

# Agricultural Development as a Rural Development Strategy in Northern Ghana: Case of Builsa North District

Douglas Kwesi Anyatewon<sup>1</sup>, Gideon Opoku Tuffour<sup>2</sup>, Irene-Nora Dinye<sup>2</sup>,  
Romanus D. Dinye<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Planning, College of Art and Built Environment, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana

<sup>2,3</sup>Centre for Settlement Studies, College of Art and Built Environment, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana

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**Abstract:** This paper assesses the contribution of Ghana's rural development strategies to poverty reduction through agricultural development. Agricultural sector remains the largest employer of rural poor in Ghana. Literature on how agricultural development has contributed to poverty reduction in the world with special emphasis on emerging economies has been presented. Drawing on the case study approach and evaluative research, the Builsa North District was selected for the assessment since it is a predominantly rural district in Northern Ghana with majority of the active labour force employed in the agricultural sector. The findings indicate that agriculture development is key in addressing poverty in rural areas particularly in developing economies like Ghana. The paper suggests that while rural development strategies should be broad-based to reduce rural poverty, agricultural development in modernised and sustainable manner should be the major focus since it employs majority of the rural poor and has the capacity to reduce poverty through employment generation, increase in income and consumption of farmers, and reduction in food prices.

**Keywords:** Rural Development Strategies, Agricultural Development, Poverty Reduction, Ghana.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Africa is the poorest continent with about 45 percent of the population living in absolute poverty. Poverty in the continent and world at large is more pronounced in rural areas than in urban areas (Diao, Hazell & Thurlow, 2010; ADB/ ADF, 2000; Anríquez and Stamoulis, 2007). Studies have shown that over 70 percent of poor Africans can be found in rural areas despite rapid urbanisation experienced in the continent over the years (ADB/ ADF, 2000). Poverty rate in the Sub-Saharan Africa in particular has always exceeded 50 percent for the last ten years with rural areas hosting majority of the poor (World Bank, 2008). Agricultural development appears to be a good prospect in addressing rural poverty in Africa. With about 90 percent of the rural labour force in sub-Saharan Africa engaged in agricultural enterprises, the sector contributes 30 percent of GDP in sub-Saharan Africa. Agriculture also contributes 30 percent of total exports from sub-Saharan Africa (ADB/ ADF, 2000).

Agricultural development enhances food supply and subsequently reduces malnutrition. Between 1982 and 2011, food supply in Ghana increased by almost 63 percent which led to reduction of real food prices. Subsequently, under-nourishment fell from 34 percent in 1991 to just 8 percent in 2003 (Wiggins and Leturque, 2011). Wiggins and Leturque (2011) asserts that increase in food supply and income of the poor as a result agricultural growth played a significant role in this achievement even though there are other intervening factors such as improvements in health and sanitation. Agriculture is therefore believed to be a major tool for reducing rural poverty in Ghana.

There is no doubt that Ghana is gradually becoming an urbanised economy. The recent Population and Housing Census conducted indicates that about 51 percent of Ghanaians live in urban centres (see GSS 2012; UN-Habitat, 2011). Nonetheless, a considerable percentage of the population (approximately 49 percent) still resides in communities with population size less than five thousand. Poverty in Ghana is primarily rural based as compared to urban centres (Nsiah-Gyabaah, 1998; Wiggins and Leturque, 2011). An estimated urban poverty rate in 2008 was 10 percent as against rural poverty rate of approximately 39 percent. The agricultural sector remains the largest employer of majority of the rural poor in Ghana, although the sector keeps losing its share to other sectors of the economy (Wiggins and Leturque, 2011). These notwithstanding, governmental policies have always supported urban development, service growth and industrialisation rather than rural and agricultural development in many developing countries (Anríquez and Stamoulis, 2007).

According to Nsiah-Gyabaah (1998), rural poverty is caused by poor planning, implementation and monitoring of rural development strategies. With this background, the study focuses on the nature and operationalization of rural development strategies and how they have contributed to the development of the agricultural sector and poverty reduction in the Builsa North District.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Definition of the Term Rural

There is no unanimous definition for the term rural. The definition differs from one country to another. However, the term is generally used in contrast to the word “urban” and describes areas which are underdeveloped with relatively less population and high poverty levels. In Ghana, settlements with a population less than five thousand are referred to as rural areas (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). Even though the definition is silent on other indicators, most rural areas in Ghana have access to few social facilities and infrastructure with high poverty levels (See Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). As opined by Overseas Development Institute (2002) and Ezeah (2005), majority of the people living in rural areas in Ghana depend on agriculture and other primary production activities just like in many other developing countries. Other countries also have different urban thresholds. For instance the minimum urban threshold is 20,000 in Nigeria, 30,000 in Japan, 2,000 in Chile and Honduras, and as low as 100 in Uganda (Anríquez and Stamoulis, 2007).

