# YOUTH IN JUST FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSITIONS:
# GHANA CASE STUDY

INCLUDE

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KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM ON INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study analyses the drivers and barriers to youth employment in Ghana's just food system transition (JFST) through a four-dimensional justice lens: procedural, recognition, distributive, and restorative. Public and private sector interventions were examined using a mixed-methods approach: quantitative analysis of nationally representative labour-force data from the Ghana Statistical Service's *Annual Household Income and Expenditure Survey*, alongside participatory qualitative research (focus groups, key informant interviews with government, private sector, CSOs, donors, and a mid-term validation workshop with youth). Two case studies: public programmes (*Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ)* and *Feed Ghana Programme (FGP)*) and private sector (*Tamanaa Company Ltd*) provided in-depth justice analysis. The methodology was gender-sensitive (46% female participation) and conducted in collaboration with youth-focused organisations including the *Ghana Food Movement*, *Center for Ecological Agricultural and Livelihoods*, *Urbanet*, and *GAWU Youth cohort*.

The statistical analysis shows that food systems remain central to youth livelihoods, yet are unattractive due to low wages, precarity, and limited mobility. Agriculture employs 48.3% of Ghanaian youth, especially young men (54.9%). Youth employment is highly gendered and shaped by geographical location. Marketing roles are dominated by young women, while crop farming is dominated by young men. Urban youth cluster in food marketing and processing, whereas rural youth overwhelmingly engage in crop farming. Wages in the food system are significantly lower than the national youth wage average, with a pronounced gender pay gap disadvantageing young women. Higher educational attainment correlates with movement away from production into marketing and non-farm food-system roles.

The study found that government initiatives designed to improve Ghana's food system and make it more attractive to youth have largely failed due to competitive clientelism and short political cycles. Agriculture programmes are frequently redesigned or discontinued after change of governments, undermining policy continuity and long-term transformation. Agricultural input distribution is often politically mediated, resulting in exclusion, mistrust, and inefficiencies in access, particularly for young people and women farmers. Traditional chieftaincy shapes access to land, reinforcing patriarchal structures that limit youth and women's autonomous participation in agriculture. Gender norms, land inheritance practices, religious norms, and unpaid care burdens disproportionately restrict young women's participation across the food system. Limited access to collateral and credit further marginalises youth and women, while restricted access to extension services—exacerbated by shortages of female agricultural officers—reduce learning opportunities and restrict productivity. Young people struggle with market access, including certification barriers, high transport costs, and unfair bargaining positions for youth and women.

The two case studies demonstrate that procedural justice is weak in public programmes due to top-down design and symbolic participation but stronger in NGO initiatives that embed youth voices. Recognition of indigenous practices and agroecology is limited, reinforcing dependence on commercial seed systems and external inputs. Distributive justice is undermined by land inequality, political interference in resource distribution, and gendered labour divisions, despite numerical youth and women's participation. Restorative justice is weak across the system, with limited investment in ecological restoration, sustainable farming practices, and climate adaptation.

Despite these challenges, youth-led enterprises, such as AB Farms and Sankofa Snacks, demonstrate significant potential for innovation, inclusion, and value addition under enabling conditions. In addition, a growing number of actors such as The Ghana Food Movement are promoting sustainable farming and traditional foods through training young people.

The study concludes that Ghana's food system transformation landscape is marked by both momentum and fragmentation. The country adopts systems-thinking on paper, but institutionalisation remains shallow. Youth and women are rhetorically prioritised yet remain marginal in concrete decision-making and resource control. Public programmes remain productivity-centred rather than justice-oriented, while private-sector cases show promising but uneven models for inclusive transformation. Without addressing structural barriers, political economy constraints, and integrating climate-resilient, agroecological approaches, Ghana's food system transition risks remaining neither just nor transformative.

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

**For the Government of Ghana:**

- Ensure continuity of food system programmes by adopting a bipartisan long-term framework, legislating the Cross-Sectoral Planning Group under MOFA, and guaranteeing youth and women's participation.
- Pilot land access schemes where chiefs provide subsidised land to young farmers, supported by secure off-set markets for specific crops.
- Support young SMEs in accessing the five-year tax exemption and Ghana Enterprise Agency (GEA) grants to strengthen youth entrepreneurship.
- National programmes should allow district-level flexibility and systematically integrate the voices of youth and women into local decision-making.

**For the Private Sector:**

- Invest in low-carbon and circular systems (e.g., solar irrigation, biochar, recycling) while embedding social economy principles.
- Empower youth and women in business by co-designing tailored financial products (flexible collateral, blended finance) and adopting inclusive models that prioritise hiring and sourcing from young people.
- Work together with local Chiefs to allow young farmers in outgrowing schemes to access land.

**For Development Partners:**

- Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure such as green transport, storage, and processing hubs.
- Advance knowledge sharing and capacity building through research, South–South exchanges, and FST knowledge hubs on agroecology, circular food economies, and youth employability.
- Fund long-term innovation networks focused on justice-centred food system transition.

**For local CSO's:**

- Advocate for an inclusive and just food system transition that prioritises people and planet, while holding the government accountable to its commitments.
- Develop a locally grounded JFST agenda across CSOs to strengthen targeted lobbying and coordinated interventions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report examines the relationship between climate change, food system transformation (FST), and youth employment in Ghana, as part of the INCLUDE Platform's wider research programme on youth employment in African food systems. Ghana, a lower-middle-income country of 30.8 million people (50.7% women; 49.3% men) (GSS, 2021), seeks to achieve food self-sufficiency through a just food system transition that meaningfully includes young women and men. This ambition is constrained by interconnected political, economic, social, and environmental factors (Asante, 2023).

Using a mixed-methods approach and two case studies, the study analyses public and private FST initiatives through a four-dimensional justice framework (Conti et al., 2025), examining:

- **Procedural justice**: youth participation in decision-making and implementation;
- **Recognition**: inclusion of diverse youth voices and lived experiences;
- **Distributive justice**: fairness in the distribution of benefits and opportunities; and
- **Restorative justice**: responses to structural inequalities and environmental harm.

This framework moves beyond productivity-focused narratives to interrogate power, inequality, and environmental sustainability in Ghana's food system. The report identifies key political economy drivers; highlights youth-led, community-based, and private-sector innovations; and underscores persistent challenges, including unequal land access, weak post-harvest systems, precarious urban food delivery work, and climate risks. The first chapter outlines the study background, analytical framework, and methodology. Subsequent chapters examine political economy dynamics and food system sub-sectors, followed by case studies of Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ), Feed Ghana Programme (FGP), and Tamanaa Company Limited. The report concludes with a justice-based assessment of Ghana's FST and policy recommendations.

### 1.1. Background

Food system transformation has gained global prominence since the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit as a pathway to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2023). There is broad consensus that transforming food production, processing, distribution, and consumption is essential for human and planetary health, with justice as a core organising principle (Tribaldos & Kortetmäki, 2022). In Africa—where over 60% of the population is under 25 (El Habti, 2022)—youth must be central actors in FST. In Ghana, youth (18–35, per the African Youth Charter) constitute 38% of the population, yet unemployment among 15–24-year-olds (32.5%) far exceeds the national average (12.8%) (GSS, 2025). Youth-centred FST therefore presents a critical employment opportunity.

Historically, Ghana's FST discourse has prioritised agricultural modernisation and productivity, a focus reiterated in recent political commitments emphasising mechanisation, value addition, and market access. Since 2011, government programmes—including the Youth in Agriculture Programme, PFJ (2017), and FGP (2025)—have linked agricultural transformation to youth employment, complemented by the National Green Jobs Strategy (2021–2025). Justice and environmental considerations entered the national framework more explicitly with the revised FST Synthesis Paper (FSTP2) in 2025, which prioritises

vulnerable communities, women, youth, and climate-smart agriculture. Whilst the latest FST synthesis paper provides a robust policy foundation for FST and incorporates inclusive development perspectives as well as justice dimensions (e.g. explicit recognition of the need to support vulnerable rural households, youth and women through the FST), implementation mechanisms remain underdeveloped. More so, because the pathway has been developed by the National Development and Planning Commission (NDPC), which is an advisory body to the government lacking executive power. Policy implementation is further constrained by weak inter-ministerial coordination, limited youth engagement mechanisms, fragmented institutional mandates, and political turnover. Youth aspirations and experiences within the food system also remain insufficiently documented.

FST in Ghana is also shaped by grassroots and private sector initiatives. Farmers are adopting agroecological practices in response to climate change, while small-scale fisheries adjust livelihoods despite limited structural support. SMEs such as Agromyx and Sankofa Snacks demonstrate how innovation, value addition, and cultural revival can create inclusive food system opportunities. Youth-led networks, including the Ghana Food Movement, are promoting local cuisine, skills development, and “Buy Ghana” campaigns.

Additionally, there is a rapid expansion of urban food systems, due to changing consumption patterns, tourism, and digitalisation. While this creates employment, particularly in food services and delivery, it also exposes young workers—such as dispatch riders—to low pay, high risks, and limited social protection. Addressing these decent work deficits is central to a just urban food system transition.

Overall, Ghana’s food system is evolving through the interaction of state policy, market forces, informal innovation, and climate adaptation within a political economy that often prioritises productivity and profit over social and environmental outcomes. In what follows, the adopted analytical framework, used to assess the inclusiveness, equity, and sustainability of Ghana’s FST as well as youth engagement will be presented.

### 1.2. Analytical Framework

The study defines the food system as the interconnected activities involved in producing, processing, transporting, consuming, and disposing of food. A Just Food System Transformation (JFST) requires addressing the structural roots of inequality, power imbalances, environmental injustice, and food insecurity, while benefiting people, nature, and the climate (Kaljonen, et al., 2023).

Drawing on JFST scholarship, the study applies four justice dimensions—distributive, procedural, recognition, and restorative—to assess how FST outcomes and processes affect different groups. The framework recognises that youth are not a homogeneous group but a socially differentiated category with diverse experiences and emphasises youth as active agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries.

**Table 1: Conceptualisation of Justice**

| Justice Dimension | Conceptualisation | Measured by / through |
|---|---|---|
| **Distributive** | Fair distribution of benefits and compensation for losses | Access to FST benefits, green jobs, and opportunities across regions, gender, and social groups |
| **Procedural** | Inclusive and participatory decision-making | Youth and women's participation in policy design and implementation |
| **Recognition** | Acknowledgement of inequalities, power relations, and diverse knowledge systems | Engagement with youth, women, farmers' organisations, and indigenous knowledge |
| **Restorative** | Addressing social and environmental harm and rebuilding trust | Evidence of compensation, mitigation, and trust-building mechanisms |

*Source: Authors, adapted from Tribaldos & Kortetmäki (2022) and INCLUDE (2025).*

### 1.3. Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining national-level quantitative analysis with participatory, gender-sensitive qualitative research. The design was co-created with youth-focused organisations, including GAWU youth cohorts, CEAL, URBANET, and the Ghana Food Movement (GFM), ensuring alignment with young people's lived realities.
The research pursued five objectives:

1. Identify political economy drivers and barriers to JFST and youth participation;
2. Situate Ghana's FST within broader socio-economic and political dynamics;
3. Identify strategies for including vulnerable groups, particularly youth and women;
4. Assess enablers and constraints to FST policy implementation; and
5. Compare justice outcomes across public and private FST initiatives.

Two purposely selected case studies were analysed: PFJ and FGP (public sector) and Tamanaa Company Limited (private sector). These were examined using political economy analysis and the four-dimensional justice framework. Qualitative methods included six focus group discussions with 61 young people (35 women, 26 men) in Northern Ghana, 25 key informant interviews across government, civil society, donors, and the private sector, and a validation workshop with 14 youth participants. Quantitative analysis drew on Ghana Statistical Service AHIES data to map youth labour market patterns.

