INCREASING AWARENESS OF GHANA’S PLANTS AND FERTILIZER ACT

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In Assin North, Assin South and Gomoa East, training courses have been provided for farmers, extension agents and agrochemical dealers in an attempt to combat the misuse, abuse and misapplication of agrochemicals in Ghana’s central region. By increasing the awareness of different value chain participants about Ghana’s Plants and Fertilizer Act, the project has increased the capacity of participants to use and sell agrochemicals judiciously, which will safeguard human health and the environment.

Agricultural crop production in Ghana’s central region is facing problems of diseases, pest infestation, and decline in soil fertility, leading to low yields. In an attempt to fix poor soil fertility, farmers are applying fertilisers without adequate knowledge of the nature of the soil, the right fertiliser to use, the quantities to apply, and how to apply them safely. The sale of agrochemicals is on the increase and some distributors do not operate in accordance with the national regulations. As a result, there is gross misuse, abuse and misapplication of pesticides.

Between June and September 2016, a project was implemented in Assin North, Assin South and Gomoa East to improve the knowledge of farmers, extension agents and agrochemical dealers about Ghana’s 2010 Plants and Fertilizer Act (Act 803). Implemented by Roots Link Africa, and funded by Chemonics and the United States Agency for International Development’s Feed the Future initiative, the aim of the project was to reduce chemical abuse by commodity value chain actors in agriculture production by building the capacity of different stakeholders on the judicious sale and use of agrochemicals to safeguard human health and the environment.

Increasing awareness

Farmers in Gomoa East, Assin South and Assin North took part in a two-day training course where they were taught how to use pesticides judiciously. For example, farmers were taught about the types of pests and diseases that are common in the area, and about the specific chemicals that can be used to control or manage them. They were also asked to consider whether the pesticides were registered for use in Ghana and/or the European Union (EU) before purchasing a product. Farmers were shown how to do this by checking the Environmental Protection Agency registration numbers, hazard pictograms, the directions for use, storage and disposal, the different safety notes, date of manufacture, and the name of the manufacturer.

Information about applying pesticides safety generated interesting discussions as many farmers did not know they were harming themselves and the environment with the methods they were using to spray their fields. They were encouraged to use equipment that complies with safety standards and were taken through the steps for an effective management of pesticides. For example, participants were advised to buy quality sprayers, apply the correct dosage, check directions on labels, or contact an extension officer if they could not read. Participants were also advised to spray in the cool period of the day, i.e. early in the morning and late evening, so that the dew could help to distribute the chemicals deeper into the canopy. They were also told about the importance of ensuring that no unprotected person or animal entered a sprayed area.
for the correct amount of time afterwards. The toxicity of certain chemicals, and how the colours of labels indicated this, was also explained.

On the second day, farmers were introduced to soil and plant nutrients. Facilitators explained about nutrient removal, deficiency symptoms, the importance of soil testing, soil pH, and type of fertilisers to apply depending on the pH level. Farmers were then taken to agro-input shops so they could examine the different types of fertilisers and pesticides, look at the labels and instructions on the containers, and get advice on the types of pesticides to use for particular purposes. A total of 134 flyers on the judicious use of agrochemicals were also distributed to participants.

Participants admitted that before the workshop they had a deficit in knowledge about the use of pesticides. Topics most appreciated were the exclusion periods after spraying, the need to avoid smoking, drinking and eating during spraying, the use of protective clothing and the importance of washing oneself thoroughly immediately after spraying.

(a) Extension agents, teachers and students
In Assin North, a separate one-day workshop was organised for 52 participants (43 men and 9 women), including extension agents and some teachers and students from the high schools which offer agricultural programmes. Facilitators outlined the five parts of the 803 Act, but focused on the first three. Part One (plant protection) aims to prevent the introduction and spread of plant pests, and regulate the import and facilitate the export of plants and plant materials. Participants were told about the importance of obtaining permits and following regulatory processes before importing or exporting plants, the examination by inspectors, the requirement to conform with the International Plant Protection Convention, and the risk of spreading plant pests through the export of plant materials. Participants were also told about the functions of the Plant Protection and Regulatory Services Directorate (PPRSD).

