

ADVANCE II Newsletter



Some of Richard Akoka's Women Farmers happily show their good quality rice grains

Farewell Message from Chief of Party

All good things come to an end and this truism aptly applies to my four-year stay in Ghana as the Chief of Party of the USAID-ADVANCE Project. I may be departing for Tanzania on February 28th but I am leaving behind many good memories and one the best projects teams I have ever had the pleasure to work with. The project is being left in capable hands with Dr. Emmanuel Dormon, one of the finest development managers I have ever met, and his one hundred-strong team from our partner companies of TechnoServe, Pab Consult, and ACDEP. To all the staff in all five offices, in all five regions, and to the partners who work with us every day, I say thank you for your service and I will truly miss you.

The ADVANCE Project, with all of its accomplishments, is really a project made successful by the Ghanaian people, farmers, associations, and companies who work alongside us through their business and farming operations with a time and monetary investment that far exceeds that of the project. You are the people doing the hard work, taking risk and hopefully making the gains from our partnerships. To all of you I say a special thank you.

A special note of appreciation to the USAID Mission and the staff there who worked closely with us. I truly hope that we will meet up again. It has also been wonderful working with all the staff from MOFA, MOTI and the many agencies who both assist us in our programs as well as benefit from our services. It has been a pleasure working with the Ghana public sector and you have my respect.

This project continues under the experienced and hardworking senior staff of ADVANCE;

To you I pass the torch..... Thomas Carr

“My aim is to support women smallholder farmers to increase their incomes,” Richard Akoka

Seeing women go through the drudgery of farming, especially preparing their land with hoes and other manual tools, has always been a sad moment for 45-year-old Richard Akoka from Navrongo. For this reason, he has wanted to find ways of helping female farmers reduce the tedious nature of land preparation. In Northern Ghana, Akoka is one of few male nucleus farmers supporting smallholder female farmers to improve their yields and increase their incomes. Akoka provides plowing services, certified seed, and fertilizer on credit to 382 women (70 percent of his 558 outgrowers) cultivating 400 acres of rice.

In addition to these services, Akoka hosted five demonstration plots in 2013/14 to teach farmers the good agricultural practices he learned from USAID/ADVANCE II: use of certified seeds, how to plant in row, correct application of fertilizer and other agrochemicals, post-harvest handling, and a technique for rice cultivation for higher profit—System of Rice Intensification (SRI). The women also received tarpaulins—small post-harvest equipment that serve as the threshing floor—to improve product quality and reduce post-harvest losses. With such support, they were able to supply high-quality produce to Akoka for his end market.

To show off the success they have achieved from adopting SRI technique and other good practices and to teach other farmers, the female outgrowers set up two demonstration plots in 2013. Following the demonstrations, 78 of the participating farmers adopted the SRI technique and are increasing yields from 1.5 mt/acre to 2.5 mt/acre.

As part of encouraging and supporting outgrower businesses to offer better and improved services to their farmers, USAID/ADVANCE II business services staff are helping Akoka and others like him to develop crop and enterprise budgets. With this intervention, he has a better understanding of how to cost his production activities per crop; know the real cost of providing services (plowing, input credit, shelling, and threshing) to his outgrowers; and how to charge them reasonably and profitably.

ADVANCE II Technical Leader at the Helm of Agricultural Production in Northern Ghana



With over 20 years working experience promoting farmers' socioeconomic development in rural areas of Ghana, Mr. Peter Asibey-Bonsu is making strides in agricultural production in Tamale, Wa, and Bolgatanga project areas.

Since joining the USAID/ADVANCE II project in April 2014, Peter has led a team of 16 agricultural production staff to facilitate the setting up of 180 actor-led crop demonstrations (maize, rice, and soybean), which were used to train over 12,000 farmers in good agricultural, harvesting, and post-harvest handling practices.

Before joining the project, Peter worked with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture from 1998–2008 as district agricultural extension officer, district agricultural coordinator, national coordinator for the Sasakawa-Global 2000 Production Program, and national coordinator for research-extension-farmer linkages. His role involved supervising and giving technical support on various demonstration plots; as well as facilitating the provision of supporting systems including finance, fertilizers, pesticides, and in some cases markets to farmers. He was part of the team that supported the African Development Bank-sponsored Food Crops Development Project to develop maize and soybean production and processing guides.

