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Women Rice Farmers Partner to Capitalize on New Opportunities

Ayesha Otibo is the chairwoman of the Nyohini Women's Group, a farmer-based organization comprised of 50 female rice processors. Capitalizing on Ghana's \$547 million compact with the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), these women entrepreneurs received nine weeks of training on methods to develop their businesses and increase crop production.



The compact's commercial training activity addresses several constraints faced by smallholder farmers and agribusinesses, including poor production, outdated post-harvest techniques and limited business and management skills. Before the training, Ayesha did not produce the quality of rice required to integrate into the value chain and compete in larger markets. Ayesha and her colleagues credit the guidance they received from Amsig Resources, the company that delivered the MCC-funded training, for helping them grow better rice, accurately track their profits and losses, and successfully negotiate better prices with suppliers and service providers.

Gina Odarteifio stands with the women rice farmers in Tamale

Working with the World Food Program

Amsig Resources Chief Executive Officer Gina Odarteifio connected Ayesha's group to an important new buyer: the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). WFP is a reliable customer; through its Purchase for Progress program, WFP purchases 100-kilogram bags of rice from the women at prices higher than they would receive in local markets. The women, many of whom are widows, credit the MCC-funded training and Gina's assistance for their newfound income, empowering them to pay for their children's school fees and household electricity bills.

In addition to the Nyohini Women's Group, Amsig Resources has trained 82 farmer groups, comprising 4,681 farmers throughout Ghana's Afram Basin and northern agricultural area. Of these, 16 were

women-led groups, and nearly 52 percent of farmers trained were women engaged in crop production and processing activities.

So far, 64,000 farmers, including Ayesha, in 30 districts in Ghana have received MCC-funded training to sharpen commercial skills and deepen the capacity of farmer-based organizations and their business partners, including processors and marketers who add value to agricultural crops. As part of MCC's commitment to measure results, upcoming evaluations will assess the extent of the impacts that can be attributed to MCC's investments, including increases in household income. To date, 3,606 metric tons of rice have been sold to WFP at competitive prices, providing a fair and reliable income to the farmers.

Embracing the ABCs of New Opportunity

Many farmer-based organizations will benefit from their ongoing relationship with Amsig Resources as plans are underway to invest in an Agri-Business Center (ABC) in the town of Woreboggu-Kukuo near the city of Tamale. The Millennium Development Authority (MiDA), responsible for implementing Ghana's MCC compact, is partnering with private investors to open new ABCs. While MiDA is building and equipping ten ABCs, the investors will bring working capital, market linkages and business and management experience. The ABCs will serve as collection or aggregation points for quality grains, giving farmers a way to treat, store and process their grain effectively and sell it to a structured market at a guaranteed minimum price.

Each ABC facility will include a warehouse with a 1,000 metric ton capacity, primary processing areas and space for stocking inputs (like seeds and fertilizers). Prior to Ghana's partnership with MCC, most grain buyers could not benefit from such locations. This resulted in cancelled contracts because buyers failed to meet both the quantity and quality requirements demanded by their clients, often international firms. Farmers had to absorb high post-harvest losses due to inadequate processing infrastructure and were forced to accept low prices for their produce, often selling to "drive-by" middlemen or women as the only option.

Creating Sustainable Business Opportunities

Now, through the Agri-Business Centers, private sector investors will impact the quality and quantity of agricultural products. Farmers will command better prices through access to higher-end markets. Each ABC will have an anchor private investor, like Amsig Resources, and shareholders, like smallholder farmer-based organizations such as Nyohini Women's Group. Private investors will contribute land and working capital. MiDA will provide grants to ABCs, but private investors and farmer-based organizations will repay the total cost of MiDA's contribution into an "ABC re-investment fund." This re-investment fund will be used to upgrade equipment and expand operations at each ABC.

The enthusiasm shared by Gina at Amsig Resources, Ayesha, and other members of the Nyohini Women's Group is the result of the Ghana compact working as it was designed. As Gina proudly says, "Through its training, Amsig has helped to improve the quality of farmers' produce and opened the door for women who have few economic options in their lives." This is how MCC's compact with Ghana is beginning to raise farmers' incomes through private-sector-led agribusiness development, generating new opportunities for poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth.