.0	0.0	4.5	26.7	6.5	0.0	6.0
Non-formal education	0.0	0.0	6.8	6.7	4.3	0.0	4.0
MSLC	14.7	14.3	18.2	13.3	17.4	0.0	16.0
Vocational/commercial	0.0	0.0	4.5	0.0	1.1	12.5	2.0
GCE O Level	0.0	28.6	18.2	0.0	9.8	12.5	10.0
SSCE/WASSCE	11.8	0.0	13.6	13.3	12.0	12.5	12.0
Tech/professional certificate	0.0	0.0	4.5	0.0	2.2	0.0	2.0
Tech/professional diploma	0.0	14.3	2.3	0.0	2.2	0.0	2.0
HND	2.9	14.3	6.8	6.7	6.5	0.0	6.0
Bachelor's	20.6	0.0	11.4	6.7	13.0	12.5	13.0
Master's	2.9	0.0	2.3	6.7	2.2	12.5	3.0

Type of Business Operations

Figure 3. OBs' business operations



Across all regions, OBs are primarily engaged in production activities, i.e., providing support services to OGs in the maize and soya value chains (see Figure 3). The results show that 99 percent of the OBs interviewed are into production activities. These OBs support their OGs with land preparation services, which include ploughing, harrowing, and levelling the fields, among others. They may also provide OGs with seeds, fertilizers, and

chemicals based on their agreement with OGs. Also, 50 percent of the OBs are into aggregation, which includes mobilizing produce from the OGs they service who in turn pay

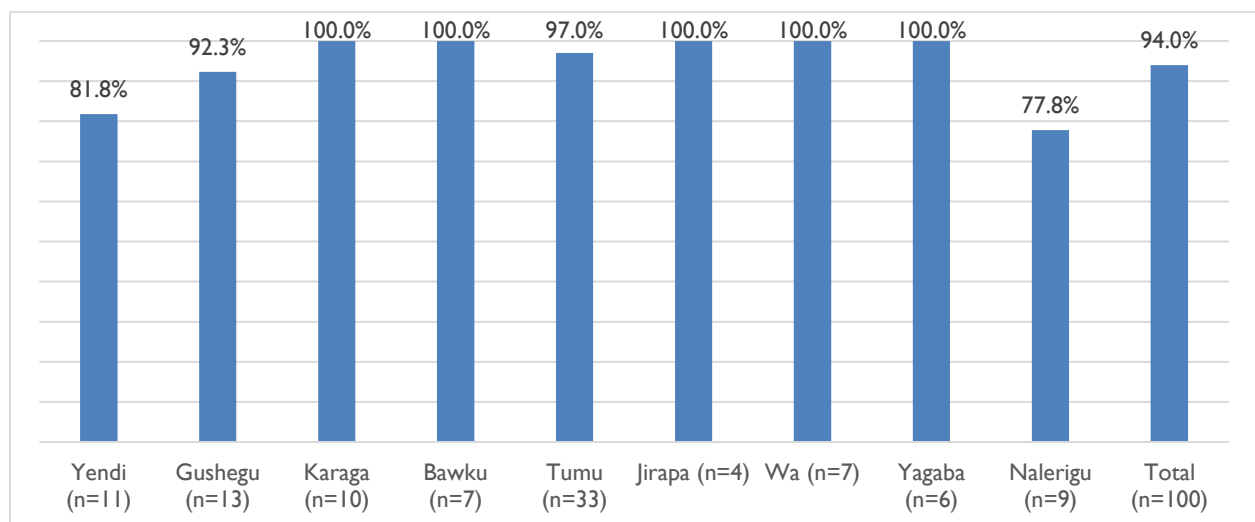
in kind, as well as buying from OGs beyond the in-kind arrangement. The proportion of female OBs in aggregation (75 percent, n=6) is comparatively higher than males (47.8 percent, n=44). This trend reflects traditional gender roles in major agricultural commodities where women tend to be involved in aggregation while men are more formally visible in production.

3.1.4 OBs' Registration Status

Figure 4 presents OBs' registration status across the zones. The majority (94 percent) of OBs interviewed reported they have formally registered their businesses with the RGD as of the time of the interview. A higher proportion of both male (94.6 percent, n=87) and female (87.5 percent, n=8) OBs have their businesses registered. The results further show that out of the 94 respondents who had registered their businesses, 58 (61.7 percent) were registered in 2014 or later. Most of the OBs interviewed attributed this to FTF ADVANCE II support in business advisory within the period. It is also significant to note that about 22 (23.4 percent) of the 94 registered OBs were registered between 2016 and 2019. Interviews with the various network leaders revealed that for an OB to receive support from financial institutions and access formal markets, business registration is a requirement. It was also mentioned that a business registration certificate was a key requirement for network membership. For instance, the secretary of the Upper West regional OB network emphasized in an interview that:

“I can say that all our members in the region have registered their businesses. As we speak, there are some people who are interested in joining our network and we have asked them to hold on because their businesses are not registered. We have asked them to go and get a business registration certificate. Because if you are member and you don't have any document or if your business is not registered we can't take any buyer or an investor's inputs and give to you. So we have asked them to go and do those things first before we allow them to join.”

Figure 4. OBs' registration status by zone



3.2 Capacity to Undertake Long-Term Strategic Planning and Implementation

This section discusses the capacity of OB networks and individual OBs to undertake long-term strategic planning and implementation, including their members' knowledge and skills in long-term planning. All OB networks have developed strategic plans to guide their operations. From discussions with executives of OB networks, it became clear that the training received on long-term strategic planning from FTF ADVANCE II has given them the capacity to prepare and implement these plans. Some networks showed their plans to the evaluation team (see Annex 4.). Upon cursory review of these plans, it was observed that the average plan period was two years. And, within the plan period key activities listed for implementation included:

- Network with other OB networks
- Look for international market for their produce
- Train OBs and OGs on financial and business management
- Register the networks with the RGD
- Prepare a constitution to guide operations of the networks
- Build partnerships for capacity building of networks

Most of the activities that were highlighted have either been implemented (e.g., registration of networks with the RGD, network with other OB networks) or are being implemented (e.g., look for international markets for their produce). Below is a SWOT analysis matrix of the capacity of the OB networks to plan and implement long-term strategic plans. An important point of emphasis in the matrix in the “strengths” column is the talent, skill, and experience of some individual members. We observed that the high educational levels (including tertiary level) and exposure in agribusiness attained by some individual OBs were being used positively to lead the networks in the preparation and implementation of the long-term strategic plans. These attributes are likely to enhance the appreciation of the other networks' members of the importance of planning strategically and actively participating in planning and effectively implementing the plans.

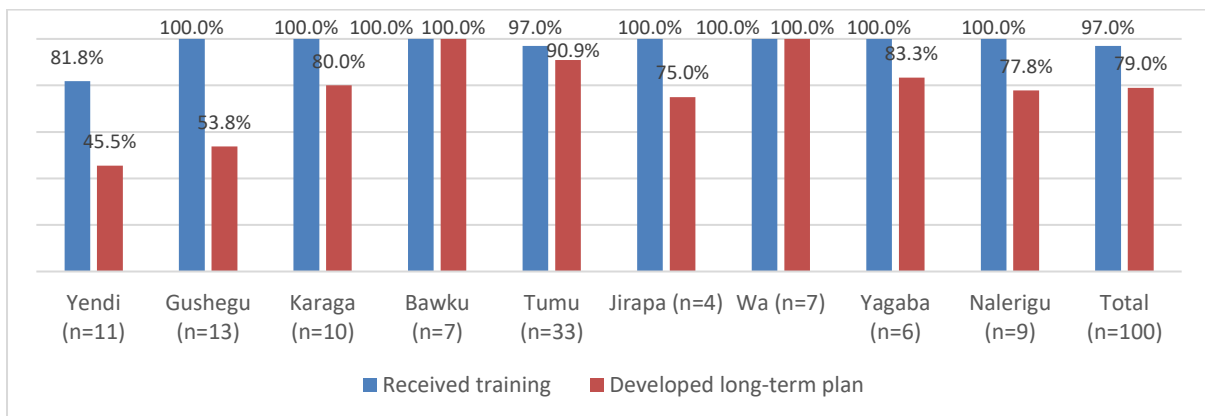
Table 4. Analysis of networks' capacity to plan and implement plan

SWOT analysis of networks' capacity to plan and implement plan			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-established and functional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed or nonpayment of monthly dues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of business advisory service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of business advisory services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material resources, including computers and office spaces, that can be used in facilitating the planning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low attendance at meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognized by appropriate authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large increase in agricultural input prices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received training in long-term planning and implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership skills and capacity gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong relationship with government agencies and other stakeholders 	

• Talents, skills, and experience of individual members	• Individual interests		
• Capacity to engage other stakeholders			

Figure 5 shows the proportion of OBs who have received training in long-term strategic planning as well as those that have developed a long-term plan. The results show that out of 100 OBs who were interviewed 97 percent (97.8 percent of men and 87.5 percent of women) reported they have received training in long-term strategic planning. Of this, 89.7 percent were confident or very confident of their capacity to undertake long-term planning and implementation. FTF ADVANCE II (100 percent), OB networks (45.4 percent), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (11.3 percent) were the most frequently mentioned providers of training in long-term strategic planning. Indeed, about 86 percent of all OBs interviewed confirmed that they have received some kind of support from their network to undertake long-term strategic planning and implementation. Support from networks was mainly training/capacity building, monitoring of strategic plan development and implementation, mentoring, and advisory.

Figure 5. Training and development of long-term strategic plan



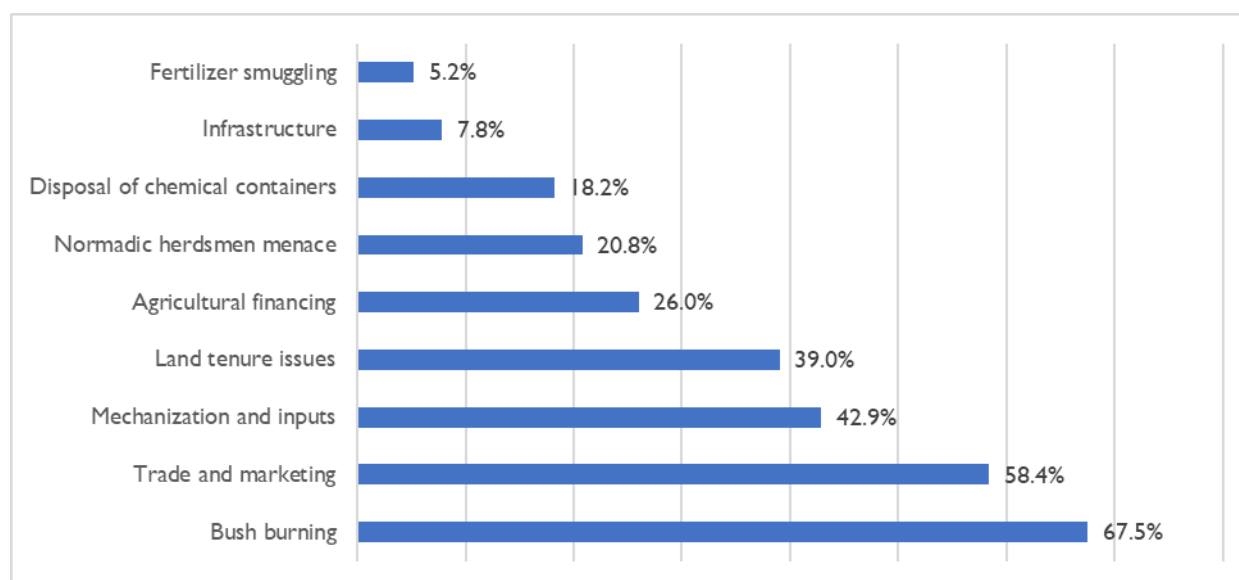
The majority (79 percent) of the OBs interviewed reported they had developed a long-term strategic plan as of the time of the interview. Half (50 percent) of the female OBs reported they had developed a long-term strategic plan compared to 81.5 percent of men. OBs with business registration (81 percent) were more likely to have developed a long-term strategic plan compared to those who are not registered (50 percent). About 86 percent of respondents who have attained some level of formal education (n=76) reported they have developed a long-term strategic plan for their business compared to 58 percent of those with no formal education (n=24). Similarly, it is more likely that OBs with an executive position in the networks (88.4 percent) have developed a long-term strategic plan than those who are members (71.9 percent). About 27 percent (n=21) of OBs who have developed a long-term strategic plan reported they developed this themselves, 68.4 percent (n=54) developed the plan with their team, and 5.1 percent (n=4) indicated this was developed by someone else. About 37 percent of OBs who developed the strategic plan with their team or through someone else indicated they paid for this service.

