



ATE Business Development Programme (BizATE) Evaluation January 2016



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Executive Summary

The ATE Business Programme Changes Lives

“There were many negatives in life, now I am self-reliant and able to provide for the family and solve my own problems”

In January 2016, Action Through Enterprise (ATE) conducted a formal evaluation of the ATE business programme (BizATE) in Lawra District, Upper West Region, Ghana, funded by the Commercial Education Trust (CET) to review and analyse its effectiveness, identify how to improve it and develop a forward plan that will impact more people more effectively.

The major conclusions of the evaluation are extremely encouraging and helpful in developing ATE’s plans for the future. ATE recognizes that some Small Business Owners (SBOs) may have felt the need to be positive in their comments. Efforts have been made to take any bias out of the results. The key conclusions are as follows:

- Average SBO income has increased since working with ATE from GH¢ 52 per month to GH¢ 163 per month (£9.60 to £30), making a really significant difference to their lives and meaning that the average annual return on the ATE grants is 185%. ATE considers this rate to be sustainable.
- SBOs really appreciated and understood the impact that the BizATE programme has made on their lives. All SBOs (except two) describe their lives as having changed extremely positively. For example:

“Before was very miserable. Now my living standard improved, and I can now enable my family to get their daily bread” (SBO 5)

“Life was not easy, I had to hide from people I owed money to, and do all sorts of dirty jobs, I had to beg, I had responsibilities as a mother I could not do fulfill for my children. Now my life is life successful, I settled debts, I am now positive in my life. There were many negatives in life, now I am self-reliant and able to provide for the family and solve my own problems” (SBO 28)

- The Lawra based ATE consultants (educated, local people who are literate in English & Dagaare and work for ATE as and when required and available) have found the experience of working with ATE a very positive developing and learning experience.
- The BizATE programme should be rolled out to other districts initially within Lawra District.
- The BizATE programme can and should be refined and enhanced going forward including in the following ways:
 - More and enhanced monitoring of the SBOs
 - More training and more local training providers. The training plan should be a blend of local based, Ghanaian and international trainers.
 - More efficient screening of candidate SBO’s in the pre-grant stage
 - Using interest free loans where appropriate
 - Larger grants where the opportunity is clear and secure
 - The development of an Association of SBOs
 - Develop an apprenticeship scheme
 - Develop a dry season farming scheme

ATE is now working on plans to incorporate these enhancements into the programme.

ATE’s BizATE programme in Lawra District, Upper West Region, Ghana is based on identifying and working with potential SBOs from the vulnerable parts of the community who are in need of assistance, granting the successful candidates then providing ongoing mentoring and training to

help the SBOs through the many challenges of setting up a new business in this challenging environment. At the time of the survey ATE had granted 48 SBOs (now that has increased to 56). 40 of the SBOs were included in the evaluation. A couple of the SBOs are no longer in business (one has died), the rest were out of area at the time of the evaluation.

The evaluation received generous funding from the Commercial Education Trust (CET) which enabled ATE to make the evaluation really rigorous. The team included an independent evaluator (Dr. Nick Maurice) as well as a dedicated ATE team both Lawra-based and UK-based. The evaluation activities included one-on-one interviews and written surveys covering 40 of ATE's existing Small Business Owners (SBOs) and 31 of ATE's Lawra-based consultants, 4 days of workshops attended by SBOs and consultants, training and many on-site visits to the Small Business Owners.



Figure 1: Akose, a BizATE-supported Small Business Owner visited by project evaluators at Lawra Market

The Brief

Objective

A thorough analysis and review of the effectiveness of ATE's small business development programme which will inform ATE's strategy to expand its scope and impact more beneficiaries more effectively.

Project Evaluation Outcomes

- A comprehensive review of the current BizATE program in Lawra District
- A detailed plan for expansion of BizATE in Lawra District
- A detailed feasibility plan for BizATE to be replicated in further districts in the Upper West Region of Ghana
- This evidence is required in order to raise substantive funds for ATE to roll out its work in subsequent districts

Confidentiality

Responses to surveys and points raised during discussions in workshops as well as during visits to ATE-supported businesses, as documented in this report and its appendices, have been provided without any identifying information. This is in order to maintain the confidentiality of the ATE-supported Small Business Owners and the ATE Consultants who freely took part in this project evaluation.

The Evaluation Team

Dr Nick Maurice – Independent Evaluator

Advised and worked alongside the Chair of Trustees throughout the evaluation process and wrote an independent report included here on p.12-15

Nick is an experienced NGO and community development professional. His key experience includes working on a community development programme in the Gambia for 30 years which includes a business development programme.

