

ADVANCE II Newsletter



Photo credit: Lauren Bell

“We can now plow, plant, harvest and sell at the right time and at the right price,” Victoria Asaaro

Victoria Asaaro from Binaba in the Upper East Region wears many hats: lead farmer cultivating two acres of maize, the only female among four input dealers in Binaba, leader of a 75-member women's group, treasurer of the Input Dealers Association, and mother of four. Victoria has been dealing in fertilizer and other agrochemicals for the past 14 years. Although she did not have any formal training in extension services, in her small way, she helped her fellow female smallholder farmers in their farming.

Victoria acknowledges that coming into contact with the USAID/ADVANCE project since 2011 has brought her business to the next level. With project support through small equipment grants (donkey carts and plows) and training on good agricultural practices such as row planting, use of improved seed, appropriate fertilizer and

other chemical application; post-harvest handling practices, record keeping and more, Victoria has moved from subsistence farming to farming as a business. In 2014, she hosted a demonstration plot to teach her group members good agricultural practices that she had learned from **USAID/ADVANCE**. **“ADVANCE has been very helpful to us. We had difficulty accessing plows. Our fields were always plowed after the men's fields were attended to which was a source of worry to us because our fields were plowed late. Now we do not have to depend on the men to plow for us. They now depend on us for our plows,”** says Victoria.

The plows are generating extra income for the group. They plow for other smallholder farmers in surrounding communities whom they charge GHC30.00 per acre. In the 2014 planting season, 18 acres of field belonging to 15 smallholder female farmers

were plowed bringing the group a revenue of GHC540. Beyond that, the donkey carts help them transport produce from the farm to the market and also carry water to homes for a fee.

Through the project's support, Victoria added to her farming operations the sale of ZeroFly storage bags - an insecticide incorporated polypropylene woven bags that prevent pest infestation. At an agricultural forum held in Tamale in the Northern Region in October 2014 called the “4th Annual Pre-harvest Agribusiness Forum,” USAID/ADVANCE linked her to an equipment supplier- VestergaardFrandsen located in Tema – dealers of the ZeroFly storage bags. The event brought together maize, rice, and soybean value chain actors to interact, establish market linkages, and enhance overall efficiency in their industries. Victoria is now purchasing the bags for the smallholder farmers in Binaba to store their grains. Per every bag sold she makes a profit of GHC2.50.

Victoria's input business is also doing well. Due to the cordial relationship she has with input agents in Bawku in the Upper East Region, the agents supply her with bags of fertilizer and other chemicals, which she sells and repays later. In 2014, she was supplied with 3,500 bags of fertilizer and 40 boxes of agrochemicals (containing 12 1-liter bottles), which she sold within three months and repaid the agents. **“Because of these arrangements with the suppliers, I don't need to go to the bank for credit,”** says Victoria. With the cost of credit of at least 30% per year, this arrangement saves Victoria substantial costs and increases her profit margins.

Introducing the only lady DCOP on USAID/FTF Project



Nirinjaka Ramasinjatovo (PhD) serves as the Deputy Chief of Party for Monitoring and Evaluation, Learning and Quality Assurance for the ADVANCE II Project. As part of her job, Niry leads an eight-member M&E and Learning (ME&L) team and oversees the implementation of the ME&L activities.

She is also in charge of designing and assessing the ADVANCE ME&L strategies and systems; coordinating the capacity building strategy of the team; ensuring the production and use of quality ME&L outputs for project management decision making and above all, responsible for the overall quality of the project data and reporting.

Niry has over 13 years experiences in M&E; projects and grants management. Niry is well versed in new business development in the sectors of health, education, natural resources management, child labor, and local development in Africa. She has developed evaluation tools and has led several evaluation projects.

She holds a Master's Degree in Economics and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and a Ph.D. in Social Science from the University of Paris Descartes.

Prior to joining ACIDI/VOCA in 2002 as the Regional M&E Specialist for West and Central Africa, she served as Deputy Country Director and Acting Country Director for Pact, Inc., in Madagascar. She joined ADVANCE in March 2015. Niry is a native French speaker and is fluent in English.

Strengthening FBOs to “Sell More for More”



Photo credit: Lauren Bell

As part of our work to equip Farmer-based Organizations (FBOs) with the requisite skills to become Farmer-based Enterprises, USAID/ADVANCE has trained 108 FBOs in Northern Ghana to bring their capacity to a level where they can improve on their farming operations and increase their income.

In this training, code named “Sell More for

More” (SMFM), the FBOs with over 1,500 members are now equipped to sell more products to increase their income. The training focused on four areas: management, money, marketing and membership.

The 'Management' session taught participants how to

develop demand-driven business plans that will help them identify opportunities, increase cash flows, address challenges and reduce risks. The 'Money' aspect focused on how members can improve internal controls to keep track of inputs, members, storage, expenses and cash.

