



# Changes in women's access to extension services in Ghana: the impact of a behaviour change campaign

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## Summary

One focal area of the PlantwisePlus programme is supporting equitable access to agricultural extension advice and technologies. To help achieve this, in Ghana the programme has been implementing social and behaviour communication approaches to change attitudes and societal norms around women's roles in agricultural work. An assessment to gauge the early impacts of these measures was conducted by CABI between December 2023 and January 2024. This study brief highlights the positive outcomes and changes that have arisen following PlantwisePlus interventions, the remaining challenges and barriers, and recommendations for future activities.

## Highlights

- Radio broadcasts and community dialogues were successfully rolled out in eight districts/municipalities across Bono and Afaho regions, reaching almost 200,000 individuals in total.
- Both men and women in the study areas now view women as farmers in their own right and recognise women's land ownership and property rights.
- Men are providing more support to reduce women's work burden; with husbands stepping up to assist their wives with household chores, farming activities, and childcare duties.
- 769 agricultural extension agents attended step-down training to learn how to better consider and incorporate women in their extension activities.
- Agricultural extension agents are consulting women farmers to determine how and when to conduct extension activities, taking into consideration the women's schedules, mobility constraints, and literacy levels.
- Further work is required in tackling some societal and cultural norms that continue to hinder women's access in agricultural activities, including taboo days (a set-aside day each week whereby, traditionally, people are not allowed to work).

## Background

Led by CABI, the PlantwisePlus programme launched in 2020, building on learnings from earlier Plantwise and Action on Invasives initiatives. The main aim of PlantwisePlus is to ensure the production and provision of more and safer food for domestic markets in 27 countries, including Ghana. In January 2022, a Gender and Rural Advisory Services Assessment (GRAST) was conducted to review the current gender gaps in agriculture and the degrees in which they are present. Among the recommendations made by the GRAST report was the need to develop interventions that can help shift individual attitudes and societal norms that restrict women from accessing agricultural extension services and partaking in farming activities.

Currently, many Ghanaian women farmers (as in other countries) face significant challenges in accessing services to support and elevate their farming activities. Despite the fact that 52% of the agricultural workforce in Ghana is made up of women, only 15-30% of this figure are reached by agricultural extension programmes. There are a number of barriers to change faced by women in Ghana. For instance, existing gender extension services are designed with a male bias, and do not take into account factors that hinder women from participating – such as poor literacy levels, low mobile phone ownership, and childcare duties. Extension service providers also do not target women farmers: they believe the male household head will pass on necessary information, and that women lack the organisational skills required to succeed in farming. There is also a notable lack of women extension agents (only 16.6%) to support other women. Even when women farmers can access extension services, gender-based social norms and beliefs that stem from these – including that women should act as their husband's 'supporter' rather than be farmers in their own right – prevent them from engaging.

In light of these challenges and building on the recommendation of the GRAST report, CABI implemented three key activities in partnership with the Directorate of Women in Agriculture Development (WIAD), the Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES), the regional and district Department of Agriculture in Ghana's Bono and Ahafo regions, and Farm Radio International.

The first approach involved creating and broadcasting interactive radio programmes, and Farm Radio International partnered with four radio stations in Bono and Ahafo regions to do so. Aired over 12 weeks, programmes included information on a variety of important topics, and listeners were encouraged to call in to share questions and experiences. The second approach involved community dialogues and repeat broadcasts of the radio programmes at community information centres (CICs). Community dialogue sessions, also known as *durbars*, were participatory in nature, and afforded women and men opportunities to share their ideas, ask questions, and engage in role play. The third approach involved step-down gender training for agricultural extension agents (AEAs). For this, AEAs attended a one-day training session to learn how to mainstream gender into their extension planning activities, using recommended tools (including a seasonal calendar and a men's/women's daily activity profile).

Together, these approaches covered essential topics such as:

- Gender concepts and tools for RAS delivery.
- The importance of recognising women as farmers in their own right and allowing them to participate in extension activities.
- The role women play in agriculture production in Ghana
- The importance of husbands engaging in joint decision-making with their wives on agriculture production, marketing, utilization of income, children's education, family nutrition, etc.
- How social and cultural norms are restricting women's access to agricultural extension and the benefits for all in overcoming these
- Husband's roles in supporting women in household tasks and childcare
- The importance of providing women with land for farming purposes.
- Women's voice and representation in farmer groups
- Exposure and use of technology in farming.
- Women farmers' access to credit.
- Encouraging women to go into commercially viable farming.
- Providing child care facility for women farmers during extension meetings.
- Recognising women's land ownership and property rights
- The benefits for women in engaging in income-generating activities
- Tackling misconceptions around 'proud' and 'disrespectful' successful women farmers and women who speak up in extension meetings
- The importance of land registration, among others.