Charles Gardner – BizATE Project Evaluation Manager and author of this report.

Led the BizATE evaluation process; development of surveys and delivery plan, and worked with local trainers on the delivery of the key workshops; analysed the data, collated findings and recommendations.

Charles is an ATE volunteer and Chair of Trustees with particular focus on the BizATE Programme. He is very experienced in working internationally with small and large businesses in strategy development, coaching and people development.

Gabriel Maanibe – Core BizATE Evaluation Team Member

Advised the evaluation project team leader in developing the evaluation process in the Lawra context and played a key role in its delivery.

Gabriel is an ATE volunteer and Chief Consultant based in Lawra, where he is from, with a degree in Development and experience in working on development programmes in the area.

Many other people had important roles in delivering the evaluation including:

Based in Lawra

- **Habib Albeboure** – ATE Ghana Operations Manager - participated in the development of the evaluation process, coordinated the training and led the consultants in delivery of the surveys, and facilitated SBO visits.
- **Team of 31 ATE Consultants** – participated in the development of the surveys, and delivery of the process, working side by side with SBOs, scribing and translating at workshops.

Based in the UK with some work in Lawra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sarah Gardner – ATE Chief Executive – provided oversight and support in the evaluation process on the ground in Lawra. ▪ Leela Shanti – ATE Operations & Fundraising Officer – edited and formatted this report and related appendices. ▪ Sarah Thompson – ATE Volunteer – provided support in the evaluation process including data entry.
Based in the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Karen Gardner – ATE Volunteer and Market Research specialist. Provided advice on the evaluation process, particularly surveys.

Foreword on the value of the Evaluation Process

The two-week BizATE evaluation process was an intensive, extremely valuable opportunity for learning and reflection which included collaborative planning meetings, formal surveys of ATE-supported small business owners and consultants, a two-day Evaluating Success and peer-learning workshop, and Evaluation Team debriefing sessions.

It has given ATE cause to further appreciate the extremely dedicated, knowledgeable staff and body of volunteer consultants that we have. The collaborative way of working on this evaluation between international volunteers and specialist advisers in partnership with local staff and volunteers proved extremely successful – it provided opportunity to enrich the process with local knowledge, fostered local buy-in and further promoted local leadership and ownership of the work ATE delivers.

ATE’s approach to the BizATE evaluation process, listening to different members of the wider ATE team, particularly to local voices in Lawra, has led to an incredibly thorough and meaningful process for ATE as an organisation. It has helped ATE capture and better understand the positive impact that the programme is having on the lives of people in Lawra, and has enabled ATE to draw together some fantastic improvements and recommendations which ATE are already implementing and exploring.

The learning that ATE has taken from this evaluation process will not only inform ATE’s strategy for the BizATE programme going forward, but also the delivery of evaluations of ATE’s other projects and programmes; in particular, the forthcoming evaluation of the Special Needs Awareness Programme (SNAP) in June 2016.

ATE is extremely grateful to the Commercial Education Trust (CET) for the funding which has made this process possible.

Background Information

About Action Through Enterprise

Action Through Enterprise (ATE) is a small but growing, dynamic charity, founded in 2012. It is one of the only charities working with communities in Lawra District, in a remote corner of Upper West Ghana. Our mission is to reduce poverty in Upper West Ghana through education, enterprise and social change. To achieve this goal ATE delivers three core programmes:

BizATE	Enables small business owners to gain new skills and make greater profits to sustainably support themselves and their families
EducATE	Improves attendance of hundreds of school children through the provision of free school meals, basic school provisions and health insurance
Special Needs Awareness	Enables families with disabled children to overcome isolation and discrimination by providing social, educational and material support

We believe in the power of working in partnership with local people to enable them to thrive, to promote economic development and improve the quality of life for all people in Lawra District and the surrounding areas.



Where we work: The context of Lawra District, Upper West, Ghana

Lawra is a rural district situated in the Upper West; the region with the highest poverty incidence in Ghana. Lawra is home to 54,899 people. 83% of the working population are subsistence farmers though food production is low, worsened by climatic change, whilst food prices continue to rise. People in Lawra District experience chronic food shortages during 'the lean season' - months during which many families can only afford one meal per day. The adult literacy rate is just 19% (four times lower than the national average). Against the odds, people in Lawra are striving to provide for their families, to live with dignity and enable their children to reach their full potential.

