



Green Jobs and Young People in Africa: Ghana report



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY



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POLICY STUDIES INSTITUTE



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Acknowledgements

Front cover photograph: Grace Baidoo, a CAMFED Association member who graduated in Welding Technology at the Design and Technology Institute in Accra, Ghana. Photo credit: CAMFED Ghana

We would like to share our sincere and deep appreciation to all the respondents who participated in this research and gave such valuable insights and evidence.

We would also like to thank Dame Barbara Stocking, Professor Bhaskar Vira, Dr Garima Sahai, and Professor Pauline Rose from the University of Cambridge for convening research teams across multiple countries to explore green jobs, as well as our project partners at the University of Cape Town, Makerere University, and Restless Development for their collaboration and shared commitment to this research. Finally, we would like to acknowledge and thank the Mastercard Foundation for funding this research.

Suggested citation

Addo, E.A.A., Anyidoho, N.A., Asante, K.T., Asare-Danquah, S., Boyce, C., Buabeng, P., Darkwah, H.A., Eshun, C., Fiscian, Y.B., Mendonca, A., Naawinkaa, M., Nyarko, S., Oliver, L., Quartey, P. 2025. *Green jobs and young people. Ghana country report*. Working paper. University of Cambridge

Acronyms

CAMA	CAMFED Association
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GIS	Geographic Information System
GoG	Government of Ghana
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
ISSER	Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research
JPM	Journey Pathway Mapping
KEEA	Komenda Edna Equafo Abirem
KII	Key Informant Interview
NEET	Not in education employment or training
NGO	Non-government organisation
PHC	Population and Housing Census
REMP	Renewable Energy Master Plan
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

Executive summary

Ghana, like many African countries, is confronted with the two-fold challenge and opportunity of promoting sustainable development and addressing high levels of youth unemployment. Recognising the potential of green jobs to address this challenge, the country has implemented initiatives to promote job creation in the green sector. These interventions include the National Green Jobs Strategy (2021-2025), which aims to provide training and support for entrepreneurs and small businesses in green industries, notably those related to renewable energy and sustainable agriculture (Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, 2021; International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2021). However, limited access to financing and technology, as well as a mismatch between the skills of young people and the needs of employers, are only a few of the challenges facing the growth of Ghana's green industry.

In recent years, heightened public awareness of the phenomenon of climate change and its ramifications for our planet and lives has added urgency to the need to grow green jobs. It has highlighted the interaction between environmental sustainability and economic development and underscored the need for collaborative efforts to create a more sustainable future. The pathway to a sustainable future for Ghana necessitates investment in greater opportunities for young people to access a diverse range of green jobs through collaborative interventions by the state, civil society organisations, and the private sector.

The Ghanaian government's National Green Jobs Strategy (2021-2025) has defined green jobs as *"decent jobs that contribute to improving the efficiency of energy and raw materials and limiting Green House Gas (GHG) emissions whilst protecting and restoring ecosystems"* (Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, 2021, 2). This research has operationalised the definition to include jobs found across both traditional and emerging sectors, such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, waste management, and ecotourism.

This research is an investigation of the aspirations and barriers experienced by Ghanaian youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially women, in respect of green jobs. Specifically, it explores how opportunities in green job industries and other careers may contribute to fulfilling livelihoods and, at the same time, have a positive impact on protecting the environment and ultimately climate change. This research was conducted collaboratively between the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana and the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED). This study distinguishes itself by embedding youth as co-researchers, thereby amplifying voices often marginalised in policy research. The research team therefore included six Ghanaian youth researchers who co-designed the study and participated in data collection, analysis, and writing.¹ A qualitative research approach was adopted in the research design, sampling, data collection, and analysis.

Qualitative participatory data collection methods were used to collect evidence, comprising:

- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), with separate groups of young women and men

¹ The profiles of the youth researchers can be found in Appendix 1

- Key Informant Interviews (KII) with key stakeholders engaged with the youth and the green jobs agenda such as government officials, industry experts and representatives of civil society organisations involved in youth jobs promotion
- Journey Pathway Mapping (JPM) with a purposefully selected and diverse group of young women and men who constructed a visual representation of their lives as a journey or a map, indicating the critical stages and milestones on that journey

A WhatsApp platform was included as part of the research as a mechanism to gather additional insights from a targeted group of young people, address gaps in field data, and validate previously collected information from the qualitative research.

Findings

The key findings of the research are as follows:

Youth work aspirations

- Young people aspired to a range of careers that could be broadly categorised into agriculture and agribusiness; large-scale enterprises and artisanal or skilled trades; positions of social or cultural influence; white collar jobs; and, often cutting across these sectors, green jobs. In general, young people's aspirations were clustered around agriculture (specifically, large-scale corporate farming - what many of them called 'professional farming') and service sectors, with only a handful of young people aspiring to careers in manufacturing.
- Green jobs did not feature frequently in the occupations that young people aspired to even though they demonstrated awareness of these types of work. When young people aspired to participate in green jobs, their interests were mainly in white collar jobs (non-manual labour) requiring high expertise such as climate accounting and academic positions in sustainability and related sciences. For the few interested in the manufacturing sector, they aspired to capital-intensive recycling.
- Young people's aspirations for both green and other kinds of work were not only about making a material livelihood, but about personal fulfilment and the social meaning of the work as well. These aspirations were shaped by individual values and passions and by social contexts, including the encouragement or pressure of family and friends, and the work modelled within the social environment.
- Young people encountered a variety of roadblocks when following their aspirations, which were similar to those encountered in the work they undertook. These included lack of social support, inadequate education or training, and barriers related to self-employment. Furthermore, the specific forms that these barriers took, and their intensity, could have been gendered. As a result, young people's aspirations reflected the trade-offs between their socioeconomic realities and the socially meaningful careers to which most of them aspired.

Critical points in the job aspiration-career trajectory

The journey from obtaining an occupation and the process of a career journey to fulfil an aspiration was not linear or uniform; the direction and nature of these trajectories differed considerably among individual youth. The study found that there were three critical experiences that shaped young people's trajectories in the green jobs they aspired to:

- Obtaining quality education or training
- Exploring opportunities (for training, work, mentorship, etc.) in the field of interest
- Negotiating obstacles (e.g. material hardships, academic challenges, and family pressures), sometimes leading to a pause in or divergence from one's aspirations

Roadblocks to the aspiration-career pathway

Work aspirations evolved as young people negotiated obstacles in pursuit of their goals. A set of obstacles were related to the social environment, including lack of social support or appreciation for green jobs, particularly observed for green jobs involving manual labour. Also, there was limited access to or lack of education and training for green jobs. There were also obstacles that were specific to entrepreneurship, including lack of financial, administrative, and regulatory support to start and sustain a business, as well as the higher cost of eco-friendly inputs. Many of these obstacles were influenced by gender, with women, for instance, reporting greater difficulty in obtaining bank loans compared to men. Women also often faced censure and restrictions in personal and professional relationships, which added further challenges to their achievements and success in their work.

Opportunities and support systems

Several resources and support for engagement in green jobs were identified by key informants within government and the private sector. These were:

- Resources such as arable land to be cultivated² and organic and plastic waste to be recycled³
- Opportunities for training offered by the government, private sector and civil society organisations
- Funding for green businesses
- Opportunities for sustainable work

Recommendations

Overall, the research evidence highlighted that the promotion of green jobs presents an opportunity for Ghana to tackle the intertwined challenges of sustainable development and youth employment. The following recommendations are aimed to identify mechanisms and quality support for increasing youth employment, as well as the broader and interconnected issues of structural economic transformation and climate change.

² While arable land is available for farming, young people's access is limited by land tenure systems in which control of family lands rests with elders; competition for land use from residential developers; and the high cost of private commercial lands - factors that often leave the youth with only small landholdings (Kidido, Bugri and Kasanga, 2017; Kidido and Lengoiboni, 2019).

³ The existence of plastic waste is itself a development problem to be tackled. However, the absorption and conversion of plastic is at once an employment opportunity and a partial solution to the problem of waste.

- ***Create and implement a green jobs policy to increase the quantity and quality of jobs available to the youth.*** At the national level, green jobs must be pursued as part of a green industrial policy. This is already in alignment with national policy, which for years has emphasised the importance of climate action, structural economic transformation, and youth employment. To bridge the gap between the high-status and well-paid jobs that young people aspire to and the capacity of the national economy to create these jobs, the Ghanaian economy must increase the quantity and quality of green jobs available to young people. This will require the highest level of national leadership to make appropriate economic policies, and specifically to adopt a green industrial policy in line with the need to balance economic growth and protection of the environment. The policy response should include specific measures to improve access to quality green job opportunities for marginalised youth, especially young women and people living with disabilities. The green jobs policy should be integrated with global strategies and financing for a just transition for young people to acquire green jobs.
- ***Strengthen access to quality education at all levels for youth, particularly for disadvantaged youth including young women.*** Young people who participated in this research recognised that their career pathways were non-linear and depended on many factors, some of which were outside their control. The factors they considered most critical to their life outcomes were education, skills development, and training. As respondents noted, quality education is the foundation of aspirational and skilled green jobs. It is imperative that the government develop a long-term strategy and plan to enable young people to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills that will help them to achieve their ambitions. Young people need the chance to develop core skills to help them become the problem-solvers and green job creators of a sustainable future. This entails addressing barriers to access secondary and tertiary education and ensuring that education equips young people with the foundational, technical, and entrepreneurial skills they need to thrive.
- ***Enhance the dignity of workers in green jobs.*** To add dignity to green jobs in the sanitation and waste management industry, the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations must ensure the enforcement of labour regulations with respect to manual workers in waste management. For instance, workers must earn reasonable levels of income; receive appropriate protective clothing; the use of basic tools and technology; and have access to social protection schemes such as pensions. These interventions, in addition to education and a public campaign about the economic and social rewards of such work, can help change public perception about the desirability of these jobs and, hopefully, create a demand among young people for such work.
- ***Support climate-smart agriculture to meet national nutritional needs and food security.*** The research showed that, among the minority of young people who aspired to work on-farm agriculture, the preference was for cash crops over cultivation of foodstuffs to be consumed in Ghana. This is one indicator of potential food insecurity and suggests a strong need for policymakers to support climate-smart agriculture to meet national nutritional and food security needs. This recommendation aligns with the government's Agriculture for Economic Transformation Agenda and with the policy to shift the government's fertiliser subsidy programme to prioritise organic over chemical fertilisers.

- ***Celebrate and communicate young people's success in a wide range of green jobs, to build aspiration and wider appreciation of the breadth of green job opportunities available.*** Given the finding that young people's work aspirations are linked to the social perceptions and status of particular occupations, a communication and media strategy should celebrate young people who are succeeding in green jobs, particularly young women and persons with disabilities. These successful case studies will act as an incentive for others wanting to pursue careers in green jobs.

1. Introduction and country context

Africa is anticipated to boast the world's largest workforce by 2040, surpassing both China and India (McKinsey 2010). This demographic shift holds promising implications for the continent's economic and social development, provided the expanding workforce is effectively harnessed. However, it also presents substantial social challenges if economic and employment opportunities fail to absorb this burgeoning labour force (Page 2012). Employment stands as a crucial strategy in combating poverty in Africa, yet governments across the continent often overlook employment-promoting strategies within their poverty reduction plans, resulting in a lack of deliberate efforts to generate new jobs (Nwuke 2002). However, like multiple countries around the world, Ghana is confronted with the two-fold challenge and opportunity of addressing high levels of youth unemployment and promoting sustainable development.

In response to the social and economic challenges posed by youth unemployment in Ghana, the Government of Ghana (GoG) has implemented various policies over the years to address the situation. These initiatives include the Youth in Agriculture Programme, National Youth Employment Programme, and Youth Entrepreneur Advocacy (Poku-Boansi and Afrane 2011). Additionally, Jumpah et al. (2020) conducted a study on the nexus between youth unemployment and economic growth in Ghana. They found that policies fuelling economic growth play a crucial role in creating employment opportunities, thereby reducing youth unemployment. The research highlights the effectiveness of national economic development policies, specifically the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda I and II, in reducing youth unemployment by approximately 6 percent. However, the positive impact proved to be short-lived. Therefore, the study suggests that broader economic and social development initiatives offer better prospects for youth employment than specific youth policies and programmes (Jumpah et al. 2020). Moreover, Poku-Boansi and Afrane (2011) advocate for placing the private sector at the forefront when planning youth employment policies, integrating it into a national development plan to ensure effectiveness. This underscores the importance of a holistic and collaborative approach to address the multifaceted challenges of youth unemployment in Ghana.

In addition, recognising the potential of green jobs to tackle youth unemployment and promote sustainable development, Ghana has implemented initiatives like the National Green Jobs Strategy (2021-2025) and Youth in Afforestation Programme (2018) specifically aimed at providing training and generating job opportunities in green industries. In 2023, Ghana also updated its National Youth Policy (created in August 2010), which includes a focus on youth participation in climate action and the greening of education and jobs in the agricultural and environmental sectors (Ministry of Youth and Sports 2022). The institutional frameworks to support, promote, and regulate the creation of green jobs include the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Renewable Energy Master Plan (REMP) launched in 2019. However, these various interventions did not address the underlying problem of jobless growth, whereby growth is driven not by structural transformation of the economy but rather than by a reliance on low-productivity agriculture and the services sector.

The search for development of the type that yields abundant jobs for citizens has so far not

been successful in Ghana. In the pursuit of development within the context of climate change, what is needed is a green industrial policy which must be formulated with the full participation of the young people who will be both the main implementers and beneficiaries of such a policy.

