



Youth Employment Paths in a Ghanaian Rural Community

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ABSTRACT

Rural youth engage in different employment activities. Due to the scarcity of literature on the employment activities and aspirations of youth in rural communities especially in Africa, the study examined the past, present and future employment of the out-of-school youth in Amankyea, a rural community in the Atwima Nwabiagya district of Ashanti Region in Ghana. Three (3) focus group discussions and interviews with 20 rural youth who were purposively selected were conducted. Questionnaires were also administered to 270 randomly selected young people in the rural community. The data analysis revealed that the rural youth engage in farming, formal employment, employment in informal enterprises, informal self-employment and family employment. Although the majority of young people were farming, most of them indicated their interest in informal self-employment as their future employment aspiration. The study recommends that farming should be made more attractive for the rural youth to choose as an employment aspiration. Rural youth should also be given skills training to enable them pursue self-employment.

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INTRODUCTION

Youth employment is a subject of considerable policy, research and practitioner interest.¹ It has assumed centre stage in the development discourse since youth unemployment has increased in most world regions.² Globally, the youth unemployment rate was estimated at 15.6% in 2021, more than three times the adult rate. Some 75 million young people were unemployed, 408 million were in employment, and 732 million were out of the labour force.³ There are concerns about Africa's "youth bulge," as well as the formal sector's poor record in creating new jobs, as accounting for the widespread youth unemployment.⁴

¹ Felix Kwame Yeboah, "Youth for growth: Transforming economies through agriculture." *Chicago Council on Global Affairs* (2018).

² Ben White, "Agriculture and the generation problem: rural youth, employment and the future of farming." *ids Bulletin* 43, no. 6 (2012): 9-19.

³ International Labour Office (ILO) (2022), *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: investing in transforming futures for young people*. ILO: Geneva

⁴ James Sumberg et al. "Africa's "youth employment" crisis is actually a "missing jobs" crisis." *Development Policy Review* 39, no. 4 (2021): 621-643.

Young people in Africa engage in different employment activities. In a study of rural youth employment in Uganda and Zambia, the young people in rural areas pursue agriculture, non-farm activities (such as trade, carpentry, metal works, garages, bars, and hair salons), and migration as employment and livelihood strategies.⁵ Agriculture however remains the most important sector in rural societies in Africa. Indeed studies have highlighted the relevance of this sector in employment generation,⁶ reducing poverty, rural-urban migration and the ageing population. Agricultural employment also helps in dealing with low agricultural productivity,⁷ catalyzing structural change, increasing food security and nutritional outcomes.⁸ Agriculture contributed more than one-fifth (21.2%) of the GDP in 2017⁹ and is the largest employer of the workforce, 36.1%.¹⁰ The agricultural sector in Ghana still employs a significant percentage (33%) of the employed population 15 years and older.¹¹

The youth in rural Ghana pursue both non-agricultural and agricultural employment trajectories. The rural youth population in agricultural households was 35.4% of the total agricultural household population.¹² Ghana recognizes the need to attract young people into the agricultural sector¹³ to enhance its development since the agricultural labour force is aging with the average age of a farmer being 55 years and their life expectancy being sixty (60) years.¹⁴ However, the general view both implicit and explicitly stated in Ghana is that young people are not interested in employment in the agriculture sector.¹⁵ Thus the general objective of this study is to examine the employment paths of young people in a Ghanaian rural community. Specifically, the study analyzes the past, present and future employment activities of rural youth in terms of agriculture and non-agricultural employment. The relevance of the study is to explore rural youth interest in agriculture, within the context of youth unemployment and its associated psycho-social and economic implications in the Ghanaian society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study reviews the developmental-contextual model, youth in agricultural employment as well as youth in non-agricultural employment activities.

Theoretical Framework: Developmental-contextual model

Theories of career development have emphasized individuals' personality and aptitude that is the developmental factors on one hand and socio-structural factors which refer to the contextual variables on the other.¹⁶ However, both the developmental, thus, individual and contextual approaches need to be used in a complementary manner for the holistic explanation of occupational aspirations.¹⁷

⁵ Kristensen Søren and Torben Birch-Thomsen. "Should I stay or should I go? Rural youth employment in Uganda and Zambia." *International Development Planning Review* 35, no. 2 (2013): 175-202.

⁶ Karen Brooks, Sergiy Zorya, and Amy Gautam. "Jobs for Africa's youth." *International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)* (2012): 49-57.

⁷ James Sumberg et al., "Introduction: The young people and agriculture 'problem' in Africa." *IDS Bulletin* 43, no. 6 (2012): 1-8.

⁸ Derek D. Headey et al., *Why African governments under-invest in agriculture: Results from an expert survey*, (2009) no. 1005-2016-79075. 2009.

⁹ Ghana Statistical Service, 2017/18 Ghana Census of Agriculture. National Report (2020).

¹⁰ Ghana Statistical Service, 2015 Labour Force Report, (2016).

¹¹ Ghana Statistical Service, *Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census, General Report Volume 3E: Economic Activity*, Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana (2021).

¹² Ghana Statistical Service, 2017/18 Ghana Census of Agriculture.

¹³ Nana Akua Anyidoho, Jennifer Leavy and Kwadwo Asenso-Okyere. "Perceptions and aspirations: a case study of young people in Ghana's cocoa sector." *IDS bulletin* 43, no. 6 (2012): 20-32.

