PROMOTING PRIVATE SECTOR GROWTH IN GHANA THROUGH BUSINESS ADVOCACY & SKILLS ENHANCEMENT

Supported by: DANIDA, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION, EUROPEAN UNION, USAID
DANIDA’S Support to Private Sector Development phase III (SPSD III) programme has been formulated with the objective of “promoting inclusive and greener economic growth through private sector development leading to increased income and better welfare of Ghanaians”.

Under this programmatic cycle of support, both the Business Sector Advocacy Challenge (BUSAC) Fund and Skills Development Fund (SDF) have played significant roles in promoting the growth and development of the Ghanaian private sector over the past decade.

While the BUSAC Fund provides support to the Ghanaian private sector to advocate an improvement in the business environment, the Skills Development Fund addresses the skill needs of the formal and informal sectors of the Ghanaian economy through continuous skills upgrading and, to a limited extent, pre-employment initiatives.

Within the past decade, a number of private sector organizations (PSOs) have been able to successfully advocate an improvement in their business environment through the BUSAC Fund's support, while also enhancing their technical and managerial skills through the support of SDF. This booklet outlines ten examples of such business associations who have experienced improved economic fortunes through the advocacy support of the BUSAC Fund and the capacity building support of SDF.

This compilation of their success stories is a demonstration of how DANIDA's support programmes have contributed to private sector growth in Ghana through business advocacy and skills enhancement.

The BUSAC Fund and Skills Development Fund wish to acknowledge the support of their development partners, DANIDA, USAID, the EU, the World Bank and Government of Ghana, whose resources have made these private sector support schemes feasible and successful.

Nicolas Jørgensen Gebara  
Fund Manager,  
BUSAC Fund

Ebenezer Ato Simpson  
Fund Manager,  
Skills Development Fund
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Members of the Apam Canoe Cooperative Fishermen Company (ACCFC) who are all fishermen have testified that the skills they acquired from the Skills Development Fund (SDF) capacity building support is enhancing their productivity and income.

The leadership of the association assert that the capacity building support from the SDF has enabled their members to reduce post-harvest losses and increase their incomes significantly.

Chairman of the association, Mr. Samuel Blankson stated that the capacity building support from SDF in June 2013 enabled their members to acquire very useful skills in ice box construction, hygienic practices in fish handling, fish preservation, business management, value chain linkages and efficient marketing strategies.

Mr. Blankson mentioned that these valuable skills acquired by the fisher folk is helping to enhance their livelihoods and their abilities to access new opportunities for growth within the fishing industry.

“Thanks to the training programme offered by SDF, many of our members are now able to use innovative ways to preserve their fish in a hygienic manner...”
in order to attract good prices on the market; and this is has enabled our members to increase their sales and incomes”, the Chairman added.

Members of the association did not only benefit from core vocational skills related to the fishing industry. The capacity building support also enabled the fishermen to learn basic accounting and book keeping skills which is helping their members to manage their fishing businesses more efficiently.

However, the elated Chairman of the association was quick to add that the skills acquired by the members of the association will not have been so beneficial to them if the business environment in which they operated had not first been enhanced through advocacy.

Lack of a commercial cold storage facility within the Gomoa West district posed a huge challenge for many years within the business environment for the fishermen, who were often compelled to travel long distances at high cost to purchase ice cubes.

The fishermen assert that their business environment was enhanced after BUSAC Fund supported the association in November 2011 to successfully advocate the establishment of an efficient commercial fish storage facility within their municipality, thus helping to overcome the perennial challenge of post-harvest losses.

According to the fishermen, fishing and fish mongering activities within the Gomoa West district of the Central Region received an injection of new energy and vigor following the association’s advocacy action which resulted in government building a fish storage facility and an ice cube-making factory.

The ice cube production factory which began working in July 2017 is serving other neighbouring communities including Nyanyano and Mumford in the Gomoa West district of the Central Region.

Mr. Samuel Blankson, Chairman of the ACCFC explained that before the advocacy action, fisher folks were compelled to reduce the frequency of embarking on fishing expedition from four times in a week to two times in two weeks due to the unavailability of ice cubes.
He also pointed out that prior to the operationalization of the factory, fishermen often gathered their money and contracted a middle man to travel 83 kilometers to Accra, or 85.5 kilometers to Elmina, or even 136 kilometers to Tema just to buy ice cubes before they can go for fishing. Transporting these iced cubes over such long distances increases the operational costs of the fishermen, thereby reducing their profits.

Mr. Blankson added that even this expensive approach did not help the fishermen to effectively preserve their catch.

“And finally when we procure the ice from the factory, due to the long distance and traffic congestion on the journeys, the ice cubes melt away within 24 hours and fish caught on high seas go bad within 12 hours of arrival at the shore if not sold”, Mr. Blankson remarked.

He also revealed: “A total of 400 of our members spend an average of GHC1.5 million buying ice blocks and additional GHC390,000 to transport them to Apam annually. Our members therefore lose GHC8,320,000 on average annually through forced sales to market women.”

But following the successful advocacy action of the association supported by the BUSAC Fund and its development partners, Danida, USAID and EU, the fishermen are now testifying that their economic fortunes have improved considerably.

“The building of the iced cube factory has reduced our operational costs and post-harvest losses as our fishermen can now store fish for longer periods (up to six months). Fishermen now buy a piece of cube for GHS 8.00 without paying for transportation cost instead of GHS 10.00 plus an additional fee for transportation”, Mr. Blankson stated.

Currently, the factory is producing 100 bars of ice in 24 hours and plans were advanced to expand production to 500 bars to serve the growing membership of the group, which now stands at 600.

At the time of the visit, the writer was shown the new metal machines that has been fabricated and was being sprayed.

Mr Fareed M. Amoah, Director of Standcode Engineering who is operating the factory says the factory has permanently employed five men and occasionally engages the service of four casual workers.