## What we did

Assessing the impact of CABI's behaviour change approaches involved a rigorous exploratory methodology using a qualitative approach. To start, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with various participants:

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- A simple random sampling technique was used to select 193 men and women farmers (108 women and 88 men) from the study's participating communities, with 15 men and 15 women randomly chosen from each community. They were not members of specific farmer groups of farmer-based organisations
- 40 AEAs (34 men and 6 women) who had participated in stepped-down gender training

Following the FGDs, key informant interviews were held with members of the regional and district agricultural department that had supported the community dialogues, extension staff, traditional leaders (known as Queen Mothers) and the Director of Farm Radio International. These were conducted so that information obtained during FGDs on outcomes relating to shifts in behaviours, attitudes, and practices, could be triangulated. Outcome harvesting and exploratory techniques (such as content and univariate analyses) were then used to identify observed changes that occurred following the implementation of CABI's activities.

## Findings

While the activities are still at an early stage, and CABI recognises that shifts in individual and societal behavioural norms involve time and commitment, positive changes are already being identified. The assessment findings confirm that the three key approaches being taken are the correct ones to encourage positive change among men and women farmers and community leaders. In devising the communication initiatives, CABI focused on three particular indicators of change:

- The recognition of women as farmers and clients of extension services
- The recognition and reduction of women's work burden
- Consideration of women's time and mobility constraints for extension activities

The following explores how the initiatives have influenced attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours in these areas.

### **Recognition of women as farmers and clients of extension services**

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of women and men who now recognise women's rights as individual farmers and regional agricultural service clients. Married women are no longer restricted by their husbands from participating in extension events or interacting with extension staff – with one AEA revealing that a higher number of women are attending plant clinics to obtain advice and assistance on behalf of their husbands. More married women are also using mobile phones to call AEAs for advice, especially in Moslem communities where this action was previously particularly limited. Ultimately, more women farmers in the study communities are accessing advisory services.

Another important aspect of recognising women as farmers pertains to land ownership and property rights. Both men and women in the study areas no longer hold the perception that women cannot own or have access to large areas of land on which to farm and grow cash crops. Following community dialogues, one community Chief and his elders promised to give land to women for farming, while individual male farmers are also providing women with farming land through renting and sharecropping arrangements.

After listening to the radio broadcasts, two women in the study communities have purchased land and are establishing cocoa farms, while a number of men say they are supporting their wives to acquire land in the future. “As women, we were not allowed to buy land without accompanying our husbands. We were also not permitted to attend or get invited to meetings,” shares Mary Baah, a farmer from Twenedua, Bono region “However, thanks to the Gauso FM radio campaign, we now live in a completely different era where we are treated equally.”

Janet Asiamah, a farmer in Ahafo Region, agrees that the radio broadcasts had a significant impact on thinking around land rights. “It has challenged the old ways of thinking about women’s ability to own land,” she states. “The programme has also influenced our men to accept our opinions in decision-making, not only in farming but in our day-to-day affairs as well.”

### **Recognition and reduction of women’s work burden**

While men’s recognition and attitudes towards the work burden and stereotypes faced by women has not changed to such an extent, gradual progress is being achieved. Men report providing their wives with additional help for farm and labour tasks, such as carrying firewood (traditionally considered a woman’s role) and using personal transport (such as bicycles and motorbikes) to carry women’s farm produce to markets. AEAs are also working with women farmers to assess their agricultural needs and introduce them to appropriate technologies to help reduce the drudgery of farm work.

“The [radio] programme really educated me about why, as a man, I need to help my wife with home chores to reduce her workload,” reports Tahiru Adams, a farmer in Njau, Bono Region. Abdulia Moro, another farmer in Beima, Bono Region, has also changed his behaviours and attitude towards housework since engaging with the broadcasts. “I [used to be] one of those people who did not respect their wives and let them do the majority of the housework alone. Now, our home feels like heaven,” he says. “Since starting the programme, I’ve transformed and now assist my wife with household tasks. When I’m at home, I don’t let her do everything on her own.”

Women also recognise that they’re now receiving greater assistance from their husbands with household tasks, such as cooking and washing clothes, along with childcare responsibilities. As a result, they are able to achieve a better work-life balance and take time to rest or attend church events and social gatherings. Households are also experiencing a reduction in illness and expenditures on medical bills, while the men state their wives look less stressed and healthier.

Ama Maame, a farmer in Ahafo Region, says that listening to the radio broadcasts with her husband brought about a number of benefits. “The programme not only empowered me with knowledge and information to farm independently, but it has also impacted my marriage positively and brought peace to my home.”

## **Consideration of women's time and mobility constraints for extension activities**

In light of women's time and mobility constraints, women farmers reported that various activities – from dialogues and demonstrations to AEA visits – have been brought directly to their communities to afford optimal opportunities to engage and participate. AEAs also contacted the women prior to organising events to ensure the dates and timings aligned with the women's schedules. Meanwhile, some women farmers noted they were provided transport fares by the Department of Agriculture so they could attend events being held outside of their community.

Alongside time and mobility limitations, constraints relating to women's literacy and education levels have also been considered in the creation and delivery of extension services. For example, community dialogues and radio broadcasts are conducted in local languages for easier understanding. "The resource personnel on the [radio] show were quite helpful with their explanations and guides, which improved my understanding of farming – and I am happy about that," says Alice Alhassan a farmer in Kenyasi III (Atedwie), Ahafo Region.