¹⁴ Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Extracted from http://mofa.gov.gh/site/page_id_5428 on 26th June, 2018

¹⁵ Anyidoho, Leavy and Asenso-Okyere. "Perceptions and aspirations: a case study of young people in Ghana's cocoa sector," 20-32.

¹⁶ Jay W. Rojewski, "Occupational aspirations: Constructs, meanings, and application." *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work*, (2005): 131-154.

¹⁷ Y.L. Wu, "Examining the occupational aspirations of Taiwanese Aboriginal adolescents based on the developmental-contextual model of career development" *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 13 no. 4 (2012):757-769.

Therefore the development-contextual model is useful in career development literature. The developmental-contextual model examines development as “the interaction between a developing individual and the multiple contextual systems”.¹⁸ The model notes that the developing individual is embedded in an interconnected set of contexts and his/her characteristics play an important role in his/her own development. The multiple systems consist of proximal and distal systems. The proximal systems consist of immediate social settings in which the individual participates that have a direct effect, while the distal systems encompass those settings where individuals do not participate actively and therefore have an indirect effect.¹⁹ The context in which people live, their personal aptitudes and educational attainment influence their career choices.²⁰ Applying the developmental-contextual model, the study acknowledges that the personality of the rural young people as well as the socio-cultural context within which they live influence their past, present and future employment.

Youth in Agricultural Employment: A Global Perspective

Agriculture has been recognized as the developing world’s biggest employer and has the growth potential to fulfil the world’s growing demand for food, feed, fuel and fibres among others and to provide decent livelihoods for many more.²¹ The agricultural sector accounts for 60% of employment in low-income economies and contributes 25% to their Gross Domestic Product (GDP).²² In developing countries, 3 billion people live in rural communities out of a total of 5.5 billion and out of all the rural households, 86% of them rely on agriculture as their main source of livelihood.²³

Despite the immense potential of agriculture for youth employment, it appears to be unattractive to the youth, who therefore turn away from the sector, as a source of employment.²⁴ This was highlighted by Juma who found that in Tanzania, agriculture does not appeal to many youths who view it as dirty and an employer of last resort.²⁵ Many youths in Kwara State of Nigeria, including those with rural backgrounds, are also opting out of farming in search of non-existent white-collar jobs.²⁶ Young Africans are increasingly reluctant to pursue agriculture-based livelihoods.²⁷ The challenge of getting the youth interested in agriculture is therefore examined either as “youth in peril” or “agriculture in peril.”²⁸ As such the picture is either “agriculture as a saviour of young people” or “young people as a saviour of agriculture.”²⁹ Young people are regarded as the key to the future of agriculture. However, as a result of the low earnings and growing disinterest of youth in agriculture, and the lack of capacity of other rural sectors to absorb the youth, particularly in Asia and Africa, there is the incidence of migration, joblessness, disillusionment, and the associated risks of instability.³⁰

Ghana is an agriculture-based African country. Agriculture is therefore very significant in Ghana in terms of its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment. It is the biggest

¹⁸ Wu, “Examining the occupational aspirations of Taiwanese Aboriginal adolescents,” 757-769.

¹⁹ Wu, “Examining the occupational aspirations of Taiwanese Aboriginal adolescents,” 757-769.

²⁰ Mark Watson et. al., “Occupational aspirations of low socioeconomic black South African children.” *Journal of Career Development* 37, no. 4 (2010): 717-734.

²¹ White, “Agriculture and the generation problem,” 9-19.

²² Jean-Jacques Dethier and Alexandra Effenberger. “Agriculture and development: A brief review of the literature.” *Economic systems* 36, no. 2 (2012): 175-205

²³ Dethier and Effenberger, “Agriculture and development,” 175-205.

²⁴ White, “Agriculture and the generation problem,” 9-19.

²⁵ Asha Juma, “Promoting livelihood opportunities for rural youth: some lessons from Tanzania.” *Paper for IFAD Governing Council Roundtable: Generating Remunerative Livelihood Opportunities for Rural Youth* (2007).

²⁶ Adefalu O. Adekunle et. al., “Constraints to youths’ involvement in agricultural production in Kwara State, Nigeria.” *Journal of agricultural extension* 13, no. 1 (2009).

²⁷ White, “Agriculture and the generation problem,” 9-19.

²⁸ Sumberg et.al., “Introduction: The young people and agriculture ‘problem’ in Africa.” 1-8.

²⁹ Sumberg et.al., “Introduction: The young people and agriculture ‘problem’ in Africa.” 1-8.

³⁰ Lance Lochner and Enrico Moretti, “The effect of education on crime: Evidence from prison inmates, arrests, and self-reports,” *American economic review* 94, no. 1 (2004): 155-189.

contributor to GDP and employment.³¹ Agriculture contributed more than one-fifth (21.2%) of the GDP in 2017³² and is the largest employer of the workforce (36.1%).³³ According to the Ghana Statistical Service, a significant proportion (33%) of the employed population aged 15 years and older are employed in the agricultural sector in Ghana.³⁴

Young people are linked with agriculture throughout Ghanaian policy documents which strongly emphasize the need to attract young people into the sector.³⁵ The youth constitute the true wealth and future of Ghana.³⁶ They are likely to contribute to Ghana's agricultural transformation if their potential is tapped. The energy and numbers of the youth provide tremendous opportunities for increasing agricultural productivity.³⁷ However, as stated earlier, the assumption in Ghana's policy discourse is that young people are not interested in employment in the agricultural sector which accounts for the ageing farmer population in the country.³⁸ A number of factors have been identified to explain the apparent lack of interest of the youth in the agricultural sector as a livelihood option including those with rural backgrounds. White identifies the problems of deskilling of rural youth, downgrading of farming and rural life, government neglect of small-scale agriculture and rural infrastructure as well as access to land as accounting for the youth turning away from agriculture.³⁹ Access to land was also highlighted by Amanor in his analysis of the commodification of land.⁴⁰