ATE's Business Development Programme: BizATE

Since December 2012, ATE has supported 48 Small Business Owners (SBOs) through the BizATE programme (not counting 3 who could not continue beyond the early stages). SBOs are selected from vulnerable parts of the community via an application process, provided with training and granted financial support to kick start a small business. BizATE supports a range of small business owners including seamstresses, weavers, mechanics, carpenters, petty market traders, snack sellers, clothing retailers, soap makers and electricians. SBOs sign up to terms of support which cover the period of one year and are monitored on a monthly basis throughout. Below is a brief outline of the four key stages of the BizATE programme:

Stage 1: Pre Grant process, Business Plan Developed, Grant Made

Applicants indicate interest, their application is reviewed, if approved they sign a contract with ATE, are supported to complete a business plan, receive an agreed grant and their initial spending is monitored.

Stage 2: Monthly meetings for one year

SBOs are visited by an ATE employee / trained ATE Consultant at least once a month to monitor and support progress in line with the contract

Stage 3: Training & Evaluation workshops

SBOs attend 2 day training workshops every 6 months to develop business skills, and evaluate and share successes and challenges

Stage 4: Ongoing Review

Review of SBOs beyond one year is ad-hoc, and SBOs receive ongoing invitations to attend the 6 monthly workshops

Method

Overview

The method was based on a two week visit to Lawra by Dr. Nick Maurice, Charles Gardner, Sarah Gardner and Sarah Thompson in January 2016 preceded by agreement of the method with the Commercial Education Trust (CET) and various planning meetings.

The method was designed to ensure that:

- The perspective and needs of all stakeholders and beneficiaries in Lawra District were fully understood and taken into account
- The team fully reviewed all stages of the current BizATE process
- The team received both formal (surveys) and informal inputs (SBO visits and discussions)
- The experience, skill and local knowledge of the team was fully utilised
- The socio-economic and geographical context of Lawra District was understood and taken into account

Surveys

Two formal surveys were carried out.

The SBO Survey

- To gather information to understand the impact of the BizATE programme on beneficiaries' income, consumption and ability to make life choices.
- 37 interviews (covering 40 of the SBOs) were conducted in the local languages by the 31 ATE consultants (as the majority of SBOs in Lawra District cannot read or write in the local language, Dagaare, and do not speak English). Responses were then recorded on the survey forms by the consultants in English.
- The consultants are literate local people who have achieved senior high school education, some also have higher education diplomas, and all have been trained in surveying by ATE. A high proportion of consultants (40%) are either teachers or nurses.
- The survey forms were processed into the master file by the ATE BizATE Evaluation team together with the Independent Evaluator.

The Consultant Survey

- To understand the impact the BizATE program has had on ATE's business consultants.
- The surveys were completed by the 31 ATE consultants in a workshop environment, moderated by the ATE BizATE Evaluation team.
- The survey forms were processed into the master file by the ATE BizATE team together with the Independent Evaluator.

Business Visits

More than 50% of the SBOs were visited in their work locations, as a representative sample by Dr Nick Maurice and Charles Gardner (some were visited together and some separately). All SBOs were met by the Evaluation team and worked with at the Evaluating Success Conference.

Workshops

Various workshops were delivered as part of the process and enabled listening, debate and discussion that was invaluable in developing a full understanding of the context in which the BizATE programme is implemented as well as its impacts.

Planning Meeting

To ensure the ATE team fully understood the BizATE Evaluation Project purpose and plan, to review and develop the plan together, to review the objectives, agenda and materials for the Consultant Briefing and Training Workshop and to review the SBO Survey questions and method.

Consultant Briefing and Training Workshop

To enable the consultants to carry out the SBO Survey consistently and to high standard, to fully brief the project to the Consultants, to ensure everybody understood their role and responsibilities in the project.

Consultants Debrief Survey

To ensure the results of each survey are recorded clearly and effectively for use, to make sure that the processing of the results of the survey can be written into a clear and easy to read report, to receive feedback relevant to the rest of the BizATE Evaluation Project and to enable successful completion of the survey.

Consultant Survey Workshop

For the consultants to complete the Consultant Survey in order to gather information on the impact that the BizATE program has had on ATE's consultants, to make sure the survey provides detail to enable ATE to analyse the competencies, development and life-benefits gained by ATE's consultants as a result of their roles in the BizATE process.