3.3 Capacity to Plan and Undertake Advocacy Activities

This section provides information related to OBs and the networks' capacity to plan and undertake advocacy activities. It discusses the networks' capacity to plan and implement group-based advocacy as well as members' knowledge and ability to initiate advocacy actions on issues that affect their business operations. Information from the qualitative interviews revealed that network leaders have received training in leadership and policy advocacy.

During the various interviews and FGDs, network leaders emphasized their confidence in their ability to initiate and implement advocacy actions. Indeed, network leaders across the regions outlined a number of advocacy actions that their networks had initiated and implemented in the past year. Quantitative data from the surveyed OBs showed that 78 percent (seven women representing 9 percent; 71 men representing 91 percent) of the total respondents indicated their networks had planned and undertaken activities related to advocacy, averaging about two advocacy actions in the past year. On a zonal basis, the Wa, Tumu, Jirapa, and Yendi zonal OB networks recorded the highest average number of advocacy actions (three) and the Gushegu zonal OB network the lowest (one). Of the OBs who reported their networks implemented an advocacy action (n=78), the majority (89.7 percent, n=70) confirmed that they actively participated in the planning and/or implementation of these advocacy actions undertaken by their networks.

Figure 6. Focus of advocacy actions



Across the zones, bush burning, trade and marketing, mechanization and inputs, land tenure issues, and agricultural financing were the top five advocacy actions mentioned by respondents (see Figure 6). A major theme that ran through all the interviews and focus groups was network leaders' awareness of major government institutions such as MOFA and National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI), and private organizations that have an influence on their business operations. In one of such interview, a network leader stated that:

“ADVANCE has trained us in advocacy and most importantly made us aware of all the institutions that have something to do with our business. They also took us through the channel we should go through to approach such issues.”

In another KII, a network leader noted that:

“We know how and who to bring in when we are faced with any issue. For instance, if we are having any issue to do with capacity building, we know that NBSSI is the place for us to go and all we need is to just write and tell them where we are falling short.”

With respect to the individual OBs, results from the quantitative analysis showed that almost all respondents interviewed (99 percent) have received training in policy advocacy; 98.9 percent (n=91) of male and 100 percent (n=8) of female OBs. The majority (92.9 percent, n=92) of respondents who have participated in such training reported they are confident or very confident of their capacity to initiate and undertake advocacy actions, while the remaining 7.1 percent (n=7) were somewhat confident or not confident. There was no significant variation between the proportion of male (91.3 percent) and female (87.5 percent) OBs who expressed confidence in their ability to initiate and undertake advocacy actions. During the qualitative interviews, OBs explained that they have developed the capacity to identify issues of interest to their business operations and are conversant with how to approach such issues as a group. The most frequently mentioned sources that OBs cited as providers of advocacy training were FTF ADVANCE II (94.9 percent), OB networks (51.5 percent), and NGOs (14.1 percent) such as ActionAid and GIZ. According to the OBs, the main benefits of these advocacy actions have been improved access to markets, enabling business environment, improved access to productive services, and improved access to financing. For instance, OBs in the Upper East Region mentioned that as a result of an advocacy action relating to the non-availability of a ready market for rice, they were able to engage key government officials and stakeholders which ensured that Avnash Industries Ltd. purchased the produce of OBs and farmers in the region. Across the regions, others spoke about the impact of advocacy actions on their access to finance, inputs, and mechanization.

Another important finding was the OBs' confidence in speaking in public. The following results were obtained when OBs were asked *“Do you feel comfortable speaking up in public for your own business interests?”* The majority (94 percent) of the OBs reported they were fairly comfortable or very comfortable (score of four to five on scale of one to five) speaking in public for their business interests. Many OBs noted that they took part in various training programs and business engagements, which might have contributed to this high level of confidence in public speaking. There are comparatively more male OBs (94.6 percent) than female OBs (87.5 percent) who said they were fairly comfortable or very comfortable (score of four to five on scale of one to five) speaking in public regarding their own business interests. With respect to women speaking in public, one evidence that came up was the executive positions some women have taken in the networks. In these positions, they are enjoined to speak during meetings and outreach programs. During the qualitative interviews, some female OBs emphasized that they have improved their ability to speak out and negotiate on their own behalf and are more confident about speaking up during their network meetings, and engaging other stakeholders on issues that affect their business operations.

3.4 Capacity of Networks to Support OBs' Service Delivery to Smallholder Farmers

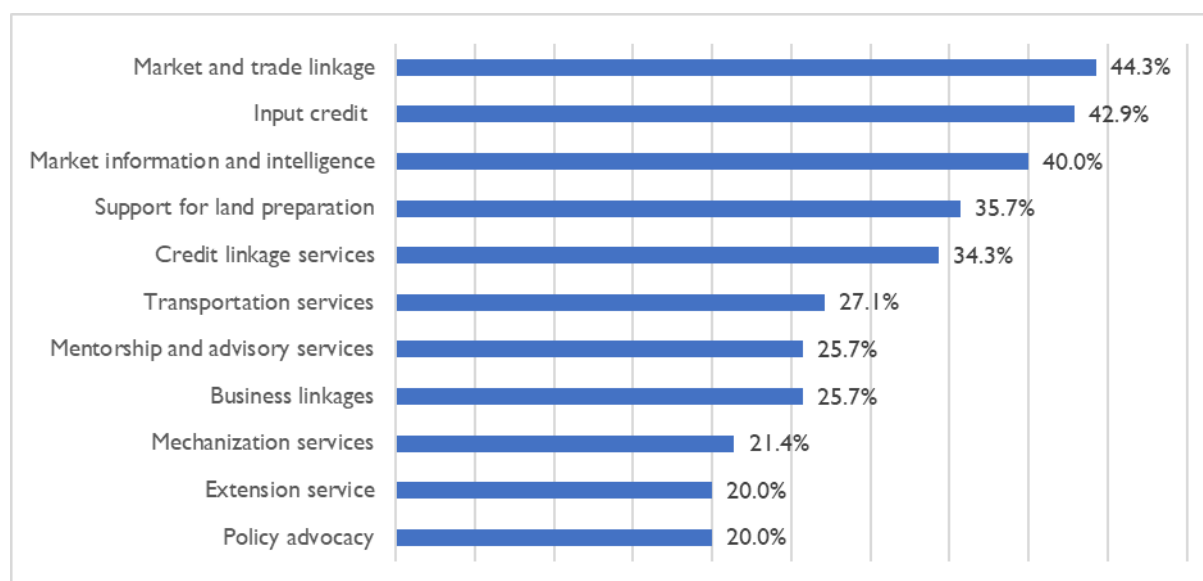
This section provides information on OB networks' capacity to provide support for members to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to their outgrowers. It

highlights the nature of support provided by networks, satisfaction with the quality of the services provided, as well as unmet demands for services.

Network leaders reported that they have developed the capacity to provide support for their members. And indeed, to ensure support delivery to OBs, the networks have established strong relationships with key stakeholders and service providers, as will be discussed (see Section 3.5). These support services are meant to equip OBs to deal with operational challenges, to provide ease of access to key production services, and ensure service delivery to outgrowers. It was found that the networks are able to leverage their goodwill and linkages to access productive services and inputs for their members. About 70 percent of the OBs interviewed confirmed they had received some sort of support from their networks to ensure service delivery to smallholder farmers. Proportionately, more women (87.5 percent of women) received support services than men (68.5 percent of men). Some network leaders attributed the difference in favor of women to a comparatively better conformity to agreements that are made in services delivery by women than men, i.e., women meet the terms of their contracts more consistently.

Figure 7 summarizes the types of support OBs received from their networks in the just ended season. Market and trade linkage (44.3 percent), input credit (42.9 percent), market information and intelligence (40 percent), support for land preparation (35.7 percent), and credit linkage (34.3 percent) were the five topmost support cited by OBs.

Figure 7. Types of support received from networks



A recurrent theme that emerged from the qualitative interviews with network leaders was the ability of the networks to sell and procure goods/services on behalf of their members. For instance, most of the networks reported selling produce on behalf of their members as well as providing trade and market linkages. Others also mentioned buying inputs in bulk in the name of their networks. In this regard, the Upper West regional network has reached an agreement with two agrochemical companies (RMG Ghana Limited and Adama West Africa Limited) to procure inputs for their members at a discounted price. The Yendi Outgrower Business Network also confirmed that it has facilitated bulk purchase of input from the RMG and Yara dealerships for its members. There is also a marketing arrangement for the members to supply maize, paddy rice, and soya to RMG Ghana Limited.

Similar arrangements were reported across the regions. Indeed, 44 percent of all OBs reported their networks procured or delivered some goods/services on their behalf. Some OBs also indicated that the network has become a point of contact for all members through which they are able to interact with and have access to service providers. In emphasizing this point, Yahaya Seidu an OB in Buoti in the Sissala zone noted:



Yahaya Seidu standing by his JD tractors at Bouti in Sissala Zone

“I was able to buy this John Deere tractor through the network. John Deere [the company] wouldn’t have come looking for me as an individual, but because we are a group, they came through the network. We were introduced to them by the network and because I am already using one I obtained from ADVANCE in a cost share grant, I know how powerful it is and I went in for it. That’s how I got to buy the tractor.”

In the Northern Region, it was mentioned that zonal networks facilitate members’ access to loans. For example, the Northern Outgrower Business Association (NOBA) has a standing agreement with Sinapi Aba Trust which gives loans to members at the beginning of the growing season and at the time of harvest. NOBA also supports its members with shelling services, tarpaulin for drying, and demonstration farms to enable members to learn best agronomic practices.