Among various rural areas, there can be further classifications into remote, intermediate and integrated rural areas (European Commission, 1988). The classification of the European Commission is based on their proximity to urban centres as well as economic and demographic characteristics. Integrated rural areas are usually located near an urban centre, and are growing in economic and demographic terms. Intermediate rural areas are spatially relatively far away, but their good infrastructural facilities ensure easy access to urban centres. Remote rural areas are settlements with lowest population density located in border regions, away from urban centres, isolated due to topographical features of the terrain and have poor transportation links. This classification becomes very relevant especially in terms of the provision of development assistance (fund and programmes) to certain areas.

The study area appears to fall in the remote rural category. However, the state of Ghana’s rural economy could simply be described as under-developed and unstructured. This is largely explained by the fact that this sector has not evolved from any mainstreamed development plan. Hence, the experience of the sector in the country’s development process has been defined by the programmes and interventions targeted at other sectors such as agriculture, health, education, water and sewerage.

### 2.2 Rural Development vs. Agricultural Development

Most often, “rural development” is used interchangeably with “agricultural development (JICA, 2005; Anríquez and Stamoulis, 2007). There are differences between them even though the focus of the two terms is to improve the economic, social, cultural, environmental, political wellbeing of people. The difference arises from the prefixes, thus, rural and agricultural. According to JICA (2005), the focus of agricultural development is to increase agricultural products using land, capital and labour as the factors of production while rural development intends to enhance the living conditions of rural people through improvement in health and sanitation, education, environment, social infrastructure and community empowerment.

Chambers (1983) defined rural development as an approach which seeks to assist the rural poor to have access to their needs. The World Bank (1975) explains that rural development is a scheme aimed to improve the social and economic life of the people residing in rural areas; it encompasses increasing the development interventions to the rural poor. Rural development entails the process whereby those who reside in rural zones have good living standard and improved quality of life (Singh, 1999). Rural development is therefore broader and more specific than agricultural development.

In the context of its broadness, rural development connotes provision of social services and infrastructure; increases in agricultural output, provision of social safety nets for the rural deprived and the development of rural enterprises to enhance the living conditions of rural folks unlike agricultural development whose primary aim is to ensure growth in the agricultural sector. Rural development appears more specific than other related terms like regional development since it focuses on deprived areas and not any area (rural or urban) as regional development targets.

### ***2.3 Rural Development Strategies in Ghana***

Development strategies can be defined as combination of policies and programmes that affect the form as well as the rate of growth (Norton, 2010). Primarily, development strategies serve as tools for achieving the vision of every country and are required to stimulate continuous and purposeful development. In a broadest sense, development strategies are blueprints for efficient utilization of a nation's resources towards short-term and long-term goals for development, often expressed in terms of economic growth, poverty reduction and structural transformation. A development strategy aims at obtaining maximum output in the form of development goals from a given input of resources working under various resource constraints (Norton, 2010). Inferring from the above definitions, rural development strategies can simply be described as actions and interventions presented in the form of policies, programmes or projects to address development issues facing rural areas.

The formulation and implementation of various development strategies in Ghana depend almost wholly on the government. Various governments have persistently pursued rural development. Boakye (2010) opined that, government interventions toward rural development dates back to as early as 1943 with community development as the focus then. Yet, there still remains a wide development gap that exists between rural and urban centres notwithstanding the considerable rural population size. More importantly, the declining performance of the agricultural sector, the economic base of the rural areas calls for formulation and implementation of rural development strategies in Ghana. The agricultural sector is confronted with numerous challenges. There is the need to increase agricultural productivity in the rural economy through infrastructure provision including irrigation and transport development, supply and distribution of agricultural inputs, provision of agricultural storage facilities and improving synergy among agricultural sub-sectors (Ghana National Commission for UNESCO, 2010). The efforts of past and present governments in promoting rural agricultural development have not fully built up the necessary capacity needed to ensure sustainable development in rural areas. Among the key rural development strategies implemented by government in northern Ghana, where poverty is more pronounced are the Northern Rural Growth Programme and the Ghana Social Opportunities Project (GSOP).

#### **2.3.1 Northern Rural Growth Programme**

The Northern Rural Growth Programme (NRGP) was initiated by the government of Ghana and financed by African Development Bank. The programme which started in 2009 in some piloted district is implemented by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) to primarily reduce poverty levels in the three northern regions, where many of the poor is believe to be found most (IFAD, 2010). It was extended to the Builsa North District in 2010. The NRGP aims to address challenges in the agricultural sector in northern Ghana by focusing on specific activities geared towards attaining sustainable agricultural in the northern Ghana. The objectives of the programme are to facilitate input (fertilizer) access and distribution to Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs); facilitate loan access by FBOs and offer training for FBOs. With an overall sector goal to ensure sustainable equitable reduction of poverty and food security among rural households, and specific aim to increase northern Ghana area rural households' income on a sustainable basis, the NRGP is a targeted poverty intervention for food crop/peasant farmers in the savannah area of Ghana. A study by Garba (2013) indicated that the Northern Rural Growth Programme boosted beneficiaries' income levels and consumption.