Rigg, notes that farming has become a low status occupation as noted by the villagers in south-central Bali, as a result of education, media influence and consumerism accounting for the youth's unwillingness to pursue farming as an occupational aspiration.⁴¹ The issue regarding the low status of farming was also identified by Perry, Przybysz and Al-Sheikhas as an important consideration in the livelihood preferences of young men in Senegal associated with different agricultural activities.⁴² In line with Perry et al's view, Tadele and Gella also mention the lack of prestige as a reason for the unattractiveness of agriculture to the youth regardless of the economic outcome.⁴³ The perception of agriculture as an embodiment of poverty and backwardness has been recognized as an explanatory factor.⁴⁴ The youth are disincentivized by the perception of the high risks and low income associated with most agricultural activities.⁴⁵

Norsida identifies some physical and mental factors that account for the lack of interest in agriculture.⁴⁶ The physical factors include lack of capital, bureaucracy in the management related to agriculture, lack of technical knowledge and management, lack of sufficient exposure to agriculture,

³¹ Clemens Breisinger et. al., "Potential impacts of a green revolution in Africa—the case of Ghana." *Journal of international development* 23, no. 1 (2011): 82-102.

³² Ghana Statistical Service, 2017/18 Ghana Census of Agriculture.

³³ Ghana Statistical Service, 2015 Labour Force Report.

³⁴ Ghana Statistical Service, *Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census...*

³⁵ Anyidoho, Leavy and Asenso-Okyere, "Perceptions and aspirations: a case study of young people in Ghana's cocoa sector," 20-32.

³⁶ Ministry of Youth and Sports, *The National Youth Policy*, Accra, Ghana: Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2010.

³⁷ Ministry of Food and Agriculture, *Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy – FASDEP II*, Accra: Ministry of Food and Agriculture 2007

³⁸ Anyidoho, Leavy and Asenso-Okyere, "Perceptions and aspirations: a case study of young people in Ghana's cocoa sector," 20-32.

³⁹ White, "Agriculture and the generation problem," 9-19.

⁴⁰ Kojo Sebastian Amanor, "Family values, land sales and agricultural commodification in South-Eastern Ghana." *Africa* 80, no. 1 (2010): 104-125.

⁴¹ Jonathan Rigg, "Land, farming, livelihoods, and poverty: rethinking the links in the rural South." *World development* 34, no. 1 (2006): 180-202.

⁴² Justin C. Perry, Jeff Przybysz and Muna Al-Sheikh. "Reconsidering the "aspiration–expectation gap" and assumed gender differences among urban youth." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 74, no. 3 (2009): 349-354.

⁴³ Getnet Tadele and Asrat Ayalew Gella. "A last resort and often not an option at all: Farming and young people in Ethiopia." *IDS Bulletin* 43, no. 6 (2012): 33-43.

⁴⁴ Anyidoho, Leavy, and Asenso-Okyere, "Perceptions and aspirations," 20-32.

⁴⁵ Anyidoho, Leavy and Asenso-Okyere, "Perceptions and aspirations," 20-32.

⁴⁶ M. Norsida, "Unleashing youth potentials in developing the agricultural sector," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 20 no. 1 (2012).

infrastructure and insufficient facilities to attract more youth to stay in the village and the lack of source and difficulties in obtaining relevant information. In terms of mental factors, being afraid to take risks, the fear of public perception and societal acceptance, lack of interest and willingness, and lack of strong support from the family and community have been recognized as variables accounting for youth non-interest in agriculture.⁴⁷

Agriculture is viewed especially, by those who have some years of education as backward, demanding and demeaning.⁴⁸ Many youths are discouraged from involvement in agriculture because farming is meant for those who have not been educated or people who failed in other jobs.⁴⁹ The factors militating against youth involvement in agriculture include a lack of basic infrastructure, modern agricultural equipment, credit facilities and subsidies, land and the land tenure system, poor incentives and income. These factors, therefore, affect the rural youth's aspiration to participate in agricultural employment as a livelihood strategy.⁵⁰ Okali and Sumberg in their study of young tomato farmers in Ghana argue that timely access to sufficient quantities of land, labour, capital, markets and information explains engagement and non-engagement in agricultural employment are economic resources which account for involvement or otherwise in agriculture.⁵¹

Youth in Non-agricultural Employment Activities; A Global Perspective

The youth and their households' engagement in non-farm (non-agricultural) employment as a source of livelihood have been expressed by various studies.⁵² Informal employment includes "a range of self-employed persons, who mainly work in unincorporated small or unregistered enterprises, as well as a range of wage workers who are employed without employer contributions to social protection".⁵³ After studying six African countries (Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa) in the Deagrarianization and Rural Employment (DARE) research programme, rural households' income from non-agricultural (non-farm) employment was pegged at 60-80%.⁵⁴ The study also revealed that the youth are actively involved in non-farm employment.⁵⁵

In another research in rural South Bali, many households were found to have no commitment to farming and thus non-farming activities are becoming a central part of their livelihoods.⁵⁶ For over two decades, the income of households in the rural South from farming has declined from about 90% to 36%, while the contribution of non-farm income has risen from 13% to 64%.⁵⁷ Many rural households stated that they obtain income from multiple sources since there is no specialization in agriculture or non-farm employment activities.⁵⁸

According to Chigunta et.al., unemployed youth especially those out of school engage in self-employment, some of which are legal and others illegal.⁵⁹ The reason might be that the formal sector

⁴⁷ Norsida, "Unleashing youth potentials in developing the agricultural sector."

