

## Assessing youth capacity to influence public policy and practice in Ghana

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### **Abstract**

*This capacity assessment on youth groups, networks and organisations revealed that only 4 per cent of youth-focused organisations and groups in Ghana were legally registered with the Registrar General's Department. Majority (at least 54%) of the groups and networks (including organisations) lacked clear-cut organisational structure and systems, mission and strategy and the requisite personnel (people) to function effectively. Leadership and management capacity to deliver on their mandate was inadequate to influence public policy in favour of the youth. Few of the youth groups and organisations understood the youth policy and legal framework in Ghana. Again, majority did not understand their sector of operations; and majority were not financially sustainable. The assessment which was conducted across the sixteen (16) regions of Ghana categorised youth groups into a) Organisations engaged in youth work; b) Youth-led organisations or groups; and c) Youth Networks or Federations. A regional list of youth groups and organisations within the three categories was the sample frame and used to purposively sample as many youth as could be reached for the assessment.*

*Keywords: Youth, Assessment, Capacity, Influence, Policy, Employment*

### **Introduction**

The youth capacity assessment was aimed at deepening understanding of the youth's ability to influence public policy and practice in Ghana in favour of the youth. The assessment focused on youth ability to assert their right of participation in governance processes, access to education, and skills development and employment opportunities. The process was anchored on youth as the reservoir of Ghana's human capital for development, if gainfully and productively engaged, but also, a source of civil strife and social tension if the untapped energies are poorly managed. As witnessed in parts of Africa and elsewhere, disaffected youth without education, jobs or the prospect of a meaningful life, may fuel instability, migration, radicalization and violent conflict.

The assessment was thus aimed at contributing to addressing existing gaps within the context of coordinated and harmonized support for youth empowerment initiatives to guarantee meaningful lives. It was further meant to provide information on strategies that work in the effective organisation and capacity strengthening of youth groups and youth-focused organisations.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The overall objective of the paper was to assess the capacity of Ghana's youth to influence public policy and practice for their own benefit.

The specific objectives were to:

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1. Assess the organisational capacity of youth, youth organisations and networks;
2. Evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to the functionality of youth organisations and networks;
3. Appraise opportunities for sustaining the functionality of youth-led, youth-focused organisations and networks;
4. Propose sustainable pathways for securing functional and sustainable youth-led, youth-focused organisations and networks in Ghana.

## **Literature Review**

### **A Youthful population**

Ghana has a population of 30,832,019. The population is said to be transitioning from a child-dominated one of (0-14 years), to a youth-dominated population of (15 – 35 years). Youth, as defined in Ghana, are persons between 15 and 35 years. This definition is however beyond the United Nations definition of 15 – 24 years. The young people in Ghana (15-35 years) make up 38.2 percent of the population, with majority of them domiciled in urban areas (60.5%) compared to 39.5 percent in rural areas. Females generally outnumber males within the youthful population by 2.8 percent and in urban areas by 5 percent. The working population of Ghana (15-64 years) is 60.4 percent of Ghana's population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). This underscores a call by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2017 that Ghana needed about 6-7 million jobs in the next 2 decades to absorb new entrants into the labour market (Korboe, 2014) (United Nations Development of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018).

### **Policy and Legal Framework**

Ghana's decision to consciously intervene on the youth front happened in 2006 following a census on joblessness among the youth. This resulted in the establishment of the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP). The NYEP provided temporary jobs to youth within some 10 employment modules with the view to exposing them to the world of work. The beneficiaries transitioned to permanent jobs within the field of nursing, teaching, security guards, sanitary workers, accounts officers, administrators etc within the public and private sectors. In 2012, NYEP was changed to the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Agency (GYEEDA) and continued to operate along the job placement arrangements of the NYEP. In 2015, GYEEDA was further changed to the Youth Employment Agency established under the Youth Employment Act, 2015 (Act 887), (National Youth Authority, 2020).

The National Youth Authority Act, 2016 (Act 939) established the National Youth Authority (NYA) with a presence at national, sub-national (regional offices) and local levels (district offices). In addition to formulating and implementing policies that promote youth development, the NYA has responsibilities for developing the capacity of youth to participate in decision-making at all levels, establish and supervise youth leadership and skills training institutions. A national youth policy has been developed to guide the implementation of the legal framework on youth. The National Youth Policy was first developed in 2010 and reviewed in 2020 to properly respond to the needs and aspirations of youth in Ghana.

### **Youth Intervention Projects and Programmes**

Youth employment has been identified by the Ghanaian government as the priority challenge of youth and hence the establishment of the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) which later became the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Agency (GYEEDA). Other employment initiatives to promote youth employment include the Local Enterprise and Skills Development Programme (LESDEP) and the Youth Employment and Skills Development Programme (YESDEP). The Youth Employment Agency Act, 2015 (Act 887) was passed to firm-up the development, coordination, supervision and facilitation of employment opportunities for youth in Ghana.

Other youth-focused projects and programmes started as interventions. These included the Microfinance and Small Loans Centre (MASLOC) which was established in 2006 to provide funding for youth entrepreneurship.

Others included modules in the NYEP, GYEEDA and YEA. These were made up of youth in security services, youth in fire prevention, youth in immigration services, youth in agri-business, youth in health extension, youth in waste and sanitation, youth in paid internship, youth in Community Teaching Assistantship, Youth in Trades and Vocation, Youth in Eco-Brigade, Youth in ICT and Youth in Oil and Gas. Recently added to these interventions are the Nation Builders Corps (NaBCO), Youth in Afforestation and the National Entrepreneurship Innovation Plan (NEIP) (National Youth Authority, 2020).

These youth employment initiatives were and are still relevant because the data shows that the youth of Ghana are better educated now than ever before and with the increasing number of youth, the unemployment situation is worsening. Ghana's unemployed youth on an annual basis comprises Secondary School Certificate holders (19.3%), Basic Education Certificate holders (11.3%) and Tertiary Educational qualification (7.3%). Post graduate unemployment has increased with only 10 percent of them able to find jobs within their first year after graduation. The number of unemployed youth however excludes (40.1%) of Ghana's youth aged between 15-35 who have no education at all (Institute of Social, Statistical and Economic Research (ISSER), 2018); (National Youth Authority (NYA), 2020).

