

# FEED THE FUTURE ADVANCE II PROJECT NEWSLETTER

## FTF ADVANCE II Hold COVID-19 Virtual Learning Event



On January 27, the U.S. government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), hosted a virtual learning event culminating a seven-year, \$41.6 million U.S. government-funded Feed the Future Agricultural Development and Value Chain Enhancement (ADVANCE II) activity.

The event was to share and discuss the outcomes of the COVID-19 Extension Phase of the USAID funded project being implemented by ACIDI/VOCA in the Northern, North East, Upper East and Upper West regions of Ghana. It was under the theme: "Feed the Future (FTF) ADVANCE II journey through COVID-19 Pandemic – Addressing Disruptions and Building Resilience". The event involved presentations and discussions by 16 selected panelists, featuring four sessions, each with related discussion theme, including "COVID-19 Agricultural Disruptions", "Communication and Education as Response to COVID-19 Pandemic", "Joint Response to Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Agriculture", and "Building Resilience to COVID-19 and Future Pandemics".

During the event, participants discussed how the ADVANCE II activity aided in addressing and mitigating the stressors the pandemic placed on the agribusiness sector in Ghana. Participants included the Government of Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Regional Coordinating Councils, representatives of the regional outgrower business networks, representatives of smallholder farmers and village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), the National Seed Traders Association of Ghana, the National Board for Small-Scale Industries, the Ghana Commodity Exchange, the Ghana Health Service, development partners, and local organizations.

Speaking at the event, USAID/Ghana Deputy Mission Director Janean Davis lauded the ADVANCE II activity for contributing to productivity and profitability of more than 145,000 smallholder farmers in partnership with U.S. private sector, the Government of Ghana, Ghanaian agribusinesses, financial institutions, and telecommunications companies, as well as other development partners. She noted: "The work completed this past year to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 has been truly remarkable. None of it could have been accomplished if we did not work together toward a common vision: to lift each other up, one person and one village at a time, and in so doing build a stronger, more self-reliant Ghana."

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## Maize crop yield sees a boost despite COVID-19 pandemic.

Ghana recorded its first case of COVID-19 in March 2020. This led to a host of government restrictions in a bid to reduce the spread of the virus. A rapid assessment conducted in May by FTF ADVANCE II project indicated a high level of uncertainty among actors, leading to delays in planning and commitments in the 2020 production season, disruptions in the input supply chains, and limited investments made by key value chain actors. The assessment also revealed that most producers required support to access inputs, seasonal labor, extension services, and markets in the current production season.

There was, however, good news at the end of the 2020 planting season for farmers, such as Ibrahim Adam, Chairman of the Yendi Outgrower Business Network. Despite the pandemic, Ibrahim indicated that farmers in his network either maintained or increased their annual yield. Ibrahim, for instance, realized over 6.5 MT/Ha from his 32.3 Ha maize farm (210 MT of maize from his 80-acre farm) compared with 2.8 MT/Ha 90 MT of maize from the same area in 2019.

Ibrahim credits this success to FTF ADVANCE II's support and facilitation for the activities of farmers and the network.



Ibrahim proudly leaning against his harvested produce  
Photo credit: Jason Amoo

## Alhaji Alidu Wins National Best Digital Farmer



Alhaji Alidu taking inventory with his FTF ADVANCE provided tablet.  
Photo credit: Jason Amoo

Alidu Abdul-Razak Abubakar is a 42-year-old farmer with over 200 acres of farmland located across the Northern Region and a member of the Northern Outgrower Business Association (NOBA). Born into a family of farmers, Alhaji Alidu began farming independently in 2000. He cultivated an average of ten acres (4 Ha) of maize and rice annually, mainly for subsistence prior to 2015.

In 2015, Alhaji Alidu was selected to benefit from FTF ADVANCE II's activities. The project supported Alhaji Alidu with skills training on business development, knowledge sharing, technical backstopping, market linkages digitization, and grants for equipment.

