

FEED THE FUTURE ADVANCE II PROJECT NEWSLETTER

FTF ADVANCE II Provides Relief to Smallholder Farmers to Boost Food Production



Wa zonal OB network's secretary, Martin Domatieha (right), presenting ADVANCE II project's grant (fertilizer) to Felicia in Jang. Photo Credit: Samuel Asinvim

In Ghana, the introduction of improved technologies, particularly the use of certified seeds, fertilizer, and herbicides, has proven effective in contributing to yield improvement for smallholder farmers.

The Government of Ghana (GOG) has invested in designing and implementing the Planting for Food & Jobs Program. This agricultural subsidy project is as part of social intervention measures aimed at boosting food productivity to address household food security, income, and the nutritional needs of vulnerable groups such as women and children.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent containment directives, including lockdowns issued by the GOG, caused input shortages for the 2020 agricultural production season as importers faced closed borders. FTF ADVANCE II's rapid assessment study results showed limited access to inputs such as seed, fertilizer, and agrochemicals.

FTF ADVANCE II through its COVID-19 grant program provided input stimulus packages to vulnerable smallholder farmers for relief and recovery from COVID-19 disruptions and the pandemic's effects on the 2020 production season in the Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) zone of influence. The grant agreements were signed with ten zonal outgrower business (OB) networks responsible for negotiating inputs with suppliers and delivering them to targeted smallholder farmers working for network members.

"I am so happy to be a beneficiary of this support. I did not know how to get fertilizer for my maize and soybean farms this season. This is a great relief for me and I am very grateful to the ADVANCE project" — Felicia Domma, an outgrower for OB Martin Dormatieha of the Wa OB Network.

In all, 922 smallholder farmers including 555 women benefitted from the input stimulus packages valued at GHS 416,105 (\$73,000.88). The package is expected to support the cultivation of 478 hectares of maize and soybean (453 ha of maize, 53 ha of soybean and 0.9 ha mixed cropping) while producing about 2,164 metric tons of maize and 89 metric tons of soybean in the 2020 production season. The produce obtained through the stimulus packages has contributed to food security for recipients and their families and additional income to support their livelihoods.

ADVANCE II Provides Personal Protective Equipment to Value Chain Actors

The Feed The Future Agricultural Development & Value Chain Enhancement Project (FTF ADVANCE II), in collaboration with the Sung Foundation, Regional Advisory Information and Network Systems (RAINS), Youth Advocacy on Rights and Opportunities (YARO), and Youth Harvest Foundation, provided 4,500 nose masks, 120 Veronica buckets, 500 (250ml) hand sanitizers, and 120 (300ml) hand washing soaps to 120 village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) to facilitate adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols.

This initiative is in line with the project's objective to ensure smallholder farmers and other value chain actors conduct their livelihood operations while mitigating the risk of COVID-19 infection.

Using the ten zonal outgrower networks it helped create, the project also distributed 20,000 nose masks to smallholder farmers in USAID's GFSS zone of influence. Preference was given to female (12,000) and youth (5,000) outgrowers, VSLA members, and safe spray providers.



Sanka Alhassan, an outgrower, washing her hands before joining a VSLA meeting. Photo credit: Jason Amoo

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FTF ADVANCE II Supports 400 Women with Mobile Phones



Mobile phone beneficiaries in Nalerigu
Photo credit: Jason Amoo

FTF ADVANCE II has distributed 400 mobile phones to women in the GFSS zone of influence in the Northern, North East, Upper East, and Upper West regions. This effort aimed to empower women and local leaders to mitigate COVID-19 disruptions through access to digital resources.

The project targeted female outgrowers who have never owned a phone and needed one to establish linkages with other value chain actors. The phones will allow these vulnerable market actors to conduct their agribusiness operations while reducing the necessity for human contact during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Manya Tewanjie, an outgrower, received a mobile phone — the first she had ever owned — through this intervention. When her husband passed away in 2011, she was left to tend to their one-acre soybean farm in Dagando, a village located in the town of Yendi in Ghana's Northern Region. With nine children, three of whom are still in school, Manya had her hands full. "The children are many," she said. "And I have to struggle to take care of them."