In spite of the relevance of these interventions to promote youth economic empowerment and social inclusion, their implementation appears ad-hoc and poorly coordinated. They have been varying with every new government, without a clearly defined purpose for the revisions. As a result, the data continues to show that a significant proportion of Ghana's youth remain unemployed or lack employable skills.

### **Methodology**

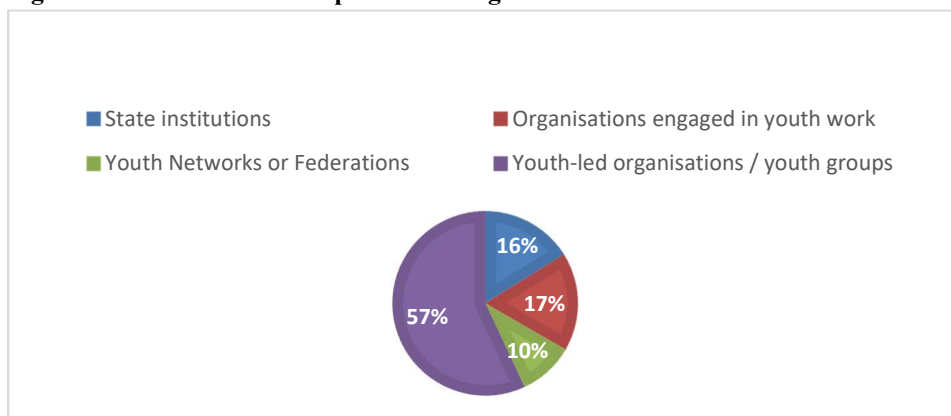
The assessment categorised the sources of data on youth work as follows: a) Organisations engaged in youth work; b) Youth-led organisations or groups; and c) Youth Networks or Federations. Organisations engaged in youth work or youth-focused organisations were identified to mainly be Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) which facilitate youth empowerment interventions. Youth-led organisations or youth groups were primarily those which directly pursue youth interests, facilitating their right to skills development, employment, social and development services from state institutions as well as community level duty-bearers.

Youth Networks and Federations were identified to be aggregations of youth groups and youth-led organisations with a centrally coordinated front, with the aim of increasing voice and visibility to make greater impact in pursuit of their interest and influencing processes. The assessment used seven (7) existing Youth Networks or Federations as entry points, notably Greater Accra Region, Ashanti, Northern, Volta, Oti Region, Upper West and Upper East Regions.

### **Results and Discussion**

The study contacted a total of 93 institutions, organisations, groups and networks across the sixteen regions (16) of Ghana. The institutions and organisations contacted included nine (9) state institutions including the NYA, YEA, seventeen (17) organisations engaged in youth work, ten (10) Youth Networks or Federations and fifty-seven (57) Youth-led organisations or youth groups, as shown in figure 1.

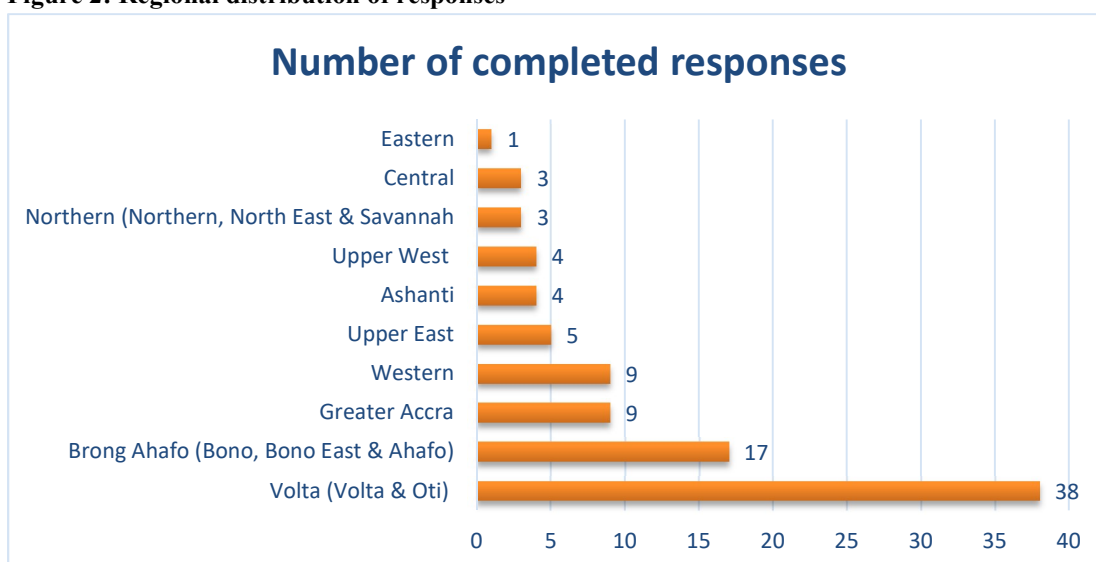
**Figure 1: Distribution of Respondent Categories**



Source: Capacity Assessment Field Survey.

On a regional basis, figure 2 presents the number of completed responses from questionnaires administered using the KoboCollect Toolbox.

**Figure 2: Regional distribution of responses**



Source: Capacity Assessment Field Survey.

The findings of the assessment are discussed in accordance with the study objectives.

**Objective 1: Organisational Capacity of Youth Organisations and Networks**

The organisational capacity of youth organisations and networks was assessed using an Organisational Capacity Assessment Tool I(OCAT). The scoring regime below was used to determine the level of capacity of the groups and networks in each of the assessment areas. The combined total number of groups, networks, youth-led and youth-focused organisations assessed was 57.

