Assessing foreign direct investment (FDI) in agriculture and employment in rural Ghana

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Abstract

Unemployment remains a major development challenge in sub-Saharan Africa, and government efforts to address it have yielded limited successes, especially in rural communities. The liberalisation policies constitute a significant instrument for African governments to catalyse development through foreign direct investment and private sector led job creation. This paper examines foreign direct investment in the agricultural sector in the Lower Volta Basin of Ghana. Data was collected through interviews, participant observation and survey to analyse both positive and negative effects of FDI in agriculture. On the one hand, FDI in agriculture injects capital into the national economy and produces positive spillovers, including youth employment, technology, and skills transfer. On the other hand, poor wages, precarious working conditions, perceived exploitation, leakages, and dislocation of smallholder farmers are evident. Investments in the agriculture sector must suit local socio-cultural conditions to minimise micro adverse outcomes.

Keywords:

Foreign direct investment; Agriculture; employment, decent work, Ghana

Introduction

Liberalisation policies that encourage FDI have been a cornerstone of development policies in sub-Saharan Africa, aiming to catalyse development and lift people out of poverty (OECD, 2002; Tee, Larbi, & Johnson, 2017). Much scholarly attention has been on cities as the engine of economic transformation (Debrah et al., 2020; Owusu & Oteng-Ababio, 2015; World Bank, 2015). The role of rural FDI and its potential to lift people out of poverty is understudied (Adu, 2018; Awunyo-Vitor & Sackey, 2018; Djokoto, 2012). Goals 1, 2, 5, 8 and 10 of the UN SDGs aim to tackle poverty and inequalities and provide decent work for all and thus, requires efforts to be concentrated not only on cities but also on rural areas (United Nations Country Team (Ghana), 2017).

In Ghana, unemployment has increased, and its impacts are particularly severe for the youth (Amankrah, 2012; Baah-Boateng, 2018; Kudjey, 2015). The rate of unemployment is highest within the age group 15 to 24 years (10.9%) and lowest among those aged 65 years and above (2.5%) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014b). The youth are usually new labour market entrants, often casual workers, and are very vulnerable compared to other groups, as they face more severe constraints to finding good jobs (Honorati & Johansson de Silva, 2016; Sakyiamah, 2014). Data from the registration of unemployed and underemployed persons highlights approximately 230,000 new entrants to the Ghanaian labour market every year, the majority of whom are youth seeking work (Tornyezuku, 2017).

Over the past few decades, graduate unemployment has been increasing, (Kudjey, 2015). Only about 10% of graduates find jobs within a year of completing tertiary education or after completing national service. It can take up to 10 years for many graduates to secure full-time employment. Graduates face challenges such as lack of employable skills, unavailability of funding capital for entrepreneurship, poor attitudes of graduates towards job opportunities and low capacities of the industry to absorb the vast numbers (Ghana News Agency, 2017). Such a high rate of youth unemployment is undoubtedly a threat to social, economic and political stability (Msigwa & Kipesha, 2013) and widens rural-urban disparities.

The economy of Ghana revolves around the service, agricultural and industrial sectors for income and foreign exchange. Agriculture remains the backbone of the economy, as it contributes to food security and poverty reduction, supplies raw materials for industry and generates foreign exchange. Agriculture also plays a role in rural development, social stabilisation, creating a buffer in economic shocks and supporting environmental sustainability and cultural values associated with farming. Again, the agricultural sector creates jobs for about 300,000-350,000 new workers who enter the Ghanaian labour market annually (Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 2007; World Bank, 2017).

Despite the potential of the agricultural sector to contribute to the structural transformation of African economies, it remains rain-fed and largely subsistent. In Ghana, almost 90% of farm holdings operate on less than two hectares and use primarily the traditional farming system (Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 2011), with more than 90% of the food produced in the country originating from smallholders (Chamberlin, 2007). Smallholder farmers have to contend with challenges such as limited access to finance, capital, information, markets and infrastructure, and smallholder friendly technologies; price shocks; high cost of transportation; a distorted land tenure structure and high postharvest losses (Fan, Brzeska, Keyzer, & Halsema, 2013). These challenges have made agriculture less attractive to the youth (International Youth Organization, 2014).

FDI in agriculture is considered critical to the sector's growth across Africa (Amankrah, 2012). Following the liberalisation of sub-Saharan economies in the 1980s, FDI in agriculture has seen significant growth (Ackah & Aryeetey, 2012). According to Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture (2018a), FDI can change the methods of agriculture in Ghana through modernisation and diversification, making it more catalytic and attractive to the youth. The effects of FDI in agriculture are, however, complex and produce diverse outcomes.

According to the International Labour Organization (2011), agriculture is key to rural households and employs half of the world's population and 75% of the world's poor. Evidence from emerging economies shows that farm and non-farm rural operations, if adequately supported, will flourish and become engines of prosperity and creativity, and hence desirable. The Food and Agriculture Organization (2011) identifies four pillars of decent work, including employment generation and enterprise development; standards and rights at work; social protection; and governance and social dialogue. Thus, under better working conditions, agricultural productivity can increase, benefiting the "working poor" in particular. People in occupations that lack social security and safety nets to protect them against periods of low economic demand, and are often unable to produce sufficient savings to mitigate a financial crisis, also stand to gain (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011). Although the government of Ghana has put in place various development programs to aid rural development, implementation of current rural policies and regulation has not been successful (Badu, Owusu-Manu, Edwards, Adesi, & Lichtenstein, 2013).

