



Dry Season Gardening: End of Year Two Report June 2018

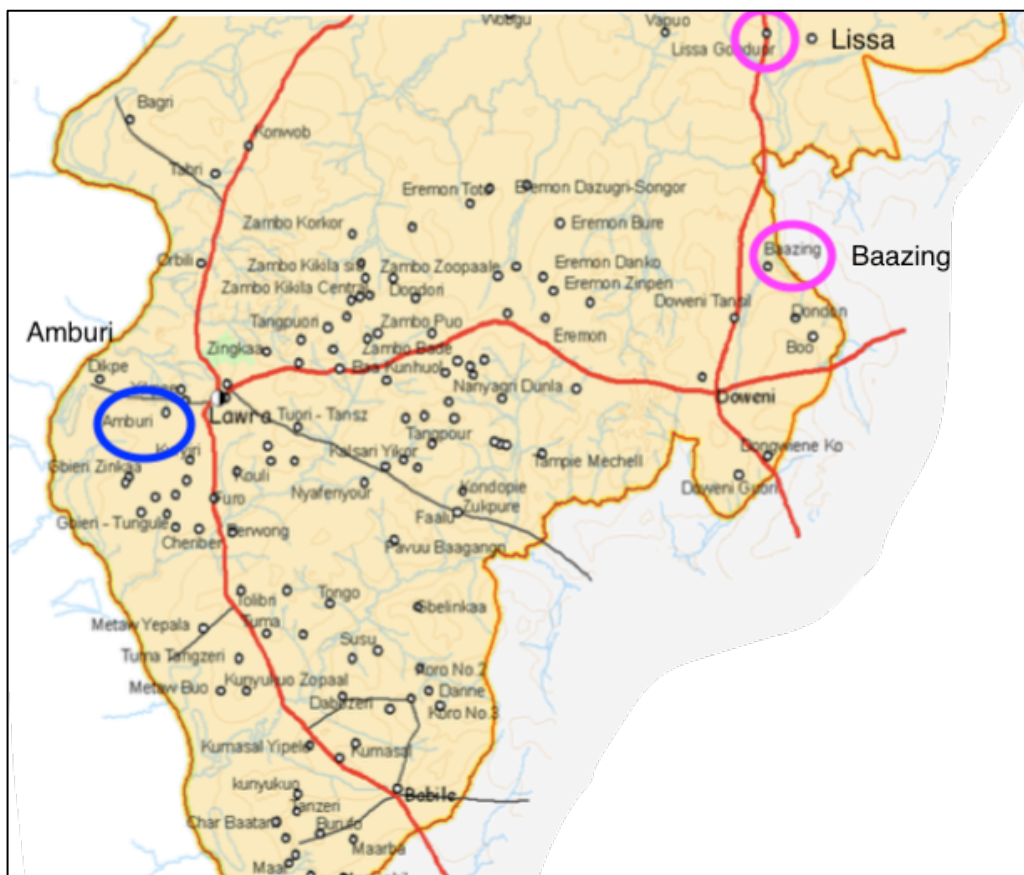


Dry Season Gardening: End of Year Two Report

Purpose:

The purpose of the Dry Season Gardening project is to support farmers in Lawra District to increase crop production, improve food security and household nutrition during the long dry season, and increase the potential for income generation all year round. The six month pilot scheme, which took place from Nov 16-April 17 was a success and the project was renewed for a second year, from Nov 17- April 18. The project was extended to include an additional farmer in Amburi on the bank of the Black Volta River, which brought the total number of farmers supported to three individual farmers and two groups of community farmers (both comprised of 32 members). Each farm was granted farming equipment (fencing wire, cutlasses, water pumps etc.) and was invited to attend our business skills workshop. For the duration of the dry season, each farm was visited on a fortnightly basis by ATE assistant, Kenneth Gan, to track their progress.

This second year of support to Dry Season Farmers in Lawra District has been a success. Crises were less common because farmers had taken on lessons from challenges encountered in the previous year. All farmers have continued to grow profits improving on last year, strengthening their financial sustainability and allowing them to reinvest in the future of their farm. This is an impactful project making a measurable difference to the farmers, their families and their communities. It is recommended this programme continues to provide support to the existing farms and expands the programme if additional farmers willing to commit to the labour intensive techniques are identified.



A map of Lawra District. The two rural community farming groups in Lissa and Baazing are circled in pink and the Amburi, where the three individual farmers work, is circled in blue.

The Farmers:

Amburi



Moses



Culture



Raymond

Lissa Community Farmers



32 member, 14 of whome are blind or partially sighted. Sebastian is the group leader.

Baazing Community Farmers



32 members, 8 of whom are blind or partially sighted. Clement is the group leader

The Successes:

- Increased profits has lead to increased savings, reinvestment into farms, spending on children's education and purchasing of special items
- Food availability increased and nutritional content of diet improved
- Farmers view regular monitoring by ATE staff to have a positive impact on their farms, believing it to encourage them to remain 'serious' and work hard knowing that they will be visited.
- ATE support promotes productivity through regular monitoring and the business training delivered

'We are most proud of the unity and togetherness that the farm has brought to us' Sebastian, Lissa leader.



