

Programme Area Summary

Country: Ghana

Programme Area: Secure Livelihoods 2005-2009

What is the aim of the programme area? To support poor and disadvantaged men and women in five regions in Ghana to achieve food and income security. This will be through better engagement with the markets and strengthened linkages with government and other service providers.

Why is VSO working in that particular Programme Area and region?

More than 65% of Ghana's population depends on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods. However, the agriculture sector is severely hindered by unpredictable climate, lack of institutional support, and limited market access among other problems. The liberalisation of the Ghanaian economy has created competition in the market, making it difficult for local farmers to compete equitably or match the cost of production. This has resulted in a decline in the agricultural labour force and incomes for most communities, and consequently, high levels of poverty and food insecurity.

According to the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy II more than 50% of the poor in Ghana (70% in Northern Ghana) are small-scale food crop farmers. Food insecurity is major manifestation of poverty in northern Ghana and a major obstacle to the poor engaging with the market.

Women have been identified as particularly disadvantaged in the northern regions and rural areas. This situation is influenced by socio-cultural practices and traditions which deny women access to land, capital for business, and skills for wage employment. However, many are engaged in agro-processing and thereby contribute significantly to household incomes. The small-scale enterprise sector is dominated by women working on products such as palm oil, gari, shea-butter, rice, smoked fish, etc. Adding value to this work by improving product quality and access to resources and markets, for example, will significantly increase their incomes and consequently, improve livelihoods of poor households and communities.

The youth constitute more than 50% of the population in Ghana and are among the most disadvantaged and poorest groups. Over the years, attempts by governments and NGOs have targeted adult men and women, neglecting youth. This accounts for the high exodus of youth from rural areas to urban centres in search of scarce jobs. This puts undue pressure on the limited facilities available in the cities and has led to disaffection and involvement in antisocial activity among young people.

Key beneficiaries and partners

- Small-scale farmers producing for household consumption in five regions
- Farmers associations
- Community based organisations and local NGOs
- Community vocational training centres
- District assemblies/Government agencies
- Private sector organisations working on creating an enabling environment
- Small to Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) supporting value chain development of selected products and services

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Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes

- To build the capacities of partners in target regions to support districts/communities produce the food that they need to achieve baseline food security with sustainable management of natural resources.
- To provide capacities to intermediary organisations (private sector and government) to support enterprise development activities of target groups to have sufficient incomes to achieve baseline income security levels from sustainable enterprise activities or employment that does not harm their health or damage the environment.
- To support advocacy initiatives by engaging with the private sector, government, civil society and communities for improved livelihoods of target groups.

Cross-cutting themes – The Secure Livelihoods programme has direct links to the Education and Disability programmes, which are VSO Ghana's other programme areas. Gender, HIV and AIDS, and Youth are cross-cutting themes for this programme area.

Current programme activities

The programme broadly aims at supporting Agri-business and Rural Industry both directly (in processing and production) and indirectly (working with intermediary organisations and/or SMEs in agri-business/rural industry value chains) in target regions.

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- Organisational capacity building of NGOs and CBOs in strategic planning, organisational development, financial management, advocacy and fundraising to effectively deliver services to disadvantaged communities and enable them to become more responsive to their own needs and environment.
- Research and development on selected products/services in target regions to enhance a market sensitive approach to poverty reduction.
- Direct service delivery - providing technical and extension services to subsistent farmers in areas such as irrigation, organic agriculture, animal husbandry and integrated pest management.
- Capacity building of CBOs in target regions on value chain development.

Workshops, training & conferences

- Vocational training programmes that are geared towards skills development in vocational and enterprise development, as alternative avenues for income generation and employment. This builds on community initiatives and where there is potential for growth.

Support to national volunteering

- The programme plans to make use of local volunteers through the VSO National Volunteering Programme (NVP). The national volunteers, mostly graduates with little work experience, will be placed within partner organisations to work alongside the more experienced international volunteers. This will not only help the local volunteers acquire valuable practical experience, but will also contribute towards the sustainability of interventions through supporting and developing local knowledge and resources.

Advocacy and Global Education

- Advocacy work to create an enabling environment and services for selected value chains.

Other partnership activities

- Collaboration with District Assemblies and government agencies to provide institutional support by enhancing linkages and information flow among the decentralized departments to enable the District Assemblies respond adequately to the needs of communities.

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What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

- VSO Ghana works with different types of partners. These include CBOs, NGOs and government institutions. These partners are mostly resource constrained, with limited financial and logistical resources to meet programme development costs. However, they share VSO's values of fighting poverty and disadvantage, and work with the most disadvantaged communities in Ghana that the programme hopes to reach.
- The programme supports advocacy on key policy issues that affect livelihoods of poor and disadvantaged communities. This is one of the strategic reasons why the programme works with District Assemblies. Local level authorities have a mandate to exercise legislative and executive powers to initiate and implement development programmes on behalf of the communities they represent. The programme supports the establishment of community structures, and links to networks that give the communities a voice in matters affecting them.