This approach grounded the study in youth perspectives and strengthens its contribution to debates on justice, climate adaptation, and sustainable food system transformation in Ghana.

## 2. POLITICAL ECONOMY AND MAPPING OF FOOD SYSTEMS IN GHANA

### 2.1 Introduction

Ghana's food system is shaped by interconnected political, socio-cultural, institutional, and economic forces. The chapter analyses how electoral politics, clientelism, and traditional authority influence access to land, inputs, and public programmes. It also shows how gender, age, and religious norms affect who can access resources and opportunities. By mapping key actors, it highlights diverse interests and power imbalances across the value chain. The chapter also identifies new prospects for jobs and inclusive participation, especially through youth and private-sector innovation, while noting ongoing structural barriers that hinder equitable and transformative food system change. These insights help assess Ghana's readiness for just food system transformation (JFST).

### 2.2 Political Economy of Food Systems Transitions in Ghana

Since the return to democratic governance in 1992, political power in Ghana has alternated between two major parties in roughly eight-year cycles. Despite relative political stability and strong performance on governance, the competitive four-year electoral cycle has fostered a short-term approach to public policy including food system policies. The absence of a consensus on a long-term national development plan has elevated the role of political party manifestos. This political economy manifests in two main problematic dimensions throughout public FST processes.

First, programme duration is closely tied to electoral cycles. Successive governments often abandon existing initiatives in favour of new ones, even when their objectives align. In the food system for instance, the Youth in Agriculture Programme (YIAP), introduced by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government in 2011, was not continued by the succeeding New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration, which came into power in 2017. Instead, the NPP launched the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) initiative, which included the Youth in Agriculture and Aquaculture Programme (YIAAP) in partnership with the private sector (MOFA b, n.d.). In 2025, the FGP was launched by the Mahama (NDC) government, further illustrating how food system programmes shift with political transitions (MOFA a, n.d.). Throughout the study, stakeholders bemoaned the adverse impact of politicisation of food system policies and programmes in the country. FST policies are perceived to be top-down and short-term, affecting procedural and recognition justice, as will be further analysed and demonstrated in chapter 4.

Second, political clientelism affects access to inputs under such programmes, undermining distributive justice. Ghana's political settlement has often been characterised as competitive clientelism where ruling parties leverage access to public resources as a bargaining tool to gain influence and secure votes (Abdulai, 2017; Odijie and Imoro, 2021). Within the food system, policies are frequently subjected to political interference, which undermines their effective implementation. It has been noted that agricultural inputs meant to be distributed to programme participants "*are often diverted to party supporters. The bureaucrats are not given chances to apply technical knowledge. In many instances, party people take over distribution of inputs, and they end up in the open market for sale*" (Interview with NGO leader, August 2025). This politically mediated diversion has implications for distributive justice, undermining the fair allocation of resources, benefits, and opportunities that public

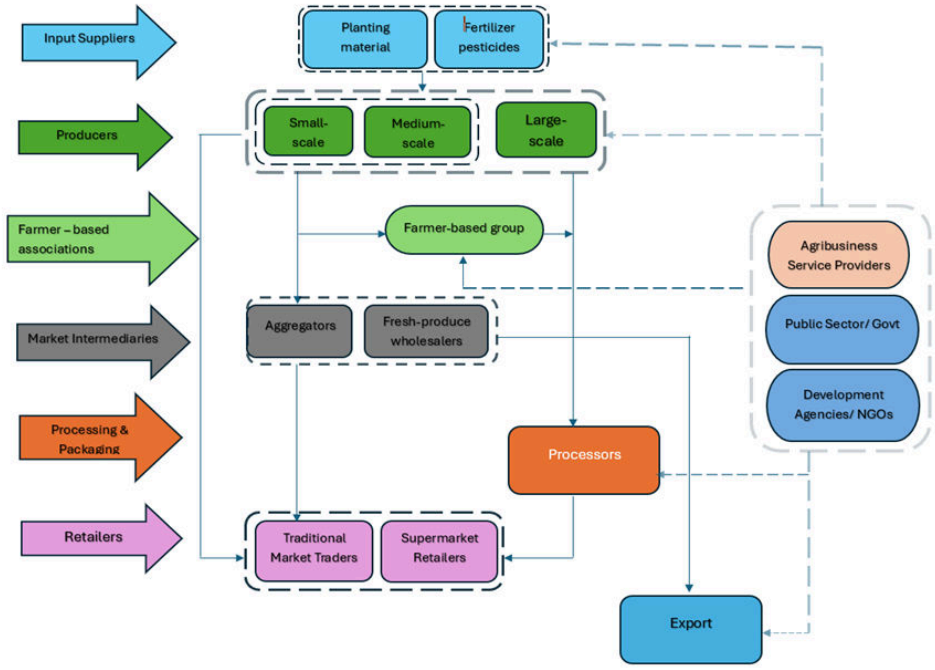
food system initiatives must deliver. Together, these dynamics illustrate how Ghana's public food system initiatives are shaped less by coherent long-term planning but more by political incentives, with significant implications for their sustainability, effectiveness, inclusiveness and developmental impact.

In addition to the above, the country's food system is embedded within chieftaincies. Chiefs are the "custodians of customary or stool land", which constitutes around 80 percent of all land in Ghana (De Bruijne et al., 2024; Ofori-Amanfo, 2022). This custodianship provides chiefs with significant economic and political leverage, as they oversee access to land and mediate various forms of disputes within the community (ibid). Thus, traditional authority remains a central determinant of land access and, by extension, shapes the inclusiveness and scalability of Ghana's food system. In one sense, this reflects a dimension of recognition-justice, insofar as it acknowledges and institutionally validates indigenous and customary systems of resource stewardship. However, this recognition exists in tension with distributive justice, as traditional authority over land access can function as a structural barrier for young farmers and women seeking to acquire or expand landholdings (see section 4 for elaboration).

### 2.3. Stakeholder mapping

The food system in Ghana is shaped by several actors including: self-employed farmers, farmers groups, government agencies, private sector, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), development partners and local and international Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) (see figure 1 below).

**Figure 1: Schematic Representation of Ghana's Food Value Chain**




*Source: Amankwah et al (2024); Acquaye et al (2011)*

Several government-bodies are involved in the food system transformation. The MOFA and the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MOFAD) lead policy development, while the NDPC coordinates cross-sectoral FST efforts. However, NDPC's advisory status—without legislative or executive authority—limits its influence. The implementation of its FST roadmap ultimately depends on the political will of MOFA and other ministries. The NDPC's Cross-Sectoral Planning Group (CSPG) brings together actors from agriculture, environment, health, social protection, education, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), with youth groups included. Yet, its infrequent, report-driven meetings raise concerns about genuine commitment, upward accountability to donors, and the representativeness and meaningfulness of youth participation.

Alongside this, the National Youth Authority (NYA) supports youth-led SMEs by helping them formalise businesses, access tax incentives through the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA), and secure certifications from the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) and Ghana Standards Authority (GSA). NYA's reach is limited due to insufficient funding and staff, especially in northern regions. Similar constraints affect MOFA's Women in Agricultural Development (WIAD) Directorate, which relies heavily on donor funding to support women farmers and processors. The newly established Ministry of Youth Development and Empowerment aims to create agricultural employment for young people, but during the study period it had not yet begun implementing such initiatives (Mensah & Bagnetto, 2025). Coordination between this ministry, MOFA, and the NDPC—key actors in driving the food system transition (FST)—remains limited. This fragmentation represents a structural impediment to the realisation of procedural justice within the food system, constraining the participation of youth and women in governance structures in design and implementation of food system initiatives.

The private sector is a pivotal force across Ghana's food value chain—serving as producers, processors, service providers, and marketers—while also generating employment opportunities for youth. Yet, as explored further in Chapter 3, the sector is marked by decent work deficits, including inadequate occupational health and safety standards and persistently low wages. Since Ghana's attainment of middle-income status, international food and retail brands have expanded their footprint, complemented by the rapid growth of local enterprises such as street food vendors and institutional catering services. Much of this activity, however, remains informal, with many actors self-employed as producers, processors, distributors, and traders. This informality restricts small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from accessing tax incentives and grants administered by the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA). Moreover, public-private partnerships aimed at fostering youth employment remain underdeveloped, and existing policies fail to clearly delineate the responsibilities and contributions of the private sector (Dadzie et al., 2020).

Local NGOs, CSOs, and farmer groups—including SEND-Ghana, GAWU, the Peasant Farmers Association, and ActionAid Ghana—play key roles in supporting smallholder farmers. Organisations such as URBANET and CEAL also provide training in agroecological practices. To increase their impact, coordination between CSOs with a FST focus is lacking, as is an outspoken justice approach. The creation of a locally grounded JFST agenda across CSOs could support targeted lobby activities and interventions.

International development aid has significantly shaped Ghana's food systems since the early 2000s, with Development Partners (DPs) using agricultural policy to address food insecurity and rural poverty. Working with the Government of Ghana, they have advanced programmes linking agricultural commercialisation to poverty reduction through improved input supply, marketing, value addition, and rural infrastructure. Major DPs include the African Development Bank, Global Affairs Canada, the World Bank, the European Union, and previously USAID. The Netherlands has been especially influential in the horticulture sector, supporting pineapple, mango, and banana production and export, and generating employment along the value chain (Amankwah et al, 2024). Both DPs and local NGOs prioritise women and youth, yet MOFA's dependence on donor-funded programmes remains a challenge. As a government official noted, "*the closure of programmes such as MAG has left departments without operational funds, limiting extension services and mobility—problems worsened by the withdrawal of USAID support*" (interview with government official, August 2025).

Generally, most stakeholders engage with young people during implementation underscoring distributive justice although they (young people) usually have limited impact on decisions (procedural justice). Recognition-justice is furthermore constrained because youth are generally targeted by DPs and government bodies as a homogenous group with limited knowledge and consideration of existing inequalities between youth groups, e.g. migrant youth or youth with disabilities.

### 2.4. Socio-cultural and economic factors influencing FST participation

Ghana's food system is also shaped by socio-cultural norms on gender, age, and religion. They shape expectations as well as access to resources for participation in the food system. In the northern part of the country, "*women are disadvantaged when it comes to accessing land. Women also face limited access to inputs such as raw materials, seeds, and chemicals. They are often not exposed or connected to sources of support and information as men*" (interview with government official, August 2025). Participants of a FGD in the Taripka community in the Savelugu Municipality in the north of the country highlighted that women often need the help of their spouses to access tractors and other agricultural services. Additionally, some service providers will not deal with women clients without their husbands' approval. Older men also tend to have easier access to financial services compared to young men and women due to the demand for collateral.

In addition to the above, religious and cultural sensitivities affect women farmers' access to extension services and capacity-building initiatives. The MOFA currently has a limited number of women extension officers. A key informant from Northern Ghana stated that "*in this region, it is often uncomfortable or inappropriate for married women to receive agricultural extension services from male officers. Unfortunately, we do not have enough female extension officers to fill the gap*" (interview with government official, August 2025). Also, due to their unpaid household responsibilities such as childcare, cooking and cleaning, women have limited time to participate in training programmes and group-based extension services. Since current extension models are group-based rather than one-on-one, they miss out on learning opportunities. For economic reasons, mechanisation services prefer to work with farmers with larger acres of land which are usually men. This illustrates how social norms and economic structures shape who can access opportunities within Ghana's food

system, reinforcing persistent patterns of exclusion and exemplifying limited distributive and recognition justice.