Evaluating Success Conference (for Small Business Owners)

A two-day conference attended by all SBOs and consultants. The aim was to, a) gather information on the impact and outcomes of each aspect of the BizATE programme, and the ability of beneficiaries to run their small businesses, b) to enhance the effectiveness of the SBOs through training in business skills against the ATE Competency Matrix, and c) to further build the BizATE network of mutual peer support.

Core Team Workshop

To review and discuss the results of the project ensuring the experience and perspectives of all core team members is taken into account



Figure 2: Group work at the Evaluating Success Conference

Key Conclusions

The financial return on the ATE grant investment is 185% per annum

- Based on an average grant of GH¢ 721 given to a small business owner (SBO) and an average SBO annual income increase of GH¢ 1,333, the average annual return is 185%. ATE considers it likely that this percentage will increase (Source: SBO Survey results).
- The return on the total investment by ATE (covering the total process from initial candidate screening through business plan development, monitoring, training and oversight) is lower – This is to be explored further.

The BizATE Programme makes a significant impact on the SBOs lives

- The BizATE programme has made a really significant impact on the lives of the SBOs and their dependents (212 of the 40 SBOs surveyed) (Source: SBO Survey results)
- The average monthly SBO income has increased from GH¢ 52 per month to GH¢ 163 per month (GH¢ 624 to GH¢ 1957 per year) (Source: SBO Survey results)
- With two exceptions (SBO 13 & 25), all SBOs describe their lives as having changed extremely positively. For example: “Before was very miserable”. Now “Living standard improved, now enable my family to get their daily bread” (SBO 5)

SBOs spend their increased income on the basic necessities of life

- The SBOs biggest areas of increased expenditure have been on food, clothes and school fees / books. 100% are purchasing items now that they were not before, including meat (21%, n.10/37), school fees & books (38%, n.14/37) and health insurance (38%, n.14/37) (Source: SBO Survey results).

The consultants have been positively impacted by the BizATE Programme

- All consultants indicate that working with ATE has been a positive learning experience. Business skills, problem solving, planning, communication skills and poverty reduction are the most often referenced areas of learning / skills developed (Source: Consultant Survey results)
- The majority of consultants (all but 3 out of 31) report that working for ATE is a positive experience in a variety of different ways enabling them to feel better about themselves and enhance their job prospects. (Source: Consultant Survey results)



Figure 3: The team of ATE Consultants with Sarah Gardner, CEO & Charles Gardner, Trustee

Recommendations

The BizATE Programme should be rolled out to other districts

The impact on SBOs and the local economy is beneficial, significant and sustainable. ATE has the people, resources, process and will to roll out the programme to other locations – initially to 8 hubs around Lawra.

The BizATE programme should be refined and enhanced going forward

Various activities to improve the effectiveness of BizATE have emerged during the survey. These activities vary in impact and practicality. The proposed ATE plan to move forward on these activities is covered in Execution Plan section of this report (see p.18).

The activities include:

- More and enhanced monitoring of the SBOs. Monthly monitoring visits to SBOs to continue beyond one year and be carried out by trained, dedicated ATE staff and/or consultants.
- More involvement of the consultants in the design and execution of the monitoring including monitoring forms and surveys for SBOs.
- More training. The SBOs and consultants value the training that they receive. The training plan should be more focused, in smaller groups and receive greater investment.
- Local training providers. The training planning and delivery should include more local based, Ghanaians working with the support of international trainers
- Enhanced and more efficient screening of candidate SBOs in the pre-grant stage
- Interest free loans. Some SBOs are considered for receiving a 2nd grant. Where this is the case an interest free loan should be one of the options so as to drive commitment and recycle scarce funds.
- The consideration of larger grants where the opportunity is clear and secure so as to have a greater impact
- Develop an apprenticeship scheme
- Dry season gardening emerged on a number of occasions during the evaluation as a real opportunity that ATE should enable through the BizATE process to enable SBO's to develop
- The consideration of facilitating the development of an Association of Small Business Owners in Lawra that meets regularly to discuss issues, successes and act as a self-support group

Independent Report

An Independent Report for CET from Dr Nick Maurice on the ATE Business Development Programme in Lawra District, Upper West Region, Ghana

This report follows a two week visit to Lawra and the ATE programme from 10th-23rd January 2016 by Nick Maurice who had been invited to evaluate ATE's Small Business Programme (BizATE). He was accompanied by Charles Gardner, Chair of ATE's Board of Trustees, and Sarah Gardner, Chief Executive of ATE. The reflections / recommendations contained within this report should be seen in the context of: 1) this was Nick Maurice's first visit to Lawra, and 2) he has been working on a community development programme in The Gambia for the past 30 years which includes a business development programme.