Participants also learned how to analyze buyer requirement and supply forecasts to help them develop marketing plans and negotiate favorable contracts. The 'Membership' component looked at helping members improve by-laws, communications, conflict resolution and gender integration practices.

“Before the SMFM training, we kept records the traditional way - in our heads, but now we are able to keep records in our records books. The records will help us to know our cost of production and the profit we get,” says Sherifa Mohammed, member of the Ziibinyer Women Farmers Group, Diare in the Northern Region.

FROM THE FIELD

Improving efficiency of Mechanization Services in North Ghana

Afgri Ghana Co. Ltd, distributors of John Deere machinery and equipment in Ghana, has provided tractor maintenance training across the three northern regions for 121 tractor owners and 129 operators. The training offered participants a hands on experience on best safety, maintenance and operation practices. In the past, tractor operators have experienced frequent breakdown of their tractors because they did not know how to operate and maintain them properly. This affected their timely provision of plowing services to farmers. To address this challenge, USAID/ADVANCE collaborated with John Deere to organize the training. This is part of a broader engagement of the project with John Deere to increase efficiency of the tractors which will ultimately increase farmers' access to timely plowing services and other related services.

“In fact, the training has been very useful. We did not know that most of the problems we have been experiencing on our tractors are caused by poor maintenance and operational skills. We will take the lesson with all seriousness to save our tractors from frequent break down,” Awal Abdul-Rahman, nucleus farmer, Bimbilla in the Northern Region.

During the training, Afgri Ghana also used the opportunity to introduce and demonstrate to farmers the “tintin” planter which plants about 80 acres per day and applies fertilizer at the same time. **“This is really an exciting implement, from the way I see things it's possible for me to sow and apply fertilizer to at least 400 acres in just 5 days instead of 8 acres in 5 days with 10 hired labour to carry out the same task. This implement will**



Photo credit: Peace Corps Volunteer Adam Aronow

Official of John Deere taking participants through the various parts of the tractor during one of the training

save a lot of time and cost,” said James Bawa an Outgrower Business Manager, Tumu.

To reach out to more potential buyers, AFGRI Ghana held a road show in Bolga as part of the training in the Upper East Region to introduce the equipment and financing options available for different models of John Deere tractors.

At the Upper West Region training, Radford FM, one of USAID/ADVANCE's partner radio stations in Wa, aired the event highlighting the project's collaborative support with a private sector firm - Afgri Ghana - in equipping tractor owners and operators to provide timely plowing services to farmers.

In northern Ghana, timely plowing service is critical and yet remains a major constraint and the collaboration with John Deere is one of several activities that the project is undertaking to address the constraint.

Strengthening the Maize, Rice and Soybean Value Chains

On May 12, 2015, Premium Foods Limited (PFL), a major maize processor in Ghana, held a Stakeholders' Forum in Kumasi to identify areas for investment in the upcoming production season.

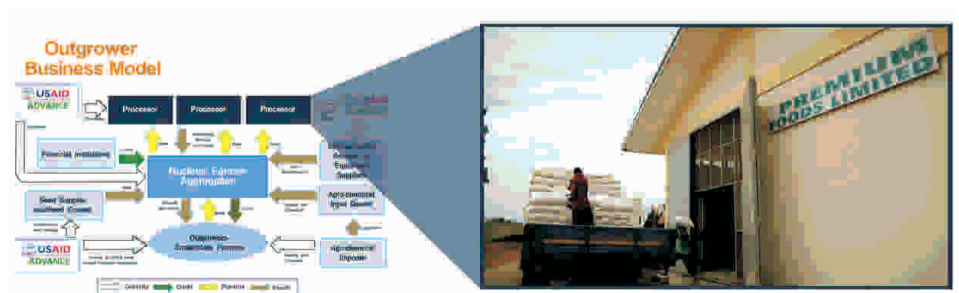
The forum brought together nucleus farmers working with the ADVANCE project, financial and research institutions, and private sector players to discuss effective ways of investing, strengthening the maize, rice, and soybean value chains; and empowering farmers to

operate independently, efficiently, and effectively. Representatives from financial institutions (Fidelity Bank, Opportunity International, and Sinapi Aba Savings and Loans) and the Ghana Agricultural Insurance Pool presented their products and explained how nucleus farmers can access them. A representative from the Crop Research Institute talked to the farmers about good agronomic practices at the various stages of plant growth, existing high-yielding maize varieties, and other

agriculture-related issues.

This specific effort is expected to result in support for over 2,000 smallholder farmers in northern Ghana to take advantage of a 5,000 mt projected demand of maize of the desired quality for supply to PFL

For the past 15 years, PFL has been supporting farmers in Northern Ghana with input and equipment credit to improve yields and quality of produce.



ADVANCE Model showing the role of PFL in the value chain.