It is also important to note that the networks have internal arrangements that respond to the need for support among OBs. This ranges from mentoring and knowledge and information sharing to mechanization support. For example, it was common for OBs to receive equipment sharing support, such as ploughing, from their colleagues during land preparation, particularly in situations where there is a tractor breakdown or a high number

of OGs to be serviced. OBs who reported receiving support services from their networks (n=70) indicated there has been a medium (24.3 percent) to high (75.7 percent) impact of this support on their business operations. Generally, the majority of OBs (86 percent) said they were satisfied or completely satisfied (rating of four or five on scale of one to five) with the support services provided by their networks, compared to 14 percent who were somewhat unsatisfied or completely unsatisfied. However, all OBs (100 percent) said they found networks worth belonging to. In addition to benefiting from the above services, it was explained that the networks have created a platform for knowledge and information sharing, capacity building, business linkages and opportunities, security for members, increasing service delivery to OGs, and enhancing profits. Most OBs said they have been able to increase their recoveries from smallholder farmers due to their knowledge of community dynamics provided by their networks and colleagues.

This notwithstanding, 20 percent of OBs (20.7 percent of men and 12.5 percent of women) expressed an unmet demand from their networks for support services. Table 5 shows the number of OBs who expressed an unmet demand across the zones and the type of service they required. This question was put to respondents: “Were there any support services you needed that your network was unable to provide?” The results show that unmet demand was concentrated on the acquisition of mechanization equipment such as tractors for ploughing, shellers, and combine harvesters. Of the 20 OBs who expressed an unmet need, more than half (65 percent, n=13) indicated the need for mechanization equipment, and the majority are in the Tumu zone.

Table 5. Number of OBs expressing an unmet demand

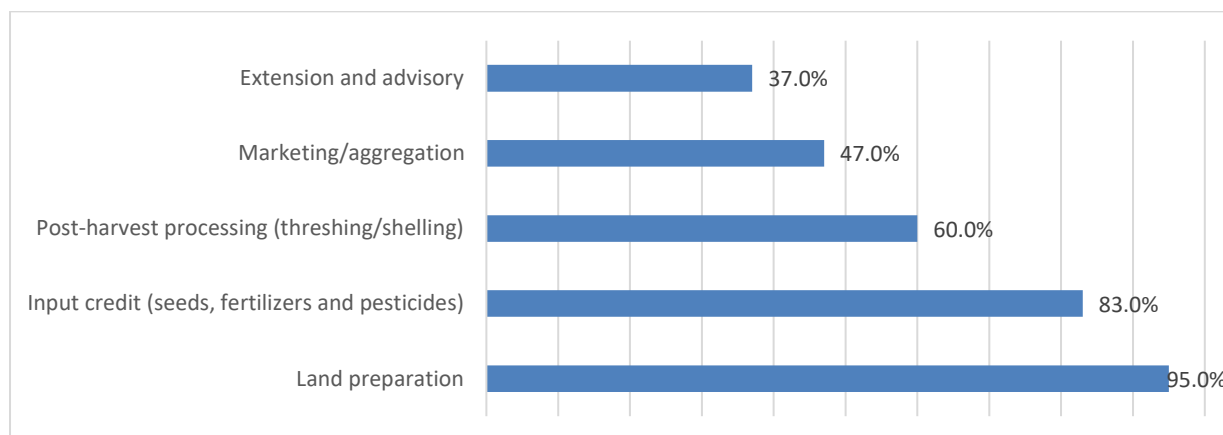
Zone	Financial facilitation	Tractor	Combine harvester	Input service	Sheller	Transportation
Yendi	0	0	0	0	1	0
Karaga	0	0	2	0	0	0
Bawku	0	0	0	1	0	0
Tumu	0	6	0	1	1	0
Jirapa	2	0	0	0	0	0
Wa	0	1	1	2	0	0
Yagaba	0	0	1	0	0	0
Nalerigu	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	2	7	4	4	2	1

3.4.1 Service Delivery to OGs

The OBs offer five main services to the OGs. These include tractor services for land preparation, input credit (seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides), extension and advisory, post-harvest processing (threshing/shelling), and marketing/aggregation. Discussions with the zonal OB networks suggested that the individual OBs deliver these services mainly on credit and OGs pay either in kind or cash per agreed terms. Most (55 percent) of these agreements are written documents that are endorsed by the OBs and the beneficiary OGs. However, a few were informal agreements based on mutual trust developed over several years of a working relationship between an OB and the recipient OGs. Figure 8 summarizes the services that OGs receive from OBs. Land preparation was the most important service provided by the OBs to the OGs. The OGs confirmed that tractor services were very crucial, particularly for land preparation. For example, in Zarantinga in the North East Region, some OGs expressed in an FGD the need for OBs to provide more and timely

tractor services to plough their lands at the beginning of the farming season, particularly when the rains set in.

Figure 8. Services provided by OBs to OGs



It was generally found that most OBs and the OGs were in very good working relationships. The OGs indicated that they were very happy and satisfied with the quality of inputs that are supplied by the OBs. It was also mentioned that OGs are able to engage OBs on issues regarding their service delivery. For instance, in an FGD at Buoti in the Upper West Region, a female OG said:

“We have a strong relationship with the OB and we are very happy working with him. He respects us and we also honor all our obligations to him as agreed. The fertilizer and seed that are supplied to us by our OB are of very high quality and we are unable to get [the] same quality anywhere to buy. The difference between his seeds and the seeds we have here is very clear even when they start germinating.”

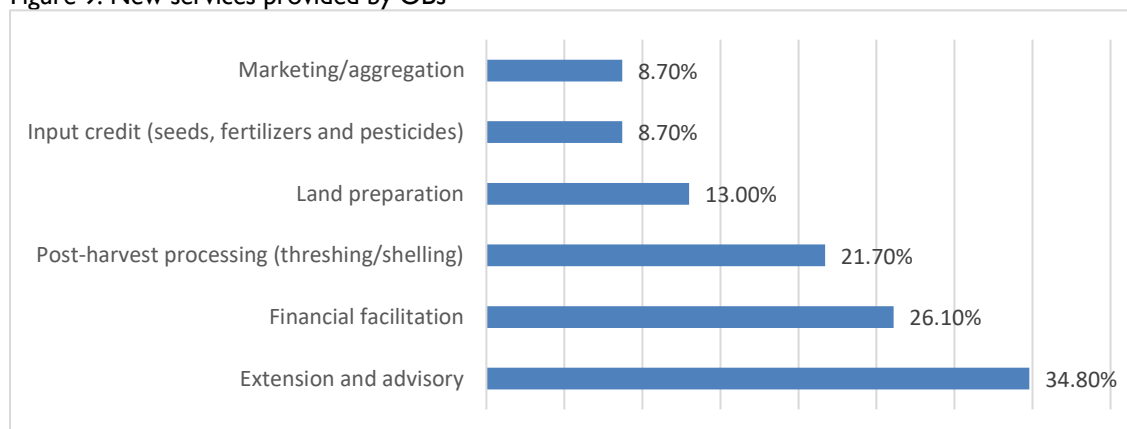
Some OGs also expressed their desire for improvement in some services and provision of additional services by OBs. Particularly, some OGs noted that inadequate machinery and access to tractor services or timely tractor service were a major challenge to their operations. They maintained that there is a high “farmer to tractor ratio,” which makes access to this service difficult during the peak of the farming season.

An OB in Tamale supported the view above which is captured in the text box below.

“I am Yusifu Alhassan, the vice organizer of the regional OB network in the Northern Region. I work with about 436 OGs, 90 percent of whom are women. Over the past four years or so that I have worked closely with my OGs, I have not had any serious case to regret about. I provide them with inputs such as seeds, agrochemicals, fertilizers, and tractor services. The training I received from ADVANCE has helped me to relate very well with OGs. I have come to understand how to work with them so that they improve themselves while I also expand my business. I have found that when you supply them with inputs and you monitor their activities very well the OGs are able to meet their obligations. Of course, a few of them sometimes disappoint me. For example, they pay me back with maize bags which are not up to the 50 kg weight. But these are few men. The women are more reliable and pay back services provided [to] them on time. And over the period, I have found that if I loan a woman I get my returns; the women are more profitable than men.”

Of the 100 OBs interviewed, 31 indicated that in the just ended farming season they added a new service that they did not previously provide for smallholder farmers. As shown in Figure 9, extension and advisory services (34.8 percent), financial facilitation (26.1 percent), and post-harvest processing (21.7 percent) were the most mentioned among new services that were provided by OBs. The OBs mentioned improved relationships with other actors and colleague OBs, and better linkages to traders facilitated by their networks as some of the reasons for the change. For instance, it was mentioned that the demonstration farms established by the networks and some OBs facilitated farmers' training and learning.

Figure 9. New services provided by OBs



3.5 Relationship between OB Network and Key Value Chain Actors and Stakeholders

This section presents information on the relationship between OB networks and key value chain actors, including new buyers. It also assesses the capacity of networks to engage various stakeholders at the district, regional, and national levels and how network leaders are able to engage and successfully access various government programs in MOFA and other agencies.

3.5.1 Capacity to Engage Various Stakeholders at the District, Regional, and National Levels

It was observed that the networks have established relationships with a wide range of value chain actors and stakeholders, including agro-input dealers, distributors/wholesalers, buyers, financial institutions, mechanization service providers, government agencies, other OB networks, and NGOs. During the qualitative interviews, network leaders reported that they have improved their skills in initiating and maintaining relationships with key actors and other stakeholders of interest to their business operations. Engagements reported by OBs were mainly at the regional and district levels, although some networks reported some engagements with stakeholders at the national level. For example, the Upper West regional network reported an engagement with a representative of the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) monitoring team through the regional MOFA directorate. This engagement, the network reported, resulted in a deal that will ensure the network's members will have a quota of the PFJ subsidized inputs for their OGs for the coming 2020 farming season. In the same region, leaders of the Sissala Area Network revealed in an FGD that they had submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Agriculture through the municipal chief executive requesting tractors to support a mechanization center they

intend to establish to increase service delivery to smallholder farmers. Network leaders across the regions also recounted engagements with parliamentarians and regional ministers as well as NGOs all in the name of securing support for the operations of the networks and their members. The networks explained that the confidence to engage with stakeholders stems, to a large extent, from the training they have received from FTF ADVANCE II. The members said that while until recently they had been aware of several institutions and companies, they lacked the courage and confidence to engage them. The networks' leadership has now been emboldened by FTF ADVANCE II to take initiatives that are benefiting members, including engagement with relevant stakeholders.

