

Savelugu Nanton Extension Delivery Improvement Project (SNEDIP): An Innovative Approach to Institutional Strengthening and Public- Private Partnership in Extension



Agricultural extension in Ghana is undergoing transitions towards participatory approaches, market-driven extension models, decentralization, and pluralism. However, in 2012 USAID’s centrally-funded Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services (MEAS) project conducted a Rapid Scoping Mission of Ghana’s extension system that found that significant challenges remain in operationalizing these transitions. Farmer-based organizations (FBOs) are often poorly coordinated, face financial management challenges, and struggle with inadequate capacity in market-driven agriculture and high post-harvest losses. At the same time, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) suffers from capacity deficiencies, logistical challenges, and funding constraints that affect the availability and quality of services it is able to provide to farmers. Addressing these gaps requires greater investment in developing the capacity of MoFA extension officers and strengthening the delivery of market-oriented extension training to farmer-based organizations in order for farmers to have the information and support required to improve their livelihoods, resiliency, and productivity.

The Savelugu Nanton Extension Delivery Improvement Project (SNEDIP) was created as a nine-month (October 2014 to June 2015) pilot project under the MEAS project in Savelugu Nanton municipality in Ghana’s Northern Region, within the Feed the Future Zone of Influence. The project was designed to represent an innovative approach to extension institution strengthening and public-private partnership by utilizing the relative strengths of an NGO to enhance the capacity of public extension actors. As such, MEAS contracted Engineers Without Borders Canada (EWB) to implement the project at the field level through partnership with the Municipal Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the Municipal Assembly (MA) in Savelugu Nanton. The four overarching objectives of SNEDIP are:

- 1) Farmers and agriculturalists along the value chain receive improved extension services in order to improve resiliency, livelihoods, and productivity
- 2) The capacity of actors within the municipal public extension system is strengthened in order to improve local agricultural extension service delivery
- 3) Linkages and lines of communication between the Savelugu Nanton MA and Savelugu Nanton MDA are strengthened to better support decentralized agricultural extension processes
- 4) Best practices and lessons learned in strengthening decentralized public extension services at the municipal level are documented, disseminated, and communicated widely to relevant stakeholders.

The implementation of the SNEDIP project involves five steps. First, in order to target relevant issues and address the real needs of the municipality, a thorough participatory process was facilitated by EWB to set the project’s priority areas. EWB consulted with the Savelugu Nanton MA and MDA and jointly identified elements built off of each entity’s Strategic Development Plan that aligned with extension gaps found in the 2012 MEAS report. The project next engaged with the agricultural extension agents (AEAs) from the MDA to identify and prioritize specific programming interventions. The three

priority areas selected were (1) training to strengthen farmer-based organizations' capacity in agricultural business and marketing skills, (2) farmer group training on effective post-harvest management practices, and (3) technical training in the use of information and communication technologies to improve agricultural extension processes and outreach to farmers in Savelugu Nanton.

Second, specific curriculum was developed to build capacity in the three aforementioned priority training areas. However, rather than create new curricula for each training area, EWB, MEAS, and the Savelugu Nanton MDA elected to modify an existing training tool called Agriculture as a Business (AAB), which is designed to build the skills of public agricultural extension agents to strengthen farmer-based organizations in market-oriented agriculture. The actual curriculum includes 10 trainings, operationalized as cards, on a range of topics including:

- Group formation and registration
- Election of leadership within farmers' groups
- Managing membership within farmer's groups
- Financial management within farmers' groups
- Access to and usage of agricultural credit
- Business planning within farmers' groups
- Identifying market opportunities
- Crop decision-making (when/what to plant)
- Creating linkages to markets
- Record-keeping

Two new cards are being developed, one on managing post-harvest losses and one on farmer-citizen engagement through ICTs.

Third, SNEDIP provided capacity building training in its priority areas to extension personnel. Trainings occurred on a bi-weekly basis and covered one AAB card per session. However, SNEDIP's focus on institutional building requires a commitment to creating changes which can be sustained past the project's lifecycle. Skill development rather than simply knowledge accumulation is therefore the objective of these trainings. Effort was made to actively reinforce and build forward upon each training so that AEAs develop the confidence to use new skills and knowledge independently. SNEDIP also explicitly encourages peer-to-peer learning between AEAs to increase the sustainable adoption of training materials. AEAs were trained as a team and EWB facilitated weekly participatory meetings so that extension agents support each other in building critical skills and sharing knowledge on how to creatively use the AAB tool to improve their FBO's capacities, both holistically and in the three targeted priority areas.