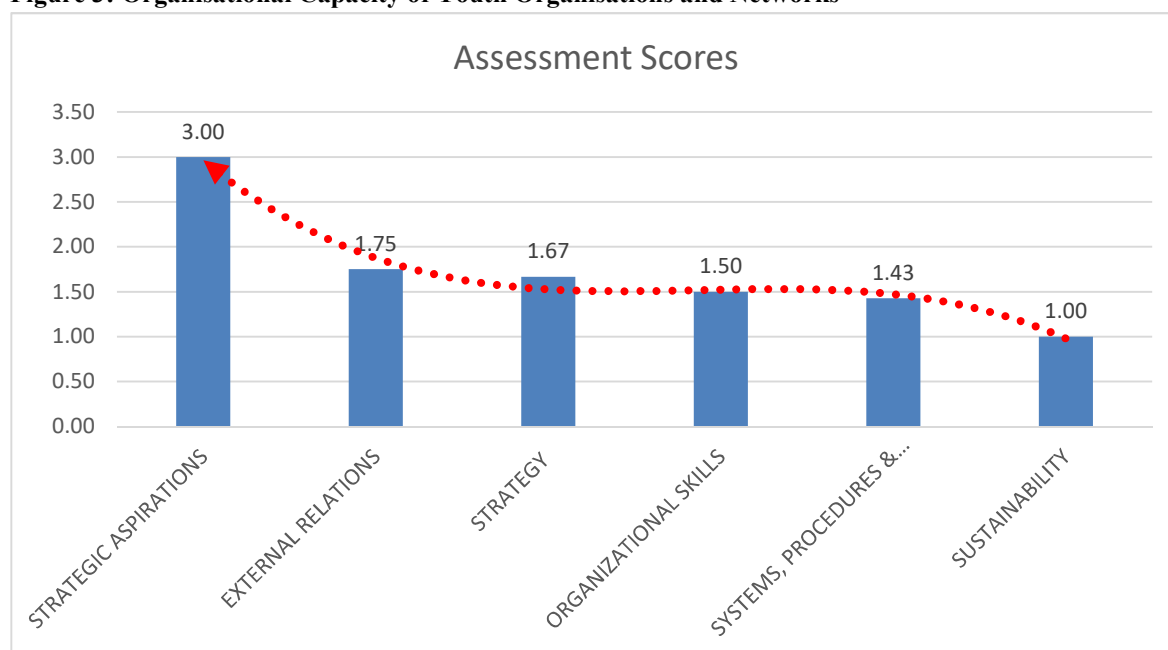
<sup>1</sup> The Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) is a structured tool for a facilitated self-assessment of an organisation's capacity followed by action planning for capacity improvements. The self-assessment approach increases ownership of the action plan. The OCAT format helps the organisation reflect on its processes and functions, and score itself against benchmarks.

**Table 1: OCAT Scoring System**

Score	Explanation
1	Weak capacity -Needs urgent and immediate attention
2	Basic capacity -Needs major improvements
3	Moderate capacity -Needs improvement in limited aspects
4	High level of capacity, should be maintained

Source: Adopted Tool

**Figure 3: Organisational Capacity of Youth Organisations and Networks**



Source: Capacity Assessment Field Data Collection

The highest scoring category from the assessment was Strategic Aspirations, while the least was Sustainability. The data shows the groups and networks could moderately articulate their mission, vision and goals, but their ability to sustain themselves and to consistently pursue their values in the long-term to safeguard and maintain their Strategic Aspirations was low. Even though Strategic Aspirations scored the highest, it is one basis point less than the highest expected score of four (4). External relations, translated as intra-group collaboration and external collaboration with other organisations including government agencies such as the NYA, scored 1.75. All other assessment areas were below the average score of 1.72.

### Strategic Aspirations of the Groups and Networks

Twenty-two (22) percent of the groups and networks had stated mission, vision and goal statements and therefore require targeted improvements to firm them up. This implies that 78 per cent of the groups need significant support to enable them develop strategic plans and be able to articulate them.

### **Strategy**

The assessment showed that 34 per cent of the groups and networks had organisational strategies and their programmes and services had relevance in their chosen sectors of involvement. The remaining 66 per cent did not have strategies or plans in place, and their core activities were not clearly defined and aligned with their mission and goal statements. Simply put, they were found to be loosely formed. They did not have resource mobilisation strategies to guarantee financial sustainability.

### **Organisational Skills**

Forty-five percent (45%) of the groups and networks were found to exhibit sectoral expertise and other organisational skills required to accomplish their missions, draw their own action plans and budget for their activities. The remaining 55 per cent did not have adequate skills to participate in network activities, generate public attention on their activities, undertake dialogue and facilitate collective action.

### **Leadership, Management and Governance**

The assessment revealed that almost all the groups had weak capacity to deliver good governance and leadership within their organisations. Even though 46 per cent of the groups said they had governance structures in place, there were no organograms to show, neither were there evidence to show the board/executive committees regularly met. Discussions revealed that commitment of members representing the varied interests of members was low and majority of them demanded monetary rewards for taking up board roles. Some of the leaders complained of challenges with reaching consensus and therefore accountability to key stakeholders was equally a challenge.

### **Partnership/Collaboration**

Almost all the groups, that is 99 per cent, had significant capacity gaps with funding agencies, including inadequate practices and procedures to respond to funding requirements. They also had weak capacity to create relevant platforms to engage stakeholders on development issues. Eighty-five percent (85%) of them had challenges with public relations, while 91 per cent had issues with inter-agency collaboration. On Government collaboration, 26 per cent of the groups gained a moderate rating for their understanding of the youth policy and its implementation, in addition to their ability to dialogue with policy-makers.

