



USAID'S ADVANCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER

USAID's ADVANCE project supports outgrower business networks to make their activities sustainable



Members of OB networks, FBEs and government agencies in a group photograph during the regional interface meeting in Wa in the Upper West Region. Photo Credit: Abdulai A. Rahaman

The USAID's Agricultural Development and Value Chain Enhancement (ADVANCE) project works with an outgrower business (OB) model that centers on outgrower businesses and aimed to reach 127,000 smallholder farmers. Since 2014, the project has adopted a value chain approach where smallholder farmers are linked to information, inputs, equipment services, finance, and markets through nucleus (commercial) farmers

and/or traders (aggregators) who have the capacity, and are willing, to invest in these value chains. These nucleus farmers and/or traders who play a pivotal role are referred to as outgrower businesses. To date, the project works with 424 OBs who have provided services to 131,394 smallholder farmers. To make OBs' activities sustainable, the project supports them to form networks through which they will strengthen relationships among

themselves and linkages with other value chain actors and stakeholders to accomplish business and advocacy goals, and also undertake joint activities. The OBs are also expected to advocate for better policies for the agricultural sector.

As of September 2018, the project had facilitated the formation of 14 zonal-level OB networks across the three northern regions and the Brong Ahafo Region. Members of the OB networks support 88,469 smallholder farmers (44,771 males and 43,698 females).

In the Upper East Region, the project facilitated the formation of a regional OB network as an apex body to oversee the activities of the zonal networks. A regional OB network will enhance the capacity of the OBs to advocate for better agricultural policies at the regional level. The project held a strategic planning workshop in mid-September 2018, with executives of the zonal networks where a regional action plan was developed, and a regional interim executive elected to oversee implementation of the action plan until permanent executives are elected. The

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USAID's ADVANCE project empowers women for agricultural production and livelihood

By collaborating with NGOs such as the Coalition for the Development of Western Corridor of Northern Region (NORTHCODE) and other projects, USAID's ADVANCE project facilitates access to land by women for farming activities. As of March 2018, the project helped secure tenure rights for 1,600 acres of farm lands to 1,000 women through a 10-year lease. The success of a female farmer, Asibobo Alhassan, in Kongo in Garu-Tempene District in the Upper East Region has urged her husband and community leaders to release additional farm land to the women in the 2018 production season.

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Asibobo Alhassan standing in her farm with a bucket of maize cobs

Meet USAID's ADVANCE project's Finance and Administration Manager



Yves Kouadio

Finance and Administration Manager, USAID's ADVANCE project

Yves Kouadio has over 14 years of professional experience working in the development field in the areas of finances and administration, project proposal writing, operations management, team capacity building and project startup. He also has skills such as conferences' and workshops' organization and logistics coordination.

Yves has worked with various international organizations including; Development Alternative Incorporated, OIC International, Habitat for Humanity (Cote d'Ivoire) and other local organizations in various positions in both French and English-speaking countries (Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Rwanda).

Yves joined USAID's ADVANCE project in June 2018 as Finance and Administration Manager. He is fully bilingual in English and French. His last place of work was with Africa Lead West Africa Region, a DAI project funded by USAID where he worked as the Finance and Administration Manager for the West Africa region. Yves loves cooking and car racing.

Spill over results of safe spray service provision lead service providers to form networks



A trained spray service provider spraying a soybean farm

In early 2015, USAID's ADVANCE project introduced safe spraying service provision program to enable proper handling and application of agro-chemicals. By September 2018, the project had trained 903 safe spraying service providers (SSPs) across the zone of influence and equipped them with personal protective equipment (PPE). These SSPs train smallholder farmers in their communities on safer use and handling of pesticides and spray farmers' fields for an agreed fee. Out of the number trained, 367 SSPs sprayed 8,905 hectares of land for over 7,954 smallholder farmers (3,102 females), and realized GHC204,208 (US\$45,357).