## 2.5 Challenges and opportunities across Ghana's food system

Ghana's food system encompasses various sub-sections (production, processing, storage, trade, transport, and consumption) and related actors. In the following section, we discuss key challenges and opportunities related to youth employment, across the various subsectors of the food system. An in-depth statistical analysis of youth employment within Ghana's food system will be discussed in chapter 3, below.

### *2.5.1. Food production*

Food production constitutes the cornerstone of Ghana's food system, albeit characterised by deficits across the four justice dimensions. Since 1975, more land has been used for agriculture to the detriment of forests (Acheampong et al., 2019). In addition, the increased use of chemical fertilizers, driven by government subsidies, has adverse effects on soil fertility, human health, and biodiversity (Kelvin, 2024). The sector contributed 22.7 % to the national GDP in 2023 and is a key source of income for 45.80 % of Ghana's households, rising to 76 % in rural areas (GSS, 2024). Ghana's agricultural sector and food production is heavily dependent on rainfall, which due to climate change has become more erratic, increasing farmers' vulnerabilities to crop loss (Yeboah et al., 2025: 2). Only 3.18 % of agricultural land has irrigation. Smallholder farmers represent the majority of Ghana's agriculture sector, with most farms not comprising more than 2 hectares in size. Large farms and plantations can be found in rubber, oil palm and coconut and to a lesser extent, rice, maize and pineapples. High incidence of poverty, 32% among households headed by individuals in the agriculture sector compared to 9.8% and 9.7 % in the industry and services sectors, and vulnerable employment such as own-account and family workers are rife within agriculture (GSS, 2025). The majority of the over 80% of Ghanaians working in the informal sector operate in the agriculture and food sector. Precarity can also be found among young workers in big agro-industries such as cacao plantations, where workers face considerable decent work deficits, such as lack of social security among others (Kizzi & Herzig, 2024). Generally, informal sector operators in Ghana have decent work deficits including low wages, long working hours, poor occupational health, safety and environment conditions. In terms of youth employment, agriculture plays an important role, as 48,2 % of young people in Ghana work in agriculture; more young men (54,99%), compared to young women (48,7 %) (GSS, 2025). Yet the average age of farmers in Ghana is 55 years, suggesting limited overall youth participation (MOFA, n.d).

Despite Ghana's growing agricultural sector in terms of hectares, food imports have been increasing over the years. The country's food product imports increased by GH₵3.6 billion (US$316.7 million) between 2022 and 2023 (GSS, 2024B), reflecting a growing dependence on external food sources, including for crops such as rice, fish, and shea nuts that are locally produced (Modern Ghana, 2025). A related challenge is the persistent high inflation of food prices (22,8% in 2024). Food prices have continued to rise despite the growth in the

agricultural sector of 6.6 % in the first quarter of 2025 and a significant increase in crop production of key staples (Addai-Kwarteng, 2025). "*The irony of a flourishing agricultural sector coexisting with high food prices points to underlying inefficiencies in Ghana's food supply chain*" (Addai-Kwarteng, 2025). The outlined tensions between agricultural expansion and forest conservation, alongside the increasing use of chemical fertilisers and the incidence of poverty among farming households, show deficits in restorative and distributive justice within Ghana's food production sub-sector. The box below demonstrates that the existing challenges can be overcome when tailored support is given to young agri-entrepreneurs, a ready market has been identified and access to land is secured.

**Inspiring Youth-led initiative on food production — The case of AB FARMS**

AB farms was founded by Benjamin Agbesi at the age of 19 in 2009 on a 100 by 100 m plot of land gifted by his father after secondary school. Passionate about farming, he started producing Asian vegetables for which there was a growing demand among Chinese shops and restaurants in Greater Accra. To reach the increased demand he started to work with outgrowers. After two years he decided to export directly to the UK, where he had found an importer. And later he was able to expand his business through grants from The Netherlands Embassy's Ghana Veg Project & Rabobank. In 2025 AB farms employs 40 people in their warehouse, of which 85% are youth, and 70% women. Of the 350 outgrowers integrated in AB farms 40% are young farmers, which according to Agbesi is not easy because most farmlands are owned by adults. "*My goal isn't just profit, it's to create jobs for African youth, both men and women, in my community. Our next step is to invest in solar powered irrigation systems because the cost of electricity and fuel are too high*" (*interview with young agri-entrepreneur, September 2025*). AB farms has open contracts with its outgrowers, in which they agree to buy their entire crop production because of the high demand of Asian vegetables in the UK market. Whilst the outgrowers provide their own inputs such as seeds and fertilisers, AB farms supports them with knowledge and training on how to reduce post-harvest losses, good agricultural practices, and pests control.

### *2.5.2. Food processing*

Food processing can be an important enabler for FST by reducing food waste, fortifying food security strategies and improving nutrition (Ampah et al., 2021). A growing number of foods are processed locally, many of which are cocoa derivatives such as chocolate, cocoa powder and cocoa butter. Dairy products are also being processed into milk and yoghurt. Other processed foods include canned tuna, cut fruits and baby food (MOBD, 2020.). The seafood processing sub-sector is emerging as one of the attractive sectors for investment due to the economic free zone which is home to one of the major fish processing firms in West Africa, primarily processing tuna which can be caught all year round in the coastal waters of Ghana (ibid). However, overall, Ghana's food processing industry remains low in capacity and faces important challenges including low productivity, lack of modern machinery and decent work deficits, (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, n.d.; UN Food System Coordination Hub, 2021; Ampah et al., 2021). Furthermore, the large distance between food-processing firms and agricultural producers increases food waste and greenhouse gas emissions (UN FOOD HUB, 2021). Apart from formal processing

companies, there are multiple informal processing activities carried out by predominantly female (young) workers, such as shea butter making, fish drying, rice-parboiling (Boakye, 2017). Taken together, the decent work deficits characterising Ghana's food processing sector, informalising of employment and the greenhouse gas emissions generated by its operations represent compounding impediments to just food system transformation. Yet, some young entrepreneurs have capitalised on the growing consumer demand in urban centres for processed foods and ready to go snacks. Inspiring initiatives such as Sankofa Snacks, highlighted in the box below, demonstrate that with a sound educational background, practical experience, dedication and government support through a 5-year tax grace and grants, starting a food processing business vested in social economy principles is possible, also for young entrepreneurs.

**Inspiring Youth-led initiative on food processing — The case of Sankofa Snacks**

Sankofa Snacks is a food-processing company that makes plantain chips founded and managed by Jamie Saleeby. The plantain chips brand wants to bring tribute to traditional food stables, whilst introducing innovative flavours, seeking to contribute not only to cultural revival but also evolution. Sankofa adopts a socially responsible business model focused on promoting youth capacity building and skills development through location production and training as well as supporting small scale plantain farmers. *"First we try to work closely with smallholder farmers, although this comes with many challenges. Second, we focus on adding value locally and building capacity, and we do this with a very young workforce; about 80% of our team is under the age of 30, which makes us a truly youth-driven business. Third, we are committed to elevating African food culture, which is still not well represented globally."*

Due to varying crop quality and fluctuating prices, Saleeby started a farming business to have more control over the quality of the crops and the prices. *"We have tried to build direct relationships with farmers, but it has not worked well. Many farmers are hesitant about long-term supply agreements. For instance, we attempted arrangements where we would buy a fixed quantity of plantain throughout the year, but the farmers did not always stick to the agreement."* Sankofa still buys from smallholder farmers through aggregator but also has its own plantain, yams and sweet potatoes. When starting Sankofa snacks, Saleeby profited from a five-year grace period, only paying 1% corporate tax. This tax benefit is accessible for all "youth businesses". He also received grants from the Ghana Enterprise Agency (GEA), in 2022 and again in 2023. *"These grants are designed to support startups and SMEs that need funding for different aspects of their operations. We used the money mainly for inventory, especially for purchasing packaging materials."*

### *2.5.3. Transport, storage and trade*

Transport, storage and marketing infrastructure and systems impinge on FST in Ghana. Road transport accounts for 12.83% of Ghana's total greenhouse gas emission, making it the second-largest source after land converted to cropland (27.23%) (EPA, 2022: 59). FGD participants stressed that poor roads—especially in Bono, Volta, and Northern Ghana—are a major yet often overlooked barrier. Weak road networks slow produce movement, increase

farmers' reliance on middle-women or market queens, and raise urban food prices because transport costs add substantial margins (FGD, validation workshop, 2025).

Adequate storage infrastructure is equally critical for a sustainable FST, yet storage remains severely underdeveloped. Limited improvements to traditional storage lead to contamination, food loss, and farmers selling prematurely to avoid spoilage from fungi or pests (Egyir et al., 2023). Ghana loses approximately 3.2 million tons of food annually, (Global Foodbanking Network, 2022). Weak post-harvest systems further drive annual price volatility, with gluts during harvest and scarcity during the lean season. At the time of this study, for example, it was "*watermelon season, and many were going bad due to oversupply and a lack of preservation or processing options. But in just two or three months, the same watermelon that costs GH₵10–30 [US$0.95–2.85] today will likely sell for GH₵80–100 [US$7.60–9.50] because of scarcity*" (interview with District Head of the Agriculture Department, July 2025). Such price fluctuations have adverse implications for both farmers and consumers. Farmers face losses during periods of oversupply, while consumers struggle with affordability during times of scarcity. This cyclical instability detracts from the robustness and resilience of Ghana's food systems. The National Food Buffer Stock Company (NAFCO) was established in 2010 to buy surplus farm produce, stabilise food prices, protect farmers' incomes and strengthen food reserves. However, NAFCO is faced with significant challenges, including chronic underfunding, poor storage facilities and allegations of political interference as well as corruption with its immediate past Executive Director standing trial over corruption allegations (Arhinful, 2025).

Ghana's food trade system spans local markets—where farmers sell directly—and large regional hubs such as Makola (Accra) and Kejetia (Kumasi). Women play a dominant role in this agro-trade, both as middle-women transporting produce and as marketplace leaders such as market queens (Britwum, n.d.; Clark, 1995). With rapid urbanisation, these major markets are becoming increasingly important, although cities continue to host multiple district-level markets (Akparibo, et al., 2021.). Local markets remain more environmentally sustainable because they reduce transport emissions and food waste.

Long-distance trading involves multiple actors, with young people often occupying the most precarious positions within these chains. Across the research, participants stressed the difficulty of securing reliable buyers. As one female shea processor explained, "*there's no ready market. Even when we process the shea, it is hard to find buyers*" (FGD, Savelugu District, 2025).

Youth also face regulatory, informational, and structural barriers to market entry. High requirements for (organic) certification—combined with weak regulatory transparency and limited institutional support—create an uneven playing field favouring established agribusinesses over emerging youth-led enterprises. Certification processes governed by the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) and the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA) are widely viewed as opaque, costly, and slow, discouraging young entrepreneurs from pursuing formal registration (FGD, validation workshop, November 2025). This, considering the carbon emissions associated with food transportation infrastructure, and the structural precarity confronting young people across the food system, reveals deficits across multiple justice dimensions.

### *2.5.4. Food waste management*

Food waste management remains a critical challenge for Ghana's food system transition. Urban marketplaces—dominated by street food vendors, small to medium restaurants, and supermarkets—rely heavily on plastic packaging and motorbike deliveries, worsening sanitation problems and driving up $CO_2$ emissions. Improper disposal of plastics has contributed to flooding and deteriorating sanitary conditions, with rising cases of malaria, typhoid fever, and cholera (Gonvalves, 2023). Existing public initiatives such as the Integrated Recycling and Compost Plant and private efforts like the Accra Compost and Recycling Plant remain insufficient. A notable exception is Safisana, a public-private partnership in Ashaiman, which adopts a circular model that creates youth employment opportunities (Safisana, 2025). Safisana addresses stigma around waste work by showcasing how waste is transformed into positive outputs—green energy and organic fertilisers—while providing income for young workers (Addo et al., 2025). Further research into Safisana could explore scaling its model to incorporate more urban markets into Ghana's waste management system.