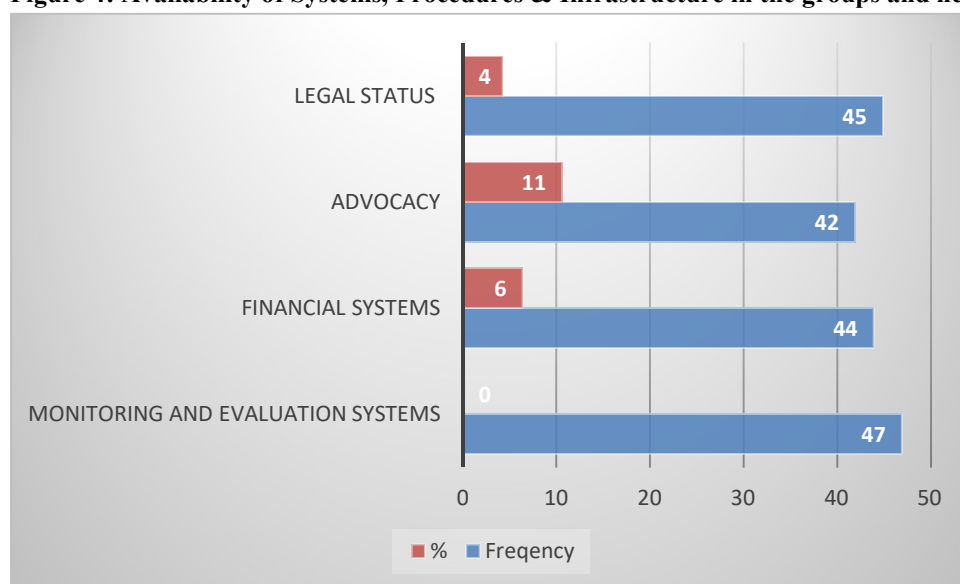
### **Sustainability**

Almost all the groups and networks rated weak capacities in their ability to sustain themselves. All the groups (100 per cent) indicated they were not financially sustainable. Ninety-six per cent (96 per cent) were unsure their groups will live beyond the next five years, while 94 per cent said their activities were not fully supported by their communities and so were uncertain if the benefits of their actions will be owned by the communities. Succession and sustainability of the groups were deeply in doubt.

### **Systems, Procedures and Infrastructure**

Almost all the groups and networks were observed to be deficient in organisational systems, procedures and infrastructure. While 4 per cent of the groups were legally registered either with the Registrar Generals' Department, the NYA or their respective Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs), 6 per cent had in place financial systems for budgeting and utilising funds, none had functional Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems in place. Only 11 per cent indicated they could undertake advocacy.

Figure 4: Availability of Systems, Procedures & Infrastructure in the groups and networks



Source: Capacity Assessment Field Survey, 2020

**Objective 2: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) to the Functionality of Youth Groups, Organizations and Networks.**

A SWOT analysis was done based on the state of youth groups, organisations and networks with the view to presenting a holistic picture of the situation of youth in Ghana.

**Strengths**

There is a large pool of youth who have completed various forms of skills training and awaiting employment or to receive start-up capital. These can be supported (i.e., incubated) to start their own businesses and in turn employ and train others. There are several innovative, creative and industrious youth in the country. The potentials of these youth could be harnessed and put to use for community development. Those talented in music could be used to develop and compose songs that can be used during live concerts to educate other youth or recorded and played on radio and TV. Football and other games could be used to mobilize youth for local development. There are several graduate youths from various tertiary institutions who could be employed or re-trained for different purposes. They could be used for coaching and mentoring services for students at the Junior High School (JHS) and Senior High School (SHS) levels and for engaging in youth mobilisation, community outreach for sensitisation and information dissemination. The youth have great interest in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and are able to learn to adapt and acquire skills in its various forms of usage. Already the youth have created WhatsApp, Facebook and other media accounts for their groups which they use to share and disseminate information. Covid-19 has increased the relevance of ICT and could therefore be leveraged upon to create employment, change the traditional manner in which services are delivered to youth.

**Weaknesses**

Unemployment and underemployment among graduate and non-graduates have resulted in continuous out-migration in search of jobs elsewhere. This phenomenon deprives the local economy of the needed physical presence of young and energetic people to engage in local development. The youth are largely unaware of the opportunities available in their environment. As remarked by some respondents of state institutions, “it becomes a big problem if something is for you and you cannot take it, because they don't know it belongs to them”. “They

seem unconcerned about their own development”. “They are not willing to volunteer”. “Charlie money dey inside? If no, they are not willing to take part”. “The youth are too relaxed to take advantage of the opportunities”. Lack of funding to enable youth initiate their own ventures. Up to 98 percent of the youth groups are unable to secure regular funding for their activities. They attribute this to inadequate previous experience in managing funds, a key requirement to accessing funds and loans. Similarly, it appears that funding opportunities for youth activities are limited and the majority of funding sources are not sustainable. This therefore makes competition stiffer and difficult for youth to access such funds. Low participation in local governance. The youth either shy away from local governance processes due to lack of resources or are crowded-out by social stereotypes that support adult participation at the expense of young people. Inadequate access to reliable information. The youth tend to receive inadequate, inappropriate and sometimes inaccurate information about government policies, programmes and initiatives meant to benefit them. This is partly the source of disaffection and apathy among the youth towards some interventions meant to benefit them.

### **Opportunities**

**Agriculture and agri-business sectors:** arable and grazing land abound in many towns and communities across Ghana and the land tenure system in many areas do not require financial acquisition of land. What is required of the youth is a change in mindset: that agriculture and agri-business is not for the non-literate, school dropout or persons who live in the village, but rather anyone who desires to create wealth through business. The youth could make use of land for economic activities, including animal husbandry, fish farming as well as crop cultivation. **Development of non-forest timber products:** the youth could be engaged in the production and development of the non-forest timber sector in Ghana. Some identifiable non-timber forest products in Ghana include cashew cultivation and processing, shea butter, dawadawa, palm oil, rice cultivation, snail, small ruminants rearing, bamboo processing, rattan, straw, medicinal plants, honey and mushrooms. Shea and dawadawa are threatened with extinction in many of their natural occurring areas of Northern Ghana and would thus require government intervention which could include engaging the youth in the planting of these natural trees.

