

'The Land of our Birth'
Rural Youth Aspirations and Career Choice in Farming

Richard Ameyaw Ampadu
International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University, The Hague,
Email: ampadu@iss.nl

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Abstract

Occupational Career choice frameworks as tools for exploring the factors that condition occupational career choices, influence policies and strategies to bring change, reduce barriers and strengthen supports for the achievement of career goals or improve performance are increasingly becoming popular. The application of such tools in the area of farming in developing countries is scanty. Focus has mainly been on educational and non-farm occupational aspirations in developed countries. This paper contributes to the discussions on young people-agriculture debate in Africa, using the Social Cognitive Career Framework (Lent, et al, 1994), to understand the choice of farming as an occupation among the rural youth in Ghana.

This paper is based on the narratives of a cross-section of young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in three selected rural communities in Manya Krobo, Ghana. It aims to show how a complex network of factors motivates rural young people to develop long term occupational career in rural farming. It shows the relationship between choice of farming as a career and youth aspirations. The factors identified to encourage the youth to stay and work as farmers in rural communities include the reality of being born and bred in a rural community, willingness to identify with community goals, personal aspirations and goals, the belief in personal capabilities, desire to be a recognized local/national farmer and the opportunity to inherit land. The reality of challenges of life was also found to have pushed some individuals back into their farming lifestyle. In view of this it is suggested that the aspirations of young people in rural farming, social relations with mentors as well as their access to agrarian resources, should be a significant element of policy and research.

Key words: rural youth, aspiration, career choice, farming, Ghana

1.1 Background and problem definition

Ghana's agricultural sector still remains the pillar that holds the general economy. Despite this, the rural sector is bedevilled with several problems including un (der) employment, rural-urban migration, ageing farm population and rejection of farming, particularly among rural young people (World Bank, 2008; White, 2011; FAC, 2010). White (2011) reports of 'agricultural labour shortage is coexisting with high levels of youth unemployment' in some rural areas. It is asserted that growth generated by agriculture is more effective in reducing poverty and generates greatest improvement for the poorest people than growth in other sectors (Båge, 2008; IFAD, 2011). In view of this Båge (ibid) for example calls for greater efforts to create employment in the agricultural sector of developing countries. Given that the agricultural sector of Ghana alone, employs over 65% of labour force and generates about a third of GDP growth, the agriculture sector is likely to stand as 'Africa's hope' and a key employer of most young people (White, 2011). This is of particular significance, given the difficulties governments' face in creating jobs or employments in the other sectors. Despite this, the rural sector is bedevilled with several problems including un (der) employment, rural-urban migration, ageing farm population and rejection of farming, particularly among rural young people (World Bank, 2008; FAC, 2010).

In spite of the emerging agri-business industries in Africa (FAC, 2010), the issues raised above suggests that a focus on rural agriculture as the potential source of employment for the bulging youth cannot be vilified. This is particularly important, especially at this time when international bodies including the World Bank are critically thinking of using this unique opportunity of agriculture to create employment and reduce poverty and inequality in developing countries (World Bank, 2008).

In pursuit of the agricultural development led growth objective, national governments and international agencies have designed and implemented various agricultural development policies and programmes. Yet, the situation in the agricultural sector has not changed that much and in some cases has worsened.

Generally, these policies and studies on the way forward show a listing of perceived constraints, opportunities and approaches to encourage the youth into rural farming¹. Policies and programmes are often founded on the premise that rural poverty is associated with 'lack of assets, limited economic opportunities, poor and inadequate educational facilities, and disadvantages embedded in socio-political inequalities (IFAD, 2011). For example, one of the reasons for the creation of the Youth in Agriculture programme (YIAP) in Ghana is to help correct the negative perceptions about farming. A major pillar of YIAP is therefore the introduction of productivity enhancing technologies and modern farm practices such as the use of tractors, high yielding seeds and other modern farm equipment which require heavy initial capital outlay, that are often beyond the affordability of many rural youth. This calls into question, the issue of sustainability of farming and poverty reduction impacts of such programmes.