Against this background, this research explores the potential for green jobs for young people in Ghana by investigating the desire of young people for such work, and identifying the ways the development of green industries can be supported to create meaningful and desirable employment for young people.

This research is an investigation of the young people's aspirations for and barriers to green jobs. Overall, it seeks to understand how opportunities in green job industries and other careers can contribute to fulfilling livelihoods for Ghanaian youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially women, while having a positive impact on the environment. The research also explores the relationship between young people's aspirations for high-status and well-paid jobs and their capacity to fulfil these ambitions and aspirations.

The study found that young people's aspirations for green jobs are related to their desire for socially meaningful livelihoods. These aspirations are shaped by a combination of individual passion and the social and relational contexts in which young people are located. Furthermore, the study revealed that young people encounter a variety of roadblocks in following their aspirations, which are like the obstacles they encounter in other types of work. These include lack of social support, inadequate education or training, and barriers related to self-employment. The specific forms these barriers take, and their intensity, are often gendered.

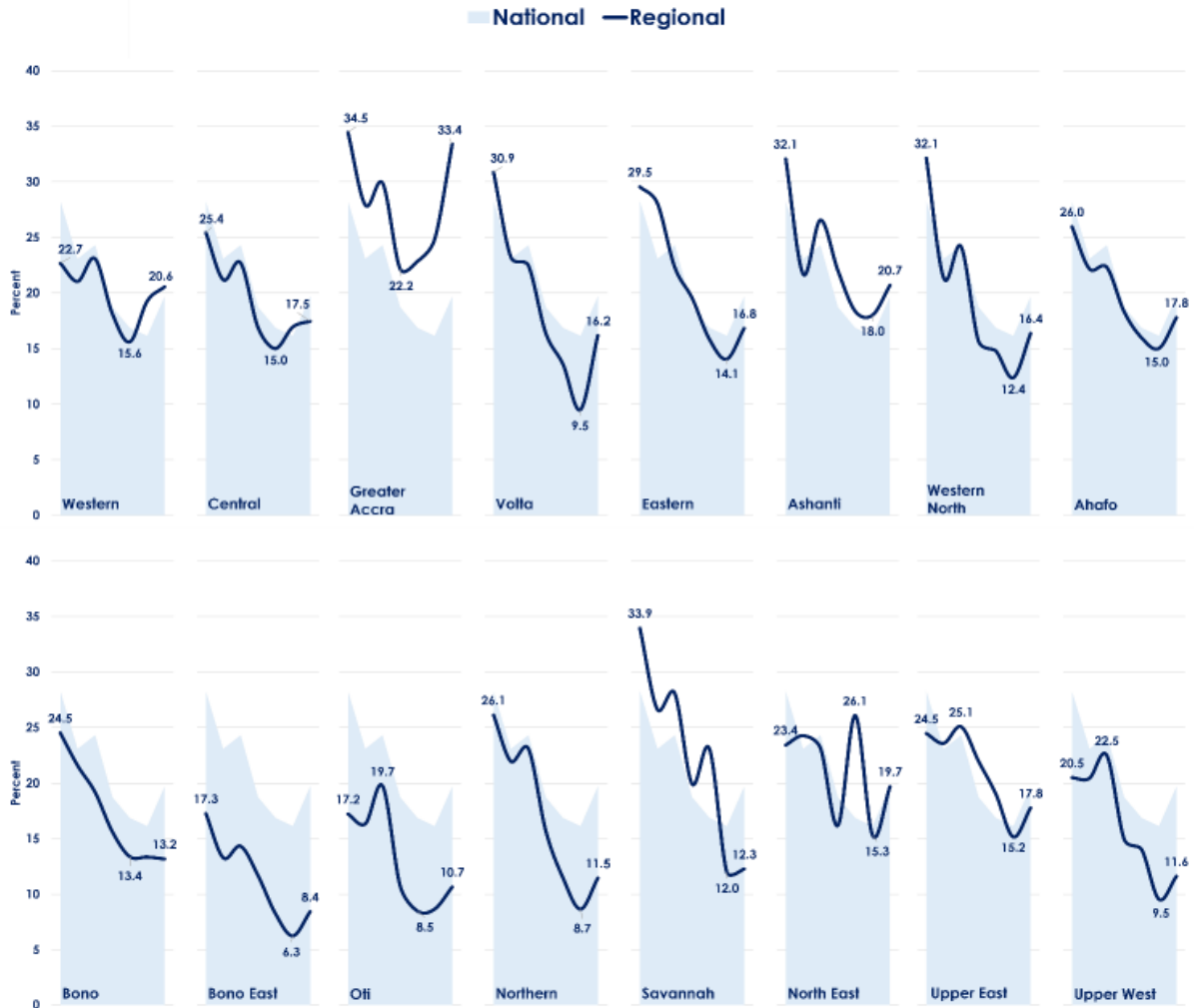
Youth employment in Ghana

Ghana's National Youth Policy (2010) defines the youth as persons aged 15 to 35 years. This segment of the population has been steadily growing over the past decades. The Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census (PHC) recorded a national population of 30,832,019, of which 38.2 percent were youth, which marked an increase from 34.6 percent in 2000. Among the youth, 50.9 percent were female, and 60.5 percent resided in urban areas (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) 2021a). In terms of the economic status of young people, 5,784,277 (or 49.3 percent) were economically active, which included the 39.54 percent who were employed, and 9.71 percent unemployed (GSS 2021b). The single largest employer of youth by sector was agriculture, forestry, and fishing (26.3 percent), followed by trading and mechanics (17.4 percent), and other services (10 percent). The manufacturing sector, which could be the sector driving the generation of high-quality, well-remunerated jobs, employed less than 8 percent of the youth (GSS 2021b).

In the third quarter of 2023, 18.2 percent of the youth population (that is, all persons from 15 to 35 years) were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (Ghana Statistical Service 2024). Crucially, the figure was higher (19.7 percent) for young people in the formative years from 15 and 24, who would ideally be in school or transitioning into the job market. The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS 2024) provides detailed information about NEET youth in the 15-24 year age bracket: in the third quarter of 2023, 63.8 percent resided in urban areas and 37.2 percent in rural areas. Spatial variation can be seen by administrative

region, as well. As Figure 1 illustrates with quarterly statistics from the first quarter of 2022 to the third quarter of 2023, most of the NEET youth from 15 to 24 years were concentrated in the Greater Accra and Ashanti Regions, which also have the two largest cities (GSS 2024).

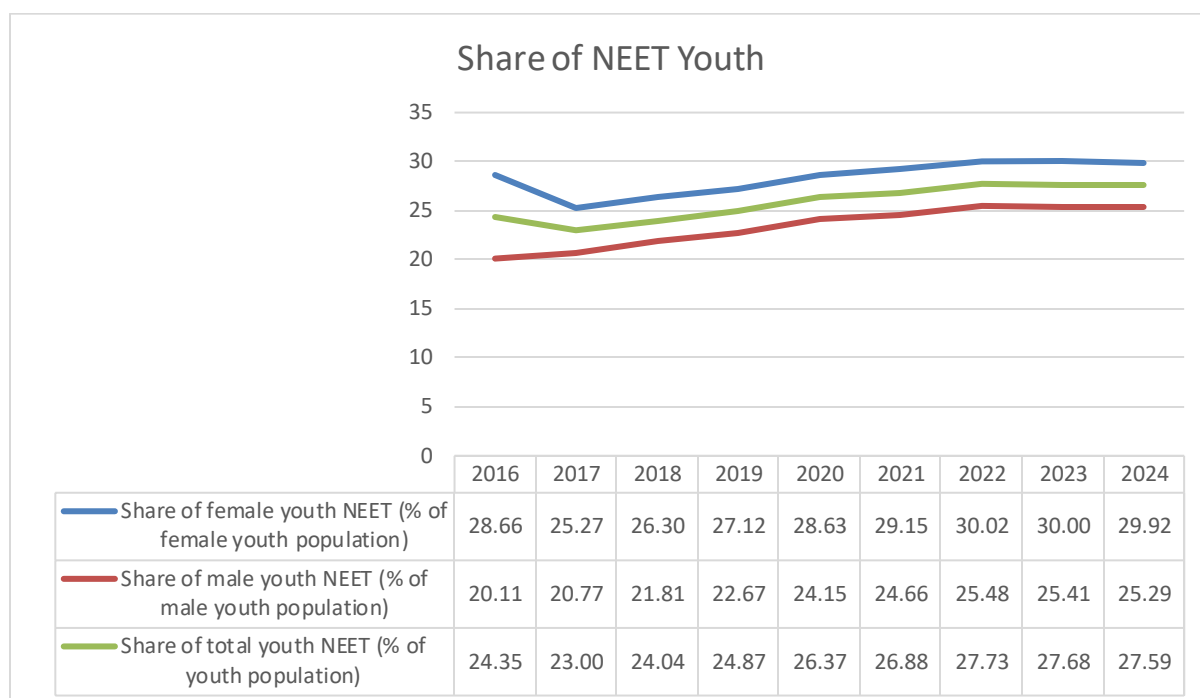
Figure 1. Number of NEET youth aged 15-24 years by region (2022 Q1 - 2023 Q3)



Source: Ghana Statistical Service 2024, 27)

As Figure 2 illustrates, the proportion of NEET youth fluctuates over time. What is consistent is that the category contains a higher proportion of the female youth population than the male youth population. This gender disparity is partly rooted in structural barriers that increase the constraints to access to education and employment opportunities for young women, among other social groups (Adeniran et al. 2020). This reality underscores the importance of addressing gender-specific challenges to create more equitable opportunities for the female youth population.

Figure 2. Share of NEET youth



Source: World Development Indicators

Green jobs and youth employment: a schema

Green jobs can be broken down into different categories according to sector, skill requirement, and potential contribution. Opportunities for green jobs exist across all the traditional economic sectors, including agriculture, industry, and services. In each sector, green jobs may vary in the required skills. In turn, the level of technical expertise needed is often associated with remuneration, job satisfaction, and the dignity and social status of the work. Depending on the particular sector or sub-sector, high and mid-level skill may be acquired by pursuing a degree programme in an institution of higher education or through vocational training. In contrast, manual labour requiring little or no formal training is likely to be associated with low financial reward and be accorded little social respect.

There is potential for green jobs to contribute to economic development across all sectors. Greening agriculture can help to shore up food sovereignty and reduce the food import bill. The assumption here is that productivity will increase concurrently with a rise in the numbers of high and mid-level skilled workers in research, development, and practice. Greening services by adopting energy efficient processes, could lead to a reduction of energy cost by reducing demand, which could, in turn, benefit high energy-consumption sectors.

The industrial sector is where the country stands to gain the most. This is the sector whose growth could absorb a large share of the workforce while substantially reducing the country’s import dependence and stabilising its currency. As the backbone of modern economies, there is an opportunity for Ghana to take advantage of the turn towards sustainability in development policy discourse to develop a green industrial policy for economic transformation. Successfully achieving this would also address the youth

unemployment problem by addressing the underlying issue of economic growth. Adding value to agriculture and promoting backward and forward linkages between agriculture and industry will potentially create better job opportunities for young people thereby stimulating economic growth and livelihood improvements.

Currently, the opportunities for green jobs vary greatly across sectors and by skill levels, as presented in Table 1. The table is a conceptual exercise based on the apparent capacity of each sector to absorb workers and the ease of entry. In the agricultural and services sectors, where entry is arguably the easiest, opportunities may still exist for low skilled work, with some opportunities at the mid-level and high skilled levels. However, the industry sector is likely to offer relatively fewer jobs, especially at the mid to high skill levels owing to the prevailing weakness of industrial capacity in the country.

Table 1: Potential for youth employment across green sectors

	Sector		
	Agriculture	Industry	Services
High skills	Medium to high	Very low	Medium to high
Mid-level skills	Medium to high	Low to medium	Medium to high
Low skills	High	Medium	High

Source: Authors' conceptualisation

This schema suggests that, even in the absence of structural transformation of the economy, it is possible for countries to generate green jobs that align with the skills set that young people possess. It is, therefore, important to understand what kinds of career aspirations young people have and how green jobs feature in such aspirations, an aspect that is addressed in Section 3 of this report.

2. Research design and methodology

The purpose of this research was to investigate and understand the aspirations of young people's career pathways, including in green jobs, and the availability and possibilities for green job creation with, and for, young people. The research was co-designed with young people from diverse backgrounds, both as research partners and respondents. A team of six Ghanaian youth researchers formed a key part of the research team and participated in data collection, analysis and writing.

Primary qualitative data was collected from youth participants using four different methods: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Journey Pathway Mapping (JPM), a WhatsApp platform, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Data collection took place between 11 July and 5 September 2024. The FGDs and JPMs took place in church halls, community centres, conference rooms, and in convenient locations requested by the participants or the community mobilizers who located respondents for the research e.g. under shady trees. Key informant interviews were usually in the office or virtually, depending on the availability and preference of the respondent.