At the district level, there is an improved relationship between OB networks and the various district assembly agencies, particularly MOFA. This relationship has enhanced the participation of OB networks in the programs of the Department of Food and Agriculture in the districts in the operational areas of zonal networks and improved information flow from the directorates to OB networks and their members. For instance, the Upper West regional network reported its involvement in last year's Farmers' Day Awards, with a representative on the awards committee. In the Yendi municipality, the OB network, in collaboration with the MOFA directorate, is working with the municipal authority on getting more youths and women into agriculture. In similar arrangements, some old MOFA offices have been rehabilitated for use by OB networks. For example, in Karaga, an office with two rooms (for the chairman and secretary), a hall for meetings of members, as well as a toilet and bath have almost been completed for use by the OB network. The Jirapa OB Network has also been offered a temporary office space by the MOFA directorate as the district works to secure a permanent office for the network. It was also noted that through these engagements the Sissala Area OB Network in Tumu and the Wa Zonal OB Network have office assistants who are national service/National Builders Corps (NABCO) personnel from the district assembly and in charge of the day-to-day administration of the offices. The secretary of the Upper West regional network asserted that, *"after going through the leadership and advocacy training, we realized that if we go to the regional director once he is aware of us and knows what we are doing, if we are looking for personnel to come and manage our office for us why don't we go to them? So we discussed with the director in a meeting and he also bought into the idea."* It is significant to note that some network leaders and OBs reported that they were able to leverage their personal relationships with other stakeholders and actors for the benefit of their networks' members. For example, the chairman of the Nawuni Nsungti Zonal Network in Yagaba (Mamprugu-Moagduri District in the Northern Region) reported that his engagement with the local district assembly resulted in the assembly allocating a permanent office space to the network. He also reported that his engagement with the Camp Trading and Farm Services had resulted in an agreement between the network and the company for the latter to supply combine harvesters to the network's members.

3.5.2 Capacity to Engage with Other Stakeholders, Including New Buyers

All networks reported they have developed the capacity to engage key value chain actors such as agro-input companies and buyers. The networks have an established relationship with some agro-input companies and dealers, including Yara Company Limited, RMG, Adama West Africa, AgriLink, Antika, and 18th April, some of which sponsored OBs' demonstration farms in the past year. During the qualitative interviews, networks' leaders indicated that they have been able to facilitate trade and market relationships between their members and key value chain actors. Results from the quantitative interviews show that 89 percent of all OBs interviewed confirmed they have relationships with other value

chain actors. Of this, 85.4 percent (n=76) indicated they have some relationship with buyers who sponsor/finance outgrower schemes (see Table 6). The results further show that these relationships were either facilitated by FTF ADVANCE II (85.5 percent, n=65), personally by the OBs (59.2 percent, n=45), by the OB network (38.2 percent, n=29), or an NGO (3.9 percent, n=3). Just about half (51 percent) of all male and female OBs indicated they have formal contracts with buyers. Again, it was more likely that OBs who have their businesses registered (53.2 percent, n=50) had a formal contract with buyers as opposed to those who had not registered their businesses (16.7 percent, n=1). Indeed, not having business registration can inhibit access to formal markets and better business opportunities.

Table 6. OBs who have relationships with buyers who sponsor OG schemes

Zone	Frequency	Percent
Yendi	7	63.6
Gushegu	9	69.2
Karaga	10	100.0
Bawku	7	100.0
Tumu	23	69.7
Jirapa	2	50.0
Wa	5	71.4
Yagaba	6	100.0
Nalerigu	7	77.8
Total	76	76.0

In the past year, the average number of agreements signed per OB was estimated at about two. It was noted by network leaders that as part of their engagements with FTF ADVANCE II, they have been introduced to a number of buyers some of whom have entered into purchasing agreements with OBs. Most of these contracts are negotiated by the networks, including female members, and signed by individual OBs (see sample contract in Annex 5). In this regard, respondents mostly mentioned Cropcare Ghana Limited and Agricare Limited. The networks also mentioned they have introduced their members to the Ghana Commodity Exchange (GCX) platform. In addition, the networks have been able to facilitate new agreements and market linkages with buyers such as Degas Limited, Premium Foods, Yedent Agro Group of Companies Limited, Kedan Limited,



An OB loading produce to be transported to buyer

“We always carry some weight when we do some of these negotiations as a group. These Agricare and Cropcare contracts, because of the network we just share ideas, sit and negotiate with them. If it is one person it will be difficult for you, but as a network we all bring our views and at the end we will know the direction we are going.”

AVNASH, and Ghana Nuts Company Limited. While some of these agreements have been concluded, others are at various stages of negotiation. Almost all OBs expressed some level of satisfaction with these arrangements by their networks. They explained that formal purchasing agreements guarantee markets for their produce and give OBs and OGs greater confidence to invest. During one of the KIIs, an OB emphasized this point saying:

The networks also mentioned they have been able to establish relationships with some financial institutions, including Sinapi Aba Savings and Loans Limited, Opportunity International Savings and Loans Limited, and Barclays Bank. They confirmed that the formalization of the networks' activities, such as registering with the RGD, development of business plans, crop budgeting, and operation of physical offices have increased their business opportunities and contributed to the facilitation of these relationships.

Also, some OBs have formal contracts with buyers which were self-negotiated and signed. Some of these contracts existed before the networks started their operations. In assessing the strength of their relationship with buyers, the majority (77 percent) of OBs were confident that their relationship was strong or very strong, 13 percent reported moderate, and 10 percent indicated a weak or very weak relationship with buyers. The relationships between OBs and buyers are determined mainly by how promptly the latter pays for the goods supplied by the former. The relationships become weak when the buyer consistently delays payments.

3.6 Extent to which Youths and Women are Reached

In this section, we explore the extent to which youths and women are reached depending on the gender of an OB, including capacity on affirmative action on women and youths. There is evidence that most network members are targeting women and youths in their service provision. At the network level, although there was no documented evidence of affirmative action on reaching women and youths, network leaders reported they were intentionally implementing actions that will motivate more women and youths to join the networks. For example, some networks have dedicated time for outreach programs in which they target for membership women and youths who they consider to be doing well in agribusiness or production. These people are informed about the potential benefits membership in the networks can bring to their business. As earlier mentioned (see Section 3.1.1), the networks are aware of the positive impact of women and are also motivating their female members to speak to other women about joining the networks. In the Yendi Municipality, the OB network in collaboration with the Department of Food and Agriculture is working with the municipal assembly to get more youths and women into agriculture. This, they explained, is to curb the migration of young men and women who often relocate to the south to take up menial jobs. It was mentioned that some youths are engaged by OBs as community agents and also to bag and load produce. This is in support of efforts within the districts to curb rural-urban migration.

Analysis of the quantitative data shows that women and youths were significantly represented in the OGs who work with OBs. The 100 OBs surveyed and interviewed had a base of about 46,184 OGs. Thus, on the average an OB is linked to about 462 farmers, 55.1 percent of them were women and 44.9 percent were men. Regardless of gender, youths (29 years old and below) formed about 36 percent of OGs who were linked to OBs. Table 7 shows the number of OGs who work with the sampled OBs across the zones. Some OBs claimed that although men are likely to have easier access to larger acreages/farmland area, women and youths are much more reliable when it comes to

repayment of loans and other services provided. Emphasizing this point, a male OB in Nankpawie in the Upper West Region noted:

“Service provision to men can sometimes prove difficult when it comes to recovery. So I am deciding to focus on providing services for women because for them the disappointment is not like the men and they are more credit worthy.”

A statement made by the same OB in respect to the reliability of youths was that:

“The youth are increasingly getting more concerned about their future, and know that they will require more services from the OB. They are, therefore, willing to pay for services they receive from the OBs.”

Table 7. Distribution of OGs who linked to OBs in the past year

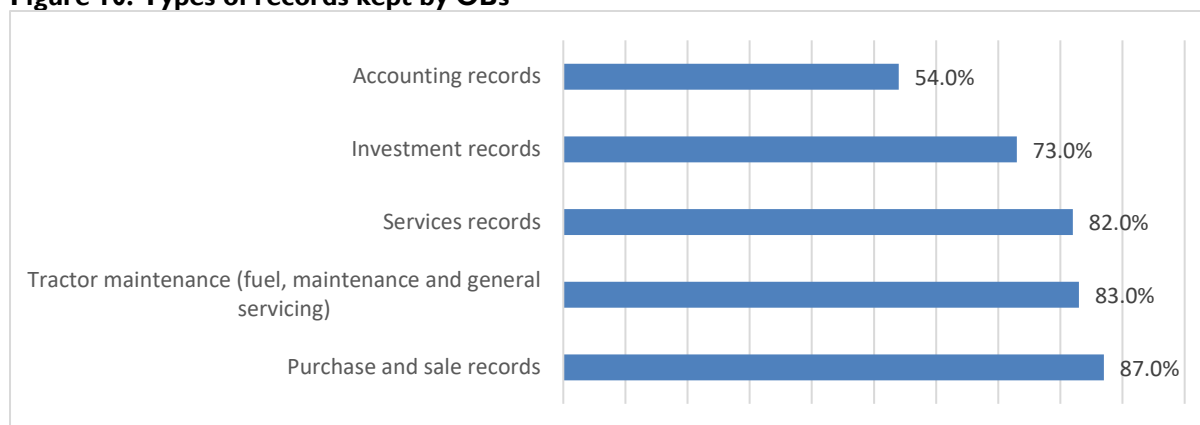
Zone	Number of OGs				Average per OB			
	Male	Female	Youths	Total	Male	Female	Youths	Total
Yendi	1672	1092	930	2764	152	99	85	251
Gushiegu	3760	3634	4138	7394	289	280	318	569
Karaga	2245	1889	1662	4134	225	189	166	413
Bawku	2315	2625	2065	4940	331	375	295	706
Tumu	9647	4826	4225	14473	292	146	128	439
Jirapa	687	625	260	1312	172	156	65	328
Wa	2286	3006	742	5292	327	429	106	756
Yagaba	962	819	1115	1781	160	137	186	297
Nalerigu	1878	2216	1487	4094	209	246	165	455
Total	25452	20732	16624	46184	255	207	166	462

3.7 Capacity to Assemble, Use, and Share Data and Information

This section details OBs’ and networks’ capacity to assemble, use, and share data and information, including market information and intelligence sharing, as well as the use of digitization in their business operations. The section also assesses the extent to which such data and information inform OB networks and OBs’ business operations and decision making.

During the qualitative interviews, the network leaders were confident of their capacity to assemble and share relevant information with their members. They indicated that their networks have been trained on data and information gathering, use and sharing, as well as incorporating digitization in their business operation. Indeed, 95 percent of the OBs interviewed confirmed they have received this training. Also, 90 percent of all OBs reported they have received support from their networks on data assembling. All OBs reported keeping records of their operations. As shown in Figure 10, purchase and sale records, tractor maintenance (fuel, maintenance, and general servicing), and services records (e.g., number of OGs and acreage serviced) were the most frequently mentioned. Some OBs said they were motivated to keep these records as part of their efforts to track investment, facilitate easy sharing of knowledge and information, and enhance their access to better business opportunities.

