

FLOW I

Achievements and Lessons of the Women's Rights to Sustainable Livelihoods Project in Ghana



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FOREWORD



Hi All!

This is the last compilation of the successes, lessons, and strategies adopted during the implementation of the Women's Rights to Sustainable Livelihoods (WRSL) I project in Ghana.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the project team, especially the project partners, Botitaba Nahira Taaba Development Union (BONATADU), Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM) and Songtaba as well as all collaborators who contributed to the success of the project.

In working with people living in poverty, ActionAid has consistently focused on one thing – power in people.

We believe that people living in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and their communities. ActionAid's work is to be a catalyst for that change.

This is what FLOW I has done, to empower and educate women, children and men who have been marginalised, to stand up and break the cycle of poverty.

Compiled from end of project reports, previous annual and evaluation reports, field reports, stories and case studies, as well as desk and literature reviews related to project, this newsletter gives you an insightful and well-documented analysis of the WRSL project.

The second phase of the project is in eight districts in Ghana: the Nanumba North and South districts in the Northern region, the Talensi, and Nabdam districts in Upper East region, the Tain and Asutifi districts in the Brong Ahafo region, the Jirapa District in the Upper West region and the Adaklu District in the Volta region. The second phase of the WRSL project focuses on increasing women's economic and political empowerment and reducing the burden of unpaid care work.

In this newsletter, you will find information about the project's background, the baseline findings, interventions, achievements, lessons, challenges and sustainability measures.

You can download this newsletter from ActionAid Ghana's website, read it as you travel, forward to a colleague, and share the wealth of knowledge that ActionAid Ghana has to offer.

Happy Reading!

Azumi Mesuna
Project Manager



Regina Kohime from Gorogo was given two female pigs in July 2015. Currently, she has 10 pigs

BRIEF BACKGROUND

The Women's Rights to Sustainable Livelihoods (WRSL) project phase one has contributed to the economic empowerment of 3,000 women smallholder farmers and their households in the Upper East and Northern regions of Ghana by focusing on increasing food security of smallholder women farmers, reducing the drudgery of unpaid care work and improving their leadership potentials.

The project was funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands for three and half years', from 2012-2015.

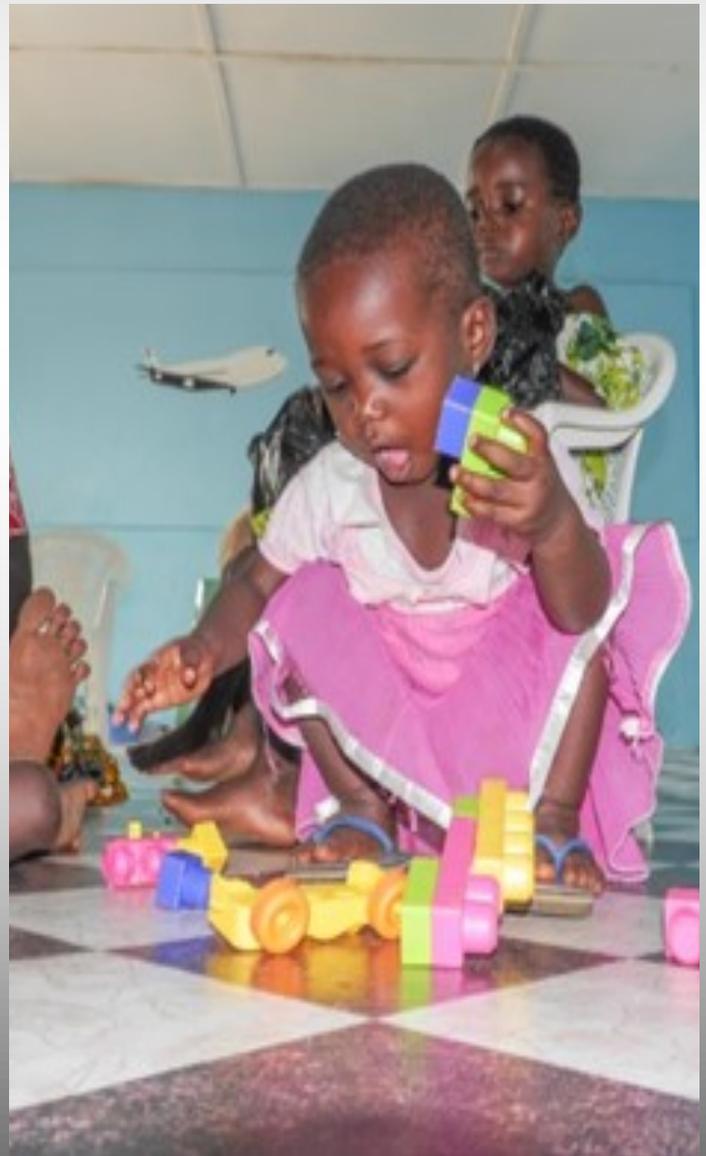
ActionAid Ghana partnered with SONGTABA, Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM), Botitaba Nahira Taaba Development Union (BONATADU), Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAAG), farmer networks, and collaborators like the Department of Food and Agriculture and District Assemblies to implement the project in four districts namely; Nanumba North & South districts, Talensi district, and the Nabdram district.