In line with the company's expansion, he states that additional five people will be employed while a number will be selected and trained at the Maritime University in refrigeration and cold store keeping to serve as technicians at the facility.
The electrical installation services sector in Ghana has witnessed a major transformation following the BUSAC Fund’s supported advocacy action embarked upon by the Ghana Electrical Contractors Association (GECA) for the enforcement of the provisions in the Legislative Instrument (L.I. 1816) on electricity supply and distribution rules.

The non-compliance of this regulation over the years was crippling the business of electrical contractors and was one of the major causes of fire outbreaks in the country, especially at state-owned facilities.

Another issue that bedeviled the sector was that the business opportunities available to members continued to decline because of the infiltration of the market by uncertified electrical contractors. This situation badly dented the credibility of the profession, thus reducing public confidence in the services of electrical contractors.
However, as result of GECA's advocacy action supported by the BUSAC Fund and its development partners – DANIDA, USAID and the EU, now all electrical contractors are trained and certified by the Energy Commission and as evidence, the names of members, the town and regions in which they operate, contacts as well as the certification category - be it industrial or domestic - have been published on the website of the Commission.

Mr. Joseph B. Walker, President of GECA, speaking in an interview expressed satisfaction about the impressive response from government and its allied agencies and the steps that had been taken to enforce regulations to sanitize the electrical sector.

He recalled that the Association, together with its consultants repeatedly visited various stakeholders including AESL, Ghana Standard Authority (GSA) Energy Commission and Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) to explain to them how the non-enforcement of the law was affecting their member's operation.

“The authorities heeded to our call and now our members all over the country have been trained and certified to undertake all forms of electrical wiring. As one of the conditions for individuals and companies to acquire an electrical meter, the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) requests to see that the wiring was done by a certified member of our association. This is helping to eliminate quack electrical contractors, while as expanding job opportunities for our members”, he noted.

Again, in September 2017, Dr. Alfred Ofosu Ahenkrah, Executive Secretary of the Energy Commission made the announcement that effective October 2017, property owners who fail to use the services of certified electrical wiring professionals will not be connected to the national electricity grid”.

GECA members also assert that one other positive change emanating from the advocacy action is the separation of electrical works from concrete works during the award of contracts by government and its allied agencies in the country.

Having achieved an improved business environment for electrical contractors, members of GECA realized the need to upgrade their skills to enable them execute more sophisticated and lucrative modern electrical installation projects that had started springing up, particularly in the renewable energy sector.

The leadership of GECA realised that public patronage for solar energy was increasing steadily among domestic and industrial electrical power consumers, obviously due to the fact that it was more economical, while
traditional hydro-electricity supply was becoming more expensive and erratic. However, many of their members lacked the technical capacity to exploit this huge economic opportunity.

“Naturally, this meant that there would be an increase in the demand for electrical contractors skilled in solar electricity equipment installation. This presented a huge opportunity for our members to exploit. But unfortunately, our members could not take advantage of the business opportunity because they lacked the skills needed to successfully work on modern solar electrical equipment”, Mr. Walker explained.

In order to address this capacity gap, the leadership of the association sought capacity building support from the Skills Development Fund in June 2014 to enable them upgrade the skills of their members in modern solar electrical systems installation. The support enabled the leadership of GECA to train up to 1000 of their members across the country in solar PV systems installation, occupational health and safety measures and marketing strategies.

Today, thanks to the support of SDF and their development partners, DANIDA, The World Bank and Government of Ghana, members of GECA are benefitting immensely from the acquisition of those modern solar technology skills.

Mr. Joseph B. Walker pointed out that as result of the solar electrical installation skills training, many of their members are able to install different kinds of solar electric equipment for both domestic and industrial clients, and this is helping their members to increase their client-base and incomes, to the extent that the average revenues of their members has increased by about 70%.

“Nowadays, our members are installing modern solar PV systems to the satisfaction of their clients. Our members are also integrating occupational safety measures and marketing skills into their electrical contracting businesses, and this is making them more profitable”, the president remarked.

With their members now abreast with new knowledge on solar panel installation and maintenance, electrical contractors belonging to GECA are growing their businesses, with a bright future on the horizons.
Members of the Ghana National Association of Garages (GNAG) in Takoradi are now enjoying higher patronage for their automobile repair services, thanks to the capacity building support the association received from the Skills Development Fund (SDF).

The mechanics who mostly ply their trade in the heavy industrial area in Takoradi, Western Region have testified that after undergoing skills training in June 2014 with the support of SDF, they have acquired very useful automobile repair skills which are enabling them to service ultra-modern vehicles and increase their incomes.

The Chairman of the association, Mr Joseph O. Sarpong mentioned that for many years, the client-base and incomes of their members were dwindling because their members lacked the relevant technical skills needed to service the numerous ultra-modern vehicles that visited their shops.

He added that in order to address this capacity gap, the association sought the support of SDF to train 3,065 members nationwide in business management, computerized auto-diagnostic techniques, modern welding technology, occupational health and safety measures and ICT.
He attested that the training enabled the members to be more skillful and efficient in the repair of modern vehicles.

“Prior to the training, members relied on the sound of a vehicle to detect faults, which could last several hours without even guaranteeing results. However, after undergoing training in the use of automotive diagnostic machines, most of our mechanics have now reduced the average time used in detecting faults from about one hour to less than 10 minutes. Also, the newly acquired knowledge on modern fuel injectors has also helped our mechanics to put off the engine first, remove the plugs before working on the faulty injectors”, Mr. Sarpong revealed.

According to the members of the association, the improved skills and efficiency of their members has led to an increase in the average number of vehicles serviced from two per day to seven per day.

The president explained that following the increase in patronage for their services, the average monthly income of their members has increased by about 250 per cent, adding that there has been an increase in revenue from an average of GHS 400 per month to GHS 1500 per month.

But prior to getting capacity building support from SDF, the association had an even greater challenge that was pushing clients away from their businesses – an unfavourable business environment caused by poor sanitation and bad roads. Business activities at Kokompe were experiencing extremely low sales due to a significant reduction in the number of customers because the stench that greeted clients who visited the area to fix their vehicles or buy spare parts was so strong and unbearable.

