Where Are They Now?



Atiako Kwame Acheampong
Technical Program Lead Gates Ag One

By Jackie Campbell

One Step Leads to Another

From a young researcher in Ghana to helping shape the future of African agriculture.

Few could have predicted where one opportunity would lead. For Atiako Kwame Acheampong, it sparked a journey from a research lab in Ghana to a career helping bring agricultural innovation to smallholder farmers across sub-Sahara Africa.

Kwame's connection with Kirkhouse Trust began at the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG). As a young researcher working in molecular biology, he saw first-hand how Kirkhouse was supporting scientific research and training through initiatives such as the Mobile Lab programme and molecular biology facilities. Those experiences expanded his sense of what might be possible.

With Kirkhouse support, his MSc research on avocado genetics took him across Ghana and then to Israel, where he spent seven months working with leading researchers in avocado breeding, genetics and pathology. After returning from a seven-month laboratory attachment, he completed the MSc that would launch an international career. The opportunity led directly to a PhD in Israel, a postdoctoral position in the United States and, ultimately, his current role as a Technical Program Lead at Gates Agricultural Innovations (Gates Ag One).

Looking back, he sees it as the moment everything changed.

"The opportunity that was given to me opened so many doors for me."

The impact went far beyond funding. In Israel, Kwame saw first-hand how science and innovation could transform agriculture. The experience broadened his horizons, shaped his ambitions and reinforced his belief in what was possible.

Coming Full Circle

Today, Kwame is a Technical Program Lead at Gates Ag One (GatesAgOne.org), an organization that works with partners to accelerate crop innovations so they can reach and benefit smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. As a Technical Program Lead, Kwame works closely with Gates Ag One's discovery research partners, as well as leading university researchers and scientists worldwide, managing research programs focused on improving photosynthetic efficiency in crops and advancing promising discoveries into innovative solutions that benefit small holder farmers in Ghana and other Gates Ag One target countries. In many ways, it feels like a return to where his journey began.

Growing up in Ghana gave him first-hand experience of the challenges farmers face and the difference that even small improvements can make.

"The little but big things really make a change."

Kwame believes that scientific advances should benefit everyone, including the smallholder farmers who stand to gain the most. What may seem like a small innovation can be life-changing in rural communities.

Today, he is helping make that happen. The young scientist whose life was changed by opportunity is now helping create opportunities for others.

As he describes it, the journey has come full circle.

Lessons for the Next Generation

When Claudia Canales, Chief Executive of Kirkhouse Trust, asked what advice he would give to young scientists, Kwame's answer was simple: embrace opportunities when they come.

"Opportunities will be presented. Take them and make the most out of them."

He encourages students and early-career researchers to grab opportunities with both hands and see how far they can take them. Looking back on his own journey, he sees a clear pattern: one step led to another.

Today, Kwame is helping deliver the kind of change he once hoped to see. Nearly twenty years later, he remains clear about the impact Kirkhouse Trust had on his life.

"I wouldn't be here today without it."



Figure 1: Students during a practical session inside the mobile lab, at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi



Figure 2: Students in front of the mobile lab at the University of Education, Winneba.



Figure 3: Interior of the mobile lab.

The mobile lab was based at the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG), New Tafo-Akim, Eastern Region, and began operating in 2007 under the direction of Jemmy Takrama. It brought hands-on molecular biology training to university students across Ghana. As student numbers grew, the vehicle was used to carry equipment and consumables to universities so practicals could run in their own teaching labs. About 11,000 students were trained with it before it was retired in 2023, when it was no longer roadworthy.