From 2008–2009, Peter made a significant contribution to the development of the extension component of the Millennium Challenge Account Compact and also provided training services to farmers' groups in the Afram Basin.

Peter is a good team player and his rich experience as a team leader overseeing two national projects has enriched and strengthened his leadership skills extensively.

Value Chain Stakeholders Engage and Explore in Lead-Up to 2015 Planting Season.

On March 26, 2015, the Ghana Agricultural Inputs Dealers Association in collaboration with USAID ADVANCE II and the Agricultural Technology Transfer (ATT) projects hosted more than 800 maize, rice, and soybean value chain stakeholders in Tamale ahead of the year's planting season. The “5th Northern Ghana Pre-Season Planning and Networking Forum” served as a platform for dialogue and networking among a range of market actors, such as farmers, tractor operators, processors, seed producers, agro-input dealers, financial institutions, and many more.

Guided by the theme “Smart Technologies for Increased Productivity,” the event included a conference and exhibition. Conference discussions focused on the benefits of using technologies, such as equipment and improved seed, and financing to boost productivity. ICT applications and crop insurance were also touted for their use in smart decision making.

At the exhibition, farmers and other participants enjoyed a hands-on introduction to products, equipment, and services that could enhance planting practices. Irrigation techniques, improved seed varieties, and the latest in weather information sharing technology were on display to attract potential buyers.

In his keynote address read on his behalf at the event, the Northern Regional Minister lauded USAID ADVANCE II and ATT for their various contributions to the region. He acknowledged ADVANCE II's efforts in facilitating strong market linkages in the maize, rice, and soybean value chains in the project's operational areas.

He also indicated that ADVANCE II and ATT have introduced farmers to several technologies and interventions that are in line with the Ghanaian government's mission to ensure food security and reduce poverty in Northern Ghana.

Closing the ceremony, USAID Ghana's Deputy Mission Director Andy Karas emphasized USAID/Ghana's continued support of the agricultural market system and promotion of collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Also in attendance were chiefs of party from other Feed the Future projects, representatives from development partners, the Regional MoFA Director, and other dignitaries.



A cross section of participants at the pre-season event

FROM THE FIELD

Tamale: Supporting Smallholder Farmers to Reduce Post-harvest Losses in Rice Production

"I am very impressed with the performance of this rice thresher. If I am to rate it, I will give it 95% efficiency. It gives out pure and clean grains, which do not need further winnowing before bagging," remarked Ahmed Yakubu Gumah. After more than 10 years of farming, nucleus farmer Gumah from Nasia in the West Mamprusi District of the Northern Region witnessed the difference between manual threshing and using a rice thresher. For all these years, he manually threshed rice by running a tractor over it, then hiring women to pick the grains and winnow it. This could take three to four days to fully thresh just two acres. In 2014, with USAID/ADVANCE II support through small equipment grants, Gumah received a rice thresher to thresh 82 acres of rice (26.32 mt) within 12 days for 65 of his 150 outgrowers. In addition, unlike with manual threshing, the rice thresher eliminated stones and other foreign materials from the grains. In the 2014 project year, USAID/ADVANCE II reached 17 nucleus farmers with 17 threshers. An additional 73 farmers will benefit from threshers to service 17,200 outgrowers by 2018 when the project ends.



Nucleus farmer Gumah admiring the rice thresher.



This locally constructed silo can store about 1.5 mt of maize

Bolga:

Financial Institution Records High Repayment Rate from Smallholder Farmers.

Many financial institutions view lending to farmers as a risky venture due to the perceived (or real) chance of high default or slow repayment rate. Farmers working with USAID/ADVANCE II implemented by ACDI/VOCA in the Kassena Nankana Municipality in the Upper East Region have portrayed a different story. Out of 532 participants, 529 of them (413 females and 119 males) have fully repaid their production credit package provided by Sinapi Aba Loans & Savings have fully repaid their production credit package provided by Sinapi Aba Loans & Savings y in full by the due date.

In June 2014, the smallholder farmers received their loan of GH¢ 266,000 at a 32 percent rate per annum for the purpose of plowing their rice fields and purchasing fertilizer and other inputs. The farmers also purchased inputs in bulk at a 6 percent discount from Enepa Ventures, a private sector firm based in Kumasi that supported community-based demonstration sites in all three northern regions. A total of 1,365 bags of NPK fertilizer and 455 bags of urea were purchased and delivered to the farmers in Navrongo in a timely manner. Each farmer received three bags of NPK fertilizer and one bag of urea to cultivate an acre of rice field.

