

Policy Brief

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MAKING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN AGRICULTURE A REALITY

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment continues to be a challenge worldwide. Young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and almost 73 million youth worldwide are without jobs. Youth unemployment remains a challenge in Ghana and a number of initiatives have been advanced to solve this problem. These include the Skills Training and Employment Placement (STEP) Programme (2001), the National Youth Fund (2003), and the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) currently known as Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Development Agency (GYEEDA). Attracting the youth into sustainable agricultural enterprises is one key way of not only replacing the aged farming population but also enhancing agriculture productivity. The argument is that the youth are more likely to adopt modern agricultural technologies and apply their entrepreneurial skills to make agriculture a productive venture. This will help to address the youth unemployment problem and also contribute to growth of agriculture sector and the economy. Investment in the agriculture sector and the manufacturing sector has the potential to create effective backward and forward linkages that will benefit the youth as they open up to creative and innovative ventures in agribusiness and agricultural mechanisation.

In spite of these possibilities, the general observation is that the youth shy away from primary agriculture. Several reasons have been alluded to this, such as the lack of initial capital, the rural nature of agricultural business, irregular income flow, high risk and poor infrastructure. Yet, the calls on the youth to venture into agriculture continue unabated. The Government of Ghana has made interventions in four areas namely: Youth in Agriculture Programme (YIAP), Agriculture Mechanization Centers (AMSEC), National Food Buffer Stock Company (NAFCO) and the national Fertilizer and Seed Subsidy Programme (FSSP). Despite these initiatives by government, agriculture remains unattractive to the majority of the Ghanaian youth.

This policy brief summarizes the central themes arising from a forum organized by the Economy of Ghana Network (EGN) in August 2013. The forum considered the question: What incentives exist to serve as push factors for youth engagement in agriculture? Representatives from Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), civil society organisations, research institutions, farmer organisation, graduates of agricultural training, students of agriculture and the general public shared their experiences and perceptions.

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

▪ A look at the Youth in Agriculture Programme (YIAP) of Ghana

The original model

The Youth in Agriculture has four (4) components namely: i) Crops/Block Farm, ii) Livestock and Poultry, iii) Fisheries/Aquaculture and iv) Agribusiness. Under the block farm, the original model was planned to provide youth clustered in an area with credit for land preparation, improved seeds, fertilizer, agrochemicals and sacks. At the end of the season, farmers were expected to repay the facility in kind. Farmers had a choice of selling their produce to the Buffer Stock Company established by MOFA or to any customer of their choice. Farmers in livestock and fisheries were to be given training and provided with housing, feeding, drugs and vaccine, utility until they were weaned off the programme in about a year.

The reality

The amount of money that was allocated for the national programme was meagre. Some described it as “non-seriousness” on the part of Government. The programme benefited fewer communities than expected. It did not create employment for new entrants or the youth who were interested in agriculture. The programme involved only farmers who had resigned themselves to crop farming in rural areas.

The new face expected

The YIAP programme should focus on enterprises that allow small holder farmers to work on blocks of farm lands provided by government, communities and farmers’ groups. Government should partner the private sector to encourage the use of productivity-enhancing inputs, irrigation systems and the sale of produce to a buying company or a well-organized market.

▪ **Lessons from a recent study on the Youth in Agriculture in Ghana**

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The study was based on responses received from 152 farmers from three districts (Akwapim North and South and Suhum-Kraboia Coaltar) in the Eastern region of Ghana. The question was: what are the factors that influenced youth participation in the YIAP? Respondents were made up of YIAP participants (60%); block farmers (14%), individuals registered in farmer-based organisation (11%) or other individuals (32%). About 40% of respondents were aged 35 years or younger, and 83% were males.

Using a logit model, the study identified the following as the key factors that influenced participation in the YIAP: being formally educated, having a large household and farm size with high farm income flow, being located close to a government land, having access to credit and being a member of a farmer based organisation. Using the Kendall's coefficient of concordance the following constraints to participation on YIAP were identified and ranked (in descending order of importance): difficulty in acquiring land for farming, remote location of the YIAP block farms, small sizes of land allocated to farmers on the block farm, low level of income derived from enterprises supported and difficulty in acquiring credit.

The study suggested that the Ministry of Food and Agriculture's District Agricultural Development Units (DADUs) and regional YIAP coordinators should sensitise the youth on the incentive package and the benefits to be derived from participating in the YIAP, in order to encourage participation among the youth. They should also partner other stakeholders to support programmes that improve the literacy levels of farmers and the youth through workshops, seminars and other training programmes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As a developing economy, Ghana needs to prioritise agriculture on its development agenda. The country needs to address the fundamental problems facing the sector – to make the agriculture more attractive to the youth.

Based on discussions, the forum made the following policy recommendations:

1. There should be increased investment in farmer education to improve literacy, learning and knowledge sharing abilities.
2. Irrigation systems should be improved and mainstreamed to ensure uninterrupted agricultural production.
3. Improve the organization of farmers to ensure that the business of agriculture works.
4. Activities and content of communication rolled out on National Farmers' day must be enhanced to make the day more beneficial to farmers.

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