Thank you for your investment in this project in FY2016.

Livelihoods
The goal of this project is to reduce the annual hunger gap for over 8,400 children and their families in Talensi District by 2017.

Seasonal periods of food shortages, or "hunger gaps", are a constant issue threatening communities in the Talensi area of Ghana. The hunger gap affects children in particular, as malnutrition can have long-term consequences for their health and development.

Land degradation through deforestation from bushfires, overgrazing, and felling trees for wood and charcoal has left fragile soils exposed to erosion, leading to poor crop yields and food insecurity. In addition to low food production, the cultural practice of costly funerals reduces household incomes, resulting in an inability to feed their families.

The result of these financial stresses is that many families reduce the number of meals, go days without food, search for wild foods, travel to find work, sell family possessions, borrow money and sell seeds they need for planting. The Talensi Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) Project helps farmers and families restore natural resources in order to address the problem of the hunger gap in Talensi.

Re-growing felled trees helps rural communities protect their fragile ecosystems, improves crop production, and provides timber, fuel, fodder, fruits, herbal medicines and raw materials to support income-generating ventures. Tree products such as shea-nut and tamarind leaves and seeds are good sources of nutrition and income for the population, especially women, who often sell these products.

FMNR is a low-cost land restoration technique that combats poverty and hunger among subsistence farmers by increasing food and timber production and resilience to climate extremes. The technique involves the organised regrowth and management of trees and shrubs from felled tree stumps, sprouting root systems or seeds.

The first phase of the project was completed in September 2011 and in 2012 Phase 2 of the project began. After building on initial gains and lessons learned, in 2016 the project expanded its reach to include more communities and an extra 105 acres of land under forest protection, accelerated environmental recovery, and improved food security to help reduce the hunger gap for over 8,400 children and families in 31 communities in Talensi.

Other project activities include creating awareness of and conducting training in sound environmental practices and management such as bushfire prevention, income diversification (for example rabbit rearing, small ruminant rearing, maize farming, trial acacia growing, and improved storage to reduce crop losses), Village Savings and Loans Associations, and education aimed at reducing household expenditures on funerals that normally lead to food shortages.

**Expected outcomes**

- Improved household food production, availability and use.
- Improved and diversified household income.
- Enhanced project quality and management.
FY2016 achievements

To address the low soil fertility caused by over-cropping, 160 farmers were trained in compost making to improve the structure of the soil and increase their crop yields. Home-made compost is easy to produce and less expensive for small scale farmers compared to chemical fertilisers. Seventy percent of farmers who adopted the compost-making technique reported an increase in crop yields. Another 100 farmers – 50 men and 50 women – in five communities were trained in land preparation techniques to restore degraded farmland and increase soil fertility during a one-day session on conservation agriculture, which included: minimum tillage, no-tillage, all year round vegetative cover on the land surface, no burning of crop residues, crop rotation of cereals and legumes, the use of stone bonding to control erosion, contour ploughing and the use of compost. After their training, the farmers constructed stone bonding on their land to reduce soil erosion, improve nutrient uptake and conserve moisture.

In seven communities, an average of 60 people participated in bushfire education sessions. One hundred and eighty fire stewards were trained in nine communities to help prevent and control bushfires and were supplied with wellington boots, cutlasses, hand gloves and t-shirts. Bushfire education during Phase 2 of the project has resulted in a drastic reduction in bushfires within the district, with over 90 percent of communities recording zero bushfires in the last three years. Soil fertility and vegetation is recovering, with fodder available for livestock, termites present for poultry production, and more wild fruits, herbs and wood for fuel available for domestic use.
FY2016 achievements

The project trained 500 women in 10 communities on how to construct improved mud stoves that reduce the amount of firewood needed to heat them. Over-dependence on firewood for cooking contributes to the practice of forest-clearing in the area. This activity specifically targeted women because they have the primary responsibility for cooking in the local culture. Over 300 women have since built mud stoves and report that they reduce the amount of firewood needed, keep their cooking utensils cleaner, produce less smoke and reduce cooking time. The remaining women are in the process of building their stoves.

Six new communities were trained in the FMNR technique, bringing the total number of communities involved in the project to 31. In each community, 10 women and 10 men – “lead farmers” – were trained in shrub pruning and tree management and provided with boots, cutlasses, sickles, knives and gloves. Farmers are now practising FMNR on their farmlands to improve crop yields and increase the availability of firewood. The new communities brought another 105 acres of land under forest protection, bringing the total land reserved for FMNR in communities in Talensi to 1,264 acres.

Acacia field trials 20 months after planting the seedlings. Thanks to your support, farmers in Talensi are able to harvest acacia seeds to help reduce the hunger gap.

Farmers undertake a pruning exercise.
Breaking Talensi’s glass ceiling through goat farming

“My children are happy,” she says, “and their education is going on smoothly.”

– Grace

Grace, aged 38, almost led a traditional life in a conservative community in Talensi, Ghana. She dropped out of school after junior high, married a man who already had two wives, and raised six children. However, she soon found that she was miserable, and could not get enough food for her children.

“Because my husband had many wives, we were left to fend for ourselves,” Grace says. “I had to wake up very early to gather shea nuts, cut firewood and collect wild fruits to sell to be able to provide food and clothing for my children. I contemplated migrating to the southern part of the country because of the unbearable situation we were living in. Life was full of despair.”

Everything changed in 2013, when World Vision expanded the FMNR project to Grace’s community and she became one of 20 lead farmers learning the new techniques.