⁴⁸ Tadele and Gella, "A last resort and often not an option at all," 33-43.

⁴⁹ B. O. Ovwigho and P. A. Ifie, "Attitude of youth to agricultural development programmes in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria." *Journal of Agricultural Extension*, 13(2) (2009):67-75.

⁵⁰ Ovwigho and Ifie, "Attitude of youth to agricultural development programmes ...," 67-75.

⁵¹ Christine Okali and James Sumberg, "Quick money and power: tomatoes and livelihood building in rural brong ahafo, Ghana." *IDS Bulletin* 43, no. 6 (2012): 44-57.

⁵² Jonna P. Estudillo and Keijiro Otsuka, "Rural poverty and income dynamics in Southeast Asia." *Handbook of Agricultural Economics* 4 (2010): 3435-3468; Dethier and Effenberger, "Agriculture and development," 175-205.

⁵³ Martha Alter Chen and Joann Vanek, "Informal employment revisited: theories, data & policies." *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations* (2013): 390-401.

⁵⁴ Deborah Fahy Bryceson, "The scramble in Africa: reorienting rural livelihoods." *World development* 30, no. 5 (2002): 725-739.

⁵⁵ Bryceson, "The scramble in Africa: reorienting rural livelihoods." 725-739.

⁵⁶ Rigg, "Land, farming, livelihoods, and poverty," 180-202.

⁵⁷ Rigg, "Land, farming, livelihoods, and poverty," 180-202.

⁵⁸ Dethier and Effenberger, "Agriculture and development," 175-205.

⁵⁹ Francis Chigunta et al., "Being 'real' about youth entrepreneurship in Eastern and Southern Africa," *SEED working paper* 72 (2005).

in Africa is unable to generate enough employment avenues for the increasing number of youth.⁶⁰ The reduction in employment opportunities for the youth has an impact on their transition to adulthood, because of the important role of employment in this process.⁶¹ Shortage of employment avenues for young people results in the postponement of marriage, access to housing and continuous economic dependence on older relations.⁶² The declining number and quality of jobs for young Africans result in the youth engaging in informal sector economic activities which are less profitable and stable.⁶³ According to Calvès and Schoumaker, the majority of the youth in Africa will be employed in the informal sector as a result of the size of the youth population and the current economic structure. Young urban men were more likely to start their working life in the informal sector rather than the formal sector and also on the streets compared to young men in the past.⁶⁴ Within the informal sector, even though the percentage of young men engaged in craft activities such as woodworking, bricklaying, tailoring or shoemaking has not changed, more of the young men participate in petty trading of non-food items and the repair of bikes and cars.⁶⁵ Yeboah posits that some youth and their household in rural Ghana engage in non-farm employment as an employment option. In Ghana, people in rural areas adopt livelihood diversification strategies by cultivating cash crops such as cocoa, citrus, and oil palm, engaging in non-farm enterprises, migrating to urban areas and engaging in the sponsorship of a family member to travel to a developed country.⁶⁶ Non-farm activities in Northern Ghana include agro-processing, transport services, commerce, charcoal production, wage work, firewood gathering, repair services and seasonal migration, among others.⁶⁷

Various factors have been identified by scholars as accounting for youth and their households' involvement in non-farm employment activities. Examining the determinants of participation in employment and income diversification, seasonality in employment avenues, diminishing returns to factors of production, market failures and management of risk are regarded as the main causes of income diversification.⁶⁸ Households' asset endowments have been identified as a determinant of diversification into non-agricultural sources of income. Using data from 15 developing countries it was found that, households that own land, have lower educational levels, have little infrastructural access and are more likely to engage in agricultural employment compared with those who do not possess these characteristics.⁶⁹

The level of education of household members is an important determinant of participation in non-farm activities.⁷⁰ To Dethier and Effenberger, some amount of human capital is needed to venture into many non-farm jobs that produce high returns resulting in the inability of households with lower levels of education to participate in them.⁷¹ A positive relationship exists between secondary/tertiary education

⁶⁰ Anne-Emmanuèle Calvès and Bruno Schoumaker. "Deteriorating economic context and changing patterns of youth employment in urban Burkina Faso: 1980–2000." *World Development* 32, no. 8 (2004): 1341-1354.

⁶¹ Calvès and Schoumaker. "Deteriorating economic context and changing patterns..." 1341-1354.

⁶² Calvès and Schoumaker. "Deteriorating economic context and changing patterns..." 1341-1354.

⁶³ Calvès and Schoumaker. "Deteriorating economic context and changing patterns..." 1341-1354.

⁶⁴ Calvès and Schoumaker. "Deteriorating economic context and changing patterns..." 1341-1354.

⁶⁵ Calvès and Schoumaker. "Deteriorating economic context and changing patterns..." 1341-1354.

⁶⁶ Eric Henry Yeboah, "Microfinance in rural Ghana: A view from below." PhD dissertation., University of Birmingham, 2010.

