

Report to Haine & Smith Charitable Trust
ATE Progress Report on Blind Dry Season Farmers – Jan 2017

Background

In Ghana, disabled people face a wide range of challenges and barriers which limits their participation in many activities and are marginalised, often regarded as cursed, less/incapable of being productive and seen as a burden on society. Disabled people have poorer health status, less economic participation and higher levels of poverty than people without disabilities (Lawra District Assembly, 2013). These are perceptions and circumstances which ATE is working in partnership with the local community in Lawra to change. Amongst the population in Lawra District, 2,568 (4.7%) are disabled, and sight-related disability is the highest recorded form of disability at 50.9% of the disabled population (Population and Housing Census, 2010).

In Lawra, 83% of the population are engaged in subsistence farming. The climate is characterised by a single rainy season (May to September) and a long dry season from October to the end of April. Over the years soils have become poor and changing patterns of rainfall have had a negative effect on crop production worsening the populations' economic situation (Ministry of Agriculture, Where the Rain Falls). Currently people in Lawra experience 5 months of dire food insecurity each year during which many households can afford just one meal a day (World Food Programme, 2012) or in some areas as little as just four meals per week (ATE baseline monitoring in Gombele village, Nov 2016).

Dry season gardening or farming, which refers to labour-intensive crop production during the dry season by planting drought resistant crops or employing moisture enhancing techniques, can be used to improve soil quality, increase water retention and grow crops all year round. By engaging blind people in this activity, some of the poorest and most marginalised individuals in the community will benefit from inclusion in economic activity, and their households will benefit from improved food security and nutrition, whilst challenging some deep-seated negative perceptions about disability.



Baazing blind dry season farming group

With the generous support of the Haine and Smith Charitable Trust, ATE launched the dry season gardening project in November 2016. ATE selected and trained 4 groups of dry season farmers with the support of the leader of the Blind Association for Lawra District.

The grant of £250 from Haine and Smith contributed towards approximately £700 (3500 Ghc) of equipment for the Baazing blind dry season farmers group to enable them to start dry season gardening in their community. The group is made up of 32 active members, a high proportion of whom are blind, located in Baazing which is in a remote location, at least a 45 minute motorbike ride from town. Equipment included a pump, hosepipe, wheelbarrow, watering cans, mattocks (shovels), rakes and fencing.

The group got to work in December 2016 once they had received their grant and the equipment it paid for. They have created their dry season garden and planted a variety of crops of beans, pumpkins, cucumbers, garden eggs (aubergines), and watermelons to name a few which are growing very well.

In the early stages of set up, an ATE representative has visited the group on a fortnightly basis in order to check progress, monitor the maintenance of equipment and mentor the group through any challenges arising, for example providing support with the instructions for the use of the pump.



ATE's Chair of trustees, Charles Gardner, visited the group and their neat, abundant garden with its raised edges, brimming with crops last week. He was hugely impressed with the progress they have made, how capable and well-organised they are with an incredibly motivating and experienced, blind leader, Clement Kanzung. The progress and success so far is fantastically evident as the garden is a lush, dramatic presence of green vegetation within the arid, hard ground that surrounds it.

The group are incredibly grateful for the support, which with their hard work has ensured that crops are growing in an area and at a time of year when they otherwise would not. They now have a second growing season which will make a significant impact on their household nutrition. The water source they have is estimated to last until April, by which time it is hoped that the rains will not be far behind. The group are ambitious, incredibly self-motivated and already keen to apply for a re-grant to expand their dry season garden, to increase their yield, in order to support themselves and their families with food all year round.



Thank you!