The environment in which ATE is working

A superficial and in some cases closer observation of the conditions under which many people are living in Lawra District, particularly in the rural areas around the town of Lawra itself made it quite clear that there is considerable deprivation with lack of access to electricity and running water and in some cases water supplies consisting of boreholes and pumps or streams as far as 2-3 km away, putting considerable pressure on households. Likewise there are high levels of illiteracy amongst the adult population. In the rural areas the main source of income appeared to be through groundnut farming during the rainy season (May - October) providing the main source of food for the rest of the year.

We were told that during the colonial era in the 1950s the President to be, Dr Kwame Nkrumah was seen as a political activist and was imprisoned in Lawra (his 12' by 10' cell is there to be seen) for 21/2 months and following his escape and having received no support from the people of Lawra, he 'cast a spell' of permanent poverty on the people of Lawra, a belief which still holds in some quarters and which is said to have acted as an impediment to development and contributed to the poverty in the area.

The BizATE Programme

Background

It is clear that the BizATE programme and the giving of grants to very poor members of the community who are the owners of small businesses (SBOs) is making a significant difference to their lives as well documented by the research carried out by the 31 ATE-trained Consultants through the survey conducted on Thursday 14 January 2016 (see appendices).

To date, some 49 small businesses have been awarded grants and plans are in place for a further batch of small businesses to be supported in the next 2 months. The grants given out range from 150 cedis up to 1,950 cedis (equal to approximately £27 up to £350).

A number of SBOs were visited and interviewed during the 2 weeks that Nick Maurice was in Lawra. These included petty market traders selling sugar, flour, bananas; seamstresses; weavers; a mechanic; a groundnut farmer; and a retailer in electrical goods.



Figures 4, 5 & 6: SBOs visited by the Independent Evaluator; a mechanic, a petty trader and a seamstress

General observations

These are genuinely small businesses making average profits of 93 Ghanaian Cedis per month (a min. of 7 Ghc to a max. of 420 Ghc) which is an approximate monthly average profit of £17 per month, but in each case the grant had enabled them to broaden the business.

There were opportunities to consult with individuals and groups at consultant workshops before and after the survey had been carried out. This was in addition to a workshop with the consultants alone at which the impact of their work with ATE on them as individuals was discussed.

Two workshops were held for SBOs working with Consultants from which much of the information for this report was gained.

Arising from these discussions and observations the following reflections are made:

Every effort is made to ensure that the small businesses are profitable through:

- 1) Analysis of and support for the business plans before the grant is given
- 2) Regular visits by ATE staff and consultants
- 3) Attendance by small business owners at training sessions organised by ATE
- 4) A survey of the businesses conducted by consultants

However, it was difficult to assess how truly successful the businesses are.

The levels of observed activity on random or in some cases planned visits were often low, reflecting conditions under which the SBOs are operating with many conflicting demands on their time not least family commitments.

Challenges SBOs face as raised and discussed at workshops included:

- Demands by the family
- Lack of office space and accommodation for the businesses
- Lack of resources in the form of technical support
- The cost of travel to neighbouring towns to acquire goods for sale.

The majority of the SBOs are illiterate and therefore not in a position to keep accurate records of income / expenditure despite the survey by consultants indicating positive benefits, and successes reported by the SBOs at a workshop.

Successes reported by SBOs without exception were:

- An increase in profits and in purchasing power
- An increase in demand
- Increased customer satisfaction

These successes were reported by SBOs as resulting in:

- Support for family income
- Sorting out family financial problems / clearing of debts
- Ability to pay school fees
- Paying for health insurance and health care
- Expansion of the business
- Improved self confidence and standing in the community

Other findings from the SBO survey:

- SBOs have savings in a variety of saving schemes: Banks (Lawra Rural Bank, Ghana National Bank, Group Nandom Bank), Mobile money services and susus (informal credit unions) – sometimes using more than one service provider
- Savings ranged from 200 cedis (£40) to 2,000 cedis (£400)

While some very specific figures on savings were recorded from verbal discussions in the survey, we had not asked to see bank account statements as evidence to back these claims.

It was also made clear by the consultants in a discussion about possibly giving loans, either in addition to grants or instead of grants, that they felt that loans would be a better indicator of true business development and would encourage greater dedication and hard work in order to keep up with the repayment schedules. It was considered thus that loans would improve the chances of success of the business, whereas grants could not currently achieve that depth of monitoring. Nevertheless it is clear that grants are appropriate as a 'start up' and loans could be the next stage of support.