The SDGs aim to improve livelihoods and working conditions for all members of societies. Therefore, it is essential to foster rural development by providing decent work in rural areas. Rural development is key to ensuring that Ghana's economic and demographic structure does not become overly concentrated on significant cities while neglecting rural spaces, as that will intensify urban-rural dichotomies and rural unemployment.

This paper assesses the dual effects of agricultural FDI in rural communities, using a case study of the Lower Volta Basin of Ghana. The study shows that FDI increases Ghana's export at the macro level and produces positive spillovers, including youth employment, technology, and some skills transfer. FDI in agriculture is conversely characterised by poor wages, precarious working conditions, exploitation, leakages, and dislocation of smallholder farmers at the micro-level. Investments in the agriculture sector must suit local socio-cultural context and minimise negative externalities. The rest of the paper is organised into five sections. Section 2 discusses FDI and agriculture; section 3 is an overview of neoliberal policies in Ghana, section 4 describes the study area and methods while section 5 presents the findings and discussions. Conclusions are drawn in section 6.

FDI and agriculture

Though the FDI inflow into Sub Saharan Africa is small compared to FDI inflows in developed countries, FDI in many SSA countries is increasing. The interaction between FDI and local conditions can lead to a positive process, spillover or development on the one hand, and to the creation of a backwash or dependency, on the other (Fløysand, Haarstad, Jakobsen, & Tønnesen, 2005).

FDI in agriculture can lead to technology transfer, expansion and modernisation, and linkage between farmers, manufacturers and local suppliers (Huchet-Bourdon, Ben Slimane, & Zitouna, 2015). FDI in agriculture will attract more funds and capital and increase output from the agricultural sector. FDI in agriculture unlocks capital for the purchase of sophisticated machines while reducing the over-reliance on rudimentary technology and enhancing local people's lives. Proper docking of FDI in agriculture can lead to increased yield and income and make the sector more attractive to the youth.

In many developing countries, FDI in agriculture creates the opportunity for spillovers in the form of diffusion of competence and skills, increases in tax incomes to the national economy and improved competence among local firms, thereby facilitating growth in the economy (Juliussen & Fløysand, 2010). The interaction between investors and locals can lead to knowledge transfer. Overall, FDI in agriculture creates the opportunity to transfer improved farming techniques and practices such as crop recovery and the management of moisture nutrients and canopy (Adeho, 2015). Proper interaction between FDI and local economies can thus lead to the development of human capital and increased revenue from farm produce in local and foreign markets. Investors in local economies sometimes support the development of infrastructure including roads, schools, hospitals, and water as part of their corporate social responsibility. National governments also benefit from tax revenue and income of employees to stimulate growth in the broader economy.

Conversely, FDI can create dependency – dislocation, corruption, "crowding out" of local businesses and leakages (Jakobsen, Rusten, & Fløysand, 2005). Thus, a significant proportion of income from FDI in the agricultural sector is repatriated to the investing country. Because of the tendency for investors to repatriate much of the profit, the sector can potentially remain undeveloped while at the same time putting pressure on the local currency. Often, the expectation that FDI will generate employment may not be actualised, as investors bring expatriate professionals and more modern technologies into the sectors, limiting the number of local labourers employed.

Besides, the activities of investors can result in the displacement of smallholder farmers and local companies. Local companies will collapse due to high or increased competition from foreign companies and lower profits. This will lead to the loss of jobs as it increases unemployment in the communities. FDIs can also result in modern-day economic colonialism characterised by labour exploitation and precarious working conditions.

Structural adjustment and FDI in Ghana

Although the initial performance of many SSA economies immediately after independence was good, the pace of economic development declined in the 1970s and came to a standstill in the 1980s (Heidhues & Obare, 2011). Ghana had a buoyant economy with an inflation of less than 1% immediately after independence (Aryeetey & Fosu, 2002). As the world-leading producer of cocoa and the second-largest producer of gold, timber and forest products, Ghana had a very high per-capita income and an average income like that of Mexico and South Korea just after independence. However, by the end of 1983, Ghana had a debt stock of US$ 1,820 billion with inflation as high as 123% (Dzidza, Jackson, Normanyo, & Walsh, 2017).

After the failure of interventions like import substitution, industrialisation and state-led investment by the Ghanaian government, the country sought support from the World Bank and IMF. It implemented the structural adjustment programme (SAP) (Amo-Asante, 2016). The goal of SAP was to boost local productivity, increase and expand the economic base, improve the balance of payment, reduce government expenditure, improve the economy, and promote its growth potential (Sulaiman, Migiro, & Aluko, 2014). Characteristically, SAP requires the liberalisation of foreign exchange, withdrawal of subsidies, fiscal and budgetary discipline, greater hospitality to foreign investors through privatisation and trade liberalisation (Azindow, 2005).

