Rural Women and Microfinance in Ghana: Challenges and Prospects

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By Irene S. Egyir[1]

1. INTRODUCTION

Access to adequate and affordable credit for businesses remains one of the key challenges to local economic development in Ghana despite efforts by both government and private sector organisations since independence in 1957 to address the problem. Issues of availability of financial institutions, proximity to clients, effectiveness of service provision, adequacy of loans granted, and timeliness and cost of services provided are among factors that have been deemed critical in addressing this perennial problem.

Various policies have been developed that target different segments of business, both rural and urban. For instance, Ghana's rural banking system which started in the 1970s has increased access to financial services for rural and under-served populations. Difficulties with these policies led later to the adoption of the Grameen model, originated in Bangladesh which focuses on group lending for maximum effect. This model also pays particular attention to women.

It is a good idea to focus on women because, historically, women, though they outnumber men in the general population, have been marginalized economically and socially, and this has affected their economic empowerment. The general perception that in the traditional division of labour women are bound to certain functions is a barrier that many women all over the world face. This perception is closely associated with a definition and understanding of space as divided between public and private spheres where women are seen as belonging to the latter. These notions are remarkably persistent and are indeed believed to be the basis of much of the difficulties women face in their effort at self- and community development. Recent advocates of women's empowerment have argued for more participation in the financial systems by women.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is also concerned about the financing issue because in evaluating the performance of its project districts in Ghana, the ILO reported that "financial resources for financing enterprises and local infrastructure remains perhaps the single most important challenge to local economic development in Ghana." This means that past initiatives by local institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, need to be re-examined to guide the development of new strategies that can enhance the efficacy of current and future initiatives and associated policies to be undertaken by government, the private sector, donors and non-governmental organisations.

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This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion on financing local economic development in Ghana. Overall, the paper does the following:

- A review of the history of microfinance in Ghana, including previous and current policies and initiatives, with particular emphasis on women in general,
- An assessment of the implementation of these policies and initiatives, highlighting any gaps and inadequacies, especially the differential impact of microfinance on rural women and the industries they are involved in,
- The implications of the current micro financing system for women's entrepreneurship and local development in Ghana and
- Recommendations on how to overcome gaps in policies and initiatives.

2. OVERVIEW OF MICROFINANCE IN GHANA

Prior to formal banking systems in Ghana, many of the poor, mainly women, and those in rural communities relied heavily on informal banking services and the semi-formal savings and loans schemes.[2] Cooperatives, especially among cocoa farmers of the 1920s, engaged in thrift and credit. The mission of the informal microcredit organizations or microfinance services in Ghana was to provide social and economic support for the less advantaged, especially rural women and their families. For some, known as *susu*, there were weekly meetings: each woman donates a set sum of money to a common pot that is given to one woman each week. When there is an emergency, a participant can withdraw out of turn; otherwise the pot is rotated uniformly until all members are served.

The first cooperatives were formed in the 1920s. In 1946, the Gold Coast Cooperative Bank was established to serve particularly savers and borrowers belonging to cocoa cooperative societies. At this time men dominated cocoa farming systems. Cooperatives are "member-owned" organizations. Well run cooperatives have commercial borrowing power that can be tapped on a seasonal basis to finance members through production loans, and to finance storage and processing of commodities that will be sold before the next season. The season's sales proceeds are used to repay the commercial loan. Short-term loans are the most common type of funding obtained by cooperatives; medium or long-term loans have been more difficult to obtain. The confidence that lenders have in the cooperative's operations, market niche and management determines its ability to attract longer-term loans.[3] The conditions that create confidence usually include a loyal membership base. In general,

[2] Botei-Doku Ellen and E. Aryettey (1996). "Mobilizing cash for business: women in rotating susu clubs in Ghana" in Ardener, S, & Burman, S (eds). *Money-Go-Rounds: The Importance of Rotating Savings and Credit Associations for Women.* Berg Publishers, Incorporated.

[3] The matching principle in finance suggests that longer-term funds are usually best used for assets that have longer lives. Exceptions may include special situations and opportunities, such as exceptionally low market rates of interest.

the more assets a reasonably successful cooperative owns and has fully paid for – buildings, equipment, stock (inventory) and financial reserves – the more others are willing to lend additional funds to it. Women-dominated agro-processing and trade got included at this stage. Through cooperative action, the Rice Farmers Cooperative in Dahwenya (mixed group) received micro-loans from a formal bank, the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) for several years.