⁶⁷ Victor Owusu, Awudu Abdulai, and Seini Abdul-Rahman. "Non-farm work and food security among farm households in Northern Ghana." *Food policy* 36, no. 2 (2011): 108-118. o. 2 (2009).

⁶⁸ Christopher B. Barrett, Thomas Reardon, and Patrick Webb. "Nonfarm income diversification and household livelihood strategies in rural Africa: concepts, dynamics, and policy implications." *Food policy* 26, no. 4 (2001): 315-331.

⁶⁹ A. Zezza, P. et.al., Rural household access to assets and agrarian institutions: A cross country comparison. *Background Paper for the World Development Report*. 2008.

⁷⁰ Dethier and Effenberger, "Agriculture and development: A brief review of the literature," 175-205.

⁷¹ Dethier and Effenberger, "Agriculture and development: A brief review of the literature," 175-205.

and non-farm income.⁷² Education and skills can help rural young people to access non-agricultural employment opportunities.⁷³

Push and pull factors were identified as determinants of rural households' involvement in rural non-farm employment.⁷⁴ Push factors include management of agricultural income risk through income diversification, coping with short-term shocks such as drought and compensating for long-term constraints including lack of farmland and credit facilities.⁷⁵ Pull factors accounting for the participation of rural households in non-farm employment include the lower risk and higher returns associated with the sector.⁷⁶ Social capital has been identified as a factor that explains individuals' ability to engage in non-agricultural employment.⁷⁷ Social capital is therefore a variable in explaining the ability of individuals to work off-farm. Workers whose social networks are not strong such as women or immigrants have limited access to lucrative non-farm employment.⁷⁸

According to Rigg, migration and mobility play a growing function in the livelihoods of households in the rural South but are often overlooked by government agencies.⁷⁹ This position was earlier recognized in rural Nepal that seasonal migration is "too important a topic for policymakers to continue to overlook"⁸⁰ In India "official awareness of the magnitude of seasonal migration or the importance of it in the lives of the [rural] poor is abysmally low."⁸¹ Writing on the determinants of rural youngsters' participation in non-agricultural employment opportunities, Van der Geest posits that apart from education and skills, they require freedom and means to migrate since most of these avenues are located outside their communities.⁸²

Although the above studies reviewed identify various employment paths pursued by the youth as well as the reasons, there is a dearth in the extant literature on the employment aspirations of out of school rural youth in Ghana. This study, therefore, seeks to add to the literature on the employment decisions of rural youth.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a case study design utilizing mixed methods for the collection and analysis of data from rural youth in Amankyea, a rural community in the Atwima-Nwabiagya district of the Ashanti region in Ghana. Farming is the main economic activity in the community. Most of the residents including youth engage in food crop farming cultivating maize, plantain and vegetables including tomatoes, pepper and cabbage. Even though a majority of the people are involved in food crop farming, some of them plant cash crops such as cocoa, orange and palm oil. There are two (2) farming seasons-major (Mid-March to July) and minor season (September to mid-November). Apart from farming, some people operate shops and drinking spots while others engage in artisanal employment such as electrical works, masonry and carpentry among others. Multiple employments also exist in the community. Some of the youth participate in "illegal" mining (galamsey) in nearby communities such as Ahwerewa, Esaase Bontefufuom, Seidi, Kobin, and Asuonwunu among others, as part-time

⁷² Jonna P. Estudillo and Keijiro Otsuka. "Rural poverty and income dynamics in Southeast Asia." *Handbook of Agricultural Economics* 4 (2010): 3435-3468.

⁷³ Kees Van der Geest, "Rural youth employment in developing countries: A global view." *FAO Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division. Overview synthesis* 1 (2010).

⁷⁴ Benjamin Davis, Paul Winters, Thomas Reardon and Kostas Stamoulis. "Rural nonfarm employment and farming: household-level linkages." *Agricultural Economics* 40, no. 2 (2009): 119-123.

⁷⁵ Davis et.al., "Rural nonfarm employment and farming: household-level linkages." 119-123.

⁷⁶ Davis et.al., "Rural nonfarm employment and farming: household-level linkages." 119-123.

⁷⁷ Dethier and Effenberger, "Agriculture and development: A brief review of the literature," 175-205.

⁷⁸ Dethier and Effenberger. "Agriculture and development: A brief review of the literature," 175-205.

⁷⁹ Rigg, "Land, farming, livelihoods, and poverty: rethinking the links in the rural South," 180-202.

⁸⁰ Gerard J. Gill and Paul Hoebink, *Seasonal labour migration in rural Nepal: A preliminary overview*, (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003).

⁸¹ Priya Deshingkar and Daniel Start, *Seasonal migration for livelihoods in India: Coping, accumulation and exclusion*. Vol. 111. (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003).

⁸² Van der Geest, "Rural youth employment in developing countries: A global view."

employment to supplement the returns from their farming activity. Others pursue illegal mining as full-time employment and therefore it is their main source of livelihood.

The quantitative data was collected first and qualitative methods were used to probe further into the issues that emerged. The mixed method was useful since it allows researchers to collect richer data and examine more complicated questions that a single (quantitative or qualitative) approach may not be able to address alone.⁸³ The views of rural youth who were between 18 and 40 years constituted the unit of analysis. This was based on the young people's definition of youth during the reconnaissance focus group discussions.