Figure 10. Types of records kept by OBs



Evidence from the field shows that all networks have a list of their members which captures some basic information such as name, gender, telephone number, and areas of operation. All zonal and regional networks had computers and Android tablets with required software (such as Microsoft Office Suite and ODK) to facilitate their data collection and sharing. In addition, it was found that the networks were collecting data on production (e.g., number of acres serviced per OB), shelling, recoveries, market information, inputs supplied to OGs, and quantity of produce supplied to buyers. It was also confirmed that individual OBs have been trained to collect and share this information with the networks. However, network leaders explained that the collection and sharing of such data comes with a great deal of difficulty, including mobility constraints, poor mobile network connectivity (internet for transmitting data and voice call connectivity), and lack of cooperation from members. For instance, leaders of the networks mentioned that some members delay the compilation and submission of the data and attribute this delay mainly to time constraints and transportation challenges to get to the zonal office. Other accounts suggested that some OBs lacked the understanding and the urgency to collect such data. This was restricted to few networks that did not have secretaries who were conversant with information technology. In these instances, the research team was told of efforts the networks were making to address this challenge.

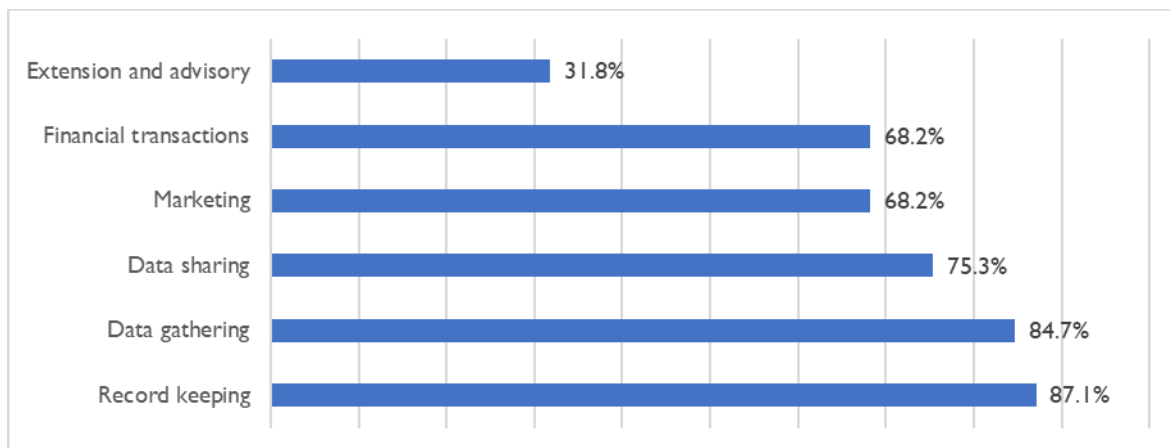
Regarding their ability to share data and information, all zonal and regional networks have WhatsApp platforms where information is readily shared. The majority (97 percent) of OBs also confirmed that they are able to share data and information with other network members, and this was mainly through phone calls, meetings, and WhatsApp. It was mentioned that the platform created by OB networks has enhanced their access to information that is relevant to their business operations. For instance, weather updates, availability of buyers, input prices among others are made readily available to OBs. In addition, some networks have a presence on other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Some OBs emphasized that information sharing among network members has improved their knowledge of community dynamics when entering new areas and enhanced their business operations and efficient use of resources. It was also mentioned that information sharing among members has facilitated the identification of gaps in service delivery and support from the networks and other OBs. During the qualitative data collection, an OB in Gwollu in the Upper West Region said:

“One important thing is that once we are in one OB network, if let’s say I am operating in Kusali and James Bawa also comes to Kusali, there will not be that duplication of efforts because there will be no need for him to be repeating what I am doing there, like some of the trainings to the smallholder farmers. And if he is even coming to the community because I am already operating in that community, I will have to help him with what to do and what not to do in the community so at the end of the day recoveries will shoot up. Another example is that when we get to Buoti a lot of the OGs don’t even know me, it’s Yahaya they know but I have acres there. Maybe his capacity cannot service 100 people, he has supported 80 people leaving 20 people, I will just go and top up the 20 for him to handle. So at the end of the day if I were to enter directly, probably even if I have gotten those 20 people without his presence I have to hire someone to handle it, but once he’s there he will just do the job.”

However, during the KIIs, some OBs said that, to prevent a duplication of efforts and improve recoveries from OGs, networks need to share their farmers’ registers with members before the beginning of the season.

It was mentioned that the networks have received training on how to incorporate digitization in their business operations. About 95 percent of the OBs confirmed that they have participated in such trainings. Of this, 88.4 percent (n=84) report they are incorporating digitization in their operations. Results in Figure 11 show that record keeping, data/information gathering and sharing, marketing, and financial transactions were the most frequently mentioned records kept by OBs. With regard to records of financial transactions, these were mainly on the use of mobile money in receiving and making payments.

Figure 11. How OBs are incorporating digitization in their operations



Some OB networks are promoting performance benchmarking in their operations. For instance, most of the networks are enthusiastic about the use of the IT training they have received and are putting it into practice; for example, a lot of them are using computer-based spreadsheet applications to capture some key information of their members. Some have developed indicators to benchmark the performance of their members; the indicators include: “number of outgrowers supported” and “percentage of total recoveries made from OGs.”

3.7.1 OBs' Access to Market Information and Intelligence

Table 8 presents the distribution of OBs with access to market information and intelligence across the zones. A majority of the respondents (97 percent) indicated they had access to market information. The network leaders indicated that they have developed the capacity to assess and make market information available to their members. The results further confirmed that the major sources of market information were OB networks, other OBs, and web-based apps (e.g., Esoko). The networks have facilitated connections of farmers. Generally, this has ensured sharing of adequate, reliable, and timely market information for both male and female OBs. The OBs emphasized in interviews that their access to market information and intelligence, facilitated by their networks, had been useful in connecting them with potential clients as well as in their negotiations and market decisions. They explained that they are able to compare prices of commodities in the major market centers across the country, and are able to make prudent decisions that ensure they are competitive and profitable.

Table 8. OBs with access to market information and intelligence

Zone	Frequency	Percent
Yendi	10	90.9
Gushegu	13	100.0
Karaga	10	100.0
Bawku	7	100.0
Tumu	29	87.9
Jirapa	3	75.0
Wa	6	85.7
Yagaba	6	100.0
Nalerigu	9	100.0
Total/Average	93	93.0

3.8 Sustainability Issues

Many of the network leaders and members expressed some level of optimism that their networks will thrive and grow. They had a more positive outlook on the impact of the networks on their future and potential for business growth. Network leaders expressed high levels of optimism that the networks will continue to provide support for OBs to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to their outgrowers when FTF ADVANCE II ends. They emphasized that training provided by the project has improved their capacity and equipped network leaders and members with requisite knowledge and skills to ensure operation of the networks. Key issues relating to the sustainability of the networks learned from the various interviews, informal discussions, and observations during the fieldwork are summarized under the headings below.

Frequent meetings and payment of monthly dues

Regular meetings are critical activities on the networks' programs. However, attendance at these meetings was admittedly low, especially during the rainy season. Nevertheless, the networks were confident that by holding regular monthly meetings, as they do, they would be able to keep members together and ensure the networks' sustainability. In that respect, most networks have instituted sanctions, including fines (cash) and dismissals, to motivate members to regularly attend the meetings. Those interviewed said that at the meetings they are able to discuss issues that are beneficial to members and collect dues. Dues are a

major source of revenue for networks. The money is used mainly to run the networks' offices and cover other operational expenses such as payment for transportation of network officers to monitor members. The networks interpreted the willingness of members to pay these dues as one of the signs that the networks will survive.

Some networks plan to charge entrance and registration fees

In Yendi, respondents emphasized that the networks will explore other ways to raise money from members in order to build up capital to run their operations after FTF ADVANCE II support comes to an end. All the networks recognize that their sustainability will to a large extent depend on their financial capacity. In this regard, some networks plan to charge entrance and registrations fees in addition to monthly fees.

Membership drive

The zonal and regional networks are already working to increase membership. The Upper West regional networks, for example, are working on radio programs to increase their membership. This was cited as an important step toward enhancing the sustainability of the networks. There was a conviction that with increased membership, networks would be competitive in doing business and thus attract more potential collaborators and partners. Greater numbers will also increase the money the networks can mobilize from dues.

Monitoring of OBs and OGs

Networks proposed to intensify monitoring of OBs and OGs to ensure that service provision achieved its intended outcomes. Indeed, the networks are convinced recipients of services are able to deliver on their obligations when they are frequently monitored. It was mentioned that special transportation arrangements will be made to enhance monitoring by the networks. Proposals were made for collaboration with the district MOFA staff.

Percentage levy on services provided to members by the network

There are plans to levy percentage charges on companies and institutions that the networks facilitate to secure contracts to supply inputs, provide financial support to members, and trade agreements. It was mentioned that these levies, including those that will be imposed on OBs and OGs, will enable the networks to mobilize more resources to enable them to operate.

Continuous engagement and education of OGs

The regional and zonal OB networks underscored the importance of continuous education of OGs. The networks intend to intensify education of the OGs (e.g., in best agronomic practices, post-harvest management, prudent use of resources) when FTF ADVANCE II comes to end in order to improve their performance.

Trust issues

The networks appreciate that the OB system (or model), to a very large extent, depends on mutual trust amongst the networks and between the network and the OGs. According

to most respondents, the survival of the networks hinges on trust. The members emphasized that they will build on the training offered by FTF ADVANCE II in this area to enhance trust among network members. They will extend the same to the OGs.

Individual interests

One of the areas that the networks were worried about was how to deal with individual egos and interests. They were concerned that this can undermine leadership and group solidarity. Some respondents mentioned that frequent meetings, as take place now and at which issues are discussed transparently with mutual respect, will enable the networks to deal with this challenge. The importance of this challenge is captured in a statement from a respondent:

“A major threat is when we decide to seek for our business interests only. If not, I don’t see any reason why the networks should not work after ADVANCE. If you talk about the reality on the ground, it is there, and every group will face these realities. There are sacrifices we all have to make to see the network working. If we come together and instead of branding, for example, Gav ventures, let us brand Sissala OB network out there. If we have this understanding, every OB will benefit from it. That is the only threat to sustainability.”