Credit unions were introduced in 1955 when the then Father Peter Poreku Dery, a Catholic priest, founded a cooperative credit union in Jirapa in the Upper Region (now Upper West Region) of Ghana. It followed the German concept developed in 1846. The objective of the credit union was to encourage thrift and savings among members – farmers, traders, processors and non-agricultural workers – for productive ventures to improve the socio-economic lives of the people. Today, there are 28 African countries where the credit union idea operates. A credit union enables the poorest in a community to save and access loans for income generating activities. Cooperative Credit Unions were expected to take over some of the lending being done by moneylenders.

A number of government-financed loans schemes were instituted in the late 1950s with the same aim as well as the general aim of making more finance available for local development. Then in the 60s special banks, National Investment Bank and Agricultural Development Bank, were established. Commercial banks, notably the Ghana Commercial Bank, also operated rural credit schemes. But rather than giving credit to rural producers, these banks were draining the rural areas of savings, which were invested in the commercial and housing sectors in the urban areas.

The need for rural banks arose by the turn of the 1970s. It had become clear that existing formal institutions formed with the goal of replacing the perceived "harmful" informal operators, especially moneylenders. The intermediating credit to the rural sector of the economy – upon which Ghana's agricultural economy depends, currently contributing 38% of GDP – had also been failing to achieve their objectives. The first rural bank in Ghana was founded in July 1976. A rural bank is a community owned and managed bank that is mandated to operate within a catchment area of 25 kilometres from its headquarters. Rural banks have the following objectives: 1) mobilising rural savings; 2) offering credit and other banking services to rural producers; 3) being an instrument of rural (local) development; and 4) contributing to national development. As more rural and community banks (RCBs) came into operation, the Association of Rural Banks (ARB) was formed to represent and seek their interest. The RCBs were regulated and supervised by the central bank, Bank of Ghana (BoG), from which they also received technical support through the ARB, until an Apex Bank was established in 2nd July, 2002 to play the role that the BoG had been playing. Up to 2002, the reserve requirement of RCBs was set as high as 62%, to enable them benefit from the high yields on sovereign securities and improve their financial standing. This has subsequently been brought down to the current level of 8% in the form of primary reserves plus 5% deposit with ARB Apex and a 30% secondary reserve. Thus, rural banks currently need to have 43% of their assets in the form of liquid assets.

With the downturn of the Ghanaian economy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the government in 1983 started implementing a Structural Adjustment Facility from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reform key sectors of the economy. By 1986 it was widely accepted that reforms were needed to encourage the development of the financial sector in order to deepen financial intermediation and create new investment instruments, as well as encourage the establishment of new financial institutions that would all go to make the economy much more competitive in the world economy. The liberalization of the system therefore could not have come at a more opportune time. As part of the reform program to strengthen banks, their non-performing assets were taken off their books and turned over to a new body, the Non-Performing Assets Trust (NPART), to pursue and restructure. A number of new banks were established. From the mid 1990s, formal and semiformal microcredit institutions including Women's' World Banking and Citi Savings and Loans were established.

Globally, modern microfinance dates from the mid-1970s. Professor Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh[4] is widely regarded as the leading innovator. He had the idea of making loans available to the very poor, especially women. He started the Grameen Bank Project in 1976, and transformed it into a bank in 1983. According to the bank, in 2005 it had nearly 6 million borrowers - 96% of them women - and almost 2,000 branches in some 64,000 villages in Bangladesh. The repayment rate of loans was 95 percent as of 2008, and the bank had earned a profit every year but three since its establishment 30 years ago. Given the success of the Grameen Bank approach, it has become a model for most microfinance institutions worldwide. Microfinance institutions in Ghana that employ the Grameen Bank model had over 1.5 million borrowers in 2000.[5]

Government involvement in microfinance

In 1959 government instituted loan schemes for rural and agricultural ventures, as these areas were not being served well by commercial banks (such as the Barclays' Bank, Standard Chartered Bank and Ghana Commercial Bank), which focused on the urban areas at the expense of the rural areas. Rural people found the size and bureaucracy of commercial banks, particularly the demand for written documentation, to be unfriendly; they also had difficulty meeting the demand for collateral security. Thus, these banks were regarded as structurally biased against the rural poor. The Bank of Ghana Act (1964) established, among others, the Rural Banking Department. In order to address this state of affairs the Agricultural Credit and Cooperative Bank was established in 1965, and the Agricultural Development Bank was established in 1967. For all banks

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[4] see BW Online, 12/26/05 "Muhammad Yunus: Microcredit Missionary".