In addition to educating and providing services to the farmers, SSPs are contributing to the reduction of farmers' exposure to health hazards from improper application, handling and storage of pesticides. "Being an SSP is not only about spraying people's farms but educating the farmers on safer use and handling of pesticides. Dressing in my PPE is enough education to the farmers as they mostly learn through visualization. I thank USAID's ADVANCE project for helping me to impact my community positively through this SSP program," Adam Wahab, an SSP in

the Upper East Region said.

The benefits and interest in SSPs participating in the program have spilled over beyond the project's involvement. Between April and May 2018, without the project's support, SSPs in the Upper East Region trained 32 smallholder farmers in the region to also become service providers. The newly trained SSPs acquired their own PPE and sprayed a total of 26.2 hectares by June 2018.

The SSPs have formed networks to make the interventions sustainable beyond the USAID's ADVANCE project. With the project's support, SSPs in the Upper East Region formed networks in Builsa North, Builsa South and Mamprugu Moaduri Districts to oversee their activities.

The Department of Food and Agriculture in the region has recognized the networks as functioning groups in the district. The networks will formally register with the Plant Protection and Regulatory Services Directorate (PPRSD) of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The networks will manage all SSPs'

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Spill over results of safe spray service inspire service providers to form networks ...cont'd from page 2



Kwame Akponjabil, an SSP, taking other SSPs through active ingredient identification and recording during an SSP training at Naadema in the Builsa South District in the Upper East Region

activities in their respective areas and deliver quality services to smallholder farmers in each community. They will engage various district offices of the Department of Agriculture and other regulatory bodies in their activities for SSP business certification and trainings.

The success of these three networks has become a model for replication in other regions. USAID's ADVANCE project will guide all SSPs to form networks in their districts to make their activities sustainable.

USAID's ADVANCE project empowers women for agricultural production and livelihood ...cont'd from page 1

Asibobo's husband, Alhassan Yakubu, cultivated 3.2 hectares of maize and harvested 0.45 MT on average in 2015 and 2016, earning an average of GHC 400 (US\$ 89) each year. In the 2017 production season, Asibobo requested 1.6 hectares of land from her husband to complement his efforts. Through USAID's ADVANCE's plea, Alhassan reluctantly released the land to his wife. She used 1.2 hectares to cultivate maize and the remaining for groundnut production. USAID's ADVANCE project linked her to an outgrower business (OB), Abdul Rahman Mohammed, who trained her on good agronomic practices, including row planting, fertilizer application, and pest management. After adopting these practices, she harvested 3.2 MT of maize and sold 2.5 MT, which generated income of GHC 2,500 (US\$558). Asibobo's husband stated: "I was not so

sure my wife could farm so I was reluctant to give her the land. Adopting USAID's ADVANCE's recommendations, she proved me and other men wrong. I now know that providing land to women can help improve families' livelihoods."

Because of Asibobo's success, the men in the community have expressed their willingness to release land to their wives to farm during the upcoming production season. Other women, upon witnessing the respect she gained from her husband and other men in the community, consult her on good agronomic practices. The couple intends to cultivate seven hectares in 2018. USAID's ADVANCE's OB will continue to provide them with the necessary training and help them access inputs. The project will strengthen its advocacy interventions for more land to be released to women.

USAID's ADVANCE supports outgrower businesses to make their activities sustainable ...cont'd from page 1

project supported five zonal OB networks to develop action plans for advocacy and business opportunities.

In the Upper West Region, the project facilitated a regional interface meeting between the project-supported OB networks and public-sector actors including the metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies, district departments of agriculture, financial institutions and the environmental protection agency in the region to formally introduce the zonal networks to the government agencies. During the meeting, the OBs elected a five-member interim executive body, who will plan and form a regional OB network in the Upper West Region and guide activities of the zonal bodies. The Director of MOFA for Wa, Mrs. Gertrude Dumeli Dary, welcomed the initiative and assured the OBs that the government will support them.

