

## PUBLIC EXTENSION AGENTS IN GHANA IGNITE BUSINESS MINDSET IN LOCAL FARMER GROUPS

**MEAS pilot enables public extension agents in Ghana’s Savelugu Nanton municipality to provide comprehensive pre-season training to farmers on how to work together effectively to increase profitability by treating their agricultural activities as a business.**

June 2015 – When you talk to Ibrahim Sumani about farmer based organizations (FBOs), he is quick to point out that not all farmer groups are created equal. As a seasoned public sector extension agent in Ghana’s Savelugu Nanton municipality, Sumani has witnessed the formation of many FBOs over the years. Often, these groups have been brought together by NGOs or government extension agents who have mandates to work with farmer groups to provide trainings and resources such as seeds, fertilizer and credit. While appearing beneficial at the onset, it is not uncommon for these FBOs to stop meaningful activities soon after the external intervention is over.



“When a group comes together simply because they think they are going to receive access to inputs, the group is almost certainly bound to die out”, says Sumani. “A good group occurs when people come together around a common goal, develop a structure, and are genuinely committed to working together regularly.” Unfortunately, Sumani believes, too often farmer groups in the area form because individuals want to personally access inputs promised to the group and then, when issues such as defaults on repayment arise at the end of the season, the group disbands as quickly as it formed. Since the trainings provided during these types of projects typically focus on technical agronomic advice but neglect the functional team work skills required for a group to work together efficiently over the long term, Sumani feels like true sustainability of these efforts is rare.

“As public extension agents, we have important roles to play in helping FBOs to really build the capacity to work well together as a unit to conduct profitable agriculture. This capacity is something that is really lacking among many of the farmer groups here in Savelugu Nanton in spite of all of the focus there is from various groups like NGOs on working with FBOs”.



With this information in mind, MEAS' Savelugu Nanton Extension Delivery Improvement Project (SNEDIP) responded to Savelugu Nanton extension agents' requests to strengthen their skills in training FBOs more effectively. The municipality's 15 extension agent received support through SNEDIP to carry out 3 months of pre-season training for 30 FBOs in the area. This training, a 12 step process called Agricultural As a Business (AAB), focused on increasing the groups' profitability by applying business concepts to their agricultural activities while also strengthening the way each group functions as an organization.

Through SNEDIP, Sumani was able to work with an FBO of 17 member farmers called Zisung Nitee Nabli. While the group has existed for several years, it was clear to Sumani that they had never received basic training on how to conduct profitable activities effectively together. "Last season the group acquired several varieties of maize seed which were all mixed up and then planted together. This lead to the maize plants maturing inconsistently and spoiling so the yield from the group's work was very poor." The group hadn't given much thought to how this decision to plant an uncertified mix of seeds might affect their profit. This year, because of the training and support he received from SNEDIP, Sumani worked with the group to help them analyze their expenses, yield and time of sale last season in order to make a better plan for the coming season. "Using the information from AAB, I explained to the group about concepts like profit margins and helped them to understand that using a business mindset to analyze their activities is very important so that they do not waste their time doing unprofitable things".

This season the Zisung Nitee Nabli Farmers Group has purchased certified quality maize seed and plans to plant two acres together. Sumani is happy with how the group is focused on self-help and is actively working together on their own. Everyone is hopeful that their harvest will be a bountiful one.