



SUCCESS STORY

Assuring a family's future by increasing business skills

With children often dependent on their success, women producers and traders urgently need ICT skills to increase the number and size of trade deals.



Phoebe Usu, a member of the Cassava Trader's Association, inspects the quality of her stock. Since 2005, she has been learning how to increase her trade deals by using ICT tools.

Phoebe Usu was already a producer in agricultural commodities when she was widowed in 1998. To support her family of six children, she took over the agricultural trade business her husband left behind. Despite her experience as a producer, she found she did not possess all the skills or business contacts she needed to be as successful as she wanted in providing for her family. With the assistance of the USAID-funded MISTOWA (Market Information Systems and Traders' Organizations in West Africa) project, Usu was able to gain the skills necessary to become a successful agricultural trader. "MISTOWA's training took the 'luck' out of being successful; instead of relying on my husband's former contacts, my network has expanded to the entire West African region," said Usu.

Although Usu had virtually no knowledge of computers, as a member of the Cassava Trader's Association she was able to attend her first ICT computer training at the Community Resource Centre in Kaduna, Nigeria in September 2005. One month later, she received additional MISTOWA training in a workshop specially geared to the information needs of women. Taking full advantage of what she learned from these events, she became proficient in using her mobile telephone to give and receive market price information and make business contacts. In April 2006 she obtained advanced training on TradeNet (www.tradenet.biz) and the West African Agricultural Trade Portal (www.wa-agritrade.net), for prices, contacts, news and offers to buy and sell.

Usu now uses the Internet at least twice a week to make business contacts and manage her affairs. Through Internet browsing and the use of SMS on her mobile phone, she has made contact with several producers and traders, contacts which have led to profitable new business. She finds that with the ICT skills she learned, her trading possibilities have expanded greatly.

By browsing the internet, Usu located a cassava producer in Zamfara State, Nigeria. She now purchases 30 tons of cassava from this producer each week at just under \$300 per ton. She then resells the cassava at a profit to Katsina state and Niger Republic, earning an average of \$650 each week. In a different online occasion, she discovered Regina Akume, a large cassava producer in Benue State, Nigeria. Doing business with Akume added \$160 to Usu's weekly income. Usu also supplies cassava to five traders in Maradi in Niger Republic on a weekly basis, earning a further \$327 each week.

Usu is optimistic about the future of her business. "Things can only get better; when I least expect it, another offer to purchase comes through my email or in a text message" she explained.