*"I saw farming as ordinary activity because I was born into it. I was farming as a vocation and not making any profit. We had no records or strategic plans, but the project took us through the rudiments of farming as a business and that is when my focus began to change because I realized it was profitable."* —Alhaji Alidu Abubakar, CEO, Asawaba Farms

*"ADVANCE supported us with digital weighing scales, digital moisture thermometers, tablets, and laptops, and these have really helped with data collection and recordkeeping."*

Alhaji Alidu currently keeps data on his outgrowers, uses a GPS system to map out his farmland, and provides mechanization services for outgrowers. These, he said, greatly influence planning and ensure profitability.

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## FTF ADVANCE Forms E-Learning Groups Knowledge Sharing Within Communities

The USAID funded FTF ADVANCE II project has distributed 295 tablets to 372 newly formed e-learning groups made up of lead farmers, women and youth leaders to promote digital learning while observing COVID-19 protocols to reduce person-to-person infection.

At least 4,292 smallholder farmers in the global food security strategy zones of influence are expected to benefit from the group learning activities. Content developed for the learning groups cover COVID-19 awareness activities, weather messages, marketing tips, agronomic tips, good business practices, anti-bush fire awareness campaigns and gender and youth inclusion activities that will be transmitted via the tablets.

The e-learning groups are expected to help increase access to information for smallholders through self-learning and group activities using the tablets provided. To ensure sustainability, the project intends to work with government agencies, NGOs, private sector, and other stakeholders in the ZOI to leverage on skills training given to facilitators of the groups for data collection, monitoring, input sales and marketing. These could attract businesses to support the initiative apart from the initial support that has been provided by their respective outgrower business managers.

This is in line with the project's strategy to mitigate the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by using small learning groups supported with digital tools for knowledge sharing.

*"My group and I can now learn at our own convenience without travelling out of the community to attend trainings for capacity building and also save time for other things"* remarked Satar Wahab, group facilitator.

## USAID Private Sector Team Lead Visits Project Participants

USAID/Ghana's Private Sector Team Lead, Pearl Ackah visited the Tiyumtaba Village Savings & Loans Association (VSLA) group at Limo in Gushegu district, on Wednesday October 07, 2020. She engaged with members of the group about interventions and support they received under the COVID-19 extension phase of the project. She also interacted with beneficiaries of stimulus packages for outgrowers, beneficiaries of mobile phones and COVID-19 peer educators as well as trained facilitators for small learning groups.

During their interactions, some women related they had difficulty going to nearby markets when COVID-19 broke out, for fear of contracting the disease. They also said that having their children at home and not going to school due to government restrictions put a strain on the little resources they had at home, especially food stuff.



USAID/Ghana Private Sector Team Lead, Pearl Ackah interacting with project participants  
Photo credit: Beatrice

According to the participants, the project helped by offering them training on COVID-19 and the sharing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) which helped them learn how to cope with the disease while conducting their daily activities.

They also had difficulty in finding inputs for their farms but through the linkages formed, the outgrower business network was able to provide them inputs to farm. The input stimulus package support by the project was a relief to them as it helped reduce the burden of accessing input for farming for the season.

Pearl Ackah said "I was happy to see women taking measures to mitigate effects of COVID-19 in their communities and pleased to learn that, the women who were trained in soap making as part of entrepreneurship training had made the soap they were using as hand washing soap at your meetings". She further admonished them to work collectively to improve livelihoods in the community and pass on the knowledge to others.

Also present at the meeting, were representatives of the Northern Outgrower Business Association (NOBA), members of two (2) VSLA groups in the community and the Executive director of Sung Foundation, Hajia Fati Seidu.

## Maize crop yield sees a boost despite COVID-19 pandemic

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Ibrahim inspecting harvested produce  
Photo credit: Jason Amoo

*"We budgeted for seeds the previous year when we did our action plan as a network. Knowing the quantities we needed helped us get pre-ordered imported hybrid seeds from Agrisolve and RMG in June after the pandemic hit and it was later that people were looking for seeds but did not get them. We made an initial deposit and used part of the grant given to us by FTF ADVANCE II to pay the balance."*

—Ibrahim Adam, Chairman, Yendi OB Network

Ibrahim further explained, *"The rains were good, so we planted on time and the yields have been up to expectation because we strictly followed the farming protocols taught to us by the project."*