[5] Hercules, Sofia (2006) Microcredit - A Way to Overcome Problems of Financial Markets in Developing Countries? Unpublished BA. Dissertation. Department of Economics, Lunds Universitet, Sweden.

prior to 1986, the policy was "provide low interest rate to the rural and agricultural sector and increase proportion of portfolio to agricultural sector". Furthermore, the Bank of Ghana drew on the experience of RCBs in the Philippines and the Netherlands and decided to promote the establishment of such banks in Ghana. Consequently, the first rural bank was established in 1976. Many more have been established since then, with the total number being 126 at the end of 2008. Over the years RCBs have been used by government and development partners – US, Japan, France, Germany, the UK, among others – for channeling credit to micro and active poor entrepreneurs. Women's groups, particularly those in agro-processing and farming, were encouraged to participate in microfinance schemes implemented by the National Commission of Women and Children (governmental) and the 31st December Women's Movement (a non-governmental organisation).

The main laws that guide the conduct of financial institutions are the, Banking Law of 1989 and Non-Banking Financial Institution (NBFI) Law of 1993. All formal banks and financial institutions are licensed by the BoG. Whereas banks and RCBs operate under the Banking Law, NBFIs like Savings and Loans Companies and Credit Unions operate under the NBFI Law. Credit Unions, however, are not regulated by the BoG, but by the Credit Union Association (CUA), which acts as a self-regulatory apex body.

As part of the new decentralized local government system instituted in 1992, the district assemblies' common fund was created with one of its aims being poverty alleviation. Women's groups were to be targeted. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs was created in 2001, and soon thereafter a fund for women's groups was established. It is widely believed that the decision to create the fund was in reaction to the Gender and Agricultural Strategy (1999), the National Gender Policy (1998); and in direct response to the gender mainstreaming agenda of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (I) and Millennium Development Goal three (MDG3). In 2005, government created the Micro and Small Loans Centre (MASLOC) to intervene in the micro and small enterprise sector to enhance access to credit by groups and individuals for business expansion. Although no official records have been obtained, it is well known that the target of "micro-entrepreneurs in groups" has led to a high level of inclusiveness by women micro service providers, particularly wholesale and retail traders of food and non-food commodities.

Private sector participation

The liberalization of the financial sector since 1987, largely carried out under the Financial Sector Adjustment Programme (FINSAP), led to the entry of new banks and NBFIs. As part of FINSAP, controls on bank interest rates were removed and consequently rates increased above the prevailing levels that were viewed as not attractive for investment. Also addressed were the weak capital base, management, and accounting information systems; inadequate legal and regulatory framework; ineffective supervision by the BoG; limited range of banking products; operational skills that were in need of modernization; and huge non-performing assets (see above).

In 2007, the BoG revised the minimum capital requirements of banks and NBFIs from GH¢15 million to GH¢70 million, and from GH¢1 million to GH¢1.5 million, respectively. Fiduciary requirements for NBFIs include: Risky assets of less than 10% of total assets; primary or tier one capital (equity and free reserves) of at least 50% of minimum capital requirement; subordinated debt of less than 50% of total secondary or tier two capital. These NBFI capital adequacy requirements are not up to the first Basle Accord standards[6].

The Ghana Microfinance Institutions Network (GHAMFIN) was established in 1998 as an umbrella organisation for regulated and non-regulated microcredit institutions, now numbering over 70. The main objective of GHAMFIN is to serve as a knowledge centre and to provide information and statistics for the microfinance industry. GHAMFIN is also providing staff training and assistance with capacity-building. The most successful microcredit institution in Ghana, with the largest number of clients (16,000) is Sinapi Aba Trust (STA). Other well known ones are Women's World Banking, ProCredit Ltd., Opportunity International, Ezi Savings and Loans, ECLOF Ghana, UniCredit, First National and Express Savings and Loans.

After over two decades of FINSAP, there are twenty-three (23) universal banks (also referred to as the traditional commercial/development banks), 126 rural banks, and 41 non-bank financial institutions, which include 21 finance companies, 14 savings and loans companies, 1 mortgage finance company and 1 discount house.[7] The need for a strategic plan to clarify the mission and goals of microfinance and to strengthen stakeholder linkages led to the development of a draft policy for microfinance in 2006. The definition of microfinance has been clarified:

> *"Microfinance encompasses the provision of financial services and the management of small amounts of money through a range of products and a system of intermediary functions that are targeted at low income clients[8]. It includes loans, savings, insurance, transfer services and other financial products and services. Microcredit is one of the critical dimensions of the broad range of financial tools for the poor."*

Strategies for institutional collaboration, capacity building, delivery management, consumer protection, among others, have been spelt out. Stakeholders now have to accept this policy document and then implement it.

