



Assessing indicators of change in the delivery of gendered agricultural extension in Ghana

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Summary

A core activity of the PlantwisePlus programme in Ghana involves working to raise awareness around gender-related inequity and related issues within the country's agricultural sector. To evaluate the indicators of change that have resulted from work in this area to date, an assessment, involving insights from national-level stakeholders, extension agents, and farmers, was conducted between December 2022 and March 2023. Findings indicate that there have been changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour around ensuring that the agricultural extension system in Ghana is more focused on the needs of women farmers. Changes are being implemented at all levels, with further work and actions to be done to move the extension system from gender sensitive to gender transformative.

Highlights

- A multi-stakeholder platform was established with representatives from leading organizations.
- Regional Agricultural Officers trained on gender principles and concepts took part in 'step-down' training, passing their knowledge onto agricultural extension agents (AEAs).

Following step-down training sessions, around 85% of AEAs began working with more women contact farmers.

- Measures were implemented to help ensure the safety and security of women AEAs, such as pairing up with male AEAs working in neighbouring communities.
- Awards were given to women AEAs in recognition of outstanding work, together with promotion to leadership roles.
- There were significant improvements in the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of staff at private advisory service organizations around gender inclusivity.
- Specific advice was given to women farmers to diversify their crop production to boost their economic empowerment

Background

PlantwisePlus was launched in 2020, building on learning from the previous CABI programmes, Plantwise and Action on Invasives. A key aim of PlantwisePlus is to ensure that women farmers are more empowered to produce more food through improved access and adoption of recommended agricultural practices. Ghana is one of the programme's current focus countries.

Currently, many Ghanaian women farmers face significant challenges in accessing services to support and elevate their farming activities, such as extension advisory services. Instead, these services are designed for and target male farmers. As such, a key PlantwisePlus intervention involves enhancing awareness around, and reducing gender inequities within the rural advisory sector. To gauge the extent of existing gender gaps in Ghana's agricultural sector, a Gender and Rural Advisory Services Assessment (GRAST) was conducted in August 2021. From this, a series of 14 recommendations were made across three levels: national enabling environment, organizational (advisory services/providers), and individual (women farmers). These included:

National enabling environment

- Ensure the policy-level commitment to include gender equity goals in the performance evaluation of extension staff is actually implemented.

Organizational level

- Raise extension agents' awareness on the need to ensure gender balance in the selection of extension contact farmers.
- Increase the number of women extension agents, including by tackling challenges they face in their jobs, such as childcare and transport.

Individual level

- Create interventions to shift attitudes and social norms, which frequently prevent women from accessing extension services.
- Enhance women's access to information through digital tools.

Following the GRAFT report, published in January 2022, CABI developed and initiated activities designed to target and drive action in the areas requiring attention to improve women's access to extension services. These activities began in March 2022, and are still ongoing. The purpose of an assessment after nine months of activities was to sense check the strategic approach and support thinking around the future direction, acknowledging that the activities are still in their early stages, and time is required for significant and lasting changes to occur. This study brief shares the key findings in relation to this assessment, which were initially shared in a more detailed report.

What we did

To conduct the assessment, quantitative and qualitative approaches were used, along with first-person insights, obtained in several ways. Key informants from the multi-stakeholder platform, as well as the advisory service providers, were engaged via face-to-face or virtual interviews. Meanwhile, AEAs responded through a structured questionnaire and the women's farmer group members met for focus group discussions (FGDs). An outcome harvesting technique was also used to recognize noticeable changes.

To select respondents for the assessment, a purposive sampling technique was adopted. As a result, the following individuals took part:

- 13 key informants from PlantwisePlus' multi-stakeholder platform (including two Regional Agriculture Department Directors and four Municipal/District Directors of the Department of Agriculture).
- 32 AEAs (26 men and six women), from four districts: Sunyani Municipal and Berekum West District, Komenda- Edina- Equafo-Abbrem (KEEA), and Twifo-Hemana District.
- Three key informants from advisory service providers Esoko, Farm Radio, and Farmerline.
- Members of four women farmer groups from communities in the above districts.

Findings

Implementation of GRAFT report recommendations

Establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform

A PlantwisePlus multi-stakeholder gender platform was launched, involving representatives from gender and agricultural advisory service-focused groups, including: Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP), Plant Protection and Regulatory Services Directorate (PPRSD), Directorate of Agriculture Extension (DAES), Esoko, Farm Radio, and Farmerline, among others. These stakeholders developed a 12-point action plan designed to target the gaps highlighted in the GRAFT report, with prioritization of an investigation into issues affecting the employment of women extension officers, a review of challenges facing the implementation of extension service-related gender policies and discussion on opportunities for capitalizing on modern ICT approaches and tools to support gender-inclusive rural advisory services.

All assessment participants stated that the multi-stakeholder platform was “good” and “commendable”, particularly in light of the diverse variety of actors involved. However, they noted the platform’s work could be further amplified by involving representatives from MoFA’s Directorate of Crop Services, women involved in apex farmer-based organizations, and the Mobile Phone Vendors Association.

