



Until we are all equal

With help from the WISE project, women like Zuweira are making a livelihood in mushroom production.



# WISE: Women's Innovation for Sustainable Enterprises in Ghana

Planting Seeds:  
The WISE project is creating a thriving future for women in Ghana.



## Project facts

**WHO:** Ghanaian women entrepreneurs ages 19 to 55 and women-led businesses are the focal point of the initiative. This project is led by Plan International Ghana and Plan International Canada, with funding provided by Global Affairs Canada and individual Canadian supporters.

**WHAT:** The project’s primary objective is to create sustainable economic opportunities that enhance the well-being of women in Ghana.

**WHERE:** The project is active in several key areas in Ghana, including the Northern, Bono, Bono East and Ahafo regions.

**WHEN:** The project has completed Year 4 of its five-year timeline.

**HOW:** The WISE project has two pivotal goals:

**1. Enhance business vitality:** Stimulate the productivity, profitability and innovation of women-owned businesses.

**2. Foster women’s empowerment:** Develop women’s capabilities and promote a supportive environment in which they can make decisions related to their economic independence, establishing them as equal partners in Ghana’s economy.

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Gifty is finding sweet success in beekeeping.

*Christiana, 27, runs a pumpkin farm in the rural north of Ghana, producing not just pumpkin seeds but pumpkin oils, drinks and powder.*



Gifty produces 90kg of honey from her beehives each year.

## The First Word

With your support, we’re helping uplift women and transform communities in Ghana.

“Everything changed when I started to earn my own income,” says Rose Aawulena, program manager for the WISE project. Aawulena’s own journey began in a village in Northern Ghana, much like the women she works with now. She saw how hard the women in her household worked and how they were responsible for everything from taking care of the family to doing daily chores to fetching water and firewood.

“With this kind of experience as a girl growing up in the village, I kept asking myself, ‘Is there a way I can grow up and change the narrative?’” Indeed, there was a way. Aawulena went on to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees in agricultural sciences and economics. Working for the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Aawulena has advocated for the rights of women to be involved in agricultural opportunities. “It means that a woman in a rural community gets the chance to be respected,” she says. “Her voice will be heard if she’s able to earn an income.”

Since becoming involved with the WISE project in 2020, Aawulena says she has seen women become more confident, in both their homes and their communities. “You can see the smiles on their faces with the small changes that are already happening in their lives. That’s what keeps me motivated to work on the WISE project.”

### THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Your ongoing support means the world to us, and we can’t wait to share some stories from the WISE initiative. In this report, you’ll meet a couple of our entrepreneurs, including Gifty, who has found sweet success in her beekeeping venture, and Zuweira, who discovered her passion in mushroom farming. You’ll also gain insight into innovative solutions, like women-friendly solar hubs, that help female entrepreneurs thrive. These stories are just a few of the transformative journeys supported by your generosity. Your continued support keeps the WISE project going strong – and it’s making a real difference in the lives of women in Ghana.

Thank you for your continued support.



A Plan staff member engages community members on gender-responsive saving groups.



# The Scene

Against a backdrop of challenges, Ghana’s progress reflects its resilience and adaptability.

Ghana was once known as the “Gold Coast” because of its flourishing gold and cacao exports, and its economy was prosperous. However, the global economic crisis and the ongoing repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have taken their toll.

In a country where gender inequality is already an issue, Ghanaian women faced even more challenges during the pandemic. Restrictions on essential services – coupled with increased responsibilities for child care, home schooling and caring for the aged and sick – placed added burdens on women.

The escalated conflict in Ukraine led to fertilizer shortages, which led to increased food costs. In addition, hikes in global oil prices bumped inflation rates. In this economic atmosphere, many women lost their businesses. But the WISE project offered them a way forward by providing crucial training in new business skills, start-up support and a safety net for them to adapt quickly during uncertain economic times.

“The inclusion of women in this entrepreneurship and economic space advocates for more women to be recognized as business leaders and to be given the opportunity to pursue different ventures,” says Sarah Schattman, program manager for Plan International Canada.



Naomi, 50, is the owner of a poultry farm in the Bono region of Ghana.





BY THE NUMBERS

# A few highlights of what your support has made possible



A community in northern Ghana received supplies for a child-friendly safe space.

**13,381** women have participated in WISE project activities.

**2,489** women have received support to produce soy, including climate-resilient soy seeds, tarps and inoculants that foster plant growth.

**400** women have received green-business support, including personal protective equipment for 55 beehive farmers, 120 pieces of snail-breeding stock and 168 mushroom compost bags for mushroom farmers.

**Start-up support:**  
**2,889** women have received business start-up support.

**Carving a path for women entrepreneurs**

**24** women entrepreneurs working in soy and green business were selected to share their experiences with savings group members, providing peer learning and mentorship. This allows women to lean on one another for support, share lessons learned and best practices and collectively brainstorm to solve challenges.

**A 10-week radio program** was created and aired to discuss gender-equality topics, such as social and cultural norms and sharing household responsibilities.

**66** communities – up from 20 in Year 1 – now have safe child-care centres, giving working women more time to run their businesses.

**450** traditional and religious leaders, alongside male champions, have engaged with community members and women to discuss topics like gender-based violence, joint-decision making and unpaid care work.

Doris, 27, is a maize and soybean farmer who cultivates 14 acres of farmland.

**Expanded skills and opportunities**

**3** women-friendly solar hubs were opened. Solar hubs are a one-stop shop where women entrepreneurs can access online platforms to buy and sell their products.