### *2.5.5. Food consumption*

Despite Ghana's rich tradition of nutritious foods, diverse crop potential, coastal access to seafood, and local poultry production, unhealthy eating habits are rising, driven largely by *"high prices of nutritious food"* (UN Food System Coordination Hub, 2021). The country continues to face the triple burden of malnutrition—undernutrition, micronutrient malnutrition (MM), and overweight and obesity (OO) (United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub, 2024)—with women and children most affected. About 33% of women of reproductive age are anaemic, which sustains child undernutrition and hinders progress toward the Zero Hunger Goal for 2030. At the same time, *"half the population is moderately to severely food insecure"* (Global Foodbanking Network, 2022; Asante, 2023). In response, a growing movement is advocating for greater consumption of Ghanaian foods, preservation of traditional cooking and food processing practices, and protection of local seed varieties. The Ghana Food Movement has emerged as a key actor in advancing this agenda.

Food safety is a significant public health issue in Ghana. The WHO Africa Region (2023) reports that foodborne diseases—including cholera, typhoid fever, dysentery, and viral hepatitis—pose major risks, particularly in urban centres (Dzudzor, 2024). Poor post-harvest handling contributes to the problem, with only 55.8% of food handlers demonstrating good Food Handling Practices (Tuglo et al., 2023). Contamination also arises at the production stage, especially in mining areas. Illegal artisanal mining (galamsey), largely carried out by young men, introduces toxic heavy metals—mercury, cadmium, arsenic, and lead—into water bodies and farmlands, endangering food safety and human health (Mensah, et al., 2025; Obodai et al., 2024). Key informants highlighted galamsey as a major barrier to Ghana's food system transition and youth participation, noting that illegal mining offers "*quick money*" compared to low paid food system jobs (interview with local CSO representative, September 2025). Addressing galamsey requires coordinated inter-ministerial action, with the Environmental Protection Agency seen as central to the response (interview with government official, October 2025).

## 3. YOUTH IN GHANA'S FOOD SYSTEMS

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a statistical analysis of young people's participation in Ghana's food system and demonstrates how participation in the sector is shaped by gender, location, educational attainment, and income levels. It draws on data from the Annual Household Income and Expenditure Survey (AHIES), a nationally representative household panel survey conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) covering the first quarter of 2022 to the third quarter of 2023. The AHIES captures data from 10,800 households across 600 enumeration areas (EAs), comprising 304 (50.67%) urban and 296 (49.33%) rural areas (GSS, 2024). Participation in the food system is proxied by employment in crop farming, animal rearing, forestry activities, fishing, food processing, and the marketing of agricultural and food products. The insights in this chapter contribute to understanding of youth positioning within Ghana's food systems, and the conditions under which their agency can be mobilised toward JFST.

### 3.2 Industrial distribution of Youth Employment

Analysis of the AHIES data reveals that agriculture is the primary source of employment for young people in Ghana**.** As shown in Table 1, 48.27% of employed youth engage in agricultural activities. The next most prominent sector is services, which accounts for about 33% of youth jobs. This pattern reflects the broader national and regional distribution of employment across economic sectors in Ghana.

Gender differences exist in the industrial distribution of youth employment. Among young women, similar proportions were employed in agriculture (41.8%) and services (40.1%). In contrast, the proportions of young men in agriculture and services employment were 54.9% and 26.1%, respectively. This disparity may be attributed to the gender division of labour in the country, where female labour tends to be concentrated in the trading sectors.

**Table 2: Industrial distribution of employment among the youth**

| | **Male** | | **Female** | | **Both sexes** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq | **%** | Freq | **%** | Freq | **%** |
| **Agriculture** | 10,940 | 54.99 | 8,744 | 41.87 | 19,684 | 48.27 |
| **Industry** | 3,767 | 18.93 | 3,753 | 17.97 | 7,520 | 18.44 |
| **Services** | 5,188 | 26.08 | 8,385 | 40.15 | 13,573 | 33.29 |
| **Total** | 19,895 | 100.00 | 20,882 | 100.00 | 40,777 | 100.00 |

*Source: Computed from AHIES-2022Q1-2022Q3*

The AHIES data points out variations in the industrial distribution of youth employment within the locations and geographical zones. As shown in Table 2, just over half of young people in urban areas are employed in the services sector, compared to 66% of those in rural areas engaged in agriculture. A similar pattern is evident across ecological zones. While 45.6% of the youth in the southern zone –the most urbanised part of the country– work in services, as many as 60.7% of their counterparts in the northern zone are in agriculture. These disparities mirror the economic structures of urban and rural areas, as well as the relative availability of land for farming across these locations.

**Table 3: Distribution of employment by location**

| Sector | Urban | | Rural | | Southern zone | | Northern zone | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| Agriculture | 4,153 | 24.06 | 15,531 | 66.04 | 5,431 | 31.39 | 14,253 | 60.72 |
| Industry | 4,165 | 24.13 | 3,355 | 14.27 | 3,980 | 23.00 | 3,540 | 15.08 |
| Services | 8,943 | 51.81 | 4,630 | 19.69 | 7,891 | 45.61 | 5,682 | 24.20 |
| Total | 17,261 | 100.00 | 23,516 | 100.00 | 17,302 | 100.00 | 23,475 | 100.00 |

*Source: Computed from AHIES-2022Q1-2022Q3*

### 3.3 Distribution of Youth Employment in the Food System

Within the food system, crop farming is the dominant subsector among Ghana's youth. As shown in Table 3, eight out of ten young people involved in the food system are in crop farming. The next most popular subsector is marketing, which accounts for about 10 % of youth employment in the food system. There are gender differences among the youth involved in the country's food system. Whereas 87.1 % of young males work in crop farming, the proportion of this subsector drops to 73.1 % for young females. Conversely, a higher proportion of females (16.8 %) than males (3 %) are engaged in marketing activities. These differences reflect gendered roles and occupational patterns within Ghana's food system. A Pearson Chi-square test of independence revealed a statistically significant association between sex and involvement in food system subsectors among the youth, $\chi^2$ (5) = 2100, $p$ < 0.001. This suggests that the distribution of males and females across different food system subsectors is uneven.

**Table 4: Youth in the food system**

| Subsector | Female | | Male | | Both Sexes | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| Crop farming | 8,498 | 73.14 | 10,028 | 87.12 | 18,526 | 80.10 |
| Animal rearing | 59 | 0.51 | 265 | 2.30 | 324 | 1.40 |
| Forestry activities | 114 | 0.98 | 123 | 1.07 | 237 | 1.02 |
| Fishing | 70 | 0.60 | 517 | 4.49 | 587 | 2.54 |
| Food processing | 924 | 7.95 | 223 | 1.94 | 1,147 | 4.96 |
| Marketing | 1,954 | 16.82 | 354 | 3.08 | 2,308 | 9.98 |
| Total | 11,619 | 100.00 | 11,510 | 100.00 | 23,129 | 100.00 |

*Source: Computed from AHIES-2022Q1-2022Q3*

Employment patterns among young people in Ghana's food system differ across locations and geographical zones. In urban areas, although crop farming remains the dominant activity (61.8 %), a considerable proportion of young people (23.5 %) engaged in the food system are involved in marketing (see Table 4). This contrasts with the situation in rural areas, where 86.6 % of young people work in crop farming, while only 5 % are involved in marketing. Similar patterns are observed when comparing the northern and southern zones of the country. As Table 4 illustrates, 86 % of youth employed in the food system in the northern zone engage in crop farming, compared to 67 % in the southern zone.

To explore the relationship between employment in the food system subsector and location among young people in Ghana, a Pearson Chi-square test was performed. The results revealed a statistically significant association between the two variables, $\chi^2$ (5) = 2200, $p$ < 0.001. This suggests that the distribution of youth employment across the food system subsectors differs significantly between urban and rural areas. In the southern and northern geographical zones, a Pearson Chi-square test produced a statistically significant result, $\chi^2$ (5) = 1300, $p$ < 0.001, indicating an association between the type of food system employment and geographic zone. This suggests that the distribution of youth employment across different food system subsectors is not uniform across the southern and northern zones of Ghana.

**Table 5: Distribution of food system employment by location**

| Subsector | Urban | | Rural | | Northern zone | | Southern zone | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| crop farming | 3,804 | 61.88 | 14,722 | 86.69 | 13,516 | 86.05 | 5,010 | 67.51 |
| Animal rearing | 71 | 1.16 | 253 | 1.49 | 239 | 1.52 | 85 | 1.15 |
| Forestry activities | 54 | 0.88 | 183 | 1.08 | 129 | 0.82 | 108 | 1.46 |
| Fishing | 220 | 3.58 | 367 | 2.16 | 368 | 2.34 | 219 | 2.95 |
| Food processing | 553 | 9.00 | 594 | 3.50 | 500 | 3.18 | 647 | 8.72 |
| Marketing | 1,445 | 23.51 | 863 | 5.08 | 956 | 6.09 | 1,352 | 18.22 |
| Total | 6,147 | 100.00 | 16,982 | 100.00 | 15,708 | 100 | 7,421 | 100 |

*Source: Computed from AHIES-2022Q1-2022Q3*

The analysis of the AHIES data suggests that educational attainment influences the type of work young people engage in within the food system. As shown in Table 5, the proportion of youth involved in crop farming and animal rearing decreases with higher education levels, declining from 86.9% among those with no formal education to 71.6% among those with tertiary education. In contrast, employment in marketing rises from 4 % for those with no formal education to 17 % among young people with tertiary education. This pattern highlights how education shapes job aspirations and labour market opportunities of young people, particularly in marketing roles within the food system. Higher levels of education influence preferences towards both blue-collar and white-collar jobs, which are more commonly available in the marketing sub-sector than in the production segment of the food system. The Pearson chi-square test shows a statistically significant association between employment within the subsectors of the food system and educational attainment among young people, $\chi^2$ (15) = 616.01, p < 0.001. This suggests that the distribution of youth employment across different subsectors of the food system in Ghana varies significantly according to the level of education.

**Table 6: Education and employment in the food system**

| Subsectors | No education | | Primary | | Secondary | | Tertiary | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| Crop farming | 3,366 | 86.91 | 10,164 | 80.24 | 3,459 | 73.86 | 479 | 71.60 |
| Animal rearing | 123 | 3.18 | 110 | 0.87 | 24 | 0.51 | 13 | 1.94 |
| Forestry activities | 36 | 0.93 | 140 | 1.11 | 40 | 0.85 | 15 | 2.24 |
| Fishing | 82 | 2.12 | 351 | 2.77 | 109 | 2.33 | 18 | 2.69 |
| Food processing | 110 | 2.84 | 679 | 5.36 | 296 | 6.32 | 30 | 4.48 |
| Marketing | 156 | 4.03 | 1,223 | 9.66 | 755 | 16.12 | 114 | 17.04 |
| Total | 3,873 | 100.00 | 12,667 | 100.00 | 4,683 | 100.00 | 669 | 100.00 |

*Source: Computed from AHIES-2022Q1-2022Q3*

Wages of young people employed in Ghana's food system are low. As presented in Table 6, the average daily wage among the youth involved in the food system was GH₵32.25 (US$3.43). This figure is GH₵11.88 (US$1.26) or 26.9 % lower than the overall average daily wage of young people in the country, which stood at GH₵44.12 (US$4.69). When compared to the national average daily wage of GH₵53.82 (US$5.72), youth in the food system earn GH₵21.57 (US$2.29) or about 40 % less.