Research indicates that not all economic development projects established in rural communities have the capacity to reverse the unprecedented out-migration of young people from rural areas (Seyfrit et al, 2010). The over-reliance on government's gargantuan projects, such as the Millennium Development Authority (MiDA) agricultural project in selected rural communities have in many cases not been able to achieve their objectives. According to Gyasi (1993) and Amanor (1999), such

¹ In this paper farming refers to the cultivation of land on smallholder basis for the production of food crops, both for home consumption and domestic markets.

projects have often incapacitated the youth agenda by excluding the youth, expropriating local land, and employing and/or under paying the local people. Allocation of loans and expropriated land to only mature and married men and dismissing of (youth) employees for 'fighting for their rights (Amanor, 2006: 9) are all deliberate attempts aimed at excluding the youth from benefits from land that in principle belongs to them. According to Seyfrit et al. (2010) the failure of such projects could be attributed to the fact that some important components of society, required to make policy effective, were ignored.

In addition, we cannot guarantee the emerging agri-businesses will provide employment for all the rural youth, since majority of them are unskilled and such agribusinesses operations require skill labour. For example processing, increased market engagements and investments in productivity enhancing technologies/inputs are typical of such businesses, generally demand higher levels of education, skills, initial capital outlay, knowledge of emerging technologies and so on, of which most rural young people lack. Also the likelihood of locating these projects away from rural communities, in order to take advantage of existing utility services in urban areas, cannot be overemphasised.

The points raised above, suggest that attributing the migration of rural youth away from agriculture and rural farming only to infrastructural development, lack of educational aspirations among others, may be factual yet, may not the realities or expressed views of rural youth, many of whom are busy thinking about 'how to be successful youth rather than successful adults' (White, 2011: 3).

The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations reports of a general 'lack of awareness concerning the needs of rural youth as they try to prepare for an active, productive and efficient life in rural environment' in many countries (FAO, 1985: Annex II). This suggests a serious policy gap here, and therefore the need to look at the issues of the youth critical and from their own perspective, if they are expected to be recruited into farming. Accepting the conventional push and pull factors of rural out migration of youth is important yet, it is not more important than identifying the actual factors that give confidence to the 'stay behind' ² who want to cultivate the land.

Generally, analysis of rural migration has too often focused on those who leave farming as opposed to those who stay behind, emphasising on the traditional push and pull factors of migration. Such approaches to migration frequently overlook the significance of the nuances of migration decision that could be derived from the views of the 'stay behind' rural youth. A focus on the 'stay behind' could enhance understanding of the choices young people make, what informs their choices, how such choices evolve and the outcomes obtained.

This raises questions about the aspirations of young people and the other factors that contribute to or underlie their decisions to stay behind. Aspirations are important and greatly influence career decisions, yet questions about why some rural young people do not migrate but stay behind and farm as a career are rarely asked by researchers. As a result youth aspirations in rural farming communities have received little policy and research attention

² The phrase 'stay behind' as used in this paper refers to people who for several reasons have on their own decided to not to (permanently) migrate to urban areas to stay (and work) but remain in the rural community .

Almost half a century ago, Haller (1966) pointed out that, farming is 'the normal occupational self-conception' and young men, having been raised in farming communities, will find it difficult to change occupation unless they are strongly influenced by external factors.

This paper questions, why and how in context of the current dynamics in the rural farming communities, young rural people are (or are not) able to engage with farming. In doing so, the paper (1) explores how the aspirations and careers choices of youth in farming are formed and maintained (2) identifies factors and conditions that may influence rural youth occupational aspirations in farming and (3) discusses how policy changes might be able to attract the youth into farming.

1.2 Framing of young people

While youth occupy a midway position between childhood and adulthood, the boundaries of these categories are still open. To understand the aspirations of the rural youth requires understanding of the concept or framing of youth. Generally factors such as age, puberty, generation, maturity or marriage, functions and roles of people, ability to sustain and care for self, independence or adulthood among others are often used to describe the youth. For reasons of the confusion in where to place the youth, they are often treated as a 'problematic social group' in Ghanaian society (Amanor, 2006).

