



Innovation Brief

Pathways Program: The Talking Book

OVERVIEW The Talking Book is an audio computer device that has been integrated into select Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) groups in the upper East and West region of Ghana since May 2015 as part of the Pathways program. The Talking Book offers audio recordings on topics such as farming extension methods, improved agricultural practices, household gender relations, nutrition and marketing to support farmers in their livelihoods and improve gender dynamics. The messages take many forms ranging from interviews to songs that make listening more interesting and messages memorable.

CONTEXT

The Talking Book is particularly useful in the upper East and West region of Ghana due to the prevalence of small-scale subsistence farming, low literacy rates, and extreme poverty. According to the Government of Ghana's 2003 Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire Survey, the adult literacy rate in the region is 23 percent, and two fifths of households in the region have difficulty meeting their basic food requirements. The initiatives of CARE's Pathways program are therefore well aligned with the needs of community members in the region.

THE PARTNERSHIP

CARE Pathways in Ghana partnered with Literacy Bridge to introduce the Talking Book within VSLA groups pre-established by CARE. The Talking Book was intended to increase access to extension information for farmers especially, women farmers with varying literacy. Literacy Bridge provided an initial training on how to update content in the Talking Book for CARE field staff, and provides ongoing technical support for software updates and monitoring.

OBJECTIVES

The Talking Book is intended to enhance the lives of subsistence farmers by providing them with information pertaining to best practices in farming, nutrition, gender and marketing. If implemented, this information will facilitate increased crop yields, ensure household food security and increase agricultural profits. Besides this, the Talking Book's messages on gender issues facilitated equitable division of household activities between men and women. These messages also demonstrate the important contributions women make to the household.

“My husband used to take household decisions on his own without consulting me, but after I took the talking book home and we listened to the messages on gender, he has totally changed and now involves me in household decision making”

- Gariba Lucy, Barboaka

CORE ACTIVITIES

Initial training on recording messages for the Talking Book was conducted by Literacy Bridge with CARE field staff. Subsequently, CARE in collaboration with Literacy Bridge trained VSLA leaders, Community Based Extension Agents (CBEA), on how to use the technology. The CBEAs were then responsible for introducing the Talking Book to their respective VSLA groups and establishing the parameters for its use within the group. Use of the Talking Book is ongoing and has become an integral part of VSLA group meetings.

“I used to cultivate my crops and at the end of the season I could not tell if I was making profit or not because I did not keep records of my production cost, but after I had the opportunity to listen the talking book, I have learnt how to keep records of production and I can now calculate to determine whether I am making profit or not”

- Ananmo Abugbil, Tankpasi

INNOVATION

This technology is innovative for a variety of reasons. First, the messages are entirely audio based and recorded in local languages. This removes the barrier of illiteracy or lack of education in accessing crucial agriculture extension information. Additionally, the messages are fully adaptable to farmers' needs and requests. Individuals can record feedback onto the Talking Book regarding the messages heard. Finally, the messages are designed by CARE and Literacy Bridge for farmers in this region. This key feature of the design process ensures that recorded messages are culturally relevant and useful.

EVIDENCE of IMPACT

An evaluation of the pilot program conducted between May and August of 2016 confirmed the positive impacts of the Talking Book in pilot communities. All eight communities voiced their appreciation for the technology. The Talking Book was used continuously throughout the year and group rotation of the device was organized to enable community



members use the device at home. All communities reported changes in the sharing of household responsibility and stated that farming and marketing information was a useful to them in their decision-making. Communities also made requests for future messages regarding dry season farming methods, more gender related content, among many other topics of interest and concern to Pathways.



Want to learn more?

Check out the full study [here](#). Or look at the other Pathways information at www.care.org/pathways

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