**Linkages between production and ready market:** In addition to state agencies such as the National Food Buffer Stock Company (NAFCO)<sup>2</sup>, there are many daily and weekly markets across the country which guarantee ready markets for various products and services the youth may desire to venture into. **Media and publicity:** social media, traditional mass media and Community Information Centres provide opportunities for disseminating targeted information about opportunities for empowerment and access to employment and businesses for youth.

**Industry, small-scale manufacturing and processing:** government policy appears to support the creation of local industries where locally produced inputs are processed as end products and or as semi-processed inputs for industry. In the three Brong Regions (Bono, Bono East and Ahafo), cashew is cultivated in large quantities, so is cassava in the Volta and Oti regions, oil palm in Central and Western regions, yam and maize in the Northern Ghana (comprising 5 regions) among others. Therefore, setting up industries and processing centres to add value to these crops will have added advantages for employment and boosting the local economies for wealth creation and poverty reduction.

**Rising population and potential market:** general growth in population and rapid urbanisation is creating ready market for goods and services. Ghana’s population trends to grow with the addition of averagely 6 million people every decade, majority being young people. The youth can thus take advantage of population growth and market centres to pitch their businesses based on potential demand. **Tourism:** many of the communities and districts in Ghana have tourist attractions that can be developed and used to create employment. Employment as tour guards, translators/interpreters, food and fruit vending and the sale of art works, traditional/locally made cloths and other items could benefit the youth.

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<sup>2</sup> NAFCO was established in 2010 as a wholly owned government limited liability company. Its mandate includes guaranteeing assured income to farmers by providing minimum prices and ready markets; mop-up excess produce from farmers to reduce post-harvest losses; ensure stability in demand and supply; and purchase, sell, preserve and distribute food stuffs.



Government policies and interventions: the government's flagship programmes offer livelihood and employment opportunities for Ghana's youth. These government interventions include the Youth Employment Agency employment modules, the Nation Builders Corps (NABCO), the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ), Rearing for Food and Jobs (RFJ) and Planting for Export and Rural Development (PERD). Non-traditional export and local industries: local activities such as weaving the local kente, smocks and other traditional cloths, pottery, paintings, baskets, huts, weavings, fans, sandals and shoes are also opportunities the youth can venture into.

Venturing into Green Business options: the world is increasingly conscious about the impacts of climate change and therefore placing emphasis on sustainable businesses that do not harm the environment. The youth could take advantage of this new paradigm and venture into organic and climate smart agriculture, plastic and other wastes recycling and reuse businesses, biofuel technology etc, all of which have great potential to yield greater profit margins.

### **Threats**

Narrow Scope of youth interventions: addressing the youth bulge in Ghana does not only require adequate planning and budgeting, but also proper scoping to cater for the needs of the 8 different categories<sup>3</sup> of youth identified by the NYA. Thus far, youth related interventions appear to be short of adequately addressing the real issues confronting the youth. Many of the youth projects come across as single projects and are usually short term. They tend to limit the number of youths who can benefit and share in the outcomes. There ought to be planning for youth-related interventions at the district level so the needs and aspirations of young people will be context-specific.

Lack of leadership support: it is the desire of many adults in leadership to use the youth as tools working for them rather than providing them support. Some public leaders see youth groups as pressure groups that are intended to attack or oppose their actions and decisions. Such leaders therefore clandestinely work against organised youth groups they suspect to be working at cross-purposes to their personal interests. Inequities in Ghana's summative school assessment system<sup>4</sup>: the Junior High School (JHS) level remains the terminal point of basic education in Ghana. Students at this level must pass all subjects including Mathematics, Science and English to get admission into Senior High School (SHS). At least 40 per cent of children are dropped off from the school system at this level (JHS) because they are unable to obtain passes in all subjects with inadequate second chance opportunities. The JHS dropouts add to about 30 per cent of children who are already unable to access JHS education after primary six, either due to distance to the nearest JHS, the absence of JHSs or some other family or economic reason of exclusion from schooling. The accumulated number of dropouts at the primary and JHS levels provides an estimate of the sheer number of young people without education and skills in Ghana.

Inadequate access to schooling in rural Ghana: there are still many communities without schooling opportunities for school age children. There are also situations where the schools exist but due to poor infrastructure and inadequate inputs and resources, such schools do not attract teachers and hence perform poorly. Where governance structures such as the Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and School Management Committees (SMCs) are unable to lobby and negotiate for improved inputs and resources to their schools, the school remain poorly equipped and thus continually produce poor students.

Low interest in female education: high female dropout rates as they progress through schooling, is the source of gender inequalities at higher levels. In situations where families choose male education over females due to socio-

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<sup>3</sup> The 8 categories of youth are: rural and urban youth, male and female, adolescent and adult youth, physically challenged and able-bodied, educated and uneducated, in-school and out-of-school, organised and unorganized, and skilled and unskilled youth.

<sup>4</sup> Children in school are not externally assessed during primary schooling until they are completing JHS. Due to the lack of experience with external examinations coupled with inadequate remedial support from teachers, many children tend to not pass the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) resulting in their total exclusion from subsequent schooling.

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cultural beliefs and practices, girls' education is greatly affected. There is inadequate parental support, coupled with the absence of schools in some places, including long distances to available schools, which tend to negatively affect girls' education. For instance, in communities in the Sene East district where there are no JHS schools, parents are not willing to rent rooms for their children at Kajaji for fear they will engage in sexual activities. Also, because parents are unable to buy bicycles for their girl children in particular, they prefer to keep them at home to support with their farm work.

Inadequate Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Ghana: until recent reforms in the TVET sub-sector, that sub-sector was less prioritized by government in terms of investment. This is added to the negative public perception that TVET education is meant for the less brilliant children. It is additionally the reason students are unwilling to enroll in TVET when they are either placed there through the computerized placement system or when they are unable to gain straight entry into other secondary schools. Government is currently making the TVET sub-sector a Service, parallel to the Ghana Education Service, with plans of setting up state-of-the-art TVET centres in every district in Ghana.

