



Agro-Source Project

Overview

CARE’s Agro-Source program was designed to tackle the challenge that even though small-scale producers contribute significantly to Ghana’s food bank and economy, they are often unable to access quality inputs. Even when they can access inputs, they lack the know-how and expertise on how to use these inputs effectively. Agro-Source worked in the Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana to improve agricultural productivity through increased availability, access, and use of good quality agricultural inputs for 30,000 women small-scale producers, their families, and their communities.

Goal & Approaches

The Agro-Source Project aimed to improve the productivity of 30,000 small-scale women producers in Northern Ghana through increased availability, access, and use of high-quality agricultural inputs by 2020. It promoted entrepreneurial opportunities for women and youth through strong partnership with the private sector. Agro-Source promoted agro-input dealerships, utilization of agro-inputs, engaged small-scale women producers as seed growers, and improved gender responsiveness.

Agro-Source Project

July 2018 – December 2020; COVID-19 extension January – June 2021

Key Activities

Promotes entrepreneurial opportunities for women and youth through strong partnerships with the private sector, including seed fairs, and training and promotion of community input dealers and seed entrepreneurs.

Geographical Coverage

Upper East Region (Garu, Tempene & Bawku West districts) & Upper West Region (Lambussie & Namdom districts)



Promoting agri-input dealership

The project collaborates with private sector agri-input dealers to improve distribution channels and timely access to quality agricultural inputs at competitive price.



Promoting utilization of agri-inputs

The project enhances smallholder women farmers’ knowledge on the utilization of quality production input



Engaging smallholder women farmers as seed growers

Increase smallholder women farmers’ access to certified seeds through community seed production system



Improving gender responsiveness

Create enabling environment for women in agri-input systems through improving gender responsiveness of private sector partners

Results

- **Increase in yields and productivity for women's crops on farmers' agricultural land:** Small-scale producers saw an average 55% increase in production per acre, for crops including millet, Bambara beans, groundnuts, cowpeas, and common beans. Use of improved practices - learned from trained community agrodealers, improved seeds, and proper and increased use of fertilizers and pesticides were noted as the most significant factors for increased yields.
- **Improved access to agricultural inputs including certified seeds:** 16,620 women farmers (55.4% of women farmers participating in the project, and 3 times the project target) have access to certified seeds from out growers. This is supported by two partnerships with commercial seed companies. As a result, 65% of small-scale farmers reported using certified seeds at the end of the project, compared to only 32% at the beginning.

Agro-Source in its three years of implementation made more than 64.17 tons of good quality improved certified seeds of sorghum, rice, soybean, cowpea and groundnut available to the small-scale producers. This amount of seed is expected to cultivate at least 4,290 acres of farmland and produce cumulative crop yields of 3,430 tons.

Overall, 89% of women small-scale producers reported an increase in their ability to access agricultural inputs that help them produce more, especially for "women's crops" that include Bambara beans, groundnuts, cowpeas, and common beans. The average yield per acre more than doubled, from 196kg at the start of the project to 436.2kg at the end of the project, though some vegetable crops were still affected by climate shocks and showed decreased yields in some cropping seasons.

- **Higher household incomes:** On average across the project, there was a 64% increase in monthly household incomes for the project's impact population that includes both small-scale

farmers and input suppliers. Overall incomes increased to 73 USD for women (a 65.8% increase) and 67 USD for men (a 62.7% increase), with the most significant increases in monthly income for women in Tempene and Garu who now earn 90 USD and 88 USD respectively, and for men in Lambussie and Bawku West who earn 99 US and 80 USD respectively. The agrodealers who participated in the Agro-Source project now earn from 344 USD up to 8,585 USD annually depending on their location, stock levels, and the portfolio of agri-inputs (pesticides, fertilizers, seeds) that they have available.