Project Outcomes

By the end of 2015:

1. 3000 women smallholder farmers in 2 Local Rights Programmes (LRPs) (Northern and Upper East region) in Ghana are organised, and their work as farmers and care givers is recognised by their communities.
2. 3000 women smallholder farmers meet regularly with local and national policy makers and engage in planning and budgeting processes to demand more resources to support them in food production and reduction in unpaid care work.

3. Hours spent by 1500 women in Ghana on unpaid care work are significantly reduced as a result of low cost pilot interventions such as community-run child-care centres, household rainwater storage, community tree lots for firewood and community sensitisation meetings by the end of 2015.
4. 3000 women smallholder farmers have more secure and sustainable access to food and surplus



A child plays at an early childhood centre in Chamber in the Nanumba South District.

Summary of Project Baseline Findings

The baseline survey of the project was conducted in 2013 and revealed interesting findings. These findings have been summarised under the various subareas listed below:

Smallholder farmers' groups

There was a weak organisational capacity of smallholder farmers' groups in AAG and its partners' operational areas with 44 loose groups. Before the project, these groups did not have any leadership or organisational abilities to link up to District Assemblies, Department of Food and Agriculture and other groups.

Recognition of unpaid care work

Community members from project communities did not appreciate the value of unpaid care work nor support in doing unpaid care work. This is mainly because their culture regarded it as, "women's work"

Time spent by women on unpaid care work

Women spent more than eight hours a day on unpaid care activities such as taking care of children, fetching of fire wood and water while only 13% of respondents indicated they spend time on activities that directly brings them income. In general, majority of their time was spent walking long distances to fetch water and collect wood for fuel.

Food security-access to farmlands, farm inputs and extension services

90% of women understood the ecological calendar, but do not have the technical knowledge to practice Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA) methods. 80% of women reported not having access to critical farming inputs during the farming season, resulting in very low yields. They were also not consulted or included in policy formulation at any level.

In addition to the scarcity of farm inputs, 75% of women did not have access to lands for farming activities.

Women's representation in decision-making

Women were severely underrepresented when it came to the management of local committees with less than 20% of women represented. There was also a low participation in household decision-making and other areas of decision making structures at the local government level.

Access to Seeds

Poor access to seeds for food production and the non-existence of community seed banks in project locations for women farmers



Community sensitisation meeting at Zanlelrgu in the Upper East Region

COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER V AND CONNECTION WITH THE WOMEN'S RIGHT TO SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PROJECT

In 2015, ActionAid Ghana launched its fifth Country Strategy Paper (CSP) titled, "Increasing Possibilities, Claiming Rights" (2015-2019). Within AAG's CSP V, the first two mission objectives read;

- Promote Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA) and women's secured access to and control over land and other productive resources;
- Advance political influence of women and girls; reduce women's unpaid care work and violence against women and girls.

These two mission objectives are the central objectives in relation to the Women's Rights to Sustainable Livelihoods (WRSL) project.

The programme on unpaid care work also connects with CSP V's mission objective three; which seeks to;

- Promote access to quality public education for girls and boys which respects their rights and enhance capacity of young people to drive their development priorities.

The WRSL project effectively merges the third mission objective to mission one and two through the implementation of community-run childcare centres as a model to reduce time women spend on unpaid care work while supporting children from age one to three years to have access to child care facilities and early education.

Summary of Past Major Project Activities

- i. Trained 100 community facilitators and partner staff on Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT) methodology.
- ii. Organised unpaid care work programme training.
- iii. Conducted leadership training for women smallholder farmers.
- iv. Trained smallholder women farmers on Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture. This included Training of Trainers (ToT) workshops with Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) staff, farmer network members and community facilitators.
- v. Trained beneficiaries on use of time diaries and data collection.
- vi. Trained farmers on leguminous seeds and seed production.
- vii. Conducted training on animal husbandry methods (small ruminants).
- viii. Organised experience-sharing workshops.
- ix. Organised engagement meetings with District Assemblies and traditional leaders.
- x. Distributed 1,530 goats, 150 poultry birds and 37 pigs to women smallholder farmers.
- xi. Held regular REFLECT group meetings with logistical support.
- xii. Organised community livestock volunteers' scheme.
- xiii. Distributed leguminous seeds to 1000 women.
- xiv. Organised international and local exchange visits. ▪



Traditional leaders engage in role-playing with community women on unpaid care work

Project Impact

The project after three and half years of implementation, yielded significant results in the lives of 3,200 smallholder women farmers in the Talensi, Nabdam, Nanumba North and South districts of the Northern and Upper East regions of Ghana.

The impact has been documented in the following areas;

1. Women's Collective Organisations

3,200 women smallholder farmers organised in 100 groups; 58 from Nanumba North and South districts, and 42 smallholder women farmers from the Talensi and Nabdam districts. The groups have strong leadership with heightened recognition from community members and local leaders. The women adopted a collective approach to identifying and presenting their issues, resulting in higher level of recognition from both traditional leaders and District Local Authorities. This created more unity and co-existence among women and provided a space for social support to each other yielding additional results as listed below:

- i. 2900 women have access to secured fertile land for group and individual farms resulting in increased farming activities and produce for women. The outputs have increased from an average of 100kgs to more than 400kgs per



Shaibu Sulemana sets fire for his wife to lessen unpaid care work load on her

woman with other cover crops such as beans, soya beans and pigeon peas.