The SBO survey also provided opportunities for the individual SBOs to advise ATE on the way forward.

Suggestions made by SBOs to ATE included:

- An association of SBOs should be formed which meets regularly and where successes and issues can be shared
- Provide more and larger grants
- Employ more consultants to provide more frequent supervision of SBOs and their businesses
- More frequent training sessions should be provided for SBOs
- Provide an ATE Business Training Centre
- ATE should expand to other districts

In Summary

There is no doubt from superficial observation of living conditions, including lack of access to nearby water for those living in the more rural areas, that the majority of the people receiving grants come from extremely deprived families with high levels of illiteracy and there is a strong argument for continuing to provide more vulnerable people with grants in the hopes that this will provide sustainable incomes through business development.

But perhaps less expectation should be laid on the success of those businesses and it should be appreciated that any money given will not be wasted and will in any event improve the life chances of the recipients of the grants.

Loans versus Grants

In a workshop with the 31 consultants there was overwhelming support for the proposal that in future loans should be given to small business owners in addition to grants.

Arguments raised in favour of loans:

- Greater opportunity for the businesses to grow
- Recipients will take their businesses more seriously and will be more committed.
- Proper records will have to be kept as the loans are repaid
- There is a greater chance of profit
- There is the opportunity to give the money to other small businesses once the loan has been repaid and expand the business programme to other areas.

Suggested challenges to introducing loans:

- Businesses would need to be properly assessed on the likelihood of success before the loan would be given
- The ability to repay the loan - the business might collapse or the beneficiary might suffer ill health or die
- Interest rates might scare off potential small business owners
- The need for bank accounts for the individual recipients of loans may present problems

Independent Evaluator's Recommendations for the BizATE Programme

1. ATE should seriously consider giving interest free loans in addition to grants. The practicalities of this should include:
 - a) Loans should only be given to existing businesses on production of a business plan and which on careful analysis by a consultant is considered to have a great chance of success.
 - b) Recipients of loans must provide a guarantor who will sign a document to the effect that in the event of defaulting in loan repayment, he/she guarantees to pay the remainder of the debt.
 - c) A small fee should be paid by the recipient before the loan is given out but the loan itself will be interest free.
 - d) A public award ceremony should be held for the recipients of loans so that others are aware that he/she has been awarded the loan thus introducing an element of pride / shame once the loan is repaid / there is defaulting in the repayments.
 - e) It should be made clear to recipients of grants that, in the event that after a set period e.g. one or two years, their business is deemed successful they will qualify for a larger loan, thus encouraging greater commitment and the further success of their business.
 - f) There should be a two month "grace period" before the monthly repayments start.
 - g) It should also be made clear to recipients of loans that they will be providing a service to others by repaying the loan on time so that the money can be passed on to other SBOs.
 - h) Recipients of loans should have a bank account.
 - i) In this context, and given that savings with banks appear to present difficulties in Lawra, ATE might consider running a savings scheme / credit union in which capital accumulated by both grantees and the recipients of loans could be invested.
2. As recommended by SBOs and consultants, the Small Business Programme should be rolled out to include other communities in the district. These communities can best be described as "hubs" and a new hub might be included every six months.
3. In order to provide the required support for and monitoring of the increasing numbers of SBOs more consultants will need to be employed on a permanent, part-time basis with a clear contract and job description.
4. More training in business management will be required both for the consultants and the SBOs.
5. ATE should explore the possibility of employing local trainers who are already in established businesses.
6. ATE should facilitate but not control the development of an Association of Small Business Owners in Lawra that meets regularly to discuss challenges and successes.

NM 28.01.16

Review of current BizATE program by stage

This is a review of the existing process – many of the development points identified in previous sections are included. Some previous points fall outside the process and are not included.

Stage 1: Pre Grant process, Business Plan Developed, Grant Made

- Availability of BizATE is publicised within the district through ATE schools, the ATE Special Needs Programme (SNAP) and by word of mouth.
- Candidates indicate interest to ATE
- ATE team makes an assessment of the applicant's suitability – focusing on honesty, need, commitment to work hard through on-site visits and community checks
- Successful candidates complete an initial application form with assistance from ATE
- Application forms are reviewed by the ATE BizATE team (Ghana and UK based)
- Successful candidates are invited to a 'How to Complete a Business Plan Workshop' where expectations of candidates and ATE are fully set, candidates' skills are developed and candidates' business plans are written by the candidate with assistance from ATE
- Business plans are reviewed by the full ATE team and approved or not and applicants are then informed of the decision reached on their final application.
- Shopping Lists of stock for the business are developed and agreed, the contract is signed and witnessed by a senior family member and the grant is made to the SBO.
- Approximately one week later progress is monitored by ATE, feedback is given and appropriate action taken where necessary (on occasions grants may be taken back).

