FEATS was a seven-year project that operated from August 2015 to December 2022. The project’s goal was to improve the economic wellbeing of women and men farmers working in four tree crops industries (cocoa, shea, cashew and rubber) of Ghana. This goal translated into focused work to strengthen the capacities of client farmers and SMEs to profitably participate in environmentally sustainable tree crops businesses; provide the client farmers with affordable financing options and support them to access affordable debt finance facilities; increase the availability and accessibility of quality seedlings to tree crop farmers; and contribute to policy/strategy reforms that will incentivize and invest in the production and supply of quality seedlings.

FEATS was funded by Global Affairs Canada and MEDA with contributions of CAD $10.75 million and CAD $11.50 million, respectively. FEATS operated within 11 regions – Ashanti, Ahafo, Bono, Bono East, Eastern, Oti, Volta, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, and Western and directly supported 108,692 small and medium-sized farmers (42.4% women).

The purpose of the final evaluation is to measure the impact of the FEATS project on its clients.

Evaluation methodology

The study applied a mixed methods approach by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from a representative sample of project clients. Three methods were used to obtain information:

1. 379 Surveys
2. 35 Key Informant Interviews with SMEs, Farmer Association (FA) representatives, and staff at Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), Tree Global, Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD); MEDA staff– Ghana and HQ-based
3. 11 Focus Group Discussions were held with FAs and SMEs
Key study findings and results

The FEATS project achieved 20 out of 22 LOP outcome targets, representing an indicator performance of 91%.

Production Volume and Revenue

The project’s SMFs and SMEs reported increased production volumes and sales.

At the time of the evaluation:

- FEATS supplied 4,178,400 cashew seedlings to 24,240 farmers
- Tree Global and COCOBOD produced and supplied 5,733,126 cocoa seedlings to 43,492 farmers.
- The three rubber SMEs supplied 686,649 rubber stumps to 1,196 farmers under the Matching Grant Agreement.

Some project clients reported an increase in their revenue because of FEATS’ innovations by adopting new technologies, capacity strengthening support, and facilitation with financial services and incentives. These innovations subsequently increased production volumes and quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>LOP Achievement %increase per crop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cashew</td>
<td>Rubber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in tree crop revenue for women and men farmers and women-led SMEs</td>
<td>30% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in productive asset score for women and men farmers, and women-led SMEs</td>
<td>45% increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Capacity Enhancement

A total of 68,978 project clients (33,655 women farmers and 35,323 men farmers) reported improved knowledge and capacity relating to planting quality tree seedlings in an environmentally sustainable manner because of FEATS technical assistance. Farmers (Cashew 89%; Rubber 97%; and Cocoa 94%) further reported increased knowledge.

The project enhanced the capacities of women-led SMEs through infrastructure development, training, and mentorship. 100% of surveyed women-led SMEs (cashew and shea tree crops) reported an increase in capacity to nurture and sell quality seedlings, and 100 of Cashew SMEs reported that they follow the nursery standards according to the Ghana Standards Authority.

Enabling Environment

Financial Services

The financial incentive initiatives were well received by the clients. 24,963 farmers (44.7% females and 55.3% males) received coupon discounts for purchased seedlings at the end of year seven (March 2021). Also, the matching grants provided to 35 SMEs supported them to benefit from financial and technical support.

Seedling Supply and Quality

The project supported the COCOBOD to establish a drip irrigation system covering a total of 28.3 hectares (70 acres) at two of its seed gardens at Bunso in East Akim Municipality in the Eastern Region and Goaso in the Asunafo North Municipality in the Ahafo region. The irrigation systems were established to ensure the reversal of decreasing seed garden pod production numbers, which improves and increases the supply of pods to the farmers to produce seedlings.
Sustainability of Impact

The seed production and supply modalities introduced by the project and the benefits to the client farmers are expected to continue after the end of the project. Available evidence showed that the client farmers will be able to purchase high quality seedlings after the end of the project will be able to continue and possibly expand their tree crop farming without the purchase discount.

Recommendations

MEDA should strengthen its project design by ensuring that the design is informed by a comprehensive assessment of relevant government policies and the program. MEDA should also engage with key actors in the relevant value chains and gather input from relevant government agencies during the design and implementation stages.

Also, MEDA must invest in developing an impactful partnership model based on a comprehensive assessment of the capacities of potential partners. Subsequently, a fit-for-purpose capacity strengthening program based on the selected partners’ capacity can be developed to enable them to effectively implement planned activities to achieve the expected results. The capacity assessment tool can serve as a blueprint that can be contextualized and adapted for different settings.

MEDA’s women engagement strategy should be practical and realistic, especially when addressing issues related to cultural norms like women’s access to land. For the project to achieve the desired results, there is a need to focus on dealing with bottlenecks and challenges associated with women accessing traditional lands. The project needed to engage traditional authorities and landowners to advocate for women’s access to land.

Further, MEDA should strengthen engagement among tree crop farmers and SMEs. MEDA can build on the relationship established with the SMEs and the client farmers of the different tree crop value chains. It can replicate the Cashew Industry Association platform across the other tree crops value chains to facilitate and sustain engagement among the members regarding tree crop production, supply, and management.