4.0 KEY OBSERVATIONS

The following are key observations:

- All OB networks have registered with the RGD. The Jirapa OB network and the Upper East Regional Network, however, had not received its certificate at the time of the interview. However, it has submitted all requirements for registration and is expecting its registration certificates by the end of the first quarter of 2020. Almost all OB networks have an office for their operations.
- OB networks have a well-defined leadership structure and various committees/working groups.
- Female membership and representation in the leadership are limited; most women joined networks only recently, i.e., in 2019, while on average networks were established in 2016.
- OB networks have developed capacity to develop and implement strategic plans.
- OB networks have improved their capacity to engage various stakeholders at the district, regional, and national levels.
- The networks have capacity gaps, including team management, problem solving, monitoring, and performance benchmarking and operational challenges such as mobility constraints, poor mobile network connectivity, and lack of cooperation from some members.
- OB network leaders have improved their skills to engage and successfully access various government programs in MOFA, the Ministry of Trade, and other agencies.
- Most OB networks and other actor groups are promoting performance benchmarking. Some have developed indicators to benchmark the performance of their members; these indicators include: “number of outgrowers supported” and “percentage of total recoveries made from OGs.”
- Most OB networks have the capacity to support members to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to smallholder farmers.
- The majority of OBs have formal purchasing agreements. Most of these contracts are negotiated by the networks and signed by individual OBs.
- Most OB networks have developed the capacity to assemble, use, and share data and information (including capacity on digitization).
- Most OB network members are intentionally targeting women and youths in service provision depending on the gender of the OBs (as well as members of the apex bodies). Some networks are targeting women because they claim that women are much more reliable when it comes to repayment of loans and other services provided.
- Youths are also being intentionally targeted to help them find gainful employment in agriculture and to change the mindset that agriculture is not viable.
- Many network leaders and OBs expressed high levels of optimism that the networks will continue to support OBs to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to their outgrowers when FTF ADVANCE II ends.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

As part of FTF ADVANCE II's strategy to sustain its achievements after the project ends, the project facilitated the formation of OB networks and currently works with 10 zonal OB networks and three regional OB networks. These networks serve as business associations for the OBs and provide business linkages and advocacy for their members. The overall objective of this study was to evaluate how OB networks have strengthened capacity for advocacy and activity implementation and assess the capacity of OB networks to address identified value chain-specific enabling environment constraints. The results and key observations from the survey have shown that OB networks have formalized their operations and this has enhanced their opportunity to access finance, enter contracts with buyers, and engage with key stakeholders and other value chain actors. Network leaders have developed the capacity to identify issues of interest to their business operations and are conversant with how to leverage their networks, institutional ties, and relationships to address value chain constraints. The study also concludes that OBs and their network leaders have high levels of optimism that the networks will continue to provide support for OBs to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to their OGs when FTF ADVANCE II ends. However, some capacity gaps (such as team management, problem solving, monitoring, and performance benchmarking) and operational challenges (such as mobility constraints, poor mobile network connectivity, and lack of cooperation from some members) were identified.

Recommendations

Based on the key findings and observations, the following are recommended:

- **Transparency**

The networks must be encouraged to adopt best organizational management practices to promote transparency and accountability, vital attributes for their survival. The networks must, therefore, be supported to prepare and use Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). These SOPs must contain basic rules, regulations, and ethics that members themselves believe will hold them accountable to each other. The SOPs should also include details on rights, responsibilities, and benefits of members, as well as sanctions for noncompliance. In this regard, the network secretariats must invest in record keeping and information sharing capacity building so that members can be frequently updated.

- **Deliberate efforts to attract young businessmen and women into the OB networks**

The goal of this effort should be to increase membership and mobilize funds to run the networks. This should include members engaging with youth associations and women's groups in their respective zones. The networks can also partner with local institutions, especially churches and mosques, to promote the networks especially among women and youths. Also, the networks should sustain their outreach programs targeted at women and youths. It is further recommended that the

established OBs adopt and mentor women and youths to enable them to transition to become fully fledged OBs.

- **Transportation**

One of the major challenges mentioned by the networks' secretariats was their inability to monitor members and their respective OGs. One option to deal with the situation may be networks investing in motorbikes for their monitoring teams. The networks could also partner with their respective Districts Assemblies' Department of Food and Agriculture (DADFA) so that they can join their extension team on their rounds. It is also recommended that FTF ADVANCE II allocate some of its vehicles to DADFA to benefit the partnership mentioned above when the project ends.

- **Capacity building**

The capacity gaps identified were mainly in the areas of team management, problem solving, monitoring, and performance benchmarking. These problems mainly relate to day-to-day running of the networks. The leadership has been established for the networks and are functioning, but they still require skills to mobilize and retain membership, particularly building strong bonds among members. We are also of the opinion that there are still inadequacies among the leadership in dealing with emerging needs of members as the networks grow and their horizons expand. Tracking their own performance requires data collection and analysis. There are gaps in these capacities, and the networks require training and support in IT equipment. Indeed, the networks need sustained training and capacity building in these areas, and others that may come up as they grow. In this respect, it is recommended that the networks appeal to local institutions, including NGOs, government departments, and agencies, to support them. The networks can leverage their links with local members of parliament and DADFA to support them to assess training and capacity building from relevant local institutions.

- **Reward high-performing OBs**

The networks must design and implement an annual award scheme for OBs that have performed extraordinary well. This will introduce healthy competition among the OBs and enhance the overall viability of the OBs and the networks.

- **Performance benchmarking**

The networks must be supported to design an M&E system that will help them establish key indicators they can use to track the performance (i.e., effectiveness and efficiency) of their network members. The networks can partner with relevant local NGOs with capacity in M&E and that are working in the commodity value chains in which the networks are also participating. Benchmarking will help the networks assess how effectively and efficiently they are delivering to their respective OGs, and intervene to make improvement plans for underperforming

OBs. Indeed, this assessment will support the process of rewarding high-performing OBs as indicated above.

- **Explore avenues to create an effective and efficient reporting system for networks**

It is suggested that networks use the data that will be gathered from the performance benchmarking process recommended above to prepare and share regular monthly reports. These reports must be shared not only at the network level, but with other relevant partners, including companies that trade with the networks or supply them inputs. This will strategically enhance the visibility of the networks and bring in more business to them.

- **Continuous monitoring by OBs of OGs' satisfaction with service deliveries**

For OBs to sustain their business operations and improve their profitability, there is a need to intensify engagements with OGs. It is recommended that these engagements include monitoring and assessing OGs' satisfaction with services that are being delivered to them.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS AND SCOPE OF WORK OF OUTGROWER BUSINESS NETWORKS' CAPACITY ASSESSMENT



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
CONSULTANCY ASSIGNMENT TO EVALUATE HOW OB NETWORKS HAVE STRENGTHENED
CAPACITY FOR ADVOCACY AND
ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESS THE CAPACITY OF OB NETWORKS TO ADDRESS
IDENTIFIED VALUE CHAIN-SPECIFIC ENABLING ENVIRONMENT CONSTRAINTS

RFP Release Date	December 9, 2019
Proposal Submission Date	December 16, 2019
Performance Period	December 20, 2019 to February 28, 2020

RFP #: ADVII/2019/002

Scope of Work

1. Introduction

A. Company Background

Based in Washington, D.C., ACDI/VOCA is a nonprofit international development organization that delivers technical and management assistance in agribusiness, financial services, enterprise development, community development, and food security in order to promote broad-based economic growth and vibrant civil society. For more information go to www.acdivoca.org.

B. Program Background

The USAID-funded Feed the Future Agricultural Development and Value Chain Enhancement (FTF ADVANCE II) project aims to increase competitiveness of agricultural value chains in northern Ghana to foster economic growth and reduce poverty among smallholder farmers and the population at large, in line with USAID Ghana's Feed the Future (FtF) strategy. The project's approach is to increase productivity, promote private enterprise development and investment, and ensure that benefits are realized by the vulnerable, i.e., women, children, and the physically challenged.

FTF ADVANCE II developed the outgrower business (OB) model toward the end of the first phase of the project in 2013. The model has become the main strategy for increasing smallholder farmers' productivity. The method of implementation is supporting OBs (mainly commercial farmers and aggregators) and linking them to formal markets (large buyers and processors), resulting in incremental sales of more than \$100 million of maize and soybean for more than 131,000 smallholder farmers since 2014.

Recent studies conducted by the project showed many improvements in the operations and profitability of the OB model, including a willingness of all buyers to continue the business relationships established with the OBs.

Furthermore, the studies demonstrated the effectiveness of the approach in improving smallholder farmers' access to agribusiness services. However, the studies identified gaps such as trust issues and some inability to completely fulfill some contracts with buyers which may threaten the sustainability of some of the OBs' operations. The studies also show that the probability of applying yield enhancing technologies and practices is significantly higher among outgrowers (OGs) who received services from their OBs.

In the same study, more than 90 percent of smallholder farmers who received different types of services from the OBs rated the quality of the services as good or excellent. However, the average number of services provided by OBs per smallholder farmer was only 1.5. There are at least five key services provided by OBs. These are land preparation, input credit (seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides), extension and advisory, post-harvest processing (threshing/shelling), and marketing/aggregation. Smallholder farmers are not receiving enough services from his/her OB and, therefore, the focus on supporting networks to promote expansion of the type of services OBs provide.

The project facilitated the formation of OB networks during FY18 as part of a strategy to attain sustainability. Currently, the project works with 10 OB district networks and three regional OB networks. The OB networks serve as business associations for the OBs and provide business linkages and advocacy for their members. The core functions of the networks include, but are not limited 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 economies of scale.
- Scout for markets, organize and participate in trade missions to explore business opportunities.
- Work to lower the risk profiles of the network and individual businesses to attract investors.
- Provide information, mentorship, and business linkages to members.
- Any other action(s) or activities that will promote the interests of the networks and their members.

During the cost extension (May 2019 to March 2020), the project, therefore, focused on building the capacity of OBs and networks to ensure the model is sustained by long-lasting behavior change that transforms their current operations into businesses that are operated professionally and trusted by value chain actors.

	OB Network	Zone
1	Sissala Area Network	Tumu
2	Nawuni Nsungti Network	Yagaba
3	Kusaug OB Network	Bawku
4	Yendi OB Network	Yendi
5	Gushegu OB Network	Gushegu
6	Beimoni OB Network	Karaga
7	Jirapa OB Network	Jirapa
8	Tininyangi OB Network	Nalerigu
9	Wa OB Network	Wa
10	Sagnerigu	Sagnerigu

Furthermore, the project addresses the gaps of value chain actors by strengthening the capacity of the OB networks through long-term strategic planning and implementation.

To promote trade and marketing of the two commodities, maize and soya, the project supports OB network members to adopt a traceability system that will ensure any product delivered to buyers that is rejected is traced to the producer. The project works with buyers, OBs, and OB networks to adapt and design an innovative and cost-effective solution that can quickly achieve scale. This includes labels that, at the least, will indicate the source of the produce and possibly the grade.

The project supports the OB networks to use digital communication equipment and channels and promote its activities and products through social media and the internet wherever appropriate. The project formally introduced the networks and their members to the operations of the Ghana Commodity Exchange (GCX) and supports them to register. Apart from enhanced access to market information, this regulated market, as an institution, is expected to support the behavior change agenda by promoting the necessary discipline regarding honoring agreements and contracts.

FTF ADVANCE II trains leaders of the OB networks on affirmative action for the participation of women and youths, effective teamwork, leadership, and effective communication with their business associates and stakeholders. The project also supports the OB networks to access and use relevant climate and weather analysis and prediction, which can reduce production risks and be shared with financial institutions when considering interest rates for the OBs.

To ensure sustainability, the project trained OB networks' leaders in project proposal development skills to enable the OB networks to target programs like the Business Sector Advocacy Challenge (BUSAC), a fund supported by DANIDA, USAID, and DFID to strengthen the advocacy capacity of Ghanaian private sector business groups and associations to further build their capacity for advocacy. As the project reduces staff and field offices, some office equipment was donated to the OB networks to improve their business operations.

II. Purpose and Scope

A. Purpose of the Assignment

The purpose of this assignment is to assist FTF ADVANCE II to assess capacity of OB networks for advocacy and activity implementation and access to markets and trade. The assignment will also provide FTF ADVANCE II and USAID learning to plan exit strategies that will sustain such interventions and guide the design of future interventions.

