



Fig 1. The participants at the Stakeholder Consultation held in Tamale, Ghana in August 2022 (Credit CIP)

GROWING Nutritious Foods, GROWING Futures

Addressing Gender Inequities to Enable the Nutritional and Financial Security of Women in Northern Ghana

April 2022-December 2026

Building healthier and more sustainable food systems while reducing poverty is a major goal of the Ghanaian government. The GROWING project recognizes that tackling gender inequities in Northern Ghana is the key for an integrated climate-smart agriculture-nutrition-marketing approach to truly make a difference to the nutritional and financial security of women and the households they reside in. Over 4.5 years, an innovative approach facilitating GROWING Futures Clubs to exploit the potential of selected nutritious foods will be implemented and evaluated.



What is the problem?

Ghana has made tremendous progress in poverty reduction over the past 20 years, but for historical and structural reasons, poverty and malnutrition rates are significantly higher in the Northern belt of Ghana than in the Middle or Southern belts. Moreover, within the north, the former Northern Region (fNR) (now divided into 3 regions: Savannah, Northern, and North East) exhibits the worst statistics when compared to all other regions in Ghana: it is home to one-fifth of the country's poor and has the highest prevalences of stunting (33.1%) and anemia (82.1%) among children under 5 years of age. A major driver of these statistics is the condition and status of women in the fNR. Only 27.2% of females 11 years and

above are literate. Early marriage is common, with 28% of girls married before reaching 18 years of age.

The other major driver is the tough, unimodal growing environment. Poor soil fertility is especially acute in northern Ghana, where agriculture is the dominant occupation. Yet the majority of households produce a limited set of crops, with low use of inputs and restricted market opportunities. Consumption data reveal that the average diet is particularly low in vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, iron, zinc and B12, key micronutrients for ensuring good health. Rapidly increasing population density has led to a fast decline in soil health, smaller landholding sizes, and greater inequalities in land distribution, with women and the poorest households having limited access



Fig 5. Young girl consuming fried sweetpotato slices. GROWING will introduce manual chippers especially designed for cutting sweetpotatoes into chips or crisps to the Clubs engaged in processing (Credit E. Abidin)

to quality land. Moreover, within Ghana, climate change is having the most negative impact in the North. Rainfed dependent farmers find it increasingly difficult to predict the timing of rainy seasons, and only 4% of the country's irrigated land is found in the North.

Clearly, there are no magic bullets to resolve such a situation. An integrated approach that addresses agro-climatic, socio-cultural and economic constraints is required.

What do we want to achieve?

The Generating Revenues and Opportunities for Women to Improve Nutrition in Ghana (GROWING) project is an action research project that uses an integrated intervention strategy and nine innovations to: 1) achieve more equitable and enhanced nutrition, particularly of women and young children, 2) increase control of income by women and youth, and 3) improve support for a more inclusive, gender-equitable, nutritious, climate-smart and resilient food system. By building a more enabling environment, increasing the agency of women, and transforming of unequal gender relations, we seek to achieve **the ultimate goal of improved nutritional and financial security of women, youth, and young children in 6 districts** of fNR. Selected for their high prevalences of poverty, high levels of malnutrition among women, and high rates of stunting and vitamin A deficiency among children under five years of age, these districts are:

- 1. Northern region:** Saboba and Gushegu districts
- 2. Savannah region:** North Gonja and West Gonja districts.
- 3. North East region:** Chereponi and East Mamprusi districts

Young children under five years of age, lactating women, and pregnant women are at greatest risk of micronutrient deficiencies. Hence, direct beneficiaries are 7,560 women of reproductive age (15-49 years) with their children under five years of age and 5,292 men (mostly spouses) from 7,560 rural households; plus 2,052 additional women of any age from marginalized groups.

In addition, for the marketing component, 12 Healthy Food Connectors (HFCs)--traders selected with community participation--will be trained, and supported with financial services for 3 years. Twenty-four urban women, prioritizing secondary school leavers, will be recruited as Nutritious Food Corps Agents (NFCs) to sell nutritious foods (bought from HFCs and others) in 12 urban markets and demonstrate their safe preparation (Fig. 2).

In terms of capacity building, there will be substantially strengthening of at least 102 Ghana Health Service (GHS) personnel at district and community levels to implement the nutrition component and 126 Community-based Extension Agents for the agricultural and market components. To create a more enabling environment to transform gender relations and enhance women's access to inputs and services, gender dialogues and trainings will be conducted with at least 308 religious leaders, 144 local



Fig 2. Map of selected districts for GROWING interventions and the 12 markets selected for demand creation activities led by Nutritious Food Corps Agents

leaders and 24 district government officials. In addition, we estimate over 15,000 indirect rural household and 40,000 indirect urban consumer beneficiaries.