She became the secretary of the FMNR lead farmers and responsible for organising the community’s activities.

Grace, along with nine other community members, also received two goats to rear. She was thrilled when one goat gave birth to triplets and another to twins. She took great care of her goats and today they have multiplied to 18. This year, she sold two male goats and used the money to buy a bag of millet to feed her family, register for health insurance and pay her children’s school fees.

“My children are happy,” she says, “and their education is going on smoothly.”

Grace says she has gained respect in the community because she is “among the first women to own this number of goats”.

Not only that, but her leadership in the FMNR project has inspired her to continue challenging restrictive cultural traditions.

“My plans for the future are to take proper care of the goats so that in a year’s time I can buy a sewing machine and a cow. Even though the rearing of cattle is perceived to be the preserve of the male, I am determined to make it with the help of God,” she says.

“I am full of hope for the future. I am so grateful to World Vision for changing my life.”
FY2016 achievements

80 farmers who received 160 goats and 50 farmers who received 50 sheep in 2015 have increased their livestock numbers by 60 percent and 80 percent respectively.

Savings groups were expanded to include 58 new groups, bringing the total number of savings groups to 184. Each group is made up of 15-25 people who band together to save funds. This creates a group fund where members can take out small loans to finance income-generating activities. The loans are charged at a much lower interest rate than financial institutions and are especially important to women, who experience difficulty accessing loans from financial institutions to start businesses due to the demand for collateral security. Members of the savings groups were trained in business and financial management and many started their own businesses in tailoring, weaving, hairdressing, cooking and shopkeeping. Women in particular have felt the economic benefits of the savings groups, and their participation in household and community decision-making has improved due to their increased financial power.

100 farmers, chosen from the most financially vulnerable households, received two goats each this year. Another 30 farmers received one female sheep each to rear. Project staff visit the households to ensure that the family provides the animals with proper housing and feed. During these visits, staff reported that 80 farmers who received 160 goats and 50 farmers who received 50 sheep in 2015 have increased their livestock numbers by 60 percent and 80 percent respectively. The families will be able to sell the offspring from the animals to buy food during the hunger gap, pay for housing and school fees and buy education materials.

180 farmers from six communities tried a new soybean variety, chosen especially to address the impacts of climate variability, such as erratic rainfall, that have made growing traditional crops more difficult. The improved soybean variety, acquired from the Savanna Agricultural Research Institute, does not “shatter” before the farmers have time to harvest it. Enough of this new variety seed has been retained at the project office to supply a further 100 farmers from 10 more communities with seed for next season. 460 farmers also trialled a new variety of sweet potato that is high in vitamin A and may help correct vitamin deficiencies in children as well as providing extra income for families.

Continued overleaf >
The first fruits from acacia planting trials that began in Talensi in 2013 have now been harvested. The acacia tree produces food in the driest and hottest time of the year and therefore has the ability to reduce the hunger gap. The quantity of acacia seeds harvested from two varieties was promising, and the trees have been pruned to allow for more cropping next year. Food demonstrations will help communities learn how best to use the crop to combat hunger, while farmers in six communities have planted acacia seedlings along the borders of their farmland to reduce wind erosion and improve soil fertility.

The project has promoted the use of Perdua Improved Cowpea Storage bags in eight communities and held demonstrations on how to reduce crop losses for 480 farmers. This has led to farmers being able to store their seeds and crops for longer periods, in order to sell them for income during times of hardship and food insecurity. Poor storage of crops can lead to food losses of up to 30 percent and contribute to food insecurity.

Communities appear to be embracing messages about the need to curtail expensive funeral practices. Project staff have observed a significant reduction in the amount of materials carried to funeral grounds. The practice of holding expensive funerals strips families of financial resources, encourages the over-consumption of alcohol and worsens poverty and hunger in many households. During talks with elders, it became clear that holding expensive funerals is a recent custom — rather than a traditional one — and one that the elders strongly dislike. Through meetings with chiefs, elders, religious leaders and young people, radio discussions and plays, the practice has been publicly discouraged.

Several activities were carried out during the period in review to help enhance project quality and management. This included partner review meetings where a progress report for the project was shared with strategic project partners, as well as the project annual plan for FY16. Partners included community chiefs, lead farmers, the Ghana National Fire Service, The Forestry Research Institute of Ghana, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the National Disaster Management Organization and Movement for Natural Regeneration staff. The project aims to foster a consensus-building community approach, where all stakeholders are engaged and supportive of the methods of reviewing and executing the project, and share and learn from each other.

Project monitoring visits were made to all FMNR communities to deepen and sustain the impact of the project and view progress. Field officers support and monitor all the savings groups in their weekly meetings and check on the progress of small ruminant farmers, bee keepers and bushfire prevention officers.
Challenges and lessons learned

Addressing gender issues is essential for change.

In order to bring about holistic change, the project deliberately targets gender issues and every activity involves women, men and children. Women are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and climate change in Talensi, because for cultural reasons their livelihoods bring them closer to the environment and their role in the household involves collecting firewood; so the more land degradation in their area, the more time and difficulty involved in their daily chores.

The project strives to select equal numbers of men and women as lead farmers, fire volunteers and for goat and rabbit rearing. The savings groups comprise 85 percent women and 15 percent men, for the purpose of empowering women economically and strengthening their confidence in contributing to decision-making in the household.

Join us at the forefront of change in 2017

Thank you for supporting the Talensi Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration Project. Your generous support is helping to reduce the annual hunger gap for over 8,400 children and their families in Ghana’s Talensi District.