

Chapter 14

Youth and Environmental Sustainability in Ghana

Climate change has resulted in increasingly adverse impacts on livelihoods and even survival. As a result of limited adaptation strategies in the face of increasingly frequent natural disasters, developing countries are being left highly vulnerable (Ezekiel, 2015).

While Ghanaian policy objectives speak of youth involvement, more effort is desired in terms of discussion on youth involvement in addressing environmental degradation and climate change. There are several areas youth can contribute to, including the restoration of degraded natural resources; the building of frameworks for resource management; the maintenance of protected areas; policy advocacy and strengthening legal frameworks on protected areas; and enhancing community awareness and participation over environmental issues.

14.1 Mining and deforestation

Ghana is a resource-rich nation and the practice of gold mining is widespread. A number of companies operate legally, committed to continuous reporting and monitoring of mining areas for environmental impacts and practising sustainable mining techniques. While these companies are certainly contributing to environmental degradation in some degree, it is the illegal mining operations that are by and large doing the most damage, infringing on local communities and ignoring sustainable practices. Illegal gold mining in Ghana is problematic environmentally and economically, and has been linked to water pollution, which in turn threatens the health and well-being of the entire ecosystem (Longdon, n.d.). Illegal mining activities often interferes with the agriculture sector's activities. In 2017, GoG banned illegal gold mining, offering miners retraining and alternative livelihoods (GhanaWeb, 2017).

In addition to illegal mining activities, deforestation in Ghana is also a cause for concern. As of 2012, Ghana was gaining 0.12 per cent of forests per year, with the loss of quality forests attributed to the conversion of closed forests into open forests, typically for agricultural purposes (MLNR, 2012). In 2012, the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR) was active in protecting forested areas through the destruction of illegal farms and the control of illegal harvesting, timber practices, mining and forest fires (ibid.). Unfortunately, lack of transparent data means that not much more is known.

Critically engaging the youth demographic in environmental awareness initiatives is one strategy to mitigate the impact of illegal mining activities and deforestation. One example of this is the reclamation project in Juabo and Yakasa areas, where the

land has been degraded as a result of illegal small-scale mining activity. The project involved establishing 23,000 acres of oil palm plantations, creating economically viable and environmentally monitored land, protected from the effects of illegal mining. In addition, two nurseries were established to provide seedlings for planting seasons. This project led to the employment of approximately 23,000 people and, as a result of its success, a similar project has been established in Ayanfuri-Dunkwa area (MLNR, 2012). Youth involvement in these types of projects can provide them with meaningful opportunities linked to environmental sustainability while they obtain skills and employment.

14.2 Agriculture

As one of the highest contributors to Ghana's GDP, the agriculture sector provides the majority of employment opportunities for the country's population (MLNR, 2011). The NYP 2010 contains policy objectives to promote youth participation in the sector through the promotion of modern agriculture as a viable career opportunity, the provision of resources and the creation of equitable conditions for males and females in agriculture. In Ghana, women are responsible for 60–80 per cent of food production. As the effects of climate change combined with environmental degradation continue to make farming and access to resources (food, water and fuel) more difficult, these women have to travel further and further distances, leaving them at greater risk of experiencing violence (Ezekiel, 2015).

14.3 Oil

In 2007, marketable oil was found in Ghana. In the hopes of increasing economic growth, further exploration is being conducted. A survey conducted in 2011 found that 81 per cent of youth had high expectations regarding oil and gas exploration (FES, 2011). As is the case with illegal mining activities, oil extraction can be damaging to the natural environment. Therefore, in order to reduce dependence on economic growth linked to environmental degradation, devoting resources towards economic opportunities that support a blue and a green economy is ideal.

14.4 Green alternatives

In addition to working towards maintaining sustainable mining practices, further exploration and experimentation is needed in order to transition Ghana towards a green economy. Youth-led agriculture enterprises such as Farmerline, a green business initiative that partners with farm input companies, sustainable food brands, financial institutions and other development agencies to foster a resource-rich network of farmers, could potentially stimulate more green jobs.¹ There exist opportunities for government and other stakeholders to partner with start-ups like Farmerline, developing workshops on sustainable farming practices and, in turn, providing youth with employable skills in the green job sector.

Youth participation in green initiatives through digital industries has been suggested as another opportunity for Ghana to create more green jobs (Billingham, 2018). For

example, Ghana can develop youth initiatives in areas like vulnerability mapping to assess areas of climate concern (Ezekiel, 2015). Moreover, Ghanaian youth could focus their attention on educating local communities on the environmental impacts of illegal mining and deforestation activities. Developing cooperative relationships with youth in other countries could also facilitate knowledge-sharing and skills exchange.

14.5 Blue growth

Oceans play a critical role in climate regulation, and act as a food resource and a source of economic growth. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, inland capture fisheries are an important way to stimulate blue production and blue communities (FAO, 2018). These fisheries can provide employment for Ghanaian youth and act as nutritious food sources, improving food security and income for the population. Drawn from past collaborations, FAO has developed and introduced a nutritional fish powder derived from fish bones in Ghana as part of a school meal programme (ibid.).

14.6 Electronic waste

UNEP has highlighted the risks posed by electronic waste in Ghana to environmental health and well-being. In 2018, GoG constructed an electronic waste recycling facility in Agbogbloshie, creating 22,000 self-sustaining jobs for Ghanaian youth (UNEP, 2018). Through the development of workshops, training programmes and educational resources in association with non-profit organisations, youth are working to inform local communities on proper electronic waste disposal techniques and where electronic waste can be taken.

14.7 Policy gaps

Youth face multiple barriers in becoming involved in public policy-making. As Ghana moves forward towards establishing a green economy, integrating youth involvement in national policy-making is necessary to enable young people's engagement in environmentally sustainable solutions. Taking a cue from the National Youth Conference on Oil and Gas, hosted by the Voice of Youth Project in 2013, the development of an inter-ministerial youth group, which could then champion a youth engagement agenda at the local and national level, could be one solution to provide youth a platform (Ayamga, 2014). Introducing policy that speaks to the importance of vulnerability and risk assessments, as well as the need for increased data collection, would create further opportunities to generate links between youth populations and environmentally sustainable employment opportunities. Furthermore, collaboration, including between youth organisations and local communities, should be a priority.

14.8 Summary points

1. The NYP 2010 outlines goals for youth involvement in agriculture and environmental sustainability. Promoting youth participation in and youth-related

policies targeted towards the sector may be one solution to prevent illegal mining and deforestation as well as to stimulate growth in the green jobs sector.

2. Illegal mining and deforestation activities are significant causes of water and land degradation in Ghana.
3. There exist numerous possibilities for youth involvement, including engaging youth in environmental awareness initiatives to mitigate the impact of illegal mining, deforestation and electronic waste; data collection on forested and agricultural land; policy-making; mapping programmes to identify areas of climate vulnerability; and educational workshops.

14.9 Recommendations

1. Facilitate youth engagement opportunities that promote lifestyle changes through environmental awareness campaigns and initiatives.
2. Provide opportunities for youth engagement in public policy-making on the subject of prevention, rather than control, of illegal mining activities in forested areas.
3. Create opportunities for youth to conduct vulnerability assessments.
4. Promote youth participation in agriculture as well as youth-related policies targeted towards this sector to minimise the occurrence of illegal mining activities, as more land is monitored, utilised and protected by youth involvement.

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Note

1 <https://farmerline.co/products/>