Indeed members of the association admit that today they are attracting more customers largely because of an improved business environment resulting from the association's advocacy action implemented in 2011 with the support of the BUSAC Fund and its development partners, DANIDA, USAID and the EU.

Today, open defecation in Kokompe and the environs of the garages has stopped due to the provision of a place of convenience by the Assembly following the advocacy action embarked upon by the Ghana National Association of Garages (GNAG).

The advocacy by the group made a great impact by bringing members of GNAG and officials of the district assembly together as partners to address the needs of the artisans and practicalising the government's quest to make the private sector the engine of economic growth.

Now, a tour to the area confirms that the sanitation situation has improved tremendously and business is flourishing at Kokompe while artisans attest that it is reflecting in their sales. They now have two KVIP facilities located at vantage points to serve artisans and clients.

Mr Joseph O. Sarpong, Chairman of the GNGA, explains that, “For more than a year now the health of our members have improved, and the rate at which
they get diseases such as malaria and diarrhea has reduced. It is making them save money which would have been used to pay for hospital bills.

“Before the intervention clients used to cover their nose when they visited some places in the area to either buy spare parts or fix their cars,” he noted.

As a measure to monitor members from engaging in the old practice of open defecation, he says the group has set up a voluntary vigilante team adding that anyone found culpable will be punished by the law court.

Another impact of the new partnership between the Association and the local Assembly has resulted in the resurfacing of the 13 kilometer road network in the area and this has eased movement of vehicles, shop expansions and attracted more formal and informal businesses to the area.

Through the advocacy a joint committee made of members of the association and other stakeholders have been set up to see to the maintenance of the resurfaced road. Also a special levy in the light industrial area has been instituted being supported by the Metropolitan Assembly for regular maintenance of the road network in the area.

As a result of the trickling effects of the advocacy action and the capacity building support, many members have embarked on expanding their businesses to recruit more youth. One of such persons is forty-year old Mr. Patrick Atta, a welding technician. With a broad smile, he pointed out that due to the volume of business he started getting, he has enlisted four more young men to supplement the three apprentices he already had.

"For some time now business has been frequent unlike some years ago when our clients complained bitterly about the bad roads and the sanitation of the area. This has increased my income, and I am able to take care of my family's needs very well and I also have peace of mind to work", he stated.

It is instructive to note that the single advocacy action supported by the BUSAC Fund and the complementary training support from SDF have helped in forging good partnership, ensuring good sanitation and health, providing and sustaining jobs as well as improving the livelihoods of artisans and their dependents. These achievements are consistent with the sixth and eighth Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are related to good sanitation, decent work and economic growth.
Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association (GNTDA)

Tailors in Cape Coast get school uniform contracts

A total of 712 members of the Cape Coast branch of the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association (GNTDA) have received comprehensive skills upgrade to meet the changing trends in the fashion industry, thanks to the capacity building support of the Skills Development Fund (SDF).

Bearing in mind the 10 top skills that are needed to earn a high paying job as proposed by the World Economic Forum, the contents of the training programme were tailored to include pattern drafting, colour combination, blocking, fashion illustration, fitting and marketing, all aimed at enhancing the productivity of the artisans.

Speaking in an interview, Mr. Alex Odame, Chairman of the Association mentioned that members lacked the skills needed to sew new sophisticated patterns that were in high demand on both the local and international fashion markets, hence the need for the training.

In order to remain relevant in the modern fashion market and also benefit from large sewing contracts, the association decided to seek capacity building support from SDF in May 2013.
to upgrade the skills of their members.

Members of the association are now testifying, that as a result of this capacity building support, the technical and marketing skills of their members have improved significantly.

The association’s chairman again stated that concept development, illustration of designs, marketing strategies and bidding processes which used to be huge challenges for their members have now become routine practice, thanks to the training support.

Members of the association are also delighted that their improved skills have started paving the way for them to increase their productivity and incomes.

“Today, I can confidently say that our members are among the most sought-after tailors and dressmakers in the Central region. Can you believe, they are sewing for clients outside the country and as a result, members have increased their average monthly income from GHS 250 to GHS700”, Mr. Odame remarked.

The elated garment makers also disclosed that one of the major reasons why they upgraded their skills was to enable them take advantage of a unique opportunity to sew a large quantity of uniforms for basic school children under the Government’s Free School Uniform Policy.

This breakthrough, which is helping members to make ends meet and improve their living standards occurred as a result of a BUSAC Fund-supported advocacy action implemented by the Association in October 2012.

The advocacy action became necessary when members of the association realised that there was a lack of transparency in the process for awarding school uniform sewing contracts. The lack of transparency resulted in loss of revenue for most members; others had difficulty in paying taxes and meeting family obligations. This had a negative repercussion on their work as well as defeated government agenda of ensuring equity in awarding contracts and adhering strictly to local content policies aimed at creating jobs.

Through this advocacy action, the association was able to persuade the Cape Coast Municipal Assembly to standardize the procedures for transparent bidding in the award of public garment sewing contracts. The advocacy action has also built and
continues to nurture a healthy relationship between members of the GNTDA branch in Cape Coast and the leadership of the district assembly. On periodic basis, the Assembly extends an invitation to the leadership of the association to participate in some meetings, while the group also reciprocates the gesture anytime they have formal gatherings.

“Before our advocacy action, the award of contracts were on preferential basis without recourse to competence. In those days, the contracts were awarded to political cronies by political appointees, who later sublet it to incompetent garment makers, which was not fair to our group. This, in most cases, resulted in the sewing of poor quality uniforms with some uniforms completely out of sync with the sizes of pupils,” Mr. Alex Odame recalled.

“Now the story is different as we are getting the sewing contracts directly from the right source, thanks to our advocacy action”, he continued.

The members of the association are also pleased about the fact their advocacy action has led to a vast improvement on their dialogue and engagement skills.

“Today, we have seen the need to regularly pay our taxes and also make certain demands from the district assembly. Now we know our rights, responsibilities and what government needs to do to improve on our work. Nowadays, if we want to meet the assembly to address a concern, we just book an appointment to meet them and talk. Previously we did not know how to get all these”, Mr. Odame disclosed.