- ii. 85% of the smallholder women farmers have increased capacity in engaging local leaders and duty bearers at the community and district level.
- iii. The smallholder women farmers have also established and maintained very good relationships between women's groups and farmer networks, District Assemblies and the Department of Food and Agriculture. This culminated in the provision of a Junior High School at Damol-Tindong in Nabdam District.



Pupils playing during break time outside the acquired class room block at Damol-Tindong JHS

- iv. Increased visibility of women smallholder farmer' groups through sensitisation on unpaid care and CRSA practices among women groups and communities.
- v. 1500 smallholder women farmers directly achieved food security and sustainable livelihoods with 9000 indirect beneficiaries.
- vi. The provision of small ruminants have improved smallholder women farmers' access to manure, and also enhanced their ability to be financially secured in meeting their basic and emergency needs such as paying for health insurance, school fees of their wards and purchasing household items.
- vii. Smallholder women farmers signed Memorandum of Understanding in 13 communities in the Talensi and Nabdam districts. Some of the communities include Gorogo, Wakii, Pwalugu, Pusu Namongo, Winkongo, Sakote, Duusi, Kulpel-Liga, Dapore, and Sheaga.

2. Changes in Attitudes

- i. Women and men have gained significant understanding of power dynamics and can discuss issues freely with husbands, community leaders, and group members, changing mind sets and behaviours towards women and girls.
- ii. Improved sharing of roles among men, boys, girls and women.
- iii. Women groups raised awareness on demands for water, education and health insurance: as a result, Sakote, Kulpeliga, Mandina and Wakii communities were provided with boreholes and annual renewal of health insurance for 113 alleged witches in the Nanumba South dis-

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- trict.
- iv. Repair of abandoned water pipes and provision of donkey cart by Nangodi District Assembly to reduce distance in fetching water and collection of farm produce.
 - v. Traditional leaders supported and convinced their community members and elders to support women's leadership and also provide support for some group's activities e.g. Lankani Chief supported women by carrying mortar for the establishment of a local community seed bank.
 - vi. Over 2500 community members comprising of men and boys, now participate in doing unpaid care work and appreciate the value of unpaid care work.
 - vii. 845 women serve in leadership positions of different capacities such as members of water user committees, unit committee members, group chair ladies, organisers, secretaries, leaders of Christian Mothers Associations and participate in the African Rural Women's Assembly forum ▪

“I’m now able to meet my basic needs as well as my children’s educational needs.” - Farapoa Zoogah



Farapoa Zoogah a widow, aged 49 years and a mother of 4 children from Sheaga community has this to say: - *“Access to and control of land by women in this community was very difficult and very rare. It was not until sensitisations and engagements were conducted with our traditional authorities that the cultural barrier was broken for women to access fertile land. My late husband’s land had been inherited by the family head, who has now released one acre of land for me to farm. I feel very happy for this development. Last year 2014, I was able to cultivate corn and I harvested 8 bags of which I sold off 3 bags for GHC 360.00 to pay for my son’s school fees. The remaining 5 bags were used for food for my family, I was able to have food throughout the year. Again this year, I cultivated corn but the weather was not favourable and I only managed to harvest 5 bags of corn. At least, much as I’m a widow, I’m now able to meet my basic needs as well as my children’s educational needs.” ▪*



Nkpalik women group jubilating upon obtaining a donkey and cart.

PILOT OF CHILD CARE CENTRES



Children and a childcare giver at the Chamba Childcare Centre in the Nanumba South District, Northern Region.

AAG piloted five child care centers at Nakpayili, Chamba, Gbea, Bolni and Sheaga in the Nanumba North and South districts in the Northern Region, as well as the Talensi and Nabdram districts in the Upper East region. Trainings were held for partner staff and AAG on child care management and a roll out training held for child givers by partner organisations. Five child care management committees were set up and represented by community leadership, the Ghana Education Service, the Ghana Health Directorate and leaders of women's groups in selected communities. The resulting effect was

50% reduction on time spent on child care by smallholder women farmers or women who had their children enrolled

at the centre, equivalent to 4 hours, or 240 minutes within the project period through the tracking of women's time use.

Out of 3200 women supported, 28% (representing 240 females) have access to child care and day care facilities as a result of the project against a baseline of zero. A total of 103 mothers, with 205 children are accessing these centres. An additional 737 mothers in these districts have their children in government day care centres where rooms have been allocated for the children.

In Ghana, the baseline study of the Women's Rights to Sustainable Livelihoods Project revealed that society has disregarded the care economy and the burden of women's multiple roles as farmers, caretakers, and market women, which contributes to perpetuating a culture where resource allocation within households tends to show the same bias against women. 85% of men submitted that they 'pay huge sums of money' to marry women, and therefore do not see any need to support women to undertake these tasks. To such men, it may be inferred that they assume that they have paid for the services of women in relation to care work by virtue of the dowry.

Yaa Naadi, the Vice Chairperson of the Parents-Teachers Association of the Care Centre at Chamba said, *"I sell meat which many people claim is the work of men, as a result of the time saved from taking care of my child from 8:30 – 3pm every day"*.