The fundamental logic of the World Bank/IMF-led SAP is that export promotion and private investment were the vital means to achieve economic growth and development. With a limited domestic capital base, FDI is considered critical to export promotion and private investment in SSA economies (Awudi, 2002). FDIs are investments that reflect the objective of establishing a lasting interest by a resident enterprise in another economy. It is an investment in a foreign country where the investor controls the investment (OECD, 2008). For an economy to attract FDI, it requires a sizable market, a liberalised economy, rationalised economic policies, improvement in domestic financial institutions and banks, good manufacturing and outsourcing hubs and political stability (Ramesh & Packialakshmi, 2014)2014.

In Ghana, post-independence development policies focused on state-led industrialisation. The government developed industrial policies like the Pioneer Industries and Companies Act of 1959, the Capital Investment Act of 1963 (Act 172), the 1973 Investment Decree (NRCD 141) and the Investment Policy Degree (NRCD 329) of 1975. By 1985, the government had established the investment core (PNDCL 116) and the Ghana Investment Centre, which was later replaced by the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC Act 478) in 1994 to promote and regulate investment on behalf of the government (Gyebi, Owusu, & Etroo, 2013).

Ghana implemented economic and institutional reforms to attract FDI and introduce a multi-party democratic system in 1992 to improve the climate for doing business (Barthel, Busse, & Osei, 2011). Total FDI inflows started increasing in the 1990s, recording about US$50 million in 1993, US$250 million in 2005 and almost US$450 in 2006, and the figures continued to rise. Currently, Ghana is amongst the top FDI receiving countries in Africa. Between 2006 and 2016, there has been more FDI inflow in the country, attributable to the initiation of good investment policies by the government of Ghana (Yeboah, 2018).

According to the GIPC, FDI in Ghana goes to agriculture, building and construction, general trading, manufacturing, service and tourism (Yeboah, Kesse, Apana, & Kudakwashe, 2018). The majority of FDI, however, goes to mining and oil and gas extraction. In the manufacturing sector, FDI is mainly resource-based, such as the processing and export of cut pineapples. In the service sector, FDI is in banking and the construction sector— building roads, public works, and hotels.

Currently, the primary sources of FDI in Ghana are the United Kingdom (320 projects), the USA (210 projects), and China (562 projects). Investments from the sub-region to the Ghanaian economy come from Nigeria with 205 projects and South Africa with 73 projects (Aheto, 2014). The Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) registered agriculture projects worth US$6,469,000 in 2016. In 2015, two agriculture projects worth US$2,520,000 were registered by the GIPC. In all, GIPC registered 110 agriculture-related projects worth US$1,303 billion from 2008 to 2016 (Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 2018b).

Table 1: Sectoral distribution of FDI in Ghana

Number	Value million US$	Sector
6	8.58	Agriculture
8	78.66	Building and construction
12	137.51	Export trade
28	1,091.23	General trade
27	55.31	Liaison
45	662.93	Manufacturing
42	1,289.77	Service

Source: Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (2018).

In 2018, the GIPC registered 168 projects from January to December, summarized in Table 1 above. Of these, 117 projects worth US$ 2.89 billion were solely owned by foreign investors. The remaining 51 projects worth US$ 652.02 million were joint ventures between Ghanaians and their foreign investors. Chinese investors participated in 37 projects, Indian investors in 18 projects, Netherlands investors in 15 projects and United Kingdom investors in 12 projects. Geographically, the investments were in eight regions. Table 2 below is a summary of the regional distribution and value of the investments.

Despite the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on global economies, Ghana recorded 69 projects worth about US$688.74 million in the first half of 2020. With these investments, the FDI component amounted to US$ 627.52 million and the local components amounted to US$ 61.22 million. The FDI value in 2020 was a significant increase of 409.10% over the FDI value of US$ 123.26 million recorded in the first half of 2019 (Ghana Investment Promotion Centre, 2020).

Table 2: Geographic distribution of investment in Ghana in 2018

Regions	No. of Projects	Value (US$ million)	Job created
Northern	2	400.50	365
Brong-Ahafo	2	1.41	158
Ashanti	7	4.95	1,532
Eastern	8	9.13	356
Volta	1	0.42	458
Greater Accra	138	3,069.52	14,464
Central	3	20.62	156
Western	7	34.02	435

Source: Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (2018)

SAP and Employment in Ghana

The SAP conditions included the devaluation of the currency, increased exports (usually primary materials), privatisation of industries (including necessities such as water and healthcare) and trade liberalization. Additionally, the government was required to cut back on social spending and imposition of user fees, reduce financial regulation and promote market-based pricing (which tends to raise the cost of essential goods and services) (Oppong, 2013). Two significant phases of SAP were implemented between 1983 and 1992, locally known as the Economic Recovery Program: ERP 1 focused on revitalizing the economy and ERP 2 focused on consolidating the gains made in ERP 1. Though both phases of recovery programs made some successes, they also resulted in retrenchment and froze employment (Azindow, 2005).