The study population for the research included the youth who were out of school irrespective of the sex and type of employment they were involved. The target population were youth between 18 and 40 years. This age categorization was developed by the young people during initial focus group discussions.

Developing the sampling frame, the researcher identified the number of households in the community with out-of-school young people between the ages of 18 and 40 years. This was done because of the absence of a sampling frame. After the identification of households, a random sample of 30 households were selected to find out the number of young people for the purpose of estimating the population of the study. It was realised after a quick survey that on average there were three (3) youths in the households. On this basis, the out-of-school rural youth population in the community was estimated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Population estimation} &= \text{Number of households} \times \text{Average number of youth per household} \\ &= 272 \times 3 = 816 \end{aligned}$$

The estimated population of youth who were out of school in the community was therefore 816. Out of the population of 816, a sample size of 270 rural youth was selected using a formula,⁸⁴ to collect the quantitative data. The researcher selected 20 participants purposively for the individual interviews to obtain qualitative data. These participants were made up of 10 males and 10 females. A questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data. The questions were simple and unambiguous to avoid misinterpretation. The use of the local language (Twi) was appropriate because of the low literacy level of the respondents. Interviews were used for qualitative data collection. The questionnaire and interview guide addressed the rural youth's past, present and future employment activities. Past employment referred to the main employment activity that the youth engaged in before their current employment, present employment was conceptualized as the main economic activity that the youth was engaging in at the time of the study and future employment referred to the employment aspiration of the youth.

The qualitative data was coded and a thematic approach was adopted for data analysis. The quantitative data collected through the questionnaire was coded, edited, entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20, and cleaned. Frequency tables and bar charts were used for the presentation of the descriptive results.

To satisfy ethical considerations in relation to intellectual or academic property and honesty, all secondary data used in the study were duly acknowledged. Individual informed consent was obtained from all participants. The nature and the purpose of the study were explained to the participants. In order to ensure the privacy of the participants of the study, participants were not made to provide any form of personal identification. With reference to the interviews, pseudonyms were used instead of the real names of participants to ensure anonymity. The confidentiality of the participants was ensured by not sharing or releasing information to others who were not directly involved in the study.

RESULTS

⁸³ Robert K. Yin, *Case study research: Design and methods*. Vol. 5. (Thousand Oaks CA; Sage, 2009).

⁸⁴ Glenn D Israel, "Determining Sample Size. University of Florida IFAS extension." *Fact Sheet PEOD 6* (2009).

This section presents the results of the data collected. Socio-demographic characteristics and the employment paths of the respondents in terms of their past, present and future employment are presented.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Males	116	43
Females	154	57
Total	270	100
Age		
18-25	94	34.8
26-30	92	34.1
31-35	55	20.4
36-40	29	10.7
Total	270	100
Educational level		
No schooling	22	8.1
Primary Education	88	32.6
Junior High School	122	45.2
Senior High School	20	7.4
Technical/Vocational	18	6.7
Total	270	100
Marital Status		
Married	91	33.7
Co-habitation	83	30.7
Never married	65	24.1
Separated/Divorce	26	9.6
Widowed	5	1.9
Total	270	100
Religion		
Christianity	253	93.7
Islam	8	3.0
Free thinkers	9	3.3
Total	270	100

Source: Field Work

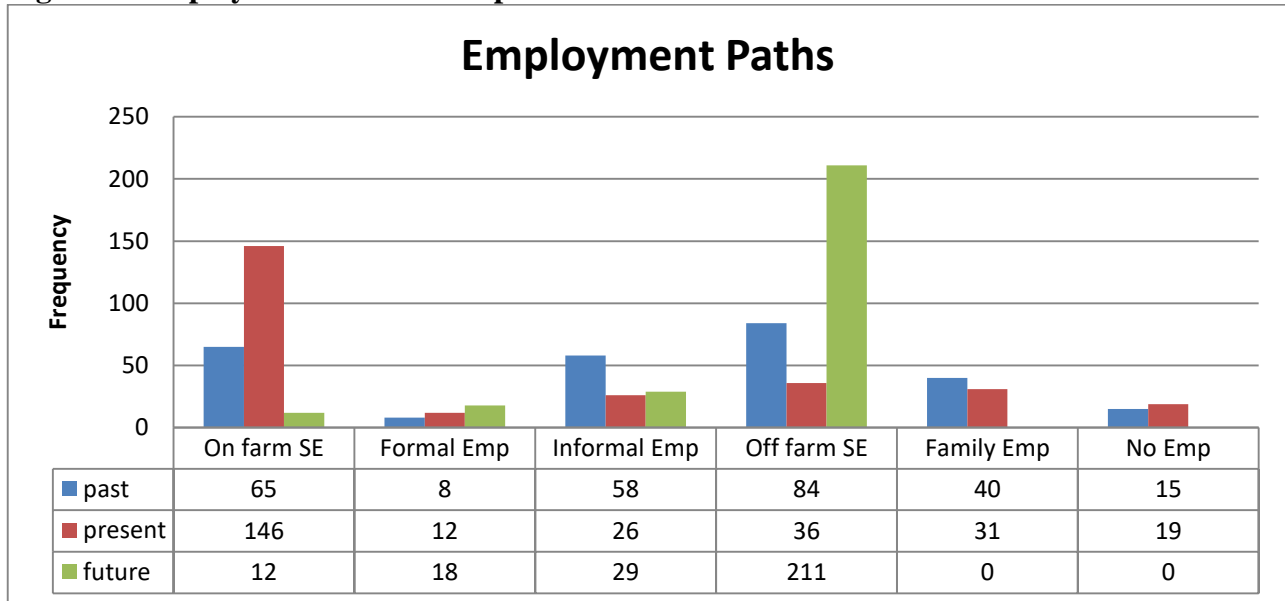
In terms of the sex distribution of the 270 respondents, 116 (43%) were males while 154 (57%) were females. More females, therefore, participated in the survey. This results probably from the migration of young men to nearby towns to seek for means of survival. The majority of rural youth who participated in the survey had Junior High education (45.2%). This shows the predominance of school dropouts among the young people in the area. Multiple factors including poverty may account for the low level of education of respondents. Also, a significant percentage (96.7%) of the respondents were religious.