Study Objectives and Focus

The study seeks to evaluate how OB networks have strengthened capacity for advocacy and activity implementation and assesses the capacity of OB networks to address identified value chain-specific enabling environment constraints.

The specific objectives of this study are:

- Assess the capacity of OB networks to undertake long-term strategic planning and implementation.
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to plan and undertake advocacy activities.
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to support OBs to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to smallholder farmers.
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to deliver or procure services on behalf of its members.
- Assess, bilaterally, the relationship between OB networks and key value chain actors, especially buyers who sponsor/finance outgrower schemes.
- Assess the extent to which youths and women are reached depending on the gender of an OB.
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to assemble, use, and share data and information.
- Assess the capacity of OB network leaders to engage with other stakeholders, including new buyers.
- Assess the capacity of OB networks to make market information and intelligence available to their members.

Hypotheses:

- OB networks are well set up, adequately registered, and operational.
- OB networks have developed capacity to develop and implement strategic plans.
- OB networks have improved the capacity to engage various stakeholders at the district, regional, and national levels.
- The leaders of OB networks have improved skills to engage and to successfully access various government programs in MOFA, the Ministry of Trade, and other agencies.
- Most OB networks and other actor groups are promoting performance benchmarking.
- Most OB networks have incorporated a benchmarking system into their network activities, assemble data, and are using the results to mentor their members.
- Most OB networks have the capacity to support members to maintain/continue to increase service delivery to smallholder farmers.
- Most OB networks have developed strong linkages with MOFA to enable access to government subsidized production inputs.
- Most FTF ADVANCE II OB networks have formal contracts with buyers.
- Most OB networks have developed the capacity to assemble, use, and share data and information.
- Most OB network members are intentionally targeting women and youths in service provision depending on the gender of the OBs.

Study Methodology

This study will adopt mixed methods and will be conducted through literature reviews, desk review of secondary data, and primary data collection.

Desk Reviews

Much of the background and review for this study will be taken from the 2016 and 2018 OB sustainability reports and FTF ADVANCE II progress reports.

Survey

The survey will combine both quantitative and qualitative questions with the following details at the least:

i. Study Population

All OB networks in FTFADVANCE II system (n=10)

All regional OB networks (n=3)

ii. Sampling Approach

The sampling frame is the entire population since all OB networks will be surveyed. Thus, no sampling is required.

iii. Sample Size Determination

Since all OBs networks will be surveyed, the sample size is the entire OB network population, i.e., n=13.

iv. Survey Instruments

The survey instrument will be electronic and administered on tablets by trained project technical staff.

Quality Control

Field supervisors will verify data collected by enumerators from the field before sending the data to team coordinators for second-level data verification to check for outliers, data inconsistency, missing values, and send incorrect data attribution back to field teams for corrections to be affected.

Data Analysis

Summary statistics

Analysis of variance

Composition And Responsibilities of the Study Team

The consultant will lead the study and will be supported by the technical director of the project M&E team and technical specialists.

Required Expertise of Consultants/Firm

- The consultants/firm must demonstrate previous experience in conducting similar studies.
- Experience in qualitative and quantitative research methods
- Knowledgeable in outgrower business and OB network operation
- Excellent analytical and report writing skills
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills, including ability to facilitate and work in a multidisciplinary team
- Knowledge of agribusiness in maize and soya value chains is preferred.

B. Deliverables

The consultant will deliver the following outputs:

- Inception report
- Data collection tools
- Draft report
- Presentation (PowerPoint)
- Final report
- Raw data
- Preparation of enumerators' training materials

- Delivery of training of enumerators
- Preparation and delivery of progress report after conduct of fieldwork
- Delivery of cleaned data sets (in SPSS and Excel; and the syntaxes in Word) from the administration of quantitative questionnaires
- Delivery of summarized qualitative data from administered qualitative interview protocols
- Photos and other audiovisual materials

The final report will include, at a minimum, the following elements:

- Acknowledgements
- Table of contents
- List of acronyms and abbreviations
- List of figures and charts
- Executive summary
- Background/brief program description, context, and rationale
- Purpose and expected use of the study
- Objectives of the study
- Methodology and data collection techniques
- Main findings
- Limitations
- Conclusions

C. Timelines

Proposed timeline and dates

#	Deliverable	Time
1	Tender for consultant	December 9, 2019
2	Signing of contract	December 20
3	Inception report and data collection tools shared with teams	December 27
4	Data collection tools finalized	January 2, 2020
5	Fieldwork	January 3-11
7	Analysis and report drafting	January 11-23
8	GH team review report	January 24-31
9	HQ team review draft report	February 3-7
10	Comments and edits ready for consultant	February 7
11	A presentation (PPT)	February 12
12	Raw data	February 17
13	Final review and comments for consultant	February 25
14	Final report	February 28

Activity	Number of Days	Tentative Date	Outcome
Prepare for study Tendering for consultant Signing of contracts	10		Contract signed
Desk review of project document, reports, and other relevant documents	3		Inception report, including detailed evaluation plan, methodology, and evaluation tools drafted and shared with project management and M&E teams
Presentation of inception report and briefing of evaluation team	1		Inception report is finalized, methodology and study plan agreed on
Data collection in the field	10		Field data collected
Review of initial data analysis with project team	1		Consultant and project team agree on specific areas of data analysis
Data analysis and preparation of draft report	5		Draft report generated
Presentation of draft report to stakeholders	1		Feedback collected and incorporated
Finalization of evaluation report	3		

III. Contract Mechanism And Terms of Payment

ACDI/VOCA anticipates issuing a fixed price purchase order to an offeror. ACDI/VOCA will issue fixed payment(s) based on submission and ACDI/VOCA acceptance of deliverables. Once an award is issued, it will include a fixed price payment schedule with deliverables specified above. A copy of the purchase order terms and conditions is attached to this RFP for informational purposes

Schedule for Payment

Forty percent down payment will be made upon receipt of an inception report for review and approval. Payment will be made within two weeks.

Sixty percent final payment will be made upon receipt of a final report within two weeks of receiving FTF ADVANCE II's comments on the draft report.

IV. Proposal Preparation And Submission Requirements

A. Instructions for Proposal Presentation

The selection committee will evaluate the offerors based upon their written technical and cost proposals. Each section will be evaluated according to the criteria for evaluations in Section V. Offerors are expected to examine the specifications and all instructions in the RFP. Failure to do so is at the offeror's risk. Interested

offerors must provide the following:

- Technical approach/specifications
- Past performance/references
- Price/cost proposal

1. Capability And Technical Experience Statement

Demonstrate capabilities and technical experience by providing the following:

- The consultants/firm must demonstrate previous experience in conducting similar studies.
- Experience in qualitative and quantitative research methods
- Knowledgeable in OG business operations
- Excellent analytical and report writing skills
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills, including ability to facilitate and work in a multidisciplinary team
- Experience working in the Northern, North East, Upper East, and Upper West Regions
- Knowledge of maize, rice, and soya value chains is preferred

2. Cost Proposal

Vendors will submit a proposed budget with their proposals in a separate, sealed envelope (or separate file, if submitting via e-mail) labeled "Budget Proposal." The proposed budget will have sufficient detail to allow for the evaluation of elements of costs proposed. Budgets should be submitted in the currency of the country in which your organization is located and will be paid; please label your budget with the name of the currency. ACDI/VOCA reserves the right to request any additional information to support detailed cost and price.

Vendors should include a budget breakdown by each deliverable listed in Section II.B. above, the Deliverables section. Each deliverable must have the detailed costs associated with completing that deliverable. ACDI/VOCA cannot honor exchange rates included in a budget and payment will be made according to the exchange rate at the time of payment. Vendors should also indicate the inclusion or exclusion of any applicable VAT. In general, ACDI/VOCA is exempted from VAT payments and will generally not reimburse for VAT. However, if the vendor has knowledge of unavoidable duties, fees, or taxes, these charges must be included as a separate line item in the cost proposal.

3. References

Please include three client references and contact information. References should have worked with your organization within the past two years in connection with the countries or regions (and, if possible, subject matter) applicable to this RFP.

B. Instructions for Submission of Proposal

The technical and price proposals shall be separately bound and identified as such or sent via e-mail. Each volume shall be clearly identified with the RFP number and the offeror's name.

All responses to this RFP must be received no later than the submission deadline on the cover page of this RFP. Offerors must submit **one** copy each of technical and price proposals in soft format of Word or PDF and hard copy to:

ACDI/VOCA # 1 Tripoli Street, EAST LEGON, ACCRA	
Attention	Chrisveen Afun/Procurement Committee
E-mail	cafun@acdivocaghana.org / procurement@acdivocaghana.org

Faxed offers are not acceptable. All inquiries and requests for information regarding this RFP must be submitted by e-mail to the following individuals no later than the question/inquiry submission deadline on the cover page of this RFP. Reference the RFP number in all questions/inquiries.

	Contractual	Technical
Name	Chrisveen Afun/Procurement Committee	Eric Sunu
E-mail	cafun@acdivocaghana.org	esunu@acdivocaghana.org

ACDI/VOCA will not compensate offerors for their preparation of responses to this RFP.

V. Criteria for Evaluation

ACDI/VOCA will evaluate proposals based on a best-value determination; vendors should submit their most competitive price proposal. Proposals will be evaluated using the following criteria:

	Evaluation Criteria	Score/100
1.	Technical proposal	40
2.	Capability statement	10
3.	Past performance/references	20
4.	Price/cost proposal	30
	Total Score	100

The evaluation committee will review the technical proposal based upon the technical criteria listed above. The cost proposals will be reviewed to ensure they are complete and free of computational errors. The committee will also assess the reasonableness of costs and the cost-effectiveness of the budget and will determine whether the costs reflect a clear understanding of project requirements. A contract will be offered to the responsible vendor whose proposal follows the RFP instructions and is judged to be the most advantageous to ACDI/VOCA.

VI. Solicitation Process

Once the RFP is released, the offerors must prepare a formal proposal to be sent to the contact person at ACDI/VOCA as indicated in Section IV.B. The submitted proposals will be reviewed against the criteria for evaluation defined in Section V above and rated on their ability to satisfy the requirements stated in this RFP document. A preferred offeror will be chosen and formally notified. A formal contract will be negotiated with the selected offeror and, if endorsed, the offeror will begin work on the project.

VII. Terms and Conditions

A. Late Submissions

Proposals received after the submission deadline stated in the cover page of this RFP may not be considered. Offerors will be held responsible for ensuring their quotations are received according to the instructions stated herein. A late offer will be considered if the cause was attributable to ACDI/VOCA or its employees/agents,

or if it is in the best interest of ACDI/VOCA.

B. Modification of RFP Requirements

ACDI/VOCA retains the right to terminate the RFP or modify the requirements upon notification to offerors.

C. Withdrawal of Proposals

Proposals may be withdrawn by written notice via e-mail at any time before award. Proposals may be withdrawn in person by an offeror or authorized representative, if the representative's identity is made known and the representative signs a receipt for the proposal before award.

D. Right of Negotiation And Acceptance of Proposal

This RFP represents a definition of requirements and is an invitation for submission of proposals. ACDI/VOCA reserves the right to fund/award any or none of the submitted proposals. No commitment is made, either expressed or implied, to compensate offerors for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of their proposal.