In the 1980s, public employment began to falter due to high employment freezes, early retirements, the retrenchment of existing employees and the suspension of the automatic recruitment of university graduates (Cornia,Van der Hoeven, & Mkandawire, 1992). In the late 1980s, over 60,000 civil servants and cocoa board staff were retrenched (Weissman, 1990). Overall, more than 200,000 public servants lost their jobs within the first ten years of implementing the SAP, while unemployment increased to about 11% from 1980 to 1993 (Amo-Asante, 2016). The employment structure in Ghana changed, with total employment by large-and-medium-scale formal sector dropping by almost 60% from 462,000 in 1985 to 186,000 in 1991 (Ablo, 2012).

The SAP and ERP negatively affected virtually all sectors of the economy. With all these retrenchments, women and the least paid, such as secretaries, clerks, and cleaners, were most affected. To mitigate the negative impacts of SAP, the government-initiated policies such as the Program of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) and the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS). Other interventions are the President's Special Initiative, the Medium Term Private Sector Development Strategy, Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), the Trade Private Sector Support Program and Vision 2020 all, aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment, but with limited success (Asafu-Adjaye, 2005).

Unemployment is high among Ghanaian youth, who make up one-third of the country's population. Youth unemployment is a major developmental problem that can bring about social conflicts and brutal revolutions, as evident in the Arab Spring (Drine, 2016) that is far from resolved. The primary concern about youth unemployment is the rising proportion of unemployed graduates. More Ghanaian youth join the labour market annually with tertiary education qualifications, but the economy has not expanded to accommodate them (Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, 2014). Thousands of young graduates roam the streets and various offices in the cities in search of unavailable jobs. Often, the types of job graduates consider appropriate for their status are not available (Dai Kosi, Tsadidey, Ashiaghor, & Baku, 2008).

Agriculture and job creation

Agriculture, the backbone of the Ghanaian economy, is vital in tackling unemployment. Agriculture was the leading contributor to GDP, accounting for 41.4%, 39.4%, and 40.9% of national GDP in 1993, 2000 and 2005, respectively. By 2013, agriculture's contribution to GDP had declined to 22.0% with an average growth rate of 3.9%, while contribution to GDP increased to 49.4% with a growth rate of 6.5% (Aryeetey & Baah-Boateng, 2016). Interestingly, the service sector took over from the agricultural sector as the primary contributor to national GDP after the rebasing of the economy in 2006 (Osei-Boateng & Ampratwum, 2011).

The relevance of economic growth is measured by its effect on citizens' quality of life by creating enough good quality jobs (Aryeetey & Baah-Boateng, 2016). Despite the decline in agriculture's contribution to GDP, it remains the major source of employment for the growing workforce. Though agriculture's share in total employment has been declining, the sector still engages over half of the workforce in the country (Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, 2014). Unlike the other sectors, agriculture employs many unskilled workers. It provides a livelihood for more than 70% of the rural population, including a considerable share of the poorest households in the country (World Bank, 2017).

The agriculture sector also provides raw materials for local industries, revenue for the government, foreign exchange, and poverty reduction (Banson, Nguyen, & Bosch, 2016). The majority of the total agricultural output is from smallholder farmers whose farms are between two and five hectares in size (Al-Hassan & Jatoe, 2003). Smallholder farmers face challenges like limited access to input, lack of capital, lack of modern technology, high postharvest losses, lack of training, inadequate storage and marketing facilities, land acquisition, and land tenure issues (Chamberlin, 2007). Agriculture remains largely rain-fed and subsistence-based, with the rudimentary technology used to produce 80% of total output (Liu, Koroma, Arias, & Hallam, 2013).

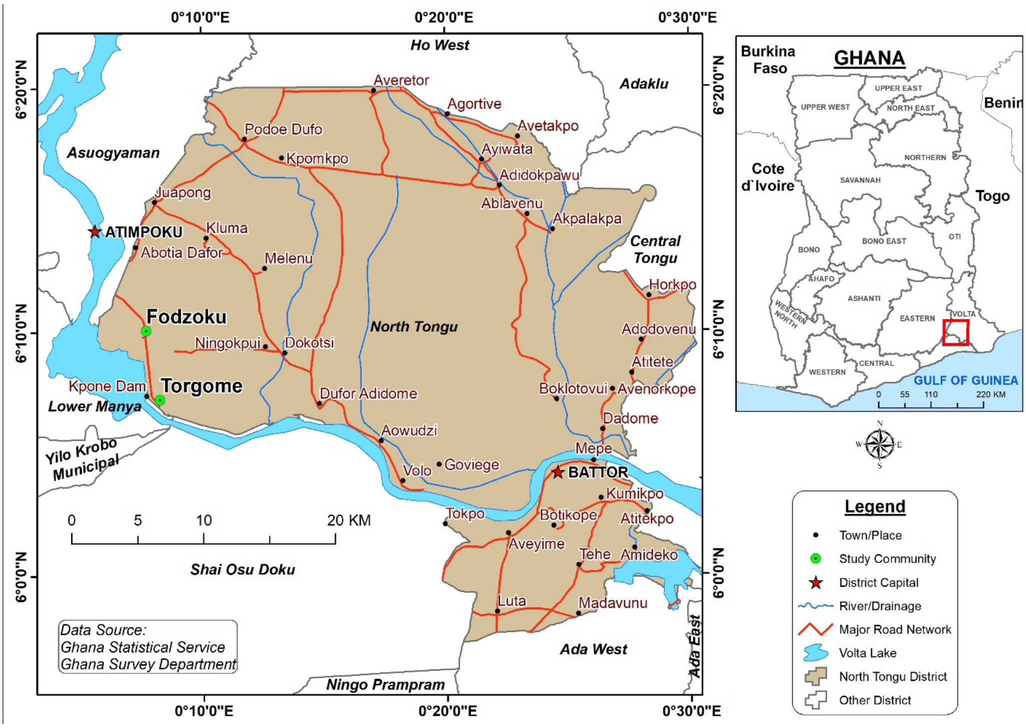
Agriculture is not a glamorous job and suffers from entrenched negative perceptions by the youth (Bafana, 2014). However, through modernisation, agriculture will be able to drive the economy and create jobs for the unemployed youth and improve food security in the country (Adeho, 2015).