Four districts/municipalities were purposely selected for data collection: Bole, Kintampo North, Komenda Edna Equafo Abirem (KEEA), and Okaikwei North. These locations are spread across the three main agro-ecological zones in Ghana, namely coastal (KEEA and Okaikwei North), forest (Kintampo North),⁴ and savannah (Bole). The agro-ecological criteria for district selection were informed by the assumption that the different ecological conditions might demand different kinds of green jobs. Four FGDs were conducted in each location, except KEEA, where three were conducted. At KEEA, the team was unable to assemble enough FGD participants for one of the categories - women in non-green jobs. Figure 3 shows a map of the districts in which the research was carried out and Table 2 shows the number of FGDs in each of the four locations.⁵

Participants in the FGDs were selected using a maximum variation sampling approach according to the objectives of the study. Specifically, the criteria used were as follows:

- Young women with experience or currently involved in green jobs
- Young women with no experience in green jobs
- Young men with experience or currently involved in green jobs
- Young men with no experience in green jobs

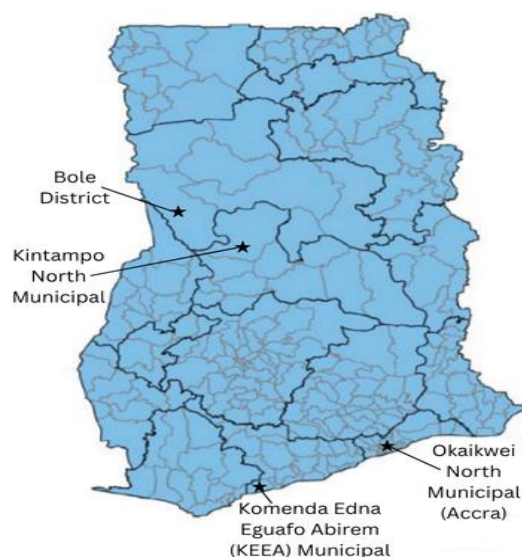
Community mobilisers supported participant recruitment using the above criteria, identifying potential candidates who were then shortlisted through a screening process to ensure a balanced representation of gender, persons with disabilities, and the different categories of respondents required for the interviews. Community mobilisers included CAMFED Association (CAMA) members, youth group leaders, and community or opinion leaders such as assembly men and women and traditional leaders.

Before the start of the FGD, recruited participants were again asked to fill a short demographic survey as part of a second screening process. The FGDs were conducted by the youth researchers using a semi-structured discussion guide. All sessions were recorded with permission from participants and detailed notes were taken by a member of the research team.

⁴ [Kintampo North is located within a transitional area between forest and savannah regions.](#)

⁵ [For the full list of FGD participants see Appendix 2.](#)

Figure 3: Map of Ghana depicting the research regions and districts



Source: Author

Table 2: Sample distribution of participants

District	Focus Group Discussion		Journey Pathway Mapping	
	Number of FGDs	Number of participants	Number of JPM sessions in total	Number of participants from all sessions
Komenda Edna Eguafo Abirem (KEEA) Municipal	3	23	4	16
Bole District	4	33	4	19
Kintampo North Municipal	4	40	2	8
Okaikwei North Municipal (Accra)	4	21	4	18
Total	15	117	14	61

Source: Field data

The focus groups included a diverse group of young men and women living in rural and urban settings, including persons living with disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds. Table 3 presents the socio-demographic profile of 117 respondents who participated in the FGD. The sample included a nearly equal distribution of male (49.6 percent) and female (50.4 percent) participants, ensuring gender balance in the perspectives gathered.

In terms of educational attainment, most respondents (65.8 percent) had up to secondary school-level education, while 30.8 percent were current university students or had completed university. A small proportion (3.4 percent) reported having no formal education.

Regarding employment status, a significant majority (92.3 percent) were currently employed,⁶ with only 7.6 percent not in employment at the time of the survey, suggesting that most of the youth involved in the discussions were economically active at the time of the survey.

Table 3: Descriptive summary of FGD participants

Variable		Number	Percent
Gender	Male	58	49.6
	Female	59	50.4
Level of education	No education	4	3.4
	Up to secondary	77	65.8
	University student	36	30.8
	Completed university		
Employment status	Currently employed	108	92.3
	Not currently employed	9	7.6

Source: Field data

The respondents were spread across various sectors, with a strong presence in agriculture and small-scale service activities. The most frequently reported occupation was farming, with 26 participants.⁷ This underscores the continued relevance of agriculture as a primary source of livelihood, especially among participants likely based in rural or peri-urban communities. Several respondents were employed in service-based jobs such as hairdressing and catering, as well as skilled trades like carpentry, tiling, electrician work, and fashion designing.

The study employed Journey Pathway Mapping (JPM), a qualitative participatory technique which allows students and young people to express themselves through drawing complemented with conversation to explain the drawings. The JPM was conducted with selected young women and men from amongst the FGD participants, who were willing and available to share their experiences of or perspectives on green jobs. Four to five participants of each FGD group/cohort volunteered to participate in the JPM.

In addition, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with a total of 29 participants, as detailed in Table 4. The structured guide for the KIIs was designed to elicit information on the opportunities for green jobs in Ghana, the barriers that young people face in accessing such jobs, and the policies and programmes that have been formulated over the years to address youth employment and climate related issues. The KIIs employed a maximum variation sampling approach to capture as much as possible the perspectives of a broad range of the key stakeholders involved in both the youth employment and the climate and green economy sectors. See Appendix 3 for the qualitative tools used in this research.

⁶ Participants were asked the question; “Are you currently employed or engaged in any economic activity”?

⁷ Participants are engaged in a range of agricultural activities, including crop cultivation, livestock rearing, as well as fish farming.

Table 4: Categories of organisations interviewed

Category of organisation	Number
Government ministries and agencies	11
Academia and research institutes	2
Media	1
Private sector	11
NGOs and CSOs	2
Development partners	2
Total	29

Source: Author

Most key informants were interviewed in person at their respective organisations, but a few were interviewed virtually, via MS-Teams or Zoom, due to their unavailability for an in-person meeting. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes on average and was recorded with the consent of the participants. The recordings were manually transcribed by the youth researchers, who also validated the transcripts by listening to randomly selected audio recordings whilst reading the transcripts and checking for missing or inaccurate content to ensure accuracy and reliability of data. Analysis of the transcripts was carried out using the thematic analysis approach outlined in Attride-Stirling (2001) and Braun and Clarke (2019). Thus, the data was largely analysed using inductive codes in line with the constructivist paradigm of the study, the goal of which is to make meaning out of the data by searching for patterns and emergent themes from these patterns. Specifically, the analysis followed the six steps outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006), namely:

- Familiarising oneself with the data
- Generating initial codes
- Identifying themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Writing the research report

After familiarisation with the data, the analysis continued with researchers attaching labels (codes) to meaningful segments or quotations from the transcripts. Most of the codes emerged organically from the data but a few were derived from the research objectives. To make this step more manageable, a simple table was created in Microsoft Excel that includes for each code, the corresponding quotations and transcripts. After this step, similar codes were categorised and re-categorised as emerging themes were identified, reflected upon, modified, discarded, or further elaborated. The structure of the findings section below broadly corresponds to the themes that emerged from the analysis.

Ethical considerations

Ethical and safeguarding research protocols and best practices as governed by CAMFED’s Child Protection Policy and the University of Ghana’s Research Ethics Policy were adhered to during the implementation of this research. An informed consent process of all respondents was undertaken. The consent process included outlining briefly the reasons for the research

and the issues and questions to be covered during the interview/discussion. The respondent was given the right to refuse to participate and withdraw at any time during the process. A safe space and an appropriate time were identified for the interview / discussion to ensure confidentiality and minimal disruption to the lives of respondents. Respondents were also assured that their responses will remain anonymous, and they would not be identified in the report.

The findings of this research, however, must be read in light of some limitations. The study employed a qualitative research approach that provides a deeper understanding of the lived reality of the Ghanaian youth. The study prioritised the experiences and voices of socially and economically marginalised young people. This means that the sample was not selected to be representative of the youth population. Secondly, although the research investigated the aspirations of Ghanaian youth from disadvantaged backgrounds including some young people with disabilities, the voices of persons living with disabilities were not sufficiently captured. Persons living with disabilities experience significant marginalisation and, consequently, an insufficient engagement with this demographic group in this research may limit the validity of the findings for this group of young people.

3. Key comparative Journey Pathway Mapping insights

The youth who took part in the JPM for this research initially engaged in a discussion that explored their understanding of green jobs, as well as their career pathways - whether in green jobs or other fields. Young people were given ample room and time for open debates and discussions to ensure that the participants were able to produce a detailed JPM of their career journey and aspirations for their future career. The JPM allowed them to reflect on their lives, including their experiences related to work, and to reflect on the challenges they had faced and the people or events that helped them overcome these challenges.

The JPM case studies highlight contrasting but equally instructive stories of young people working in green and non-green sectors. The four case studies, two in green jobs and two in non-green jobs, offer valuable insights into how young people navigate employment pathways, respond to structural barriers, and tap into personal and community assets to build meaningful livelihoods. A comparison across their journeys underscores key differences in motivation, enablers, and challenges.

The youth in green jobs sectors are often driven by a dual-purpose: economic viability and environmental impact. Their trajectories tend to be innovation-led and often involve transitions from formal or academic backgrounds into green entrepreneurship. Non-green jobs actors tend to be grounded in livelihood resilience and survival entrepreneurship, motivated by community impact or necessity, especially for marginalized individuals.

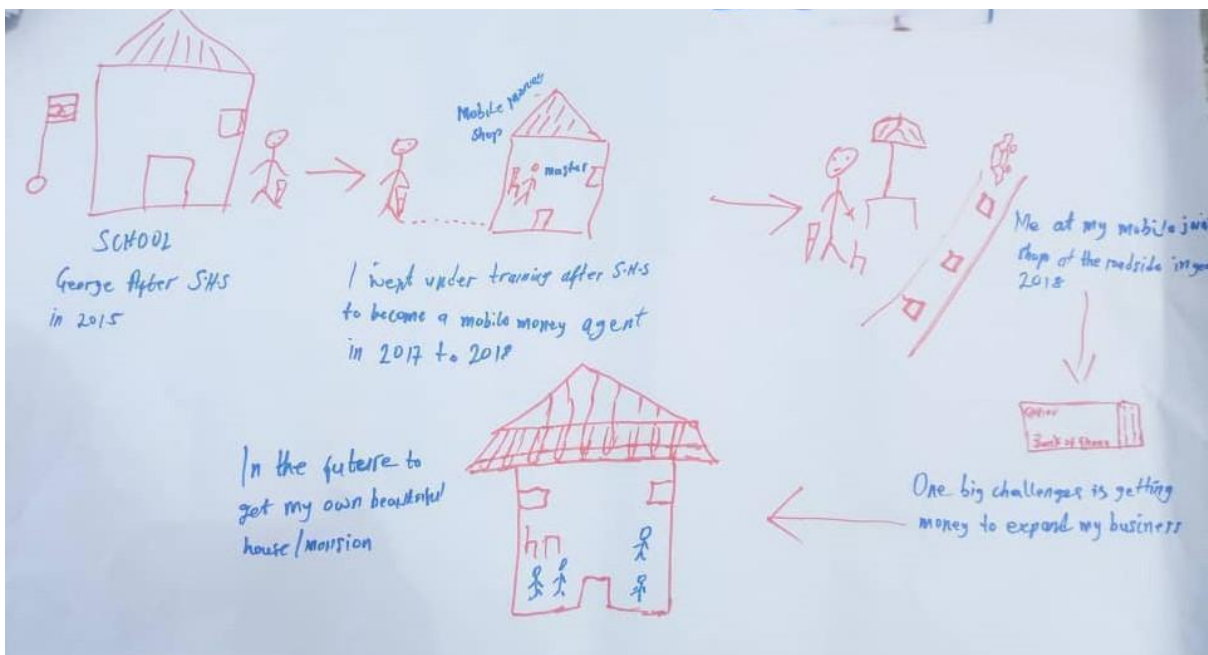
Many of the challenges faced by young people are common to green and other jobs. However, there are some differences. Green entrepreneurs in particular face systemic and market-level constraints, as the regulatory environment for green jobs is still evolving and is unable to fully support large scale growth in this sector. This is reflected in the fragmented policy environment and lack of funding for certain sub-sectors. In addition, many young entrepreneurs across various sub-sectors struggle with basic capital access and social

acceptance, especially women and young people living with disabilities and gendered professions.

Peer influence, informal mentorship, and self-drive are recurring enablers across both categories, though structural enablers (policy, regulation, financial support) appear more vital yet lacking, especially in the green jobs sector.

The JPM helped the researchers to understand young people’s experiences from their own perspectives, and to gain insights into their priorities, motivations and needs around work in general and green jobs in particular. An inspirational JPM from a youth with disabilities in Figure 4 below demonstrates personal resilience in overcoming obstacles to employment.

Figure 4: Case study 1 - Journey Pathway Mapping



GE is a young man whose journey of resilience exemplifies strength in the face of physical disability. Initially born without disability, his life changed when he contracted polio, resulting in a permanent mobility impairment. GE completed his senior high school education in 2015 and pursued additional training in small business management from 2017 to 2018, equipping himself with valuable skills. However, the path to financial independence proved challenging, as employment opportunities were limited, especially for persons with disabilities. Determined to create his own path, GE established himself as a Mobile Money Agent in his community in 2017, operating his business by the roadside with unwavering commitment.

Despite significant obstacles, especially in securing capital to grow his business, GE remains optimistic about his future. He aspires to create employment for others and build a home as a testament to his resilience (See Figure 4).

4. WhatsApp platform

The WhatsApp platform, established in late September 2024, attracted 32 youth participants from the FGD participants, (16 males and 16 females). These youth participants represent diverse backgrounds and involvement in both green and non-green jobs. Between November and mid-December, research assistants engaged these participants by posing targeted questions designed to gather additional insights, address gaps in field data, and validate previously collected information. The targeted questions included:

1. What do you think a green job is? Can you share an example of a job that helps the environment?
2. How can green jobs contribute to solving climate issues and creating a better future?
3. What changes in your community or environment make you think about climate change?
4. In your opinion, what role can young people play in combatting climate change?
5. What challenges or obstacles have you faced in pursuing your dream career?
6. What do you think prevents young people from pursuing careers in climate-related fields?
7. What skills or knowledge do you think are necessary to work in climate-related fields?
8. How important is making a positive impact on the environment in your career choices?