Socio-culturally, the concept of (male) youth connotes a person who is neither a child nor an adult, but physically strong and energetic hence often used to fight war or as errands boys by the elderly (ibid). These are claimed to have no or little property yet are good at executing the difficult manual jobs (ibid). Traditionally they are perceived as those with little or no experience in managing resources. Such views ignore reality of elders frowning on their capacity as economic resource managers and thereby justifying their denying them access to resources property in gerontocratic society.

In many cases in Africa and also in Ghana, the girl child is not recognized as far as issues of land are concerned. The female youth given a limited space is such matters and are perceived as those able who do household chores and able to take good care of their bodies hygienically. Their labour is often exploited and even where they are paid they receive wages lower than their counterpart male youth. What counts more here is when the girls reach puberty so they can be given to early marriages.

The National Youth Policy defines a 'youth as an unmarried person aged between 15 and 35 years' (NYP, 2010). In the communities studied, a bachelor of say 40 years, living and feeding from parents' kitchen could be treated as a youth while, a girl of 18 years, married with a child is perceived an adult. The youth here is defined based on a complex of social, cultural, economic or political context. The youth therefore constitutes a people with their own identity, needs and aspirations different from the rest of the society. To avoid such confusions the age criterion (15-35) as described in the NYP is employed here.

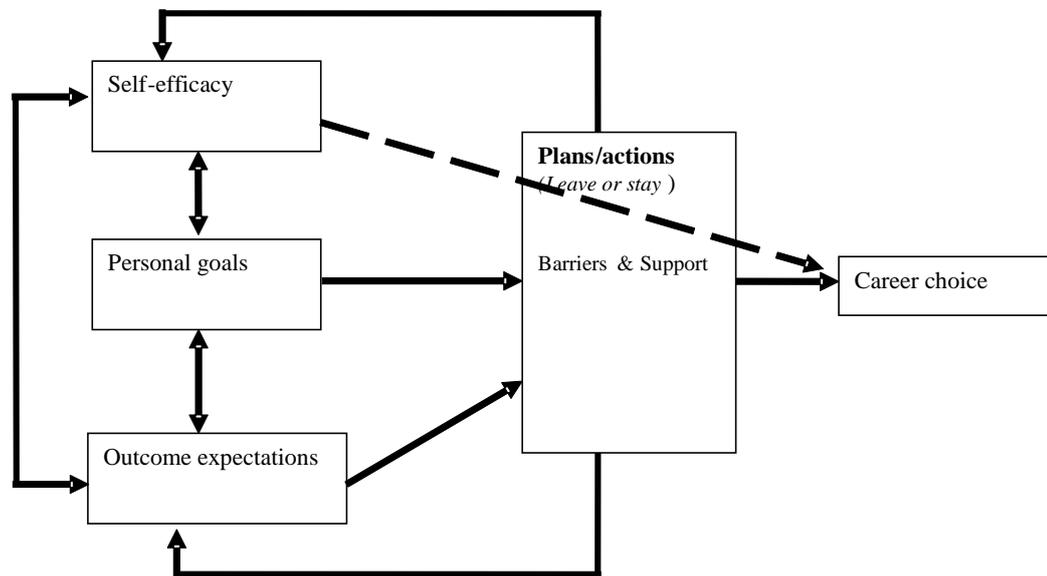
2.1 Understanding aspirations of rural youth and participation in farming

This paper employs a social cognitive career (SCC) framework developed by Lent et al, (1994; 1996) to explore and understand the development of interest in, choice of and adjustments in farming among Ghanaian rural young people in the context of other contextual factors (barriers and supports) which may enhance or limit their personal agency.

The social cognitive career framework based on the general cognitive theory of Bandura (1986), is premised on the proposition that vocation outcomes or choices are determined by the mutual interactions among a persons' cognitive attributes, external environmental factors and over behaviour. Specifically it emphasizes the role and interaction of self-efficacy (the dynamic ways by which individuals estimates the abilities and capabilities in order to initiate or undertake a course of action or a career), outcome expectations (an individual's estimation of the chances of an outcome or performance) and personal goals (values people place on their actions, plan of action in order to achieve a set objectives) as central to their occupational choices. Since the future is not certain, success in career development is based on probabilities, modified by how one perceives or is treated by existing contextual factors (challenges and opportunities). If an individual views barriers as low, uncertainties and risks are presumed to be low. This raises their confidence and therefore the career in mind will likely be pursued. Continuity or change of such choices very much depends on how individuals react to the support or barriers they may face in life. It is therefore assumed that at any point in time certain unforeseen events or real conditions may erupt to change the course of action of an individual's career, knocking him/her off the initial pathway, compelling him/her to adjust or change occupation or pursue another career.