Study Area and Methods

The study was conducted in the North Tongu District. It has a total land size of about 1,131.64 km^2, constituting 6% of the total land area of the Volta Region (See Figure 1). The people of North Tongu are Ewe; they are organised under traditional authorities (North Tongu District Assembly, 2016). The district has an agrarian economy with

57.2% of the employed population engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishery, compared to 15.3% involved in service employment (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014a).

Figure 1: Map of the North Tongu District



Source: Author (2021)

Agriculture in the district is carried out by small-scale unorganised farmers who depend mainly on basic labour-intensive production techniques. The fertile soil and available water attract foreign companies such as Praire Volta Limited, Vegpro Kenya Company Limited and Quist Farm to the district to produce various crops for export (North Tongu District Assembly, 2017), summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Major Agriculture Investments in North Tongu District

Name of Farm	Crop	Location
Prairie Volta Rice	Rice	Aveyime
Musahamat Farm	Banana	Aveyime
Vegpro	Maise	Torgorme-Fodzoku
Anyako Farm	Pepper	FodzokuTorgorme
Fresh Field	Pepper	Yaeweh
Quist Farm	Mushroom	Aveyime

Source: NTDA (2017).

We collected data for the study through fieldwork undertaken between May 2017 and August 2019. During fieldwork, the case study method used in the social sciences was employed (Yin, 2013). In this study, the case study research design was used to check whether the theory of FDI as a positive process and FDI as backwash applied to the phenomena in Vegpro. Vegpro Company, which is one of the major and early investors in the district, was studied to know whether it would yield if it were to interact with the local economy, whether it will produce rural development or dependency. The study also aimed to find out whether the jobs the company provides to North Tongu District are sustainable.

Data was collected using interviews, informal conversations, participant observation, surveys and site reconnaissance. Thirty-five key stakeholders were interviewed. These stakeholders include assembly members, executives of youth groups, community landowners, management of companies such as Vegpro, team leaders and workers at Vegpro. Interviews focused on the employment history, terms and conditions of work at Vegpro, training and capacity building, benefits enjoyed, and challenges faced by youth who work on the Vegpro project. The survey included 80 respondents and focused on assessing levels of education, health, employment and financial history, and working conditions. Participant observation was carried out on social amenities, infrastructure and living situation in the communities.

Overview of the Vegpro project

Vegpro is a horticulture company founded in 1979, operating on the nucleus-out-grower schemes. As a result, Vegpro cultivates less of its area as smallholders provide most of the company's supplies. In the 1980s and 1990s, the company focused on producing French beans and Asian vegetables such as karalla, dudhi, okra, turia and various chillies for export markets in the UK, France and Germany. The company maintains additional investments in African countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Ghana that produce vegetables and flowers for supermarkets in the UK and Europe.

The company secured funding from the International Finance Corporation and started operation in Ghana in 2011 but started exporting in 2012. Vegpro produces baby corn, butternut squash, sweet potatoes, sweet corn, chillies, and other vegetables. According to the company's management, they cultivate more than 1,000 hectares and aim for full employment of more than 4,000 workers by the time the project is in full operation. The company currently employs about 400 skilled and unskilled personnel in and around the North Tongu district.

According to the manager, the North Tongu District was their chosen investment destination, 'basically because of land and water availability for irrigation. This is the perfect environment for the type of farming we do' (Manager, January 2018). The availability of low-wage labour in the North Tongu District is key to ensuring low production cost. According to the farm manager, their workers 'are from Fodzoku, Torgome, Azagornokope, Sorkope, Somenya, Kpong, etc. Because these people are predominantly farmers, they understand the farm work' (Manager, January 2018).

There are three main operational areas in the company – administration, the farm, and the pack-house. The administration is where the managerial work occurs – the preparation of accounts and budgets, recording information on production and farm management practices. Other tasks performed here are providing equipment and supplies (personal protective equipment, seeds, and fertilizer) for effective work, calculating employees' pay and keeping employment records. To be able to work in administration, one must have some level of educational qualification. According to the manager, the categories of people employed 'depends on where they need people. For areas like administration, you need some qualification or skills, to be able to work there' (Manager, June 2019). Indeed, some workers confirmed that there are people with Senior High School Certificate who work at the administration as office assistants. But none of the 80 respondents surveyed at the time worked at the administration, although some had a high school certificate.