The key findings from these WhatsApp discussions focused on green jobs, climate change, career aspirations, and the challenges young people face in pursuing climate-related careers.

Participants (majority women) described green jobs as roles aimed at environmental preservation, sustainability, and pollution reduction. These jobs span sectors like renewable energy, construction and manufacturing, including roles such as solar panel installers and environmental scientists. Participants explained how green jobs can contribute to addressing climate issues by reducing carbon emissions, conserving resources, and promoting public health while fostering climate resilience.

Participants (majority women) identified key indicators of climate change, including rising temperatures, unpredictable weather, droughts, and floods. These environmental changes have disrupted farming, caused water scarcity, reduced biodiversity, and exacerbated air pollution, highlighting the pressing need for sustainable solutions.

Participants highlighted several challenges to pursuing their career dreams (not specifically in relation to green jobs) including limited mentorship, networking, and funding opportunities. Support from family, role models, and self-motivation were noted as critical drivers for success.

Young people stated that they face general barriers to jobs such as lack of awareness about opportunities, limited environmental education, and misconceptions about job stability. Overcoming these obstacles requires climate education integration, awareness campaigns,

internships, and skill-building programmes in areas like renewable energy, Geographic Information System (GIS,) and climate policies.

Several of the participants' aspirations for their careers included being engaged in climate activism, education, green entrepreneurship, and sustainable development, driven by a passion for societal impact and environmental preservation.

Lessons from the WhatsApp platform underscored the importance of structured, flexible engagement with young people and the effectiveness of social media as a tool for data collection, despite connectivity challenges. The findings from the WhatsApp platform mirrored those from the FGDs and KIIs, which are further detailed in the next section.

5. Youth career aspirations

Youth participants described a range of career interests that could be grouped into five broad occupational categories, based on responses from young people in the FGDs:

- Agriculture
- Artisanal or skilled trades,
- Positions of social or cultural influence,
- White collar jobs (including those with high technical expertise), and
- Certain green jobs

Table 5 provides further details on these five categories, which are not mutually exclusive but reflect the main characteristics that young people highlighted in describing the jobs they aspired to.

Table 5. Respondents' career aspirations

Category	Job	
	Category	Sub-category
Agriculture and agribusiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 'professional' farmer ● agriprocessing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● cash crop cultivation ● export oriented cultivation
Artisanal or skilled trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● business (unspecified) ● food and beverage production 	<i>of which, artisanal/skilled trades</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● beautician ● fashion designer ● carpenter
Occupations with social or cultural influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● sports (footballer, coach) ● journalist ● politician ● migrate overseas 	
Salaried/ 'white collar' jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● security agencies (army, immigration) ● other security (guarding) ● Human Resource professional roles 	<i>of which, highly skilled professions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● engineer ● cyber-security ● medical professional ● certified safety personnel ● lawyer ● Human Resources

<p>Select green jobs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● sustainability accountant ● professor in climate & sustainability ● waste management professional
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Source: Authors' construction from data

Agriculture and agribusiness

Cash crop cultivation was the main choice for respondents who aspired to careers in agriculture. All those who specified agriculture as a preferred sector, identified cultivation of a cash or export crop, such as cashew or oil palm. It is not surprising that young people would choose cash crops over food crops for consumption in Ghana when thinking of an income-earning activity. Food crop cultivation is critical for food sovereignty and to reduce reliance on food imports that expose the country to shocks in a fractious world food market and during periods of geopolitical turmoil. However, food crop farmers face severe material deprivations and are among the poorest workers in the country (Torvikey et al. 2019). On the other hand, cash crop farmers, especially if they organise their operations on a commercial scale, tend to be economically better off (Dzanku et al. 2024; Yeboah et al. 2023). Many respondents specifically employed the term ‘professional farmer’ when talking about their job aspirations. The use of this term can be interpreted as a direct attempt to distance their aspirations from the widespread ‘cutlass-and-hoe’ image of farming that has become associated with food crop cultivation. Aspirations in agriculture and tree crop farming were mentioned frequently among respondents in the middle and northern parts of the country (Kintampo and Bole), but were mentioned in only one of the southern focus groups (Cape Coast).

Whether based in the north or the south of Ghana, respondents who had this aspiration were already involved in farming in one form or another. However, their goal was ‘professional farming’ or large-scale corporate farming, with some hoping to expand into agro-processing. This was clearly articulated by one respondent aspiring to produce and export oil palm, who stated,

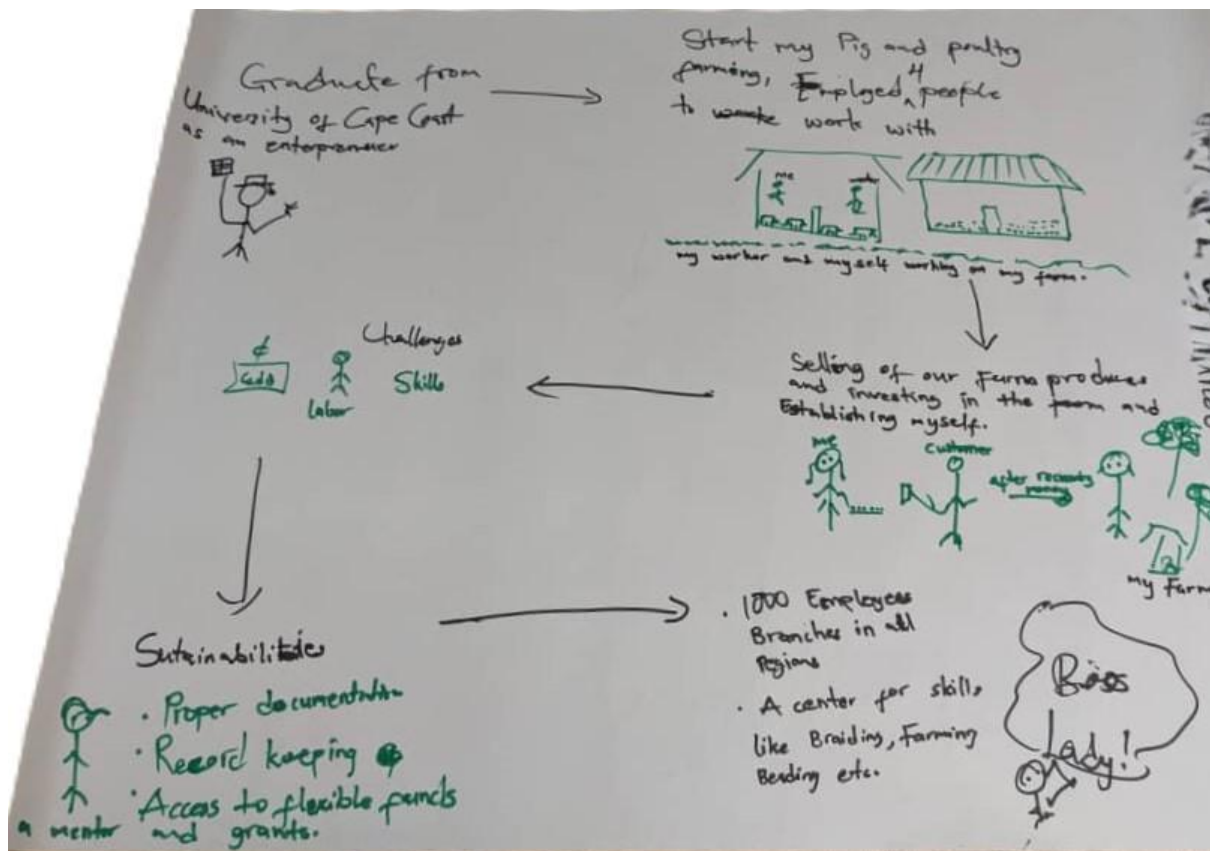
...so, I am into tree crop farming, oil palm. My aim is that in the next five to ten years to come, at least I should have palm land of 400 to 500 acres. And a processing plant to process my produce and export and get money to expand my business (Male FGD, UCC, 18 July 2024).

While some youth focused on traditional farming, others sought to create value through the agro-processing or distribution businesses. These aspirations were often linked to the downstream activities in the agricultural value chain. One FGD participant aspired to be an aggregator who bought produce at the farmgate to ‘[distribute] to other communities’ (Female FGD, Kintampo, 8 August 2024). Most of the other respondents were interested in some form of agro-processing, specifically food and beverage production. Like those with agricultural aspirations, these respondents shared aspirations of large-scale operations. As one FGD participant (Female FGD, Accra, 5 September 2024) said, ‘I want to have my own company, a very massive food production company that will make lots of money.’ Pursuing these aspirations involves leveraging talents, passion, and the ‘power’ of small beginnings, as emphasised by the entrepreneurial attitude of a respondent working as a teacher:

I'm a teacher, but I'm the type who likes to use my hands to do things. I'm just so passionate about it. So I even go to YouTube, look at a meal, come and go and buy the things, come and try it on my own. So out of that, at least for now, I'm able to produce this coated groundnuts in large quantities. I have the machine. So, I'm all that. I just learnt it and the passion that I had. So, I think that passion and the right support (Female FGD, Bole).

An interesting case study from a respondent who participated in the JPM showed evidence of how her career in animal husbandry has led to job creation for others and why she has been an inspiration for entrepreneurs to establish their own businesses.

Figure 5: Case study 2 - Journey Pathway Mapping



As depicted in Figure 5, HW, a determined university graduate, went into animal husbandry establishing her own poultry and piggery business. Her bold venture has not only provided financial stability for herself and her family but also created positive ripple effects in her community, as she is seen by other young women as a role model. She reported that her enterprise has inspired other young women to go into animal husbandry. She highlighted that her success has been a result of both personal factors (self-motivation, a strong can-do attitude) as well as external opportunities, such as access to grants and loans.

Despite her success, HW now faces challenges in securing the funding needed to expand her operations. With the necessary support, HW envisioned a thriving future:

- Expanding her business to employ local youth and stimulating local economic growth.
- Establishing a farm training centre to share knowledge, empower others, and strengthen agricultural skills in the community.
- Becoming a role model in agriculture, inspiring a new generation of "Boss Lady" entrepreneurs.

HW's story illustrates the transformative impact of self-belief, hard work, and visionary leadership in agriculture, highlighting how entrepreneurship can drive meaningful change and economic development.

Artisanal or skilled trade

Another category of aspirations were entrepreneurial ventures unrelated to agriculture. This category was mainly represented by respondents who wanted to pursue artisanal careers or skilled trades in fields that were traditionally gendered. For instance, young women expressed interest in careers in fashion and beauty (e.g. seamstress and beautician) while carpentry was a choice expressed by some male respondents. In the cases of these aspirations of more modest scope, their goals were self-employment or sole proprietorship. While passion was important for some, for most the entrepreneurial ambition grew out of the need to escape the hardships associated with their current jobs, such as farming:

I'm a farmer but I want to become a seamstress due to the unfavourable conditions in farming. So, farming is something that I will do to attach to my dream job being a seamstress (Female FGD, Kintampo, 8 August 2024).

Occupations with social or cultural influence

The third category of aspirations related to careers whose occupants could wield some form of cultural or social influence, either because the office itself is imbued with authority, or because the roles are socially valued. Political office was an obvious one. One FGD participant who, in addition to farming, was a district-level political party operative, expressed a desire to contest for the national organiser position of the political party (Male FGD, Kintampo, 6 August 2024). For others, the aspiration was for the influence that comes through stardom rather than through political power. These stardom careers were those that enjoyed high social visibility and some glamour; some careers that respondents mentioned included professional sports (e.g. football star and coach) and journalism.⁸

Even those who aspired to careers that were not traditionally associated with glamour still hoped that it would gain them social recognition. For example, a farmer and church organist who hoped that *'in the next five years people will be coming for training at my studio'* (Male FGD, UCC, 18 July 2024). Some whose current socio-economic situation ruled out a high social standing sought to pursue this overseas, as one respondent voiced: *'I want to go to Canada, so I have to look for money through my farming and I will... it will help me get*

⁸ While journalism is generally low-paying and non-glamorous, Ghanaian journalists who rise to the highest levels, often called 'senior journalists', enjoy considerable prestige and economic comfort.

money to travel to Canada' (Male FGD, Kintampo, 6 August 2024).

White collar/salaried work

The fourth category of aspired occupations were salaried, white-collar jobs. These included a diverse collection of occupations with the only common denominator being that they were salaried roles in formal public or private organisations. Many respondents, both males and females, expressed interest in jobs in the security agencies. The specific agencies included the army and immigration services, but there was also interest in emerging specialisations like cybersecurity. Many of the jobs aspired to in this category were technical in nature, requiring specialised expertise and advanced educational qualifications. These included human resource management,⁹ engineering, and a variety of medical professions nursing and clinical psychology. The jobs in this category commanded enormous social prestige but, in contrast to the third category, the reputation was inherent in the occupation itself, rather than its social visibility or cultural cachet.