As part of their advocacy action, the group invited Mr Isaac Arthur, Procurement Officer of the Municipal Assembly to educate them on the processes involved in putting together a winning bid to be able to secure sewing contracts from the assembly.

Mr Arthur confirmed that, during the said meeting he also explained to them to register their company, present tax clearance certificates and pay taxes.

Thirty four-year old Mr. Kweku Mensah, who is one of the first fifty beneficiaries is happy about the current trend and says the contract will boost his income and enhance his skills.

“Before getting this contract I used to get only few orders to sew dresses, which made my income very low. Now I am going to save the proceeds I get from these contracts and use it to pay my child’s school fees and buy an embroidery machine to enhance my business”, Mr. Mensah stated.

“We are being paid GHS 6 per one uniform and I currently have a contract to sew 2,000 pieces. This is a good deal for me and my family because I usually don’t get that quantity in my normal business. I prefer this to waiting for one or two client orders. We thank BUSAC Fund for supporting our empowerment journey,” said Mr Mensah.

Members of the association like Mr. Mensah are very grateful for the opportunity, and they see the sewing contracts not only as an avenue to make money but also a civil responsibility to support government’s development agenda.
Association of Building and Civil Engineering Contractors of Ghana (ABCECG)

ABCECG breaks new frontiers with advocacy

The Association of Building and Civil Engineering Contractors of Ghana (ABCECG), through the BUSAC Fund support, have established a new body called the Federation of Construction Chamber (FCC) to unite all the Built Environment professional associations to ensure sanity and harmonisation in its activities to ensure professionalism.

They professional associations include the Association of Road Contractors, Ghana Real Estate Developers Association, Ghana Electrical Contractors Association, Artisans Association of Ghana, Progressive Road Contractors Association, Ghana Electronic Security and Safety Association and Ghana Plumbers Association.

Already the new institution that was formally established in 2017 has been duly registered at the Registrar General's Department and it is in full operation.
Mr. Prosper Yao Ledi, President of ABCECG, stated that the formation of the unified body is helping to bridge the gap between policy and practice, as it provides the opportunity to enforce established standards and best practices.

The Construction Industry was made up of fragmented professional groups and associations. The lack of a unified body resulted in a gap between policy and practice with no formalized body to enforce standards and practices.

"Before our advocacy action, the divisions among members within the built environment resulted in poor standards and low capacity development within the industry, thus making the industry uncompetitive and retarding the growth of the industry. We are grateful to BUSAC Fund and its development partners, DANIDA, USAID and the EU for their advocacy support" he said.

Mr. Ledi also mentioned that for the body to achieve its mission of sanitizing the built environment sector, a Legislative Bill, known as the Construction Industry Development Authority (CIDA) Ghana bill was initiated in 2015, as a result of the group's advocacy action.

He further pointed out that as a first step, the draft bill was sent to the then government in 2016. However, proceedings halted due to a change in government. He added that the bill is at the last stage of review and will be submitted to the Attorney Generals' Department towards the end of 2018 for the enactment process to continue.

The establishment of CIDA– Ghana, he notes seeks to develop the capacity and ability of the players in the Ghanaian construction industry to enhance the quality of the industry's work, profitability and productivity through the promotion of professionalism, innovation, and knowledge just to mention but few.

The key pillars of the proposed authority will be anchored on three thematic areas such as Construction Business Development (Process), Construction Technology, Development (Tools) and Construction Manpower Development (People).

Mr. Harry Anim-Danso, Second Vice Chairman of the Association explains that the key pillars represent the short, medium and long-term priorities for the construction industry development programme. Outlining some of the benefits, he said the bill, when passed into law, will be the antidote to the menace of indiscriminate construction of buildings especially those on waterways in the country that sometimes resulted in flood disasters.
“This move is also bringing artisans under one body so no one can build without a professional mason, plumber, electrician, architect or anyone involved in the built environment,” Mr. Anim-Danso emphasized.

While working to enhance the business environment for the built industry in Ghana, members of ABCECG also realized the need to upgrade the managerial and technical skills of their members to enable them operate in compliance with the higher standards that are being established, while also taking advantage of the opportunities that an improved business environment is likely to bring.

The leadership of ABCECG realized that despite their professional skills, many construction professionals do not have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and emotions needed to begin and end projects to meet consumer and corporate needs sustainably and profitably.

To address this capacity need, the association sought Business Development Services (BDS) support from the BUSAC Fund in September 2017 to enable them enhance the capacity of their members in modern construction project management methodologies.

The training which was organized in the second quarter of 2018, presented members with the opportunity to learn core BDS skills such as Integration Management, Scope Management, Time Management, Quality Management, Risk Management and Professional Responsibility.

Mrs. Antoinette G. Arkorful, Administrative Secretary of ABCECG

“Personally, the training has improved my administrative work and ethics. It has sharpened my creativity and taught me how to multitask in my work with various clients in project implementation.”

The leadership of ABCECG are testifying that the BDS capacity building programme is enabling their members to execute projects in a more efficient and professional manner.

The association’s vice chairman again explained that one of the most significant benefits of the BDS support from the BUSAC Fund is that it gave their members valuable insights into the importance of risk management in civil engineering projects, as the training taught their members how to identify the sources of risk and uncertainty, determine their impact and develop responses to mitigate the risks.

The BDS skills provided by the BUSAC Fund to ABCECG complemented the administrative capacity building received from the Skills Development Fund (SDF) in July 2013.
Commenting on the support offered by SDF, Mrs. Antoinette Gyesi Arkorful, Administrative Secretary of ABCECG, disclosed that through the SDF support, about 480 members from the Western, Northern, Upper East and Upper West regional branches of the association received training on Occupational Health & Safety measures, entrepreneurship and technical aspects of various trades.

Mrs. Akorful pointed out these skills are enabling their members to manage their businesses efficiently and increase their incomes.

