Adaptation Learning Programme in Ghana

Savings and enterprise for adaptation to climate change

Members of the Tariganga Village Savings and Loans group, during a training on how to save money.

ALP Community Stories

Anabig Ayaab is a 50 year old farmer from Tariganga, Garu-Tempane District, in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Tariganga is in the dry savannah zone of northern Ghana where vegetative cover is sparse, especially during the dry season. The village and surrounding landscape is flat and dusty at this time, with the few trees that still stand, including shea-nut used for cosmetics and dawadawa, a local medicinal tree, shedding their leaves. The landscape will become increasingly green with the June rains. These rains will only last until October when the dry season, with varying temperatures and wind conditions, will set in again and last for the remainder of the year, guaranteeing a hungry period from March or April until the next rains. Families depend almost entirely on the land for producing their food and generating income, growing staple crops such as maize and raising livestock. As part of their domestic work, the women in the community are responsible for fetching water from sources that are between half a kilometer to a kilometer away. Although a few of the families have bicycles which can be used to bring firewood to the market, or for the children to get to school, most people move around by foot. The village centre landmark is a large mahogany tree surrounded by open area, which turns into a bustling market every third day. Ingredients such as salt, maize, and several varieties of pepper sold at the market attract people from other communities up to ten kilometers away. Around the centre, houses are dispersed and arranged in informal clusters, with reddish-brown mud walls and mostly thatch roofs, while a few have zinc.

Anabig is married and a mother of seven children between the ages of 2 and 25 years. As with most of the families in Tariganga, Anabig's livelihood is based on crop farming, dry season gardening, animal rearing, and petty trade. However, increasingly devastating climate hazards such as drought, floods, and windstorm are making these livelihood activities more difficult and less productive. For example frequent and severe droughts destroy crops, result in insufficient water and

food for animals, and increase disease incidence. Although communities can cope with these hazards by hiring out labor, borrowing food and money, and selling animals, these coping strategies are often unsustainable. Anabig describes how she uses the resources in her communities such as farmlands, economic trees, and the market to support her livelihood. But she still lacks access to key resources such as farm tools, means of transportation and weather information.

"In recent years, farming has become more difficult. The soils are less fertile, seeds have become more expensive to acquire and the rains come late and leave early", says Anabig Ayaab.

Anabig laments that poor yields lead to hunger and poverty but until recently, she did not have the capital and skills to undertake a different livelihood. Three years ago, she was among a group of women who benefited from training on how to save money under the Village Savings and Loans Project implemented by CARE International in Northern Ghana. Anabig, alongside other women, were also trained on how to make compost instead of buying inorganic fertilizer and how deforestation hurts her environment.

Through the group savings and her new ideas for farming, Anabig has been able to increase yields from her farm during the last season. She said, "I was able to acquire improved seeds of maize from the seed growers by taking a loan from my savings group. I bought enough seeds which I shared with my husband. The results are very exciting. On my own, I harvested 5 bags of maize from my 2½ acres of farm land as compared to 2 bags the previous years and my husband harvested 9 bags from his farm as compared to 5 bags in previous years. We used the improved seeds combined with use of farm residue as organic fertilizer and this has brought a lot of excitement to my family. There is now peace, unity and love in my family. My husband now respects me and I feel happy to be among my fellow women in the community".

Apart from farming, Anabig has been able to take better care of her children in school. They now have all the materials they need to read and write in school and her family is also insured under the national health insurance scheme. Anabig's existing enterprising spirit, knowledge and openness to changing her agriculture systems are an important and valuable asset for the development of her family and an example of success in the face of adversity for the wider community.

Anabig expresses her excitement at working with the Adaptation Learning Programme.

It was therefore not surprising when Anabig openly expressed her excitement and commitment during the Adaptation Learning Program (ALP) meeting in Tariganga. The ALP process begins with an assessment of the community's vulnerability and capacity to adapt to climate change. Anabig hopes that she will gain a better understanding of how to design and apply community-based adaptation strategies including increasing the resilience of her livelihoods choices, reducing disaster risk, and gaining increased capacity. ALP aims to build capacity and further empower women like Anabig and communities like Tariganga to gain skills for diversifying their farming systems and make wise choices for adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

For more information on the ALP in Ghana, please contact Romanus Gyang - Romanus.Gyang@co.care.org or alp@careclimatechange.org.

Story by Madeleine McPherson, July 2011.

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