Manya would typically sell 300 to 500 kilograms of soybean annually, earning about GHS 800, or the equivalent of US \$137. To supplement her income, she joined a VSLA, which allowed her to contribute to a shared savings account with other community members, receive share-outs (accumulated savings and earnings shared out proportionally to the amount that each member has saved throughout the agreed cycle), and take out small loans when necessary. Through these share-outs and loans, Manya launched a side business selling *pito*, a type of beer made from fermented millet or sorghum.

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GAB Ventures Expands Outgrower Scheme Despite Market Uncertainties Caused By COVID-19 Disruptions

Over the years, ADVANCE II has supported Gouhabelle Agriculture and Business (GAB) Ventures, an OB, through a variety of interventions to increase its market competitiveness.

The support included set up of demonstration farms to train its outgrowers on good agronomic practices, market linkages, business development services, financial services, outgrower scheme and business linkages to major buyers of maize and soybean.

Through ADVANCE II's facilitation, GAB Ventures was linked to RMG, an agro-input supplier, and Agrisolve, an agro-solution company, in 2014 to establish an outgrower scheme that will support more than 1,000 smallholder farmers in accessing inputs and technology on credit and repay with produce.

Even though COVID-19 brought input supply chain disruptions and market uncertainty, John Dima, CEO of GAB Ventures, with resources from RMG and Agrisolve, took the risk to expand his production area from 1,244 hectares in 2019 to 1,969 hectares (1,648 ha of maize and 321 ha of soybean) for the 2020 production season.

Through this year's outgrower scheme, he supported 1,052 farmers (886 men and 166 women) from 38 communities within the Sissala East and West districts of the Upper West Region.

Under this scheme, GAB Ventures pre-financed certified seeds (53 MT), fertilizers (824 MT), pesticides (9,043 L) and crop protection (1,030 L) for a total value of GHS2,093,893 (about \$364,000) to other OBs and smallholder farmers.

This scheme will enable production of 7,000 MT of maize and 56 MT of soybean at the end of the season with a projected value of GHS7, 847,150 (about \$1,364,000).

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Partner Profile:

Regional OB Networks Appoint Agribusiness Managers to Expand Business and Markets and Effectively Coordinate Regional Activities

The agribusiness managers will help run the business of the OB networks and specifically work with input firms and buyers to ensure inputs are received on time and aggregation and supply of produce is managed professionally. They are also responsible for addressing challenges of their zonal OB networks to raise adequate funds for their operations.



Jeremiah James Bavug, Northern Region OB Network's agribusiness manager, is a Chartered Finance, Accounting and Auditing professional with over eight years of work experience.

He previously worked as a business advisory service officer for USAID-funded Financing Ghanaian Agriculture Project assigned to Saha Training and Consult where he was responsible for providing technical and administrative support to facilitate access to finance for agribusiness enterprises.

Abdul-Malik Braimah, Upper West Region OB Network's agribusiness manager, is an agriculturist with over 10 years of work experience in farming advisory services and market development.



His last position was with the GIZ-funded Market Oriented Agriculture Program in Wa as an agribusiness manager where he led the team in charge of training and extension services for conservation Agriculture in the Savannah Region.



Ibrahim Rasheed, Upper East Region OB Network's agribusiness manager, has over a decade of work experience in policy and organizational development.

Prior to this role, Ibrahim was a business service officer with FTF ADVANCE II in Bolgatanga responsible for diagnosing and developing business for outgrower businesses.