'ATE has come to save lives.' Clement, Baazing leader

	Average monthly profit		
Farmer	2017	2018	% increase
Lissa	100	280	64
Baazing	320	383	16
Moses	600	625	4
Culture	100	295	77
Raymond	n/a	460	

All farms were able to increase on their profits from the year before. The community farms are less profitable due to the challenges caused by their remoteness and limited water availability, however Lissa's average monthly profit increased from 100 GHS to almost 300 GHS and Baazing's monthly profit increased by 16%. The farmers in Amburi were making a typically higher average

monthly profit.¹ Due to the low profit made last year because of a fire that damaged the majority of his crops last year, Culture was able to make an 77% increase on his monthly average. The increase in profits is attributed to each farm's hard work and commitment, their willingness to learn from challenges of the previous year, and ATE's continued support, particularly the additional fencing materials which reduced fire damage and animal damage dramatically. All farmers were able to generate savings from this year's profits. Reasons for saving included children's education (fees, text books, uniforms), housing, repairing equipment and saving for unforeseen events. In addition, all farmers chose to reinvest into their farms, with the three Amburi farmers all choosing to spend more on pesticides to protect from pests and rodents. Raymond and the Lissa group also stated that they were saving for the future expansion of their farms. It is encouraging that all farmers are using their profits to make their farmers better and more profitable year on year.

'ATE is very supportive to people that are hardworking and also organising workshops to train people on how to succeed in a business.' Culture, Amburi farmer

In addition to establishing greater financial security and spending more money on education, all farmers found they were able to spend more on 'special items', such as meat or clothes for festivities. For example, Culture bought his children dresses for Christmas, Raymond bought dresses for the Kobine festival and the Baazing group bought new clothes and sandals for families at Christmas. Special items also included rice and meat. However, the groups of community farmers who are based in very remote parts of the district said that even when meat wasn't an option, their diet has improved dramatically through the increased access to a variety of fresh vegetables. Both community farms are eating two meals a day and the Amburi farmers are eating three meals a day during the dry season. This is compared with the majority of people in Lawra District who eat just three or four times a week during the dry season.² Testimony from all farmers interviewed stated that this improved diet during the leanest time of the year has reduced hospital visits for their families and community. The leader of the Baazing group told ATE that pregnant women 'look healthy' now and Moses, a farmer in Amburi, told us that 'My children used to fall sick and I was spending much money on drugs but when I started my garden work there were vegetables which helped my children's condition and they do not fall sick again'.

¹ Monthly average profit is calculated from January to April. Equipment grants and workshops take place in November, with December being used to plant and cultivate their crops.

² Testimony gathered by ATE staff during baseline assessments at Gombele JHS in 2016 and Biro JHS in 2018.



‘ATE has helped so much in buying garden materials for us to work and feed our families.’

Sebastian, Lissa leader

As well as dramatically improving food security and diets, all farms reported that ATE’s support has made their garden better, easier to manage and more profitable. Each farmer said they valued the equipment granted to them from ATE the most, with most stating that the fencing equipment was the most important. Clement, the leader of the Baazing farming group told us: ‘The support from ATE that we value most is the fencing wires. Initially animals used to penetrate into the garden and destroy our plants but the fencing wires have prevented the animals from destroying our plants again.’ In the first year ATE supported dry season farmers, all reported problems with fires damagin fences made of straw/branches and of the difficulty of keeping roaming animals out their gardens. Adequate fencing is vital and ATE is pleased that in providing fencing materials that these farms have been more successful, more profitable and easier to manage. Farmers also stated the reassurance and support the received through the mentoring and business skills encouraged them to be serious in their work and motivated them to maintain their hard work.

‘ATE’s support has made my garden better, easier to manage and much more profitable. ATE is an NGO that is reliable for people.’ Moses, Amburi farmer

‘ATE is well organised when it comes to workshop and trainings on how to succeed in business.’

Raymond, Amburi farmer

The Challenges:

- Lack of adequate fencing material due to expense, prohibiting farmers expanding farm into available land
- Water remains a challenge for inland community farms
- Food insecurity is a problem for community groups outside of dry season.
- Poor price for peppers

Farmers in Lawra District continue to face extreme adversity in managing their dry season farms, but we are pleased that many crises have been avoided or minimized by taking appropriate action from last dry season. One of the main problems identified last year was the lack of adequate fencing material, which caused farmers to use dried grass and branches. This material is grossly inadequate for keeping roaming cattle out and highly flammable and vulnerable if bush fires are set nearby. However, due to the high price ATE is unable to grant the full amount requested by the farmers. This year, we were able to add to the existing amount of fencing granted in 2016, which enabled the farmers to protect and farm more of their land. Raymond was the only ATE supported farmer to suffer fire damage this year because he has only received one grant of equipment and therefore, less fencing material so when he attempted to expand his farm using branches and dry grass, his fence and farm caught fire when a bush fire was set.