### 2.3.2 Ghana Social Opportunities Project (GSOP)

The Ghana Social Opportunities Project (GSOP) is a five year International Development Assistance (IDA) and Government of Ghana funded project under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. It commenced in 2008 with the objective to increased access to employment and cash earning opportunities for the rural poor. Specifically, the project sought to offer social protection and provide income support to poor households through support for the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), grants and the Labor Intensive Public Works (LIPW) infrastructure in targeted districts (World Bank, 2015). The Labour Intensive Public Works (LIPW) component was designed to provide short term employment to the very poor in rural areas who find it difficult to meet their household expenditure particularly during the agricultural off-season. The project has had many success stories as reported at the Ghana Social Opportunities Project's (2015) web site. For instance, in the Kamachu and Lamina communities within the Nkwanta North District of the Volta Region, GSOP is reported to have engaged a number of women in tree planting and the construction of a Dam to provide water for the rural people.

### 2.4 Agricultural Development and Poverty Alleviation

The relationship between agricultural development and poverty alleviation particularly in developing/ emerging economies cannot be underestimated. According to the World Bank (2008), agricultural development is at least twice as effective in ensuring poverty alleviation as development of any other sector. Anríquez and Stamoulis (2007) attest that agricultural development often preceded industrialisation in many advanced countries where poverty levels are currently relatively lower. Even though growth in the agricultural sector does not always guarantee reduction in poverty level, it often aids in reducing poverty by increasing farmers' income, creating employment and reducing the prices of food especially when agricultural strategies target smallholder farmers (World Bank, 2008; Anríquez and Stamoulis, 2007). In Latin America and South Asia, the agricultural sector has employed about 25 percent of active males in rural areas as wage labourers. Reduction of food prices as a result of agricultural development has been beneficial to both rural and urban poor. In fact, studies from India have shown that, reduction in food prices has significant influence on poverty alleviation than other effects of agricultural development (World Bank, 2008).

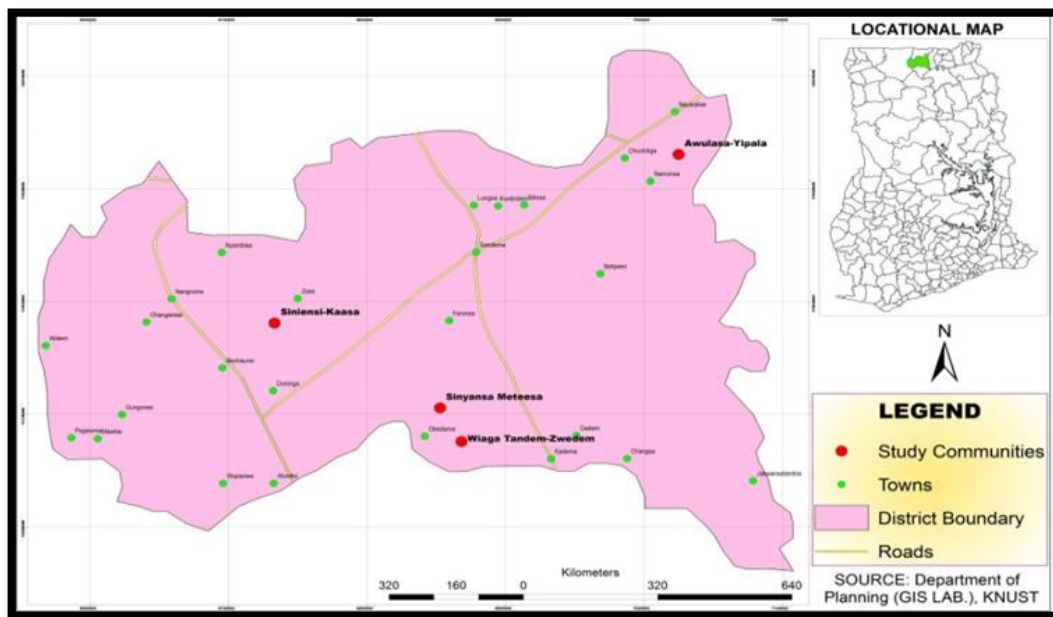
Ghana has more favourable agricultural conditions than other sub-Saharan African countries like Rwanda and Malawi. The country is one of the few in Africa that has sustained high agricultural growth over a period of time. However, it is worth mentioning that the extent to which various agricultural sub-sectors contribute to poverty alleviation in the country differs. Ghana's share of stable and livestock is as high as 70 percent of total agricultural output (Diao, Hazell & Thurlow, 2010). Comparatively, growth in the stable sub-sector has a larger impact and stronger growth linkages/multiplier effect on economic development than export sub-sector because it employs a significant section of farmers. A substantial growth in the export sub-sector as the expense of the stable sub-sector is likely to benefit a few farmers and has low poverty alleviation tendency (Diao, Hazell & Thurlow, 2010).