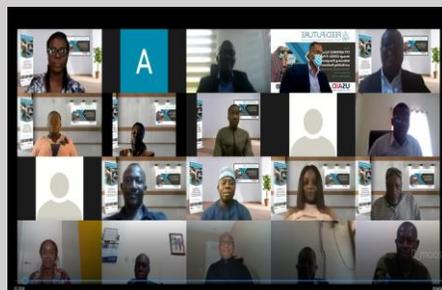
This was not void of challenges, as labor was hardly available at the time of land preparation due to the lockdown. Ibrahim admits that, *"Planting was slow and cash flow was not there because people could not travel to buy our produce from the previous season. However ADVANCE facilitated sale of all our remaining produce stock."*

## FTF ADVANCE II Hold COVID-19 Virtual Learning Event

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In May 2020, the Feed the Future ADVANCE II activity, conducted a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Ghana's agribusiness sector, revealing high level of uncertainty among actors leading to delays in planning and commitments resulting in disruptions in supply chains in the 2020 farming season. Using assessment findings, USAID ADVANCE II developed solutions to mitigate pandemic-related supply chain and agribusiness service disruptions. USAID ADVANCE II distributed personal protective equipment and hygiene kits to 22,650 farmers and conducted COVID-19 sensitization campaigns in communities and by radio; established a relief grant program that provided farm inputs such as fertilizer to 1,000 smallholder farmers; promoted and linked farmers to locally-bred seed varieties; restored disrupted ploughing services for smallholder farmers; supported over 80 outgrower businesses in their loan applications to access a portion of the 600 million cedi Coronavirus Alleviation Program – Business Support Scheme fund; and provided mobile phones to 400 women smallholder farmers to increase their access to digital information and strengthen their networks.

Director of Crop Services at the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Seth Osei-Akoto, in his opening remarks commended USAID for the immense contribution made towards improving the livelihood of smallholder farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic. He added *"the Government of Ghana has also put in place measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the production and distribution of food by offering solutions to address systemic challenges in the agri-food sector to enhance productivity and resilience. So far, 1.7 million farmers have benefited from the planting for food jobs program which has distributed improved seeds, inorganic and organic fertilizer"*.



A section of participants during the virtual event.

ADVANCE II is the flagship activity under Feed the Future, a U.S. government initiative to end global hunger.

The United States continues to lead the global COVID-19 pandemic response. These efforts are made possible through the American people's generosity. In Ghana, the United States has provided almost \$19 million to address immediate impacts of COVID-19 by helping to strengthen health systems and to continue to improve reading outcomes.

Contact:

FTF ADVANCE II, #1 Tripoli Street, adjacent Mj Grand Hotel | East Legon | Tel: +233 302 520231/2 | [jamoo@acdiovocaghan.org](mailto:jamoo@acdiovocaghan.org)  
Website: [www.acdiovoca.org](http://www.acdiovoca.org)

## Alhaji Alidu Wins National Best Digital Farmer

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Since joining the project, Alhaji Alidu has expanded his business and currently cultivates 50 acres(20.4Ha) of soybeans, 150 acres(60.7Ha) of maize, 15 acres(6.1Ha) of cowpea, and 10 acres(4Ha) of groundnuts. He collects most of his farming data using the Open Data Kit (ODK) platform adopted by FTF ADVANCE as a tool used by all project participant to facilitate data-backed decision making. He also has a website and subscribed to several digital agricultural platforms, such as Grain Mate for marketing, information sharing, and growing trends in good agronomic practices, which he says has been instrumental to stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the 36<sup>th</sup> National Farmers Day Celebration in November 2020 at Techiman in the Bono East Region, Alhaji Alidu Abubakar was adjudged the Best National Digital Farmer for his use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools in his farming activities.

*"I did not expect the award, but it has challenged me to do more because I was chosen out of many. I currently listen to a lot of podcasts and videos on YouTube by FTF ADVANCE farmers and John Deer to learn news of digitizing agriculture."*  
—Alhaji Alidu Abubakar

The 2020 edition of the National Farmers' Day was celebrated under the theme, "Agribusiness Development under COVID-19; Opportunities and Challenges."