ACDI/VOCA may reject any proposal that is nonresponsive. A responsive proposal is one that complies with all terms and conditions of the RFP. A proposal must be complete, signed by an authorized signatory, and delivered no later than the submission time and date indicated on the cover sheet of this RFP. ACDI/VOCA may reserve the right to waive any minor discrepancies in a proposal.

ACDI/VOCA reserves the right to issue an award based on the initial evaluation of proposals without discussion. ACDI/VOCA also reserves the right to enter into the best and final negotiations with any responsive offerors for all or part of the proposed scope.

E. Validity of Proposal

Proposals submitted shall remain open for acceptance for **30 days** from the last date specified for receipt of proposals. This includes, but is not limited to, pricing, terms and conditions, service levels, and all other information. If your organization is awarded the contract, all information in the RFP and negotiation process is contractually binding.

F. Intellectual Property Rights

All tangible or intangible property created or acquired under this contract shall be the exclusive property of ACDI/VOCA and the donor. The term "property" includes all data and reports associated with this engagement. Reference is made to Sections 12 and 13 in the business terms and conditions attached in Appendix A.

VIII. Attachments

Appendix A: Purchase Order General Terms and Conditions

Appendix B: Sample Budget Format

Appendix C: Technical Proposal Submission Sheet

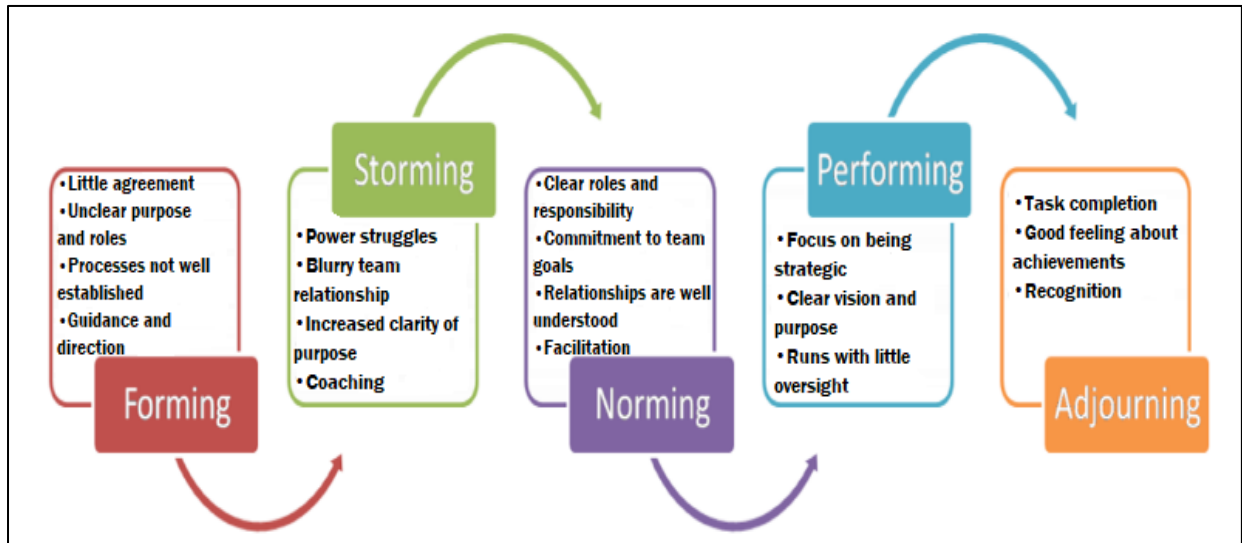
ANNEX 2. Interviews and Focus Group Discussions Held

List of Qualitative Key Informant Interviews, In-Depth Interviews And Focus Group Discussions Held				
Region	Name of Network	Name of Person(s) We Met	Designation	Gender
Northern	Beimoni OB Network	Alabagn Ibrahim		Male
Northern	Beimoni OB Network	Alhassan Bawa		Male
Northern	Beimoni OB Network	Suleman Ibn Alhassan	Chairman	Male
Northern	Beimoni OB Network	Abukari Natogma	Secretary	Male
Northern	Beimoni OB Network	Mariama Karim		Female
North East	Nawuni Nsungti Network	Isahaku Jibril	Chairman	Male
North East	Nawuni Nsungti Network	Adam Wahab	Secretary	Male
North East	Nawuni Nsungti Network	Shahadu Nawurugu	Network member	Male
North East	Nawuni Nsungti Network	Mahama Abdul-Rahman	Network member	Male
Northern	NOBA	Yussif Alhassan	vice organizer	Male
North East	Tiniyangi OB Network	Ben Awuni Asatanga	Chairman	Male
North East	Tiniyangi OB Network	Grace Auni Alo Grumah	Vice chairperson	Female
North East	Tiniyangi OB Network	Alhaji Mahamudu Baaba	Secretary	Male
North East	Tiniyangi OB Network	Sullemana Ibrahim	Treasurer	Male
North East	Tiniyangi OB Network	Alhassan Hamidu	Network member	Male
Northern	Gushegu OB Network	Alhassan Mumuni Baaba	Chairman	Male
Upper West	Upper west regional Network	Seidu Hafiz	Secretary	Male
Upper West	Wa OB Network	Grace Bomansan	Network member	Female
Upper West	Wa OB Network	Nuhu Abdula	Chairman	Male
Upper West	Jirapa OB Network	Sumaila Guri	Chairman	Male
Upper West	Jirap OB Network	Emmanuel	Secretary	Male
Upper West	Sissala Area OB Network	Alhaji Issah Bawourun	Chairman	Male
Upper West	Sissala Area OB Network	Iddrisu Jampore Dima	Treasurer	Male
Upper West	Sissala Area OB Network	James Paani Welbeck	Organizer	Male
Upper West	Sissala Area OB Network	Janet Baniachia	Office Assistant	Female
Upper West	Sissala Area OB Network	Yahaya Seidu	Network member	Male
Upper West	Sissala Area OB Network	Batong Asamiru Ibrahim	Network member	Male
Upper West	Sissala Area OB Network	John Dimah	Secretary	Male
Upper West	Sissala Area OB Network	Afisatu Iddrisu	Network member	Male
Outgrowers Focus Group Discussions				
Upper	Buoti	Abass Seidu	Outgrower	Male

List of Qualitative Key Informant Interviews, In-Depth Interviews And Focus Group Discussions Held

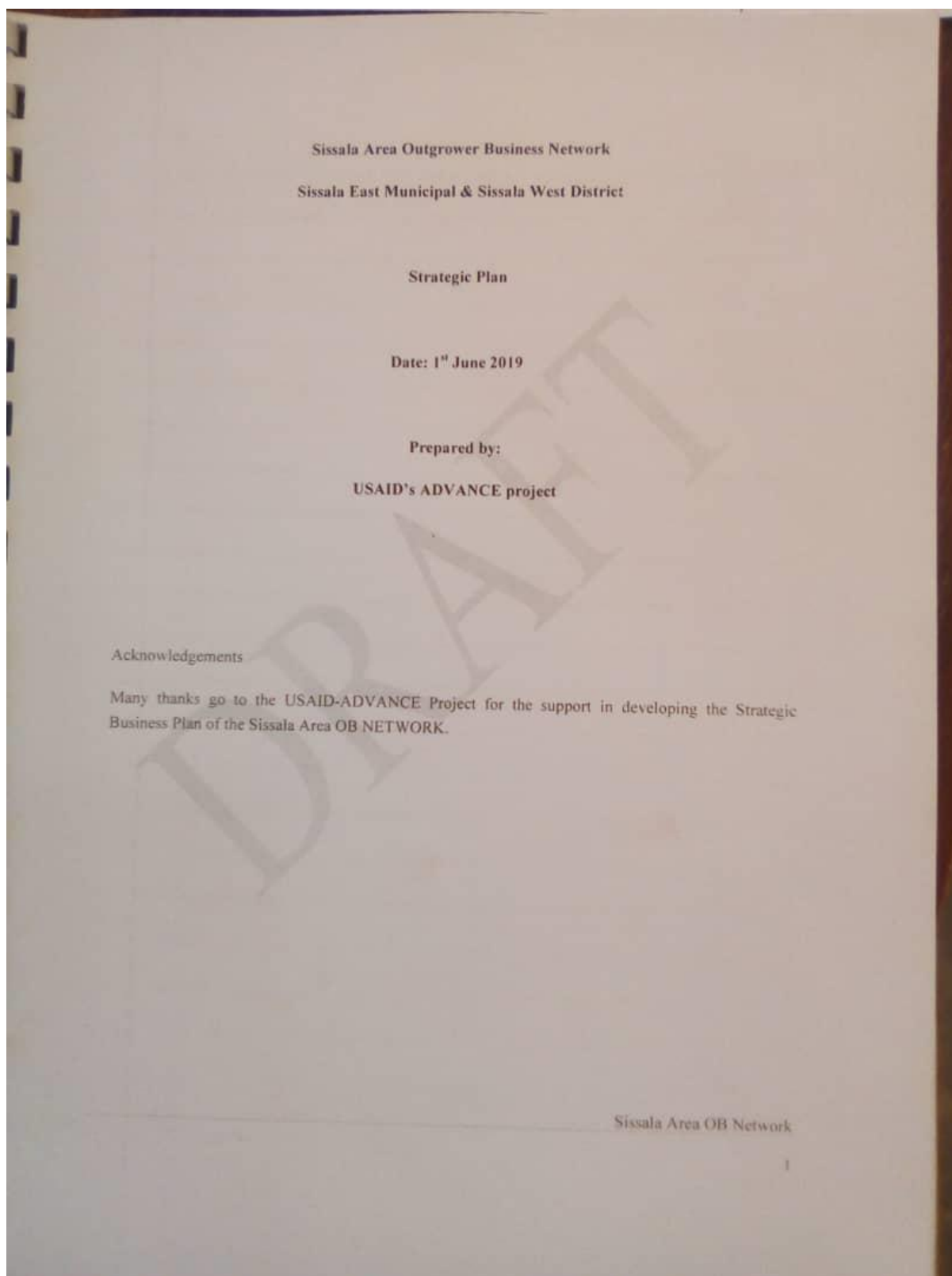
<i>Region</i>	<i>Name of Network</i>	<i>Name of Person(s) We Met</i>	<i>Designation</i>	<i>Gender</i>
West				
Upper West	Buoti	Seidu Juawie	Outgrower	Male
Upper West	Buoti	Payala Moro	Outgrower	Male
Upper West	Buoti	Tahiru Seidu	Outgrower	Male
Upper West	Buoti	Issifu Zeinab	Outgrower	Female
Upper West	Buoti	Hawa Imoro	Outgrower	Female
Upper West	Buoti	Afisatu Yahaya	Outgrower	Female
Upper West	Buoti	Abdulai Ajaratu	Outgrower	Female

ANNEX 3. Bruce Tuckman's Five-Stage Model of Group Development



Source: Adapted from Tuckman and Jensen (1977)

ANNEX 4. Sample of OB Network's Strategic Plan



ANNEX 5. Sample of Purchasing Contract

