



# YOUTH AHEAD:

## Policy Innovations to Create Opportunities for Young People in Africa's Agrifood Systems



### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past thirty years, Ghana has implemented economic and political reforms that have led to a stable socio-economic situation and substantial economic growth (Owusu, Yankson and Osei 2016). The positive economic trends have fostered increased local and foreign investment. This has led to significant improvements in social, economic, and political structures, more inclusive education services, and reduced inequalities among its population (Commonwealth Secretariat 2021).

Like many nations, Ghana's youth are a strategic asset for nation-building and development. The youth population is rapidly increasing, now making up 36 percent of the total population. Youth are more likely to reside in urban areas than in rural parts of the country (Kwakye, Dadzie and Elmaleh 2022). Thus, the Government of Ghana and its partners have implemented a range of interventions focusing on youth cohesion, empowerment, and development (NYA 2021).



These initiatives include free secondary education and vocational training, as well as promoting entrepreneurship and providing job opportunities through programs like the Youth Employment Agency and the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Program (YEA 2023a). The government aims to increase access to quality tertiary education and skills training for Ghana's youth to meet the increasing demand for a more highly skilled workforce. In 2017, it was estimated that 34 percent of Ghanaians of working age had completed secondary or tertiary education (ILO 2023a)

Ghana's economic development vision recognizes agriculture as an important economic pillar. Fifty-two percent of the labor force is engaged in agriculture (FAO 2023b). Agricultural productivity is rising—from 2017 to 2021, Ghana's Agricultural Production Index per capita (2014-2016 = 100) averaged 104.9 (FAO 2023a). The country's success in achieving its food and nutrition security goals will continue to be closely tied to the development of agriculture. Ghana's agriculture contributes 20 percent of the country's GDP and employs 60 percent of the population (FAO 2022d). The country's Enabling Business for Agriculture score in 2019 of 50.5 was among the highest of countries in West Africa (World Bank 2019c). Over the past two decades, Ghana has seen significant information communication technology (ICT) penetration across various economic and social sectors, including business, education, governance, and agriculture. The impact of these technologies on socio-economic activities is significant, contributing to GDP and employment, particularly among the youth. The main drivers of the ICT industry are mobile phones and internet services.

This case study examines the efforts made by the Government of Ghana and its development partners to involve and empower youth in the agrifood sector through various institutional, policy, and programmatic interventions.

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS

The Government of Ghana (GoG) has established various institutions to involve and enhance the participation of young people in development sectors, particularly in agrifood systems.

**Ministry of Education (MoE).** Ghana's Ministry of Education is responsible for all education policies,

including apprenticeships and skills acquisition, and for ensuring equal educational opportunities for all citizens. Established in 1957, MoE coordinates education policies, sets standards, and monitors implementation. Its goal is to make quality education accessible to all Ghanaians, thereby supporting human capital and national development. MoE also aims to prepare Ghanaians for work by developing an educational system that promotes problem-solving, creativity, and critical skills through academic, technical, and vocational programs (MoE 2023). The Ministry focuses on providing education for junior secondary school graduates and increasing access to primary and junior secondary schools for all eligible young people.

MoE is implementing a comprehensive reform agenda through a coordinated Education Reform Delivery Framework to transform the education sector and meet Ghana's human resource and development needs. The reforms are to improve learning outcomes, particularly at pre-tertiary levels, and to enhance accountability and equity in access to education at all levels. These reforms are aligned with the Education Strategic Plan (2018-2030) and were approved in November 2018 by the cabinet (MoE 2018a). MoE is further working to improve formal education systems, particularly in making them more relevant to rural students.

To improve technical and vocational education and training opportunities for youth, GoG works through agencies like the National Youth Council, the Ghana National Reconstruction Corps, the National Vocational Training Institute, the Department of Social Welfare, the Labor Department, and the Council for Women and Development. These agencies and representatives from the Ghana Education Service and seven other training agencies formed a National Advisory Committee on Vocational Training.

**National Youth Employment Agency (YEA).** The National Youth Employment Programme was established in 2006 to reduce youth unemployment. In 2012, it was relaunched as a public service organization and renamed the Ghana Youth and Entrepreneurial Development Agency. However, a lack of legal support caused administrative issues for the new agency. To address this, in 2015 the Youth Employment Agency Bill was passed into law and YEA was established.