Green jobs

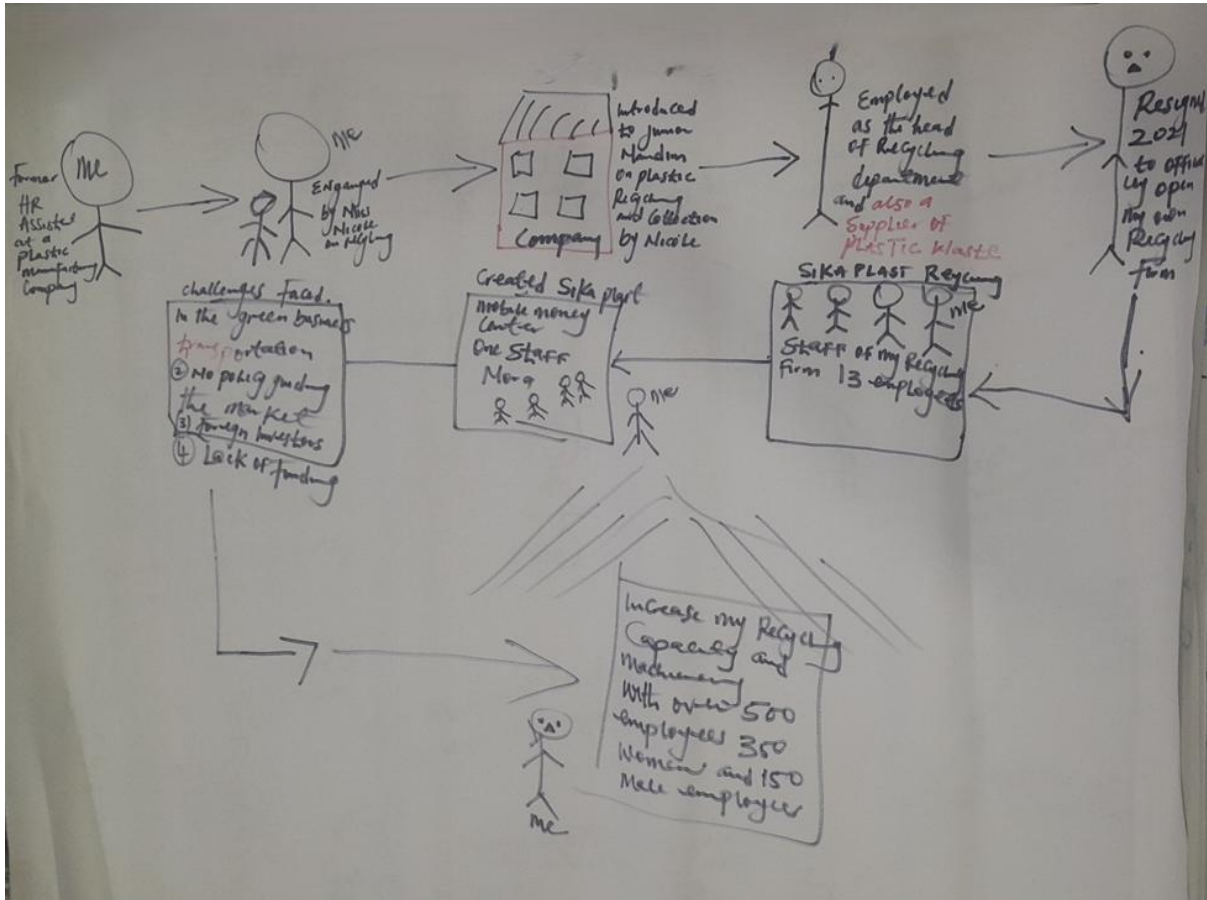
The final aspirational category was one that the respondents defined as green jobs.¹⁰ Notably, the green jobs that respondents aspired to had similar characteristics to those in the fourth category; they were highly technical jobs, enjoyed considerable prestige, and were higher salaried occupations. The distinction was that they were specifically identified or described as 'green'. Jobs in this category included academic careers in climate or sustainability-related fields, waste management consultancy, and related expertise. One student expressed the desire to establish a recycling company that would employ a large number of young people (FGD with MIGJ).

The aspiration to higher salaried green jobs was illustrated by the story of a JPM respondent who navigated challenges to achieve his aspirations and establish himself as the owner of a recycling company:

⁹ This respondent had acquired the relevant degrees and had high ambition: 'my intention was to become an effective HR with the highest qualification or kind of great'. However, he eventually shifted to another field due to a combination of personal challenges and emerging opportunities at work (Male FGD, Accra, 2 September 2024).

¹⁰ This is an artificial category since it is not analytically distinct from the four preceding categories; however, we have decided to set it apart as its own category because of the objectives of this study.

Figure 6: Case study 3 - Journey Pathway Mapping



As illustrated in Figure 6, JP began his professional journey as a Human Resources associate at a plastic manufacturing company. Though the role provided stability, it was a chance encounter with a friend that set him on a new path, one that aligned more closely with his passion and purpose. His friend, Nicole, introduced him to the world of recycling, connecting him with a recycling company where he was soon appointed head of the recycling department, and he also served as a plastic waste supplier to the company. This role opened JP's eyes to the potential of the circular economy and deepened his understanding of the recycling value chain.

Driven by an entrepreneurial spirit and a desire to make a bigger impact, JP resigned from his formal job and launched his own venture. What started as a small operation with just one employee at the plastic recycling centre has grown into a beacon of innovation and hope in the recycling industry, now having 13 employees. Nonetheless, JP's journey has not been without challenges. He has had to navigate limited transportation options, insufficient regulatory support, stiff competition from foreign-owned firms, and chronic underfunding. Looking to the future, JP aims to expand the company's recycling capacity, modernise its equipment and create work for others. He sees his mission as empowering communities, protecting the environment, and leading the way toward a more sustainable and inclusive green economy in Ghana.

This case study highlights the fact that respondents aspiring to jobs in the green sector have

similar aspirations to those seeking non-green jobs, namely a desire for employment that is financially rewarding, and which offers them a meaningful place in society.

Awareness of and aspirations for green jobs

Participants were aware of a much wider range of green jobs than those they aspired to. The green jobs that were mentioned by participants included afforestation efforts by farmers, forest protection by forest guards, environmental education by teachers, and advocacy and awareness campaigns led by broadcasters, community engagement specialists, and sanitation workers, including street sweepers and waste collectors. Those they mentioned that required technical expertise and training included meteorologists, responsible mining professionals, firefighters, recycling experts, climate activists, and drainage construction experts.

The wide range of green job opportunities was also echoed in the responses of the key informants, who noted that green jobs could be found across the three core sectors of Ghana's economy (agriculture, industry, and services), as well as in areas of the economy specifically devoted to environmental sustainability. In the agricultural sector, key informants highlighted the adoption of sustainable farming practices as some of the activities in the agriculture sector that help to preserve the environment. For instance, one mentioned climate smart agriculture and use of technologies such as drip irrigation (KII, government research agency, 18 July 2024). In the services sector, opportunities identified included ecotourism and the use of digital platforms to deliver a range of services including healthcare and advertising (KII, academic institution, 29 August 2024).

However, as noted above, young people's green career aspirations clustered around white collar jobs and highly technical and well-paid jobs. Notably absent were aspirations for jobs in the industrial or manufacturing sector. This is partly a reflection of the weakness of the sector which has suffered de-industrialisation following the implementation of the structural adjustment programme in the 1980s (Opoku 2010).

The social rootedness of youth career aspirations

Youth career aspirations are simultaneously personal and social, reflecting the interplay between individual interests and backgrounds with the broader societal contexts within which they are situated, and within which aspirations are pursued. Career preferences, while often a reflection of individual interests, are not impervious to social influences. For instance, while some respondents were drawn by the aesthetic appeal of certain professions, this attraction was also rooted in a social context:

Growing up, I always admired those who sew clothes. So, after going through school for a while I concluded I wanted to do that (Female FGD, Kintampo, 4 August 2024).

Uhm, my dream was to be a nurse. Because of the uniform, I just admire the uniform. So, after completing the SHS (Senior High School), I went to nursing school... (Female

FGD, Accra, 5 September 2024).¹¹

As is well established in the literature, families play an important role in young people's work choices, necessitating a careful negotiation between individual predispositions or interest and those of close social relations (Akosah-Twumasi et al. 2018; Akosah-Twumasi et al. 2021; Palos and Drobot 2010). In some cases, it could take the form of heavy-handed parental imposition. While some of the young people in the study had learned to embrace such impositions after initial resistance (*'I didn't like it at first, but I've grown to accept it'* – Female FGD, Accra, 5 September 2024), for others it became a source of deep-seated and long-term resentment:

From nursery, they should start looking at the kids. What is this one interested in? Then they [should] start training them from there. Because when I started schooling, I always knew I wanted to be in the media space. Like, even- I don't want to face the camera, I want to dress people, I want to see people [looking] nice, style people, and show them to the world. But then nobody even saw that! My dad was like, 'You have to do- You have to be a midwife.' He took me to secondary school, chose science for me, and I did it for one year [but had to change mid-way]. Wow! Because I couldn't cope with the E-math, the biology, the chemistry, the physics (Female FGD, Accra, 5 September 2024).

However, the role of parents and other family members was not always prescriptive. For the respondents for whom this was the case, they described having been 'encouraged' by close family relations to consider a particular career path. Their eventual decision to take the suggested path – in all cases, these were in agriculture – was a result of having been persuaded rather than a sense of compulsion. Sometimes, it was not even necessary to 'convince' them because the social context of their upbringing exposed them to these careers, as is illustrated by one young woman who wanted to go into farming: *'My father has received the best farmer [award] three consecutive times in this community'* (Female FGD, Kintampo, 8 August 2024).

Beyond individual motivations and close-knit social circles, career aspirations were also shaped by deeply held social commitments. For respondents whose aspirations did not collide with family imposition, they framed their career choices as vehicles through which they could pursue causes that they cared about. Some of these causes have arisen out of life transforming experiences, such as one respondent who had developed a passion for the medical sciences after her mother died of cancer: *'I want to help save women with cancer'* (Female FGD, Accra).

Other motivating causes were 'purely altruistic' in the sense that they are not the result of personal experiences, tragedy or otherwise. Many of these were quasi-philanthropic in nature. For example, two FGD participants in Accra each wanted to pursue careers in agro-processing because one was motivated by the desire to create jobs for economically marginalised women while the other wanted to contribute towards the alleviation of rural poverty by providing farmers with a secure market, thereby reducing post-harvest losses

¹¹As this quotation suggests, the relationship between aspirations and eventual career is not linear, a point to which we return to later in the report.

(Female FGD, Accra, 5 September 2024).

For those who aspired to careers in green jobs, the main social cause motivating them was a passion to protect the environment as explained by one respondent:

So, for me I think my goal is to promote... My main aim is to help safeguard the environment. Because if every place is polluted, I don't feel like, eh – we will all not be safe. So that's how I come about it. So, for me I keep striving for people to also have their own ends meet, so that most of the burden does not fall on only one individual. We have to protect the environment because without the environment, we are not there (Male FGD, Accra, 2 September).

Some respondents voiced their concern about plastic pollution in their surroundings while others had developed this social commitment after getting exposed to the potential social and political destabilisation that could ensue if the threat of climate change is not addressed quickly (Female FGD, Accra). These factors are not mutually exclusive. For some respondents, their aspirations related to both philanthropic and climate-conscious objectives.

The research highlighted lessons that can be drawn from young people's career aspirations in general and aspirations for green jobs in particular. Beyond the imperative of material livelihoods, they indicated the important roles that work plays in social life. This is not unique to Ghana or Africa. Indeed, the central insight in the literature on organisations and work is the role that work plays in social relations and giving individuals a sense of place in society (Brown 2015; Darkwah 2007). For the young people in our study, their aspirations displayed a desire for jobs that would enable them to play meaningful roles as members of society. This can be seen in the importance that prestige and social commitments played in their conception of a desirable career.

Furthermore, these aspirations reflected the trade-offs that young people must make as they negotiated the tensions between their socioeconomic realities and the socially meaningful careers to which most of them aspired. As detailed in the following sections, young people's ability to pursue – rather than attaining – their aspirations are constrained by their material and social realities. The material conditions of the study participants differed considerably, spanning agrarian livelihoods, urban informal employment, and access to higher education and the formal labour market. The ability to attain the middle-class aspirations that most respondents wished for were closely tied to variations in these material conditions.

6. Turning points in the aspiration-career pathway

For most young people, the aspiration-career pathway was not a linear trajectory. Moreover, the direction they took and the speed with which they proceeded differed considerably according to individual circumstances. Based on data from the study, we outline three crucial turning points in the aspiration-career pathway, namely:

- Obtaining education or training
- Exploring opportunities in the sector of interest

- Negotiating obstacles and making trade-offs

For the young people in this research, education – whether in the form of an academic pursuit, vocational training, technical training, or apprenticeship – was a core aspect of the aspiration-career pathway. Where the aspiration required advanced training, some were planning to pursue postgraduate studies after completing their degree programmes. Acquiring education or training was not limited to the physical confines of the training institutions. Many respondents proactively took advantage of opportunities to learn more or increase their expertise in the careers to which they aspired. For example, an aspiring seamstress liked to *'look at those working, and learning from them'* (Female FGD, Kintampo, 4 August 2024).

Another turning point involved proactively exploring opportunities that could be exploited in pursuit of career aspirations. These actions took multiple forms, including continuous learning, building networks with industry players, and exploring what new opportunities were emerging in the field. A young woman pursuing a career in the food and beverage industry has made it a practice to *'go to YouTube, look at a meal, come and go and buy the things, and come and try it on my own'* (Female FGD, Bole). For those at the university, their strategies included undertaking internships in the field of interest or closely paying attention to how the profession is practiced. A young woman aspiring to be a lawyer said she had been *'visiting the courts, the district courts... just to hear them speak'* (Female FGD, Accra, 5 September 2024).

