



Profile: Memuna Kusiau

By Kwasi Gyamfi Asiedu

Memuna Kusiau had been planting soybeans for years on her small plot of land in north-western Ghana. Her harvest had never been plentiful, and her soybeans didn't fetch a good price in the market. In 2013 all that changed.

Kusiau, along with the rest of the women in her community took part in a new agricultural development initiative called GROW (Greater Rural Opportunities for Women) led by Canada-based Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), with support from the Government of Canada.

The aim of the six-year project was to improve food security and empowerment for women farmers in rural Ghana. Women received training in sustainable soy cultivation techniques led by the Tumu Deanery Rural Integrated Development Programme (TUDRIDEP), one of five local organizations MEDA partnered with to implement the project. Women also were supported with the purchase of farm inputs such as three-wheeled motorcycles which they could use to transport their produce to market.

Although the GROW project ended in 2018, Kusiau's soybean farm is still giving high yields. Her storage room is stacked with sacks of soybeans almost reaching the ceiling.

The first year Kusiau took part in GROW she harvested a record soybean crop. “I felt very happy,” she says. “I was able to get four 100 kg bags from my acre of farm. I was able to keep some and also sell some of the soy to buy fertiliser for my maize farm. I was very happy because that was the first time I was able to get a harvest up to that quantity.”

The training women received and the structures put in place by TUDRIDEP and the other local partners organizations continue to benefit the women of Tarzor. One of these structures is collective bargaining. When each of the women has completed their harvest, they get together and bargain collectively with buyers of soybeans for a fair price.

The women also have learned how to process soybeans so they don't go bad. They learned to produce soy milk and soy kebabs which they sell at their local markets. This gives them more bargaining power when middlemen try to offer them uncompetitive prices.

Kusiau saves her earnings with the nearby credit union. It's money she uses to pay her children's educational needs. The income also means that women feel empowered at home and in the community at large. Community meetings now have women at the table, says Kusiau.

For Kusiau, the success of the project has not only been monetary. She says she used to be afraid to speak in public. “But because of the GROW project, I was taken to some meetings and I mingled with other women and influential people. It helped me build confidence and now wherever I am, I can talk more easily.”

*The GROW project is featured in new research commissioned by the Canadian Food Security Policy Group (FSPG), a coalition of civil society organizations seeking to improve Canada's food security work overseas. The GROW project is featured as one of six independently researched case studies in West Africa that demonstrate how support for agriculture in rural communities can improve livelihoods, promote gender equality and build climate resilience.*

*To read the GROW case study, and other reports from the Food Security Policy Group's research project, please visit <https://ccic.ca/leaders-in-the-field>*

*To learn more about MEDA GROW, please visit <https://www.meda.org/GROWlearning>.*

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