Career or occupational choice models assume that choices are lifelong process that usually begins from childhood through adulthood (Super, 1991). Thus individuals make decisions to choose or not choose a career based on information they gather through various vicarious learning processes or experiences, social pressures, emotional states or reactions and values the individual holds.

Figure 1: Toward an understanding of youth occupational choice in farming



The decision to remain, change or return to farming in case of those who left, is usually based on compromises people make (Ginzberg et al., 1951). In most cases this is based on personality, competencies and experiences of people. This creates feedback mechanisms that shape and reshape individual career choices. This

influences the individual's agency³, by which the individual is expected to use the information available to make his/her career decisions.

The choice of the social cognitive theory here is also because its specificity to particular performance domains and the fact that it interacts complexly with the person, environment and behaviour and contextual factors' (Lent et al, 1994: 83).

3.1 Location of study

This study was conducted in three rural communities of Manya Krobo, Ghana. A great percentage (80%) of the people are farmers cultivating mainly food crops, such as maize, cassava, yam, plantain and some vegetables, both for home consumption and the domestic market (<http://www.uppermanyadistrict.com/agriculture.php>, 3/8/2011). Manya Krobo is noted for its pioneering activities in the production of oil palm and later cocoa. As a result of the discovery of oil in other parts of the world, as to replace palm oil, the infestation cocoa by the swollen shoot disease and the construction of the Akosombo Hydroelectric dam on the Volta River, which flooded the area, cocoa and oil palm are history in the community. Much of the land here lies in the valley of the Krobo Mountain. Although rainfall has become erratic and highly unpredictable, under normal years, mean annual rainfall is between 900 and 1,150 mm with average daily minimum and maximum temperatures around 24 and 32 Celsius. With the exception of the vegetable growers, the use of chemical fertilizers is much lower. Pottery, bead making and food processing provide alternative employment for the local women. Although electricity is available the area a few homes are connected to the national grid for reasons of non-affordability.

3.2 Data sources and data collection

As has been explained above, given that little attention has been given to those who 'stay behind' in migration debates in developing countries, this paper focuses on the rural Ghanaian youth in farming as opposed to those migrating. A focus on the stay behind who farm – whether by choice, or in the absence of alternatives - rather than those who are migrating presents an opportunity for policy makers and researchers to know more about factors which encourage them and will attract others to return and stay in rural areas and take farming as a career. This also helps to present a more comprehensive picture of the migration situation.

Data was gathered through personal observation and gathering of narratives of people's life stories. Most career development studies use quantitative techniques (Macbrayne, 1987). This have the potential to ignore some detailed and useful information of processes involved in decisions to move or stay. A qualitative case study methodology is employed here to allow detailed exploration of how the decision (not) to migrate is formed and explore factors that influence decisions. This enables researchers to understand the youth's career choice by 'standing in their shoes'.

Of the 35 cases gathered (mainly from young men) five are analysed and presented with a focus on young people's perceptions, experiences and expectations in occupational farming. These cases were chosen not only because they represent the real situations of young people within the communities, the selection cuts across the identified backgrounds of the youth, mainly based on age, gender, nativity, parental and financial backgrounds as well as their educational and work aspirations.

³ As used in this paper agency refers to 'a person's autonomy over their own lives, their choices as it impacts on their socialization as men and women, status, and social class' (Gill, 2004)

4.1 Case studies: Youth perception, experiences and expectations in farming

For the sake of ethical reasons, the names of my interviewees have been changed in order to change their identity.