Finally, young people were often compelled to make trade-offs as they navigated their aspiration-career pathway. Material hardship was an important factor necessitating trade-offs, but issues like academic challenges and pressure from family also posed key obstacles. This could result in a career diversion, ranging from short-term to permanent. Many of the respondents in this situation anticipated getting back on track, while others were still actively pursuing their aspiration while holding down a day job. As one respondent explained *'I made up my mind to learn a skill... [but] I work on another job to earn money and I am looking forward to what God will do'* (Female FGD, Kintampo, 4 August 2024).

Young people who had green career aspirations also encountered the same set of challenges, but their aspiration-career trajectory displayed distinctive characteristics. This was largely due to the fact that the jobs to which they aspired belonged to the category that required special expertise and advanced educational qualifications.

As such, almost all the respondents who aspired to green jobs had pathways that included plans to pursue at least a master's degree. In preparation for this, many were also involved in climate- or environmentally related student associations at the university and sought spaces or events that could propel them in their career path:

Okay, so for me, apart from my educational prospects, there are other scholarships I usually join, like for short courses, basically things that are geared towards women, the gender... women, anything that has to do with women, I find myself there (Female FGD, Accra).

Networking and seeking out mentorship opportunities was another key area in the

aspiration-career trajectory of respondents with aspirations for green jobs. In this regard, student associations served as a crucial bridge in the transition from campus to the world of work by exposing members to key spaces and networks. As one young man aspiring to become a sustainability accountant observed:

...after school we are not ending there. We have a national page. So even [if I'm] not in UCC, I'll still join the national page.... Then we'll look more into the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals], because what we are all doing... clean ocean, clean ocean – it's all about sustainability and climate change (Male FGD, Cape Coast, 18 July 2024).

The aspiration-career trajectory manifests the tensions between individual agency and the opportunities and resources that shape the scope of action. The interplay of these factors shows that far from being fixed destinations, career aspirations evolve as young people navigate their motivations or passions and the roadblocks that they may encounter in pursuit of their aspirations.

7. Challenges with the aspiration-career pathway

Young people often confront a variety of barriers as they navigate the pathway to their desired careers. These barriers can be found at any stage of the aspirational journey, and for some people, it could occur at the very young and impressionable age when career aspirations are just beginning to emerge and require nurturing and care the most. For the young people in our study, the barriers that they have encountered or anticipate encountering as they pursue their aspirations fall into four broad categories, namely:

- Lack of a supportive environment/ stigma
- Education and training
- Self-employment related barriers
- Gender-based barriers

These barriers are analytically distinct but not mutually exclusive. For example, a structural constraint such as inflation could exacerbate barriers relating to self-employment. And challenges relating to lack of career guidance could arise from lack of social support from family or close relations and could also have a gendered aspect linked to harmful norms.

Unsupportive environment

The research evidence showed that young people were often confronted with an environment that was not supportive of the pursuit of their aspirations and could in some instances actively undermine such aspirations. Lack of support came in different forms, including lack of encouragement from close relations or friends. In extreme cases, some young people encountered discouragement from the very people they had hoped would be supportive. As one respondent who had such an unpleasant experience with a friend said: *'Naysayers, they can really, really draw you back'* (Female FGD, Accra, 5 September 2024). But discouragement can also come from close family members. A mother told a respondent who wanted to be a fashion designer that *'...she won't use her money to pay for [her fashion*

training course] and would only allow her to go to a government-funded training institution' (Female FGD, Kintampo, 4 August 2024).

Stigma related issues

The stigma attached to manual labour, especially those that take place in unhygienic conditions, also constituted another significant social obstacle. This was particularly the case for those working as frontline waste pickers who had to work at dumpsites or landfills, bringing them into regular contact with all manner of solid waste that exposed them to health hazards. They also encountered disrespect from community members. According to one respondent, the emotional toll on him was so great that he had almost abandoned the work: *'At first, I didn't want to... when I started... I forgot [i.e. eventually decided to ignore] the shame'* (Male FGD, Accra, 2 September 2024).

Key informants from the private sector observed that even though jobs like waste collection are crucial to environmental health, young people are repelled by those jobs because of the perceived indignity of the work as one key informant explained *'Most of the youth see the green industry to be more filthy or dirty and then they don't want to involve themselves in this'* (KII, private recycling plant, 11 July 2024).

The stigma is compounded by the lack of labour protections for frontline sanitation workers. These workers earn notoriously low wages that fall far below the minimum wage. In April 2025, street sweepers working with Zoomlion Ghana Limited, the largest private waste management company contracted by the government, were paid GHS250 (~ \$17) a month (3News 2025). Additionally, most frontline sanitation workers lack access to protective gear, which exposes them to health hazards and make the work undesirable to young people thinking of a career (KII, representative of private sector association, 9 September 2024).

Education and training-related issues

Inadequate or lack of education and training constituted another category of obstacles for young people navigating their career path. One set of education-related challenges concerned inadequate access, which particularly affected marginalised girls and young women, as well as young people living with disabilities. Certain districts in the country lack secondary, vocational, or tertiary educational institutions, which further raises the cost barrier to access education or training. For young people whose families lack the means to afford the extra cost, this situation may lead to either a delay or termination of their education and training. This was a problem identified by participants in the Focus Group Discussions in Kintampo.

However, even where schools do exist, the quality of education and training may not be guaranteed. While assessment of what constitutes quality training may be subjective, for the young people in our study, this may be a serious obstacle if they perceive the schools or training institutions in their regions or districts as inferior in quality. Thus, for a young woman who wants to be a fashion designer, she needs *'to go to Accra to enrol in their big schools in order to learn what I want to learn'* (Female FGD, Kintampo, 4 August 2024). Sometimes, the problem is with specific instructors rather than the entire institution. For instance, a young man undergoing an apprenticeship complained that *'...my master doesn't*

take me along for jobs and he doesn't really teach me anything. Sometimes when he is back, he gives me the leftovers to practise with, which does not help' (Male FGD, Komenda, 17 July 2024).

Another factor deterring the youth in Ghana from engaging in green jobs was the lack of investment in education, skill training, and green technology. Several of our key informants observed that the youth in Ghana currently do not have the requisite skills, education, and training to venture into green jobs in a way that would be transformative for the national economy. According to one respondent who felt that whilst *'you may have the idea, but because you are not really specialised in it, you may need, like, extra skills or extra training to be able to really deliver on what it is that you say you want to do'* (KII, member of youth environmental association, 23 August 2024).

Another aspect of educational barriers related to access to career guidance to help young people decide what type of courses to study or the right kind of training to undergo. Without the right guidance, one respondent mentioned that *'I wasted my energy on other stuff'* that had not contributed to his career path' (Male FGD, UCC, 18 July 2024). Others had also avoided the science-related courses that was their passion out of an ill-conceived fear, *'I really wanted to do Science when I was in SHS but feared elective maths so much that I did General Arts [instead]'* (Female FGD, Accra, 5 September 2024).

Barriers to self-employment and entrepreneurship

Young people whose pursuit of their career aspirations take them down the path of self-employment reported they had to contend with the entrepreneurial challenges of starting and running a business. Financial constraints were a recurring theme among these respondents. Formal credit was not easily accessible, especially for women in small-scale enterprises who tended to be averse to the perceived and actual risks of bank loans (Ackah et al. 2024). Women who apply for bank loans often report experiencing unequal treatment, noting that *'they don't give women that high amount of money' as they do with men'* (Female FGD, Accra).

Key informants across government ministries and agencies, private sector, academia, and NGOs indicated that financial challenges could hinder the adoption of green jobs among the youth in Ghana. Difficulty in accessing loans and high interest rates make the initial cost of capital a huge challenge for start-ups. As one respondent explained:

If even the financial institution is willing to give you the money even without the collateral... Let's put the collateral aside. You'll have to pay the cost, the interest rate. Currently as we speak, the cost of capital is not less than 30%. Some pay as high as 36 percent. Which business are you going to do in Ghana here to make a profit of over 36 percent for you to be able to service your loan and also make some return? (KII, government ministry, 14 August 2024).

Some respondents also believed that the relatively higher prices charged on green products such as organic fertilisers, electric vehicles, etc. deter the youth from starting businesses that require the use of these products. This aligns with a study by Gerhardt et al. (2020) that revealed that sustainable products are an average of 75-85 percent more expensive than

the price of conventional products. This is because usually businesses that offer eco-friendly products pay extra costs in the process of production and manufacturing, as well as eco certification, hence affecting the final price of such products. This therefore creates a green gap where customers' intention does not match their actions (Gerhardt et al. 2020).

Another barrier related to the complicated or time-consuming administrative procedures regarding registration of businesses or acquisition of permits. As a manager of a waste recycling plant explained:

When you want to acquire permits, it takes a whole lot of procedures for you to go through the permits. When you want to relocate, you have to get a new permit. Even getting somebody to come and even inspect your place is another challenge (Male FGD, Accra, 2 September 2024).

Green jobs are not standard jobs and even though we have policies for them, the policies are not thorough and the lack of efficiency in our system. So, registering green businesses is, you face a lot of hurdles. You have to register with the Environmental Protection Agency, you have to register with Ghana Standards Board, you have to register sometimes with the Food and Drugs Authority. You have to register with so many regulatory bodies when you could actually centralise this at one place and make it a one stop shop (KII, journalist, 9 July 2024).

However, problems can also arise when regulations are limited or totally absent. Another respondent engaged in plastic waste collection identified this as a problem:

The market is not regulated. There's no rules, there's no body guiding, there's no policy guiding the collection of plastic or the recycling thing. So, any player can just come from anywhere, set their own price, do their own thing and leave the scene, then it becomes a problem for people who are consistent in the business (Male FGD, Accra, 2 September 2024).

After the initial hurdles were cleared and a business was up and running, different sets of setbacks had to be tackled. These mainly applied to respondents in the sample who were involved in farming. One of the main barriers they faced was lack of access to productivity-enhancing machinery or equipment. In the absence of machinery, those who could afford it resorted to hired labour to tend their farms. However, management of farm labourers could be difficult because of the lack of clear boundaries between social and employment relations. As one respondent recounted, after having already paid someone to work on his farm, he was told that he could not 'expect his elder to come and work' on his farm (Male FGD, UCC, 18 July 2024).

Gender-related barriers

In addition to the barriers outlined above, young women face further challenges. In many parts of the country, the persistence of patriarchal norms restricts women's opportunities for full economic participation. For instance, a respondent said it was conceivable that after getting married, 'my husband might stop me from learning fashion, preventing me from achieving my dream' (Female FGD, Kintampo, 4 August 2024). Women who exercise

oversight over men also reportedly face hostility: *'I had men working under me and they were stubborn. The emotional turmoil these people put me through almost made me give up'* (Female FGD, Accra).

Romantic relationships and marriage can come with career risks for women. If the relationship is *'toxic'*, it can *'draw you back, it will frustrate you'* (Female FGD, Accra, 5 September 2024). For example, without the right support, pregnancy or marriage may slow down a woman's career or even take her out of work altogether (Female FGD, Kintampo, 4 August 2024). Finally, the problem of sexual harassment was one that young women constantly confronted:

Sometimes you meet a man, they are like, why do you want to do this? Then out of the blue, they want to start with something like sexual advances. Sometimes you are there in your head, there's nothing in your head. You haven't dressed in any provocative way, you haven't done anything. Then out of the blue, they just want to approach you with that (Female FGD, Accra).

8. Opportunities and support systems

In our study, the key informants pointed out various opportunities available in Ghana for the youth who want to transition to the green economy. These included:

- Availability of resources and inputs
- Green training and skills development
- Green funding
- Availability of green occupations

The first opportunity, cited mainly by key informants from the government agencies and the private sector, were the resources available to young people in Ghana in the form of organic and plastic waste, sunshine, arable land, etc.

Look at the number of the plastic waste that we have. The waste management company, they are coming, they are mushrooming, but still the waste is there. We have a lot of opportunities to processing waste, even waste to energy into circular economy models (KII, representative of international organisation, 26 August 2024).

Some of the key informants highlighted that the availability of abundant sunshine and arable lands in Ghana provides an avenue for jobs in the solar energy industry and the sustainable agriculture sector, respectively. Additionally, others believed that the youth could transform the abundant organic and inorganic waste in Ghana to energy or convert the available waste plastics into various useful products.

I know some youth who have put their resources together and they are into biogas production in schools and hotels...They write proposals to them that they can convert their waste into biogas for them (KII, government agencies, 29 July 2024).

Agbefu et al. (2025) argue that waste is now an opportunity for innovation, transformation and empowerment. In their study, the students segregated the waste and used the

toward a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable future.

The second opportunity most key informants from our study cited was the available training and skill development for people interested in the green sector. Green training is expected to equip individuals with the knowledge needed for a successful contribution to environmental preservation. Such training comes from various stakeholders. In addition to government agencies and the local private sector, *'the opportunities [also] come from international NGOs or the other civil society organisations themselves. So, they organise training, they organise capacity building'* (KII, member of youth environmental group, 23 August 2024).

Several key informants observed that there are funds available to support people and institutions that want to engage in the green sector.

Just yesterday I had a meeting with an officer from GIZ, a German Development Bank who is willing to finance initiatives that will make the University of Ghana plastic free. So, the global space, the global environment is willing to put in resources in this area...even if you want to study in this area of green jobs, there's a ton of scholarships in this space (KII, researcher in academic institution, 29 August 2024).

I know mostly the embassies have funding for a lot of green jobs (KII, recycling plant manager, 11 July 2024).

Finally, some of the key informants indicated that currently in Ghana, there are plethora of green job opportunities the youth can apply for, if they are interested in the green sector:

There are so many opportunities for anyone who wants to work in a green job, like I said, in the energy sector, in the waste management sector, even in research, you know, there are so many job opportunities (KII, official in recycling plant, 1 August 2024).

