



The five-year ASSAR project (Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions, 2014-2018) uses insights from multi-scale, interdisciplinary work to inform and transform climate adaptation policy and practice in ways that promote the long-term wellbeing of the most vulnerable and those with the least agency.

Background

In the Upper West Region of Ghana, climatic and non-climatic stressors affect the most vulnerable in society, especially the elderly, widows, young unmarried and even married women with limited support from relatives. According to research carried out by the Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR) project, traditional patriarchal roles have favoured males and promoted structural inequalities among females in terms of decision making, access to and control over land for agricultural activities and the ability to engage in more productive livelihoods.

Consequently, various women self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as an important social safety net that helps overcome many of these barriers by reducing vulnerabilities and increasing the resilience of women and their households. These SHGs are set up to provide financial and other livelihood support for their members, and empower women through skills development and the promotion of diversified livelihood options at the local level.

Despite the advantages, SHGs are often limited in the needed capacity, skills and opportunities to be effective and sustainable. It is against this background that ASSAR Ghana in collaboration with the Nandom Deanery Integrated Rural Development Programme (NANDIRDEP), SEED¹ and with grant support from START International organised a capacity building workshop to enhance the capacities of these groups while facilitating the establishment of a community-based women platform.

The Grant for Local Adaptation Support (GLAS) specifically sought to provide rural women with: (i) skills in eco-inclusive livelihoods and business models, (ii) access to climate information and communication from/to relevant parties, and (iii) advocacy skills to effectively engage on issues that affect women in their respective communities.

Approach

The ASSAR Ghana team engaged 30 women leaders involved in the coordination and training of SHGs – related to groundnut and shea butter processing, soap making, *pito* (local malt) brewing, petty trading, smock weaving, and Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) in the Lawra and Nandom districts – in two sets of two-day workshops. The training and capacity building workshops were organised using the participatory learning and action, and training of trainers' approach. Participatory processes help people identify, prioritise and share ideas from their knowledge of local conditions while the training of trainers' approach was intended to promote widespread transfer of knowledge acquired by participants.

¹SEED is an initiative founded by the United Nations Environment, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) that promotes eco-entrepreneurship for sustainable development

Using simple business models such as the LEAN Business Canvas as a guide, participants were equipped with the required skills for testing the validity of new business ideas as well as for improving existing businesses by emphasising key factors such as value addition, branding, effective customer targeting and marketing.

The workshop also trained the women leaders in advocacy in order for them to communicate their challenges better; networking and linkages through the creation of an SHG platform; and introduced them to sources of credit and business registration procedures from within and outside of their districts, to improve their livelihoods.

To harness support for the GLAS project, the workshop also brought together representatives from the Business Advisories Centres (BACs), planning officers, the Gender Desk Officers of the Municipal and District Assemblies of Lawra and Nandom, respectively, and the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development (CIKOD), a non-governmental organisation (NGO).

Achievements

- Groups that previously acted in isolation in the two districts have been brought together at leadership level.
- The groups have been registered as apex bodies at the respective district assemblies.
- These groups have been linked up with the Business Advisory Centre (BAC) to facilitate their activities, and to provide access to credit and other future training programmes.
- The groups have gained skills and processes to advocate on issues that negatively impact women livelihoods and wellbeing – and holding regular meetings in this regard.
- The women groups are now acting as trainers to empower other groups in the districts.
- ASSAR Ghana has established digital resource centres in both Lawra and Nandom districts for both farmers and others (including women) who are interested in other livelihood opportunities for additional training.



Lessons Learnt

Empowering and increasing the agency of women requires the creation, formalisation and the strengthening of existing women groups through participatory approaches that enhance effective knowledge sharing in collaboration with their male counterparts to engender support for the adoption of promoted adaptation responses.

The grants for the implementation of these activities are in recognition of the need to go beyond academic capacity building within ASSAR to do more to strengthen the capacities of those living and working in the ASSAR study sites. The Grant for Local Adaptation Support (GLAS) are intended to draw on the findings of ongoing ASSAR research to support the most vulnerable groups in each region on overcoming top barriers to and supporting enablers of their adaptation.

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