A gender wage gap exists among young people employed in Ghana's food system. As shown in Table 6, males generally earn higher average daily wages across all subsectors, except in animal rearing. In this subsector, females earned slightly more than males, with average daily wages of GH₵18.52 (US$1.97) compared to GH₵16.48 (US$1.75) among males. A two-sample *t*-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the mean daily wages of males and females. The results indicate that males (M = GH₵39.47, SD = 116.19) earned significantly more than females (M = GH₵22.45, SD = 23.54), $t$ (1256) = 3.33, $p$ = 0.0009. The mean wage difference of GH₵17.02 [95% CI: 7.01, 27.03] provides statistical evidence of a gender pay gap among young workers in the food system. This may be attributed to the disproportionate representation of males in high-income sub-sectors of the food system, particularly within the forestry sector.

**Table 7: Average daily wages in the Food System**

| Subsector | Both sexes | | Male | | Female | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | GH₵ | US$ | GH₵ | US$ | GH₵ | US$ |
| Crop farming | 31.03 | 3.30 | 31.85 | 3.39 | 29.42 | 3.13 |
| Animal rearing | 16.52 | 1.76 | 16.48 | 1.75 | 18.52 | 1.97 |
| Forestry activities | 64.00 | 6.81 | 77.20 | 8.21 | 20.96 | 2.23 |
| Fishing | 47.94 | 5.10 | 49.15 | 5.23 | 22.50 | 2.39 |
| Food processing | 27.26 | 2.90 | 30.44 | 3.24 | 24.15 | 2.57 |
| Marketing | 28.72 | 3.05 | 56.96 | 6.06 | 16.52 | 1.76 |
| All | 32.25 | 3.43 | 39.47 | 4.20 | 22.45 | 2.39 |

*Source: Computed from AHIES-2022Q1-2022Q3 and FWSC 2021, FWSC, 2022*

The wages of young workers employed in the food system are higher in rural areas than in urban centres of Ghana. As shown in Table 7, average daily wages across all food system subsectors were higher in rural areas compared to urban centres. A two-sample *t*-test assuming equal variances was done to assess whether the difference in wages between urban and rural youth was statistically significant. The results show that rural workers (M = GH₵37.61, SD = 120.88) earned significantly more than their urban counterparts (M = GH₵26.29, SD = 27.41), $t$ (1256) = -2.23, $p$ = 0.0257. The mean difference of GH₵11.31 [95% CI: -21.25, -1.38] indicates a significant association between location and wage levels among youth in the food system.

**Table 8: Average daily wages within locations**

| | Urban | | Rural | | Southern zone | | Northern zone | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Subsectors** | GH₵ | US$ | GH₵ | US$ | GH₵ | US$ | GH₵ | US$ |
| **Crop farming** | 30.51 | 3.24 | 31.31 | 3.33 | 29.67 | 3.16 | 33.56 | 3.57 |
| **Animal rearing** | 10.60 | 1.13 | 18.21 | 1.94 | 25.28 | 2.69 | 10.75 | 1.14 |
| **Forestry activities** | 36.79 | 3.91 | 77.82 | 8.28 | 52.62 | 5.60 | 74.50 | 7.92 |
| **Fishing** | 34.21 | 3.64 | 71.96 | 7.65 | 53.43 | 5.68 | 5.12 | 0.54 |
| **Food processing** | 26.59 | 2.83 | 28.39 | 3.02 | 30.00 | 3.19 | 18.73 | 1.99 |
| **Marketing** | 20.93 | 2.23 | 43.16 | 4.59 | 32.46 | 3.45 | 20.20 | 2.15 |
| **All** | 26.29 | 2.80 | 37.61 | 4.00 | 32.77 | 3.49 | 31.21 | 3.32 |

*Source: Computed from AHIES-2022Q1-2022Q3 and FWSC 2021, FWSC, 2022*

In contrast to the urban–rural disparities, daily wages in the food system are comparable between the southern and northern zones of Ghana. As shown in Table 7, the average daily wage was GH₵32.77 (US$3.49) in the southern zone and GH₵31.21 (US$3.32) in the northern zone between the first quarter of 2022 and the third quarter of 2024. A two-sample *t*-test assuming equal variances was conducted to examine the difference in wages between these zones. While the mean wage in the southern zone (M = GH₵32.77, SD = 96.34) was marginally higher than in the northern zone (M = GH₵31.21, SD = 75.64), the mean difference of GH₵1.56 was not statistically significant, $t$ (1256) = 0.29, $p$ = 0.7708, suggesting that there is no meaningful variation in average wages by geographic zone.

The analysis highlights the participation of young people in the food system. The centrality of agriculture to youth livelihoods has been demonstrated, with the sector absorbing nearly half of all employed young people in the country. Nevertheless, significant decent work deficits persist, manifesting low pay, gender wage gaps, and wage disparities in urban and rural areas, with higher wages in rural areas, counter to the general discourse. Further, the analysis shows the ways in which educational attainment shapes the distribution of youth employment within the food system, as well as the extent to which employment patterns vary across geographies. Young Ghanaians without formal education are more likely to find themselves in the production segment of the FS, whilst those holding tertiary degrees tend to move towards marketing. These national-level trends show both the opportunities, and challenges young people face in Ghana's food system, providing the background for the subsequent chapter, which turns to a granular examination of the experiences of young people working within the food system.

# 4. CASE STUDIES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVES

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents case studies of public and private food system initiatives in Ghana. It sheds light on youth engagement within the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) Programme and the Feed Ghana Programme (FGP) —flagship initiatives of the Government of Ghana and subsequently dives into youth within a private company alongside the rice value chain, Tamanaa Company Ltd. Together, these empirical cases ground the analysis of both public and private dimensions of food system governance and youth engagement in Ghana.

## 4.2. Public Sector FST

Ghana's public food system initiatives have historically centred on boosting agricultural production, with the PFJ and the newer FGP representing the most prominent in recent times. Both programmes aim to enhance food security, create jobs, and expand agricultural output. Yet, their implementation has been shaped by political turnover and persistent operational challenges. These initiatives also prioritise conventional agricultural intensification, with limited attention to agroecology, climate resilience, and post-production challenges such as storage, value addition, and marketing.

### *4.2.2. Planting for Food and Jobs and Feed Ghana Programme*

Over the past decade, Ghana has launched two flagship food system programmes: PFJ and the FGP. The PFJ (2017–2022) aimed to "ensure food security," *"increase productivity and production levels," "promote import substitution," "expand exports," "encourage value addition and agro-processing," and "create jobs and wealth, particularly for young people*" (MOFA, 2023). Its successor, PFJ 2.0 (2024–2028), sought to modernise agriculture through value chain development with strong private-sector involvement (MOFA, 2023).

However, PFJ 2.0 was discontinued after the 2024 elections brought a change in government. As one district agricultural official explained, *"each government comes into office with its strategies to promote agricultural productivity and ensure food security. The current administration's approach is the Feed Ghana programme"* (interview with District Head of the Agriculture Department, July 2025).

The FGP aims to accelerate agricultural transformation, enhance food security and nutrition, reduce import dependence, expand exports, and create sustainable jobs (MOFA, n.d.). It consists of nine sub-programmes:

1. Crop Development – boosting cereals, legumes, starchy staples, and vegetables via irrigation, improved inputs, land development, greenhouses, backyard gardening, boreholes, market linkages, and trade facilitation.
2. Livestock Development – increasing poultry, cattle, sheep, goat, and pig production through vaccines, quality feed, battery cages, and improved breeds.
3. Farmers' Service Centres (FSCs) – hubs improving access to inputs and services including mechanisation, extension, veterinary care, market linkages, aggregation, and in-kind credit.
4. Farm Banks – designated production zones offering developed land (especially for youth and women), plus mechanisation, irrigation, and secure markets.

5. Institutional Farming – supporting security agencies, religious bodies, and corporate institutions with inputs, advisory services, and market access.
6. Feed the Industry – focusing on tree crops through improved planting material, enhanced processing, expanded credit, and land access.
7. Infrastructure Development and Agro-Production Enclaves (AgPEs).
8. Innovative Agricultural Financing.
9. Institutional Development and Regulatory Framework – strengthening MOFA and related institutions.

Although PFJ and FGP state their intention to support young people and women, there is little evidence that these programmes address the structural barriers limiting participation. Within the FGP, only the Farm Banks sub-programme explicitly targets these groups by providing secured, developed land and shared infrastructure such as mechanisation and irrigation. Even so, key informant accounts show strong youth engagement when agricultural inputs are distributed: "*Over 50% of the registered farmers are youth. Even more significantly, over 60%… are women… During the 2024 input distribution, most beneficiaries were women*" (interview with District Head of the Agriculture Department, July 2025). This indicates that public programmes, though not explicitly youth-focused, still reach significant numbers of young people and women.

However, land constraints, credit barriers, and gendered norms continue to restrict meaningful inclusion and a FST wherein youth are considered active agents of change rather than programme beneficiaries. As one government official bemoaned the extent of financial inclusion among the youth, noting, "*the youth are often left behind… high cost of borrowing, high interest… [and] do not have collateral to secure loans*" (interview, November 2025). Access to finance is further compounded by restricted access to land. In Northern Ghana, land tenure systems are gendered favour older males. One male FGD participant observed that "*women depend on the generosity of their husbands to access land to farm."* A female participant recounted that land allocated to her by her late husband was later taken by his family. By contrast, young men are often given land by fathers or older brothers. These gendered barriers shape programme outcomes. As one informant explained: "*the PFJ was open to everyone, but women were given priority… Despite the priority, more men ended up benefiting… mainly because of challenges women face with access to land*" (interview with local government official, August 2025).

A further structural barrier affecting participation in PFJ and FGP is the requirement of the Ghana Card as the sole form of identification. In a women's FGD in the Bunglung community (Savelugu Municipal Assembly), only one out of ten women had a Ghana Card and had registered for support. The remaining nine missed the free mass registration because of long queues, explaining that they could not wait due to "*childcare, cooking, cleaning and other domestic chores.*" Although Ghana Card registration is still possible at National Identification Authority offices, it now costs GHS200 (US$20), raising affordability challenges.

In addition to the above, the implementations of these two programmes have been challenging. The abrupt replacement of PFJ 2.0 with the FGP has had significant implications for Ghana's food system. At the time of this study, the FGP had been in operation for only a few months, with participant registration emerging as its most visible outcome. Support to programme beneficiaries had been delayed, with considerable

consequences for programme effectiveness. As one rice processor lamented, "*not a single bag of seed or fertiliser has been delivered. They came to register the farmers, collected all the needed information, but nothing has been provided. By the time they do, the season is already over, and the inputs end up being useless to the farmers*" (interview with rice processor, July 2025). The timing challenge was underscored by another key informant:

"*We are in July, and we are going to August, and you are all aware of the one single rainy season pattern of the north; you miss it, and you are finished. Soya beans, certain crops needed to be on the ground by now. Certain maize varieties are supposed to be on the ground by now. We are now going into August, and all those we [the NGO] facilitated their participation in the affordable loans [scheme under the FGP] have not received anything yet*" (interview with NGO representative, July 2025).