On the farm, the manager says they have plans for the cultivation of other fruits and vegetables and baby corn, which is their main product. He said, 'Our main product is baby corn. We have some vegetables on trial stages, Okra, Cherry tomatoes. So, in the future, we are also looking at going into mangoes and avocadoes. As I speak to you now, we have a nursery of about more than 20,000 seedlings of avocadoes and mangoes which we look forward to growing' (Farm Manager, December 2018).

Since the company operates a highly mechanised farm, the only manual work done is the harvesting of crops. Since baby corn is harvested daily, people are employed to harvest the crops. As stated by the manager at Vegpro, education is not a requirement for general workers. He said, 'for the general workers, the main thing is you need to be fit and then at least, able to understand what is required of you. Education is not a major requirement' (Farm Manager, January 2018). Out of the total population sampled, 15% are farmworkers, of whom 75% are men and 25% women. Fifty per cent of the farmworkers are casual workers, and the rest are permanent workers. The salaries for the farmworkers ranged from GHC 100 to GHC 500 a month.

Another operational area employing local labour is the packhouse, where the baby corn is cleaned, packed, and stored for export. As indicated earlier, education is not a major requirement to work at the packhouse. However, a farm manager noted that for certain positions like a team leader, you need to have at least a secondary school certificate' (Farm Manager, January 2018). Some respondents work at the receiving area in the packhouse where harvested baby corn is processed. After harvesting, the crops are transported to the receiving area and offloaded. Sixteen respondents worked in the receiving area, all of whom are men; 10 of them are permanent employees, and the remaining six are casual workers with salaries from GHC 100 to GHC 500 monthly.

In the production area of the packhouse, the baby corn is de-husked, weighed, and wrapped. Thirty-six respondents worked in the production area, including 14 men and 22 women. Of these, 24 are permanent workers, and 12 are casual workers. After processing, the baby corn is moved to the dispatch area, where the final wrapping and packaging occurs. Here, the baby corn is packaged to meet international standards and transported to the airport for shipping. Eight (8) men work in the dispatch area, seven (7) of whom are permanent workers, while one (1) is a casual worker.

The quality control department is central to the operations of the company. The quality control personnel are responsible for ensuring that crops meet EU standards before export. They examine the baby corn and reject overgrown corn. Periodically, the quality control unit workers are trained on the current trends to prevent products from being rejected on the international market. A total of twelve people, comprising six permanent workers and six casual workers, are employed in quality control.

FDI as Development or Spillover: Evidence from Youth employment in the North Tongu District

The operations of the company provide an important employment source to many of the youths in the communities. A 25-year-old cleaner noted that before securing a job with Vegpro, she was a casual labourer helping a kenkey seller. According to her, 'my previous employer paid me 8 cedis daily, and I could eat kenkey and fish for free as well as take some home to give to my family. I joined Vegpro because most of my friends work here and due to the prestige attached to working with a big company' (Cleaner at Vegpro, June 2018). Thus, for many of the youths, waged employment provides income and has symbolic significance.

The survey data shows that 63.8% of respondents were unemployed before securing a job with Vegpro. According to a youth executive from Fodzoku, unemployment among the youth is a significant challenge in the community. He noted that 'The rate of unemployment among the youth is on the increase. Though we made several complaints to the Member of Parliament of North Tongu and the District Chief Executive, nothing has been done to curb the problem' (Youth Executive Member, January 2019). According to an Assemblymember, youth unemployment in many of the communities in the district remains a problem. According to him, the 'unemployment issue is very high amongst uneducated youth since they do not qualify for jobs requiring specific skills and knowledge' (Assemblymember, January 2018). Many respondents argue that fishing and farming no longer provide a stable income source, and hence they are unattractive. Many of the North Tongu District youth migrate to the cities searching for jobs, while those who stay behind are mainly unemployed.

Ninety-two percent (92%) of the respondents agreed that Vegpro has helped in addressing the unemployment challenges. Employment has provided some independence for the youths who previously depended on their parents for food, shelter, and clothing. The benefits of work go beyond the individuals, for as the team leader in the packhouse observed, ‘before Vegpro project commenced, unemployment was high. The unemployed youth were dependent on their parents for money, and crime was high in many communities. But since Vegpro began, the youth have become more independent, and they have learnt how to manage time and money. Also, during fundraising in the town, youth can contribute to the town’s development parenthesis (Team Leader, January 2018). Youth employment is thus essential to addressing various social vices. A UN-Habitat and IHS-Erasmus University Rotterdam (2018) report confirms that FDI employs in the different sectors of the economy. FDI usually generates employment in two ways: direct employment by the investor and indirect employment through backward and forward linkages to local and national economies. In this study, local food vendors also sell food around the company premises.