These job opportunities offer practical skills for the youth to contribute to environmental preservation. Through these job opportunities, the youth can build sustainable careers for themselves while also contributing towards environmental sustainability. The respondents highlighted that these job opportunities were available across many sub-sectors such as sustainable agriculture, waste management, and renewable energy. Additionally, these job opportunities could be found in both the government and private sector.

9. Conclusion and policy recommendations

This research, led by young Ghanaians themselves, investigated the hopes and aspirations young people have for their working lives and for making a living in a changing world. It has explored what opportunities are available for them for dignified and fulfilling employment and the types of work which contribute to reducing the human impact on the planet, including mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. Our analysis of responses from our sample of young people indicated that they aspired to well-paid and socially reputable jobs that aligned with their individual interests and desire to contribute to society. While their aspirations were wide-ranging, they clustered around the agricultural and service

sectors, with only a handful of young people aspiring to careers in the industrial sector.

For the young people whose aspirations were specifically for green jobs, their interests were mainly in white collar jobs requiring significant technical expertise such as climate accounting and academic positions in sustainability and related sciences. For the few interested in the manufacturing sector, their aspirations were for jobs in capital-intensive recycling. The key informants referred to green job opportunities across the economic sectors, namely agriculture, manufacturing, and services, and ranging from manual work like waste collection to high-tech roles in the field of renewable energy. There was closer alignment between the aspirations of more highly educated young people and green job opportunities at the skilled, well-paid end, but most young people did not aspire to work in manual jobs like waste picking. Indeed, respondents who worked in such manual occupations aspired towards occupations with higher social standing.

The range and diversity of aspirations reflect the negotiations that young people often make between their material realities (including agrarian livelihoods, urban informal employment, access to formal education and labour markets) and their desire for jobs that give them a meaningful place in society. While young people harboured high expectations, their aspiration-career pathway was fraught with multiple obstacles. These included lack of social support, challenges in accessing quality education and training related issues, barriers related to self-employment (such as red tape related to business registration and permit acquisition), and sexual harassment. These challenges were common across both legacy and green jobs and were particularly pronounced for young women and young people living with disabilities.

For policy to effectively address the challenges that young people encounter in pursuing their green career aspirations, it is important to situate these jobs within the broader efforts by Ghana and other African countries to structurally transform their economies. This then raises the question: What role do green jobs play in the broader objective of Ghana and other African countries to structurally transform their economies? There are two possible answers to this question.

First, green jobs can serve as a stop-gap measure to address the urgency of youth unemployment. However, this approach is likely to lead to fragmented interventions that are divorced from the underlying problems that give rise to youth unemployment in the first place. These include an undiversified economy and the consequent reliance on the export of raw materials, which expose the national economy to the ebbs and flows of the international market. The second approach to green jobs is one that is strategically aligned with national, long-term development priorities.

Future work linked to and extending beyond research, could potentially focus on broadening the understanding and appreciation of green jobs, and mapping the trajectory of support involved in preparing young people to access and succeed in green jobs (broadly defined). This could start in secondary or even primary school and continue through all levels of education, work experience and be reflected in industrial policy. This could entail mapping such an alignment to education curricula, national service opportunities, work linkages and incentives for greening business.

Recommendations

Overall, the research evidence highlighted that the promotion of green jobs presents an opportunity for Ghana to tackle the intertwined challenges of sustainable development and youth employment. The following recommendations are aimed at the development of economic opportunities that address the mechanisms and quality systems to support the increase of youth unemployment, as well as the broader and interconnected issues of structural economic transformation and climate change.

- ***Create and implement a green jobs policy to increase the quantity and quality of jobs available to the youth.*** At the national level, green jobs must be pursued as part of a green industrial policy. This is already in alignment with national policy, which for years has emphasised the importance of climate action, structural economic transformation, and youth employment. To bridge the gap between the high-status and well-paid jobs that young people aspire to and the capacity of the national economy to create these jobs, the Ghanaian economy must increase the quantity and quality of green jobs available to young people. This will require the highest level of national leadership to make appropriate economic policies, and specifically to adopt a green industrial policy in line with the existential need to balance economic growth and protection of the environment. The policy response should include specific measures to improve access to quality green job opportunities for marginalised youth, especially young women and people living with disabilities. The green jobs policy should be integrated with global strategies and financing for a just transition for young people to adequately acquire green jobs.
- ***Strengthen access to quality education at all levels for youth, particularly for disadvantaged youth including young women.*** Young people who participated in this research recognised that their career pathways were non-linear and depended on many factors, some of which were outside their control. The factors they considered most critical to their life outcomes were education, skills development and training. As respondents noted, quality education is the foundation of aspirational and skilled green jobs. It is imperative that the government develops a long-term strategy and plan to enable young people to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills that will help them to achieve their ambitions. Young people need the chance to develop core skills to help them become the problem-solvers and green job creators of a sustainable future. This entails addressing barriers to access secondary and tertiary education and ensuring that education is equipping young people with the foundation, technical and entrepreneurial skills they need to thrive.
- ***Enhance the dignity of workers in green jobs.*** To add dignity to green jobs in the sanitation and waste management industry, the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations must ensure the enforcement of labour regulations with respect to manual workers in waste management. For instance, workers must earn reasonable levels of income; receive appropriate protective clothing; and have access to social protection schemes such as pensions. These interventions, in addition to education and a public campaign about the economic and social rewards of such work, can help change

public perception about the desirability of these jobs and, hopefully, create a demand among young people for such work.

- **Support climate-smart agriculture to meet national nutritional needs and food security.** The research showed that, among the minority of young people who had any aspirations for on-farm agriculture, the preference was for cash crops over cultivation of foods for consumption in Ghana. This is one indicator of potential food insecurity and suggests a strong need for policymakers to support climate-smart agriculture to meet national nutritional needs and food security.
- **Celebrate and communicate young people's success in a wide range of green jobs to build aspiration and wider appreciation of the breadth of green job opportunities available.** The communications and media strategy should particularly celebrate young women and youth including those with disabilities succeeding in green jobs. This report and other related reports in Ethiopia, Uganda and South Africa, will act as a stimulus and incentive for others wanting to pursue a career in green jobs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Youth researcher profiles



Name: Hannah Afra Darkwah

Current Profession: Research Assistant

Degree: MSc. Economics – University of Essex

Testimonial:

As a researcher, I am always passionate about inclusive growth and sustainable development. My academic path, from the University of Ghana to the University of Essex, has given me a strong foundation in economic research and policy analysis. This exposure has deepened my commitment to using data-driven research to inform policy and drive change.

As a youth researcher in the ‘Youth Engagement and Green Jobs in Ghana’ project, my role was not symbolic. My contributions in the form of tool development, data collection and analysis, and report writing, enabled me to better understand and assess green job opportunities across sectors in the country. One of the most rewarding aspects of this project was working with a diverse team including interdisciplinary researchers and my direct engagement with key stakeholders such as policymakers and research institutions. This experience has sharpened my communication and problem-solving skills and has also challenged me to approach research questions more holistically. Also, the importance of youth participation reinforced in this project has given me a better appreciation for youth-led research as a valuable advocacy tool.

Additionally, participating in this project affirmed my belief that inclusive policies and sustainable employment are critical to solving the high rate of youth unemployment in Ghana. Ultimately, being part of the project has given me the opportunity to explore the intersection between youth employment and environmental sustainability in Ghana. I feel very privileged and proud to have contributed to a report that advances Ghana’s economic growth and environmental sustainability.



Name: Shadrack Nyarko

Current Profession: Researcher

Degree: Master of Philosophy in Economics

Testimonial:

I am a highly motivated and intellectually curious economics graduate with a strong passion for research and policy analysis. Growing up, I developed a keen interest in understanding the structural factors that drive inequality and limit economic opportunity. These experiences solidified my resolve to study economics and shaped my research interests, which include monetary and financial economics, trade, inequality and poverty analysis, labour markets, and migration. My academic and research journey has equipped me with solid analytical skills and a strong foundation in both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Looking ahead, my career aspiration is to become an academic researcher. I aim to contribute meaningfully to the academic community through my research, and I also seek to collaborate with government ministries and agencies to inform policy decisions and drive impactful change.

My experience as a research assistant on the Green Jobs and Young People project has significantly deepened my understanding of the link between youth employment and sustainable development, particularly within the green economy space. This project has enhanced my skills in research conceptualisation, data collection, and empirical analysis, as well as my ability to collaborate within interdisciplinary teams and communicate research findings effectively. Through this experience, I learned that despite the availability of resources and institutional support for green jobs in Ghana, such as arable land, recyclable waste, training programmes, and funding opportunities, green jobs are not commonly featured in the career aspirations of young people. Moreover, youth aspirations are shaped not only by economic need but also by personal fulfilment, social meaning, and the expectations of family and community.



Name: Comfort Eshun

Age: 29

Current Position: Youth Research Assistant

Degree: Bachelor of Science Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics

Testimonial:

As a dedicated and passionate youth leader, I leverage my skills and experience to drive positive change. With a Bachelor of Science in Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics from the University of Cape Coast, I've developed a strong foundation in research and enterprise after taking a few courses. I run a climate-smart fashion business, which transforms waste into ready-to-use items, showcases my creativity and commitment to sustainability.

After three years of waiting for posting to the health sector, I took the initiative to start my own business, driven by the high unemployment rate within my coastal community. This experience sparked my passion for entrepreneurship and led me into the research space. With CAMFED giving me the chance to contribute to research and surveys, I've gained more experience and worked with organizations like Densu Associates on projects such as the "Ghana Grows" Project, sponsored by the Mastercard Foundation and SpringBoard, which focused on climate-smart space as well.

As a Monitoring and Evaluation Resource team member at CAMFED Ghana and a youth research assistant, I've honed my skills in research, leadership, collaboration, and decision-making. I'm committed to empowering young people to secure sustainable livelihoods through my roles as Regional Alumni Lead for the Mastercard Foundation at CAMFED Ghana, the elected Chairperson for the young women's network CAMFED Association - Western Region, and President of the Youth in Entrepreneurship, under the National Youth Authority Western Region.

Being a research assistant on the Ghana Green Jobs Research project, I have gained invaluable knowledge and insights into climate-smart jobs and young people's aspirations and perceptions of green jobs. This experience allowed me to engage with diverse groups, understanding their knowledge and perspectives on green jobs and societal attitudes

towards environmentally sustainable careers. I worked closely with my colleagues from the very start of the research to develop questionnaires, conduct interviews, analyse data and present research progress and reports. Notably, I interacted with persons with disabilities, highlighting the challenges they face in accessing employment opportunities. A key takeaway was the societal stigma attached to green jobs, such as sanitation and recycling work, which can hinder young people's efforts to pursue sustainable careers. Despite these challenges, the project positively impacted young people by raising awareness about green jobs and their role in sustaining our community. This experience has deepened my understanding of the importance of promoting climate-friendly businesses and supporting young people in their pursuit of sustainable livelihoods.

Being equipped with all these knowledge and exposure in communication, leadership, and collaboration skills, has combined with my passion for helping others secure sustainable businesses.

Name: Yaa Boatema Fiscian

Current Profession: Researcher

Degree: Master of Philosophy in Planning

Testimonial:

My involvement in the Ghana Green Jobs Research Project was a rewarding and purposeful experience that closely aligned with my passion for sustainability and inclusive development. I have long been committed to promoting the sustainable use of resources—meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs—and this project offered a meaningful opportunity to actively contribute to that vision.

The focus on green jobs was both timely and significant. As Ghana and the global community shift toward more environmentally sustainable development models, understanding how young people can access and shape green job opportunities is critical. Through the project, I engaged deeply with the aspirations, challenges, and opportunities facing young Ghanaians as they build livelihoods in the green economy.

A particularly enriching aspect of the experience was the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of stakeholders, including government agencies, industry experts, and development partners. These engagements broadened my understanding of the policy and institutional frameworks that underpin green jobs and youth employment in Ghana.

Overall, the project allowed me to apply my academic background in planning, learn from experienced professionals, and contribute to a cause I care deeply about. It strengthened my determination to advocate for green, inclusive growth and to continue supporting efforts that amplify young people's voices in national conversations on sustainability and livelihoods.



Name: Elizabeth Afua Amomea Addo

Age: 26

Current Position: Research Assistant

Degree: Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, University of Cape Coast

Testimonial:

As a first-generation university graduate raised by a single parent, my journey has been shaped by resilience, curiosity, and a strong passion for technology and social impact. I studied Computer Science at the University of Cape Coast with a full scholarship from the Mastercard Foundation through CAMFED Ghana, an opportunity that opened doors for both personal and professional growth.

Participating in the Ghana Green Jobs research project was a transformative experience. As a youth researcher, I had the opportunity to contribute to a project that aligns deeply with my values of sustainable development, youth empowerment, and job creation. The research process allowed me to engage directly with communities, stakeholders, and young people whose lives are being shaped by the evolving green economy in Ghana.

Through fieldwork and stakeholder engagements, I gained firsthand insights into the realities many youth face in trying to enter or grow within the green sector. These include limited access to funding and technical skills training, low awareness of green job opportunities, and the absence of clear pathways into green entrepreneurship. Many young people, especially in rural areas, are passionate and eager to contribute to climate solutions but lack the support systems and enabling environment to do so.

Despite these challenges, I was inspired by the creativity, innovation, and resilience of the youth we met. Some were creating businesses from recyclable materials, others were engaging in sustainable agriculture. This reinforced my belief that with the right investment in education, capacity building, and policy frameworks, young people can lead Ghana's transition to a green economy.