The mission of YEA is to coordinate efforts to create jobs for Ghana's youth. This is achieved through offering training in employable skills and organizing internships to help youth transition into employment. The agency also helps to create job opportunities and job placements for youth (Dadzie, Fumey and Namara 2020). By 2012, around 620,000 young people had been employed or trained through the program (Ampadu-Ameyaw, et al. 2020). YEA enabled young people to learn a trade and then to receive assistance for two years before exiting its programs. Different modules were developed and implemented based on the needs of the time. In 2018, the President of Ghana announced that over 100,000 young people were engaged in the various modules run by YEA, with 125,000 set to be engaged in 2019. The government also has facilitated the placement of unemployed individuals in vocational and technical skills training, agribusiness enterprises, and ICT firms. GoG has funded YEA through taxes and levies (YEA 2023b, Jumpah, Owusu-Arthur and Ampadu-Ameyaw 2022).

**Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA).** MoFA is responsible for developing and implementing policies and strategies for the agriculture sector (MoFA2023). The government's vision for agriculture in Ghana is a modernized sector, resulting in a structurally transformed economy with food

security, significant employment opportunities, and reduced poverty. MoFA promotes sustainable agriculture and thriving agribusinesses through research, technology development, and support services for farmers, processors, and traders. As agriculture is the mainstay of the Ghanaian economy, impacting poverty reduction, rural development, social stabilization, environmental sustainability, and economic stability, the ministry also aims to industrialize agriculture, increase food security and employment opportunities, and lower poverty rates. Its mission is to support producers, processors, and merchants to enhance their living standards through technological advancements, research, and efficient extension services.

MoFA promotes youth participation in the agricultural sector to change the negative perception of farmers as uneducated, unskilled laborers with low economic returns by introducing youth-focused initiatives, such as the Youth in Agriculture Programme (MoFA 2011). Through efforts to support the emergence of a modern agriculture sector in Ghana, MoFA also offers career opportunities for youth in research, environmental protection, financial management, engineering, and other technical areas to change the negative perception of farmers as uneducated, unskilled laborers.





**Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS).** The Ministry of Youth and Sports, mandated by the Civil Service Act 1993, is tasked with formulating and coordinating youth and sports policies in Ghana, ensuring their efficiency and effectiveness for national integration and international recognition (MoYS 2023). Focused on three functions—sports development, youth development, and sports promotion—MoYS is to provide effective leadership in policy formulation, coordination, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, while fostering greater public-private sector participation. The ministry has three central agencies—the National Sports Authority, the National Sports College, and the National Youth Authority. These operate to promote youth empowerment through promoting effective youth and sports organizations, fostering youth participation in socio-economic and political development, and facilitating investments in youth and sports from private and third-sector providers.

**National Youth Authority (NYA).** Established in 1974 under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, NYA is Ghana's lead youth sector organization, providing guidance, support, training, and staff development opportunities for youth workers and organizations (NYA 2022). Its mission is to promote youth participation in cultural, socio-economic, and political development through appropriate technology and highly motivated professionals. NYA coordinates and supports youth empowerment initiatives in Ghana to promote the development of the country's youth. Its objectives include:

- Developing the creative potential of youth,
- Instilling a sense of nationalism and civic responsibility in them, and
- Involving the youth in the country's development by mainstreaming youth development issues into national development frameworks.

The Authority formulates policies and implements programs to achieve its objectives among the youth. To ensure effective coordination, NYA has a reviewable National Youth Policy with action plans to guide its implementation. Its staff comprises specialists in youth work who support youth professional development in person or via online training.

NYA also fosters stakeholder interest in skills training, employment, and market information

for youth to provide a conducive environment for their entry into the workforce and participation in the Ghanaian economy. Additionally, the agency cooperates with youth organizations in other countries, develops mechanisms for youth participation in decision-making, establishes and supervises youth leadership and skills training institutes, and organizes annual youth conferences. These activities strengthen the link between educational institutions and the labor market, promote youth participation and universal ethics, and reduce violence and crime among young people (GoG 2023).