The government of Ghana recognises the important role of agriculture development in reducing the poverty level and therefore acknowledges the need to focus on agricultural development in rural areas in the current national policy framework, Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda, GSGDA II (IFAD, 2010). Ghana's overall poverty level has decreased but not in the three northern regions where poverty rates are twice or thrice the national average. Even though Ghana's agricultural conditions looks favourable as compared to other counties in the sub-Saharan region (Diao, Hazell & Thurlow, 2010), there is chronic food insecurity in Northern part of the country due to poor climatic conditions (IFAD, 2010). The IFAD (2010) mentioned limited access to farm inputs, lack of infrastructure and equipment including storage, processing and marketing facilities as other agricultural challenges in rural areas increasing their poverty level.

## 3. PROFILE OF STUDY AREA

The Builsa North District in the Upper East Region was selected as a case for this study. Builsa North District is located at the Upper East Region of Northern Ghana (see Figure 1). The Builsa North District lies between longitudes 1<sup>o</sup> 05' West and 1<sup>o</sup> 35' West and latitudes 10<sup>o</sup> 20' North and 10<sup>o</sup> 50' North (GSS, 2014). The Builsa North District covers an estimated land area of 816.44030 km<sup>2</sup> and constitutes about 12.1 percent of the total land area of the Upper East Region. It is

bounded to the North and East by the Kassena-Nankana West District Assembly and Kassena-Nankana Municipal Assembly respectively. The West and South are bounded by the Builsa South District Assembly as seen in Figure 1.



Source: Department of Planning KNUST (GIS Lab), 2015

Figure 1: Map of the Builsa North District

Northern Ghana was chosen because it is the part of the country that is predominantly rural, poor and continues to present Ghana with the most formidable development challenge compared to the South. The three northern regions are characterised by poor climatic conditions as compared to Southern Ghana (IFAD, 2010). There is single maxima rainfall pattern recorded in August-September in the Builsa North District with their highest temperature recorded in March and this can rise as high as 45<sup>0</sup>C. The monthly temperature in the district ranges between 21.9<sup>0</sup>C and 34.1<sup>0</sup>C (Builsa North MPCU, 2015).

The Builsa North District in Northern Ghana specifically was selected because it is one of the most rural districts in the Upper East Region. Almost ninety percent of population reside in rural areas (GSS, 2012). The district is relatively underdeveloped rural economy, with low agricultural productivity, poor social amenities, and less developed enterprise with approximately 75 percent of houses built of mud brick/earth (GSS, 2012). Statistics show that agriculture is the main economic activity in the district. Agriculture and its related activities employ approximately 70 percent of the active labour force (GSS, 2012; Builsa North MPCU, 2015). The district has a population of about 98 communities with a total population of 56,477 (GSS, 2014). Communities considered in the study include Sinyansa Moteesa, Wiaga Tandem-Zuedem, Awulansa-Yipala and Siniensi-Kaasa. These were purposely selected for the study since they are rural areas and have benefited from the various rural development strategies under consideration.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This study uses the case study research approach, combined with the evaluation studies research approach to address the research questions. A case study design allows for an in-depth examination of events, phenomena, or an observation within a real-life context. The key variables for this study are rural development strategies, agricultural development (agricultural infrastructure provision, access to farm inputs and increase in productivity) and poverty reduction (improvement in wellbeing of poor farming households). Drawing on this, the units of observation for this study were the Farmer Based Organizations, beneficiaries of GOSP, the District Assembly and Project staff. The unit of observation is a critical factor in the study since it is the basic unit from which information is collected and analysed.

After identifying the various units of observation, questionnaires were designed to ascertain the effectiveness of the current rural development strategies in ensuring agricultural development and reducing poverty in the study area. The data collection process employed direct administration of questionnaires to units of observation to solicit information through



direct interviews. The information sought among others comprised the roles of institutionalized stakeholders (notably, the Builsa North District Assembly) in administering development strategies and the rural people's assessment of development programmes/projects in enhancing agricultural development and reducing poverty.