A mother of three children (two boys and one girl) and married to Gmabayi Naadi for more than 8 years, Yaa said she currently earns at least Ghc10 a day from the sale of meat and would make more than Ghc300 in a month. Yaa contributes financially to the upkeep of her family.

She said, *"I no longer have to always ask for money from my husband who was not willing to take up his responsibility."*

Yaa's empowerment is as a result of the use of existing community structures at Chamba, one of the communities in Nanumba South where the project is implemented.

AAG added value to the existing building by renovating the structure, supplying play items and providing

PILOT OF CHILD CARE CENTRES

monthly allowance to caregivers.

Other support also included the setting up of child care centre committees as well as training partners and volunteers on management principles.

Two major workshops were also conducted with a step down training for care givers and committee members.

To sustain the intervention, parents are required to contribute, on a monthly basis, a charge of Ghc2 which is used as allowance for caregivers.

Currently, 47 children are signed up at the centre.



At the Sheaga Childcare Centre, children are supervised by young volunteer care givers



Children of the Bolni community childcare centre in the Northern Region



Community facilitator supporting in time diary training at Madina in the Northern Region

The 4R Approach to Unpaid Care Work

From the implementation of the project, ActionAid Ghana proposed a 4R approach for interventions that are geared towards reducing the burden of unpaid care work, economic empowerment and women's leadership in programming. The 3R framework propounded by Professor Diane Elson; **Recognition, Reduction and Redistribution** was adopted into the project.

However, recently, a new R has been uncovered; **Representation**

1. Recognition;
2. Reduction;
3. Redistribution and;
4. Representation.

Recognition of unpaid care work means that the work done by (mainly) women is "seen" and acknowledged by the women themselves and others. It also means that it is recognised as an activity that consumes time and energy. The demand for recognition can take several forms such as changing perception and attitudes towards care work, and/or



Women use bore holes closer to their homes to reduce the drudgery of water collection at Madina, Northern Region.

valuing and appreciation of the drudgery of care work for women and girls. This also entails broad acceptance and value from various stakeholders, especially government, through the creation of appropriate policies and programmes that recognise the value of care work on national statistics. Recognition does **NOT** mean paying for this work directly through wag-

es.

Reduction of unpaid care work means that the burden is reduced for individual women and for the general society. This can happen through service provision in a different way.

E.g. Women's childcare burden would be reduced if government provided services such as health care, and child centres closer to where people live and work, as well as roads so that less time is spent in accessing these amenities. Reduction can also happen through identifying policies that can minimise the difficulty, and therefore the time of undertaking unpaid care work for women and girls is reduced by government.

Redistribution of unpaid care work means that the overall amount of unpaid care work remains the same, but it is more fairly shared among different people. One example of this is where male household members take on a greater share of housework and child-

care. Another example is where government takes on a greater share of healthcare provision by setting up an effective public healthcare system and provision of adequate and affordable water facilities.

Representation

means women recognise the value of their unequal workload and responsibilities and pre-

sent their demands for change before men, community leaders and government. Representation through individual and collective action is critical for women's empowerment to bring changes to women's status in society.

This can contribute to a more collective responsibility for unpaid care work between women, men, households, communities and the state ▪

THE 4R CHART



The figure above (Fig. 1.5.) represents the 4Rs documented over the three year period.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 4 R

The Four R approach was applied in the project through a number of interventions at the group, community, district and regional level all through to the national level.

In terms of **Representation**, women, through training in leadership, public speaking and confidence building, were able to present and voice out their own demands, which were submitted to household members, community leaders, local government authorities, and other civil society organisations. This resulted in women claiming their rights. Women's groups took advantage of community meetings, dialogues, and other international moments like the International Women's Day (IWD) and other national and global events to

discuss with duty bearers and make concrete demands towards the reducing and redistributing of the burden of care work. For instance, groups were provided with boreholes as a result of their demands and ability to identify and lead their own agenda.

Through community sensitisation meetings, as well as weekly and monthly group meetings, household and community members' perceptions and attitudes were changed towards women's leadership, and unpaid care work. With the use of time diaries to track women and men's time use, smallholder farmers measured their use of time over the project period and compared with each other to address the burden of care work. This helped to change perceptions and attitudes, enabling women themselves

and community members to **Recognise** and appreciate the value of community members. The achievement of Recognition led to the participation of many stakeholders such as government, community and household members, political parties, and civil society organisations in the provision of care services such as the construction of local community seed banks, extension of electricity, support in the collection of water and fuel wood and releasing lands for the construction of child care centres. This resulted in significant **Redistribution** of care work

among all these stakeholders in the care pyramid. The result of all the interventions along these areas contributed to 50% **Reduction** in child care. Beneficiaries used 240 minutes (4 hours) as against 480 minutes (8 hours) at the start of the project. Productive and paid activities like trading, rearing of animals, and food crop production improved over 300% from 120 minutes to 360 minutes. The right for women to enjoy leisure and also engage in personal development increased self-hygiene and cleanliness among women and their household members. ▪

Secured Livelihoods and Food Security

Women smallholder farmers secured livelihoods through sustainable climate resilient practices such as mulching, composting, mix cropping, stone bonding, and use of leguminous crops. The use of these CRSA practices resulted in improved soil fertility, increased access to quality seeds, and improved yields of women smallholder farmers.



