

VISIONING STORY

"I was very tired, thirsty and had sores that did not heal, which made me feel socially uncomfortable. I spent a lot of my earnings on herbal cures that didn't work."

Says Adzo Owusu, a 40-year-old mother of three, living in Jamestown, a coastal community in Ghana's capital Accra.

Five years ago, in 2021, Adzo was unaware that she was suffering from symptoms of anaemia and type-2 diabetes, both health conditions were aggravated by her poor dietary habits. Now she has overcome the anaemia and has learned how to control her sugar levels and manage her diabetes, thanks to the government's new dietary guidelines, nutrition policies and the accompanying national campaign on the Ghanaian healthy diet. These measures had been implemented by the government in collaboration with the private sector, NGOs and scientists. Their consensus was reached based on **research conducted** by local (Ghanaian) and international (including Dutch) experts that facilitated the development of Ghana's **dietary guidelines** and **nutrient profiling system**. These served as standards for the private sector for reformulation, fortification and marketing of their products. They also ensured that dietitians, public health advocates, community health nurses and volunteers had standardized guidelines to use when monitoring and educating their clients/patients, including Adzo, on healthy diets. These initiatives were leveraged through a **media campaign** which reached her household in urban Accra with convincing messaging, through a variety of channels.

As part of launching the national campaign for a healthy diet, Kaneshie market, where Adzo sold kenkey and smoked fish, was selected for the pilot. She had been approached by volunteers

from the municipality, to participate in **meetings with other market women to talk about their business**, how Covid-19 had affected their circumstances, especially since schools had been closed and the mothers had to take care for their children during the day. The volunteers also talked about the importance of fresh foods. As part of the program, Farm Accra had organised **outreach cooking demonstrations** with local chefs using fresh foods grown in their own Osu demonstration site and **fortified foods** with the Obaasima seal, which means "women in all their beauty, morals and kindness." The women liked the ideas but said it was difficult to get time away from their selling and that access to certain vegetables were expensive and therefore only used in small quantities in stews/soups served with banku, kenkey, fufu or konkonte. However, the head of the market women agreed with the idea of organising cooking demonstrations at Kaneshie market but asked how the vendors would be compensated for missed sales during the trainings.

The cooking demonstrations showed how a broader variety of vegetables and indigenous grains could be included and prioritized in traditional and new dishes in larger quantities. The response to the demonstrations were encouraging. Furthermore, another group of volunteers had organised a workshop with market vendors on market management and organisation and food hygiene and safety.

With assistance of the municipality the market vendors upgraded the market.

These positive developments at the market attracted the interest of nearby **urban/peri-urban farmers**. They were contracted and began supplying hygienic, safe and **more varied fresh vegetables**. **The Ministry of Agriculture taught the farmers** about improved seed varieties, valuable indigenous crops, the importance of soil health and sustainable agricultural practices. The direct links developed between farmers and the market created a synergy and helped to develop **technology-based solutions for temperature-controlled transport and storage at the market**, from where the market women would collect produce twice daily to guarantee that the produce was fresh and stored in hygienic conditions.

While customers were learning about the new healthy Ghanaian diet through the targeted media and behaviour change communication activities and enjoying progress in the modernized market, the business of the vegetable farmers and market traders improved. Thanks to the **new market design** and the market women's association collaboration, a **day-care** was set up to take the additional burden of childcare off the market women. The success of the interventions in the Kaneshie market had not gone unnoticed by policy makers, donors and market leaders, and 10 additional markets in the Accra metropolis had implemented a similar approach.

Fast forward to the last quarter of 2023, the Government of Ghana committed to policies including **restrictions on the advertisement of unhealthy foods to children** and a **module** was developed based on the new dietary Guidelines and **included in the school curriculum**. A new **social safety program** was also adopted to issue vouchers specifically for local fresh, indigenous,

or tropical vegetables and products bearing the Obaasima seal. The momentum of the campaign led to **mandatory standards for the school feeding program** which ensured the nutritional well-being of Adzo's school-aged children and that their risk of anaemia and diabetes would be greatly reduced, breaking a generational cycle of non-communicable disease.