

Full Spectrum Development

ACDI/VOCA Takes Empowerment to the Airwaves in Ghana

By Collins Boafo and Mike Kelly

With its stable political environment and steady economic growth, Ghana has emerged as a bright spot in West Africa. The government of Ghana has made it a priority to boost agricultural production and reduce hunger and poverty, and its efforts have paid off: National poverty rates have fallen by almost half since 1991.

ACDI/VOCA is working through several programs funded by USAID and Ghana's Millennium Development Authority to help maintain this momentum. A critical aspect of our work is sharing knowledge with the farmers, processors, retailers and others who constitute Ghana's agricultural sector. For example, we provide training on improved seed varieties and better planting and harvesting practices. We also convene conferences to bring together farmers, input providers, buyers, banks and retailers so they can cooperate to grow and sell more food.

But while the impact of a training session or conference can be significant, it is necessarily limited by the constraints of space and time. So we draw on technologies such as TV, radio, cell phones and the internet to transcend those boundaries and expand learning and linking opportunities to Ghana's increasingly connected population.

TV Broadens Impact

"People used to think, 'What does the media have to do with agriculture?'" says Amoako David Appiah. "But we are trying to lay out the roles that the media can play in agriculture. What is the best way for you to get your message out in a country? It's through the media, through television."

Appiah has some insight on the topic. As host of "The Platform," a weekly TV program, he travels throughout Ghana to report on topics related to agriculture. As a result, he frequently covers trainings organized by ACDI/VOCA's ADVANCE program.

"If ACDI/VOCA is trying to reach out to all farmers, we think that—as media practitioners who have a slot on national television—it's best to collaborate with them to really get the message out."



Our outreach team in Ghana coordinates with Appiah and his director, Richard Takyi Obeng, to bring training sessions to a wider audience. While TV ownership is not widespread in rural Ghana, it is growing.

"We love to collaborate with organizations like ACDI/VOCA, who are doing so much to help our farmers," says Appiah. "People think work is all about putting on your suit and tie and sitting in an office. But hey, the best way to make money is not to come running to the city. You can be wherever you are, you cultivate maize, you cultivate grasscutter [cane rats], you cultivate honey—the initial investment is meager, but the returns are enormous."

Radio and Cell Phones Make Information Accessible

It's a message that resonates with Jonie Addo-Fening, whose mango farm supplies a local juice company. "We wanted to run our farm as a business. We thought we could expand our experience to other farmers," he says.

Through his other career as director of administration and operations at 90.1 RITE FM, "The Station for Agric and Social Development," Addo-Fening is making that happen. The radio station targets the agricultural community, filling its line-up with shows like "Agric Forum" and "Food Safety and Hygiene" that bring agricultural content to the Greater Accra, Volta and Eastern regions.

Radio is an effective way to reach out to the community—a recent ACDI/VOCA study found over 90 percent of farmers in the target regions have radios.

Programs cover "agripolitics, new technology, research from universities and how to run your farm

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The station doesn’t just rely on radio to get its message out. Cell phones play an increasingly important role as well. For every 100 people in Ghana, 63 have mobile phone service, one of the highest rates in West Africa.

With assistance from ACDI/VOCA, RITE FM has added an SMS feedback system that allows its audience to interact via text messaging. Many listeners use cell phones not just to contact the station but also to listen to it. Through special dedicated lines, the station makes weather updates and programming available to listeners on demand.

Through its outreach via radio and cellular communications, the station aims to spur growth and interest in the agribusiness sector. It seems to be working—a recent survey conducted by ACDI/VOCA found that over 50 percent of listeners gained knowledge on social issues and agronomic practices.

“Anybody can be part of the value chain,” says Addo-Fening. “All the kids need to know there are opportunities in farming. They need to understand that agriculture is not just for the poor. It can be run as a business. We want them to see that there are careers in agriculture. By the time they are ready to do business, they will be thinking about agribusiness.”

Internet Connects Next Generation of Farmers

To achieve that goal, RITE FM and ACDI/VOCA teamed up to create the Green Club. The extracurricular club offers firsthand agriculture experience



to students, sharing a vision of agriculture as a viable post-graduation career choice. Recent outings include planting trees and a visit to the national food and agriculture exposition. The club currently has 78 members, 20 boys and 58 girls.

So far the club has been established at one local school, but over time it will expand to include more schools. To coordinate the different groups, RITE FM is building a website. The site will serve as a central hub where Green Club members can interact with one another and plan activities.

Only 5 percent of the country’s population currently uses the internet, but that percentage will continue to grow over time; it already has doubled since 2006. Websites like the Green Club will provide another outlet for sharing knowledge and expanding opportunities.

The Green Club represents a combination of traditional hands-on learning and plugged-in participation. Emma, a member, explains the group’s appeal:

“I learn things I can use,” she says. “Also, it’s fun and I can use it for the future. I don’t plan on spending life sitting in an office. I want to do something hands-on.”

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