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[6] BOG has laid down exposure norms for banks as per best practices in banking. The current stipulations on group and individual exposure and so on are listed as follows: To any one group or individual not more than 25% of the net worth of the institution should be given; Unsecured Credit should not be more than 10% of net worth of the institution; Loans to Director and employee credits have a ceiling; and Investment in immovable property other than for own business is not permitted.

[7] Bank of Ghana (2007).

[8] United Nations, Concept Paper: *Building Inclusive Financial Sectors to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals* (International Year of Microcredit, United Nations, 2005)

3. MICROFINANCE AND LIVELIHOODS OF RURAL WOMEN

Whether microfinance services have created significant changes in the livelihoods of rural women or not is discussed from two dimensions. The first dimension is the opportunity created by the microfinance system for people to save, borrow or engage in other financial activities (insurance and money transfer). The second dimension is the application of proceeds from production due to access to credit. A major guiding principle of rural banks, credit unions and microfinance institutions that were established with financial and human capital from rural people is that the rural people would subsequently participate in the administering of credit to themselves. Such participation in loan decision-making and repayment is expected to result in efficient and effective intermediation of credit and enables the institutions to serve the microfinance needs of their catchment areas. These institutions do not exclude women from participating. In fact most of them mainstream gender in product development; many analyse the roles males and females play in communities and target the disadvantaged, who more often than not are women.

In spite of the participation of rural people in the establishment and administration of these institutions, a study has shown that about 78 percent of rural households do not have *access* to financial services.[9] This figure appears large, unless it is understood that those who do not have *access* include those who have never attempted to participate in the financial system as well as those who attempted and failed. This category of people are considered as having limited access to microfinance services due to certain fears. Their fears were usually based on wrong information or perceptions that they hold about the financial system. In a recent survey by CMA (2008) only 11.5 percent of the women respondents who have attempted to borrow have failed. Those who sought information and made attempts were largely successful (70%). Out of those who were successful, many were given the full amount[10] they applied for (72.5%); only a few were not given the full amount applied for (27.5%). The issue of effectively educating rural women to understand the financial system becomes critical. The perceptions people hold about a system has been found to influence the decision to participate in it.

When people are not well informed they can act in ways that are not beneficial to their livelihoods. For instance, a study by Akudugu in 2009[11] showed that women in the Upper East region who perceived that high education is a requirement for accessing credit from financial institutions were less likely to be successful when they attempt to access credit. In the same way, those who perceived that the application procedure was cumbersome, that there was difficulty in accessing land for cultivating cash crops, that

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[9] Republic of Ghana (2008) Food and Agricultural Sector development Policy. Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Accra

[10] About 90 percent of these are determined upfront by loan suppliers.

[11] Akudugu, M. A. (2009). The contribution of rural banks' financial capital to the livelihoods of women farmers in Upper East region. Raw data. Unpublished MPhil. Thesis. Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra

the interest rate was high, the distance to bank was far[12] that banks would refuse credit to women with low income levels, or have small farm sizes, grow no cash crops, have no previous bank savings, and were not members of economic associations, were less likely to be successful with loan application. This is because such applicants refuse to seek further clarifications on the workings of formal financial institutions[13], or fail to alter behavior and therefore resign themselves to their fate. Those who learn from financial information they received are those who are encouraged to save and receive credit later or are given credit and encouraged to save during repayment. The survey results indicate that, many women have received about GH¢500.00 because of the mere fact that they engaged in micro enterprises and participated in financial literacy meetings organized by microfinance institutions. Sometimes the actual financial needs of the micro-entrepreneurs are not adequately assessed and the monies they are given are far below what is needed to spur investment and growth.

What is of key interest though is that, whether credit is rationed or not, many of the women who learned and have associated with microfinance institutions have indicated that they have benefited somewhat from their association with the micro-financial system to a large extent. It is noted that the women who said their livelihoods have been influenced are of varied backgrounds: Age, marital status, family size, educational level, occupation, scale of operation (farm size), religion, ethnicity, and location (remote rural versus close to urban) (Table 1). Over 70 percent of women respondents said when they borrowed micro-funds they used most (60%) of it for working capital or investment capital and the gains from investment (albeit, small) have increased family food supply, supported child education, medical care and occasionally led to the establishment of new micro enterprises.