“Personally, the training has improved my administrative work and ethics. It has sharpened my creativity and taught me how to multitask in my work with various clients in project implementation. The training has transformed my work to the expected heights, and made me more effective and efficient. It has also enhanced my professionalism,” she said.

Thanks to the support of SDF and the BUSAC Fund, members of ABCECG are now optimistic that the construction sector would see drastic transformation because the training has equipped members with the 10 skills needed to be in the shifting landscape of work by 2020 as outlined by the World Economic Forum.
The stories of fraudsters parading as doctors and laboratory scientists in Ghana are becoming increasingly alarming and urgent measures are required to curb the country's health system of such quacks.

It is feared that the continuous neglect of the health laboratory services would affect quality healthcare delivery in the country.

Medical laboratory service is the pillar behind the cure of ailments as proper treatment of diseases require proper diagnosis and management.

However, unqualified medics and laboratory scientists, popularly known as quacks, pose a serious threat to the country's health delivery system.

It is in a bid to curb the growing infiltration of unqualified personnel in the medical laboratory sciences and promote local content in the health delivery system that Skills Development Fund (SDF) provided
We have now established a proper supervision and practices procedure to enhance practical training of laboratory scientists, since members' practical and hands-on skill training from school seem inadequate.

Dr Ignatius Awinibumo, President of GABMLS

support to upgrade the skills and knowledge of the members of the Ghana Association of Biomedical Laboratory Scientists (GABMLS). So far, over 300 medical laboratory assistants have been trained on the World Health Organisation (WHO) malaria testing and reporting standards, as well as quality control systems.

This has boosted the confidence of medical laboratory professionals across the country to report efficiently and accurately on malaria testing and also improve on the quality of medical laboratory services.

President of GABMLS, Dr Ignatius Awinibumo said the capacity building support from SDF has helped the laboratory scientists community to achieve standardization in medical laboratory results across the country.

Again, the training and technology transfer has improved the incomes of the association members because they are now able to competently use modern laboratory equipment to detect malaria parasites and compete effectively with their foreign counterparts.

Dr Awinibumo said, “We have now established a proper supervision and practices procedure to enhance practical training of laboratory scientists, since members' practical and hands-on skill training from school seem inadequate”.

In order to fully utilize their skills to enhance their laboratory science businesses, the leadership of GABMLS realised the need to improve the business environment for their members through proper regulation of the sector. Therefore in October 2014, the association, sought the support of the BUSAC Fund and its development partners, DANIDA, USAID and the EU to advocate the operationalization of a legislative Instrument (L.I.) that would inject sanity and public confidence into the delivery of medical laboratory results.
According to the Ghana Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists, about 90 per cent of laboratory processes in public health facilities in Ghana are not controlled, and this threatens the quality or accuracy of lab results churned out.

The passage of the Legislative Instrument (L.I) on Health Institutions and Facilities Act 857 2013, to ensure sanity in the industry was therefore considered an urgent need.

So far, the Legislative Instrument had been drafted and awaiting administrative procedures from the Allied Health Professions Council.

President of GAMLS Dr Ignatius Awinibumo said his outfit had concluded the post dialogue stage of their action, which began with a media interaction and stakeholder discussions.

Committees have also been formed to dialogue with the Allied Health Profession Council, Ministry of Health, Ghana Health Service, Attorney-General's Department and the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health.

Dr Awinibumo said, “The passage of Act 857 has streamlined the training of medical laboratory scientists and improved healthcare”.

“This is because until the passage of the act, people were practicing as laboratory scientists without regulations”, he recalled.

This, he said, had led to the increase of quack and fake laboratories, which are producing deficient laboratory results, resulting in wrong diagnoses and mistreatment of patients. He said majority of people who worked at these facilities were without license and that the situation could have dire consequence on the health of people who patronise their services. According to him, many people have died as a result of wrong diagnosis from quack laboratory scientists leading to wrong prescription.

General Secretary of GAMLS, Mr. Michael Amo Omari said it was time pressure was brought to bear on the government to do the proper thing to ensure that medical laboratory practice was done professionally.

“We will continue to lead a national effort to promote best laboratory services in Ghana so that our people will have the confidence in our laboratory results”, he said.

Ghana Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists (GAMLS) was established in 1971, and incorporated under the Professional Bodies Registration Decree (NRCD143) in 1973.
Garment makers give compelling testimonies

The Ghana National Association of Garment Makers (GNAGM), a national body of garment workers has embarked on an intensive capacity building campaign for its members to update their skills in risk management and packaging procedures for their products.

With the support of the Business Sector Advocacy Challenge (BUSAC) Fund, the association set out to train a set of nucleus of trainers to train masters and apprentices in selected skill areas to overcome the challenge of bad labelling, poor packaging, inadequate knowledge on record keeping and poor risk management.

In line with its core objectives, GNAGM ensures that steps are taken to build the capacity of its members through the organisation of training programmes to constantly update their skills.
This is to help them source for market for their products, expand their businesses, increase revenue, generate more jobs and spur them on to pay their taxes.

To address these challenges, there was the urgent need for capacity building and training programmes to bridge the capacity gaps identified. It was at this critical point that the BUSAC Fund, supported by DANIDA, USAID and the EU, came in to give the association a helping hand.

According to the President of the association, Mr David Setsoafia, BUSAC Fund financed 80 per cent of the cost of a five-day residential training programme held from April 15 to 19, 2018 which trained 30 selected officials of the association drawn from all the 10 regions of Ghana.

He explained that the 30 trainees were taken through record keeping, risk management, labeling, packaging, basic accounting, and other modules that will help them to upgrade their services.

The trainees were then supposed to train other members of the association to improve on their work during the implementation stage. The replication of this training is currently taking place across various regional branches of GNAGM in Ghana.

Mr Setsoafia said the story so far has been so good because the garment workers are in good business.

"I can say for a fact that the support from BUSAC Fund has been the game changer for us. So far, more than 400 other people have been trained across the country while many others are also coming on board.

"I have personally visited many of our people to see how they were applying the skills they learnt from the training programmes and can tell you on authority that there is massive improvement in the way they do business now."