- **Increase in the number of community input dealers:** Agro-Source facilitated the registration and certification of 87 agri-input dealers – 41 new dealers (25 women and 16 men), based in rural underserved areas, who were both registered and certified, and 46 dealers who received certification. This represents an increase from 20% of existing agrodealers who were based in rural areas at the start of the Agro-Source project, to 43.7% at the end of the project. The number of women-owned agri-input shops also increased from 16 in 2018 to 41 in 2021. Agro-Source provided district-level technical/business management training and networking events for these agri-input dealers that included training in financial and inventory management, product knowledge, safe product usage, handling and storage, good agronomic practices, and policies and regulations on agri-input sales.
- **Decreased distance and travel time to agricultural inputs:** At the end of the project 46% of small-scale farmers reported walking 5km or less to access agricultural inputs, compared to only 12% at prior to the project – a 34% improvement. Prior to the project, some small-scale women producers had needed to travel over 15km to access inputs. As a result of closer availability nearly 9 out of 10 small-scale women farmers reported an increase in their ability to access agricultural inputs.

- **Increase in the number of community seed out growers:** 169 women and 44 men (213 total) became community seed out growers for two private seed companies through the project, while 11% of those out growers became seed growers with their own networks of seed out growers. Twenty-four of the out-growers, including 19 women, have graduated as certified seed producers who are engaging a network of

157 (125 women, 32 men) seed out-growers to sustain and scale the impact of the initiative to improve women's access to certified seeds.

Through the facilitation of the project, the Seed Producers Association of Ghana (SEEDPAG) was formed by the project's seed growers. Their goal is to produce improved seeds and promote its use to increase yields and improve farmers' livelihoods.



Farmers attend an agro-input fair, CARE Ghana 2021



A trained seed producer shows off her healthy crops, CARE Ghana 2021

Strategies

- **Promoting agricultural input dealership:** Collaboration with private sector agricultural input dealers improved the distribution channels and timely access to quality agricultural inputs at competitive prices. Over the span of the project, over 9,800 farmers attended agri-input fairs within the 5 districts. At these fairs, GHS 105,374.00 (\$20,264.00) worth of inputs, including certified seeds, weedicides, personal protective equipment, insecticides, simple farm tools, and fertilizers were sold. Agri-input-dealers maintained relationships with the farmers they met at the fairs and continue to work with them.
- **Forming formal relationships between agricultural wholesalers, importers and local agrodealers:** The project linked 142 (41 women, 101 men) local agro-input retailers to 16 major suppliers of agricultural inputs. This was

achieved in part by the project working with the Ministry of Agriculture's flagship program, Planting for Food and Jobs that links last-mile agrodealers to small-scale farmers, and with the National Board for Small-Scale Industries (NBSSI) to begin addressing concerns raised by wholesalers about agro-dealers having low capital outlay which did not engender significant interest for wholesalers to provide supply credit.

- **Promoting utilization of agricultural inputs:** Small-scale producers learned how to use inputs; Knowledge gained at these input fairs, demonstration plots, and trainings led to 100% of both farmers and input dealers using personal protective equipment (PPE) when handling inputs, and 52% of farmers using recommended Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and inputs application practices.

- **Engaging small-scale producers as seed growers:** Access to certified seeds through community seed production systems increased for women small-scale producers. 213 small-scale producers became community seed out growers, and some even built their own networks of seed out growers.
- **Improving gender responsiveness:** Agrodealers were trained to better understand the needs and constraints of female farmers and to address them in their business operations. Using the *24hr workload schedule* for women and men, which takes into account the full in-home and outside-of-home work hours undertaken, agro-dealers understood the challenges women face and why it was appropriate to factor this in planning and

running their business activities. This creates an enabling environment for women in agricultural input systems. Women were also encouraged to become agrodealers, which resulted in a nearly 40% increase in women-owned agro input dealer shops in rural areas.

To effectively target women farmers, agrodealers use the VSLA platform to educate women on GAPs, the proper application of inputs and use of PPEs for protection against the negative effects of agrochemicals.

Additionally, the project provided 5 key recommendations to public and private sector institutions at the district and regional levels to improve the gender responsiveness of both private and government sector partners, which have received positive feedback in their implementation.