Country: Ghana
Principal Organisation: Slow Food Youth Network (SFYN)

ABSTRACT

Sanni Mohammed is a young farmer associated with the Slow Food Youth Network and the founder of Unique Solution Farms. The company has been producing mushrooms and 800 crates of natural fruit juice per week for nine years. The company has trained sixty-five youth in producing fruit juices, such as papaya, orange, mango, banana, pineapple, pineapple-ginger cocktail, fruit cocktail, and prekese juice made from an indigenous tree species with traditional medicinal properties, botanically known as Tetrapleura tetraptera.

ILC COMMITMENTS

- Secure Tenure Rights
- Diverse Tenure Systems
- Transparent and Accessible Information
COMPETENCIES

AREAS

RURAL LAND GOVERNANCE

YOUTH

SKILLS

LAND BASED FINANCING

BACKGROUND

Young people are a human capital resource in Ghana. Their sheer numbers, enthusiasm, and strength are valuable assets required for economic development. They are the most significant resource needed for growth in developing countries as they constitute the largest group of job seekers. Youth access to land is critical in Ghana, as most farmers engage in cash crop farming and depend on land for their livelihoods. As many areas in Ghana face increasing competition for land, land shortages have become commonplace, owing to customary land tenure insecurity. Further, as an agriculture-driven economy, insecure land tenure has a devastating impact on the welfare of vulnerable groups like women and landless youth. Ghana's population is expected to grow from 30 million people in 2020 to 33 million by 2030, increasing the young population. Youth participation in agriculture is crucial for a food-secure future, providing youth employment and preventing rural to urban migration. However, youth access to farming land is increasingly difficult, owing to the increase in population, increasing competition for land, young people's lack of financial resources, land corruption, private estate development, monetisation of land, and land tenure insecurity.

THE CHALLENGE

Ghana has two land tenure systems, namely customary and statutory land tenure systems. Over 80% of lands in Ghana fall under the governance of customary authorities who have significant influence in land ownership, access, control, and use arrangements. Customary lands are mainly unregistered and managed by traditional leaders such as chiefs or family headmen. However, the unwritten nature of customary law in Ghana renders it susceptible to manipulation, corruption, land grabbing by land guards, leaving the poor such as women and youth, vulnerable to impoverishment. The unpredictability of trustees to either uphold traditional values or abuse them for personal benefits presents some challenges to young farmers who remain overwhelmingly under customary land governance.

Other obstacles to youth access to land in Ghana include slow administration of justice, with land cases taking up to 20 years in the court system, the lack of youth-specific land policies, and lack of access to cadastral information on customary lands. In 2010, Sanni Mohammed, a young farmer affiliated with the Slow Food Youth Network (SFYN), rented land (size?) for a watermelon project from a family claiming to own the land. However, after clearing the land and commencing farming activities, the supposed landowners emerged, threatening the young farmer's life. Although he approached the local chief to resolve the land dispute, it was clear that his life was in danger. As a result, Sanni gave up the land and lost the money paid for the lease and the planted watermelons.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

Customary land tenure offers some protection to land users, especially in rural areas where privatisation, individualisation and exclusive land rights are foreign concepts. When appropriately applied, traditional tenure mechanisms prioritise communal and egalitarian land governance principles that ensure tenure security. Traditional lands are held under kin-based communal control and management, managed by patrilineal clans, and with provisions to accommodate outsiders to share in the use of the land. These benefits are notwithstanding some gaps in customary land governance such as women's lack of access to land, lack of cadastral information on customary lands, vulnerability to corruption and customary land trustees treating communal lands as personal property.

MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

Sanni Mohammed, a young farmer, managed to leverage Ghana's customary land tenure system to lease and eventually buy a farm. He produces mushrooms and natural fruit juice, with an output of 800 crates per week. He has trained sixty-five youth in producing fruit juices, such as papaya, orange, mango, banana, pineapple, pineapple-ginger cocktail, fruit cocktail, and prekese juice made from an indigenous tree species with traditional medicinal properties, botanically known as Tetrapleura tetraptera.

Sanni Mohammed approached a traditional chief to lease land to leverage the customary land tenure system to commence his farming project. He began farming operations on the 0.7 hectares of leased land.
Farming in Ghana presents multiple challenges to smallholder farmers, especially young farmers who often lack resources. These challenges are more apparent in rural areas, where farmers face insufficient transport infrastructure, limited access to the internet and technology, limited access to markets, intermittent electricity supplies, weak government support for agricultural science and technology, and extension support.

