

Women take lead in tackling climate change



Alimatu Sandobila, elected to represent her community at the local assembly

ALP Community Stories

Saamini is located in East Mamprusi district of Northern Ghana, with a population of about 3,350 people in just over 500 households. East Mamprusi has a multi-ethnic population with close to 80 percent of people involved in agricultural production. The district lies within the guinea savannah woodland belt with grassland vegetation, and short deciduous trees, experiencing one short rainy season and a hot dry season. Dominant tree species include the Shea tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) and Dawa-dawa (*Parkia biglobosa*) both of which provide edible fruits and raw materials for local industry. Located near Saamini are the White Volta River and a natural forest reserve.

Although household headship and ownership of productive resources at Saamini are male dominated, both men and women are involved in agriculture. Groundnuts, bambara beans and cowpea are crops that are commonly grown by both men and women. In addition, men grow maize, millet, soya beans, sorghum and yam. Women also grow okra while few of them venture into the cultivation of maize, millet and sorghum. They also earn income from processing of shea nuts into butter for sale. Other livelihood activities for both genders include livestock rearing, petty trading, picking and, groundnut oil extraction, sale of food and grain banking among others. Men are responsible for providing food for the family, but due

to the weather changes, whatever they grow is not enough for food and for income generation. This necessitates the women to grow additional food – some to sell so as to earn money to educate their children. But farming is not always easy for women in Saamini; they face a number of constraints. Over time the land's fertility has been reducing, with men using the most fertile portions, if any, while leaving the infertile land for women. When women find ways to improve the fertility of the land, men reclaim it for their own farming thereby depriving the women of a livelihood and additional food for their families. Further, women in Saamini support the men in growing their crops but men do not do the same for them, unless those who have been hired to provide labour. Overall, the Saamini community mainly engages in rain-fed agriculture and the community struggles with annual droughts and, more recently, sometimes floods which destroy their crops.

Adaptation strategies

The Adaptation and Learning Programme for Africa (ALP) in collaboration with Partners in Rural Empowerment and Development (PARED) is supporting the Saamini community to enhance agricultural livelihoods.

ALP and PARED began with community mobilization e.g. organizing women into groups and working with both women and men. This was followed by Climate Vulnerability and Capacity

Assesment (CVCA) to identify areas of vulnerability and priority adaptation activities, based on climate information and community knowledge and capacities, these activities are then included in community action plans. Tisungtaaba Women Group, comprising of 26 members, is a pre-existing group that is mainly engaged in farming; the group members were among those who participated in the CVCA. Since the start of ALP, group members have been trained on best farming practices, such as the use of new and drought resistant crop varieties. They received certified drought tolerant soyabean seeds (Jenguma variety) and fertilizer for multiplication through block farming on a three acre plot of land. A rain gauge was also provided and community representatives were trained by officers from the meteorological services on rainfall data collection. The rain gauge was placed at a central point which is easily accessible to the community members. Analysis of rainfall data will assist the community in seasonal and long-term decision making on crop choices and appropriate timing for planting.

Challenges experienced by Tisungtaaba Women Group

Major challenges for the group members, who intend to use the anticipated harvest for seed multiplication and for food, include late planting due to lack of funds for ploughing and poor soil fertility. Members cited gender inequity in allocation of community land as a factor limiting women's potential. They also feel insecure about investing on accessible land since the allocation is not permanent. Additionally, the land is not fenced so crops are often destroyed by domestic animals. The group plans to access land further away from the village to avoid this destruction. In other activities, they explained that they lack protective clothing for soap making and shea butter processing, capital for expansion is inadequate and use of manual labour for butter extraction is a challenge.

Women's participation in community leadership and enabling factors

Women in Saamini community are actively involved in community leadership, playing a key role in promoting adaptation initiatives. Among the enabling factors is the community's history of fostering women's participation in leadership.



Saamini is one of the two communities in the district headed by a Queen mother, a traditional leader known in local parlance as "Poa Naa". She has a council of elders who assist her in the day-to-day administration of the village. In the modern political system, the community has also witnessed the emergence of ambitious young women leaders like Alimatu Sandobila. Married with four children, and a Junior High School leaver, she and her husband are both farmers and she is a member of the Tisungtaaba group. Now 34, Alimatu was only 30 years old when she was popularly elected to represent the community at the local assembly for a three year period. As an assembly representative, she successfully advocated for construction of a bridge, among other achievements. The community is currently represented by a man who took over from Alimatu and the group collaborates with him in community initiative.

Climate change is a global challenge with intense local impact especially on women. At Saamini community in Northern Ghana women are demonstrating their capacity to contribute to local leadership that enhances adaptation strategies.

A Saamini farmer states: "Food shortage is now common, unlike 30 years ago when food was plentiful. Traditionally women mainly stayed at home to nurture their families. Women's workload has now increased tremendously due to their involvement in agriculture and other activities such as petty trade, picking shea nuts, producing shea butter and charcoal for sale. Women now work harder than men and provide food for their families even though cultural barriers limit women's access to productive resources." He added that men are taking up new roles such as participation in child care and food preparation. In addition, girls and boys are increasingly moving to town for casual labour as a coping mechanism which increases their vulnerability and adds to the breakdown of the family.

ALP and PARED will continue to engage with communities like Saamini so as to promote further learning on sustainable agricultural practices and to foster replicable adaptation processes. They are encouraging the participation of both women and men in programme activities and in leadership roles that support community development. This will be achieved by putting in place systems and programme activities that encourage discussion on how gender affects family decision making and livelihoods and women's empowerment. They will develop appropriate methods and tools, strategies and messages for promoting changes in attitudes so as to increase women's ownership and control of productive resources in the long-term and training and capacity building in advocacy and lobbying skills for male and female gender champions to promote gender equality and equity.

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Alimatu and other members of Tisungataaba women group, she successfully advocated for construction of a bridge among other achievements.

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