[12] Far relative to bank location due to poor road network and surfaces

[13] Microfinance institutions have structures and requirements that ensure their survival and sustainability in the system.

Table 1: Characteristics of women with access to microfinance (By source of Researcher) [14]

Variable	ECLOF	Akudugu	CCA	CMA	FES	Average
Age range (Years):						
Minimum	20	25	19	21	19	21
Maximum	80	65	80	80	80	77
Mean	47	41	37	48	42	43
Marital status (%):						
Married	68	95	68	70	85	77
Single	32	5	32	30	15	23
Family size:						
Minimum	2	2	2	1	3	2
Maximum	9	12	9	15	7	10.4
Mean	5	6	5	6	4	5.2
Gross income per annum from major occupation (GH¢)	1,500	1,221.77	4,000	2,200	3,061.2	5,064
Major occupation (%):						
Farming	80	100	12.3	30	33	51.1
Wage employment	3	0	50.2	13	12	15.6
Agricultural commerce	9	0	10.4	30	30	15.9
Non-agric. Commerce	8	0	27.1	27	25	17.4
Ethnicity (%):						
Indigene	62.5	100	50	50	60	60.6
Non-indigene	37.5	0	50	50	40	39.4
Religion (%):						
Christianity	90	55	90	95	85	83
Islam	9	40	10	5	15	15.8
Traditional	1	5	0	0	0	1.2
Education (%):						
Literate (<9 years)[15]	55	8	20	70	99	62.4
Illiterate	45	92	80	30	1	37.6
Farm size:						
%<2 hectares	26.3	90	95	89	90	78
%≥2hectares	73.7	10	5	11	10	21.9
Mean	4.2	1.64	1.8	2.0	2	2.3
Location (%):						
Rural	62.5	50	40	70	60	60.5

[14] See Appendix A for explanation of acronyms and related studies.

[15] Currently, a person who completes nine years of education is given a basic education certificate. However, this may not be enough, especially if a person spends another decade or more not reading and writing, as most women in rural areas do.

Urban	37.5	50	60	30	40	39.5
Access to credit (%):						
Yes	43	50	83	91	81	69.6
No	57	50	17	9	19	30.4
Amount granted (GH¢):						
Minimum	100	44	200	50	25	83.80
Maximum	700	120	4000	5000	500	2064.00
Mean	450	57	1000	800	200	501.40

A key impact which is often overlooked is the improvement in social empowerment that results from microfinance activities. These activities expose women to group work and increase their leadership and interpersonal skills (as told by one Credit Union member). Some women who join groups during financial literacy activities save for the first time and are encouraged to continue saving, while others become functionally literate, learn how to read and write and appreciate arithmetic (as told by a facilitator of the NFED, MoE[16]).

For improved contribution to the local economy by rural women, there should be increased economic empowerment. This cannot be achieved by only the support of the micro finance system. The effort of the latter should be complemented by other transforming processes and structures. The U.K. Department for International Development (DfID) and the Canadian Cooperative Association (CCA) term the transforming power of microfinance and other institutions as "the sustainable livelihood framework". In the framework, it is noted that in order for the livelihoods of women to be sustainable, financial assets are necessary but not sufficient. Other assets including human capital, natural resources and physical infrastructure are important. Social facilities such as relate to safe water, health care, sanitation and education also make for sufficiency.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The concern of this paper is that rural women in Ghana may not have been empowered adequately by the microfinance system to contribute to local economic development. Today, the policy of financial liberalization has led to many private sector-based microfinance institutions, especially rural banks, credit unions and savings and loans institutions. More than one hundred rural and community banks are located all over Ghana. The problem is that the microfinance institutions have 'rigid' requirements that they hold on to, mainly to ensure their survival and sustainability. So, only rural women who are actively generating income and **will learn** from financial information that they received are deemed suitable for financial assistance. Indeed, the studies on women's

[16] Non-formal education division (NFED) of the Ministry of Education (MoE).

socio-economic status and factors of accessing credit from microfinance institutions shows that women of varied backgrounds have benefited from the microfinance system. Religion and other socio-cultural factors (marriage, age and gender) are no longer the **key** barriers to successful borrowing from or saving with micro-financial institutions. Probably, wrong perceptions of the workings of the financial system, stemming from low levels of education or poor flow of information, is what is contributing greatly to the exclusion of many rural women from the benefits of the microfinance system. Other key challenges are related to the poor road network and surface conditions as well as lack of other socio-economic and community infrastructure which restrict market access and the mobility of financial institutions to serve remote populations. Over dependence on natural rain cycle, limited use of modern technology for production and limited access to remunerative markets also reduce the income earning and capital accumulation capacity of rural women. There is a vicious cycle: Without adequate financial and other resources to increase the scale of operation, micro enterprises earn just enough to remain micro in scale and finance household needs; they do not earn enough to increase their scale of operation to become small or medium scale enterprises.