The significance of the above narrative becomes clearer when considered alongside the credit constraints faced by smallholder farmers. As one farmer in northern Ghana explained "*we can't take loans easily. We don't understand the loan forms, and the interest is also high*" (FGD in Savalugu District, 2025). Against this backdrop, the abrupt shift from PFJ to the FGP not only disrupted continuity but also undermined the consolidation of gains made under earlier programmes. This approach to restructuring flagship food system initiatives, often driven by political cycles, creates uncertainty for farmers. Ultimately, such discontinuities erode trust, reduce long-term effectiveness, and hinder the stability required for sustained food system transformation.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that while delays in input delivery under the FGP may be attributed to the teething challenges of a new programme, this aspect of public food system initiatives is not new. Similar delays in input supply also bedevilled the PFJ, suggesting a persistent structural weakness in programme implementation rather than an isolated challenge. According to a key informant:

"*Back in 2018, we tried to introduce our farmer groups to the Planting for Food and Jobs programme so they could receive inputs for their farms. But we quickly realised it wasn't practical. Farmers need their seeds and fertilisers between May and June. If they don't get them by then, they miss the planting season. But the government inputs were being delivered as late as September, and by that time, no one is farming anymore. Even in August, most farmers are done planting. So, the inputs come too late to be useful, and they just go to waste*" (interview with rice processor, July 2025).

Beyond timing delays, participants also raised concerns about the certainty and reliability of input supply under government programmes. FGD narratives revealed a persistent gap between promised support and what farmers receive. As one resident explained, *"government officials come to register us for programmes, but we never hear back*" (FGD in Savalugu District, 2025). Another added, **"***only one woman here got fertiliser under the Planting for Food and Jobs programme***"** (FGD in Savalugu District, 2025). These experiences reflect weak implementation and fuel growing mistrust—especially among smallholders and women who feel excluded from intended benefits.

Political interference further undermines fair delivery. Input distribution is often shaped by partisan influence rather than need. A MOFA Extension Officer lamented, **"***politics is*

*affecting our activity… Who do you think the MP (Member of Parliament) will give support to? The party members, not the farmers"* (interview with Extension Officer, July 2025). An NGO representative confirmed similar experiences, noting that **"***those whose names were captured as people who needed to be supported didn't get the support… the party members took over the input distribution"* (interview with NGO representative, July 2025). Such practices distort equity and deepen exclusion, particularly for youth and women. Unreliable support weakens confidence in government programmes. Because agriculture is highly time-sensitive, late inputs reduce yields and expose farmers to losses. As one NGO representative observed, *"government programmes are beautifully designed on paper, but out there, implementation is an issue"* (interview, July 2025). This mistrust shapes participation patterns: the District Head of Agriculture reported that "*when we approach women about registering, many… say, let me try it and see. But some men… ask, what do I get from registering? Or they simply refuse"* (interview, July 2025). These reactions highlight how implementation failures undermine participation and the inclusiveness of Ghana's food system interventions.

A further limitation of public food system initiatives is their weak integration of agroecological principles. Although PFJ and FGP are ambitious in production and employment goals, they **l**ack explicit climate change targets and fail to embed agroecology in programme design or implementation. One NGO leader described attempts to raise this concern during consultations, stating: **"***the government has their own idea, and we were invited to confirm*" (interview with NGO-leader, August 2025). Agroecology remains marginal within Ghana's FST discourse. As another informant noted, **"***in the Northeast Region, stakeholders are doing great work… but they are not focused on agroecology like we are. They follow whatever methods align with government food security policies"* (interview with NGO representative, July 2025). PFJ's heavy emphasis on fertilisers and agrochemicals further illustrates this gap. Such reliance limits the programmes' ability to promote sustainable farming practices, curb environmental degradation, and strengthen resilience to climate shocks.

Ghana's agriculture is closely intertwined with climate change, with extreme weather directly undermining livelihoods. As a northern farmer recalled, "*last farming season, there was drought. Our crops did not do well. What we harvested was not enough to sell and also keep for the next season's ploughing and land preparation"* (FGD in Savalugu District, 2025). The limited use of agroecological approaches further weakens long-term productivity: conventional intensification depletes soils, increases pest vulnerability, and heightens dependence on chemical inputs. By overlooking these approaches, PFJ and FGP risk short-term production gains at the expense of sustainability, leaving Ghana's public food system initiatives misaligned with global priorities on climate-resilient agriculture. At the same time, lack of irrigation is a major barrier to JFST. With increasingly unpredictable rainfall, irrigation is essential for stabilising production. Yet the One Village, One Dam initiative failed to address this challenge. Research found that none of the 400 dams constructed could hold water during the dry season, despite GH₵47 million (US$4.3 million) spent on the programme (Agengre, 2025).

Public initiatives also pay limited attention to post-production. PFJ and FGP heavily prioritise yield increases, while value addition, storage, distribution, and marketing remain weak. As one district agriculture officer explained, **"***we have done a lot around production, but very*

*little in post-harvest management and processing… a lot of food goes to waste simply due to poor handling and lack of storage or preservation systems after harvest"* (interview with District Head of the Agriculture Department, July 2025). Attempts to improve storage and processing—such as NAFCO and the One District One Factory respectively —have achieved very limited success. Structural limitations of these interventions are well documented; NAFCO is insufficiently resourced to procure crops at glut market prices nationally (Abokyi et al., 2020), while the One District One Factory initiative has faced implementation challenges such as weak linkages between national bodies and district assemblies, information gaps, and the non-functionality of District Implementation Support Committees (Larnyoh et al., 2022).

Marketing constraints further undermine farmer income. Young male farmers in Kumbungu district described severe price fluctuations, especially for chilli. One discussant pointed to a bag of chilli and said, "*this bag of chilli now selling at GHS200 ($20) can sell as low as GHS40 ($4) during glut. The market women take advantage of us because we don't have alternative buyers. When that happens, we are unable to pay back loans we took to support our work".* This demonstrates how weak markets erode profitability and deepen financial precarity.

In summary, while Ghana's public food system programmes—PFJ and FGP—have expanded production and involved many youth and women, their broader impact is limited by structural and design weaknesses. Persistent challenges such as input delays, political interference, limited agroecological integration, and a production-centric focus undermine the sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience of these initiatives, as well as public trust in state institutions. Furthermore, the inefficiencies within government's agricultural programmes and the negative impact they have on farmers' livelihoods, further disincentivize young people from venturing into agriculture and seeing it as a viable career path.

### 4.3. Private Sector FST

This section examines a private sector food system initiative – the rice value chain initiative by Tamanaa Company Ltd in the North-East Region – to explore how emerging food system transformations in Ghana generate new opportunities and inequities for young people and women. It sheds light on how private sector innovations contribute to, and complicate, questions of fairness, sustainability, and inclusion within Ghana's food systems transition.

#### *4.3.1. Tamanaa Company Ltd*

Tamanaa Company Ltd (TCL) is a social enterprise that operates across the rice value chain, encompassing farming, milling, processing, and marketing. Its stated mission is to deliver integrated agribusiness services that enhance income sustainability for rural residents, especially women (TCL, n.d.). The factory has an estimated daily production capacity of 290 tonnes. It employs 105 workers (65 females and 50 males) including young people.

The TCL operates an out-grower scheme that supports own-account farmers to cultivate rice. It organises out-growers into five clusters, each supported by two Extension Officers who deliver training on agronomic practices and other agricultural techniques. The TCL

supplies inputs on credit to out-growers while access to land falls on the farmers without growers renting land. After harvest, farmers repay in kind with rice (interview with rice processor, July 2025). This approach is significant as it removes input constraints that often limit the involvement of rural residents, particularly women, in agricultural value chains. As one participant explained, "*we are provided with inputs such as seeds and fertiliser, and sometimes tractor services and when we harvest our rice, we pay for the inputs in kind based on the cost of the inputs supplied to the farmer*" (FGD Tamanaa outgrowers, November 2025).

Tamanaa also makes sure female and male outgrowers are treated the same although access to land remains a barrier to most female farmers.

"*When it comes to access to tractor services and seeds, we all bear the brunt regardless of gender. However, with the issue of land men have an upper hand because they can directly inherit family land and in fact, they are able to do most of the farm work on their own compared to women*'' (FGD Tamanaa outgrowers, November 2025).

By removing barriers to input access, the TCL's out-grower scheme facilitates women's participation in commercial farming and contributes to their empowerment. As one FGD participant stipulated: "*when Tamanaa is to provide us with inputs, gender doesn't come in because we are treated equally*".

In Africa, contract farming has been associated with increased productivity of rural households and is often seen as a mechanism for poverty alleviation (Ncube, 2020). However, the extent to which these schemes deliver inclusive and sustainable outcomes remains debated, as they can simultaneously enhance livelihoods while reinforcing dependencies on agribusiness firms, related to the need to buy seeds and other inputs for example (ibid). Also, while improved access to inputs strengthens women's capacity to engage in productive agriculture, the extent of empowerment depends on their control over decision-making and the distribution of benefits within the value chain. The TCL's rice out-grower model reflects these dynamics, offering farmers access to inputs and markets, but also raising questions about long-term empowerment and bargaining power. Female FGD participants emphasised the empowering impact of entering the Tamanaa outgrowing scheme, both economically as well as with regards to household decision making.

"*Here, a man can marry three or four wives, and though he may be willing to help all of you, the resources are not always enough. Those of us who find ourselves in such situations are beginning to appreciate the work we do because we can support ourselves, pay our children's school fees, and are accorded respect for doing so*," (FGD Tamanaa outgrowers, November 2025).

"*Before joining this scheme, there could be a meeting in the house, and they would not tell you anything. But now, they know you can equally contribute, and so they always involve you*," (FGD Tamanaa outgrowers, November 2025)

The TCL relies on a labour-intensive approach in rice processing. Its parboiling operations —soaking, steaming, and drying rice in the husk before milling— are not mechanised. Instead, the company has developed a decentralised parboiling system that integrates

women into its value chain. The TCL has trained over 1,500 women to carry out parboiling and has constructed parboiling centres for this purpose. These women are provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure their safety while working although some women remarked it was not sufficient to deal with the extreme heat related to their work (FGD, Tamanaa Parboilers, November 2025). FGD participants were particularly positive about the stable market provided by TCL (interview with rice processor, July 2025).

*"Before working with Tamanaa, I was only able to parboil a small quantity of rice, and sometimes I struggled to find buyers. Now, with a guaranteed market and guidance on improving production, I can parboil larger quantities and earn a steady income to support my family.*" (FGD, Tamanaa Parboilers, November 2025)

These decentralised parboiling systems integrate women into the rice production value chain beyond cultivation, creating employment opportunities in processing and potentially facilitating the transfer of knowledge and technology. By engaging in processing rather than remaining confined to cultivation, women gain access to higher-value segments of the chain, which can enhance their incomes and strengthen their bargaining power within households and communities.

"*We have learned things we never knew before. It's through the organisation that we got those opportunities, and even though the wages are not that high, which I will say need improvement, the training and exposure make up for it. You grow in experience, but as I said, there's still room for improvement as far as wages are concerned*" (FGD, Tamanaa Parboilers, November 2025).

It has been identified that participation in production value chains in emerging economies enables women from low-income communities to access formal and informal employment opportunities, which in many cases enhance their financial power and economic status (Li and Goerzen, 2024). It is in this light that the decentralised parboiling system of the TCL is significant. *"Obviously, it has given me a voice in my family. Now when decisions are made, my opinions are respected because I also contribute financially*." (FGD, Tamanaa Parboilers, November 2025)

However, women's participation in value chains does not automatically translate into gender equality or empowerment, particularly in low-income countries characterised by social and economic instability (ibid.). Some of the operational areas of the TCL are culturally patriarchal, economically fragile in terms of vulnerability to economic and climate change shocks (the Northeast region has a MDP rate of more than 50%) and embroiled in security challenges due to ongoing conflicts in the area (GSS, 2020; ADF, 2025). In such contexts, women may secure income-generating opportunities through participation in rice production but may remain marginalised in decision-making, leadership and be precluded from moving to higher-value segments of the chain. Beyond rice production, TCL supports women through alternative livelihood programmes. It has established Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) to enable women to save collectively, access small loans, and build financial independence alongside rice processing. TCL has also piloted crop diversification.