Small holder farmers harvest corn from their group farm

1401 women had access to seed through seed production, and available seed banks. Groups and individual farms have improved the right to access seeds as one of the major input requirement for farming. From a baseline of zero, 76.6% of women smallholder farmers in Ghana (representing 2298 women) are now using indigenous seeds by adopting their own strategies for storing seeds.

Women smallholder farmers have gained seed production, storage and testing knowledge from trainings organised by Action-Aid Ghana.

Research reports and REFLECT discussions with women indicates that majority of women in northern Ghana use indigenous techniques to process and preserve seed. These techniques include: use of neem seed extracts and pepper to treat grain seed for storage, use of earthenware and metal pots with ash to

preserve leguminous seeds such as bambara beans; and drying and keeping cereals such as maize and millet in open places like kitchens or by hanging them on their verandas.

To women farmers, the use of indigenous seed means a lot to them because they do not have to struggle to buy expensive seeds from seed companies; they can use the money to do other things like pay for tractor service, and pay community labourers who have agreed to work for them by providing lunch.

Also, it helps the women to diversify their crop production so

they can produce various food crops. Preserved seeds also enhance their access to seeds for future farming.

- 1530 small ruminants distributed to 765 women.
- 50 women received 3 poultry birds each and 37 pigs were distributed to women farmers ▪



Men completing time diaries to track their time use

Key Lessons/Learning for Programme Integration

1. Holistic analysis of women's rights such as addressing unpaid care work, violence against women and girls, access to food and public responsiveness in the delivery of goods and services, serves a better way of achieving gender equality and promoting the rights of women. Programme integration will support to address the challenges many women and girls are confronted with. For example, the blend of unpaid care work, leadership and food security issues captures the support of many communities and government stakeholders, this helps to create networking between all these stakeholders and rural women farmers.
2. Addressing unpaid care work as a new concept in Ghana and using education and awareness raising among different stakeholders has gone to the extent that it has become a household concept among the women beneficiaries, men, community leaders and even local government officials. This gives a clear evidence of a successful awareness raising about the concept.



Gorogo women's group showing their excitement after receiving their fowls.

their self-confidence, communication skills, participation and leadership. One REFLECT member from Duusi said; *"It is possible to change the old habits or practices of people when they are properly sensitised and orient-ed"*. Another REFLECT member from Nasamba said, *"We thought men feel belittled if asked to perform household chores that were usually done by women but with sensitisation, some men have started participating in such chores."* Community sensitisation has helped to create a lot of changes, the quotes from right holders above reveals.

4. The training and use of Community Livestock volunteers improved small ruminants production as part of project support to smallholder farmers' aspect of Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women (FLOW).

5. Using time diaries as a tool to sensitise and involve men in unpaid care work debates helps to enforce their understanding and helps to make them recognise and provide support.

6. Piloting child care centres is one best approach to reducing women's unpaid care work, there is therefore the need for more advocacy on child care issues to be included and recognised by policy makers.

7. The analysis of unpaid care work in rural households seems to depict a likely situation in peri-urban and some urban areas. Similar strategies can be adapted to support this and provide further guidance on how to start and deepen interventions in peri-urban rural and



Women's group constructing a community map at a REFLECT meeting

3. The use of REFLECT as an adult learning methodology gave women the space to learn, understand and apply the principles to discuss their issues, analyse them and agree on actions for change. The issues that informed the agenda for each of the REFLECT circles were as a result of the discussions in the group meetings and other development issues at all levels. Through these discussions in these REFLECT circles, the women have managed to develop

- 8. The use of compost, mulching and leguminous crops as climate resilient methodologies have improved soil fertility and improved yields, government policies on this needs to be increased and monitored closely by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and smallholder women farmers to ensure adequate implementation of national policies*

Project Sustainability Strategies

- 1. Women who were supported with two goats from AAG and partners, passed on their offspring to other women within their groups. This is a practice which will continue after the project ends, enabling more women to have access to the animals and creating more commitment to monitor their colleagues by ensuring the benefits are spread widely and is sustainable. So far, 270 goats have been passed on.
- 2. Voluntary savings and credit schemes are social funds set up by each of the 100 groups established in Ghana, whereby members make a small contribution to finance their groups' actions that they have agreed on. They also use it as a credit scheme to loan to members with a small percentage. This keeps the group united and bonded.



A woman asking question at Awaradone community on group formation in Upper East

- 3. Through the engagement meetings held with traditional and local government officials, women groups are connected to these leaders and thus their issues are heard and dealt with. The linkage between officials and community members results in 4. strengthened commitments to provide infrastructure and other resources women farmers might require. The women felt confident to engage with decision makers and understand how to appropriately present their issues in a positive 5. manner. This is an indication that they will continue to do so after the end of the project. The project has also facilitated linkages between women's groups, women leaders and established farmers' networks in Ghana to advocate for common issues as farmers.

of sustainability after the completion of the project because they will be recognized and invited for meetings and community actions even after the end of the project.

Development of Advocacy Plans. The groups were supported to develop their advocacy plans outlining a road map for their advocacy priorities and activities beyond the time of the project.

Programme Coherence and Integration: Unpaid care work and the whole project concept has been integrated as part of the current CSP V which spans from 2015 to 2019 and is an essential part of AAG's main stream work with oversight roles from all Regional Programme Areas (RPAs).



