A learning platform provides an open and safe space that brings together farmers, researchers, private sector and local institutions at district level. Participants exchange, learn and adapt knowledge, practices and practical innovations that contribute to sustainable livelihoods. Learning platforms are organized around a critical theme that affects all stakeholders.

**BENEFITS FOR FARMERS**
- Knowledge and ideas for sustainable livelihoods
- Be heard and get immediate answers from the relevant institutions
- Learn how other farmers deal with challenges
- Learn how others create opportunities
- Engage with researchers and hear about new research findings

**BENEFITS FOR INSTITUTIONS**
- Gain more insight into farmers’ different needs and strategies
- Become more visible as an institution
- Clarify and raise awareness about policies, your role and responsibilities
- Improve the quality of your local network
- Share ambitions and responsibilities with other institutions

**BENEFITS FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR**
- Improve the relationship with farmers
- Learn where the bottlenecks are
- Find a basis for more tailored service provision
- Engage with public agencies

**BENEFITS FOR RESEARCHERS**
- Bring research results back to farmers and practitioners and make it more relevant
- Validate research findings
- Understand local dynamics better

Cocoa and oil-palm communities engaged in learning platforms so far (2015–2017)

A) KWAEBIBIREM DISTRICT
- Adankrono
- Pramskrene
- Darmang
- Kwaie
- Kwamang
- Asuom

B) UPPER DENKYIRA EAST MUNICIPAL DISTRICT
- Mbraim
- Mmradane
- Baubin
- Kramokrom
- Kontokrom
- Rubbermu

O) AHAFO ANO NORTH DISTRICT
- Mfanibi
- Tanokrom
- Nkynesedanho
- Achina
- Manfo
- Camp

**FARMERS ARE NOT ALL THE SAME**
Farmers involved in cocoa and oil palm production are not one single group. A male 35-years’ old sharecropper has other needs than a female farmer of 70 who owns land. The sharecropper may aspire to become a landowner, and be willing to invest time and resources in making the best of his abunu arrangement. But what if he lacks the finance to make the necessary investments? The older women may have difficulty in finding labour to do the weeding. Her farm could benefit from labour support services.

“That farmers are not all the same was an eye-opener. It helps us, as facilitators, in the way we present information to different types of farmers and interact with them”
(extension officer, Ashanti Region).

**SHARECROPPING AS STRATEGY**

**IN 10 YEARS TIME**
I want to become a farm owner (no other jobs than cocoa). I want to expand my farm (through a new abunu arrangement) and have high yields. Generate income to take care of my children.

**WHAT DO I NEED?**

**HOW DO I GET THERE?**
Increase access to land (formal will be more difficult in the future). Access to land is the only way to get income. Form a group.

**WHO AM I?**
Only male. Average age 44 (most between 30-40 and 50-60). Medium size farms with very low yields. Farming since less than 10 years (start-ups). All have other cash and food crops. 1 plot of land. Low education.

**MY CHALLENGES**
Financial constraints to apply knowledge. Abunu requires initial investments - first years (establishing the farm) no yields. Need for compensation. PC cannot help.

**MY CHILDREN**
Proper jobs. If no opportunities in the cities they have the land.

**FROM WHOM?**
For financial constraints – PC.
PEOPLE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A possible feature of a Learning Platform is a live interview with change makers. These are people who bring new ideas that impact on the lives of other people and often “do things differently”. Examples are farmers and processors from whom others can learn how to deal with livelihood challenges. They found other ways of organizing their production or gaining access to savings, credit and markets. They also include buyers, extension officers, public officers and researchers who found unique ways of engaging with farmers.

Change maker Fati Ibrahim, leader of the oil-palm processing association in Tepa argues, “We have to help ourselves, before others can help us”. Fari has set up the association, which has changed people’s life because she taught women how to trade and get benefits. Having Fari as a female leader also empowered other women. For women it is easier to communicate with other women.

Víctor Atta Asare is a commercial officer Sustainable Management Services (SMS) for cocoa-buying company AGL in Tepa. Being active in Tepa for already 4 years, he has assisted farmers in making a lot of changes in their lives. He also tries to help farmers to get the support they need. For example, he pushed AGL to provide protective gear when farmers expressed this necessity.

Georgina Antwiwaa introduced the Susu saving groups idea in Mfaniw. She got the idea through training of the cocoa buyer from Agro-ECOM Ghana Limited (AGL) and the NGO Care. The saving groups have brought financial relief for women in the community.

Headmaster James Kwaku Ataning was inspired by Anna Adowaa and decided to set up a credit scheme for an informal teachers union. There are already 60 members, who can save money and take out overdrafts with low interest rates (10%).