*"Over the past two years, Tamanaa has introduced tomatoes, onions, and peppers cultivation on a small scale … this provides an alternative income source for the women,*

*especially when they are not engaged in parboiling"* (interview with rice processor, July 2025).

These alternative livelihood programmes are significant because they diversify incomes, potentially reducing dependency on TCL. By broadening income sources, such initiatives also strengthen the resilience of farmers and women against market fluctuations and mitigate the risks associated with relying on a single buyer or value chain.

Nonetheless, key informants revealed that TCL's operations face challenges from climate change. According to one officer, *"climate change has become a major challenge for our operations. All our farmers rely solely on rainfall for cultivation. As a result, unpredictable weather patterns and shifting rainfall due to climate change are severely affecting productivity in our operational areas"* (interview with rice processor, July 2025). This reliance on rain-fed agriculture highlights the vulnerability of smallholder-based production models, raising concerns about long-term sustainability in the absence of climate-resilient investments such as irrigation and water management systems. Tamanaa has taken measures to become more environmentally friendly by adopting a zero-waste policy and promoting tree planting.

"*We protect the environment by practicing minimal or zero tillage, preserving trees, and advising farmers on deforestation. We use rice husks to make briquettes, so we don't have to cut trees for firewood or charcoal. Nothing is wasted here. The hard husk is used for biochar, and the soft one, that is the bran, is used for animal feed. Everything is put to use*" (FGD, Tamanaa Parboilers, November 2025).

The Tamanaa Company Ltd shows how private-sector food system initiatives can open new spaces for participation while reproducing structural inequalities. At Tamanaa, women benefit from improved access to inputs, decentralised processing, and alternative livelihood schemes, which help strengthen their income, status, and decision-making power. Yet these gains remain constrained by enduring barriers, including unequal land ownership, restrictive cultural norms, and climate vulnerability.

The two case studies highlight both opportunities and structural challenges in Ghana's public food system initiatives—PFJ and FGP—and their implications for procedural, recognition, distributive, and restorative justice are explored in the next chapter.

# 5. JUSTICE ANALYSIS OF GHANA'S FOOD SYSTEM TRANSITION

## 5.1. Introduction

This chapter turns to the question of justice in Ghana's food systems, examining the extent to which procedural, recognition, distributive, and restorative justice dimensions are embedded in the PFJ and FGP of the Government of Ghana and the private sector rice value chain by Tamanaa Company Ltd. It interrogates youth agency in programme design, the equitable distribution of returns, the recognition and integration of traditional food system practices, and the relationship between these initiatives and environmental conservation. Together, these insights illuminate the structural conditions shaping food system participation among young people in Ghana.

## 5.2. Procedural Justice

The case study of public sector programmes reveals ambivalent expressions of procedural justice within the food system while the private food system initiative analysed lacks procedural justice. As previously discussed, procedural justice encompasses the participation of stakeholders in the design and implementation of policies and programmes. Such participation is essential to ensure that these initiatives reflect the lived experiences and aspirations of young men and women, thereby increasing programme relevance and appeal, and enhancing youth engagement.

Nonetheless, narratives by the participants of the case studies highlight the limited manifestation of procedural justice in public food system programmes, particularly at the sub-national level. This is because state-led programmes, such as the PFJ and the FGP, are designed in Accra and handed down to districts for implementation with minimal opportunity for local adaptation. Often, these programmes are conceptualised during manifesto writing stages in the context of presidential elections. Whilst the political parties often engage with various stakeholders during this phase because of voter optics, they tend to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, overlooking local contexts. Then, once the election is over, participation comes to a halt. Various key informants as well as FGD participants pointed to the lack of genuine participation. One respondent indicated that they "*were asked to attend to sign the list of participants" but not to have their opinions heard* (interview with CSO representative, August 2025). In the case of TCL, narratives by participants show lack of involvement in decision-making related to the design or implementation of the rice value chain.

As a result of the top-down approach in programme design, the most significant manifestation of procedural justice in these public initiatives is the initial selection process, where young people have the option to register and participate. In the words of a key informant, *"in our District alone, we registered over 50,000 farmers. Based on the data we have, close to 50% of these registered farmers are youth, individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 [years]"* (interview with an officer of the Department of Agriculture, July 2025). However, the lack of meaningful involvement in shaping these programmes deprives them of the valuable local insights and lived experiences of young people, including women in the area.

### 5.3. Recognition

To explore just food system transition, this study examined the extent to which traditional approaches are embedded within the food system. Participant narratives suggest limited recognition of traditional or indigenous farming practices. There is a prevailing view that these methods are inefficient, leading to a shift towards modern practices that often diverge from indigenous approaches. Notably, in food production, the emphasis on generating higher yields has engendered the use of improved seed varieties, chemical inputs, and other techniques that conflict with indigenous agroecological principles. These approaches are evident in both public and private food system initiatives studied. As one key informant observed:

"*But there have been a few cases where farmers asked for more clarity about the seeds being distributed, especially why they couldn't be stored and replanted. One farmer asked if we can't save and reuse our own seeds, and all seeds have to be imported, what happens to our food security in the future? His concern was that in times of crisis, like during the Russia-Ukraine war, when fertiliser imports became difficult and prices went up, it exposed how dependent we are on other countries. He wondered what would happen to our food production if we couldn't get the seeds or inputs we needed*" (interview with an officer of Women in Agriculture, July 2025).

Although the above-mentioned trend is widespread, there are some emerging efforts to integrate agroecological principles in food production. For example, there are some local NGO initiatives- notable among these are URBANET and the CEAL, who are supporting farmers to adopt local agro-ecological farming practices. Whilst there is a growing number of local organic farms and labels. In Accra, small businesses such as Sowgreen Organic and Kantanka Organic Farms, among others are pioneering organic farming practices. Their customer base typically consists of middle-class to affluent households, with produce often intended for family consumption. Interestingly, Ghana's 2021 national best farmer Alhaji Mohammed Mashud of Cudjoe Abimash farms has successfully incorporated conservation agriculture (CA) techniques as part of the Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation in the Savannah (TAAT-S) funded by the African Development Bank (SAPIP, n.d.). This approach is like regenerative farming where cover crops are planted and then cut to be used as mulch in the field, and soil tillage is limited to the minimum. Whilst CA can go hand in hand with chemical fertilisers the goal is to improve soil health to the extent that chemical fertilisers are no longer needed (FAO, 2025). Using conservation agriculture Abimash farms has grown 1000 % and now works with 36,000 smallholder farmers (SAPIP, n.d.). The extent to which the out-growers are benefiting from Abimash Farm's growth could not be covered in this research. Yet, perhaps this example and the political recognition it has received can inspire young farmers to adopt similar techniques.

### 5.4. Distributive Justice

The limited recognition of traditional and indigenous practices in the food system has implications for distributive justice. As previously discussed, distributive justice denotes fair allocation of resources, benefits, and opportunities within a system. In the context of the study area in the north of the country, the pressure to increase agricultural output through the widespread adoption of improved seed varieties places growers at a disadvantage by making them increasingly dependent on seed companies. A key informant intimated that

"*commercial farmers see farming as a business and are more focused on getting high yields, so they prefer improved seed varieties that produce better results, even if the seeds can't be reused*" (interview with an officer of Women in Agriculture, July 2025). This situation prevents farmers from selecting and saving seeds for replanting, embedding commercial seed suppliers more deeply into the food system. Given the low-income levels typically associated with food production in the study areas, as well as the challenges in accessing inputs, this situation contributes to the erosion of the revenue margins that farmers can earn from their labour. The marketing and distribution inefficiencies documented in Chapter Two further compress revenue margins, intensifying the distributive injustices experienced by smallholder producers involved in this study.

Additionally, accounts by the participants of the study question the distributional justice of public sector food system programmes. There is a significant influence of partisan politics, especially local political elites, on the distribution of publicly funded agricultural inputs. A public official decried that "*once politics is brought into these interventions, their purpose is weakened, and we cannot achieve the intended results. For real change to happen in Ghana's agriculture sector, we need interventions that are free from political influence*" (interview with an official of the Department of Agriculture, July 2025). We have seen how some qualified farmers who register with these programmes are excluded from receiving inputs due to local politicians hijacking the distribution process.

In contrast to access to inputs, food system programmes generally offer fair opportunities for the enrolment of young people and women. Although these programmes are not always explicitly targeted at these groups, key informants from both the public and private sectors observed that youth and women often dominate participation. For instance, in one district, nearly half of registered beneficiaries were youth. As one NGO official explained, *"young farmers are linked to financial institutions to help them access credit and support their farming activities. So, in this way, the youth in Ghana are receiving support to participate in agriculture"* (interview, July 2025). Moreover, there appear to be no discriminatory practices in access to climate change adaptation initiatives, such as irrigation water. This equality of access to water resources reflects distributive justice within the food systems studied.

However, it is essential to assess distributive justice through the lens of control of productive resources, particularly land. In the north of Ghana, issues of land access and control persist. Although young people and women have access to land, control and ownership remain largely patriarchal. As one key informant noted, *"in Ghana it's difficult to work only with youth as out growers because most of the land is owned by older people. Many young people don't have access to land"* (interview with commercial farmer, August 2025). Given that land is the *sine qua non* of food production, the lack of control over this critical resource detracts from the distributive justice of the food system and limits the effective participation of youth and women in the food system.

### 5.5. Restorative Justice

As previously discussed, agroecological practices are limited in the food systems. This has implications for the restorative justice of the food system by undermining the efforts to rehabilitate degraded soils and ecosystems negatively impacted by agricultural practices.

Restorative justice in food systems entails actions that seek to mitigate the ecological harm, regenerate natural resources, and promote environmental sustainability. The prevailing emphasis on productivity and the widespread use of chemical inputs detract from such objectives, reducing the long-term resilience of the food system. At the same time, fossil fuels remain significant in food processing and distribution systems. In the food processing sector, the use of diesel-powered generators as substitutes for unreliable national grid electricity is not uncommon. The boom in food delivery in urban areas by motorcycle increases $CO_2$ emissions.

In sum, this chapter shows that the pursuit of just food system transformation in Ghana remains a contested and structurally constrained endeavour. Across the four justice dimensions examined, the empirical evidence reveals uneven and contradictory progress. Procedurally, the top-down design logic of the PFJ, FGP, and Tamanaa Company Ltd.'s rice value chain initiative systematically marginalises the voices of young people and women, reducing meaningful participation to tokenistic enrolment rather than substantive co-design. In terms of recognition, the prevailing emphasis on increasing output displaces indigenous and agroecological knowledge systems. On the distributive justice dimension, while access to programme enrolment and certain productive resources such as irrigation water reflects some equity, entrenched patriarchal land tenure arrangements and deepening dependency on commercial seed suppliers reproduce structural disadvantages for youth and female smallholders. Restoratively, the continued reliance on chemical inputs, increasing use of fossil fuel-dependent processing infrastructure, and carbon-intensive distribution systems undermines ecological regeneration. Taken together, these findings highlight a tension between the imperatives of output increase and the demands of the four justice dimensions.

# 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 Conclusion

This study explored JFST in Ghana, focusing on both public and private initiatives in the country. Whilst there have been some advances in Ghana's food system transformation, many challenges remain to be tackled. Until these challenges are addressed in a meaningful and sustainable manner, the effective participation of young people, including women, in Ghana's JFST will remain elusive.

