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Breaking New Grounds - the success story of EBWF women

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BREAKING NEW GROUNDS

Increased access to new and international market has been identified as one of the key achievements of the advocacy actions undertaken by the Empretec Business Women's Forum (EBWF).



The leadership of EBWF speaking to GTV about their advocacy achievements

Front cover: A busy working day for Staff of Class Catering Centre (a member of EBWF)

Executive members of the EBWF who are delighted that the business advocacy action has exposed their businesses to new domestic and international markets, also added that the advocacy action is helping them to increase their sales.

Ms. Paully Apea-Kubi, President of EBWF, testified that as a result of the exposure from the advocacy action, some members of the association had gained contracts to supply products to new

clients both home and abroad.

“The impact of the advocacy action on our businesses has been amazing! The documentaries we aired gave our businesses enormous exposure, to the extent that many female entrepreneurs who featured in the documentaries won orders from local and international clients. This has resulted in the growth of our members’ businesses,” Ms. Apea-Kubi stated in an interview.

To buttress the assertion of Ms. Apea-Kubi, a member of the association, Ms. Fulera Seidu also testified that, *“My business got enormous international exposure after featuring in the documentaries within the advocacy action. In fact, I was invited to a couple of trade fairs abroad where I had the opportunity to access new markets, increase sales and income and network with other business organizations. I also learnt a lot from this advocacy action, and honestly, my business has never been the same ever since.”*

Members of the association also expressed satisfaction that duty bearers are beginning to respond by tackling some of the various concerns raised in their advocacy action including gender

inequalities. This according to Ms Ama Vanderpuye, the Vice President of the association is helping more women to improve their businesses.

“As a result of the media exposure gained from the action, the management of Women’s World Bank Ghana amended their portfolios to create credit facilities and other special products to support women businesses in Ghana, and women businesses stand to benefit enormously from these new facilities,” Ms. Vanderpuye revealed.

The immediate past president of the association, Ms. Edwina Assan also pointed out that EBWF’s advocacy action has attracted significant support from duty bearers and private organizations in the form of capacity building for women entrepreneurs in Ghana.

“It is worth mentioning that the awareness created by our advocacy action prompted the National Board for Small Scale Industries to start collaborating with EBWF to train women entrepreneurs on business strategies; and many women entrepreneurs are benefitting from this training scheme. As I speak, both Google Ghana Ltd and Kofi Annan ICT centre have also expressed interest in developing ICT products to support women entrepreneurs in the informal sector,” Ms. Assan remarked.

The remarkable advocacy action of EBWF also attracted support from reputable organizations beyond the boundaries of Ghana.

“The televised documentaries within our advocacy action also drew the attention of UN Women to EBWF’s activities. Subsequently, UN Women sponsored a member of EBWF to attend a workshop on women entrepreneurial issues in Senegal; and she returned to share her knowledge with EBWF members,” Ms. Vanderpuye added.

The Empretec Business Women’s Forum is an association of women entrepreneurs in Ghana. The association identified the lack of adequate understanding and appreciation of gender issues and its impact on women enterprises among duty bearers as a huge challenge for women businesses.

With support from its development partners-DANIDA, USAID and the EU, the BUSAC Fund responded by providing an advocacy grant to EBWF,



Ms. Fuleira Seidu, Treasurer of EBWF and CEO of Winanzua Enterprise speaks about benefits of the advocacy action



Some jewellery products from Winanzua Enterprise

making it possible for the association to embark on an advocacy action that has successfully led to addressing some of the challenges confronting women businesses in Ghana.

As part of the business advocacy action embarked upon the association, the group produced and televised 12 episodes of 30-minute documentaries (on GTV) which highlighted the challenges confronting women businesses in Ghana today. Following the airing of these documentaries on GTV, a number of women entrepreneurs who featured in the documentaries testified that their businesses have benefitted immensely from the exposure given gained from the advocacy action.

Story: Ebenezer Kpentey, the BUSAC Fund.



MORE INCOME FOR CASHEW FARMERS

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Cashew farmers processing their cashew nuts for sale

Cashew farmers in the Bole District are beginning to reap the benefits of business advocacy as they now earn more income from the sale of higher quality cashew nuts on the international market.

Members of the Gbankuliso Cashew Farmers Association (GCFA) have testified that the advocacy skills gained from the BUSAC Fund support has enabled them to dialogue with the district assembly and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) for easy access to the services of Agricultural extension officers.

Speaking about the benefits derived from the advocacy action, the Secretary of the association, Mr. Alfred Simidon pointed out that through the technical support received from the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG) and MOFA, GCFA members were able to learn innovative ways of cultivating quality cashew crops; and this has significantly helped the farmers to increase the volume and quality of cashew production.

“I have been able to learn innovative methods of agro-chemical application and cashew tree pruning, and this is has enabled me to gain more yield and income from my cashew farm”, remarked Mr. Alfred Simidon, a

retired educationist who owns a 27-acre cashew farm at Bamboi.

The cashew farmers are also delighted about the fact that the innovative techniques of cashew cultivation they have learnt is enabling them to produce quality cashew that meets the high standards of the international market, thereby improving their sales and income.