Comments:

- Need to review the publicity process to maximize application process effectiveness
- An improved assessment form is required (This was developed in response to this evaluation process and piloted in February 2016 with much success)



Figures 7 & 8: Habib Albeboure, ATE Ghana Operations Manager giving grants to new SBOs (left) and carrying out a monthly SBO meeting with Patricia, a weaver (right).

Stage 2: Monthly meetings

- SBOs are visited at least once a month without fail (more often if requested / required) for a period of 12 months (longer if deemed necessary) by the relevant ATE employee or consultant. At these meetings a financial record sheet is completed and business progress and challenges discussed.
- The purpose of these visits is to check that the SBO is adhering to the terms of their contract, encouragement of the SBO, provide support with general problem solving, business strategy and marketing advice etc.

Comments:

- Focus on ensuring that all purposes/objectives are carried out at the monthly meetings

- As the number of ATE SBOs develops ATE needs to ensure that each SBO is consistently visited by the same ATE staff / consultant.
- In some cases more than one year of monthly visits is desirable and required. A plan is in development to ensure there is a clear assessment process for continuation.
- As the number of SBOs grows, ATE needs to give training to the relevant ATE existing/new ATE staff and consultants to improve the quality of the monthly visits and ensure all purposes/objectives of the monthly meetings are carried out effectively.

Stage 3: Training

- SBOs attend 2 day training workshop every 6 months where the success of the businesses is evaluated, SBO's are trained against key elements of the ATE SBO Capability Matrix, skills are shared and challenges are discussed and SBO community spirit and self-help ethos is developed

Comments:

- As each SBO has a one on one consultant working with them at the workshops to translate and coach, ATE needs to focus on ensuring where possible that the same consultant works with them consistently
- ATE needs to evolve to the right blend of Lawra based, Ghana based and international trainers
- Formal review of the overall training plan is required ensuring that the right topics are covered at the right time in the right way. It is likely that some of the 6 monthly workshops will change to smaller groups e.g. all carpenters in one group. Some SBO's will benefit from more training which will also be reflected in the training plan

Stage 4: Review

- Ongoing review of the SBOs once they are more than one year old is carried out on a largely informal basis though contact at the 6 monthly workshops and irregular contact points and business visits. Where the opportunity exists 2nd grants are given and the process is repeated. Where this is not the case, main contact and review is conducted at the 6 monthly workshops that SBOs are expected to (and virtually all are very keen to) attend

Comments:

- The benefit to the SBOs and ATE's ability to optimize its support of SBOs after the first 12 months would be enabled by the post 12 months review being formalized and recorded more systematically. Plan to be developed.
- A number of the SBOs have benefited from a second grant. These second grants are given when a clear opportunity is seen for a SBO to develop further. The second grant process will benefit from more formal review as above
- The use of interest free loans rather than second grants was clear in the evaluation process. Interest free loan plan to be developed

Execution Plan

Start Now

Roll out the BizATE Programme to other districts

- The roll out of the programme should incorporate enhancements as they are ready to be applied with immediate effect. The roll out to the Dowine hub commenced with 8 SBOs in February 2016.
- There are 8 identified, potential hubs within the Lawra District, including: Kuolli, Babile, Dowine, Kalsagre, Bagri, Yikpe, as well as Lawra Town.
- The outline plan is based on one new BizATE hub being established in each January / February and 8 new SBOs accepted in Lawra Town in July each year
- A detailed plan needs to be developed but will include that 8 businesses in a hub requires a consultant Project Assistant working 1.5 days per week ongoing.
- The roll out model used in Dowine is that at the same time as the first 8 SBOs are granted, the first school is supported in the same location. This is efficient in terms of management, supervision and immersion in the local community. If practical this model will be repeated in each hub.