WHAT INSTITUTIONS DO FOR FARMERS

Forestry Commission
- Reforestation of degraded forest areas
- Support farmers in tending trees on farmland
- Landscape restoration

Ministry of Food and Agriculture (district office)
- Providing extension services and trainings for farmers

Young professionals for Agricultural Development
- Promoting agriculture among young people
- Facilitating access to resources and capacity building

Cocobod
- Pest and disease control in cocoa farms
- Extension services
- Providing inputs
- Buying cocoa

Centre for Climate Change and Gender Studies (UENR)
- Action research for more inclusive, gender and climate sensitive value chain collaboration
- Capacity building of students (including staff of the Forestry Commission, other public agencies and NGOs)

GAABIC (Ghana Agricultural Associations Business and Information Centre)
- Farmer training on agribusiness management
- Setting up demonstration plots to transfer technologies
- Learning platform advocacy and support among local and national stakeholders
- Value chain networking among farmers

OPREF-CSR
- Supplying high-yielding and disease-tolerant oil palm and coconut planting materials
- Developing evidence-based strategies for pest and disease management in oil palm and coconut
- Feasibility studies and collaborative research on oil palm and coconut production, pest and disease inspection on farms etc.

District Assembly
- Promote economic and social development
- Mobilize resources to that end
- Feeder road construction and maintenance
- Promoting law enforcement and justice (e.g. fighting illegal mining)

District chief farmer, queen mother
- Represent farmers
- Give general advice to farmers

Cocoa Buyers (AGL)
- Buying cocoa
- Providing farmer trainings and extension
- Provision of farming inputs

Oil palm processors (GOPDC, OBOMA, Seredipalm)
- Buying oil palm
- Providing farmer trainings and extension services in outgrower and smallholder schemes
- Provision of farming inputs
To separate the palm fruit from the husks, oil palm processors throw the fruits. In this manner they reduce the time spent on peeling the palm fruits and reduce labour costs.

Oil palm processors and soda traders establish women’s associations to help each other and to reduce their dependency on buyers.

Soap makers use gloves and face masks to reduce the coughing and skin irritation because of working with soda.

Women formed groups and weekly contribute money. Each week one of the women receives the sum of money that she can use as initial capital for her business.

Soap vendors have added colouring to their products to invent new products. In this way they attracted more customers and increased their cash income.

Because women do not control the income from cocoa and oil palm production you see that women tend to be active in oil-palm processing and soap making. These activities go hand in hand with challenges and opportunities. Key challenges are high labour costs, dependency on buyers, health and initial capital in credit. Key benefits are increased cash income and control over this income. Women have innovated to minimize the challenges and increase the benefits of their work.
Cocoa and oil palm growing communities in Ghana experience a range of changes in their landscape, including diminished and polluted water bodies, increased population and community size, decreasing cocoa production, diversification into rice and vegetable farming. These landscape changes bring about new challenges and opportunities. These challenges include difficult access to clean water, land scarcity and decreased cocoa revenues. Key opportunities are the emergence of new income sources such as rice or cabbage production.

Bird scare
Rice farmers experience an increasing number of birds that eat the rice once it starts tasselling. They have invented a new technique using rope and metal waste to create noise and scare the birds away with minimal effort.

Shallow water well
Access to clean water is decreasing because of diminished and polluted rivers. To access water on the farm, farmers started digging through three layers of earth until they reach clean water.

Cabbage farming
Increased pressure on land because of an increasing community population and declining cocoa yields due to climatic changes is driving people to diversify into other livelihood activities. Cabbage farming has emerged as a new alternative because of a quick harvest, quick money and suitable land near the riverbanks that allows for high profits during the dry season.

Emergency borehole contribution
Increased community size and polluted water bodies put increased pressure on the community boreholes. As a result the boreholes break down more often. To cope with this situation, the community initiated a compulsory individual borehole contribution of 10 GHS every three months collected by the assembly and Unit Community member.

Cocoa association
This is a new association proposed by cocoa buying company AGL and taken up by the community. They pool resources (10 - 15 kgs of cocoa per year) to save for larger investments or inputs. The aim is to combat decreasing cocoa yields due to depleted soils, increased temperature, intense sunshine and erratic rainfall. In addition, there are monthly meetings where members contribute 5 GHS used for social benefits: funeral contributions to members or their direct family members and payments in case of hospitalization.

Rice partnerships
New partnerships emerge between traders and producers to access credit for an emerging crop: rice. These partnerships give a growing population without land or resources (e.g. youth, women) the opportunity to get into rice farming.