NYA has given young people economic and livelihood empowerment training to combat poverty and social problems. In 2018, NYA launched a project in collaboration with the Accra Digital Centre and the Ghana-Indian Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT to provide digital marketing, ICT, and entrepreneurship training to over 3,000 unemployed youth. This initiative aims to benefit young individuals from urban and rural areas, including those with disabilities, by providing them with job-creation skills (Larnyoh 2018). In 2021, NYA trained 50 vulnerable youth, primarily women and persons with disabilities, from the Bongo District in the production of liquid soap, pomade, beads, fabric, and leather wear, as well as in packaging and marketing skills to help them attract customers and meet market demands (MyInfoGh 2021).

**Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Rural Development.** The Ministry and its departments and agencies ensure good governance and balanced development of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies. Its mandates and structure are derived from the 1992 Constitution and section 12 of the 1993 Civil Service Act. The Ministry is responsible for promoting government policies and projects. It also works to improve governance and promote balanced development in rural areas (MoLGDRD 2022).

In 2018, through its Department of Community Development, the Ministry offered training to almost 5,000 young people to improve their technical and vocational skills (MoLGDRD 2019). The training was also conducted in subsequent years with 3,000 trained in 2019 and 2020 and 3,500 in 2021 and 2022. This training is designed to help youth find employment and create job opportunities, ultimately reducing poverty. The



training has been conducted in 25 different locations countrywide.

The Ministry's local-level development and management programs aim to stimulate social and economic growth in rural communities by involving community members in reducing poverty, creating jobs, and improving literacy rates among adults and young people in rural and disadvantaged urban areas. It also works to establish guidelines and goals for community development. It promotes vocational and technical education and training to young people to reduce rural-urban migration and enable them to lead fulfilling lives in their local communities (MoLGDRD 2019).

### 3. POLICY INNOVATIONS

International and regional initiatives aimed at promoting youth development and empowerment operate in Ghana. These efforts are supported by national policies specifically tailored to the local context. Indeed, to involve young people in the country's economic growth, Ghana primarily focuses on their employment and on increasing their participation in the economy. Young Ghanaians view economic management and unemployment as the two most important problems requiring government action (Torsu and Asiamah 2023).

**Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS).** GPRS ran in two phases from 2003 to 2009 and was a significant step in Ghana's socio-economic development planning and programming. It became an effective tool for development programming, inclusive dialogue, partnerships, and resource mobilization. The strategy was aligned with major development assistance frameworks (GoG, ILO, & UNDP 2004). It included specific policies, strategies, programs, and projects to create wealth through economic management, sustainable livelihoods, human development support, and private sector involvement. The strategy aimed to stabilize the economy, create jobs, and empower all Ghanaians to participate in wealth creation. It ensured access to essential social services and expanded participation in decision-making processes, regardless of socio-economic status or location (GoG 2003). In financing activities under the strategy, priority was given to infrastructure (roads, energy, ICT), modernized agriculture, enhanced social services, good governance, and private sector development.

The first GPRS was implemented between 2003 and 2005 to boost the country's economy and improve the lives of its citizens. Developed after consulting with young people and other important stakeholders, its primary goals were to achieve sustainable economic growth, reduce poverty, and protect vulnerable groups within a decentralized democratic system. Significant progress was made in achieving the goals of the first GPRS.

One specific area of focus was agriculture and encouraging more young people to get involved in the sector by providing them with modern tools, technologies, and support services, such as credit and tractor services. Agricultural research institutions also collaborated in efforts under the strategy to offer farmers improved crop varieties and animal breeds. Additionally, there were efforts to create job opportunities for young people in aquaculture and to establish microfinance institutions to improve their access to credit. Legislation was introduced to make it easier for youth to access land. The first phase of GPRS also aimed to enhance technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to improve skills development, including increasing the number of TVET institutions in the country over time (GoG 2003). This included training on elements of agriculture and agrifood systems.

After the successful implementation of the first phase of GPRS, the second phase ran from 2006 to 2009 to extend the achievements of the first phase and overcome its limitations. The second GPRS aimed to create better job prospects, especially for young people and vulnerable populations. The focus was on modernizing agriculture and improving rural infrastructure to support youth employment in the agricultural sector. The poverty reduction strategy additionally aimed to address several key issues to improve competitiveness in private-sector agriculture. These included reforming processes for land acquisition, expanding irrigation facilities, crop development, livestock production, and improving access to mechanized agriculture (Ampadu-Ameyaw, et al. 2020). Overall, the implementation of the GPRS across its two phases achieved significant success—13 of the 16 indicators monitored under the productive and gainful employment theme of the Strategy showed significant improvement.



**Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA).** After extensive consultations on its design with various stakeholders, including young people, GSGDA was introduced in 2010. The program, implemented in two phases, aimed to increase food production, improve nutrition and security, and create sustainable job opportunities (GoG 2015). To achieve these goals, the government increased funding for agriculture through the Agricultural Development Fund. Several actions were taken to address the specific challenges faced by young people, including coordinating the youth-directed actions of different ministries, departments, and agencies, promoting trade and investment, providing training and skills development, and implementing appropriate labor laws. The Youth in Agricultural Program and the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority were important initiatives under GSGDA that aimed to encourage young people to participate in agriculture.

**Ghana Education Reforms, 2018-2030.** The Ghanaian government has launched a significant education reform through the Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2018-2030). ESP is to improve teaching and learning and empower the next generation through their achieving better educational outcomes (MoE 2018a). Before the tertiary education level, Ghana's education system consists of basic education (kindergarten for two years, primary for six years, and junior high school for three years) and secondary education (senior high school or technical/vocational education for three years). ESP 2018-2030 has three main objectives: improving access to inclusive education, enhancing teaching and learning quality, and ensuring sustainable management and accountability.

These reforms align with the Education Strategic Plan for Ghana (MoE 2018b) and the global Sustainable Development Goals that focus on improving learning outcomes, accountability, and equity in education. The reforms aim to make the education system more relevant to national development priorities and adapt to changes in technology and knowledge. They also aim to set clear standards for teaching, learning, assessment, and grading, professionalize teaching, and ensure these standards are met. The reforms include transforming teacher education, reforming the curriculum, making legal and regulatory changes, improving technical and vocational education, decentralizing basic education, and integrating ICT in education. The Ministry of Education oversees the implementation of these reforms through the National Education Reform Secretariat. The reform initiatives are coordinated and chaired by the National Reform Coordinator in the Secretariat. The Secretariat provides oversight to ensure that all activities of the Ministry are aligned with the ESP, to hold reform participants accountable, to provide support, and to address any challenges arising. Specific goals related to learning outcomes, accountability, and equity are set for all agencies and departments within MoE, demonstrating Ghana's commitment to improving education quality for all children.

Ghana has made significant progress in reforming its education system, particularly in secondary technical and vocational education and training. A policy for free secondary education was implemented in 2017. This has improved the access of youth to secondary education, with increased enrollment from junior high school to senior high school from 68 percent to 78 percent,





without affecting teacher-to-student ratios. More students are also enrolling in kindergarten and primary school. Notably, gender equality exists in all levels of education before university (World Bank 2018).

**National Youth Policy of Ghana.** Ghana has implemented various policies and programs over the years to create job opportunities and support the development of young people. This includes initiatives such as the Workers Brigade, Operation Feed Yourself, and the National Youth Employment Programme. The government's vision is to empower young people to contribute to the country's development. This is to be achieved through encouraging their involvement in society, promoting self-development, and including them in decision-making processes.

Youth employment has been a significant focus of development policy in Ghana since 2000. The National Youth Policy of Ghana, first implemented in 2010 and updated in 2021, is designed to empower and positively impact the country's development by providing guidelines for implementing policies and demonstrating commitment to international agreements regarding youth (MoYS 2010, NYA 2021). It aims to involve youth in productive activities, help them reach their potential, involve them in decision-making, and promote learning and networking. The National Youth Policy focuses on agriculture, employment, entrepreneurship, education, technology, and gender equality. The policy specifically encourages young people to participate in modern agriculture as a career and economic option, committing the government to support their involvement in the sector.

The policy also encourages youth creativity, innovation, and self-discovery to improve their quality of life and instill in them democratic values and responsibility. Government will partner with stakeholders to develop interventions and services that equip youth with knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and ethics. GoG and stakeholders are responsible for providing resources that will enable youth to contribute to economic, social, and cultural advancement. In this context, the policy provides guidelines for implementing plans, programs, and projects for youth development and demonstrates the country's commitment to international conventions and charters affecting youth.

