

The Marketplace

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**Talking Books:
Training
Ghanaian
farmers**

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Techies and church leaders

MEDA

Teaching with Talking Books

Pre-recorded messages are an effective way of getting info to rural Ghanaian farmers

Teaching technical information to people who are mostly not literate can pose serious challenges.

But if use of books isn't helpful, talking books can get the message across.

MEDA's Greater Rural Opportunities for Women (GROW) project has made wide use of talking books through a partnership with Literacy Bridge, a Ghanaian non-governmental agency.

More than 1,000 lead farmers — producers trained to share information and best practices with their peers — who are part of the GROW project use the technology. Talking Books help them share critical information related to agriculture, gender, nutrition, finance, buyers and suppliers, and other matters that affect the farmers they work with.

The Talking Book is an inexpensive, mass communications technology that promotes learning opportunities for women, men and children. Literacy Bridge provides the book to the women in the GROW program at no cost. Users buy the AA batteries needed to power the device, which could also be run by electricity in areas where that is available.

Last year, MEDA's efforts to record timely and valuable advice on pest control saved farmers from having crops in the upper west region of Ghana being ravaged by an infestation of fall army worm. Early warnings helped farmers launch

large-scale efforts to rid their fields of the worms.

"The Talking Book is much better than the radio because it deals with issues that affect our daily lives," said Hillia Kazie of Kohuo in the Lambusie District, which is in the upper west region of northern Ghana.

"The radio sometimes talks about things that are not useful to us, but we cannot ask the people inside there to switch to a different topic... With the Talking Book we decide what to listen to and when to do that. All the topics are useful."

Literacy rates among women in Ghana are much lower than the proportion of men who can read and write, particularly in rural areas. Talking Books are a powerful exten-

sion tool because multiple messages are recorded in the appropriate local dialect and uploaded to the device for people to listen to and use.

Messages are updated quarterly as necessary on emergency issues such as disease outbreaks or pest problems. MEDA technical staff put together the messages and have Learning Bridge translate them into seven local languages.

All MEDA groups in the GROW project have a Talking Book device. They listen to information during their village savings and loan associations meetings, and also at the individual or household level, as the device can be shared among group members. If a member misses a meeting or training session, they can



Talking books can be used by MEDA clients regardless of their level of literacy.



Ghanaian lead farmers with their Talking Books

listen to the Talking Book and catch up with their fellow farmers later.

Abina Bagiro is a 64-year-old lead farmer with the Neeweri group, which means “where is better.”

Bagiro has found that her participation in the GROW program, and use of the Talking Book, has led to positive changes in attitudes around gender roles in her 14-member household, which includes five children and her husband.

Prior to the start of the project, she was responsible for cooking, fetching water and caring for household needs. Her husband, Fatawu Bagiro, decided which crops to plant, took care of the farming and household decision making.

Now she and her husband work together to achieve the common goal of improving living standards for their household. “The Talking Book teaches me how to take care of my

children and the roles of a man, a woman and children,” she said.

Household members now share responsibilities equally. Males pitch in with cooking, washing utensils and fetching water. Women help with farming and caring for livestock.

Fatawu, Abina’s husband, realizes he must rely more on his wife to care for him. He is now supportive of her choice of land to farm and gives free access to the farm, which allows the family to plan their agricultural activities together.

“In my household there is nothing

“With the Talking Book we decide what to listen to and when to do that. All the topics are useful.”

like this work is mine and the other is not mine,” Abina says proudly.

Her two married sons have also heard the Talking Book messages about gender and spouse relationships and have happy and peaceful relationships with their wives and families. If anyone shirks their responsibilities or starts to slip back into an old way of thinking, they are referred back to the Talking Book to listen to the message again.

A lead farmer from Kohuo says the Talking Book messages have even helped to expand her family. “My in-law has become pregnant through the unification between she and her husband through the consistent learning to the gender messages,” she said. “It is my hope that, when she delivers successfully, I will even name the baby after MEDA or PRUDA (Partnerships for Rural Development Action, one of MEDA’s local partners).” ♦