ADVANCE II Provides Personal Protective Equipment to Value Chain Actors

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"Frequency of hand washing has increased since we received the items. We always have the veronica bucket, soap and sanitizer at our meetings, and everyone must wash their hands before joining the meeting" - Sanka Alhassan, an outgrower and VSLA member

FTF ADVANCE II is promoting behaviors that reduce the risk of COVID -19 infection and spread within the communities. In line with this objective, the project also provided grants to four local non-governmental organizations to train 8,000 women, 2,000 youth, and members of 120 VSLAs on COVID-19 safety protocols. The training covered social distancing, use of sanitizers and nose masks, regular hand washing, avoidance of crowds, and quarantining when noticing signs of the virus, among other topics. In addition, some participants were trained on income generating activities related to COVID-19, such as mask sewing and the production of liquid soap and hand sanitizers, to enhance their livelihoods.

The trained women and youth are subsequently responsible for conducting COVID-19 sanitation activities in their various communities. These activities are mostly carried out during VSLA meetings or during social gatherings.

"We usually go to the mosques and churches to talk to them about COVID-19 after prayers or sometimes at funerals or market places. Initially, most people did not believe the virus existed but gradually people are beginning to accept our messages and complying with the protocols" – Shetu Abdulai, outgrower in Kpatai, Bawku West District who attended the COVID-19 training-of-trainers by Youth Harvest Foundation, Ghana in Bawku.

The trainers also advised women and youth group leaders who attended the training to advocate for the construction and use of tippy taps to community members to ensure hand washing under running water since most communities lack access to such amenities.



Female outgrower in Gushegu using a tippy tap outside her home. Photo credit: Iason Amoo

FTF ADVANCE II Supports 400 Women with Mobile Phones

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"I usually borrow from my VSLA group to buy inputs for my farm but decided to start the [beer] business to raise more income to support my children's education" she said.

When the first cases of COVID-19 occurred in Ghana and the government enforced restrictions, Manya panicked because most of her children worked or attended school in Kumasi, Accra, or Cape Coast. The three who attended school returned home after their schools closed, but the others remained in the busy capital city of Accra. Manya worried they could get infected and she would be unable to reach them. Previously, she had to ask neighbors to place calls to her children. And because she also relies on financial support from her brothers in Accra, Manya also had to rely on her eldest son to collect the money. Sometimes, that meant waiting weeks.

"Now I can easily call my children if anything happens, and I will be able to send and receive money from my brothers directly," Manya said.

Before receiving the phones, MTN, the leading mobile network operator in Ghana, partnered to lead the women through a mobile money training. At the training, the women were taken through the step-by-step process of accessing mobile money services, benefits of using digital payment systems, and information on fraud detection and prevention. The project also taught them how to access COVID-19, agricultural, and weather information on the Vodafone 3-2-1 Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system.



Katumi learning how to access mobile money from an MTN vendor.
Photo Credit: Iason Amoo

Katumi Issah, an outgrower and mother of four, received her first phone and made her first mobile money deposit. *"I am so happy I can't wait to get home and show somebody how to also do it. I just checked my balance and now know how to send money to my input dealer to bring goods to my house", she said joyfully.*

During COVID-19, the Feed the Future Ghana ADVANCE II Project is providing relief to smallholder farmers through its outgrower business networks in the Northern, North East, Upper East, and Upper West regions and by promoting the use of digital tools and services, including mobile money to limit physical contact and the spread of the virus.

GAB Ventures Expands Outgrower Scheme Despite Market Uncertainties Caused COVID-19 Disruptions

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The expansion was possible because of ADVANCE II's advice to quickly take measures to avoid COVID-19 disruptions on global input supply chains by using locally produced certified seeds.

"We had planned to purchase Pioneer seeds for production of maize on about 2,000 hectares of land, but they were not available due to COVID-19. With ADVANCE's support, I quickly decided to use locally produced seeds for soybean and maize production since they are available in local markets even though I normally don't use them."

— John Dimah, CEO of GAB Ventures



John Dimah (left) with outgrower during field inspection to assess input performance provided under outgrower scheme.
Photo credit: Charles Yaro

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