

FIRST +

Financial Institution
Resilience & STrengthening

February 2023



WOMEN IN CHARGE OF THEIR ECONOMIC FUTURES

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



FIRST+ (Financial Institution Resilience and STrengthening)

FIRST+ 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 Bank of Ghana, Ghana Microfinance Institutions Network (GHAMFIN), and the Mastercard Foundation.

This story demonstrates the impact of FIRST+ on a woman entrepreneur and her business, enabling her to be financially independent, improving the quality of life of her employees and customers, and making her a role model for other women seeking economic empowerment.





Koforidua
(Eastern Region)



Loans for Women's Businesses Create Jobs and Increase Education for Youth



Lydia Awatey and her son Frederick

Lydia Awatey has an infectious smile which keeps her customers coming back. She began her Sosei Agro-Chemicals business with the dream of achieving financial stability for her family. For the past 20 years, her shop in Koforidua has been selling agro-chemicals and other agricultural inputs to farmers in neighboring villages, and Lydia has become a role model for other women seeking economic empowerment.

“I was a seamstress, but I was earning very little out of making dresses so my partner advised me to find a different business. After discussions with him, I decided to go with the agro-chemicals business.”

When Lydia first set up her shop, she ran into a roadblock until Akuapem Rural Bank came to her aid. “I started really small, four boxes of agro-chemicals

initially, but gradually sales got better. The company I was buying from gave me goods on credit but after a while they couldn't do that anymore. I did not have the cash to continue so I turned to Akuapem Rural Bank for support,” she recounts.



I am thankful for this business. It has empowered me financially since I do not have to depend on my husband for everything. Through it I can assist my husband in providing for our children. I have also supported some of my siblings through their secondary and tertiary education”

“The bank has really helped my business. I appreciate

their customer service and the patience they had to explain their operations. They told me that with the regular nature of my savings with them, I qualified for business loans.”

With the loans, Lydia can buy more goods to stock her shop and serve her community better. “Loans have helped me to expand. Because of that, my customers get everything they need in my shop—they don't need to buy a few items here and go looking elsewhere for the other things they need. It puts my business in a good place in their minds,” she notes. Lydia also protects her customers' health by ensuring that she sells quality and approved agri-inputs. “I make sure not to buy chemicals that are harmful to inhale. I am mindful of my health and the health of my customers.”

The loans also play a vital role in helping to sustain Lydia's business through the agricultural cycle. "It is important to mention that the agro-chemical business is seasonal. Sales peak around June, during the main rainy season in Ghana. During the dry season, there is a decline in sales."

When women-owned businesses have access to the right amount of finance at the right time, they can unlock opportunities to grow and generate much-needed jobs in their communities. That is why CapitalPlus Exchange (CapPlus) is working with Akuapem Rural Bank to strengthen the bank's systems, practices, and skills to significantly expand its small business lending – especially to women – as part of the FIRST+ (Financial Institution Resilience and Strengthening) program, implemented by CapPlus in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, GHAMFIN, and the Bank of Ghana.



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"In our 40 years as a bank serving rural communities, most of our clients have been women. When lending is targeted to women, it also benefits the rest of the family. As a rural bank, we want to impact the communities we work in, and empowering women is a sure way to reach everyone else in the family structure," Daniel Kwesi Mensah, credit manager of Akuapem Rural Bank, explains.

Today, Lydia is financially independent, her business is booming, and she has opened a second branch at Adowso, 115 km away. "I am thankful for this business. It has empowered me financially since I do not have to depend on my husband for everything. Through it I can assist my husband in providing for our children. I have also supported some of my siblings through their secondary and tertiary education."

Lydia's business is not only helping her achieve financial independence but is allowing

her to leave a legacy for the next generation. Her 27-year-old son, Frederick, is her business partner who joined the business after his university education. He keeps the books and helps with all the business' documentation.

Frederick dreams of a large business in the future that will unleash many job opportunities. "I am really proud of my mother. I am looking forward to expanding this business – I have a business plan that will set up more branches and employ more salespeople," Frederick says.

As a role model for other women in her community, Lydia believes that women must rethink how they see themselves. "Women who want to be entrepreneurs reach out to me for guidance. I tell them that men and women have the same capabilities, so as a woman you should be diligent and do what you can. Work hard for yourself, and strive to be independent so you can support your family."



LYDIA'S BUSINESS: AN INCREMENTAL PROGRESSION

2 ACCESS TO CREDIT

Lydia ran into a roadblock—her suppliers could no longer give her goods on credit—until Akuapem Rural Bank came to her aid. With loans, Lydia is able to make Sosei Agro-Chemicals a one-stop shop for her farmer customers. They get everything they need from her shop, and they are happy about her reliability.

1 SMALL BEGINNINGS

Like many successful business owners, Lydia started small with four boxes of agro-chemicals. She took goods on credit to stock her shop.

3 A LEGACY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Lydia's business is allowing her to leave a legacy for her 27-year-old son, Frederick, who joined the business after his university education. He keeps the books and helps with all the business's documentation. He dreams of a large business in the future that will unleash many job opportunities for young people.





We are using the capacity building assistance from FIRST+ to help our customers sustain their businesses and make sure they survive and retain jobs for the community,” says Daniel Kwesi Mensah, Akuapem Rural Bank’s Credit Manager, seen here inside the Bank headquarters in Mamfe.

“

I’m a role model for other women in the community. Women who want to be entrepreneurs reach out to me for guidance.

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Lydia Awatey