Part Two (seeds) was explained in detail: the regulation and monitoring of the export and import of seeds, and their commercial transactions, were discussed with participants. The importance of acquiring a license before operating as seed importer, exporter or grower
was also explained, as was the application process, conditions of registration and non-transferability of registration. Different categories of locally produced seeds, the different types of tag (white for basic seed, blue for first generation certified seeds, and red for second generation certified seeds and hybrid seeds) and the need to tag seeds before distributing or retailing them were discussed. In addition to being told that locally-produced seeds had to be certified before they could be sold, participants were also given information about regulations surrounding labelling and packaging of seeds, and offences and penalties of not conforming with the regulations.

Part Three (fertiliser control) focuses on the provision for control and regulation of fertilisers. The types of fertilisers highlighted included inorganic fertilisers, organic fertilisers and bio-fertilisers. Participants also received information about the registration and licensing of fertilisers.

(b) Input dealers
A 3-day workshop was organised for 39 input dealers in Assin North (16), Assin South (12) and Gomoa East (11). The workshop focused on Part Two (seeds) and Part Three (fertiliser control) of the Act. The inputs dealers were told about the purpose of regulating and monitoring all commercial transactions in seeds, and how they needed to register before they could operate as seed importers, exporters or growers. Participants were also made to understand the importance of sampling and testing in accordance with the rules of the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA). Tagging and identification of seeds, labelling of seed packages, and offences and penalties were also covered.

Regarding part three (fertiliser control), participants were told about the processes they had to go through before they could import, manufacture or distribute fertilisers in commercial quantities. As well as informing participants about how to properly store fertilisers in their shops and warehouses, facilitators also highlighted four ‘don’ts’ (mislabelling, adulteration, short weight, and harmful substances that may be included in fertilisers) and informed participants about offences and penalties under the Act.

On the third day of the workshop, participants were asked to observe practices in an input shop to enable them to distinguish between good and bad practices, and be able to apply good practices accordingly. Some of the poor practices identified included a lack of protective clothing being worn, no labelling of local seeds, exposure of some chemicals to the sun and no display of banned chemicals.

(c) Police and immigration officers
A three-day training workshop was also held for police and immigration officers in Assin North, Assin South and Gomoa East to enable them to identify people who have broken the law and act as a deterrent, helping to inspect chemicals, and reduce importation of adulterated chemicals and seeds on the market.

What were the results?
As a result of the workshops, farmers were able to demonstrate a greater understanding of agrochemical applications for pests and diseases, as well as improved knowledge and skills in soil testing and fertiliser application. Participant’s knowledge about the Act, how to handle agrochemicals, and how to monitor the compliance of input dealers has also improved. In the long-term, abuse of agrochemicals should therefore be reduced. Input dealers have also improved their compliance with the law in the distribution and sale of agrochemicals and seeds.

One of the agricultural extension agents who took part in the training workshops was Madam Catherine. “I can confidently say that I now have the know-how on the handling of agrochemicals and the right ones to recommend to farmers who are in need of agrochemicals,” Catherine explained. “I think the impact is great because extension officers and farmers work hand-in-hand, and applying the right dosage of agrochemicals to crops has enhanced farmers’ production, improved crop yields and reduced abuse of agrochemicals to a minimum.”

Knowledge of the Plant and Fertilizer Act needs to be spread across the remaining districts.
Nevertheless, although the workshops were a success, participants did identify a number of factors that limited their ability to implement the Act. Farmers were concerned about the high cost of protective clothing, and about the low levels of literacy which made reading information on containers difficult (especially where there are no extension officers). Other challenges identified by the different stakeholders were the low numbers of extension officers to help disseminate knowledge and technologies to farmers, the lack of logistical support for extension officers to reach remote farmers, and the low levels of inspectors to support the police.

To enhance the ability of farmers to use appropriate spraying methods and identify fake seeds and fertilisers, knowledge of the Plants and Fertilizer Act (803) needs to be spread across the remaining districts, in the central and western regions. Strategies that could be used to disseminate this information include the use of radio programmes, community sensitisation programmes, school fora and face-to-face training of farmers, input dealers, law enforcement agencies, students, teachers and agricultural extension agents.

The government is not currently running a training programme in this regard, but with additional funding, Roots Link Africa would be willing to embark on similar programmes across the country.

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