Enhanced and more efficient screening of candidate SBOs in the pre grant stage

- The pre grant stage of the BizATE process is vital to ensure that the right SBOs are selected and that SBO expectations are firmly set
- SBOs consistently state that this stage including the development of their initial business plan working with ATE is particularly valuable
- More detailed assessment of potential SBOs is required
- An SBO Base Line Data Assessment Form has been trialed in the Dowine hub. Assessment of its effectiveness is due before further developing plans to enhance this stage of the process

Larger Grants

- The evaluation confirms ATE's view that larger grants should be considered to SBOs where the opportunity is clear and secure. It is perceived that larger grants will have the potential to have a greater impact.
- It is equally clear that larger grants present larger potential challenges for ATE to manage in terms of ensuring SBOs adhering to the terms of agreement / contract.
- The enhanced screening of candidate SBOs is a key part of effectively managing larger grants.
- In the short term each application will be judged on its own merits within the new screening process – caution is being applied.

Dry Season Farming

- Dry season farming emerged on a number of occasions during the evaluation as a real opportunity that ATE should support through the BizATE process to enable SBOs to develop
- The objectives here are to create SBOs that target the seasonal food gap in the Upper West Region and allow the SBOs enhanced and more valuable subsistence farming opportunities
- A feasibility study is under way – due to be completed by early March 2016.

Develop an Apprenticeship Scheme

- Apprenticeships exist in the Upper West Region and are seen to be a positive way of creating employment and economic opportunities.
- A draft plan for an ATE scheme is being developed that will ensure that both employer and apprentice are rewarded if they fully meet their responsibilities in the scheme.
- A feasibility study is under way – to be completed by end of March 2016.



Figures 9 & 10: Dry season farmers and an ATE-supported SBO, Haruna (far left), with his apprentice.

To be Planned

More and enhanced monitoring of the SBOs

- Monitoring SBOs covers four tasks, 1) Ensuring that the SBO is keeping to the terms of their contract with ATE, 2) Completing financial record sheets and discussing progress and challenges, 3) Providing mentoring, encouragement and motivation for the SBO, and 3) Providing business acumen, helping find solutions to business problems and helping to identify business opportunities
 - The evaluation confirmed through the Consultant Survey and the SBO Survey that monitoring is valued by SBOs and does play a vital role
 - In particular it is perceived that monthly visits continuing beyond the existing one year will be valuable for certain businesses
 - The monitoring should be done by consistent and dedicated ATE staff and consultants who have the right skills to excel at mentoring and business development
- Next step: development of a planning document that fully develops and evaluates the options for execution and identifies all implications and costs.

Enhanced training plan for the SBOs

The SBOs value the training that they receive and the evaluation confirmed its importance.

The training will include:

- More focused training in smaller groups (e.g. tradesman group, Petty Trader Group). The initial pilot group is planned to be for Carpenters.
 - Greater investment in the training provided
 - If possible, training will provide a blend of local based, Ghanaian and international trainers
 - The annual BizATE training conference for SBOs held in January each year is likely to continue
- Next step: development of a planning document.

Enhanced training plan for consultants

- The training of consultants is valued by them and has clearly had a positive impact in its own right
 - ATE's perspective is that the priority is that consultants should be trained to do the jobs we want them to do and that consultant's personal/professional development in its own right is a valuable but secondary benefit
 - Consultants will be selected on the basis of; 1) Language capability, 2) Commitment demonstrated/available to ATE, and 3) Business Advisor capabilities. Consultants will require a job description and contract where appropriate
- Next step: once the BizATE roll out and future monitoring and training plan for SBOs are finalized the Consultant Training Plan will be developed and auctioned.

Interest Free Loans

- Interest free loans should have a role in BizATE going forward, particularly when an existing SBO is considered for receiving a 2nd grant. Where this is the case an interest free loan should be one of the options so as to drive commitment and recycle scarce funds.
 - It should be recognized that in an 18% inflation environment, a two year loan will mean that interest free loan leads to a potential cost to ATE of approximately one third of the loan amount.
 - Running a loan scheme requires proper infrastructure and systems.
- Next step: a feasibility study will be carried out.

Association of Small Business Owners in Lawra

- Facilitating the development of an Association of Small Business Owners in Lawra that meets regularly to discuss issues, successes and act as a self-support group will be carried out if sufficient interest by the SBOs exists.

Business Centre

- A future opportunity may exist to develop a significantly sized building which would include space for businesses to operate, retail, training center and an ATE office.
- This may become part of a future vision for ATE but not for immediate implementation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: SBO Survey – Key Insights

See separate document

Appendix 2: Consultant Survey – Key Insights

See separate document

Appendix 3: Data tables and research summary (excel file)

See separate excel file