Employment Paths of Rural Youth

Analysing the employment trajectories of rural youth, the past, present and future employments of respondents were examined. Six (6) employment categories, namely on-farm self-employment (On farm SE”) formal employment (Formal Emp), informal employment (Informal Emp), off farm self-

employment (off farm SE), family non-wage employment (family emp) and no employment (No Emp) were identified based on preliminary focus group discussion. These constituted the main employment activities of respondents. Figure 1 presents the results of the employment paths of respondents.

Figure 1: Employment Paths of Respondents



Source: Field Work

Figure 1 shows that in terms of past employment, the majority (n=142, 52.6%) of the young people engaged in informal and off-farm self-employment. Being an employee in an informal enterprise or an entrepreneur appears to be the initial employment option that young people pursue after dropping out of or completing their schooling. The immediate survival strategy pursued by these young people was to migrate to a major town to engage in informal employment. Some return to the community to engage in farming after encountering challenges such as poor accommodation and other living conditions. This situation accounted for the high number of rural youth selecting farming as their main present employment. Farming, therefore, is a secondary option in relation to rural youth's past employment.

Farming was reported as the main present employment status of the majority (n=146, 54.1%) of rural youth in the community. This occurred because farming was regarded as the main economic activity, engaged in by community members. The necessity in terms of limited opportunities appears to account for rural young people's engagement in farming is evident in the words of Mike, a 28-year-old young man:

"I would have loved to do something else if there is that opportunity because I can't farm throughout my life. If I get another job which pays well, I could even send money to my mother to hire labourers to work on my farm but there is no such opportunity so I only do the farming and hope for the best" (Male, Mike, 28).

This interviewee, Mike, asserted that given a more lucrative job, he would take up that opportunity rather than farming. When asked whether farming was not an employment option he really liked, Mike confirmed by saying:

"Yes, but it is the only option for now so I have to do it. I can't also do the galamsey (illegal small-scale mining) because I don't have the strength for it" (Male, Mike, 28).

The choice of farming by the majority of rural youth who participated in the study as their main present employment, therefore, was out of necessity rather than an opportunity. The need for survival was the motivating factor since they were willing to reduce their involvement in farming if other

employment opportunities were available. This goes to support the notion that farming was not held in high esteem or liked by the youth as an employment option.

In terms of employment aspirations of rural youth who participated in the survey, few (n=12; 4.4%) selected farming as the employment avenue they wanted to pursue. Farming, therefore, did not appear to be the most desired future employment of the rural youth. This non-interest in farming as rural young people's main employment option in the future was evident when Rose, aged 21, said that:

"I personally don't like it (farming). If there is something else, I would have preferred doing that; I would have only done small-scale farming and not as I am doing now" (Female, Rose, 21)

When asked why she would not pursue farming as her main future employment, she said:

"It is very tiring and very demanding. The energy you have to exert especially when you are farming on a virgin land. You have to clear the land, cut down trees, construct fire belt before burning and a lot of activities which are so demanding" (Female, Rose, 21)

Rose explained the difficulty involved in farming as the reason for her disinterest in farming as a future employment avenue. Agreeing with Rose, another interviewee (a 26-year-old young man, Martin), identified price determination by middlemen and women as affecting his interest in farming. In his words;

"Farming is a very difficult work and besides after spending a lot of money, time and energy in it, you can't determine the price of your produce. It is the buyer who determines the price and that makes it nauseating" (Male, Martin, 26).

There were some young people who had plans of engaging in multiple employment activities as a survival strategy. They, therefore, reported their interest in combining off-farm self-employment with farming. One of the interviewees, Ofori aged 34 had this to say:

"If I should get some money from my produce, I would either open a grocery shop or buy a car for commercial purposes; in that way, I can get enough money to hire labourers to work on my farm. Even though I am ready to do something else, I wouldn't quit farming completely. Sometimes it's difficult to go to the farm most especially during the rainy season. I cannot stick to farming alone because the land is not vast enough to support large scale farming. Since it's a family land, you can only cultivate about 4 acres" (Male, Ofori, 34).

Even though Ofori did not want to stop farming completely, he would prefer to have other income generating activities such as a grocery shop or a commercial car. This would help him financially since he did not have access to a large parcel of land to engage in large-scale farming and get income during the lean season.

The majority of rural youth (n=211; 78.1%) involved in the survey reported off-farm self-employment as future employment activity they wanted to pursue. During the interviews, respondents were asked about their future employment plans. Employment activities identified by female youth included sewing, trading and hairdressing. Rural young men stated driving and trading as their future employment. Consistent with the survey results, off-farm self-employment was the main future employment avenue of young people who participated in the interviews. When asked why they wanted to engage in off-farm self-employment, Grace, a 24-year-old young woman had this to say:

"Having your own job is more secure than farming" (Female, Grace, 24).