The government also recognizes the importance of science, technology, and innovation in addressing youth challenges and has developed a national policy to integrate these fields into youth development efforts. The implementation of the Youth Policy in Ghana has had positive effects—creating employment opportunities, offering training, and giving valuable experiences to youth (Kwarteng 2021).

**National Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) Policy.** GoG introduced in 2000 the first National Science and Technology Policy. This policy was aimed at improving the expertise and capabilities of the country's workforce. The strategy focused on using science and technology in all aspects of society, including promoting the inclusion of women in science and technology fields and addressing the economic and social challenges to doing so. It also encouraged cooperation between government and industry. The policy emphasized that for Ghana to achieve middle-income status by 2020 would require increasing the number of students studying science-related subjects (Amankwah-Amoah 2016).

The National Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy was relaunched in 2010 to promote the development and use of science, technology, and innovation in Ghana's national development strategy (MoEST 2010). The policy aims to create favorable conditions for these fields to thrive. The Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research were designated in the policy as key contributors to STI development in the country. To advance STI development, the government provided about 60,000 laptops, 100,000 computers, and 5,000 scholarships to support students in adopting new technologies to close the ICT gap in the country (Modern Ghana 2012).

The main focus of the STI Policy is to ensure that science and technology play a significant role in every sector of the economy. The policy document outlines the strategies and guidelines GoG will pursue to utilize STI for economic growth and youth development. Specific STI-focused programs and strategies are implemented by specific government agencies based on the overall STI policy. It aims to address youth challenges by applying solutions that leverage STI. The interventions include promoting innovation in education, encouraging youth to utilize their technical and



scientific capabilities, organizing competitions and award schemes to reward innovation, providing scholarships for science students, promoting science education, identifying talented young scientists, and establishing mentoring programs in STI for the youth.

The Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology manages and implements the government's policies on STI. An apex coordination body within GoG was also established to advocate for STI investments and development initiatives, provide advice, and coordinate the nation's STI policies.

Under the STI Policy a venture capital fund administering authority has been established to promote venture capital investments in both private and public sector development. The fund aims to commercialize new technologies that emerge from the work of scientific and technological institutions and to encourage public and private procurement of STI products and services. GoG encourages private sector participation in science and technology management as a way to promote knowledge sharing and advance socio-economic development (UNIDO 2012).

However, due to limited resources, GoG's vision for promoting science and technology has not yet been fully implemented (African Center for Economic Transformation 2023, Adomako,

Quansah and Mensah 2022). Nonetheless, the government's commitment to youth development and empowerment has not been in doubt, especially with the promotion of science and technology education reaffirming its national commitment (Amankwah-Amoah 2016). Amid resource constraints, significant progress has been made within the sector (Buabeng-Andoh 2019). A significant increase in enrollment in science and technology-related courses at the tertiary level occurred between 2003 and 2018, especially for females (Appiah-Castel, et al. 2020). Numerous public universities in Ghana now provide degree programs in science and technology-related fields, including computer science, computer engineering, and telecommunication engineering (UNCTAD 2011).

ICT can benefit Ghana's young people by enhancing their development and employment opportunities. However, it is crucial to address underlying problems, such as gender disparities in accessing ICT. ICT policies need to be flexible and adaptable to accommodate advancements in technology. Furthermore, it is essential to support initiatives that educate young people about privacy invasion, identity theft, online scams, and exposure to offensive content (Commonwealth Secretariat 2021).

**National Employment Policy (NEP).** GoG acknowledges the importance of youth







employment for socio-economic development by accelerating decent job creation through sustainable growth in all sectors of the economy, including the agrifood sectors. Therefore, in 2015, Ghana launched the National Employment Policy (NEP) to tackle unemployment issues, focusing on creating decent job opportunities for youth and vulnerable groups, like women and persons with disabilities (MoELR 2014). The Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations led the development of the policy (Ampadu-Ameyaw, et al. 2020).

NEP aims to create more jobs, improve living conditions and job quality, increase productivity, and strengthen labor administration. It also aims to contribute to economic growth and ensure fairness and security. The policy specifically targets reducing unemployment among youth, early school dropouts, graduates, women, and persons with disabilities. It prioritizes strategies for creating jobs through targeted policies and programs and promotes an enterprise culture. To achieve these objectives, NEP proposes increasing skills training, improving technical and vocational education facilities, promoting programs that employers demand, and collaborating with industry to design relevant curricula. The goal is to better connect the education system with the economy and expose students to the realities of the workforce.