"They now keep proper records, do accurate accounting, label appropriately, and are able to package their products well all because of the skills they acquired," he explained.

Meanwhile, 35-year old Mark Adu, a garment worker at Katamantu market in Accra testified that his life has not been the same since he got the opportunity to be trained by the trainers from the BUSAC Fund programme.

"I could not keep proper records or label my products appropriately but the training programme has helped me to overcome that challenge. Now, my work has improved and I get a lot of work from customers," he said.

Members of the association have also testified that the BDS support from the BUSAC Fund actually complements the capacity building support the association received from Skills Development Fund (SDF).

The Association's president, Mr. Setsoafia said the association received about a grant from SDF in 2013 to support a three-month training programme for its members. According to him, the support enabled the association to train about 150 of their
members across the country on garment production line methodologies.

He explained that the association realised that most of its members lacked modern skills needed to produce articles that met the ever-changing tastes of customers. There was therefore the need to upgrade their skills to make their products relevant.

“We had two training workshops at the Trade Fair at La in Accra and Krobo Odumasi in the Eastern Region respectively where our members were trained in practical skills to improve their work”, he explained.

“The result has been very positive because the skills our members acquired gave them a clear picture of what the trends in the industry are and how to produce things to meet the need of customers. I can boast that our people now produce things to meet the taste of the market” he said.

He also stated that as a result of the training, additional customers have been won by members, who have also increased their productivity by an average of 40%.

He said skills such as accurate measurements, better colour combinations and focus designs have also been learnt by members, and these enhanced skills are reflecting their increasing productivity and incomes.

Compelling testimonies

There is crystal clear evidence from the testimonies that, when more attention is paid to players in the informal sector, especially by supporting artisans and craftsmen to upgrade their skills, the society stands to benefit a lot.

The Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) needs to adopt innovative strategies to make the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) and other Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions relevant to informal sector players to equip them with skills that will make them relevant to the promotion of national development.
Members of the Central Regional branch of the Ghana Traditional Caterers Association (GTCA) have disclosed that they are now operating in a more conducive environment and increasing their incomes, thanks to their successful advocacy action supported by the BUSAC Fund and its development partners, Danida, USAID and the EU.

The traditional caterers have testified that as a result of their advocacy action, the district assembly now involves the leadership of the association in discussions with regards to the fixing of tax rates, thus promoting tax compliance among their members.
The president of the association, Ms. Anita Danso explained through the advocacy action, the association has been able to establish a tradition of dialogue with the assembly, such that all their branches in the various districts are now consulted by the District Assemblies for inputs before new tax rates are released and enforced.

“Now I can tell you that in the Central Region, in any district our association operates, when they are fixing their fees or levies, they involve us and we are able to negotiate with them before the final rates are approved and released,” Ms. Danso remarked.

However, the situation was very different about eight years ago when tax issues presented a major headache for traditional caterers operating within the Central Region. In those days, the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the district assemblies often fixed tax rates and kept increasing these rates without any form of negotiations with the association of traditional caterers.

The President of the association pointed out that the high tax rates were stifling the businesses of their members, as these tax rates did not fairly correlate with the revenues and profit margins of their members, hence many members could not pay.

“At that time, tax issues were one of the problems that gave our members sleepless nights. Mostly, these tax collectors, especially those from the district assemblies, visited our members and told them what to pay without giving them prior knowledge. They also kept on increasing the tax rates without even finding out how much our members were earning. This was a big problem for our members,” Ms. Danso disclosed.

To address this challenge, the association sought the support of the BUSAC Fund to embark on an advocacy action to persuade district assembly officials to involve the association of caterers in negotiations about the fixing of tax rates.

Ms. Danso stated that with aid of an advocacy grant from the BUSAC Fund, the association commenced an advocacy action in July 2011, which involved sensitization workshops, media campaigns and stakeholder conferences during which the association invited tax authorities from the regional and district levels.

“We brought our issues to the district assembly officials, we dialogued over it and at the end of the day, they heard us”, she remarked.

Ms Danso noted that ever since the association was able to advocate their inclusion in the fixing of tax rates, members now pay reasonable taxes which do not put their businesses at a disadvantage.
“Now, more of our members are paying taxes, but they are paying taxes which will not collapse their business. This means we now have more money to invest in the business,” she added.

Skills Development Fund Support

Having overcome the tax hurdle, members of GTCA realised that in order to fully exploit the enhanced business environment, their members needed to overcome one more challenge – lack of entrepreneurial skills and managerial expertise.

The leadership of the association realised that most of their members lacked the skills required to efficiently manage their business finances, while many more struggled to cater to successfully meet their customers' expectations.

To address this capacity gap, members of the association applied for support from the Skills Development Fund Support (SDF) in May 2013 to enable them train their members on how to operate efficiently and profitably within the competitive domestic catering industry.

Madam Danso disclosed that with the support of SDF, the association was able to train up to 8,000 traditional caterers in July 2013 on modern entrepreneurship skills, business management, customer service and food safety.

Ms. Danso again pointed out that as a result of the training, the business management skills of their members have improved significantly, leading to an increase in members’ productivity and income. She again noted that following the capacity building programme, their members are now able to drastically reduce wastage of food ingredients, thus leading to an increase in revenue from an average of GH¢ 280.00 to GH¢ 500.00 daily.

A member of the association, Madam Dorothy Ocran was quick to add that she has been able to expand her business by opening another food joint near Cape Coast in the Central Region.

“At first, our members did not adhere to good business practices, but now because of the training programmes, they now know how to keep good records, how to expand, as well as comply with the necessary rules and regulations governing the food industry”, she said.

Despite making so much progress owing to the support from BUSAC Fund and SDF, the leadership of GTCA realised that their members still needed some vital skills to enable them exploit opportunities within the lucrative formal catering sector, particularly the catering opportunities within the corridors of government and large corporate institutions.
The inability of the Traditional Caterers Association to participate in government or any formalised tender invitation process was a serious inhibition to their participation in an otherwise lucrative sector of the catering service industry in Ghana.