Case 1

Hesse is a 23 year old young man and a student in secondary school near his village. He grew up in the community in which he lives, a community where farming is main occupation of most people. His father has no formal education but he is rich by the rural standards. Hesse told me he never wanted to go to school and that he always dreamt of becoming a great farmer, although his uncle, who lives in the next village, told his father to put him in school and promised to pay part of his school fees and religiously did so. He told me that education would take him out of the village since there are no 'good' advanced schools around even if he wanted to be a scholar. He does not therefore want to school anymore.

According to Hesse, his aspiration of becoming a farmer and therefore following in the footsteps of his father was welcomed by his father. Hesse's grandfather did not like the idea though and as he wanted Hesse to become a medical doctor so he could serve the community in that capacity. For the respect he had for his father, Hesse told me he did not ignore his father's wishes.

Hesse's father owns large acreages of farmland and hence unlike some youth in the community he was not worried about how to gain access to land. As the elderly son, he has an inheritance in land. Given that land in this community is communally owned and that it is usually allocated to those who are around to cultivate it, he fears that leaving the land could result in it been transferred to another person in the family. In that case he and his brothers would lose the land to their relatives or even 'strangers'. This would mean that his children will have no land in the community to cultivate.

In explaining why he thinks he will succeed with farming, Hesse said the whole village admire him for his hard work on the farm. He harvested fifteen bags of maize last year (from his assigned plot⁴), an increase of three bags over the average of the past two years. In the past he cultivated cassava with his father and they had very good yield. His family has therefore become the envy of the village because of the output from their farm, he told me. His goal is to become the national best farmer in Ghana, when he is grown. He cited Nene Koboe, the 2010 national best farmer (who also happens to come from his area) as his role model.

About his failures in farming, Hesse claims he has never experienced any failure expect for bad weather which the whole village suffered. He intimated that even in the case when he failed, he was able to recoup the money he invested in the farm. He attributes his successes to the competition between himself and his friends to see who is able to get good harvest. He told me *'we do not all have our own plots of land and we farm our fathers' plots, yet we compete. Imagine when I have my own land and farm, I tell you, the whole village will hear of me. I will pitch my camp in the farm and will be sleeping there'*. He appears enthusiastic and confident about farming.

⁴ Hesse cultivates this plot of land, which belongs to his father but he kind of co-manages it with his father. The harvest however belongs to his father who gives him portions of the proceeds after harvest.

He told me neither he nor his father has ever received anything in the form of assistance from any government yet, they are able to manage with the little they have. He told me he heard on radio that the government will be coming to help them but they are yet to know the truth. He blames the government for the poor state of food crop farming as opposed to cocoa and oil palm, which thrive in the community. He told me *'I have never seen any policy document before. I do not know what it contains and am less worried about it. If the government has anything for us, we are waiting'*. He said *'they (referring to politician) are able to come here during the political campaign season but do not tell us anything about farming; they never even visit us after they become parliamentarians'*.

Case 2

Musah is a 35-year-old native of a village in the northern region of Ghana but born in the community of study. He told me he wanted to be an engineer or a Police Officer, careers he dreamt of since his childhood. Although he lost his father in the last year of his junior high secondary school, he did not give up his educational aspirations. He managed to complete the senior high school. He could not get any job to do in the village and did not want to travel out of the village because he wanted to be close to his mother and siblings. At his age and a non-native with no certificate to earn him a job he became a farm labourer, working for people. Like his father, Musah later became a farmer working on a little piece of land his father bought years ago.

He later had a job as a messenger in a nearby town in a government office, where he worked for four years and then used the money he had saved to sponsor himself in apprenticeship training in Asesewa, a nearby town. Musah trained and became an apprentice mechanic (fitter) in a local workshop. He told me, there were not many cars coming to the workshop for repairs except for those which pulled over during market days. Because life was so difficult for him, he had to give up this job. He joined the Ghana Police after few months of recruit training in Koforidua, the capital of the Eastern Region of Ghana.

Fortunately he was posted back to Asesewa after his training. His dream of becoming an engineer and a responsible Police officer was shattered when he was charged with bribery, in a case he told me he knew nothing about. He told me, *'when I was charged, I knew somehow that my job as a Policeman was coming to an end. My boss (superior officer) did not like me. He disliked Northerners so bad that I became his enemy. I tried several times asking to be posted (transferred) to another community but that never materialized'*.