Investigation into employment issues of women extension staff

Platform stakeholders, the Ghana News Agency and Graphic Business investigated challenges of recruiting and retaining women extension staff members, as well as issues and dangers these women face when working in the field, such as violence. The final report aimed to encourage those responsible for recruiting women extension officers to reconsider their procurement and management approaches and will be published in media outlets and shared with relevant stakeholders and institutions.

Review of challenges around implementing extension service-related gender policies

Platform stakeholder NETRIGHT conducted a review of policy-related issues, such as strengths and gaps, with regard to gender inequalities in the planning and delivery of rural advisory services.

Sharing of best practice on ICT for gender-inclusive rural advisory in agriculture

CABI, DAES, PPRSD, Women in Agriculture Directorate (WIAD), Farmerline, and Esoko reviewed the currently available digital extension tools, their uses, and how existing operations support or hinder the equitable delivery of services. The discussions identified that organisations have been introducing digital extension delivery products and services, targeted at all ages, genders, and locations; however, many digital tools do not come with adequate support for accessing information (relating to the weather and markets, for instance).

Training extension staff in four regions on gender principles and tools

To educate AEAs on the importance of incorporating gender analysis and gender and inclusion issues in their plans and general activities, a three-day Trainer of Trainers (ToT) programme was held in early March 2022. Led by CABI, along with MoFA, the training involved Regional Agricultural Officers from various MoFA directorates – PPRSD, WIAD, and DAES – from six regions of Ghana: Bono, Ahafo, Ashanti, and the Northern, Central, and Volta Regions. Six topics were covered during the programme, including an introduction to basic gender concepts and gender inequalities, an introduction to the concept and practice of gender analysis, and gender division of labour. Following this, selected participants engaged in ‘step-down’ training to pass on their new learnings to AEAs at designated training sessions. This ensured AEAs were also equipped with the skills, knowledge, and tools required to better integrate gender perspectives into the planning and delivery of their services. A total of 16 step-down day-long trainings were held in Bono, Ahafo, Central, and Volta Regions, led by selected trainers and a communication specialist. Around 75% of participants were AEAs, with the remaining number made up of management and technical staff from different Municipal and District Departments of Agriculture.

Indicators of change relating to gender-based knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours

Following the implementation of the five core activities, it was anticipated that individuals and organizations would benefit from and demonstrate enhanced knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours towards gender inclusion in Ghana's agricultural extension delivery services. This section explores the extent to which changes occurred at four levels: the policy enabling environment, public organizational level, private organization level, and individual level.

The policy enabling environment

The results at this level are somewhat mixed. Gender and inclusion goals are already a key element for policy making and influencing organizations, such as MoGCSP, WIAD, PPRSD, and DAES, meaning that PlantwisePlus' interventions had little impact in this respect and no changes were observed.

However, PlantwisePlus was shown to influence positive change in other policy-related respects. For instance, MoFA, WIAD, and DAES previously focused on collecting quantitative data, but have now begun gathering qualitative data as well. That said, PPRSD and Human Resource and Development Management departments did not demonstrate any changes in collecting qualitative data.

Elsewhere, some of the interviewed policy makers demonstrated improved attitudes towards women's access of climate-smart plant health practices following PlantwisePlus awareness campaigns. Positive attitudinal and behavioural changes have also been seen among policy makers around recruiting and retaining female extension staff. In one key informant interview, a respondent stated that the knowledge gained from CABI's interventions would support them in making a case to the government that, even during the recruitment ban (preventing the hiring of new staff within Ghanaian public institutions from 2022-2026), women AEAs should be replaced.

Public organizational level

The changes seen at this level as a result of interventions were mixed. The number of female AEAs in the Central Region remained consistent, and no new female AEAs were recruited in the Bono Region. In fact, the number of female AEAs in Bono actually decreased following retirements. Some districts within regions also have no female AEAs at all, and, with the government recruitment ban in place, this is not set to change.

Changes have been made to help tackle the challenges faced by female AEAs in their daily work. For example, in Bono and Central regions, both regional agricultural departments (RADs) and district agricultural departments (DADs) established strategies to support women with sufficient transport means. In Bono Region, male AEAs were encouraged to pair up with female AEAs working close by to help ensure their safety and security.

To retain female AEAs, strategies have been implemented by RADs and DADs in Bono and Central regions. During farmer days, for instance, awards are given by regional extension departments to female AEAs who demonstrate outstanding work, and these individuals are often promoted into leadership roles. RADs and DADs are also supporting women farmer groups to diversify their crop production (into crops such as soybean, cowpea, onions, and tomato) to boost their economic empowerment.

Assessment respondents noted that women and gender balance are taken into greater consideration during community, zonal, and district Research and Extension Linkage Committee planning sessions. In addition, women farmers and other value chain actors are now often invited to participate in these meetings. Following step-down training sessions, around 85% of AEAs increased the number of women contact farmers they were working with, and 44% 'strongly agreed' that the training had led to attitudinal and behavioural changes. Further, all but one AEA said their knowledge on gender inclusivity had developed to become 'good' or 'very good'. It was noted by AEAs that, while the content of step-down training was very good, the one-day duration of the training session was inadequate to effectively cover elements.

There is evidence that ICT and digital tools are also being better utilized by women farmers to obtain extension messages, although further consideration around accessibility is required. Mobile phones and community information centres (CICs) are being employed to effectively disseminate extension messages to women farmers, with 80% of communities in Bono Region, for example, able to access CICs. However, radio stations are increasingly used to share messaging, but most women do not own their own radio sets and are not easily able to use their husband's radio.

Private organizational level

The outcomes at private organization level following PlantwisePlus interventions were generally positive. Changes were observed around knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours with regards to the need to enhance women's access to agriculture extension advisory services. For instance, during Food and Agricultural Organization, United Nations, and MoFA-led E-Agricultural Policy technical meetings and E-Extension Strategy Pilot implementation meetings, one Farm Radio respondent advocated to improve women's access to services via ICT and digital tools.

Farm Radio have also trained 48 digital focal persons (including women) in Ghana, while the number of female staff supporting the delivery of GRASST recommendations also increased. It was often found that women Farm Radio staff working with male farmers faced challenges, such as acceptance, so the organization arranged for their women staff members to speak on the radio in order for male farmers to recognize their knowledge and abilities.

In addition, Esoko has considerably improved its collection of qualitative data from women farmers, and also recruited 60% more women call centre staff. Esoko's female staff members also faced issues in working with male farmers, particularly with regard to harassment and violence. To help overcome these issues, the company has taken several steps, including pairing female and male enumerators to work together, particularly in more remote areas. Esoko has also introduced IT infrastructure solutions to aid their female call centre staff (for example, mobile or remote capabilities to suit women unable to travel to Accra for work), and is training more women lead farmers so they can pass on digital solutions knowledge to others in the field.

Farmerline works to ensure a gender balance among participants for all its training programmes and, like Esoko, has improved its collection of qualitative gender data. It has also been training farmers to use a short code on their mobile phones, which links them to call centre agents who provide advisory services in the local language. However, the organization has not increased its number of female zonal managers and field agents.

Individual level

FGDs were held with four women farmer groups, in Bono, Central, and KEEA regions, to corroborate the findings and feedback from AEAAs. Participants noted experiencing several positive changes following CABI's activities. For example, in KEEA and Bono Region, women attending trainings with AEAAs were allowed to bring their babies and children to meetings in the absence of designated childcare facilities. In both areas, women were also consulted with regard to the scheduling of meetings and extension programmes. For some meetings, women in KEEA were also provided with transport fares to enable them to attend.

Digital tools are used to communicate messages to women in these groups. In Bono Region and KEEA, women reported receiving advice via radio and CICs on climate-smart plant health practices including pest and disease control, post-harvest handling, and soil sterilization. The majority of women in all three regions have access to phones (but usually not smartphones), although those in Bono Region said they would benefit more from these devices if AEAAs provided support on accessing information through them.

The women highlighted several other critical areas that still require attention. In Bono and Central regions, no changes have been seen with regard to AEAAs working to reduce societal, cultural, or religious norms that prevent women from accessing extension services. Women farmers in Bono Region also reported that they have not received new training on leadership skills or confidence building following CABI activities; any training they received in these areas occurred prior to the step-down AEA training. Finally, relationships with AEAAs in some areas could be strengthened. In both Central and Bono Regions, the women's farmer group reported infrequent contact with their AEAAs.

The way forward

As a result of the assessment, CABI were provided with a set of 10 recommendations to improve implementation of the PlantwisePlus programme. These included:

- Extend GRASST training to technical staff at DAES, PPRSD, and the Directorate of Crop Services to enhance their gender and inclusion capabilities.
- Share the GRASST report with MoFA's Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Directorate, and the Head of Civil Service and Local Government Service.
- Provide technical and financial support to PPRSD as they review policies to ensure enhanced women's access to advisory services.
- Expand the multi-stakeholder platform with representatives from MoFA's Directorate of Crop Services, MoFA's Agriculture Colleges, mobile phone dealers, and Apex farmer organizations.
- Enhance women farmers' access to climate-smart plant health practice information, through means such as improved content for CICs and training more AEAAs as plant doctors.
- Move from a 'gender sensitive' approach in programme implementation towards a 'gender transformative' one.

Conclusions

The indicators of change assessment revealed that changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour have occurred as a result of PlantwisePlus interventions. These are evident within all levels of Ghana's agriculture sector from the policy environment through to organizations and individuals. Around 70% of recommendations made following the GRAST report have been implemented, and the actions taken to facilitate these have played a key role in driving demonstrable improvements.

Overall, the activities being initiated for the PlantwisePlus programme are the correct ones required to achieve desired and expected outcomes. The creation of the multi-stakeholder platform is arguably the strongest approach being taken and is a critical component to the programme's success. However, inviting actors from other institutions could strengthen the platform's outcomes further. The training programmes, particularly the ToT and step-down GRAST trainings, have also proven especially successful and are yielding anticipated results.

Although many activities are underway, it will take time for some to achieve their full potential. In several instances (such as enhanced messaging through digital tools), additional support could be provided by CABI and AEAs to ensure this occurs.

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