

FEMALE FARMERS EMPOWERED TO HOLD LEADERSHIP POSITIONS



Assuming a leadership role in Ghana, even at the community level, continues to be something often dominated by men. During Ghana's 2016 general election campaigns, there was great public support for increasing the number of women in parliament at the national level. The parliament that began working in January 2017, now includes 35 women out of a total of 275 parliamentarians (an increase of six women from the previous national elections). The US Agency for International Development-funded Coastal Sustainable Landscapes Project (CSLP) is similarly interested in promoting female leaders and is doing so through empowering women in the Western Region. To date, seven of the project's Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are chaired and managed by women who had previously not held such a leadership role. Relatedly, women form 80% of the 165 management committee members from the more than 30 VSLA groups facilitated by the CSLP.

The US Forest Service-managed CSLP has also used its Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) vegetable production activities to mentor other female champions. From 14 CSA vegetable groups with over 150 members, two groups are chaired by women and 60% of management committee members are females. To further support these leaders, CSLP is supporting them with numeracy, literacy and basic record keeping skills to ensure they have the skills and resources available to manage their new found opportunities beyond the life of the project. These female leaders are making their impact felt by effectively managing their groups, serving as role models and transferring new skills in leadership to other women, men and children in their communities. As noted by some of the women, "we now feel empowered in various spheres of life and are poised to attempt greater leadership responsibilities".

Within the past three years, the CSLP has improved the economic benefits of more than 400 female farmers through improved agricultural and livelihood activities using the VSLA as a sustainable financing scheme for other interventions.

A VSLA is a member or community managed group of 15-25 people who save together and take small loans from those savings. Each member has a passbook for recording share purchases (savings) and loans.

Photos: *Top:* CSLP farmer, Gladys Atsu addressing the media on CSLP's food security intervention *Middle:* CSLP organic vegetable farmer, Cecilia Tandoh receiving award from the CSLP Director on Farmers Day. *Bottom:* Executives of Nebeyin VSLA at Asonti at a share out meeting.

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