Female Community Livestock volunteers deworm a goat

This addresses the issue

- 6. Introduction of com-



Erosion control terraces (erosion ditches) on a woman compound farm in Tongo

community livestock volunteers who are members of the groups ▪

CHANGE STORIES



Alhassan packing fire outside his compound for his wives

Family Regains Joy as Husband Wears Gender Lens.

“I consider my involvement in household chores as part of my responsibilities and not a favour to my wives. Through this, I have enhanced mutual respect among my family.

“My name is Alhassan Abukari, a 35 year old subsistence farmer in Madina community in the Nanumba North District. I am married to two wives namely Aramatu and Amatu. I have seven children.

I am glad that ActionAid and SONGTABA under the FLOW Project opened a REFLECT circle which created an opportunity for women and community members to learn and apply REFLECT to discuss and understand their issues.

With discussions and education through the REFLECT circle meetings, the myth has been broken and it has become normal for men to do some of the household activities to support their wives.

I learn a lot listening to some of their discussions regarding women’s workload, I had a second thought and decided to start helping them in some of the workload. For example, I have fully taken over the fetching of firewood for them. I used to carry the firewood on a bicycle, but now I have succeeded in buying a motorbike. So I now carry the firewood on a motorbike for them. Traditionally, the society sees collecting firewood or water to be strictly for women. It was an abomination for men to do these types of household chores. Their discussion on women’s workload made me deeply reflect on their situation and I have made up my mind to take up some of their daily activities in order to free up some time for them to also engage in productive activities that would support them economically. I realised they usually become so tired after walking long distances and spending over seven hours on a daily basis collecting fuel wood whilst I sometimes had virtually nothing to do. Fuel wood has become scarce and very difficult to get. Since I offloaded this burden from them, the women are so happy. Now I see happy faces in my family as they converse a lot among themselves” ▪

“I had no access to land in the community.”

“My name is Esther Mbek. I am 65 years old. I live with my children in Sakote Baraboug in the Upper East Region. I am a mother of five; four boys and one daughter. My oldest son lives in Kumasi. My second boy, after completing his Polytechnic course, got a job with the Ghana Broadcasting Cooperation (GBC). My other son, Thomas, is one of the REFLECT facilitators under the FLOW project. I am a member of the FLOW REFLECT circle. I am also the leader of the widows group in my community.

Previously, we never knew that certain aspects of work could be done by both boys and girls. Our culture assigns different roles for boys which are separate from those performed by girls. Unfortunately there is an unfair distribution of these roles – with the girls working more than the boys. For instance, during harvesting, the men will only uproot the

groundnuts and leave the rest of the work such as conveying, ploughing, drying and storing for the women to do.

We do all this work as well as other tasks such as collecting firewood and water. In the home, the men will be resting while the women are busily cooking, washing, sweeping and taking care of children.

These seriously affected girls’ education as most of them entirely missed out and others dropped out at the basic levels of education. Our husbands took the girls out of school and gave them out for marriage in exchange for cows as part of the bride price.

We never knew that we could share roles and responsibilities equally among males and females in the family. We lacked confidence and could not easily demand for what was due us. For example, it was very difficult for a woman to ask for land and to produce certain types of crops.

When I lost my husband about 15 years ago, they wanted me to remarry one of his brothers which I strongly resisted.

Due to this, the family head seized all our farm land, including my immediate surroundings just to punish me. I had no access to land in the community. Getting food to eat and to feed my children was a big problem for me.

I had to travel into another community to get land to cultivate some foodstuff in order to feed my children. I walked long distances every day to my farm. This affected my productivity because I was tired most of the time, also I didn’t have any time to do other important things.

Life was hard, and I just couldn’t make ends meet or come up with a solution to make it easy for myself and my children.

When I joined the REFLECT circle under the FLOW project, I was surprised by the things they discussed.

I was educated about my rights and I began to understand that I was being taken advantage of.

I felt angry that my rights were being infringed on but most importantly I was not willing to have them abused any further.

I went to the Chief’s palace to take up the issue of the confiscation of my land with him.

After I had explained everything that had happened to me, the chief intervened and I won the case.

I claimed all seized farm lands that belonged to my late husband!

I am now farming on my own land, and I believe no one will ever dream of taking it away from me anymore. I now produce more than enough food to feed myself and my family, and even have some reserve to sell and take care of other needs!

My life has changed due to the FLOW project. I am empowered!” ▪



Esther Mbek owns her own land now and is able to take care of her children.

“They said that I would use the resources for development to cater for my children” – Agatha Achiaa

“I started contesting for the District Assembly Elections since 1996 and each time, I have been competing with not less than 3 or 4 men. Throughout the period that I have contested, the men campaigned that the people should not give me the mandate just because I am a woman. They also campaigned that I would use the resources for the development of the electoral area to cater for my children.”

At 60 years old, Agatha has seen her fair share of losses.

“I have contested for the assembly elections 6 times and lost because of all these negative allegations. I received a lot of insults and other allegations from the other contestants, mostly the men. However, in 2015, ActionAid organised a forum for women who have lost assembly elections and those who have decided to contest for the elections. I participated in the forum and the capacity building training.