Capacity building, skills, technology, and other positive spillovers

Most of the respondents confirmed that they had received on-the-job training. The training focused on leadership, personal hygiene, safety measures and quality control. Some workers are trained monthly, and respondents believed that the new knowledge and skills gained can be used elsewhere. Respondents have also gained knowledge in dealing with fire hazards and overall workplace safety. Additionally, some of them have been trained in the use and maintenance of farm equipment. As one of the managers noted, ‘some of the workers have developed computer skills while others have been trained on the use and maintenance of farm machinery’ (Manager, January 2018). For an agrarian district, such skills in the operation and maintenance of farm machines can be helpful beyond the company as an increasing number of farmers are renting tractors to clear their lands.

The project has therefore provided a critical avenue for the acquisition of skills that can be transferred to other sectors of the economy. FDI in agriculture also provides the avenue for the transfer of technology and technical know-how to developing economies. A critical relevance of the Vegpro project is the development of human resource in many of the villages in the project catchment area. As argued by a key informant, ‘some of the youths have improved their knowledge of farming and how to operate machines’ (Key informant, January 2018). As Eimers, Nouwens, and Toorman (2005) noted, the potential for improving access to modern technology is core to countries’ drive to attract FDI. Thus, working with foreign companies provides locals with the avenue to acquire new skills and knowledge as they learn how to use these modern technologies. Such knowledge and skill may not be readily available to local producers or people in host countries.

About 37.5% of respondents confirmed positive changes in their lives since they started working at Vegpro. With a stable income, respondents can now take care of themselves and other family members. Conversely, 62.5% said they had not seen any changes in their lives since they started work at Vegpro. In general, workers' benefits also included awards on Farmers' Day celebrations, Christmas gifts, bonuses, pension contributions and health insurance.

FDI can produce spillovers like capital, economic freedom, employment and integration into the global economy (Ramesh & Packialakshmi, 2014)2014. Dinh, Vo, and Nguyen, (2019) added that FDI enhances tax revenue and human capital and increases long-term benefits and connections between different countries. This is obvious in North Tongu as the youths who could not contribute to development in the past can do so now.

FDI as backwash: Poor wages and exploitation

While there is no doubt that the FDI in agriculture plays a positive role regarding employment, stimulating local economies and linkages to broader national economies, there are also several adverse outcomes. In addition to their salary, the company also provides lunch and transportation for the workers. Nevertheless, most workers stated that they were being exploited and complained about the working conditions (Survey, January 2018). Work starts from 7 am and ends at 4 pm with a one-hour break for the workers to eat and rest. Many workers further complained that the work was tedious, and that there were no efforts to improve the work environment and opportunities for upskilling.

Although workers received wages above the minimum wage per day (9.68 cedis), most of them still considered the salary, insurance, and allowance as inadequate. Wages depend on how long they have worked at Vegpro and range from GHC 9.80 for less than a year to GHC 11 for four years and above. However, workers who work overtime claim they are usually paid only half of what is due to them.

There is a lack of stability in employment for the workers. Most of the respondents argued that the job is not sustainable as their employment is seasonal. The majority of workers are laid off when production is down. This view was confirmed by a manager who noted that 'I may say, the work is not stable. Small-time, on and off.' Interestingly, only 25% of respondents have an alternative source of income. The remaining 75% do not have an alternative income source, and hence when they are laid off, they become temporarily unemployed.

The baby corn is kept in cold storage units during processing, packaging, and transportation for export. According to an informant, 'when you put a sachet of water where we work, it will freeze in just 30 minutes' (Male worker at Vegpro, January 2018). Although workers have PPEs when they work in the cold area, many still feel the effects of the cold. Workers stand up to five hours in the cold room and only come out during break periods. Due to this, the women who de-husk the baby corn complain of health problems linked to their work in the cold areas. Many of the women interviewed complained about irregular menstrual cycles and severe abdominal pains attributed to their work in the cold room. As one of the women who worked in the cold room noted, 'The cold room prevents the baby corn from going bad. If you are inside the cold room, sometimes you will feel pains under your feet. And your hands can freeze. One of my friends who works in the cold room cannot wear a normal sanitary towel during her menstrual periods. This started when she started to work in a cold room. However, she could not stop the work because she needs the money' (Female worker at Vegpro, January 2018). A medical expert who was interviewed on this issue attested that drastic changes in lifestyle and environment could cause hormonal changes, especially in women. These lifestyle changes can cause drastic changes in human bodies. He said that 'For many women, the freezing environment can cause changes in their menstrual cycle' (Medical Expert, December 2020), as was experienced by some respondents.

Also, most of the workers complained about intimidation from management and in many cases, they are often sacked when people raise concerns about specific issues that adversely affect them. A female worker said, 'I see that because we are youth and they see us that we are not well educated, they do not respect us. If the managers say something and you disagree, then you try to voice up, they feel that you are challenging them. So, before you realise, with a little mistake, they will just sack you. This is because they feel like what they are doing is right, or we do not have to complain, because after all, we are working for money' (Female worker at Vegpro, January 2018).

Management officials, on the other hand, also complained about the poor attitude of employees towards work. They complained that on weekends many workers prefer to attend funerals or weddings, or to stay at home instead of working. The unwillingness of workers to work on weekends, the employers contended, affects production negatively. Officials noted that baby corn cannot be exported when it overgrows, leading to a loss for the company. Thus, they expect workers to be at post whenever they are needed for harvesting. Officials also complained about theft, encroachment and fire outbreaks that adversely affect their output. According to officials, several sacks for packaging cables and other equipment were stolen by some employees.