The treasurer of the association, Mr. Kassim Alhassan stated: *“Our farmers are now able to produce quality cashew that meets international standards, and this has enabled our association to gain the confidence of Fair Trade, and international organization that currently buys our cashew nuts. Today our farmers can sell their produce on the international market and earn more income.”*

Mr. Kassim also pointed out that the advocacy action embarked upon by the association has also strengthened the advocacy capacity of its members, which is helping the association to dialogue with policy makers to address the concerns of their industry.

“The advocacy skills we acquired have empowered us to engage policy makers to respond to the needs of

our sector. At the moment, we are using these skills to advocate for government to establish a national cashew board that will be responsible for the development of the cashew sector,” he noted.

Formed and registered in 2002, the Gbankuliso Cashew Farmers Association (GCFA) is a union of cashew farmers whose cashew cultivation businesses have become less lucrative as a result of technical support from Agricultural Extension Officers. Cashew farmers in the Bole- Bamboi District do not have adequate Agricultural Extension Agents(AEAs), hence expert advice to assist farmers in quality cashew cultivation was not readily available.

This situation compelled the leadership of the association to apply for an advocacy grant from the BUSAC Fund to enable them engage duty bearers from MOFA, CRIG and the district assembly in talks over the need to bring Agricultural Extension Agents to their aid.

Story: Isaac Nongya & Ebenezer Kpentey.



Cashew nuts are nutritious delicacies around the world. A boost in the crop's cultivation could yield more income for farmers



Cashew farmers weighing bags of cashew for sale : photo credit: <http://blog.sap-tv.com/2011/05>



IMPROVING INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS PRACTICE IN GHANA



A healthy industrial relations practice will boost productivity and economic growth

The ability of the National Labour Commission to settle industrial disputes within the shortest possible time has been identified as one of the key advocacy achievements of the Media and Printing Industry Workers Union of Ghana (MEDIANET).

There is ample evidence that the National Labour Commission (NLC) is in a stronger position to promptly deal with industrial disputes between employers and employees as NLC's efficiency at settling industrial disputes has improved.

This improvement, according to the members of MEDIANET, is good for building public confidence in the work of the Commission as more business entities send their petitions to the Commission.

"This sends a good signal to potential investors in Ghana, as efficiency in settling industrial disputes significantly impacts the ease of doing business in Ghana," observed Mr. Desmond Sackey, Industrial Relations Consultant of MEDIANET.

The General Secretary of MEDIANET, Mr. Charles Adjetej Sowah is further delighted that this improvement has addressed one of the long standing impediment, - the slow pace of settling industrial disputes that has frustrated the corporate community in Ghana.

"As a result of the union's advocacy action, the NLC's capacity has been so enhanced that it is now able to adjudicate up to 10 or more corporate petitions per week, as compared to hearing a maximum of five petitions per week prior to the advocacy action," Mr. Sowah pointed out.

Mr. Desmond Sackey is also excited about the fact that as result of their advocacy action, the NLC is extending its operations towards other regions in Ghana in order to deal with the large number of pending industrial disputes.

"Today, the NLC is fast expanding its frontiers, as it has now set up three additional regional committees (in Takoradi, Kumasi and Tema) to enable it settle more

industrial disputes between workers and corporate bodies across the country.” Mr. Sackey pointed out.

Following the successful advocacy action embarked upon by the Media and Printing Industry Workers Union of Ghana (MEDIANET), the NLC is now better equipped with a more befitting office complex, office logistics, and an increased number of full time administrative and technical staff, and this has positively impacted on the NLC’s efficiency at settling industrial disputes.

Several workers and employers in Ghana were gradually losing confidence in the NLC, the only institution mandated to deal with labour disputes since a high number of cases reported to the Commission were not promptly addressed because it was not adequately resourced to perform its duties creditably.

Poor industrial relations in Ghana had fuelled industrial unrest and persistent strike actions, resulting in low morale for workers and stagnant national economic development.

This challenge prompted the leadership of MEDIANET to seek support from the BUSAC Fund to enable them advocate for sound industrial relations practice in Ghana. As a pro-private sector programme, the BUSAC Fund, with support from its development partners-DANIDA, USAID and the EU, assisted the association by providing a business advocacy grant that enabled them to embark on an advocacy action that has contributed significantly to the improvement of the NLC’s performance.

Story: Ebenezer Kpentey, the BUSAC Fund

MEDIA IN BUSINESS ADVOCACY ACTION

The provision of a national media platform for business sector associations and public sector officials to dialogue on issues affecting business growth and development had eventually created favourable conditions for many businesses in the country.

The Ghana Association of Journalists (GJA) intervention to draw the attention of duty bearers/policy makers to the numerous challenges confronting the private businesses has compelled many duty bearers to be more responsive to the needs and concerns of businesses.

The immediate past General Secretary of the association, Mr. Bright Blewu stated that as part of the advocacy action, “Business Advocate”, a live business discussion programme which was aired on GTV for two years, provided a media platform for over 200 business associations and some banks to articulate the concerns of Ghanaian private sector businesses.