Any positive evidence generated will be used by advocates encouraging the uptake of the part or all of GROWING integrated approach by government programs and other project investments. Major outcomes expected are positive improvements in the Women's Empowerment In Agriculture Index, gender parity, and the diversity of the diet consumed by women and young children.

How are we going to make it happen?

The Integrated Approach. Major barriers to having a quality diet are inadequate access to seed of nutritious crops, having land allocated to grow them, having income to purchase them, and a lack of appropriate knowledge and practice among women and men about the balance of diverse foods to prepare and consume and who within the household has the greatest needs. During the first six months of GROWING, formative research and stakeholder consultations were undertaken to confirm which nutritious crops and small livestock to focus on, to adapt nutrition modules to local conditions (Fig. 3), and to design an environment and sustainable production plan. This led to the current version of the integrated implementation approach.

Over four years, there will be 3 full cycles of the integrated intervention package, each lasting 24 months. We begin with recruiting women and men from households with children under five years of age or pregnant women into Growing Futures Clubs (GFCs), with approximately 30 households per Club. There are four major components of integrated intervention:



Fig 3. Women in focus group discussions led by University of Development Professor Clement Kubuga provided feedback on using the Healthy Baby Toolkits designed to assure the density and amounts of enhanced porridges served to young children (Credit C. Kubuga)

1) Nutrition: The goal is to enhance the nutrition for households, women and young children, emphasizing improved young child feeding practices and enhanced household diet quality through greater use of nutritious foods;

2) Climate-smart Agriculture: The goal is to supply seeds and promote improved climate-smart agronomic and post-harvest practices for vitamin A rich orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP), calcium rich moringa and amaranth leaves, vitamin C rich papaya fruit, protein-rich soybean or groundnut and B12 and iron- rich cavies (Fig. 4). Two new OFSP varieties bred in Northern Ghana for Northern Ghana and released by the Savannah Agricultural Research Institute in collaboration with CIP are examples of key innovations to be introduced.



Fig 4. The nutritious crops and small livestock being promoted under GROWING (from left to right: orange-fleshed sweetpotato, papaya, moringa, groundnut, soybean, and caviaries) (Credit JB Artworks)

3) Gender Inequity: Locally identified and trained gender champions will conduct gender-transformative dialogues to influence the attitudes of community and local leaders and husbands towards women's equitable access to land, productive assets, and services. The goal is to see real change in gender norms and relations that lead to improved women's decision making within the home and greater income-earning opportunities for women;

4) Marketing and Business Skills: The goal is for the clubs to become self-sustainable income-generating units that will be well-linked to marketing opportunities in 1 of 3 potential areas: a) selling fresh nutritious crops; b) processing OFSP baked or fried products (Fig. 5); or c) rearing caviaries (*Cavia porcellus*) for sale and consumption. GFC members will also have the opportunity to join existing or newly formed Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), an approach to encourage households to save and provide loans to each other.

All income-generating components of the GFCs will be supported by a market linkage intervention that will enhance the ability of GFC members to successfully commercialize climate-resilient nutritious crops, with gender-transformative discussions undertaken to ensure that women have more control over the sales. First, GROWING will support a two-year market-based demand creation campaign in 12 urban markets (two per district), to increase the demand for nutritious foods, including processed products using the selected crops, and emphasize greater awareness of environmental concerns. Second, GROWING will train and support so-called Healthy Food Connectors—youth and women traders using motorized tricycles to buy produce from Club members and sell through project supported marketing booths or to other identified buyers, including institutional markets.

By working closely with district assemblies and government agents, the project-trained gender champions will engage pro-actively with district assemblies and local leadership at the community level to improve the enabling environment for women, in

particular seeking their increased access to land for engaging in agriculture and to government extension services.

Partnerships. GROWING's design is well aligned with the Feminist International Assistance Policy of Canada, and Global Affairs Canada is funding this work. The International Potato Center (CIP), a One CGIAR agricultural research center with deep experience in integrated agriculture-nutrition-marketing efforts, leads the project. Success will be ensured through building strong partnerships with 1) CARE, a non-governmental organization (NGO), who has developed and tested women's empowerment programs in Northern Ghana that increased capacity and skills of women smallholders, expanding their access to financial services, productive assets, inputs and influence over household decisions; 2) the nutrition division of the Ghana Health Service, which since 2000 has been investing in increasing access to health and nutrition services through establishing and strengthening sub-district level health facilities and Community Health Planning and Service units; 3) Local NGOs engaged in agriculture and District-level Ministry of Food and Agriculture extension personnel; and 4) Regional and district level agents of Women in Agricultural Development (WIAD) Directorate of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, which supports women's groups in processing of biofortified crops. Consulting services and private sector actors will be engaged for water management services, cavy rearing training and breeding stock, media-based interventions, multiplication of quality planting materials, and agro-processing equipment installation and training on use.

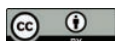
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