On an institutional level, the fact that the NDPC together with MOFA is leading the national governance of Ghana's FST presents several challenges. First, NDPC is an advisory body to the government and does not hold the mandate to write legislation or draft policies. So, whilst the FSTP2 developed by the NDPC represents a holistic approach with attention to youth, women and climate, it is unclear if and how these commitments will be supported by necessary laws and regulations. The effectiveness of the FST agenda will depend on the political will of the government in power. This uncertainty is further compounded by the influence of political cycles on the continuity of public programmes, as discussed above. Second, the Cross-Sectoral Planning Group (CSPG), coordinated by NDPC, brings together representatives from agriculture, environment, health, social protection, education, and water and sanitation sectors. However, the ad hoc nature in which this CSPG meets, generally in preparation of reports, raises questions about the stakeholders' commitments and whether their focus lies on upwards accountability to development partners or on local level change. Third, because MOFA has a co-coordination role, the FST agenda is geared towards its policy priorities: productivity over sustainability, homogeneity (through improved seed varieties, for example) over diversity, food security over food sovereignty, and large-scale agri-businesses over small holder farmers. Critical issues of inclusiveness, environmental conservation, and climate resilience are second in line. The limited role of the Ministry of Environment further attributes to the lack of attention for environmental concerns. Sustainability is conceptualised within the existing productivity-driven paradigm, as climate-smart agriculture and agro-forestry. But more transformative discourses, such as agro- ecology, which seek to make farming beneficial for both people and the planet, were not validated.

From a justice perspective a lot remains to be accomplished. Although the FS pathway, as stipulated in the FSTP2, recognises the need to address distributive, procedural and restorative justice, by uplifting marginalised communities, actively including women and youth as well as improving environmental sustainability, turning these paper commitments into practice are faced with structural barriers. Regarding distributive justice, high levels of MDP among rural communities especially in the North and vulnerable employment and decent work deficits throughout the FS hinder equal distributions of gains. Political clientelism furthermore undermines fair access to agriculture inputs whilst patriarchal norms related to land and capital undermine equal women's participation in Ghana's food system. The cases of AB Farms and Sankofa Snacks demonstrated how young agri-preneurs' potential can be unlocked when the barriers of access to land and capital are overcome. They also demonstrate that social, youth-focussed, sustainable entrepreneurship can generate job opportunities for young Ghanaians.

Procedural justice is generally restricted to participation of youth groups in project design phases. Active youth participation during implementation and monitoring and evaluation of government and development partner programmes is limited. Furthermore, even though youth and women are featured in the NDPC policy framework, they are presented as key target groups, not active actors within the FS who have their own agency. Such an approach undermines youth and women's ownership of the FST process. In private sector initiatives such as Tamanaa Ltd, youth are also not engaged in a structural way into the company's decision-making bodies. Although FGD participants among young parboilers indicated they could turn to the company when issues arise. The GFM and CSOs such as CEAL and Urbanet are important, inspirational outliers in this regard.

The recognition of heterogeneous youth groups and the incorporation of indigenous traditions and knowledge in Ghana's FST have not been prioritised. Generally, traditional farming methods are perceived to be inefficient and labour-intensive and there is growing use of improved seeds to the detriment of traditional seed varieties. In addition, changes in consumption patterns due to urbanisation and a growing middle class, tend to undermine Ghana's rich and nutritious food heritage. Youth included in programme design phases are often not representative of the various indigenous groups living in Ghana. Existing language barriers further complicate inclusive youth participation. Apart from young women, other vulnerable youth groups (such as young people with disabilities) are not specifically targeted in public FS programmes. Interestingly, Tamanaa has made efforts to make their female workers comfortable and hired a gender officer as one of their core staff. The gender officer is the liaison between female workers and the company's management board.

Restorative justice concerns, such as protecting biodiversity and enhancing environmentally sustainable strategies within the FS, are overshadowed by Ghana's focus on increasing agricultural productivity. The Ministry of Environment has implemented programmes to boost agro-forestry but these initiatives remain to be patches if the root cause of environmental degradation, industrial agriculture, is not addressed. Abimash farm demonstrates that conservation farming can go hand in hand with modernisation, job creation and business expansion.

### 6.2. Recommendations

Considering the above insights, this study with input from the validation workshop participants, proposes the following recommendations to strengthen Ghana's JFST and promote inclusiveness, sustainability, and resilience across the sector.

**Government of Ghana**

**Decouple programme continuity from political cycles to safeguard long-term food system initiatives:**

- **Justice failures addressed:** Insulating programmes from electoral cycles strengthens distributive justice by reducing clientelism and ensuring fairer resource distribution.
- **Implementation pathway:** Adopt a long-term national development plan (as recommended by the 2025 Constitutional Review Committee) and entrench food system initiatives legislatively. Independent, multi-stakeholder governance structures

at district and community levels should oversee implementation, providing safeguards against political manipulation, elite capture, and discontinuities.

**Integrate restorative justice into food system transition by balancing productivity with social and environmental goals**:

- **Justice failures addressed**: Elevating indigenous farming techniques and seed varieties advances restorative and representational justice, fostering a more sustainable and climate-resilient food system.
- **Implementation pathway**: Give farmer organisations and agro-ecology movements (e.g., CIKOD, CEAL) formal roles in policymaking, such as seats in the Cross-Sectional Planning Group under the NDPC. Showcase best practices like ABIMASH farms to raise awareness of agro-ecological methods that boost yields and shift young farmers' mindsets toward sustainable farming.
- **Ensure decent work across all food system sub-sectors** by improving working conditions, health and safety, and extending social security to farm and non-farm workers, while supporting the formalisation of informal workers and SMEs.
- **Justice failures addressed**: Strengthening decent work enhances distributive justice (through fair wages and social protection) and representational justice (through collective bargaining and worker voice).
- **Implementation pathway:** Trade unions such as GAWU should hold the government accountable to its ILO commitments, while the Department of Labour must enforce compliance with the Labour Act through effective monitoring.

**Establish systems that protect or compensate farmers against climate shocks:**

- Smallholder farmers -who are central to Ghana's food production- bear the greatest climate-related risks.
- **Justice failure addressed**: by enhancing the resilience of small holder farmers distributive & restorative justice are addressed
- **Implementation pathway:** Enhancing their resilience through measures such as crop insurance or policies that require agribusiness to share climate related losses across the value chain would strengthen their ability to withstand climate-induced crop failures. Promoting crop-diversification as well as taking measures against droughts (e.g. frugal irrigation systems, based on rain-harvesting) and floods (through risk mapping) will further increase small-holder farmers' resilience.

**Support young SMEs in accessing the five-year tax exemption and other GEA grants**:

- **Justice dimension addressed**: Enabling youth to establish SMEs within the food system advances distributive justice.
- **Implementation pathway:** Raise awareness of exemption through a national campaign led by the Ministry of Youth Development and Empowerment (MYDE), the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (NEIP), and the National Youth Authority (NYA). Employment programmes targeting youth—such as *Adwuamawura* and the National Apprenticeship Programme (NAP)—should also assist SMEs in formalising their businesses to qualify for the exemption.

**Enable district-level flexibility in national programmes to align implementation with local needs.**

- **Justice failures addressed:** Poor implementation undermines distributive justice, while weak feedback loops between national and district agencies limit recognition and procedural justice, as end-beneficiaries' voices rarely reach policymakers.
- **Implementation pathway:** Translate national food system policies into district-level plans through participatory processes that systematically integrate the perspectives of youth and women.

**Improve distribution by investing in logistics infrastructure—roads, storage facilities, and aggregation centres—to better connect farms with markets.**

- **Justice failures addressed:** Enhanced infrastructure reduces storage and transport costs, benefiting both farmers and consumers, thereby advancing distributive justice.
- **Implementation pathway:** In partnership with development actors, Ghana should design an infrastructure plan aligned with its food system transition pathway, improving efficiency while cutting transport costs and food loss.

**<u>Private Sector</u>**

**Collaborate with chiefs to secure land access for young farmers in out-grower schemes.**

- **Justice failures addressed:** By engaging chiefs, agribusinesses can help overcome this distributive inequality and demonstrate the broader community benefits of youth participation in farming.
- **Implementation pathway:** Agribusiness owners should consult with chiefs in their operational areas and negotiate agreements that allocate customary land for young farmers within out-grower schemes.

**Support the formalisation of informal food processors (e.g., rice parboilers).**

- **Justice failures addressed:** Informal workers in the food system often earn lower wages, lack social security, and face poor health and safety conditions. Formalising these roles and ensuring decent work standards strengthens distributive justice.
- **Implementation pathway:** Integrate informal processors into formal business schemes with guaranteed offset markets based on contractual prices and volumes. Companies must also assume responsibility for health and safety measures and provide social security, as demonstrated by Tamanaa.

**Adopt youth-centered, women-friendly business models that prioritise hiring and sourcing from young people.**

- **Justice failures addressed:** Empowering youth and women within companies strengthens their voices (procedural justice) and ensures access to decent work (distributive justice).
- **Implementation pathway:** New food system businesses should prioritise hiring young people and sourcing from youth producers, while fostering youth-friendly work environments. Appointing female extension officers to provide safe spaces for women to share concerns—and establishing similar spokesperson roles for youth—ensures their specific needs are recognised and addressed by management.

**Invest in low-carbon technologies to reduce food system's environmental footprint.**

- **Justice failures addressed:** Sustainable technologies advance restorative justice by making the food system less harmful to people and the environment.
- **Implementation pathway:** Prioritise solar energy over diesel generators, adopt energy-efficient processing methods, transition to natural fertilisers, and develop low-emission logistics and distribution models.

**Promote access to finance**.

- Design youth and women responsive financial instruments, including flexible collateral loans and blended finance for ecological enterprises.
- **Justice failure addressed**: by providing financial packages catered to the needs of youth and women, distributive justice will be enhanced as young entrepreneurs within the FS will have easier access to capital, vital for starting a business.
- **Implementation pathway:** financial institutions and banks should develop evidenced based loans and support packages for young SME's, government policies could be developed to incentivise banks to develop such products

**<u>Local CSOs</u>**

**Create FST platform with a shared JUST FST agenda**

- **Justice failure addressed:** strong and coordinated CSOs can contribute to ensuring that justice principles are imbedded into their and Gov't FST programmes
- **Implementation pathway**: Map existing CSO working within the FS and create a shared agenda based on the four justice principles.

**Advocate for inclusive and just food system transitions that prioritises people and planet.**

- **Justice failures addressed:** Bottom-up policymaking, targeted approaches, and the integration of traditional and sustainable techniques strengthen all four dimensions of justice—procedural, distributive, recognition, and restorative.
- **Implementation pathway:** Civil society organisations should engage political parties during election manifesto development to shape food system policies and programmes. A shared agenda can then serve both as a lobbying tool to influence programme design and as a platform for public awareness.

**<u>Development Partners</u>**

**Support sustainable transport infrastructure**

- Development partners should invest in environmentally friendly food transportation systems that enhance efficiency while reducing carbon emissions across the value chain. Youth perspectives and needs should be prioritised throughout the entire cycle of such programmes (from design, implementation and M&E).
- **Justice failure addressed**: bad roads connecting farmers to markets was flagged as one of key challenges faced by young people within the FS, leading to food waste and loss and fluctuating prices. Making food transportation more environmentally friendly and efficient will support restorative justice as well as distributive justice.

- **Implementation pathway:** together with the government of Ghana a green transportation strategy should be developed, which prioritises farmer to market connectivity.
- **Facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity building**: Partners can play a critical role in enabling access to international best practices of youth led FST, research insights, and technical expertise (related to, scaling up youth led agri-ecology businesses and circular economy among others) to support Ghana's ongoing food systems transformation.
- **Justice failure addressed**: procedural justice and recognition will be enhanced if such exchanges and capacity building programmes are built on the experience and knowledge of young FS changemakers. Development partners have international platforms where insights across countries can be shared among peers.
- **Implementation pathway:** support exchange visits and expert capacity building and ensure follow-up through online platforms through which young FS changemakers can keep on sharing challenges and solutions

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