“As a matter of fact, this well structured media discussions

created the platform for both private and public sector officials to dialogue about how to address the numerous impediments in Ghana’s business environment. These discussions made the relevant duty bearers a lot more responsive to the needs of the Ghanaian private sector,” Mr. Blewu remarked.

He explained that the advocacy action enabled GJA to organize over fifty dialogue sessions between policy makers (Ministers, MPs and District Chief Executives) and entrepreneurs across seven regions which helped in addressing challenges confronting some Ghanaian businesses.

“For instance, in the heat of our advocacy action, a Sunyani-based entrepreneur expressed his gratitude to GJA for its intervention which got the then Internal Revenue Service to resolve his tax concerns which had been a source of dispute for over six years,” Mr. Blewu revealed in an interview.

To a large extent, as a result of GJA’s advocacy action, the media developed a higher interest in producing





Former Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Hon. Joseph Yieleh Chireh (right) discusses private sector challenges with the then host of GTV's live "Business Advocate" programme, Kofi Asante Frimpong

more quality pro-business development stories to highlight the needs and challenges of the private sector. For instance, due to GJA's advocacy action, in July 2008 alone, journalists published 102 business stories across print and electronic media, and these balanced stories reflected the challenges confronting private Ghanaian businesses and the response of relevant government agencies at the time.

The GJA's remarkable advocacy action also urged the media to play a watchdog role by keenly monitoring and ensuring that government interventions designed to develop the private sector, such as MASLOC, were well implemented.

Even though the private sector has always been touted as the engine of economic growth, for many years, the Ghanaian media had not given the sector the needed prominence and coverage. The Ghanaian media has often been accused of

devoting much coverage to political and sensational news stories, thus relegating private sector business issues to the background.

Realising the need to address this problem in order to support Ghana's economic growth, the GJA sought the support of the BUSAC Fund to advocate the need to use sustainable radio and television platforms to articulate the concerns of private businesses.

The BUSAC Fund and its development partners, DANIDA, USAID and the EU came to the rescue by providing GJA with an advocacy grant that enabled the GJA to embark upon a nationwide advocacy action that highlighted the challenges confronting the Ghanaian private sector, and triggered favourable responses from the public sector.

Story: Ebenezer Kpentey, the BUSAC Fund

SUPPORT FOR AGRO-PROCESSING INDUSTRIES

Financial support for Ghanaian farmers is expected to improve as the Export Development and Agricultural Investment Fund (EDAIF) expands its operations to support capital investments in the agricultural sector of the economy.

The persistent advocacy by the Private Enterprise Foundation (PEF) and the amendment of ACT 582 to include the provision of financial resources for the development and promotion of agricultural related activities, present real opportunities for farmers to gain access to capital to expand their agro-businesses.

The Senior Economist of PEF, Mr. Moses Agyemang who is glad that the fund has a zero percent interest loan facility, is hopeful that this will enable more farmers and artisans to undertake agro-processing and export oriented activities.

Mr. Moses Agyemang further explained that among other functions, the funds from the agricultural component of EDAIF are intended to finance the development and promotion of agriculture, related activities such as agro-processing, purchase of agricultural equipment as well as credit guarantees through designated financial institutions to persons in the agriculture and agro-processing sectors of the economy.

The Export Development and Investment Fund (EDIF) was established by Act 582 dated 4th October 2000 to provide financial resources for the development and promotion of the export trade in Ghana with no provision to support the agricultural sector.

Despite the fact that agriculture forms the back bone of Ghana's economy, for many years there was no fund in Ghana dedicated to supporting agriculture, which is considered by many financial institutions as one of the high risk sectors of the economy. Worst of all, there was very little awareness about the need to establish a fund to support the sector, and this led to a low investment drive in the agricultural sector. To address this challenge, the leadership of PEF sought the support



*EDAIF now supports Ghana's agro-processing sector:
Photo credit: <http://www.technoserve.org/blog/photo>*

of the BUSAC Fund to advocate the establishment of a national fund to support agricultural production in Ghana. With the support of DANIDA, USAID and the EU, the BUSAC Fund responded by providing an advocacy grant that enabled the leadership of PEF to engage officials of Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture on the need to establish a national fund to support agricultural production in Ghana.

Mr. Agyemang also pointed out that *"as a result of the advocacy action, the government indeed made allocation for an Agricultural Fund in the 2008 budget. Unfortunately the government could not implement it before it left office."*

"Upon assuming office in 2009, the new government bought the idea of creating an agricultural fund. Unfortunately, owing to financial constraints, they could not create a sole agricultural fund. However, an agriculture fund component was inculcated into the Export Development and Investment Fund (EDIF); hence it became EDAIF," he added.

Story: Ebenezer Kpentey, the BUSAC Fund



Watch video documentaries on the remarkable success story of six BUSAC Fund-sponsored grantees. Please click the links below to watch the grantee documentaries online:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaMewDA3EojnKE-KN3FUhdQ/feed>

<http://vimeo.com/channels/720677>

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Writers: Ebenezer H. Kpentey & Isaac Nongya

Editors: Charles Mawusi & BUSAC Fund Editorial Team

Designed by: Ebenezer H. Kpentey

Email: contact@busac.org

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