Today Musah is back to his old job, farming, and he is doing well. He thinks that he is destined to become a farmer so has vowed to stay in the community and farm. He believes that his life and that of his old mother and siblings will be much better with farming than any other career in the world. He attributes the poverty in their community to government. He said *'we are all citizens of this nation but when it comes to sharing the national cake we (rural people) are exempted and ignored because we wear torn clothes and eat from bowls'*. He hopes that one day the government will turn its attention to rural agriculture, particularly to food crop farmers and improving their lives. Musah changed job not because he wanted it that way, but because life circumstances and what he calls 'bad luck' seem to follow him wherever he goes. In order to make a headway, he told me *'I have to compromise with the reality of life. My dream of becoming an engineer had been curtailed and hampered by my financial difficulties'*. He has convinced himself that he was created to be a farmer and a farmer will he be.

Case 3

Dede is a 33 year old mother and a single parent, who came to live in the community of study some 20 years ago, after her father and mother broke up. She told me 'even though I wanted to become a nurse from my childhood, I also liked plaiting people's hair for a fee. She used the money earned to buy few items for herself and the rest for her school fees back in her former village. Dede told me she became a farmer after the death of her father, although she used to go to farm with her father until his sudden death.

Before her father's death, Dede's father gave a portion of his land to her (in the presence of family members and elders) as a reward her loyalty, hardworking and being obedient girl.

A few months after the burial of Dede's father, her stepbrothers started harvesting her crops without her consent. Upon enquiry, the brothers became angry with her and reported the case to the village elders. After several meetings, she was told not to set foot on the farm again. It was said that since she did not go through the whole process of land transfer, she was to forfeit the land and give it to her stepbrothers as tradition demands.

Dede has since decided remain in the community. She told me '*I have no family anywhere and have nowhere to go. Here I get food to eat and a place to sleep. Why travel? I would rather prefer to die in my father's house than to travel and go and suffer shame and disgrace somewhere*'. One of her uncles, she told me advised her to stay around and farm. She agreed and took land from his uncle to start her own farm. She hopes that with that plot of land she will be able to take care of her child. She claims farming is her religion (God) and everything (what she depends on for all her needs). She is now able to feed her child, herself and afford a few other domestic things. She hopes to invest her savings in her child's education so she can become what she could not achieve. Since women's rights to land in this community is depended on the relationship between the two parties, Dede's rights to remain on her uncle's land are equally insecure, and she may be living in uncertainty.

In narrating a story about where the youth get information concerning farming in the community, she said '*in the context where fathers are less concerned about their girl child's career and mothers are always interested about issues of their children's marriage, your peers become the source of career choice information. She told me that 'fathers are only interested in farming because of their lack of education'. Somehow fathers believe that their girl children cannot farm on their (father's) land since land is not directly allocated to women. They however believe that their daughters land problems should be that of their future husband*'. She pointed out that mothers do not have land to give to their daughters. They also believe that once their girl children get married they would have land to farm as independent women or in collaboration with their husband.

Like the other informant she blames all governments (past and present) for not doing anything about their plight except for campaign promises. She personally feels that governments have let them down.

Her narration suggests that women do not always shun so-called male careers or occupations, as postulated by some authors (Haller, 1981). Rather, her story suggests that lack of access to resources and the framing of what are considered appropriate activities for young women do not encourage women or girls to envision a career in farming.

Case 4

Oko is a 30 year old, dismissed civil servant who spent most his youthful days in the village until his uncle came and took him to the city. In the city, he had the opportunity to go to school and build a better future for himself and his family. Alongside schooling, he served as a shopkeeper in his uncle's shop and became the shop 'manager'. He had a lot of exposure to a range of careers and experiences and knew many people because he did all the errands for his uncle while he was staying with him. He left his Uncle's shop because he claims he was not been paid well by his uncle and joined a fertilizer company.

Not long after joining the company he became the secretary of the junior staff association (JSA). Few months in his new job, Oko was dismissed for alcoholism and also for instigating junior staff members against their superiors. He could not go back to his uncle because of his new records, and was not sure of getting formal sector employment. He told me that a bosom friend and a native of his community approached him and advised him to return to the village, with his severance award and try farming. He said *'upon much deliberations I agreed with my trusted friend and decided to move to the village'*

The family knew him as a hard working boy, who was confident in himself and loved to participate in village activities so they agreed and gave him land on his arrival in the community.