## **Additional findings**

Alongside the three main indicators of change, the impact of CABI's communication initiatives on other barriers impacting women's participation and access in farming were also assessed.

While positive strides are being demonstrated in the distribution and undertaking of household chores, less progress has seemingly been made in respect to women's equal participation in household decision-making. Men and women report making decisions together on their children's education. However, only 50% of women farmers practice joint decision-making with regards to agricultural production activities and management and household food and nutrition. Even fewer women (40%) reported that they engage in joint decision-making with respect to selling farm produce and using the resulting income.

In addition to attending extension service meetings, AEAs have been encouraging women farmers to join farmer-based organisations – such as processing groups, women's associations, and cash crop groups. Previously, women who spoke up during mixed gender meetings and group events were viewed as proud and disrespectful by men, but this is no longer the case. Women state they can now speak freely at meetings and voice their opinions, with their concerns taken into consideration by men – which has helped build confidence.

FGD findings revealed that when women farmers have contact with women AEAs, this also aids empowerment and motivation; particularly as women AEAs provide additional training in alternative income-generating activities. Young girls in communities also look up to women AEAs as role models and have expressed interest in becoming AEAs themselves. However, the number of women AEAs remains low – with only four of the seven study communities having them.

Women's understanding around accessing credit has also improved, and they are now aware that – through registered farmer's groups – they can establish joint savings accounts and register with banks for formal loans. In Moslem communities where women were



previously restricted from engaging in income-generating activities, men are also encouraging their wives to participate in these and partake in village savings. However, while the majority of both men and women in the study communities now participate in village saving groups, both genders report continued difficulty in accessing and obtaining loans from banks.

While all other areas have demonstrated some degree of change, there has been notably less movement with regards to shifts in perceptions around socio-cultural restrictions such as taboo days and women's ability to engage in activities when they are menstruating. That said, there is hope on the horizon: following community dialogues, some community Chiefs have recognised the negative effect of socio-cultural restrictions on women and have promised to perform the necessary rights to abolish certain norms so that women have increased access to extension services.

## Conclusions and the way forward

The three primary interventions adopted by PlantwisePlus – interactive radio broadcasts, community dialogues and CIC broadcasts, and step-down GRAST training – were well embraced by the target beneficiaries. Changes in men and women's attitudes and behaviours regarding women's role in farming and accessing agricultural extension services are already visible. Women farmers report feeling happy and empowered following the implementation of initiatives, while male farmers note the interventions as being relevant and timely. Meanwhile, community Chiefs and Queen Mothers now recognise the negative impacts that socio-cultural norms have on women and the necessary actions required to tackle these.

Barriers to women's access to extension services have been removed in varying degrees: some significantly, while others not at all. Some of the most positive outcomes have been seen in areas such as:

- The number of married women farmers who recognise themselves as farmers in their own rights, as well as being regional agricultural services clients who participate in extension programme activities with their husbands
- The number of women farmers reporting changes in men's perceptions about women's roles and abilities, and their rights to own and access land
- The number of women engaged in more joint decision-making in the household, particularly with regards to agricultural activities and the use of income from the sale of produce
- Women receiving greater support from their husbands in undertaking household chores and childcare responsibilities, as well as better division of agricultural labour
- Enhanced recognition among AEAs around measures required to accommodate women in extension meetings and activities
- Improved confidence and knowledge levels among women farmers

Although these outcomes are highly commendable, steps should be taken to ensure such changes are maintained and further heightened, and that persisting barriers continue to be tackled. Lessons learned from the assessment have already been used to shape

recommendations for the ongoing and planned implementation of the social and behaviour change activities relating to gender by CABI and national stakeholder organisations, including:

1. Men and women farmers and community leaders should consistently practice what they have learned and discuss success stories during farmer meetings and in household discussions. AEAs should also share ideas and successes amongst themselves and continue to incorporate gender concepts and tools in their activities.
2. Farm Radio International could collaborate with radio stations that are preferred by farmers to increase reach, while AEAs could also remind farmers of broadcast dates and times.
3. Some radio programme listeners complained of not being able to get through to the show upon calling in, so broadcasts could be made more inclusive and interactive through text and WhatsApp messages.
4. Radio broadcasts should be scheduled on days and at times that better suit schedules, particularly those of women – and CIC management should also consult women on the best times to repeat broadcasts.
5. Funding should be provided so that radio programming can be scaled to other districts and communities, and the series extended in length to exceed 12 episodes.
6. The assessment revealed that 57% of women farmers who owned mobile phones did not know how to use their device to listen to radio broadcasts. Thus, PlantwisePlus should include an activity that involves AEAs training men and women how to use a mobile phone to listen to the radio and procure earpieces to listen.
7. Adequate funding should be provided to regional and district agricultural departments so that community dialogues can be opened up to more relevant stakeholders from other communities, such as AEAs and Department of Agriculture technical staff.
8. Step-down GRAST training should be extended to two days and, if possible, made residential to support attendees from far away communities.

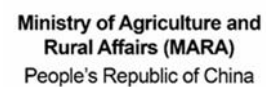


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