To determine the sample size, Slovin's sampling method by Yamane (1970; 81-87) was used. The mathematical formula

$$\text{is stated as: } n = \frac{N}{1+N\alpha^2}$$

Where:  $n$  = the sample size

$N$  = the sampling frame

$\alpha$  = Margin of error (5%) at 95% confidence level

From a preliminary survey at the study area, a project staff of GSOP revealed that a total number of 367 people had registered as beneficiaries of the project. Using Slovin's mathematical method, 191 LIPWs beneficiaries were interviewed. The study purposively selected the leaders of beneficiary Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs) registered with the NRGP. With the help of the Department of Agricultural Development Unit, researchers could easily identify the leaders of all the eighteen (18) registered FBOs. The head of District Agricultural Development Unit and one project staff were also interviewed.

## 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper analyses the nature and operation of programmes/ projects, their impact on agriculture and rural livelihoods, as well as issues concerning programmes/ projects' sustainability. The pro-poor programmes/ projects under consideration include the Northern Rural Growth Programme (NRGP) and Ghana Social Opportunities Project (GSOP) which are all implemented in the Builsa North District.

### 5.1 Northern Rural Growth Programme (NRGP)

The Northern Rural Growth Programme is an agricultural development programme which has been initiated to contribute to agricultural development and rural poverty reduction in northern Ghana. The main variables that were discussed under this section included the nature and operation of NRGP, impact on NRGP agriculture and rural livelihoods and sustainability of programme benefits.

#### 5.1.1 Nature and Operation of NRGP

NRGP aims at providing essential inputs for Farmer Based Organizations to increase farmers' agricultural output. The programme's packages to communities were based on farmers' assessed needs and the demand for intervention packages. The District Assembly played critical roles in ensuring that NRGP goals are met. As part of the implementation process, the District Assembly is engaged in all the stages of programme planning and implementation. The District Assembly performed several functions such as assessing the agricultural needs of beneficiaries, planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. One of the project staff explained that:

*"We (project staff) try as much as possible to involve the local people in the implementation of the programmes. Even though we provide the platform for implementation, we make sure inputs are the ones requested by the farmers themselves.... the Assembly also assists us (project staff) in various forms such as providing office accommodation and utilities. This has been very beneficial in the programme implementation process".*

NRGP provided assistance to beneficiaries who were mainly farmers. Approximately 90 percent of the respondents were males. This shows that few female were FBO leaders. Female access to land in Northern Ghana has been extremely difficult due to certain traditional beliefs (Bonye and Kpieta, 2012). Females are therefore expected to play supportive roles in the agricultural sector in addition to their household responsibilities even though they provide almost the same labour force as males and produce more food crops than males in Ghana (Duncan and Brants, 2004). It is very likely that the agricultural needs of women may not be met since they are underrepresented. As revealed by Send-Ghana (2014), more men have benefited from government interventions towards agricultural development than women irrespective of the critical play in the agricultural sector.

Basically the programme empowered beneficiary farmers to increase their productivity through increasing farmers' access to loans, providing agricultural inputs like fertilizers, irrigational facilities, and training members of Farmer Based Organisation on different but modernised farming methods. The District Assembly and the project staff performed these roles with the help of input dealers (who supplied the farm inputs at reasonable prices) and BUCOBANK, a financial institution which provided financial assistance/ loans to FBO members at favourable terms of conditions. This collaborative and participatory method adopted is intended to ensure project sustainability and as such provide long lasting benefits to poor farmers as opined by a project staff at the NRGP secretariat. Studies have revealed that, involving the local people or beneficiaries in project planning and implantation promotes project ownership and sustainability (see Olukotun, 2008; Stiglitz, 2002; Ofuoku, 20011).

Among the various packages, majority (almost 40 percent) of the respondents indicated that NRGP has enhanced their access to fertilizer, followed by 28.7 percent who agreed that the programme has been very helpful to them in terms the training offered. About 11 percent also revealed that the programme had linked FBO members to the BUCOBANK for loan while 22.2 percent indicated that they had been provided with irrigational facilities

### 5.1.2 Impact of the NRGP on Agricultural Development and Poverty Reduction

All the respondents agreed that NRGP has helped improve their productivity and income levels. More than three-fourth (85.7 percent) of the respondents indicated that the programme has been very helpful while the remaining opined that NRGP has been helpful. They explained that the programme has enhanced the livelihood of rural farmers and needs to be continued and extended to other areas to ensure sustained and greater benefits. Considering their current economic situation, the study revealed that access to the programme packages had increased their income considerably as can be seen in Table 1. Farmers were classified into three groups based on their seasonal income: low income of less than GH¢500 (US\$278); medium income of between GH¢ 501- 1000 (US\$279-556) and high income of above GH¢1000 (US\$556).