Inadequate support for youth apprenticeship: even though informal apprenticeship is the commonest form of technical and vocational skill acquisition by youth in Ghana, it is challenged with certification by state agencies as well as high cost to trainees which renders it quite ineffective.

Lack of start-up capital: this is linked to TVET and informal apprenticeship. When youth acquire TVET skills either formally or informally, most are unable to start their own businesses due to lack of start-up capital. They therefore resort to seeking employment from others when they should have been indeed creating employment for others by setting up their own businesses. In this regard, there are actually several youths with skills in carpentry, auto-mechanic, masonry etc but without employment due to lack of start-up support.

High Out-Migration: the lack of jobs in the immediate vicinities of young people has accounted for the huge out-migration to urban centres. In resource rich regions such as the Western Region, where there is oil and gas as well as mining activities, when the youth fail to secure jobs in these otherwise "juicy" sectors, they resort to travelling overseas for greener pastures or end up in big cities like Takoradi, Accra or Kumasi in search of jobs.

The small size of local economies: in situations where products are not directly linked to markets across Ghana, young people get frustrated when the products of their businesses are inadequately patronised by the local economy. This is a reason many will relocate from rural to urban areas to do business. A community of less than 500 members and about 35 houses such as Ningo near Kajaji in the Sene East District cannot support 25 artisans to be gainfully employed. Such artisans are forced to relocate to other communities where they can find jobs. This affects the interest of other youth who desire to become artisans.

### **Objective 3: Opportunities for sustaining the functionality of Youth Groups, Youth-focused Organizations and Networks**

The goal of youth groups and youth-focused organisations and networks is to advance the cause of the youth through empowerment, to assert rights to participation and access to social services, skills acquisition and employment. This capacity needs assessment revealed enormous gaps in the set-up of these youth-related organisations and groups, relative to the enormity of the youth challenge in Ghana. Therefore, well-thought-out strategies are required to not only sustain the actions of these organisations and youth groups, but also reposition them to be more relevant to staying their course.

A summary of the capacity gaps of the youth organisations, groups and networks shows that only about 4 per cent of the organisations and groups were found to be legally registered with the Registrar General's Department. Organisationally, majority (at least 54%) lacked clear-cut organisational structure in terms of structure and systems, mission and strategy and the requisite personnel (people) to function effectively. This tended to affect leadership and management capacity to deliver on strategic objectives of the organisation. In terms of mission and strategy, 66 per cent require strategic plans to properly define their mission and strategy to enable them properly

situate their interventions within context. In respect of capacity to collaborate, network and work with others, majority (an average of 85%) lacked that capacity. Within the policy and legal framework of youth work, few of the organisations understood their sector of operations. Again, in terms of operations, all contacted were not financially sustainable and just a few (11%) could independently engage in advocacy activities to advance the cause of the youth.

In view of the above, a multifaceted approach is required to not only revamp youth groups and organisations in youth work in Ghana, but also ensure their sustainability.

**Organisation Development:** every organisation, no matter their stage of development, require structure and systems, a mission and strategy and people, to be able to function and be sustainable. Nevertheless, these basic ingredients were found to be missing among most of the organisations and groups contacted. In order that youth-related organisations are in a position to survive and pursue the cause of youth, they ought to be properly set up for that purpose in line with every organization's development cycle, otherwise they will not be sustainable.

**Strategy development:** in order that an organisation has a structured approach to their activities, they ought to be guided by a strategic plan. The strategic plan, which is solely owned by the organisation defines the vision, mission, objectives and strategies of the organisation. Unfortunately, the absence of strategic plans among many of the youth related organisations meant that their activities were not well structured, and thus not sustainable.

**Programming:** every organisation works on a theme or a sector to be able to cause a change. The assessment showed that even though most of the youth related organisations did youth work as their sector of operations, the lack of knowledge of the youth policy and legal framework as well as youth-related interventions by many, meant they did not fully understand what they were into. Youth-related organisations ought to have up-to-date information and knowledge about the context of youth, government's intentions for them, in terms of policy and what strategies they need to put in place to advance the cause of youth.

**Partnership/Collaboration/Network:** in a bid to tackle the challenges confronting youth, joint action is critical. Sector-wide approach, including working with other agencies to empower youth to participate in decision-making processes, equip them with skills, and secure employment opportunities for them. In these engagements, partnership, collaboration and networking are absolutely prerequisites, if progress is to be made. Unfortunately, majority of the youth groups and organisations lacked these qualities and skills to operate.

**Institutional support for youth work:** NYA's mandate include developing the creative potential of the youth and ensuring the effective participation of youth in the development of the country. Implementing these strategic objectives entail allocating a portion of the NYA's youth budget to building the capacity of youth organisations to be effective at their roles. Independent organisations, individuals or civil society could be contracted to undertake capacity strengthening of youth organisations and groups. This could be part of the regular NYA programme in order that the youth are properly mobilised for national development and for their personal wellbeing.

**Financing for youth organisations:** the NYA and its collaborators on youth work in Ghana could establish a criterion for financing activities of youth groups and organisations. This could include some of the elements of strong organisations identified in this assessment, to enable qualified ones, access funding to undertake common activities and report to NYA at the district level. This will not only seek to permanently strengthen the capacity of youth groups and organisations, but also create a consistent relationship for targeting youth for various national development initiatives, ranging from participation in decision-making processes to skills training and employment.

**Objective 4: Pathways for securing functional and sustainable youth groups, organizations and networks in Ghana.**

Functional youth organisations, groups and networks are the building blocks to well mobilised youth for nation building. They potentially serve as the entry point for the NYA to “develop a dynamic and disciplined youth imbued with a spirit of nationalism, patriotism and a sense of propriety and civic responsibility” (NYA objective b, 2020). A conscious effort is therefore required to strengthen the capacity of youth groups, organisations and networks to ensure they are well mobilised for collective action in support of youth empowerment, skills acquisition and employment. The following are proposed pathways to supporting the establishment of a unified youth front in Ghana.