Under such circumstances, it was important for Sanni to focus not on the money generated through farming activities but to invest in mitigating the challenges inherent in farming under such circumstances. With prior experience in farming, Sanni knew to first lease the land and not buy it outright to understand expected costs, test the soil quality, and acquaint himself with the characteristics of his plants.

Conducting due diligence on land rights holders and the seller’s capacity to lease or alienate the land is a necessary process to be carried out by the buyer for their protection. They can engage with the neighbours and community members to determine prior conflicts regarding the land. A visual inspection of the land also assists in determining land-use concerns such as boundary issues, dumping, environmental contamination, soil quality, access to resources such as water etc.

Based on a previously problematic land deal, Sanni first conducted due diligence checks on the land he wanted to lease from a traditional leader. The local villagers proved to be a valuable source of information on the land and the trustee chief.

The youth need to understand the customary land governance system, especially in areas that remain overwhelmingly under customary control and management. Customary law makes provisions such as leases to accommodate people from outside.

To rent the 0.7-hectare piece of land, Sanni approached the village chief, who was willing to lease the land to him. However, the neighbouring chief claimed jurisdiction over the land. Although Sanni managed to lease the land after mediation and dialogue, such disagreements bring to light the lack of clear land boundaries and cadastral information.

SPYN unites young farmers, activists, and food producers to share information on current issues and introduce young food producers to the world of gastronomy. SPYN uses their platform to raise awareness about important food issues such as food security, food waste, and sustainable food production.

Sanni was introduced to SPYN in 2017. He learned about the Ark of Taste, which identifies and promotes traditional food species at risk of genetic erosion and promotes agricultural biodiversity in small-scale and family-based production systems. In Ghana, SPYN identified prekese, an indigenous tree species with traditional medicinal properties, botanically known as Tetrapleura tetraptera, as part of the Ark of Taste. SPYN helped Sanni commercialise prekese by making tea, fruit juice cocktails and powder to sell and encourage local indigenous foods.

Young farmers benefit from training and internships at successful farms. They learn various skills, including how to manoeuvre the customary land system, negotiate lease agreements, manage financial resources, manage farm operations, and add value to farm produce. Other skills include natural pest and diseases control methods, organic crop husbandry, crop protection and chemical application.

As Sanni’s farming operations grew, he purchased a 7-acre land in Nsawam, Southern Ghana. His company, Unique Solution Farms, employs 35 young people to produce fruit and vegetable juices, mushrooms, and the indigenous prekese powder, juice, tea, and spices. The profits from the company’s operations have also financed the purchase of farm implements such as an industrial juicer, a hammer mill for grinding ginger, a bottle capping machine, a pasteuriser, and a heat gun sealer.
Although customary land tenure in Ghana is flexible compared to individual titles, commercial farming activities have led to the emergence of customary land markets, leading to the de facto privatisation of customary land. Thus, traditional leaders can sell land to young farmers for exclusive use. This de facto privatisation of land presents new opportunities for young farmers to purchase customary land. However, it also requires more accountability measures for unscrupulous traditional leaders who may abuse the system.

Additionally, land registration of purchased land with the land commission is expensive, cumbersome and tedious. It takes an average of two years to receive a title deed to purchased land. Thus, purchasers generally receive contracts of sale (indentures) and proof of payment, which they use to register their lands in future. However, there is a risk of multiple sales of the same land.

**KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS FOR REPLICABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY PURPOSES**

1. **Transparency in land deals** – all parties to land deals should do due diligence to ensure transparency of the transaction. Without due diligence, there is a risk to enter fraudulent land deals where one loses money.

2. **Learning about customary land tenure** – young people must know about customary land tenure systems and the opportunities they offer to secure land for youth. They also include alternative land dispute resolution mechanisms such as approaching the local land commission consisting of a traditional council of elders.

3. **Young farmers’ capacity building** – young rural farmers often cannot commercialise their farming activities. Thus, it is essential to build their capacity in various ways, including through employment, mentorship, apprentices etc.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Although customary land tenure in Ghana is flexible compared to individual titles, commercial farming activities have led to the emergence of customary land markets, leading to the de facto privatisation of customary land. Thus, traditional leaders can sell land to young farmers for exclusive use. This de facto privatisation of land presents new opportunities for young farmers to purchase customary land. However, it also requires more accountability measures for unscrupulous traditional leaders who may abuse the system.

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