**Table1: Income of Farmers**

Income	Before Intervention		After Intervention		% Change
	No.	%	No.	%	
Low income	10	55.6	1	5.6	(-)50.0
Middle income	6	33.3	11	61.1	(+) 27.8
High income	2	11.1	6	33.3	(+) 22.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey, May 2015

Prior to intervention, a little more than half (55.6 percent) of the farmers were within the low income bracket. This however changed as NRGP was introduced to farmers. Majority of the farmers moved from low income status to the middle income status. Farmers whose seasonal incomes were between GH¢ 501- 1000 (US\$279-556) increased by 27.8 percent. Again, farmers who were within the high income bracket increased from approximately 11 percent to about 33 percent. Farmers explained that they could not afford fertilizers, did not have adequate capital to expand farms, had low extension services and inadequate training on farming methods. With the NRGP addressing some of these challenges, their outputs consequently increased which affected their income levels as well. These are some of the expressions of some respondents concerning the various NRGP packages they have received and their impact on their current situation:

*"... In order to meet the standards and demands of produce buyers and industries, we were trained on crop varieties and improved seeds. Farmers have been linked to mass buyers like Savannah Farmers Marketing Company, and the National Buffer Stock Company to continuously produce more to feed agro-based industries".*

*"I knew the importance of fertilizers in farming, but its application was a problem. Through NRGP I can easily get them from dealers at cool (affordable) prices. We are also thought how to apply them to yield good result"*

*"In the past, I was not applying fertilizer to my farmland. I did not even know how it was done. Now their training programme has been helpful and I know what to apply, how to apply and when to apply it to increase production..."*

The latter was confirmed by the project staff. He indicated that NRGF has implemented a number of activities which are mainly geared towards improving crop yields. Among these measures include the integrated soil fertility management measures. He also mentioned that co-financing is a key measure adopted to reduce food insecurity and poverty in Northern Ghana. For instance, he stated that the role of input dealers who offer farm inputs at affordable prices was very significant in the programme financing. Concerning access to loans, some of the respondents expressed their experiences in the following ways:

*“It was always my desire to expand my farm size to produce more, sell more and gain more to cater for my large household size but access to loans was my biggest worry. Banks were not willing to offer me loan because I could not provide any of the collaterals they demanded. Others (banks) who were willing also requested for high interest rates. But with the introduction of this programme, association members can access loans from the BUCOBANK at acceptable interest rate due to the arrangement between the bank and registered FBO”*

*“... After accessing the loan, I was advised to invest the money in my farm. I purchased additional farm inputs. I produced more maize and my income level increased considerably. I intend to send my daughter to the Senior high School this year. Almost all her colleagues are in school. Even though she passed so well, I could not afford to further her education at that time...”*

The study also revealed that, NRGF has created employment for a number of people in the agricultural sector due to increase in their farm sizes. About 54 percent of the farmers indicated that they have employed at least two additional people as production increased. A sustained programme is therefore likely to create additional employment opportunities. Some farmers stated that:

*“Previously, I only engaged my household in my farms. Now, our farms are too large for us to work on them alone. I always hire labourers to help us (my household) weed on them”*

*“I have secured two additional farm lands since I enrolled in the programme. I cultivate millet and rice on separate lands in addition to my maize farm. I have employed caretakers to watch and maintain my farms for me.”*

Considering the impact of the programme, majority of respondents were satisfied with the effectiveness of the programme to: facilitate access to input (fertilizer) for FBOs (83.3 percent); facilitate access to loan by FBOs (72.2 percent); and offer training for FBOs (55.6 percent). The respondents explained that access to these interventions had increased their output considerably. Farmer Based Organization members could not afford fertilizers, did not have adequate start-up capital, had low extension services and inadequate training on agricultural development. However, about 67 percent of respondents reported that there has been improvement in their productivity as a result of the NRGF which catered for some of these aforementioned challenges. Most respondents (71.2 percent) also receive extension services from NRGF which has increased yield significantly.

### 5.1.3 Sustainability of Programme Benefits

According to Tango International (2009), rural poverty will remain on the ascendancy if rural development strategies are not sustainable. With respect to perception of respondents on the sustainability of the benefits of NRGF, a little more than half of respondents (55.3 percent) revealed that they were not sure if the programme benefits would continue after the programme has ended. They noted that they will not be able to access facilities that the programme provides for them easily to increase their agricultural output. The remaining respondents explained that the programme will make farmers financially sound to purchase farm inputs even if the programme ends. However, they were quick to add that other packages such as easy access to loans from financial institutions and training of farmers will be difficult to gain after the programme ceases. This is how one of the respondents expressed his fear.

*“Getting money for farming had always not been easy. The programme liaises with the BUCOBANK to provide us (farmers) with loans to expand our farms at good interest rate. I am convinced we are enjoying this nice opportunity because of the agreement. I am not sure the bank will continue to offer us loans at reasonable interest rate when the programme is no more. Maybe we as a group can negotiate with them to continue to offer us this package”.*



## 5.2 Ghana Social Opportunities Project (GSOP)

The Ghana Social Opportunities Project is a social intervention strategy which provides rural areas with development interventions including road improvement or rehabilitation and construction or rehabilitation of dams or dug-out wells. The programme engages rural people in Labour Intensive Public Works (LIPWs) to provide the socio-infrastructure interventions in beneficiary communities. The study investigates into the nature and operation of GSOP, GSOP's impact on poverty reduction through agricultural development and sustainability of GSOP's benefits.