Grace identified job security as the reason for her desire to engage in off-farm self-employment. To her, and other participants, young people were more assured of daily, weekly, or monthly income from self-employment. None of the respondents in the survey selected family non-wage (employment in a family business without earning a wage) and nothing (being unemployed), indicating that rural

youth had the desire to engage in economic activity for some personal financial benefits and be independent.

The study found that in terms of past employment, majority of the young people engaged in off-farm self-employment. Majority of the rural young people were engaged in farming as their present employment. Majority of rural youth also desired to engage in off farm self-employment as their future employment.

DISCUSSIONS

A key finding from the research was that though majority (54.1%) of the rural young people were engaged in farming as their present employment, few people (4.4%) had the desire to pursue it as a future employment option (Figure 1). This view was supported by the qualitative data which indicated rural youth's willingness to engage in mainly informal employment and self-employment as their future employment. For some of the rural youth, involvement in farming would be on a subsistence basis rather than as a main economic activity for their livelihood. So even though opportunities abound on Africa's farms,⁸⁵ young people did not recognize and aspire to take advantage of them. This finding from the study corroborates the view that agriculture appears to be unattractive to youth accounting for them turning away from it.⁸⁶ Similarly in Tanzania agriculture does not appeal to many youths, who view it as dirty and an employer of last resort.⁸⁷ Many youths in Kwara State of Nigeria, including those with rural backgrounds, are opting out of farming in search of non-existent white-collar jobs.⁸⁸ Agricultural employment is often not seen as a viable career, especially by young people in villages who see the reality of their family's situation.⁸⁹

Reasons for this unwillingness according to the rural youth include the views that farming is tiring, demanding and not lucrative since prices of output were externally determined by middlemen and women. Again the prices of their produce as indicated by the rural young people were low due to demand and supply interaction during bumper harvest. This finding is consistent with the views that the high possibility of reduced price and therefore the perception of the risky nature of most agricultural activities as well as low income were identified as reasons for the unattractiveness of the youth to this sector.⁹⁰

The majority of rural youth (78.1%) desired to engage in off-farm self-employment as their future employment. Engaging in informal employment was also identified by Hashim when he noted that a significant proportion of low-skilled migrants end up in the informal sector, in occupations where very little or no education and skills are required.⁹¹ Rural young women who participated in the study identified becoming seamstresses, hairdressers, or traders while the young men wanted to pursue driving and trading. For rural young people, self-employment was more secure and lucrative than farming. Lower risk and higher returns have been recognised as motivating factors for households including youth's involvement in non-farm employment.⁹² Turning to the informal sector whether as an informal employee or entrepreneur of an informal enterprise, results from the declining number and quality of jobs for the youth.⁹³

⁸⁵ Brooks, Zorya and Gautam, "Jobs for Africa's youth," 49-57.

⁸⁶ White, "Agriculture and the generation problem," 9-19.

⁸⁷ Juma, "Promoting livelihood opportunities for rural youth: some lessons from Tanzania."

⁸⁸ Adekunle, et.al., "Constraints to youths' involvement in agricultural production in Kwara State, Nigeria."

⁸⁹ Brooks, Zorya and Amy Gautam, "Jobs for Africa's youth," 49-57.

⁹⁰ Anyidoho, Leavy and Asenso-Okyere, "Perceptions and aspirations," 20-32.

⁹¹ Iman M Hashim, "Exploring the linkages between children's independent migration and education: Evidence from Ghana." *Sussex Centre for Migration Research* (2005).

⁹² Davis, et.al., "Rural nonfarm employment and farming: household-level linkages," 119-123.

⁹³ Calvès and Schoumaker. "Deteriorating economic context and changing patterns..." 1341-1354.

RECOMMENDATION

The study found that rural young people were unwilling to engage in farming as their future employment. It is thus recommended that stakeholders should put in place measures that will make farming and agricultural employment lucrative for the youth to develop the desire to participate in it, to reduce the widespread youth unemployment in Ghana. Government and entrepreneurs should invest in agriculture to make it more attractive to the rural youth. There should be the provision of subsidized farming inputs such as chemicals and equipment to enhance farming. Again marketing opportunities that offer attractive prices for agricultural products should be offered by the government and entrepreneurs. This will make farming a more profitable venture and therefore motivate the rural young people to partake in it as a future employment option. Rural youth should be encouraged to choose farming as a present and future employment option rather than migrating to urban centres to look for non-existent jobs. The study also recommends that the appropriate authorities whether private or public should provide resources in terms of skills, and capital among others that are needed to pursue their employment aspirations.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the employment paths of the respondents, the study revealed that a significant number of rural youth were involved in farming as their main source of past and present employment. However, few of them aspired to pursue farming as future employment. This shows the unattractiveness of the sector to young people in rural areas who have experience in the agricultural sector. Reasons adduced for this unwillingness include the tiring and demanding nature of farming work. Again, farming was regarded by the youth as highly risky and unprofitable accounting for the widespread poverty in the area. Informal employment and self-employment were the employment avenues rural youth aspired to pursue. Some of the young people however had plans of engaging in multiple employment activities in terms of farm and non-farm activities as a means of mitigating the risk involved in any single employment. Efforts should be made by authorities to encourage and support the youth in the pursuit of farming as an employment option to reduce youth unemployment in Ghana.

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