



A sunflower field cultivated as part of the AVRR project for migrants returning from Libya. © IOM 2012

As part of its Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, IOM Ghana provides support to Ghanaian nationals in the diaspora who wish to return home and are interested in establishing a small business, engage in training, or further their education.

Sunflower Production and Community Development: From Seeds to Oil

IOM assisted a group of 35 Ghanaians who returned from Libya to Nkoranza, Ghana to form a cooperative union and provided them with the necessary training and tools to start producing sunflowers. The participants were taken through 10 practical-oriented modules, including planning and commencement of business, effective ways of crop cultivation, weather patterns and planting seasons, harvesting and storage, commercial aspects of business, and formation, organization, and benefits of cooperatives. The facilitators of the workshop were Mr. Issah Sulemana from Tropical Agricultural, Marketing, and Consultancy Services (TRAGRIMACS) and Mr. Paul Aliba from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA).

The workshop led to the birth of the Sunflower Project, which allowed participants to put into practice the theoretical concepts acquired during the workshop. Each of the 35 participants was assisted to cultivate an acre of land for sunflower production, which they harvested and then sold to the market. Immense benefits accompany the cultivation of sunflowers; not only are

they used for oil, but they also have the added benefit of being used for bio-diesel. There is a great need to address the root causes of migration by supporting similar income-generating activities in major migrant-sending areas. IOM Ghana plans to include such initiatives to support other communities affected by migration.



Above: Members of the Sunflower

The Dangerous Search for Greener Pastures: A Journey Across the Desert, Sea, Mountains and Home Again

Mr. Kofi was a carpenter from Chirano village, lived in the Western Region of Ghana. Although he earned a decent income working at the local goldmine, he was told by friends that individuals with his skills could earn good income abroad. He wanted to provide the best future for his family and this motivated him to journey abroad.

Early one morning, Mr. Kofi set off with his life savings, USD 1,000, and headed North. He traveled by bus to Burkina Faso and then on to Niger. Once in Niger, he located other Ghanaians making their way to North Africa and travelled with them by truck across the Sahara Desert.

Here is an excerpt from Mr. Kofi's harrowing journey:

I was in a group of about 75 people and we were packed into the trunk of a truck. Most of us had to stand throughout the journey. I carried along water mixed with gas oil, gari, and shito to survive through the journey. On the journey to Sarbah, we were attacked seven times by armed robbers who took our money, clothes and anything valuable they found on us.

After two days of travel, one fellow Ghanaian on the truck died due to dehydration and thirst. His own brother was with the group, but could not give him water to save his life because he had just a little water to keep himself alive. During the journey through the mountains, I saw something I would never forget – the sight of a friend from my village who had died just the day before with all his belongings beside him. I learned their vehicle broke down and they had to walk the rest of the journey. It was a very terrible experience and it still lingers in my mind; to this day, I have not been able to tell the family of the friend about his death even though I have since returned to Ghana. Sadly, they are still anticipating his return.

We had to abandon the truck in which we were traveling before the Libyan border and I arrived to Sarbah after walking for three days. I stayed there for one month to earn more money to continue my journey. Once I reached Tripoli I worked as a mason (Malaga), as that was the only available work. I realized that all the stories of the opportunities in Libya were not true and life was very difficult.

I was in Tripoli for close to three months and decided to move on to Europe, as life was really tough in Libya. I managed to save enough funds to pay for my boat trip

across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy, which cost me USD 1,000. The journey across the Mediterranean was even more dangerous than the one across the Sahara Desert. The boat journey was really terrifying, as the sea looked so huge and moreover I didn't know how to swim. Once we set out on our voyage to Italy, our troubles began when the engine of the boat ceased to operate. It was then I realized the captain of the ship had no clue of how to navigate, as he could not even read the compass nor even detect the fault of the engine. Everyone started panicking, which made the boat wobble, and because it was overloaded it nearly capsized. Luckily the engine started again, thanks to a fisherman on board who knew how to repair outboard motors. We assisted the captain to read the compass and got to Lampedusa, where we were lucky to have been rescued by the Italian Sea Patrol.

Upon being rescued, most people on board were very weak due to lack of food and water and from the inhalation of carbon monoxide emanating from the engine. While the rescuers paid attention to the weak and vulnerable ones, I escaped from the camp. I then set off to find work, stopping first in Palermo, then Napoli and finally Modena. After a difficult year in Modena I traveled across the Alps to journey to the United Kingdom. I realized that the stories of Europe as 'heaven on earth' were a fallacy and I regretted ever leaving Ghana.

Once I reached the UK I heard about IOM's AVRR programme and the opportunity to return to Ghana. My application was accepted and once I returned home IOM Ghana provided me with reintegration assistance to start a cocoa farming business.

I am now very happy to be home and reunited with my family. My business is doing very well and I am thankful to IOM for their assistance, which helped me earn an income and re-establish my life in Ghana.



Above: Mr. Kofi at his cocoa farm. © IOM

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