

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Minister Bibeau visits women closing the hunger gap in Northern Ghana**

**Ottawa, July 10, 2017** - Canada's Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Marie-Claude Bibeau, heard rural women describe their achievements narrowing the hunger gap during her visit to Northern Ghana this weekend.

Minister Bibeau was in Tamale to meet with partners working with Canada to deliver results in the agricultural sector in one of the poorest and most vulnerable regions of Ghana. During the visit, several women farmers from CCA's FOSTERING project took time to talk about how the gains they are making in food security and gender equality are making life better.



*Co-operative chairperson Linda Adufude (l) tells Minister Bibeau (r) how women are bringing food security to their farm families through better production and marketing of their crops, and by off-farm businesses they started with loans from their credit unions.*

Hardworking smallholder farmers in the Eastern Corridor of Northern Ghana struggle to

meet their nutritional needs during household *hunger gaps* - periods where food and money are scarce due to recurring droughts and floods. Women and young children are particularly affected, with women more likely to forgo eating to feed their families first.



Working to  
achieve ZERO  
HUNGER

The Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA), in collaboration with SEND-GHANA and the Ghana Co-operative Credit Unions Association (CUA), has been helping smallholder farm families here to increase their food security. Today, over 90% of farm families surveyed no longer experience hunger gaps. They've done this by improving their farm yields as members of local family-based farmer co-operatives and by starting off-farm businesses to lessen their dependence on farm income.

Enabling women farmers to contribute more fully and equitably to the health, productivity and prosperity of their families has been key to this turnaround, says Michael Casey, Executive Director of the Canadian Co-operative Association and the Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada.



Working to  
achieve  
GENDER  
EQUALITY

"There can be no sustainable food security without greater equality between men and women, and the full and equitable participation of women in farming. By helping men and women farmers develop their agricultural, financial and marketing co-operative enterprises, we know the gains they have achieved will be long lasting and gender equitable. They will shape and use these community enterprises to carry this work forward long after aid agencies are gone. More importantly, they have been equipped to continue to provide women with opportunities to realize their full potential as equal members in their homes, their workplaces and their communities."

Over 49,000 smallholder farmers in the region have organized into 130 co-operative enterprises they manage through elected boards and committees. The co-ops provide equitable access to needed farm inputs and training, and buy their produce. Farmers also established nine marketing co-operatives to store and sell their produce when prices rise after the post-harvest glut is over. To help finance planting and harvesting, farmers have formed eight local credit unions which are providing financial services to 19,000 farmer members, most of whom - particularly women - were not served by other financial institutions.

To become less dependent on income from seasonal farming, women have started their own off-farm businesses. They are building their savings and taking small business loans as members of local women's savings groups. When they have established enough credit they graduate to become full members of their local credit union. Women occupy nearly half of all leadership positions in their respective co-ops and credit unions - double the number since the project began. Girls and women are now seeing and hearing more women sharing the public stage alongside men; a legacy of SEND-GHANA's longstanding work championing gender equitable leadership and women's key role in co-op governance.

Gender equality starts at home. Over 560 families in the Eastern Corridor have taken training to become certified Gender Model Families, living out gender equitable sharing of household tasks and demonstrating mutual respect between family members, both in their homes and in plain view of friends and neighbours.

Family tensions improved when Sarah Babor and her husband Joseph became a gender model family. They now share household chores, planning and decisions about the spending and saving of money. Sarah says that people in the community are watching with interest. Some have also decided to become gender model families. With

her extra time, Sarah took a loan from her credit union to buy and store groundnuts until the price was high. She makes and sells soy products and has started a women's group in her co-op. They farm together and have formed a micro-finance group. The money Sarah makes is earning interest in her savings account, helps pay for family provisions and school costs, and growing her business. Traditional leaders have taken gender training and have voiced their support for lessening women's burden and promoting greater gender equality in homes and communities.

Michael Casey says CCA's experience in Northern Ghana and elsewhere points to an important takeaway lesson. "Women and men farmers cannot ensure food security working in isolation, nor through better seeds, marketing, and training alone. Farmer-owned credit unions and co-operative enterprises are uniquely positioned to bring farmers together to achieve economies of scale and to deliver needed tools and benefits over the long term, aided by the ongoing support of co-operative networks like the Credit Union Association of Ghana."

"We also know - and this is key wherever we work - that co-operatives and credit unions are stronger and more resilient when both women and men can participate equally."

- 30 -

[The Canadian Co-operative Association \(CCA\)](#) is a not-for-profit co-operative which establishes and strengthens co-operatives, credit unions and community-based organizations to reduce poverty, build sustainable livelihoods and improve civil society in developing countries. CCA proudly delivers programs for the Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada (CDF) and other organizations which help communities fight poverty and create more secure lives through community-owned co-ops. [The Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada \(CDF\)](#) is a registered charitable organization. It raises money, mostly from Canadian co-operatives and co-op members to help alleviate poverty by building and strengthening financial and non-financial co-ops in developing countries. Working with the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) and other partners, it helps communities fight poverty and create more secure lives through community-owned co-ops.

[Food Security Through Co-operatives in Northern Ghana \(FOSTERING\)](#) is a five-year (2012-2018), CAD \$8 million project with financial support from Global Affairs Canada and the Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada (CDF).

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