The policy outlines several key issues to address to reduce unemployment. These include rising

youth unemployment despite economic growth and reducing seasonal unemployment in rural communities. Underlying these challenges are more systemic issues, including rising unemployment, especially among young people, rapid population growth, limited links between productive industries, a non-competitive private sector, a dominance of informal sector jobs in Ghana's labor market, insufficient resource mobilization, overemphasis on academic education as a job qualification, unemployment among rural farmers, inadequate labor administration capabilities, and a lack of reliable labor market information for decision-making and planning purposes. The government acknowledges the multifaceted challenges faced by youth. The NEP calls for a multi-sectoral approach to address them, acknowledging the need for a comprehensive approach to create sustainable employment opportunities (Ampadu-Ameyaw, et al. 2020). NEP identifies job creation opportunities across all economic sectors and establishes a framework for facilitating job creation, especially for youth, through coordination and collaboration among sectoral policies and interventions (Hanson 2022). The government's commitment is evident in its efforts to address these issues and improve the quality of employment opportunities (Taylor Crabbe 2020).

It is important to note that the Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies, the National Medium-Term Development





Policy Framework, and the National Green Jobs Strategy prioritize youth employment in line with Ghana's National Economic Policy and aim to overcome supply and demand constraints. They focus on skills development, entrepreneurship, and job creation in the agriculture, infrastructure, light manufacturing, and transportation sectors (ILO 2023d). A recent report from the World Bank showed that agribusiness, entrepreneurship, apprenticeship, and construction are among the sectors that can provide more job opportunities for young people in Ghana (World Bank 2020b).

#### 4. PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS

Besides institutions and policy innovations, several programs have been implemented to encourage youth to participate in Ghana's agrifood sector. Young people make up a significant portion of Ghana's population, and the government has implemented various initiatives to cater to their needs, such as free secondary education, job training, and agriculture programs. The country is repositioning its education system to produce a more knowledgeable and empowered Ghanaian population with relevant skills for socio-economic transformation.

**Youth in Agriculture Programme.** GoG, through MOFA, launched the Youth in Agriculture Programme (YIAP) in 2009 to address the negative perception of the agriculture sector that prevails among young people (Twumasi, Jiang and Acheampong 2019). The program is a significant step taken by GoG to provide jobs for unemployed youth. Its initial goal is to facilitate food and nutrition security to increase employment, particularly in rural areas. The program's main goals, as stated by MOFA, are to encourage young people to see farming as a profitable business, generate sufficient income for their daily needs, improve their living conditions through higher income, and motivate them to remain in rural areas (Charles 2014). Thus, YIAP encourages youth to consider farming as a commercial venture, thereby pursuing farming as a life-long vocation.

The program provides employment opportunities through tractor services and agro-inputs, generates income to meet farmers' domestic and personal needs, improves their standard of living, encourages youth to stay in rural areas, and encourages the production of enough food crops,

meat, and fish using modern methods (YPARD 2013). It encourages youth to adopt farming as a commercial business to improve living standards by providing credit-based but interest-free inputs at their farm gates (MoFA 2011). The beneficiaries received free land, which was also plowed for them. The beneficiaries were also given agrochemicals on credit by MOFA. Providing land and agrochemicals was the principal motivation for beneficiaries to participate in YIAP.

Through the program, young farmers are organized in cooperatives, enabling them to access government input credit without collateral. They work with relevant government agencies and departments to secure land from the government or village. YIAP offers productive alternatives for youth engagement, reducing crime and social problems, diversifying farming practices, introducing new crop varieties and animal strains, reducing soil pollution, and reducing rural-urban migration. Regular advice and supervision from MOFA aims to help reduce soil degradation. Over 11,000 youths are engaged in the program in the three northern regions and the Volta Region, using over 28,000 acres for maize and rice (MoFA 2023).

**Next Generation Cocoa Youth Programme (NGCYP), 2016-2020.** Also called the MASO program, NGCYP was a five-year program supported by the MasterCard Foundation and implemented by Solidaridad, Ashesi University, the Ghana Cocoa Board, Aflatoun, Fidelity International, and Opportunity International. It focused on the creation of sustainable employment opportunities in the agriculture and construction sectors for youth aged 18 to 25 years in Ghana's cocoa communities (Ashesi University 2017).