### 5.2.1 Nature and Operation of GSOP

The primary aim of GSOP is to provide short-term employment to the core poor in beneficiary districts especially during agricultural off seasons. The programme's intervention in the study area was centred on two main areas: improvement of road conditions to facilitate physical accessibility; and provision of dams or dug-out wells for agricultural and domestic uses. Even though GSOP served as a safety net for the rural poor, the programme enhanced agricultural development in the Builsa North District.

The implementation of the programme has been decentralised. GSOP is managed at policy and technical co-ordination level by a National Project Steering Committee. At the implementation level, the GSOP Regional Coordinating Office at Bolgatanga spearheads the implementation and co-ordination with technical backstopping from the National Office. Sub-project implementation, however, is the responsibility of the Builsa North District with timely and efficient back-stopping provided by the project staff at the regional level. It was realised that the Departments of Feeder roads and Social Welfare and Community Development have been providing technical support to the project by helping to provide good roads within beneficiary villages and identifying the core poor in the society (who will be engaged in LIPWs) respectively. The implementation of GSOP at the district level is therefore a collaborative effort of project staff and the District Assembly. The project secretariat develops capacity building programmes for local actors in the form of training recruited workers who are supposed to be the core poor in selected communities.

Beneficiary communities play key role in the implementation of the project aside executing the tasks in public works. Beneficiaries are also included in the decision making processes. This is exemplified by the frequent meetings organized with community members to solicit their views and concerns on the project which are taken on board. Project officials interviewed pointed out that, they assist the beneficiary communities to draw a development plan known as "Community Action Plan" which embodies the projects they need. This is an effective way of ensuring that communities participate in the project. The community action plans assist the beneficiary to select priority subprojects for implementation. Other responsibilities of the community members in the project implementation process include community mobilisation; assisting in the selection of participants/beneficiaries; monitoring progress and providing feedback on progress to the district authorities.

### 5.2.2 Impact of the GSOP on Agricultural Development and Poverty Reduction

There have been numerous success stories about GSOP in many beneficiary districts across the country as reported at the Ghana Social Opportunities Project's (2015) web site. Among them include tree planting exercise and construction of dam at Nkwanta North District in the Volta Region, rehabilitation of dug-out well at Boro and Pole in Wa West District, rehabilitation of feeder road from Oli junction to Oli township in the Upper West Region and rehabilitation of dug-out wells at Nako, Dorimon and Ladayiri at Wa West District.

The story in the Builsa North District has not been different from that of other beneficiary districts across the country. Approximately three-fourth of the respondents indicated that the programme has helped improve their livelihood mainly through Labour Intensive Public Works (LIPWs). People engaged in the LIPWs such as road improvements at Siniensi-Kaasa and rehabilitation of dug-out at the Wiaga Tandem-Zuedem were provided with financial incentives on rotational basis for a period of time. For instance, participants of the road rehabilitation were paid GH¢10 per day in 2012, GH¢12 per day in 2013 and GH¢15 per day in 2014 and 2015 while workers engaged in the Dam and Dugouts rehabilitation and maintenance earned GH¢8 per day in 2012 and GH¢10 per day in 2013, 2014 and 2015. The amounts paid to workers were above the minimum wages required in different years as presented in Table 2. Beneficiaries were engaged for a period of three months after which different set of individuals were employed to also benefit from the programme.

**Table 2 Wages of Beneficiaries against Minimum Wage**

Year	*Min. Wage (GH¢)	Amount paid to Dug-out well Workers (GH¢)	Amount Paid to Road Workers (GH¢)
2012	4.48	8	10
2013	5.24	10	12
2014	6.00	10	15
2015	7.00	10	15

Sources: Field Survey, January 2015

\* [www.africapay.com](http://www.africapay.com)

Among the two opportunities, most beneficiaries were employed to rehabilitate and maintain feeder road (57.6 percent) and rehabilitate dug-out well (42.4 percent). About 93 percent of these respondents indicated that the income provided to them during agricultural off-seasons as a result of participation of LIPWs sustained them though it usually delayed. Some of the respondents expressed their concerns as follows:

*“I have no occupation apart from farming. I can’t farm during some time of the year due to poor climatic conditions at that time. I hardly made ends meet during agricultural off-seasons. My household could hardly afford three square meals a day...GOSP became my saviour when I was enrolled”*

