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Policy Brief

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ORGANIC AGRICULTURE AS A LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY FOR RURAL FARM HOUSEHOLD IN GHANA

INTRODUCTION

Organic agriculture potentially provides means of addressing both human and environmental predicaments. Environmental factors such as limited water supply and land degradation create huge challenges for food security. The prolonged sustainability of agricultural activity benefits all other sectors and it has become absolutely necessary to ensure the preservation of the environment and ecosystems. Concerns have been raised about the health implications of the using of fertilizers and other chemicals on the survival of humans, plants and animals. The yields of organic agriculture have been the centre of debates. There are those who argue that organic farming due to its lower yields, requires considerably more land to produce the same amount of food, resulting in more widespread deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss. However, organic farming methods have also been proven to increase yield, while preserving the environment.

Presently, only about 1% of arable land is used for organic agriculture in Ghana. Research into the productivity and profitability of the organic farming system is lacking from Ghana and other developing countries. Evidence is needed to change mindsets towards organic agriculture to encourage farmers to adopt these practices. What is the government's role? Which policies evidently support the adoption of organic farming

practices in Ghana? These and many other questions were addressed by officials from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA).

KEY ISSUES

Evidence that supports organic agriculture

- Scientific evidence supports claims that organic agriculture enhances maximum output, as compared to the traditional way of using chemicals. It increases yield in the long-term, compared to conventional farming practices at significantly lower production costs and higher margins.
- Following universal organic standards for food, obtaining certification can add value to products and attract higher and more stable market prices for organic farmers who are mostly subsistence or small-scale. This increases incomes and well-being for rural communities.

Low market availability in Ghana for organic produce

Ghanaian farmers can cultivate a variety of crops organically, including cocoa, citrus, oil palm, pineapple, cashew, banana, mango, papaya, vegetables and herbs which are already produced by companies like Yahyra Glover Joint Ventures, National Citrus Growing Association, Serendi Palm and Root Capital, among others. Commodities that have been certified as organic have received between 10 and 20 percent premium prices over that of conventional products. There is low market availability of organic foods in Ghana (32.5% of respondents indicated availability). More than half of market actors surveyed indicated a desire for organic foods. This is even more significant for consumers (66.2%), indicating a willingness to patronize organic produce.

Policy response

Agriculture in Ghana has undergone various changes due to numerous economic reform policies which have focused on increasing growth in the sector. The government of Ghana has adopted programs since 1957 to boost agricultural development in Ghana. Policies have aimed to develop Ghanaian agriculture through six main models; Frontier, Conservation, Urban Industrial Impact, Diffusion, High Pay-off Input and Induced Innovation (Ruttan and Hyami, 1995 & 2008). Though they have not explicitly outlined

reforms for structures and institutions pertaining to organic production, they focus on the support of environmentally conscious farming practices. The most recent Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy (FASDEP II), introduced in 2007, emphasized suitable use of resources and environmental sustainability through two objectives of this policy, namely 1) Sustainable management of Land and 2) Environmental Science and Technology Applied.

Challenges

Agriculture is generally plagued by bottlenecks which make it costly for farmers, coupled with low revenue levels from lower prices. This perpetrates a vicious cycle of low yields and unsustainable income, since farmers are by default small scale.

Other include:

- High transportation costs, poor infrastructure, lack of investment in high value non-perishable commodities, low demand for naturally grown foods, and lack of standard enforcement, low farm yield and low returns in investment.
- Input costs are high, affecting the profits of farmers and their desire to engage in organic production
- Erratic rainfall for irrigation makes the practice unpredictable and hinders adequate planning.
- Lack of proper monitoring and evaluation which makes it difficult to control the influx of adulterated fertilizer and pest-control inputs, and to assure the quality and standards of organic products.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Potential solution to these challenges exists, some of which would require resources and the political will to support the main actors within the sector.

- Policies should also be dedicated to changing mindsets toward organic farming. by providing training on organic farming methods.
- Providing evidence from research and supporting farmers through extension services will equip them to engage in organic practices.

- Labelling and certification is key to ensuring that farmers are able to differentiate their produce on the market and generate the deserved premium price as a reward for preserving the environment and ecosystems.

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