**Registration of youth groups and youth-focused organisations:** a conscious effort at registering organised youth groups and organisations at district level will help provide a comprehensive database of all youth in Ghana. Even though district level registration is currently a requirement by NYA, there are no compelling modalities in place to ensure this is complied with. Publicising this requirement through traditional and new media and linking registration to benefits, could be a way to ensuring that all organised youth groups are well registered. This will make it possible for organised and structured support to youth groups and organisations.

**Activating the Youth Federation concept:** even though a requirement under the mandate of NYA, youth federations are yet to be fully operational in Ghana. Meanwhile, aggregating all youth groups into federations at the district level, is deemed an effective way to mobilising youth, learning from practices in the Western World. Youth federations will make it possible for all youth related organisations to be represented under one umbrella. It will make capacity strengthening support and information dissemination to the youth much easier to accomplish.

**Capacity Strengthening of Youth Groups and Organisations:** these could range from organisation development support, fundraising, to strategy development. This will contribute to organisational independence and sustainability. It will further prepare youth groups and organisations to receive any financial or material support that may come from government and other agencies.

**Dialogue between Youth Organisations and NYA:** regular dialogue between youth organisations and NYA, will not only compel youth groups and organisations to be functional, but also ensure that they comply with guidelines required to make them recognizable and functional. It will further ensure dissemination of accurate information to all youth and enable them benefit from government interventions.

**Needs Assessment of the Youth:** Youth groups and organisations are likely to be much more functional, when periodic needs assessments are conducted on them. The youth would appreciate the need to remain organised, whilst government and other agencies will receive the right inputs to inform policy and interventions for their benefit.

**Mentorship and Coaching of the youth:** to ensure that youth groups and organisations remain on track, there is the need to consider a team of facilitators in the districts who will periodically provide onsite, hand-holding or arms-length support to the youth. This will contribute to strong youth organisations and networks who will consistently pursue a structured agenda at the districts, which could dovetail into regional and national level functionality.

### **Challenges and Constraints of Youth**

The challenges confronting youth have been categorised at the individual level, youth group and at the level of youth-related organisations and or networks.

#### **Individual Youth Challenges**

The challenges of youth were assessed to be deeper when they remained at the individual level; they were less burdensome when the youth belonged to groups or associations. Groups and associations serve as social capital and a fallback mechanism for youth.

**Negative Partisan Politics:** perhaps the greatest challenge confronting the individual youth of Ghana is the influence of partisan politics in the provision of opportunities for their benefit. The youth either belong to the youth wing of political parties and get rewarded when their party is in power, or decide not to belong and be excluded. This meant that youth who are non-aligned politically or whose parties do not get into government, might remain excluded from interventions meant to benefit youth. The youth of the parties tend to benefit when their parties are in government to the detriment of those whose parties are not in power or are not politically aligned. Unfortunately, youth interventions in Ghana so far appear to skew more in favour of rewarding political youth to the exclusion of the so-called vulnerable youth. This situation has been lamented hugely by the youth and ought to be urgently addressed.

**Unemployment and underemployment:** members of the various categories of youth in Ghana express the lack of job opportunities. Such youth are unable to meet any financial commitments if they belong to a group. The expression of joblessness is both a reality but also a mind-set. The data on unemployed young people as put out by ISSER shows that annually, there are 19.3 per cent unemployed young people with the Secondary School Certificate, 11.3 per cent with Basic Education Certificate and 7.3 per cent with Tertiary Educational qualification and these exclude an outstanding 40.1 per cent of youth aged between 15 and 35 years who have no education at all. In spite of this reality, some youth refuse to take up employment opportunities within the agricultural and agribusiness sector owing to their craving for quicker ways of getting money.

**Lack of requisite employable skills:** in spite of the presence of numerous informal apprenticeships, there are still many young people without the skills required by industry. This suggests that informal apprenticeships are rather skewed in fewer and specific trade areas for self-employment. Therefore, when the youth fail to secure start-up capital, they are unable to fit into the wider employment market. These apprenticeship challenges are further linked to the absence of certification of the skills provided by informal apprenticeship.

**Inadequate skills training opportunities linked to employment:** The lack of formal education, including formal skills acquisition is compounded by inadequate technical and vocational education and training. These would have provided a variety of certificated skills set areas for self-employment and for industry, but this is now being considered by government. Also, the absence of a linkage between informal apprenticeship and formal certification, tends to exclude graduates from the formal job market.

**Lack of start-up capital:** initiatives such as the Venture Capital Fund and MASLOC, which were set up to finance youth entrepreneurs have probably not focused on their core mandate because the youth have hardly acknowledged awareness of these financing opportunities.

Lack of trust among the youth: the individual youth of Ghana are better-off joining hands with others to set up businesses. However, they appear to be caught-up in the wider Ghanaian cultural difficulty of not being able to get into joint business ventures. This is largely is the reason some individual youth have skills but remain unemployed because they do not want to join hands with others to set up businesses.

### **Youth Groups and Networks**

Organised youth-led groups and networks of youth provide voice for individual youth. They provide opportunities for youth to advocate and influence policy in respect of access to social services, skills training and employment. Nevertheless, their functionality has been challenged by couple of factors. These include but not limited to the following:

**Irregular sources of funding:** this affects the ability of youth groups and networks to implement their activities. There are ordinary groups who contribute their own resources to promote their personal welfare without necessarily relying on external financing and support. The activities of such groups are however limited in scope, principally to their immediate welfare and community interest. However, there are others, especially at the level of the networks, which are largely driven by external financing. This brings up sustainability challenges as the

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seeming general decline in external financing has equally affected their funding situation. This has perhaps been aggravated by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

**Apathy and complacency among youth:** even though, membership of a group helps to motivate the individual youth into action, some youth remain unconcerned and disinterested in issues that affect them. When such tendencies are widespread in the group, it affects group cohesion, cooperation and operations. The groups become unsustainable because such “tired” youth refuse to meet any financial or other obligations that may be required of them. The experience is that they eventually exit the group.