OB networks in the Northern Region also strengthened their internal structures. In Karaga, the zonal OB network adopted a constitution and scheduled induction meetings with the Karaga District Assembly and Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA). In Yendi, the zonal OB network discussed the implementation of a new deal with Yedent Agro Limited, an agro-food processing firm in Sunyani. The deal provides

them with certified seeds, fertilizer, weedicides and crop protection chemicals for two of their members to cultivate 150 acres of maize. The company expects to receive 105MT of maize as repayment and purchase additional produce the farmers may offer. In Tamale, the OBs invited project staff to help them restructure the Tamale zonal OB network which was formed in 2017 but was facing challenges. They elected new executives, and proposed a new name for the network, Northern Outgrower Business Association (NOBA). They also reviewed and adopted a constitution.

The project will continue to monitor the OB networks, support them to develop additional plans as they implement the existing ones, address all lapses and provide technical backstopping in areas such as advocacy and business expansion where needed.

USAID's ADVANCE project connects smallholder farmers to input suppliers and buyers through mobile money services

Most of the USAID's ADVANCE project beneficiaries live in remote communities in the three northern regions with limited or no financial services. They face challenges, such as inadequate access to financial services and difficulty obtaining agrochemical and other agricultural inputs. To mitigate this situation, the project collaborated with financial institutions and telecommunication companies to provide digital financial services (DFS) through mobile money. This technology promotes cashless transactions among value chain actors to promote efficiency and reduce risk associated with cash payments.

Since 2014, the project has linked 4,756 actors to mobile money and trained 1,482 project beneficiaries, including 692 women, to become mobile money subscribers.

Adopting DFS has contributed to smallholder farmers' access to money, improved payments, reduced the risk of cash transactions, and facilitated input credit recovery process. In August 2018, the project organized community input promotions for over 8,750 smallholder farmers across 16 districts in the Northern Region. After the promotions, 222 farmers from the Zagum, Fio Naya, Boamasah, Kinkandina communities in the West Mamprusi District used mobile money to purchase 13.2 metric tons of NPK fertilizer from Mumuni Enterprise, an input shop owned by Alhaji Mumuni Braimah, at a value of GHS17,952.00 (USD 3,740).

Early purchase and application of fertilizer contributes to improved yields. "We do not have to travel long distances to give money to anyone. We can sit in the comfort of our homes and transact business. Because we have gotten fertilizer early, I am sure we will increase our production volume this farming season," a smallholder farmer said. The input dealer appreciated the payment system and remarked, "In 2017, USAID's ADVANCE project set me up as a mobile money merchant to facilitate transaction with clients. I am grateful to the project for that initiative. It is easier to transact business with farmers through mobile money rather than having to



Registration of farmers as MTN mobile money subscribers at Mimima community in the Upper East Region

make physical payment."

The mobile money service has also improved credit recovery for outgrower businesses. Matthew Mbanti Dagbanja, a nucleus farmer in the Yendi Municipality in the Northern Region, said that the introduction of the electronic money payment system by USAID's ADVANCE project helped an appreciable number of smallholder farmers repay their credits through mobile money. Matthew extended his services from 90 outgrowers in 2012 to 219 outgrowers in 2018. "Before the introduction of mobile money service, my farmers either risked carrying cash or traveling long distances to purchase agrochemicals," Matthew said. "With mobile money, farmers now send money to me before I transport their goods to them in their respective communities. This makes the work easier."

Most input dealers have set up agents in the communities. These agents are mostly lead farmers, who provide services to smallholders and receive payment through mobile money. Additionally, mobile money has become a savings platform for most smallholder farmers, as they find it as a secure way of keeping money.

The project plans to scale up the number of beneficiaries who use DFS to 10,000 smallholder farmers, by the end of 2018. The project will also continue to work with the telecommunication companies to provide technical support to smallholder farmers on mobile money services.

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