Though the company provides workers lunch, respondents complained about the lack of animal protein in the food. It is important to note that most Ghanaian foods are served with animal protein. Since the company is managed by vegetarians and targeted consumers are usually vegetarians, eating meat, fish or eggs is prohibited. Also, nuts are not allowed on the premises. Therefore, workers are served food that is usually without animal protein. One team leader at Vegpro argued that 'because the managers are vegetarians, they want to impose their culture on us. Ewes cannot eat without fish or meat. Yet they serve us lunch without protein. For instance, they give us rice and stew without fish, meat or eggs, sometimes just banku and pepper. If you want to eat fish or meat, you have to hide and do it. Ensure you are not caught else you will be sacked' (Team leader, January 2018). A cook with the company confirmed that they do not add any animal protein to any of the food they cook for the workers.

However, company officials explained that most of their clients in Europe are vegetarians, so if the product gets contaminated with animal protein or nut, they will be out of business. The manager said, 'It is true. The company has a nut and allergen control site. That is why you go to other companies, and you have rules for their site, so that is it. The food that we produce is consumed by customers who are allergic to some of these things. Most of our customers outside [Europeans] are vegetarians. If you are producing food for vegetarians, you do not have to bring anything that vegetarians do not consume close. So that we do not get ourselves that problem, the company has that policy, we do not bring meat, fish, or nut around. You can eat it outside but not in the premise where production is going on' (Manager at Vegpro, January 2018). There is, thus, a clash of cultures in the docking of FDI in a local context.

The project has resulted in the displacement of several smallholder farmers. The land acquired for the project belonged to several communities and multiple families whose members cultivate the land. Backed by the state, the land has been leased for large scale commercial production geared for the export market leading to the dispossession of several farmers of their lands. These negative outcomes of FDI at the local communities (Haarstad, 2009) are often not the subject of critical policy and scholarly debates. In North Tongu, the land acquisition for the project also led to intra-family disputes over compensation for the land.

Ultimately, community elites received a significant proportion of the compensation while vulnerable social groups like women and migrants did not benefit from the compensation. These vulnerable groups also suffer further as they have lost their lands to the project without allocation of alternative lands. Also on the rise is inter-family and inter-community boundary disputes. While some of these disputes are not new, they have been largely dormant and only became a problem when the land was acquired for the project. Thus, FDI can also produce adverse outcomes such as exploitation, environmental degradation, crowd-out, leakages of resources from the country, poor wages, dislocation of smallholder farmers and precarious working conditions (Juliussen & Fløysand, 2010). Ecologically, monocropping, which investors practice, has negative implications for biodiversity.

Conclusion

FDI inflows into the agriculture sector generated mixed outcomes. Although there are macro-economic benefits, micro negative effects were also recorded. Unless jobs are upgraded, and more technological innovations introduced, FDI orientated investments in agriculture will remain satellites of investments with little prospects for transforming rural areas into sustainable communities with decent work. Of course, a critical mass of FDI is needed, and frontier investors such as Vegpro are likely pioneers. Transformation may only occur when workers have various employment prospects so that companies are forced to improve working conditions, upgrade rural agricultural activity and catalyse rural communities as local engines of sustainable development.

It is important to note that Agricultural FDI in the North Tongu District resulted in modest positive outcomes such as skills upgrading for a minority of the workforce, technological transfer and economic activity, but not enough to transform communities. For instance, international companies train the youth in particular projects, contribute to human resource development and engage workers in utilising technological approaches to agricultural development. This enables the workforce to transition towards a more technical and scientific-based approach to agricultural development and crop production. Through such operations, the high rate of unemployment in the communities and their catchment areas has been reduced, and the success of these projects makes the area more attractive to enticing new FDI, but not enough to generate and sustain sustainable rural development.

On the other hand, agricultural FDI in North Tongu District has also resulted in negative outcomes such as loss of land, poor wages and precarious working conditions for some, and limited upskilling. It is evident that not all the workers participated in and engage in technological approaches. Some remain as basic labourers with little prospects of being upgraded and, therefore, are not much better than traditional agricultural labourers.

FDI in the agriculture sector needs to balance its positive effects and its local negative externalities. Investments could be better designed to suit the local socio-cultural and economic context; thus, government support programs could play a better partnership role in marrying FDI with upgrading the labour force. The investment framework should not only favour foreign investors outside the continent but incentivise and target African investors, both in Ghana and from other SSA countries. The government should target more FDI into rural areas and not overly emphasise urban-based projects. Since FDIs with efficiency-seeking objectives look out for host countries with a lot of labour, they will be willing to invest in Ghana. This will create more jobs for the youth in the country.

FDI could also consider shared community ownership in FDI. It is essential to transition away from the neo-colonial models of FDI, and neoliberal emphases that privileged outsiders and led to a frenzy of land grabs in many countries. It will help move towards more sustainable and resilient pathways so that Ghanaian agriculture can bring about actual, sustainable development for its people. It is high time that policymakers and experts focused more attention and policy instrument towards the sustainability of Africa's rural spaces and populations.

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