**4,018** women to date have received training in cultivating soy that is more resilient to climate change.





A STORY OF CHANGE

# The Mushroom Queen

How Zuweira discovered her unexpected love for mushroom farming.

Harvesting mushrooms wasn't what Zuweira had in mind when she started farming. The 53-year-old mother of five lives in a community in Northern Ghana, where mushroom farming and consumption were considered uncommon.

"Mushrooms weren't cultivated here; I had never eaten them, and I didn't think people around this area even liked them," says Zuweira, who had been involved in small-scale trading.

But thanks to the WISE project, many women, including Zuweira, received mushroom start-up kits, including 300 compost bags, allowing them to kick-start production. Today they're transforming people's understanding of the kind of work women can pursue to support their families and make a living.

"I chose to do mushroom [farming] because I saw that it could be profitable and it wasn't common here," explains Zuweira. "I want to introduce mushrooms to my people so that one day many people in my community will do the production for a livelihood."

Her children and husband were the first to try her



Zuweira stands inside the hut where she grows her mushrooms.

mushrooms. "My children and I liked them," she shares. "I intentionally served my husband as well. Having not tasted them, he called me and questioned where I got money to buy meat, because he didn't give me money for meat. I told him it was not meat but mushrooms from the mushroom bag I brought from training."

Since starting her business in September 2022, Zuweira has made GH¢400 (approximately CAD\$45) from four harvests. While this may seem like a small amount in Canadian dollars, in rural Ghana it is a valuable income supplement – it can buy enough staple grains, like rice, maize, millet or beans, to last a small family for a couple of weeks.

“

I want to introduce mushrooms to my people so that one day many people in my community will do the production for a livelihood.”

– Zuweira, a project participant

A STORY OF CHANGE

# Solar-Powered Empowerment

Over 13,000 female entrepreneurs have joined the WISE project's revolutionary solar hub.



A project volunteer stands outside the women-friendly solar hub, made possible by your support for the WISE project.

The launch of the first women-friendly solar hub was one of the WISE project's most notable achievements in Year 3. The hub provides a one-stop shop for more than 13,000 women entrepreneurs in the Kumbungu and Tolon districts to start and grow their businesses. The innovative hub, a prefabricated building container from Germany, is equipped with solar-power technology that guarantees an uninterrupted power supply for 15 years.

"If a woman has a number of bags of soy or other goods she wants to sell, it's just a matter of her going to the solar hub," says Rose Aawulena, program manager for the WISE project.

The hub is equipped with desktop computers that include access to the Esoko app, an online platform that enables women entrepreneurs to connect with potential buyers for their products. The hub's trained agents are available to assist women in setting up their sales on the platform. Esoko also offers weekly market prices for various products, making it simpler for women to evaluate offers from potential buyers.

The hub agents, who are trained by the WISE project, are also there to help women access vital services.

"If a woman coming to the solar hub has a business idea or needs help making a business plan, the agents can connect her with business advisory centres, where they can get more services, like training," says Aawulena. There are five business advisory centres in the project area where women receive assistance in starting and growing small businesses.

With two more solar hubs opening in Year 4 of the WISE project, the full impact of this groundbreaking project and how it will support future female entrepreneurs remains to be seen.

“

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– Rose Aawulena, program manager for the WISE project



A STORY OF CHANGE

# Buzzing Business

Gifty is finding sweet success as a beekeeper.

In Ghana, honey has become a golden opportunity for women like Gifty, who are finding sweet success in their beekeeping businesses.

The 43-year-old mother of three received green-skills training for beekeeping in 2018 through a program that was funded by the European Union and delivered by Plan International. Gifty, who lives in the Bono region of Ghana, started with six beehives. Unfortunately, none of them yielded any honey – but this didn't discourage her.

She took additional training through the WISE project and decided to give beekeeping another try. She started with three beehives, and this time she was able to successfully produce seven gallons of honey, which allowed her to earn an income and deposit some of the funds in her savings account.

Today Gifty has 19 beehives. They have helped her purchase materials for her cake business as well as pay for school supplies for her children.

“My wife is a very industrious woman in her business, and that is why I fully support her in any of her endeavours,” says Victor, Gifty's husband, who now supports her in caring for and managing the hives.

In addition to her remarkable achievements, Gifty has benefited from mentorship programs organized by Plan International Ghana and its partners. She has developed essential business skills and tapped into a network of potential honey buyers as well as shared her knowledge with women entrepreneurs and savings groups in six other communities.

Between her thriving beekeeping business and her commitment to supporting other women eager to learn about honey production, Gifty has endless opportunities. We can't wait to see what she does next.

“

My wife is a very industrious woman in her business, and that is why I fully support her in any of her endeavours.”

– Victor, husband of project participant Gifty

Gifty tends to her beehive business in a forest close to her home.



## Thank you for your ongoing support of female entrepreneurs in Ghana.

We look forward to continuing to work together so that we can create more opportunities for women to grow their green businesses and change the future for themselves and their families.

**Thank you again for your continued support.**





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**A community-based volunteer conducts training for gender-responsive savings group members.**

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## About Plan International Canada

Plan International Canada is a member of a global organization dedicated to advancing children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International has been building powerful partnerships with and for children for over 85 years and is now active in more than 80 countries. We stand with children, especially girls, wherever they are oppressed, exploited, left behind or not equally valued. We're determined optimists, and we will continue to persevere until we are all equal.