*“I almost become useless during the period I don’t farm. Since I don’t work, there is no money for house-keeping. My family only depends on the little we earned during the farming period. This makes life difficult during those times. Even though the period of engagement is short and payments sometimes delay, the programme helped me with some income for if nothing else house-keeping”*

Aside the programme serving as a safety net for many poor agricultural households, GSOP aided agricultural development in the district. Approximately 70 percent of the respondents indicated roads in the community were in very poor conditions which were very difficult to access during the rainy season. The Siniensi-Kaasa road has been rehabilitated making it accessible all year round even though untarred. They reported that the poor nature of roads affected them adversely as commercial drivers were unwilling to operate in the communities and the few drivers who operated in the area demanded outrageous fares. The poor condition of roads also affected income level of farmers since they were faced with the difficulty of transporting their fresh produce to the market centres on time. This often led to the spoilage of surplus produce which resulted to post harvest losses as produce delayed at the farms. Farmers indicated they feared to produce more to avoid huge losses. The improvement in road conditions has considerably reduced post-harvest losses due to easy transportation of farm produce from the farms to market centres. This is consistent with the observation by Andreas (1997) which states that road infrastructure brings increase in productivity which helps reduce incidence of poverty in the long run. Improvement in roads condition increases the vehicular fleet by facilitating the transportation of goods and people at a reasonable cost. It also reduces the incidence of food spoilage in the process of transporting them to the market centres and thus increases income level and encourages farmers to increase their output as farmers are assured that their foodstuffs could be transported to the market with ease.

The rehabilitation of dug-out well at Wiaga Tandem-Zuedem had also improved farming activities in the Builsa North District. An overwhelming percentage (83.8 percent) of the respondents stated that they have access to water due to the rehabilitation of the dug-out well. They indicated that they accessed the dug-out for both agricultural and domestic purposes. Only 10.2 percent reported that they accessed the dug-out well to perform household chores while a chunk of the respondents used water from the dug-out mainly for agricultural purposes. The respondents explained that the provision of irrigational dams reduces their over dependence on the rains for cultivation. A farmer who is a beneficiary of the dug-out project said:

*“I used to depend on only the rains for production. Even though, my output during the agricultural off-season is not as high as when I depend on the rains, the dug-out has really been helpful. At least I am not idle when the rains stop. I can still farm with the help of water from the dug-out well”.*

Similarly, farmers at Sinyangsa used to farm all year-long with water supply from the Sinyangsa dam until the water dried up. Sustainability of agricultural and pro-poor programmes and projects has always proven to be necessary to ensure poverty reduction.

### 5.2.3 Sustainability of Programme Benefits

Considering the perception of beneficiaries on project benefits, 53.8 percent of the beneficiaries were of the view that the effects of the project would be sustained because of adequate project sustainability mechanism in place. Beneficiaries were deeply involved in the implementation process. In particular, the project has adopted the participatory approach to allow the communities constitute local executives for the management of the project. Again, the beneficiaries have always been given capacity building to enable them have the required capacities to maintain and run the programme after the time has elapsed. About 86 percent of the respondents who see the programme as not sustainable threatened to migrate to the southern part of the country especially cities like Kumasi and Accra during agricultural off-seasons to seek for greener pastures when the programme ends. This is likely to create overpopulation, pressure and associate effects such as streetism, slum development and flooding in the two major cities if urban managers are not proactive in addressing urbanisation issues.

Women who are traditionally charged with the responsibility of taking care of the home were prepared to leave their children with their parents and move to the southern cities to be gainfully employed. They revealed that parents were willing to accept the children and leave with them because of anticipated remittances. This may affect the children's upbringing especially when their grandchildren are either busy or weak to take good care of them. The respondents explained that migrating to the south was the only remedy to continuously meet their basic needs and that of their families. The outmigration is very likely to affect agricultural production in the district since about 79% of the respondents who threatened to move out of their community were in the active age group (18-45 years).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The ability of the agricultural sector to solely continue to support the livelihood of the households in parts of the rural areas of northern Ghana is doubted considerable (Bacho, 2004). This notwithstanding, the role of agriculture in reducing poverty in rural Ghana particularly the Builsa North District in northern Ghana cannot be downplayed. Evidence shows that many industrialized economies were ones agricultural dominated economies. Neglect of the agricultural sector in the rural economy will perhaps be a serious policy blunder to be committed especially in the African context where agricultural employs majority of the rural poor. The study has provided evidence to support that the agricultural sector has the capacity of reducing poverty levels in rural Ghana through providing employment and increasing the income and expenditure of many rural households. The paper suggests that while rural development strategies should be broad-based to reduce poverty in rural areas, agricultural development in a modernised and sustainable manner should be the major focus since it employs majority of the rural poor and has the capacity to reduce poverty through employment generation, increase in income and consumption of farmers, and reduction in food prices.

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