The program consisted of three components:

- Agro Academies in cocoa-growing regions to equip young people with knowledge and entrepreneurial skills,
- Business Academies for young entrepreneurs to start businesses in cocoa-growing communities, and
- MASO Connect to connect youth to exchange knowledge on best practices and to enable them to create a common political voice on issues affecting young people.



The overall goal of NGCYP was to assist over 200,000 poor Ghanaian youth, including those living under the USD 2.00 per day poverty line, to equip them with the skills to become successful farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs in the cocoa sector. NGCYP also aimed to create a supportive environment for the youth by enhancing their access to land, finance, and markets, thereby reducing barriers to their economic success.

Cocoa production is crucial for Ghana's economy, contributing 3 percent to its GDP and supporting the livelihoods of 4 million farming households (GSS 2014). NGCYP connected young people with quality employment in the cocoa sector or assisted them in starting cocoa-related businesses. This was done by offering them training as skilled farmers or entrepreneurs. These efforts also assisted existing cocoa-related businesses to grow, thereby expanding local employment opportunities (Aflatoun 2020). Additionally, the program aimed to promote gender equality and women's empowerment by involving both men and women in its activities. It achieved 40 percent female participation in all interventions, thereby reducing gender inequality, improving the business skills of young women, and enhancing their involvement in income-generating activities (Dabire 2018).

NGCYP implemented two academies—the Agro Academy, which trained cocoa farmers in best farming and marketing practices, and the Business Academy, which trained service providers in the cocoa sector. The academies offered entrepreneurial life skills, mentoring,

and coaching. In the program's first year, over 4,500 youth participated in the two academies, with nearly 2,000 graduating as cocoa farmers or service providers (Asamoah 2017). By the end of the program, over 11,000 youths in cocoa-growing areas of Ghana were trained and mentored under NGCYP through the Agro and Business Academies in farming practices, life skills, financial literacy, agricultural inputs, and digital technology (Solidaridad Network 2020, MASO 2019).

### **Rural Enterprises Programme (REP)–Phase III.**

The third phase of Ghana's REP, implemented between 2012 and 2020, aimed to improve the living conditions of poor rural entrepreneurs by building their capacity through training in agro-industry and traditional craftsmanship, creating a conducive environment for business generation and job creation, and facilitating access to rural financial services. The Ghanaian government supported REP III through loan and grant financing obtained from the African Development Fund. REP III was designed to create 100,000 new jobs through its different activities designed to support agricultural modernization and micro and small-scale enterprise development in 161 of the 170 rural districts in Ghana (ADF 2012).

REP III consisted of four components: business development services, agricultural commodity processing infrastructure services, a service focused on creating an enabling business environment, and program coordination and management. The program focused on inclusive growth, youth employment, and women's





economic empowerment. REP III also aimed to improve the financial stability of rural individuals engaged in small business ventures, particularly youth, women, and people with disabilities. This was achieved by helping these entrepreneurs increase their profits, expand their businesses, and, in turn, create more job opportunities by fostering business development, promoting improved commodity processing infrastructure and technologies, and building skills for private sector development (AfDB 2013).

REP III sought to improve its beneficiaries' technical and entrepreneurial skills through capacity building. This included offering business advice, training in technical skills, access to financing through grants and loans, and improving the capacity of organizations that support small businesses. Additionally, REP III sought to improve its clients' income, wealth, nutrition, and resilience indicators, particularly for women and youth, by generating good job opportunities for young people.

REP III also worked to improve financial inclusion and to build the capacity of rural entrepreneurs. Its clients were found to be more likely to have a bank account and to apply for and secure loans than the comparison group of non-participants in REP III. The program helped micro and small enterprises better meet collateral requirements so they could access larger loan sizes. This is important in Ghana, where the cost of credit is a barrier to investment and private sector development. REP III also improved business management skills among rural entrepreneurs through vocational training and apprenticeships that involved developing skills in bookkeeping and financial management (Boukaka, et al. 2022).