Picture showing fire damage to Raymond's farm.

This has frequently been a problem for dry season farmers in the past. This year, with exception of Raymond, all ATE supported farmers relied only on the fencing supplied by ATE and, as recommended, set a fire belt around farm perimeter for additional protection. We were pleased to see that the farmers had taken our recommendation seriously, but we must ensure all recommendations are passed onto any new farmers who join the project in future years.

All farms currently wish to expand their farms into their available land. They believe this is important for increasing crop variety and boosting their profits but they are prevented by the high price of fencing material. Despite all farms improving their profit margins this year, it is still an expense they cannot afford, and as shown, attempts to expand farms with inadequate fencing can have terrible consequences. Baazing is planning for the expansion of their garden next year and have started preparing the land available to them but all other farms state they cannot expand without a further provisions of fencing wires from ATE. Fencing materials are the single greatest expenditure when granting dry season farmers. We anticipate that this may continue to limit the

farming capacity of new farmers joining the programme but we must ensure that all steps possible are taken to protect farms, and dissuade farmers from expanding without appropriate fencing.

Water continues to cause problems for the community farming groups in Lissa and Baazing. Unlike the farmers in Amburi, these groups have farms inland, away from the Black Volta River and with all nearby tributaries drying up during the dry season. The Lissa group identify water availability as their greatest challenge still but remain hopeful that they can expand their farm with ATE's support. It is still unclear how they will resolve their water availability problems but a solution should be identified before expanding their garden and it is recommended that specialist, in the UK or in Ghana, is approached for advice. The two community farming groups are having a remarkable impact on the lives of the farmers and the community as a whole so it is imperative that viable solutions can be identified. The Baazing group has started working earlier in the morning to allow more working hours before too much water is lost through evaporation, allowing them to make more of their water sources.



Picture showing a fire belt next to ATE supplied fencing.

However, Baazing have also noted water as a challenge for them because they believe the water is being contaminated by pigs swimming in it. The Baazing group complains that their plants are 'browning' due to contaminated water. ATE's research suggests that animal waste in the water should not be damaging the plants but rather contain 'excellent plant nutrients'³ having a similar impact as manure would. It is clear that this is a point of concern for the Baazing group and ATE will endeavor to reassure them and help them identify the cause of 'browning' plants.

³ EPA Environmental Education: 'Role of Plants in Water Filtration'

The farmers in Amburi do not encounter these problems with water but they did suffer from the poor seasonal price of peppers. Last year, peppers were a source of great success for Moses' but both Moses and Culture have complained that peppers fetched a poor price this year. The farmer's desire to expand their farms and therefore introduce a greater variety of vegetables would help protect against losses if one or more of the vegetables they focus on were affected by poor market prices one season.

The Baazing leader, Clement, told ATE assistant, Kenneth Gan, that the community struggles with food insecurity during the rainy season, which is a concern. It indicates the extreme challenges these communities face everyday. Kenneth's regular monitoring visits and assistance in compiling this report demonstrate that dry season gardening is having a dramatic impact on the earning opportunities and food security for these community farmers but it is saddening that the income and savings they generate does not afford them more protection during the rest of the year.



Recommendations

- Fires belts recommended around all farm perimeters and only adequate fencing to be used.
- ATE representative/ATE supported farmers to visit the Farmer Managed Natural Re-generations site in Kalsagri-Pavuu to learn more about conservation farming techniques from the local experts and seek specific advice.

It is brilliant to see such a progression for all ATE supported farmers and it is a trajectory we fully expect to continue as ATE's support continues and the farmers continue to build on their success. It is reassuring that many of the lessons taken from the first year of the programme have been implemented and have made a difference. To ensure this continues, all recommendations should be reiterated at the start of season workshop as and to use this as an opportunity for concerns to be heard and discussed.

ATE has recently become aware of Farmer Managed Natural Re-generations site in Kalsagri-Pavuu, Lawra District, which has been developed to help identify and overcome the problems farmers encounter working in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The local knowledge and experience

farming in the same context and climate makes this group a highly valuable resource for ATE supported farmers. As such, ATE is keen to make a visit to this site, ideally with the farmers. This would allow the farmers to learn directly from the experts with the opportunity to ask questions relevant to the challenges they face. It is highly advisable that this visit takes place before the start of the next season so that action plans and development strategies can be properly developed and implemented.

Dry season gardening has proved again to be a successful and powerful tool for improving income opportunities, reducing food insecurity, improving nutritional intake and bolstering the entire community. The farmers in Amburi along the bank of the river have built on the success of last year improving the immediate prospects for themselves and their families, and creating a stronger, sustainable future with genuine opportunity for positive, permanent change. The community groups in Lissa and Baazing face greater challenges because of the remoteness and lack of access to reliable water supplies. However, these groups continue to create a growing profit from their farms which is otherwise entirely unavailable to them. The large size of the groups and sense of community means that the positive impact is felt throughout their towns and has the capacity to be life changing to these communities over the next few years.