Five years later, his family approached him and requested that he shares his portion of land with his younger brother, who has been transferred to a nearby community to teach. He gave portions of his land to his younger brother, who according to Oko has good links with politicians, who often sub-contract jobs to him.

In addition to the family land he cultivates, Oko entered into a share tenancy arrangement with another family. Oko tells me that now that he has returned to the village, he is going to make it in farming.

He said *'my brother has taught me a lesson and now I am awakened'. I wanted to be a lawyer because of my eloquence but if I missed, that farming should not fail me this time. My schooling fell in the gutters and my office job is gone. Now is the time to do what I was born to do'*. He said the *'elders of the community call him anytime and send him on errands. They can call me names but I am here to succeed'*. Oko sometimes works as a village farm labourer, working on other people's farms in order to make a living and take care of his wife and two children. He told me he is arranging to rent land. He said, *'when I get the land the community will know that I have bounced back'*. He has planned to stay in farming till he dies.

Case 5

Mokobe is a 28 year old farmer, a trained teacher and married with two children. He lives in his father's compound although he has his own rented land. Mokobe is a native of the area and has been living in this community all his life. As a humble and respectful boy, he is expected by his parents and the society to be a role model for other youth in the community. He told me that he stopped teaching and became full time farmer because he felt farming was his calling. He told me, salaried work could be supplementary but not complementary to farm income. He sees teaching as a private and voluntary service to his community. He said *'when I was growing up I wanted to be either a journalist or a lecturer in the University. I always wanted to be like my Uncle who is currently a lecturer in the University. My father and mother*

however wanted me to be a doctor or a teacher because I have the head (was brilliant). Although my father, a former teacher, wanted me to be a teacher he never stopped insisting that I add to my career, farming. He always encouraged me to do the work of a farmer so I can be able to feed my family'.

Mokobe told me he was born into farming and as the firstborn son, he has greater share of the inherited portion of his father's land than any other member of the family. As a son of a *dademantse*⁵ (chief farmer) and a grandson of a *dademanste*, he told me *'I also hope to become a dademanste in the future'*. With this hope and expectation he needs to be a farmer at all costs.

Mokobe told me he had often asked himself questions like why the elders of their village seem unconcerned about what is going on in the community, referring to the unemployment situation and the exodus of youth to the city. He told me, *'in the past our forefathers used the youth of their days for conquests and protection of our community and land yet they have ignored these (youth) today because there are no wars'*. He said *'this is our land, we have no land anywhere and we must make sure that the land is kept safe for generations to come or else posterity will never forgive us'*.

He also wants the government to come to the aid of the area and to help them solve the problem of youth migration from rural areas. *'The politics on the radio waves is just too much. We need them to come down to the village to solve the problem. This is where the problem is and not the castle or ministries'*. He told me he is one of the youth who can travel to the city to work in the city and return to the community to invest earnings in farming, because that is their future.

5.1 Synthesis and implications of findings.

Although four of the five cases presented involve young people of ages between 25-35 years, and thus above the 'youth' age definition of the UN, (but within the NYP's definition of 'youth' in Ghana), from their histories it shows how the experiences of these youth in their teens and twenties have influenced their decisions to take up farming as their main occupation.

The five cases we have briefly summarized above suggest that young people's aspiration to farming as a career is influenced by a wide range of factors, with the individuals' outcome expectation, self-efficacy and goals playing key roles. The paper suggests that right from the beginning persons like Hesse had aspirations or planned to become farmers, while those such as Oko, Dede and Musah originally aspired to non-farming occupations but because they either failed to enter the occupations of their choice, or entered but failed in those occupations, came later to realise the relative attractiveness and benefits of farming. Although Oko, Dede and Musah for example did not initially aspire to be farmers, they had experienced farming in the past. This somehow made it easier for them to go back to farming without any skill training. All they needed was the provisions of land and other farm resources. The results demonstrate that decisions to remain in farming could either be intended (the case of Hesse) or unintended (the case of Oko, Dede and Musah) or both (Mokobe).

