



Gladys Fawks (center) and employees

FIRST +

Financial Institution Resilience & STrengthening

February 2023

AHANTAMAN RURAL BANK PLC

Game Changer: A Mindset Shift to Small Business Finance

A case study from FIRST+, a CapitalPlus Exchange, Bank of Ghana, Ghana Microfinance Institutions Network, and Mastercard Foundation partnership



Gloria Andoh (right) and employees

Ahantaman Rural Bank has served Ghana’s Western Region for 40 years, expanding to 18 branches and four mobilization centers across the mining and agricultural communities in the region. In recent years, the Bank took advantage of high returns from profitable investments in financial instruments. But the Bank’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Benjamin Afful-Eshun, knew instinctively that the strong securities market would not last forever. He was ready for change.

“When the FIRST+ team proposed in March 2022 to improve our capacity to increase lending to MSMEs (micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises), I was motivated to take advantage of it,” stated Mr. Afful-Eshun. He championed the FIRST+ program to his Board, then personally took part in all technical interventions delivered by CapitalPlus Exchange (CapPlus) through the FIRST+ program. Under his leadership, the Bank’s dynamic and entrepreneurial management team fully committed itself to the entire transformation work plan co-developed with CapPlus.

Ahantaman Rural Bank is now a model for other banks on how to accelerate MSME lending through strong leadership, reinforced by accountability to the Board of Directors for the new direction. The CEO reallocated the Bank’s resources to adopt impactful new technologies and build staff skillsets to improve credit appraisals, portfolio management, and customer service. “FIRST+ more than exceeded my expectations – it is a game changer. It came at the right time for us,” asserts Mr. Afful-Eshun.

“COVID-19 hit us so hard, and I faced the difficult decision to lay off some of my workers. The loan provided the cushioning my business needed to keep my employees and even offer them a 25% pay increase.” – Gloria Andoh, First Gate Grocery

FIRST+ (Financial Institution Resilience and STrengthening)

The FIRST+ program is catalyzing systemic change to accelerate job creation in Ghana through small business growth powered by access to finance.

Through FIRST+, CapPlus applies an ecosystem development approach to address the underlying challenges that inhibit financial institutions’ lending to small businesses, partnering with them to change mindsets, implement proven methodologies and practices, and tailor financial services for women and youth with a focus on the agricultural sector.

CapPlus employs change management principles while bringing best-in-class expertise and systems to profitably increase lending to underserved small businesses, the largest creators of jobs in Ghana.

FIRST+ is led by CapitalPlus Exchange (CapPlus) in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, Bank of Ghana, and Ghana Microfinance Institutions Network (GHAMFIN) which offers group-based skills training on critically relevant topics to financial institutions, reinforcing the skills that CapPlus delivers in the field.





The Board is now confident we're doing the right appraisals and they increased the limit on loans that management can authorize without Board approval from 25,000 to 50,000 Ghana Cedis. That's an absolute winner for us – it helps us provide timely disbursements so businesses can grow." – Benjamin Afful-Eshun, CEO



It was a dramatic success – by the end of the year, the Bank's loan disbursements to the underserved agriculture and small business sector grew by 53% and loans to women business owners grew by 119%. CapPlus' tool for fast and accurate credit scoring and loan appraisals, the Integrated Creditworthiness Appraisal Model (iCAM), was customized for the Bank and quickly deployed to all 18 branches after a successful pilot. Understanding the importance of digitalization, Ahantaman Rural Bank stepped forward to be the pilot Bank for automating iCAM for further efficiency and expanded lending. Through a newly created Sales and Marketing Department, the Bank's highly motivated workforce is providing award-winning customer service using new skills learned through FIRST+.

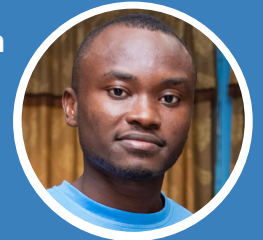
With renewed confidence in its risk management and MSME lending skills and processes, the Bank's Board decided in February 2023 to sell its securities investments and invest instead in accelerating its MSME lending. By refocusing on MSME lending – the real business for banks – Ahantaman Rural Bank became a market leader, not only among rural banks, but in the entire Ghanaian financial sector.



This job has helped me to be independent of my parents. I am also saving to further my studies at the nurses' training college." – Augustina Quayson, Accounts Officer



From starting a conversation with a customer to building a lasting relationship, the FIRST+ training taught me things that I did not learn in my Sales and Marketing course in the university." – Obed Asiamah, Branch Credit Officer and Winner, 2022 FIRST+ National Sales Champion Challenge



AHANTAMAN RURAL BANK 2022 IMPACT



14,066
MSME LOAN CUSTOMERS



21,940
TOTAL JOBS



11,778
JOBS HELD BY YOUTH



8,547
JOBS HELD BY FEMALE YOUTH



17,768
JOBS HELD BY WOMEN



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