This study has shown that if rural women capable of engaging in a wide variety of economic activities remain operators of informal sector micro enterprises only, they do not contribute adequately to communal leadership, they are not effectively included in the tax bracket, and they will continue to depend on others (especially spouses) for their livelihoods. The implications of these findings for local economic development are that until all institutions (public and private) in the local economy play their roles in the provision of various economic and social infrastructures, the microfinance institutions alone cannot ***effectively*** support rural women to maintain high standards of living and contribute to local economy development.

Recommendations: It is clear that improving the information base of rural women, upgrading community physical and social infrastructure and clarifying the roles of different stakeholders in a policy document is the way forward to improve microfinance services for the rural woman. The following strategies are suggested:

1. There is a need for human capital development of women entrepreneurs so as to improve market access and financial information flows. There should be intensification of the functional literacy programme for adults being run by the non-formal Education Division (NFED) of the Ministry of Education; together with the Department of Cooperatives, the Department of Community Development and agricultural extension services, more illiterate and rural women need to be sensitized and psyched up through financial literacy campaigns so as to change their negative perceptions of borrowing from formal sources. These agencies should strengthen their collaboration with one another. Financial literacy will empower women as it will make them understand financial service requirements better and improve their ability to obtain full amount of loan applied for and

take advantage of savings and other microfinance services.

2. To make the financial literary more effective, there should be an improvement of the FCUBE policy which seeks to keep girls in school. In addition, there should be implementation of a secondary school policy that encourages more girls not to drop out so as to make more women become and stay literate.
3. To make rural women more credit worthy, the business practices of rural women, particularly record-keeping and planning should be improved. Adequate planning is the key to financial success; women's business practice should change from thinking about subsistence to thinking about expansion. Attitudinal change is the key to inclusiveness in open systems.
4. The pre-loan financial education of microfinance institutions should be repackaged as a social responsibility programme and adequate post-loan educational sessions should also be included; government is called upon to support private sector in its financial literacy programmes through tax incentives and direct logistical support for capacity building programmes among others.
5. Microfinance institutions also need capacity strengthening especially in analysis of risks related to rural micro enterprise ventures. The provision of a proportion of government soft loans and grants to umbrella organizations such as GHAMFIN, ASFIN, CUA and ARB APEX Bank would be necessary. Such funds will support the capacity building programmes of member financial organizations of these umbrella bodies. The development and funding of tailor-made micro-credit facilities for rural women would be made more possible.
6. There should be an increase in government funding to District Assemblies for road maintenance and supply of social infrastructure (safe water and sanitation facilities as well as provision of health and education facilities). Local and international NGO should intensify the support of these activities. Accessibility and assurance of good environmental conditions in rural areas is sure to attract more MFIs to interact with clients at their door step.
7. A good policy framework contributes to stakeholder collaboration. Hence, the finalization, acceptance and the prompt and thorough implementation of the Microfinance Policy document for Ghana should be given priority attention by the key ministry, Ministry of Finance, and other stakeholders.

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Appendix A: Description of cited studies and their authors

Source	Description	Location	Sample size		
			Women	Men	Total
ECLOF (2009)	Case study: understanding farm enterprise risks for effective agro loan delivery	Seven regions in Southern Ghana; Interviewed farmers and agro processors	76	215	291
AKUDUGU (2009)	Case study: Contribution of rural banks to livelihoods of women farmers	Four districts in the Upper East region: Interviewed women in communities with Rural banks	200	0	200
CMA (2008) Christian Mothers Association	National study: Access to credit by women as group members in communities with Rural Banks;	10 regions of Ghana: Interviewed members of CMA and other women's groups as well as staff of financial institutions	222	42	264
CCA (2008) Canadian Cooperative Association	National study: Gender assessment of community credit unions	Six regions in northern and southern zones of Ghana: Interviewed active clients, managers and other leaders	93	72	165
FES (2005) Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung	National study: Women in trade in Ghana	Desk search and case study of three regions in southern Ghana	155	30	185
Total	Women's access to credit, savings culture and demands of financial institutions	National	746	359	1105