

## AGRICULTURE

• Esther Kyerewaa Twumasi, founder of Miss Agriculture, in her vegetable farm



crops grow better," Abena explains.

Cooperatives are another avenue for progress. Women like Afi Komla from the Central Region have joined farming groups to pool resources, share knowledge and provide mutual support.

"We contribute small amounts of money every week. When someone needs help, we use the money to support her," Afi shared.

Technology is also helping women farmers access vital information. Platforms like Esoko provide real-time market prices and weather updates, allowing farmers to make informed decisions about planting and selling crops.

### The Role of Support Systems

While women farmers innovate, external support remains inconsistent. NGOs such as ActionAid Ghana and CARE International are stepping in with programmes to empower women in agriculture, offering training in modern farming techniques, financial literacy and climate resilience.

Government initiatives like Planting for Food and Jobs provide subsidies for seeds and fertilisers; however, these programmes often fail to reach the most marginalised women, particularly those in remote areas.

"We need more extension officers to reach women in remote areas, education is key to helping them improve their productivity," said agricultural expert Dr Afua Sarpong.

### A Call to Action

To fully harness the potential of women in agriculture, stakeholders must address the systemic barriers holding them back. This includes policies promoting women's land ownership, improved access to affordable credit and targeted training programmes.

Changing societal perceptions of women's roles in agriculture is equally important. By recognising and valuing their contributions, Ghana can create an environment where women farmers thrive.

For Esther, Akua, Mary and Abena, the hope lies in these changes.

"All I want is a little help. With better tools and training, I can do so much more for my family," Akua said.

For Esther, she has desired to see women farmers doing more with what they have, adding, "With the right tools and support, we can transform agriculture in Ghana."

### Resilience in the face of adversity

Women farmers are not just sustaining their families; they are transforming their communities and inspiring others. Their resilience and ingenuity make them invaluable to Ghana's agricultural sector.

As Ghana pushes towards sustainable development, empowering women farmers is not just an economic necessity.

# Silent backbone: Women defying odds in Ghanaian agriculture

By Delali Sika

**I**N Ghana, the rhythmic hum of life in rural areas is powered by the unyielding hands of women. These women, often unsung heroes, dedicate their lives to farming and agribusiness, ensuring food security for families and communities.

Despite their immense contributions, they remain underappreciated, battling systemic barriers that impede their growth. Their resilience, however, keeps Ghana's agricultural economy thriving.

### Life of a woman farmer

For Esther Kyerewaa Twumasi, a farmer, founder of Miss Agriculture Ghana and co-founder of the Chamber of Women in Agribusiness Ghana, a typical day is a careful balance of farm work, household responsibilities and community engagement.

"My day starts early with farm activities like harvesting cocoa pods. After that, I process the husks into potash, which is used for making black soap. I also spend part of my day engaging with communities and supporting women farmers," Esther said.

Her story echoes the experiences of many other women in agriculture, like 43-year-old Akua Mensah, a subsistence farmer in the Brong-Ahafo Region. Akua's day begins before dawn, preparing meals for her family of five and trekking five kilometres to her farm.

"I grow cassava, maize and groundnuts," she said, with a tired smile. "These are what my family depend on to eat and any extra is sold to pay for school

fees and other needs."

These women's narratives underline the diversity of roles they play, not just as farmers but as caregivers, breadwinners and innovators.

### The Role of women in agriculture

Women like Esther and Akua are the backbone of Ghana's agricultural economy, contributing nearly 50 per cent of the labour force in the sector. While Esther focuses on cocoa farming and repurposing its husks into black soap, Akua relies on staple crops to feed her family.

Another farmer, Mary Amoako, from the Volta Region, has taken to growing yams and tomatoes. "These crops grow well here," she explains, "but they're also fragile, especially when it rains."

Their contributions sustain millions of households and contribute to Ghana's food security. Yet, these efforts are often undervalued, with little recognition or support from the broader agricultural system.

### Challenges women farmers face

Women farmers in the country face numerous challenges, the most prominent being limited access to land. Traditional customs often favour men when it comes to land ownership, leaving women dependent on borrowed or

family-owned plots.

"I don't own this land. It belongs to my uncle. He can decide to give it to someone else whenever he wants," Akua revealed.

Access to credit is another major hurdle. Without collateral, women like Mary cannot secure loans to invest in improved seeds, fertilisers or tools.

"When my crops fail, it's difficult to recover. Banks won't lend us money

because they think we can't pay back," she said.

Beyond financial challenges, women face societal pressures to juggle household responsibilities with farming duties.

"There's also the challenge of balancing community outreach with personal commitments," Esther noted, speaking to her dual roles as a farmer and advocate for women in agriculture.

### Innovation and resilience

Despite these challenges, Ghanaian women farmers are finding innovative ways to thrive. Esther's use of cocoa husks to produce potash for black soap is a prime example of resourcefulness. Similarly, 50-year-old Abena Ayisi from the Upper East Region has embraced composting to improve soil fertility.

"I started using compost instead of chemical fertilisers. It's cheaper and my