Facilitating Data Entry and Analysis with a Data Capture Interface software

Managing large volumes of field data for reporting and analysis while ensuring that none of the data is lost seems a huge task. To prevent such occurrence, USAID/ADVANCE has developed a tool that facilitates data capture, entry and analysis. The Data Capture Interface (DCI) Software helps to register farmers and update activities such as farmers' biodata, services offered to the outgrowers by ADVANCE and Outgrower Businesses, technology adoption, training attendance among others using a smartcard and a smart card reader connected to a laptop. The system is user friendly and works without internet connection.

Operating the system is easy and friendly. The farmers' biodata is captured into the system together with their photos. Photo IDs are then generated on the smart card. During activities such as field training, the project's field officer allows farmers to swipe their card on the card reader to enroll them on the training making attendance data collection very fast, easy and accurately. Even without the ID card, photo and data of the beneficiary entered into the system allows for verification of

the person's identity. All information captured by the field officer stays on his (field officer) laptop until he gets to the office. While in the office, the field officer exports the data from his system which can be imported by all the other officers ensuring data synchronization among project team members.

With this system, capturing and analyzing data is easy eliminating the tendency of double counting since it assigns unique ID numbers to all project beneficiaries. This allows an easier and faster way to enroll beneficiaries for training with the use of the swipe card. Overall, high quality of data is assured with less effort and less time. The project will use those system to track activities and progress of the over 113,000 project beneficiary targeted over the next four years.

After three months of its installation, data quality from the field has improved considerably. Farmers are excited about the ease with which their training records are taken; and wearing the cards gives them a sense of belonging.

Farmers Share Experience on Competitive Maize Production

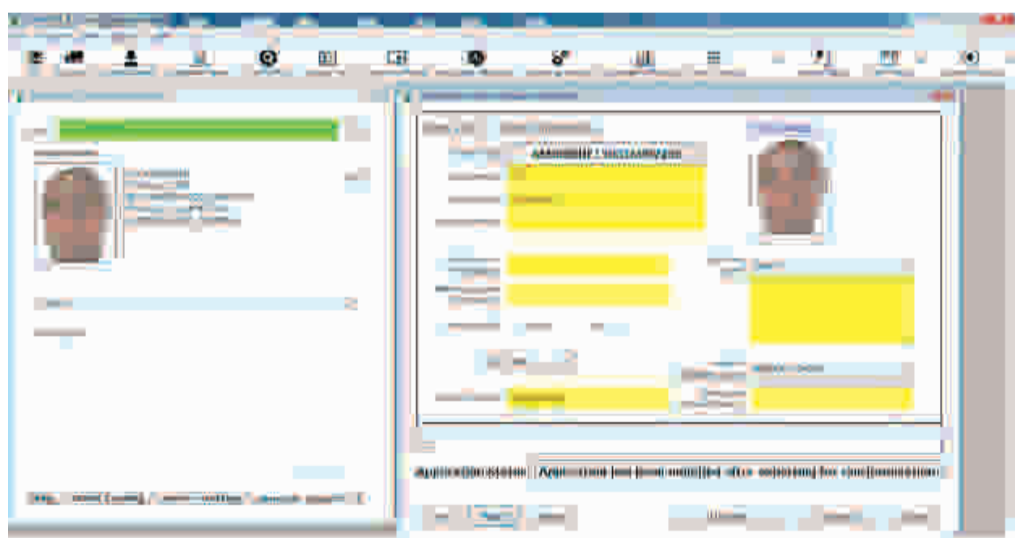


Farmers observing the Pioneer Adikanfo hybrid maize field

A farmer and an aggregator working with USAID/ADVANCE project, hosted 55 smallholder farmers and other stakeholders in the maize value chain at a Farmers' Field Day on June 4, 2015 at Nsoatre and Kobedi in the Brong Ahafo Region.

The hosts of the Field Day, Kusi Baffour and Johnson Kyere, shared their experiences on how they obtained high yields using the Pioneer hybrid Adikanfo maize seed as compared to their usual seed. Kusi has harvested two crops of Pioneer hybrid Adikanfo maize in the last six months and presently has a third six-week old crop growing (to be harvested in August 2015) and intends growing a minor season crop in August 2015. Kusi will be one of the few smallholder farmers in the Brong Ahafo Region to have successfully cultivated four maize crops within one year without irrigation. Kusi shared his learning experiences of how he got a yield of 0.6 mt per a quarter of an acre demonstration field using Pioneer Adinkafo hybrid maize seed as compared to 0.15 mt per same size using his own seed. Further, instead of using inorganic fertilizers which could have increased his per acre cost by at least GHC700.00, Kusi used poultry manure which he had in abundance from his poultry farm.

Johnson Kyere, on his part, indicated that he obtained a yield of 8 mt/ha from his pioneer field as compared to 3.22 mt/ha from his usual seed type which motivated him to cultivate a three acre field solely with the pioneer hybrid seed during this year's early rains.



Snapshot of the Data Capture Interface screen