

Women of Biu: breaking ground, earning income, beating aflatoxin



Female smallholder farmers in Biu, Upper East Region, used to be held back by limited access to land and agricultural inputs. Before engaging with Adakant Enterprise, a partner of the UK DFID-funded Market Development Programme for Northern Ghana (MADE), in 2015, most women in Biu cultivated groundnut and vegetables on small parcels of land allocated to them by their husbands and heads of family. The yield was not enough to eat all year round, let alone to take to market.

Today, an innovative business model implemented by MADE and Adakant has enabled more than 400 Biu farmers belonging to 24 women’s groups to upgrade their fields – from half an acre to between three and five acres each. The women have added maize and rice to their repertoire, and they are now farming for income as well as household meals. By learning to reduce aflatoxin contamination, they are also making that income higher and those meals safer.

It began in 2014 when James Adawine, Chief of Biu and founder of Adakant, partnered with MADE to support the women of his community who wished to farm as a business. Chief Adawine encouraged the women to organise into groups and convinced men to allocate more land to them. He also linked the women to the Tono Irrigation Company, on whose irrigated plots they could cultivate rice all year round.



The women of Biu at a Village Savings and Loans meeting.

Working in partnership with MADE, Adakant supports the women's groups with ploughing services, certified seeds, fertiliser and agrochemicals on credit. The women also benefit from training and the services of a team of Farm Enterprise Advisers (FEAs). Adakant buys back rice harvested by the groups, and has an arrangement with Agricare Limited, a leading animal feed producer in Ghana, to buy their maize. Many of the women have formed Village Savings and Loans groups where they save up some of the income earned from these sales.

As harvests grow, the women are also taking on another longstanding problem: the high rate of aflatoxin contamination that infiltrates their groundnut and maize fields, harming the value of the crop and the health of those who eat it. To reduce the incidence of aflatoxin in Biu crops, Adakant, with support from MADE, trained the women's groups in the use of Aflasafe in the 2017/18 farming season. Aflasafe is a biological control product that can be applied to maize or groundnut fields to reduce the incidence of aflatoxin-producing fungi.

“Working with women is gratifying. Women are eager to learn and to adopt improved farming practices. The training in the use of Aflasafe has, for example, enabled them to increase production and to reduce the incidence of aflatoxin in the maize and groundnuts they produce.”

John Mark Itinkong,
FEA working with Adakant Enterprise

Lamisi Atim now cultivates two acres each of groundnut and maize on land provided by her husband, and three acres of rice under the Tono irrigation scheme. At the end of the 2018/19 farming season, she sold 20 tonnes of paddy rice for GHS 26,400 and 2 tonnes of maize for GHS 4,500. “Income earned from farming has given me the freedom to manage my affairs,” she says. “I no longer quarrel with my husband over money to cater for my needs.” Her groundnut harvest has also increased from 60 kg four years ago to 500 kg this year, but this is not for sale; Lamisi keeps it to feed her whole family.

“The FEAs taught us how to farm as a business. We learnt good farming practices such as how to harrow the land before planting and to plant in rows. This has helped us to properly manage our farms and to increase yield.”

Lamisi Atim, leader of Asatichaaba Women's Group

Seeing the improved living conditions of members of the women's groups is inspiring other women in the community to form new groups and access Adakant's support. As Abigail Alongweh, member of the newly formed Biu Young Sisters Group, puts it: “We do not need to travel outside our communities to labour for our daily income. There is help here in Biu for women who want to make a living from farming.”



Lamisi Atim with two of her children.



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