ActionAid Ghana and partners also organised radio discussions for women contesting in the elections, giving the women the opportunity to reach a larger audience with their ideas and share their campaign messages.

The experience sharing and the encouragements from the participants revived my interest to contest for the elections again. I felt encouraged to contribute to the development of my electoral area.”

The platform of engaging in media discussions increased Agatha’s visibility, but this did not stop the abuse she was receiving from competitors.

According to her, although she continued to experience false allegations and



Agatha Achiaa sharing her experience as a woman in politics

threats of violence, she did not allow that to prevent her from campaigning for the position of Assembly Woman for her community.

Agatha won the election and is now the elected assembly woman for Atronie in the Sunyani Municipality of the Brong Ahafo Region ▪



Women smallholder farmers' leader presenting a petition to Nanumba North District Chief Executive at Bimbilla

Women feed their issues into district assembly plans and budgets

"Adisa Inifa is my name. I am a 73-year old widow residing in Kukuio in the Nanumba South District. I have three sons and one daughter. I am a member of the Kukuio Alleged Witches' REFLECT group. I am also a member of the Circle Committee. The REFLECT circle was organised by ActionAid, SONGTABA and the alleged witches' group in 2012 under the FLOW project.

Since I lost my husband many years ago, I have not had access to fertile land to farm. That was why my children had to migrate to Wulensi in search of farm lands. Many other women in this community are facing similar situations, but unfortunately we hardly come together to discuss these problems and meet the authorities with a stronger voice. It was during the REFLECT circle that we discussed about our rights to good food and health. Thanks to the FLOW project, we were all brought together and this has given us the skills and voice to present our issues to the District Assembly.

I was among the 7-member committee who held dialogue sessions with the District Chief Executive (DCE) at the Nanumba South District Assembly in Wulensi in May, 2013. Other key officials during the meeting were the District Coordinating Director, District Planning Officer, District Budget Officer, NADMO coordinator and Health Insurance Manager. This meeting

offered an opportunity for us to present our concerns on behalf of the group to the government authorities and demand our rights. We made them know that we are fully aware that it was the responsibility of the government to take care of our welfare as well as those of the 179 women in the alleged witches' camp in Kukuio. We are all now on the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and we can go to any hospital for medical services. What makes me happy is that the District Assembly has captured our issues into the 2014 budget plans.

These include our feeding and renewal of health insurance.

The DCE has asked the District Social Welfare Officer to register all of us alleged witches' under the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme. We have plans to follow up with the Social Welfare Officer to ensure that we are all captured to benefit under the LEAP programme.

Through this meeting, the DCE assured us that they will support us with foodstuff, and actually he later fulfilled his promise by providing us with 145 bags of maize. As I do not have anybody to help me, it is the food support that we received that has helped me to survive. The other issue we demanded from the Assembly was to register us with the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) to enable us easily access health care services. The District Assembly again fulfilled their obligation by providing us with annual registration since 2013."

NB: The District Chief Executive is the political head representing the government in the district.



Women engaged in a sensitisation workshop at a REFLECT meeting

Men willingly take part in doing Unpaid Care Work

"My name is Anapogbila Baba. I am 40 years old and from Dapore in the Talensi District of the Upper East Region. I am married with three children (two boys and one girl who are of ages 20, 13 and 2 years respectively). My first son is currently in Goore Senior High School, the second is in primary school, class 5 and my little daughter is in nursery school.

As a woman smallholder farmer, we faced various challenges in our farming activities and in our families, but we did not know how to mobilise ourselves to address issues confronting us. We simply kept brooding over our woes and blaming nature as our problems increased. We did not know what to do to get out of this undesirable situation.

It is the FLOW project which was introduced to us by ActionAid Ghana and BONATADU that has mobilised us and continues to support us to hold meetings regularly. We now hold meetings in this community at least twice a month. We are working in unity and harmony among each other in the group and the community as a whole.

The FLOW project has enlightened us because we never knew that boys could do certain activities without intimidation from the community. Previously, when a boy was seen doing household chores, he was labelled 'poanindoa' which literary means "a female man". The society has assigned most of the unpaid care work to females while the males are more engaged in schooling or productive activities that give them income. This trend has made us women poor.

With awareness created under the FLOW project, many people in the community have become aware of the heavy workload on women and appreciate the need to support us in some of the household chores. Now the boys have started taking up some of these unpaid care work such as collecting firewood, water and some other household chores.

Recently, my husband baths the children, sweeps the compound and even washes children's dresses during week-

ends. This is really surprising because in this community, these things were never done by men.

Also, we feared to go to the Assemblyman or the chiefs to engage them, but through confidence building in the REFLECT circle, we now easily move to these opinion leaders without fear. For instance, when we needed land to cultivate corn on our group farm, we went to the chief, had a dialogue with him and he allocated 10 acres of land to us.

When animals grazed our corn, we even had the confidence to go to the chief who summoned the owners and warned them to peg their animals. In the past, we as women would not have known what to do to stop the animals but we discussed the issue in the REFLECT circle and identified a workable solution to it.

Our group, which is made up of 36 members, has just finished harvesting our corn, which we are yet to thresh but I am sure we will get not less than 20 maxi bags from the farm.