The leadership of GTCA realised that a vast majority of traditional caterers did not have the minimum requisite knowledge to prepare bid documents that meet the technical evaluation criteria of the prospective contracting institutions. This constraint reflected in their members’ lack of capacity to utilize available resources and expertise to develop business proposals to solicit catering services from corporate institutions and other catering service-related government offers.

The challenge was also denying traditional caterers the opportunity to compete favourably for hugely lucrative catering services such as the government’s school feeding programme, catering for state functions and for state institutions such as Parliament, health institutions and the military.

To address this challenge, the traditional caterers once again successfully accessed Business Development Services (BDS) support from the BUSAC Fund in September 2017. The BDS support enabled the members of the association to receive training on Standard Bid Documents and Responding to bids, Preparation of winning bid documents, Preparation of effective business Proposals, Standard Bid Requirements and Ghana’s Procurement Framework.

Members of the association are of the opinion that after receiving this recent BDS support, they have now understood the basic rudiments of the contract process and also know where to seek help.

Ms. Danso said the support from the BUSAC Fund and SDF have had a massive impact on both the association and the members as it has given the caterers the requisite training needed to improve and expand their businesses.

She noted that as a result of the support, the traditional caterers association has now become one of the leading stakeholders in the domestic food industry and its suggestions were respected by policy makers.

"Now I can tell you that in the Central Region, in any district our association operates, when they are fixing their fees or levies, they involve us and we are able to negotiate with them before the final tax rates are approved and released,"

Ms. Anita Danso,
President of GTCA
Ghana Rice Inter Professional Body (GRIB)

GRIB pushes for high standards in rice production

Ghana has a target of supporting one million farmers in the next four years with plans to invest in agriculture as the country seeks to increase trade and cut its reliance on food imports that cost about $2.2 billion annually.

Rice is now a staple food in Ghana, but unfortunately, the country has failed to capitalize on the Ghanaian appetite for rice, leading to the importation of about $500 million worth of rice annually.

Despite the continuous increase in domestic rice cultivation every year, the country still remains a large market for foreign rice, as many Ghanaians have a strong preference for foreign rice because of its perceived quality.

The Ghana Rice Inter Professional Body (GRIB), the national umbrella organisation of rice stakeholders, has identified poor standards in the rice value chain as one of the major factors inhibiting the growth and competitiveness of locally produced rice. Indeed, many members of GRIB and other stakeholders in the rice industry have attributed the lack of standards and quality packaging as the cause of low patronage of locally produced rice in Ghana. The low patronage of the local produced rice has caused some rice farmers to abandon their farms to seek alternative livelihoods while the youth are also not attracted to take up farming in place of the aging farmers.
In a bid to encourage higher patronage for locally produced rice and cut down the nation's huge annual rice import bill, the leadership of GRIB sought the support of the BUSAC Fund in May 2012 to advocate the promotion of national standards for local rice.

With the support of its development partners, DANIDA, USAID and the EU, the BUSAC Fund financed GRIB's advocacy action that focused on increasing stakeholder engagements with regulatory bodies such as the Food and Drug Authority (FDA), the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These engagements with duty bearers have resulted in the reviewing of draft national rice standards take into account the quality of the popular paddy rice.

The President of GRIB, Nana Kwabena Ayeh, described the BUSAC Fund as crucial to GRIB's quest to ensure that the rice industry in Ghana met international standards and becomes competitive for the Ghanaian and international markets.

He said the advocacy support enabled GRIB to engage stakeholders on the need for right standards in all aspects of the rice value chain. These include quality seeds, good agronomic practices, standards in packaging, labelling, among other standards.

Mr. Ayeh again pointed out that as a result of the group's advocacy action, the importance of quality standards in rice production in Ghana is now highly regarded by stakeholders in Ghana's domestic rice industry, such that value chain actors have shown increasing interest in quality standards for locally grown rice. Although the increasing interest in higher standards is reflecting in the improving quality of locally grown rice, members of GRIB are of the opinion that mere standards without enforcement would be a work in futility.

"At the end of our advocacy action, we want to ensure that the standards are backed by law and enforced; and since enforcement is in the remit of the mandated regulatory agencies, we need to have more engagements with them," Mr. Ayeh remarked.

Members of GRIB are optimistic that stakeholders in the rice industry will soon have national rice policy documents to serve as a basis to educate its members and rice value chain actors to produce and mill rice of premier quality to attract competitive prices.

While working towards improving standards for local rice and increasing domestic consumption, the leadership...
of GRIB also realised that the consumption of locally grown was increasing year after year, but there was no corresponding increase in the volume of local production. The leadership of GRIB realised that many actors within the rice value chain lacked the capacity and technical expertise to increase the volume of rice yield to meet the increasing demand.

To address this capacity gap, members of GRIB sought capacity building support from the Skills Development Fund (SDF), which is financed by DANIDA, the World Bank and the Government of Ghana.

The Executive Secretary of GRIB, Mr Emmanuel Padi recalled that the capacity building intervention from SDF enabled GRIB to train their local rice outgrowers on Good Agronomic Practice (GAP). Under the GAP project, GRIB provided training for rice farmers on the sort of practices that would help them maximize yields. These include the selection of good production sites, good pest control, managing soil fertility, reducing post-harvest loses, among others.

Some members of GRIB also attested to the fact the SDF capacity building support also enabled the association to transfer the system Rice Intensification (SRI) technology to 1,032 rice out growers (677 males and 355 females).

Members of GRIB say the SRI system is ideal for higher yields cultivated on a small land size and less resources, and that demonstration works carried out on an acre of land yielded in excess of 20 bags of rice, with the quality also doubled.

Members of GRIB are pleased that the use of the SRI technology enables the rice farmers to increase their revenues by about 100%, hence the technology is being transferred to all rice farmers to ensure standard procedures and produce among members.

Indeed, the advocacy efforts of GRIB and other stakeholders within the local rice value chain is making a significant impact on the volumes of rice being grown locally in recent years. Data available at the Ministry of Food and Agriculture indicate that at the end of 2016, Ghana's rice production stood at 687,680 metric tonnes, as compared to about 200,000 metric tonnes in 2012.