⁵ A *dade mantse* (literal means the cutlass chief) is a title accorded to hard working farmers in a locality. They usually have the powers to act and serve local farming community's chief, represents the other farmers. He is usually elected by the local farmers in consultation with the traditional leaders.

Although, financial constraints, low aspiration for education, personal interest in farming and unemployment may explain reasons why some individuals (for example Oko, Mokobe and Dede) have to adjust their aspirations and change occupation or deviate from their initial occupational aspirations (for example, Mokobe and Dede), the reality of people deciding to go back or remain in farming as opposed to the other making a career in the city or elsewhere could be an indication that there still people around who have hope in farming, despite the negative comments the occupation seem to have been receiving. Arguably, whether or not people perceive farming as the last resort, the cases presented show clearly that all the interviewees have previous experiences with farming and rural life and that did not need any mastery to farm.

The results show that farming aspirations were cultivated/ instilled in these individuals from their childhoods yet not all of them automatically became farmers. Some compromises had to be made here and there are the individuals grew and also came in contact with the realities of life. The kind of barriers and supports they faced in life as they grew and also made career choices played key roles in determining what they are currently doing-farming.

While persons like Oko and Hesse explicitly pointed out that they are aspiring to become 'smart' farmers with respectable positions in the community, the responses from the other interviewees suggest that they are comfortable with their present mode of small-scale farming. Arguably this suggests that some of these young people believe that small-scale farming is still the way forward for improvement in their life. The reward of choosing to farm as reported by some of the interviewees could be self satisfaction, social approval and not necessarily monetary. This is not to say that they do not need monetary rewards. As pointed out in their responses, they all think about how to survive and hence require some monetary rewards, yet their focus not on the latter. The ease with which they entered farming clearly shows that even though capital is a necessity in farming, the level cannot be compared to a large scale farmer. The cost of becoming a large scale farmer could be a disincentive to these young individuals as the initial capital outlay may be difficult to come by.

Farmers' perception of farming was linked to several things of critical importance in life. For example, to some interviewees farming is a way of life (Oko), innate (Hesse), and religion and everything (Dede). We can infer from their responses that survival and the possibility to feed one's family seem to be more important than profit-maximising imperatives. Yet this does not necessarily mean a lack of interest in market production, technical improvements and farm investments so long as food security and food sovereignty are maintained.

The preference for farming was also influenced by the need to fulfil basic human needs (example Dede and Oko), assurance of inheriting land (Hesse and Mokobe) or becoming a farmer of respectable stature (Hesse) and or continuing ones father's occupation (Mokobe) in order to protect and keep the family's land in safety for the sake of posterity. Again unemployment (Oko), personal aspirations and abilities and the opportunity to fulfil societal objectives (Mokobe), all contributed to decisions to change job.

It can also be inferred from the views of some interviewees that government does not actually understand their situation and has therefore not provided smallholders with any meaningful support. The creation of a rural environment that fits into their aspirations and makes the youth masters of their own environment is critical and should be seriously looked at. Since parents played a role in some cases to get their children to follow their steps, it may be suggested that public policy should try to

improve the environment for youth, by taking on board needs of parents and other relatives who may have the power to influence the choice of the youth.

This paper has shown that in addition to personal confidence, influences from parents and other relatives as well as friends, ability to gain access to land played vital roles in informing decisions of youth to farming. Therefore it is suggested that in all things issues of equitable land tenure and distribution should be critically emphasized in agricultural development policies. Land reform in the country should be given urgent and significant emphasis in order to ensure that land is adequately made available to youth (both young men and women). This is likely to encourage the young people to stay and work the land.

It must be pointed out here that the disillusionment among the youth, in connection with their feeling that public policies do not seem to be meeting their aspirations can have serious repercussions on governments' future land and agricultural development policies. The building of adequate trust and institutional relationship with young people should be carefully considered by policy makers and planners. As some interviewees (for example Hesse and Dede) clearly pointed out, the long-term neglect of rural areas and smallholder agriculture in government spending has contributed to the young people's migration challenge of today.

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