**Poor leadership among the youth:** the youth have let themselves down in many instances. The bad attitudes and poor leadership styles have resulted in petty conflicts, squabbles and the inability of youth groups to pursue their collective agenda. Poor leadership and management largely emanate from lack of orientation on leadership skills and qualities.

**Political Party infiltration:** some youth groups reported of political party infiltration into their ranks. The parties, accordingly work to sway the groups from their mandates with resources and divisive tack ticks. This is often to prevent them from being critical of their government in power, and get them to join their fold.

**Low female participation in youth activities:** out of the 57 groups and networks contacted, only two groups were an only-female group. This shows that besides professional groupings, females appear unwilling to join hands to pursue their interest. This tends to reflect in the number of females who get access to opportunities meant for the youth, including jobs.

**Lack of youth interest to belong to the group:** there was reported difficulty in mobilising the youth due to the unwillingness of some of them to participate in volunteer work. Some youth are interested in monetary returns for participation while others genuinely require travel and transport allowances (T&T) to commute from their communities to attend functions. Therefore, when the activity does not have a budget line to cater for T&T and refreshment, attendance is often low.

**Payment of Dues and Fees:** NYA demands registration and payment of dues before the youth are qualified to benefit from interventions designed for them. Some youth are genuinely challenged by distance, geographic location, whilst others hail from very low-income communities and are therefore unable to make certain payments.

### **Conclusions**

The youth capacity assessment revealed that youth groups, networks and organisations doing youth work have capacity gaps. This has limited their level of policy and practice influence on the youth front. The youth are not sufficiently sensitised to take advantage of opportunities designed for their benefit and thus are unable to claim rights due them.

In spite of categorising the youth to appropriately address their diverse and unique needs, youth development interventions are not adequately addressing the needs of the youth because of their ad hoc nature. It is the reason the youth ought to be supported, mobilised and organised to take their destinies into their hands by consistently demanding and claiming rights from duty-bearers, influencing policy decisions that affect them, and directly demanding accountability from state agencies set up to work in their interest.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Policy Shifts for the Youth**

It is strongly recommended that a transparent mechanism for determining the appropriate allocation of the “at least 20 per cent of revenues from Communications Service Tax Act 2008 (Act 754)” to finance youth empowerment schemes be established. The harmonisation of all youth policy interventions in Ghana under the National Youth Authority from local to national levels must be of utmost priority for all youth stakeholders;

It is urgent now than ever, that there is need to decouple Youth from the Sports Ministry of Ghana. Given the magnitude of the youth phenomenon, a Ministry for Youth Affairs should be contemplated. The youth should be represented on all critical positions at the proposed Youth Ministry and NYA leadership at all levels; There ought to be youth representation in all youth policy discourse particularly at the local government level.

#### **Establish Strong Youth Federations and or Networks**

There is the need for alignment of Youth Networks with Youth Federations, since their mandates appear the same. They both serve as the mouthpiece of all the youth and could invariably influence the NYA to act in response to their felt needs and interests.

#### **Capacity Strengthening Support for the Youth**

In order that the youth are well informed about interventions meant for them, it is important that a structured approach is developed to provide youth organisational and personal capacity to make them responsive to such interventions. The youth could benefit from capacity strengthening through the youth federations, groups or networks. This will also enable the youth to identify their competitive advantages as well as opportunities within their localities.

#### **Needs Assessment of the Youth**

Continuous dialogue between NYA and other agencies and the youth are required to ensure that policies, projects and programmes are relevant to their needs. The various MMDAs need to create platforms for the youth to engage with Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies.

#### **Sensitisation of the Youth on Government Policies and Programmes**

The youth require orientation on the mandate of NYA and all allied institutions whose activities are meant to benefit them. They should further understand the youth policy and its implementation programmes. This will raise consciousness among existing and incoming youth to take advantage of opportunities and contribute to nation building.

#### **Establish Start-Up Capital Fund for the Youth**

In the absence of dedicated financing for youth entrepreneurship, it is proposed that a revolving fund be established with branches in all districts for financing young entrepreneurs. The fund should include the option of equipment for specified trade areas aligned to the context of the youth.

#### **Increase NYA Visibility and Influence**

As the national authority responsible for coordinating and harmonising youth interventions in Ghana, the NYA ought to increase its visibility and youth influence across Ghana.

The NYA should further consider a robust monitoring, evaluation, research, learning and accountability system into youth work to help create synergy between research and development partners, bridging competences in a results-oriented platform.

#### **Civil Society Collaboration with NYA**

There are a number of CSOs and NGOs doing youth work across Ghana. In spite of some observed institutional challenges with some of these organisations, they still appear stronger than youth groups and networks and could be used to support organised youth groups to function properly.

#### **Mentoring and coaching support for youth**

The NYA and other organisations doing youth work ought to collaborate with both state and non-state actors to ensure adequate mentoring, coaching and career guidance support for the youth.

#### **Strengthen Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET)**

The TVET sub-sector of Ghana has not received the needed support over the years and has not sufficiently benefited the youth of Ghana. With the incorporation of a TVET Service under the Pre-Tertiary Education Bill 2019, efforts must be made to consciously raise public awareness to make TVET an enviable sub-sector of education and training in Ghana for the youth.

### **Strengthen Non-formal Skills Training for the Youth**

Advocacy for equitable access to non-formal education and skills training should focus on alternative options of skills training for young people who might be out of school. Given that 54 per cent male and 43 per cent female respectively, complete basic school with the necessary basic literacy skills, investing more in non-formal technical, vocational education and training for youth ought to be of utmost priority to ensure the youth acquire relevant skills.

### **Formalise Artisanal Training and Apprenticeship**

Artisanal training and apprenticeship offer the majority (up to 80%) of available training options for young people in Ghana. Therefore, formalising artisanal apprenticeship could be linked to functional literacy for unskilled youth.

### **Implement the Complementary Education Policy**

It is great piece of news that government plans to establish Complementary Education (CE) Centres as alternative pathways to schooling for out of school children and youth. The literacy and numeracy to be offered in these centres must offer life skills and TVET to make them relevant.

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