Nana Ayeh said GRIB had received lots of positive feedback from its stakeholders and is, therefore poised to continue its advocacy work for better standards and increased patronage for locally grown rice.

At the end of our advocacy action, we want to ensure that the standards are backed by law and enforced; and since enforcement is in the remit of the mandated regulatory agencies, we need to have more engagements with them,

Nana Kwabena Ayeh
President of GRIB
Members of the Ghana National Association of Poultry Farmers (GNAPF) believe that they are now in a better position to increase their productivity and incomes after receiving capacity building support from the Skills Development Fund to upgrade their skills in poultry management practices.

The support from SDF enabled the members to acquire very useful poultry keeping skills such as good feed intake and feed formulation, feed utilization in broiler chicken, superior egg production and chicken growth rate management.

A total of 1,200 poultry farmers from across the country benefitted from the poultry management training which has upgraded the skills of members to increase productivity and incomes.
The Vice President of GNAPF, Mr Napoleon Agyemang Oduro, stated that the capacity building support from SDF is helping the poultry farmers to increase productivity and income.

“As a result of the training support, our members are experiencing an improvement in the growth rate of birds, as well as a reduction in the morbidity and mortality of birds, leading to an increase in revenue for our farmers”, Mr. Oduro remarked.

Members of the association also testified that through additional support from the Animal Science Department of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), poultry farmers belonging to GNAPF have benefitted from weight improvement techniques for birds, which is helping the farmers to get better value for their birds.

Poultry farming in Ghana has seen dwindling fortunes in the last decade due to the lack of skills and knowledge to prevent high morbidity and mortality of birds. The industry has also faced stiff competition from imported cheap poultry products that has negatively affected productivity, income and profit.

Poultry farmers currently produce only 10 per cent of the broiler meat consumed in the country and this is due to the lack of skills and knowledge to counter the growing threat of imported chicken. There is also the problem of disease outbreaks, which has also negatively affected the prospects of poultry industry in the country. So acute are the challenges that local giants such as Darko Farms, Akate Farms, Jokas Farms Limited, have all become a pale shadow of themselves, leaving the industry in a distress situation.

It is in this regard that the poultry farmers association sought the capacity building support from SDF in May 2014 to train its members in poultry production and management to enable the farmers enhance their productivity income.

Having upgraded their core technical skills in poultry production practices, the leadership of the poultry farmers realised that their members also needed Business Development Skills (BDS) to enable them manage their poultry farm businesses efficiently.

The leadership of GNAPF realised that majority of their members lack entrepreneurial skills, innovative marketing strategies and leadership skills. These capacity gaps were slowing down the growth of poultry businesses, thus rendering them uncompetitive and unproductive on the local market. Ultimately these skill handicaps deprived poultry farmers the opportunity to get a fair share of the local market to facilitate business growth and development.
To address these capacity needs, members of GNAPF again applied for a BDS grant from the Business Sector Advocacy Challenge (BUSAC) Fund in September 2017 to enable them polish their business management skills.

The BDS support from the BUSAC Fund enabled the poultry farmers to undergo training on innovation and marketing strategy development, entrepreneurial development, modern leadership skills, monitoring and evaluation.

Members of the association believe that these skills will enable them to improve their market share, improve their competitiveness, increase productivity and incomes.

Mr. Oduro stated that the association is optimistic that these skills will help them grow their poultry farm businesses and assist their drive to reposition the poultry industry to recover from the ailing times.

Even before the members of the poultry farmers association embarked on their quest for improving their technical and managerial skills, they saw the need to address some challenges in the business environment that were hampering the growth of the poultry industry in Ghana.

One of those key challenges in the business environment was the collapse of broiler production in Ghana as a result of unfair competition from imported cheap poultry products. From a market share of nearly 100 per cent in the early 1980s, local producers then accounted for less than 3 per cent of market share for poultry products. The collapse of broiler production also adversely affected the related hatchery, feed mill and associated industries. To save the poultry industry from further decline, the Ghana National of Poultry Farmers sought funding from the BUSAC Fund in 2011 to enable them advocate the enactment of the ECOWAS Common External Tariff on poultry imports.

With the support of its Development Partners, DANIDA, USAID and the EU, the BUSAC Fund provided an advocacy grant to the leadership of GNAPF to enable them press home their demands for policies to protect the local poultry industry from unfair competition from imported poultry products. As part of their advocacy action, the leadership of GNAPF had fruitful dialogue sessions...
with duty bearers on the need to protect the local poultry industry from unfair external competition.

The Vice President of GNAPF, Mr Napoleon Agyemang Oduro, described the support by BUSAC Fund as a game changer since it has helped to put the association on a good path to turning around the fortunes of the poultry industry.

In an interview with Mr. Oduro on October 6, 2018, he explained that through the BUSAC grant, they have been able to build the capacity of 38 of their leaders at the national, regional and district levels on how to identify key challenges in the industry, sensitize other members, and engage in healthy discourse on how to address those challenges.

"There were many misconceptions and myths about the eating of eggs which was a negative development for our industry, but through BUSAC’s support, we have been able to engage the government and appropriate stakeholders to discredit those myths," he said.

Mr Oduro said the great support the GNAPF received from BUSAC could not be measured especially when there was the urgent need for strong engagement with policy makers to put more investments in the poultry industry to create jobs and expand the economy.

Way forward

"Importation of poultry and poultry related products is still high in this country and this is making the local industry uncompetitive. Meanwhile, the government has a mantra of making the private sector the engine of growth for the country. Through the support of the BUSAC Fund, we have been able to build capacity in research so we are able to provide data and strong evidence to the government on why they need to support the local poultry industry to grow. If the private sector is the engine of growth, we are telling the government that the engine needs fuel to move," he said.

Mr Oduro added however, that more work still remained to be done for which reason the GNAPF will be an Oliver Twist by asking BUSAC Fund to extend more support packages to the association.
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