Furthermore, two funds were established for youth under REP III. The Youth Business Development Fund aimed to help young people by giving them loans from participating financial institutions worth 30 percent of their total investment. The Graduate Youth Challenge Fund focused on supporting innovative and scalable projects in agribusinesses and ICT that can solve problems in agricultural value chains and create job opportunities in rural areas. Additionally, the component of REP III on building an enabling environment included a subcomponent to enhance institutional capacity and promote policy dialogue (Boukaka, et al. 2022).

**National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (NEIP).** Also known as the Youth Enterprise Support program, NEIP was established in 2016 by the Ghanaian government to offer comprehensive support to startups and small businesses. The program offers young entrepreneurs looking to start or grow their small and medium-sized enterprises financial assistance, expert guidance, startup incubator and business development services, and funding. NEIP is aligned with Ghana's vision of becoming a middle-income country with a strong economy that generates sustainable jobs for development. The program began with an initial capital fund of over USD 830 million. In 2017, the program was expanded and rebranded to provide young entrepreneurs with a broader range of services. The 2019 national budget allocated over USD 3.9 billion to the program. By 2023, NEIP had trained 45,000 entrepreneurs, funded 9,350 businesses, and created more than 92,000 jobs (NEIP 2023a).

A small percentage of senior high school students are interested in starting their businesses, but most believe they must go to college to get a job. However, not all students can afford or access higher education, leaving many unemployed. To address this issue, the Student Entrepreneur Initiative was established under NEIP in 2017 to support senior high school graduates with viable business proposals (NEIP 2023b). The initiative provides these young entrepreneurs with financial support and low-interest loans, with a particular focus on agribusiness proposals. In 2018, the initiative supported 1,300 student entrepreneurs. In 2019, the initiative offered about 50,000 young people with skills development, training, and financial assistance.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Ghana's experience has shown that it is essential for a country to take ownership of its development strategies if it is to implement and monitor them effectively. In addition to macro-stability, investments in institutions and infrastructure are crucial for growth, while political and corporate governance reforms are necessary to create a favorable investment climate (GoG 2007). To support and strengthen the involvement of young people in its agrifood systems, GoG has implemented various policies and established a



number of institutions. These have been reinforced by flagship programs emphasizing education, skills and capacity building, entrepreneurship, job creation, good governance, and balanced development. These efforts will better enable Ghana to meet emerging economic challenges and to integrate young people into its economic development. Its youth are urged and supported to make the most of growing economic prospects in agriculture.

Ghana's National Development Plan incorporates initiatives and policies promoting youth leadership and employment. Through solid and innovative national policies and programs, Ghanaian youth are encouraged to seize emerging opportunities in the agricultural sector. Involving young people in decision-making and addressing their needs has several advantages. It ensures that policies, programs, and projects are better tailored to their requirements, as their opinions are considered during the planning, execution, and evaluation stages. Furthermore, actively involving young people in finding solutions to their problems helps them develop skills and prepares them for leadership positions in the future (Hoetu 2011).

Despite tremendous achievements in youth empowerment in Ghana's development sectors, particularly in agrifood systems, some youth still face challenges, such as complicated land ownership systems and the lack of recognition that agriculture is a respectable profession, among others. If these issues are addressed, agriculture could significantly contribute to youth

employment and build sustainable food security in Ghana, given the considerable potential of the sector to boost youth creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Moreover, expansion in the agriculture sector will have knock-on effects on the performance of other economic sectors through more vibrant agricultural value chains feeding into or drawing from those sectors.

To increase youth participation in agriculture in Ghana, a support system that guarantees exposure to and participation in agricultural investment and self-employment for youth in rural, peri-urban, and urban areas is crucial. Additionally, Ghanaian authorities need, first, to implement and strengthen comprehensive youth employment strategies to change youth perceptions about economic opportunities in Ghana's agrifood systems (Allen, Howard, et al., 2017). Second, to make agriculture appealing to youth, significant investments in education should be made to enable youth to be successful agricultural entrepreneurs. These include ICT innovations in the agrifood system to advance value chains and provide new employment opportunities, enhance access to the market, improve market and rural infrastructure, and reinforce business environments. By adding these efforts to what already is being done to engage and maintain young people in the development of its agrifood systems and, therefore, in its socio-economic development, Ghana will reaffirm its position as a leader in Africa in designing and implementing policy innovations for the sustainable development of the continent and the economic success of its youth.

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