Fourth, SNEDIP facilitated the delivery of extension services by trained AEAs to farmer-based organizations. Each AEA worked with two farmer-based organizations, allowing the project to directly support 30 FBOs and 986 total member farmers. Farmers who were not FBO members frequently attended AAB sessions and also gained access to the information, further expanding project impact. The extension agents used the AAB tool to conduct 12 weekly extension visits to each FBO over the course of the SNEDIP timeframe, taking them through AAB's training curriculum. The focus of these trainings is to strengthen the groups' market-based agricultural knowledge and skills as they prepare for a new season. SNEDIP also provided nominal fuel allowances to allow AEAs the mobility to interact with farmers, in response to logistical constraints found in the 2012 MEAS scoping mission.

Fifth, EWB and MEAS developed a strong monitoring and evaluation plan to assess implementation and evaluate the impacts of SNEDIP, along with specific tools to track progress towards indicators. Monitoring and evaluation is conducted through:

- 1) AEA baseline and endline surveys
- 2) Farmer baseline and endline surveys

- 3) Pre- and post-tests before and after trainings
- 4) On-going qualitative feedback during bi-weekly AEA meetings and bi-weekly high level MDA meetings
- 5) Weekly pre- and post-FBO training session planning sheets completed by AEAs and submitted to their supervisors.
- 6) On-going qualitative feedback during quarterly MA reporting meetings
- 7) Post-project interviews with MA staff, MDA personnel, and participating farmers

Monitoring was utilized to identify successes and failures in implementation but also to allow for in-stream modifications to programming. Several methods are used for impact evaluation, which is ongoing. First, baseline and endline instruments track knowledge, skill, and attitude changes among both farmers and AEAs on the prioritized training areas. Qualitative interviews will be conducted with participating farmers, MDA representatives (AEAs and administrators) involved in implementation, and MA staff involved in planning to provide context to the overall impact evaluation.

Results for the SNEDIP project track the first two objectives: (1) farmers and agriculturalists receive improved extension services, and (2) the capacity of MoFA is strengthened to improve extension service delivery. Although endline data is not yet available for comparison, the following results are anticipated based on early data. Results for objectives three and four will involve post-project interviews and qualitative data analysis, and results as still undetermined at this time.

Five components compose objective one. First, improved access to extension services is anticipated, including 360 visits by AEAs to FBOs, 986 FBO member farmers trained through SNEDIP with approximately 2,000 non-member farmers also benefitting from indirect knowledge-sharing, and a 50% increase in contacts compared to pre-project levels as reported by farmers through baseline-endline differentials. Second, improved quality of MoFA extension services is expected, with a targeted 20% improvement reported by farmers. Third, stronger administration and group processes, consistent weekly FBO meetings, and completion of market-based planning in 20 (of 30) FBOs is anticipated. Fourth, increased farmer capacity in market-oriented agriculture and post-harvest management is expected, with targeted increases of 20% in knowledge, skill, and attitudes on each AAB topic area, and 20% increases in intention to adopt new practices. Finally, 80% of farmers will report expecting increased yields and incomes due to involvement in SNEDIP.

Objective two includes increased AEA capacity to facilitate market-oriented agriculture among FBOs, train in post-harvest management, and utilize ICTs for extension, along with increased use of these capacities. First, 20% increases in knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to AAB topics are anticipated. Second, increased use of these capacities is expected, with 80% of AEAs implementing all 12 trainings to FBOs and all AEAs increasing ICT use by 20%. Finally, the project anticipates improved knowledge-sharing among AEAs, demonstrated by peer-to-peer debriefing at 100% of bi-weekly meetings.

Overall, SNEDIP anticipates several positive impacts by the end of its operational cycle. Among farmers, the 30 participating FBOs, representing nearly 1,000 farmers, will receive increased quantity and quality of extension services that enhances their ability to practice market-oriented agriculture and reduce post-harvest loss, ultimately strengthening productivity and livelihoods. Among extension providers, all 15 AEAs within Savelugu-Nanton will have improved capacity to train farmers in market-oriented agriculture and post-harvest management, and increased ability to use ICTs in extension. This increases institutional capacity and promotes sustainable impacts. Finally, SNEDIP is a pilot project that can potentially scale up to multiple districts in northern Ghana or be reproduced elsewhere. Project results can allow modifications and replication to impact many additional farmers and extension agents, and improve broader agricultural outcomes in a diverse range of locations.