Also, through FLOW, I was given two goats to rear. All of us benefiting from the small ruminants were trained in animal management. We are applying these methods to make sure that our animals are healthy and productive. My animals have been vaccinated and through me, other community members got the opportunity to also vaccinate their animals." ■



John Kuba supporting his wife, Jennifer Kuba, by washing the cooking utensils, in Duusi, a community in the Talensi District.

“Lifted from the back to the front”

“Many people in Tongo are surprised at how I have been lifted from the far back to the fore front. It is all about knowing your entitlements, and demanding what is due you. I now get what I need without depending on anybody. I am proud of myself and can confidently say I am now living a dignified life.

My name is Nauguh Boarezii from Tongo in the Talensi District of the Upper East region.

I am a 65 year old widow. I live with my children, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. I have three daughters and two of them are married. Unfortunately, both of my two sons have passed away, leaving behind their wives and children. I am now the head of the household.

Like it happens to other widows, when my husband passed away, his brothers seized all our farmlands. I had no land to farm on so I resorted to selling firewood. It was not easy to get wood to sell. The distance was very far, and I had to cross a river to find any to chop and sell. I would stop and rest at

least 5 times before I got home with the fire wood and I spent not less than nine hours each day collecting firewood.

When I set off at about 5 o'clock at dawn, I arrive home with the firewood around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, then proceed to the market at Bolga and Zuarungu to sell the firewood.

This made me very tired and I was always falling sick, I could not sleep nor eat well.

Usually, one headload of firewood is sold at Ghc3.00 (less than \$1). This profit from one head of firewood is just enough to buy me two bowls of maize to prepare Tuo Zaafi (a staple food among people from Northern Ghana made from flour).

It was not enough to keep me from not suffering for survival. I could not afford basic necessities such as good food and health care.

I knew I would not be facing these challenges if I still had access to land to farm.

I joined the REFLECT circle and it was an eye-opening experience for me.

I was never aware that by law, my husband's property was mine and his family didn't have a right to take the land and everything we had worked together for from me.

I held a meeting with my late husband's brothers concerning the land they had taken away from me and I let them know I knew my rights. I threatened to report them to the appropriate authorities if they refused to return the farmlands to



65 year old Nauguh Boarezii stood up for her rights and reclaimed her land.

me.

They knew I was serious and being afraid of facing the law, they returned the land to me.

The maltreatment and verbal abuse I suffered at their hands also stopped.

I now use the land to cultivate millet, groundnuts and bambara beans and I have stopped selling firewood.

I'm now producing enough food to feed my grandchildren and the rest of my family.

I see myself as being lifted from the back to the front, I have regained my freedom and respect.”



Lydia Miyella, assembly woman for Kolpeliga in the Brong Ahafo Region

“I am better poised for the future...” – Lydia Miyella

“I am a smallholder woman farmer from Kolpeliga community belonging to the Female Headed Household (FHH) group supported under the FLOW project.

Aside farming, I’m also a teacher at a kindergarten school in the Winkongo community, near Bolgatangana in the Upper East Region, where I earn some income to support my children since I’m a widow. Only men in our communities are represented at the District Assembly during General Assembly meetings. This resulted in most of the issues affecting women not being on the agenda by the Assembly.

Over the years, ActionAid Ghana and Botitaba Nahira Taaba Development Union (BONATADU), through capacity building, have supported our group. One key issue that captivated me was the issue of addressing women’s rights through advocacy and lobbying as well as engaging with duty bearers to demand our rights. I got a conviction that if I joined the Assembly, it would position me better to advocate and present women’s issues on board. The leadership training and sensitisation workshops I have received from BONATADU and AAG has increased my confidence during discussions in community and group meetings.

During the 2015 Assembly Elections, I offered myself and publically declared to contest for the General Assembly Elections where I competed against the incumbent Assemblyman. With logistical support from BONATADU/AAG, I was able to package my campaign message of working together for the development of my electoral area with particular emphasis on fronting women issues; this made me a favourite candidate for the electorate who voted me. I used a winning strategy of standing as an independent and neutral candidate, who was not under the influence or support of any political party. I communicated my message of my readiness to serve the interest of all my community members regardless of which political party they belonged to.

When the elections were held, I won by 355 votes, beating my male contender by 45 votes.

I must admit that it was not an easy task, especially with our culture and being a widow. Also, I did not come from the Kolpeliga community unlike my husband, I moved from my community, Datoku, after marrying him and lived there following his death.

For me this is a stepping stone as the sky is the limit, my vision is to climb higher on the leadership ladder to the level of a Member of Parliament or a District Chief Executive (DCE) to continue to fight for the rights of women. As I have already taken an extra step by going back to school to further my education at the University of Education, Winneba to better position me for the leadership aspiration.”

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PARTNERS



**WIDOWS & ORPHANS
MOVEMENT**



Songtaba

(Securing Basic Rights for Women and Girls)



LOCATION

Oko Kotey Link
East Legon
P.O. Box AN 19083,
Accra-North

CONTACT

Tel: +233 (0) 30 254 4714 / +233 (0) 30 254 4715
Mob: +233 (0) 24 431 6392 / +233 (0) 28 910 9560
Fax: +233 (0) 30 276 4930
E-Mail: aaghana@actionaid.org



@ActionAidGhana

Design and Layout
Communications Office
Deborah "Smallie" Lom...