To ensure that the farmers achieved yields required to repay the credit facility comfortably, USAID/ADVANCE II trained them in good agricultural practices and monitored their progress through the growing season. The farmers adopted the recommended practices and reported yield increases from 0.6 mt/acre to 2 mt/acre; a 333 percent increase.

"This has been the best recovery so far in the season. The farmers repaid on time. The training on good agricultural practices helped them to correct production practices and have good yields," says Justice Brempong, credit officer, Sinapi Aba Savings & Loans Company.

Wa: A Real Innovation!

After a training on post-harvest handling by USAID/ADVANCE II in collaboration with MoFA, Lawrence Litor, one of the participants from Kokoligu in Nandom district, initiated the construction of a silo using local materials: mud and dried straw. The dried straw reinforces the strength and prevents cracks on the silo. According to Litor, the silo can store about 1.5 metric tons of maize or 15 maxi bags. *"During the training, I was introduced to different types of silos, which could be made locally. In view of this, and with the knowledge I gained from the training, I decided to construct one for myself. I used to store my maize in the bedroom and realized that 30 percent of the produce was being destroyed by pests, especially mice and other insect pests. Thanks to the post-harvest handling training from ADVANCE, I have been able to construct this silo and I have used it to store my maize since October last year to date without any pests attack. I personally think knowledge gained must actually be put into practice,"* said Litor.

Beneficiaries of the credit facility in their rice field



USAID Celebrates Women's Contribution to Agriculture

The USAID/ADVANCE II project, implemented by ACDI/VOCA, strongly believes in reducing gender inequality and recognizing women's contributions to agriculture. The project has developed a gender strategy and work plan that emphasizes gender mainstreaming. To mark International Women's Day, USAID/ADVANCE II joined the global community to celebrate the success of women by organizing a series of activities in two of its operational areas.

In Binaba, a community in the Upper East Region, USAID/ADVANCE II joined 211 smallholder farmers (201 women and 10 men) in the celebration. Hosted by Nucleus Farmer Chief Moses Abaare, the event was marked by songs, dances, a cooking contest, quiz to test farmers' knowledge on good agricultural practices, and thoughtful speeches. Messages delivered by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Women in Agriculture Development, District Coordination Council, and private sector firms including MTN and major input dealers highlighted the various contributions female farmers are making in agriculture. The speeches applauded USAID/ADVANCE II's role in creating equitable and sustainable opportunities for women and men along the maize, rice, and soybean value chain. They encouraged increased engagement between female farmers, community leaders, and other value chain actors.

Two female farmers—nucleus farmer Hajia Teini Tia and FBO leader Janet Ali—shared how they have made significant progress in their farming operations through the support of USAID/ADVANCE II.



Judges for the cooking contest inspecting the dishes



Winners of the cooking contest receiving their award from Nucleus Farmer Chief Moses Abaare Appiah

Teini indicated that she had moved from being a commercial farmer to an outgrower business cultivating 50 acres of maize and providing plowing and input services for 100 outgrowers (60 women and 40 men).

Janet recounted how the adoption of good agricultural practices helped her group to increase their maize yield from an average of 0.3–0.4 mt to 1.0 mt and how the use of a tarpaulin for threshing improved the quality of their produce.

Various awards including knapsack sprayers, improved maize seed (9 kilos each), and MTN souvenirs were given to the winners of the contest and quiz.

The Gindabour Women's Group in the Upper West Region hosted over 200 women from seven female farmer-based organizations in the region. The women shared how they have improved household incomes as a result of their access to fertile land following the USAID/ADVANCE II intervention. They recounted project interventions such as training on good agricultural practices, empowering them to see farming as a business, and numeracy training. They indicated that their adoption of the good agricultural practices improved their yield from 0.3 mt to 1.5 mt leading to an increase in household income to support their families. *We used to throw our seed anyhow on the farm until ADVANCE came and taught us how to plant in rows. We put it to practice and indeed the results have been very good. Now we get more than the men on the farm. We can now get up to 10 bags of maize from 1 acre, a big difference compared to a maximum of 3 bags from an acre,* said Agnes Sarfo, leader of the Gindabour Women's Group.

The women's groups entertained the audience with traditional dances and songs that taught the good agricultural practices, farming as a business, and numeracy training they learned from USAID/ADVANCE II.

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