Serving as a youth researcher on this project has strengthened my research, communication, and advocacy skills. It has also affirmed my belief that we, as young people,

are not just beneficiaries of change but the drivers of it. I am proud to have played a role in this important work and look forward to applying these insights in future roles related to technology, development, and climate action.



Name: Madonna Naamwinkaar Kuuniabah

Age: 27

Current Position: Research Assistant

Degree: Diploma in Midwifery

Testimonial:

As an orphan raised by my grandmother, my life has always been driven by hope for a better future. Each day, I strive to inspire others and bring them along on the journey. I pursued midwifery at the Midwifery Training College in Bolgatanga, supported by a full scholarship from the Mastercard Foundation through CAMFED Ghana. This scholarship not only shaped my leadership skills but also gave me the opportunity to discover more about myself and explore my full potential.

Participating in the Ghana Green Jobs research project was a transformative experience. As a youth researcher, I had the opportunity to contribute to a project that aligns deeply with my values of sustainable development, youth empowerment, and entrepreneurship. The research process allowed me to engage directly with communities, stakeholders, and youth whose lives are being shaped by the evolving green economy in Ghana.

Through fieldwork and youth engagements, I gained first hand insights into the realities many youth face in trying to enter or grow within the green sector. These include limited access to funding, technical skills training, low awareness of green job opportunities, foreign competition and the absence of clear pathways into green entrepreneurship. Many young people, especially in rural areas, are passionate and eager to contribute to climate solutions but lack the support systems and enabling environment to do so.

Despite these challenges, I was inspired by the creativity, innovation, and resilience of the youth we met. Some were creating businesses from recycled materials, others were engaging in sustainable agriculture most especially women. This reinforced my belief that with the right investment in education, capacity building, and policy frameworks, young people can lead Ghana's transition to a green economy.

Serving as a youth researcher on this project has strengthened my research, communication, leadership skills and career development. It has also affirmed my belief that we as youth are not just beneficiaries of change but the drivers of it. I am proud to have played a role in this important work and look forward to applying these insights in future roles related to technology, development, and climate action.

Appendix 2: FGD Participants¹²

	Location	Education	Career
Male Respondents			
1	Accra	Tertiary	Manager of a plastic recycling facility
2	Accra	Secondary	Plastic waste collector
3	Accra	No education	Recycler
4	Accra	Tertiary	Plastic waste recycler
5	Bole	Secondary	Farmer
6	Bole	Secondary	Farmer
7	Bole	Primary	Farmer
8	Bole	Tertiary	Farmer
9	Bole	Primary	Farmer
10	Bole	Secondary	Farmer
11	Bole	Primary	Farmer
12	Bole	Primary	Carpenter/farmer
13	KEEA	Secondary	Farmer
14	KEEA	Tertiary	Farmer
15	KEEA	Tertiary	Vice president of Clean Ocean Project Ghana
16	KEEA	Tertiary	Volunteer and environmental educationist at the Clean Ocean Ghana Project
17	KEEA	Secondary	Crop farmer
18	KEEA	Tertiary	Farmer
19	Accra	Tertiary	Hardware engineer
20	Accra	Secondary	Security personnel
21	Accra	Tertiary	Account officer
22	Accra	Primary	Coconut seller
23	Bole	Primary	Barber
24	Bole	Secondary	Carpenter
25	Bole	Tertiary	Barber
26	Bole	No education	Tiler
27	Bole	Secondary	Tiler
28	KEEA	Tertiary	Carpenter
29	KEEA	Secondary	Maison
30	KEEA	Secondary	Electrician
31	KEEA	Secondary	Tiler and call credit vendor
32	KEEA	Secondary	Mobile money agent
33	KEEA	Tertiary	Barber
34	KEEA	Primary	Former driver
35	KEEA	Primary	Fisherman
36	Dodowa	Primary	N/A
37	Dodowa	Secondary	Painter
37	Dodowa	Secondary	Painter
39	Dodowa	Secondary	N/A
40	Dodowa	Secondary	Food vendor

¹² Some participants did not fill the screener/demographic questionnaire

GREEN JOBS AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN AFRICA: GHANA REPORT

41	Dodowa	Secondary	Agro input dealer
42	Kintampo	Secondary	Farmer
43	Kintampo	Primary	Driver
44	Kintampo	Primary	Mechanic
45	Kintampo	Tertiary	Teacher
46	Kintampo	Secondary	Electrician
47	Kintampo	Secondary	Student
48	Kintampo	Primary	Tailor
49	Kintampo	Primary	Agro input dealer
50	Kintampo	Primary	Mobile money vendor
51	Kintampo	Secondary	Farmer
52	Kintampo	Secondary	Painter
53	Kintampo	Secondary	Electrician (apprentice)
Female Respondents			
1	Accra	Tertiary	Country Manager of Associazione Zenzero
2	Accra	Tertiary	Plastic waste recycler
3	Accra	Tertiary	Plastic waste aggregator
4	Accra	Tertiary	Entrepreneur
5	Accra	Tertiary	Herbal tea producer
6	Bole	Primary	Entrepreneur (provision shop owner)
7	Bole	Secondary	Farmer
8	Bole	Secondary	Farmer
9	Bole	Tertiary	Livestock farmer
10	Bole	Primary	Not specified
11	Bole	Primary	Hairdresser
12	Bole	Secondary	Farmer (crop and livestock)
13	Bole	Secondary	Groundnut processor/seamstress
14	Bole	Secondary	Not Specified
15	KEEA	Tertiary	Plastic waste collector
16	KEEA	Tertiary	Volunteer - recycling
17	KEEA	Tertiary	N/A
18	Accra	Tertiary	N/A
19	Accra	Tertiary	Teacher
20	Accra	Tertiary	Entrepreneur (packaging and distribution of peanut products and cereals)
21	Accra	Tertiary	Intern at UGMC
22	Accra	Tertiary	Fashion
23	Accra	Tertiary	Farmer
24	Accra	Tertiary	Cybersecurity specialist
25	Accra	Tertiary	Fashion designer
26	Bole	Secondary	Entrepreneur (sales of baby clothes)
27	Bole	No education	Hairdresser
28	Bole	Tertiary	Teacher
29	Bole	Tertiary	Caterer
30	Bole	Tertiary	Caterer

GREEN JOBS AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN AFRICA: GHANA REPORT

31	Bole	Primary	Hairdresser
32	Bole	Tertiary	Foodstuff vendor
33	KEEA	Primary	Hairdresser
34	KEEA	Secondary	Hairdresser and makeup artist
35	KEEA	Tertiary	Pastry chef
36	KEEA	Primary	Baker and bartender
37	KEEA	Secondary	Fashion designer
37	KEEA	Primary	Hairdresser
39	KEEA	Primary	Seamstress
40	KEEA	Tertiary	NSP - procurement unit
41	KEEA	Primary	Seamstress
42	Dodowa	Primary	N/A
43	Dodowa	Primary	Hairdresser
44	Kintampo	Primary	Farmer
45	Kintampo	Primary	Farmer
46	Kintampo	Primary	Farmer
47	Kintampo	Primary	Farmer
48	Kintampo	Primary	Farmer

Appendix 3: Qualitative research tools

FGD Guide

Ghana Green Jobs Research Project

Date of interview:

Names of interviewers:

Region:

District:

Introduction to interview

Thank you for dedicating your time today and expressing interest in participating in this group discussion. I am [...], and I will be serving as the moderator for this group. My colleague is [...] and s/he will be taking notes during the interaction and may also ask some questions to make sure that s/he is understanding you correctly for the notes. As you are aware, we are undertaking this research to help us understand youth career aspirations as well as efforts to protect the environment.

We are here to learn from you. There are no right or wrong answers, so please feel free to fully express yourself. If at any point during our interaction you feel uneasy, feel free to pause or terminate the interview. You can skip specific questions or areas that you prefer not to talk about.

With your consent, we would like to record the interview to ensure we have an accurate record of our discussion. Before we begin, could you confirm that you have understood and given us the permission to record our discussion. The recording will only be used for research purposes and your identity will not be disclosed when we write our report.

Warm up question

- What is your favourite colour? Why?

SECTION A: CLIMATE CHANGE AND JOBS

1. What do you know about climate change?
 - I. How did you find out about the term climate change?
 - II. How does climate change affect your community?

2. Are you aware of any career prospects related to combating climate change or protecting the environment?
 - I. How did you learn about them?
 - A. What do you know about them?
 - II. Have you heard about the term ‘green jobs’?
 - A. If so, what do you know about them?
 - B. How did you hear about them?

SECTION B: CAREER GOALS OR ASPIRATIONS

3. When you think about career success, what comes to mind?
 - I. How did you come to have these career goals or aspirations?
4. What plans have you all put in place to achieve your dream job?
 - I. What has or has not worked well? Please explain.
5. If you’re currently working, how is your current job related to the career you aspired to?
 - I. If you’ve shifted, what were some of the reasons that influenced the change?
 - II. If you are not currently working, how close do you think you are to realising your dream job?

SECTION C: BARRIERS AND SUPPORT IN PURSUING CAREER DREAMS

6. What challenges or barriers have you all faced in pursuing your career dreams?
 - I. PROBE FOR: education, finance, environment, family, friends etc.
7. What do you all need in order to be able to achieve your career goals?
 - I. What has helped you so far in realising your goals? Please explain.
 - II. What has *not* been helpful? Please explain.
8. How do you think the government can better prepare young people for their dream jobs?
 - I. PROBE FOR: education, training, funding, other support etc.
 - II.
9. How can others also help?
 - I. PROBE FOR: religious groups, civil society organisations, NGOs, family, friends etc.

SECTION D: BARRIERS AND SUPPORT IN PURSUING CLIMATE-RELATED JOBS

10. What role does protecting the environment or climate play in your choice of an ideal job/career?
11. For someone who wants to pursue a career in sectors related to protecting the climate or the environment, what challenges do you think they are likely to face?
 - I. PROBE FOR: education, finance, environment, family, friends etc.
12. How can such a person be supported to attain their goal?
 - I. PROBE FOR: support from government, religious groups, NGOs, family, friends, etc.

SECTION E: WRAP UP

- Is there anything else any of you want to add?

Thank you very much for your time!

Journey Pathway Mapping

Date of interview

Interviewers

District

Instructions for the interviewers

There will be two interviewers present at the Journey Pathway Mapping sessions. When the participants are describing their mapping, it will be recorded (if respondents are happy with this) however, one of you will also need to be taking notes so you are capturing what the respondents are recounting to you from their journey mapping and also in their responses to the discussion prompts.

Allow the respondents at least thirty to forty minutes to complete their journey pathway mapping and then ask a few of them if they would like to share their drawing and explain them to the rest of the group – this needs to be voluntary – do not force the respondents.

You will then need to 1:1 interview with each of the respondents and give them time to describe their journey pathway mapping to you. Make sure that you are recording what is being explained to you by the respondents– both audio and written notes.

Take photographs of each student's journey pathway mapping. If possible, bring the journey pathway mapping diagrams away with you.

At the end of the session, thank all of the participants for their participation.

Brief for the researcher

Hello, our names are [...]. We are researchers from ISSER and CAMFED, and we are going to be doing an activity together called a Journey Pathway Mapping, which will help us to get a better understanding of your experience of the type of job/s or career/s you have undertaken so far in your life's journey or a mapping out of that journey.

Thank you all very much for joining us and for being a part of this activity. We know that you have given consent to participate in this activity today, but at any time you feel you do not want to participate then please let us know. We would also like to record this session. Are you all happy for us to do this?

We will not use your names or refer to you individually in the report so please feel free to share your thoughts, opinions, and ideas with us freely today.

Warm up activity

We would like to ask each of you to share with us one thing that has made you smile or made you happy this week. We would like to share with you first - one thing that has made us happy is [...].

Note for researchers.

These probing questions below are the most vital questions as these will be necessary to help us get to the detailed insight on the understanding and perceptions of the participants around green jobs and their career pathway either in a green job or in other careers. You will need to ensure that you give ample room and time for open debates and discussions around the aspect

of careers and green jobs to ensure that the participants are able to produce a detailed journey pathway map.

We would like to start by hearing your thoughts and views on access to jobs in your community / Ghana.

- 1) How easy is it for you to access a job in your community?
 - a) Are these the same for men and women? Why is this so?
- 2) What do you consider as being a 'good' job?
 - a) Why is this so?
- 3) What are some of the barriers for access to good jobs especially for young people?
 - a) Are these the same for men and women? Why is this so?

Now, let's talk about climate change and its impact on Ghana. We all realise that there have been changes in weather patterns in Ghana over many years.

- 4) What do you know about climate change?
 - a) Have you noticed any such changes in weather patterns? (Describe.)
- 5) What type of jobs do you consider as protecting and conserving the environment and / or helping us to adapt to climate change?
 - a) Have any of you been engaged in these types of jobs?
 - b) Why did you or others that you know choose this career?
 - c) Was it an easy career to be engaged in? Why is this so?

We call these jobs 'Green Jobs'

- 6) Have you ever heard of the term 'Green Job'?
 - a) Please explain what you know about the term. There is no right or wrong answer.

Definition of green jobs

Some people define green jobs as jobs that contribute to preserving or restoring the environment. It can also include jobs that reduce humans' negative impact on the environment and / or help us adapt to the effects of climate change.

(These jobs can be in traditional sectors, such as manufacturing and construction, or in new, emerging green sectors, such as renewable energy and energy efficiency e.g. solar energy. Green jobs can be found in sectors like agriculture, education, health, hospitality, and tourism if they centre, nurture, and develop our individual and collective capacity to care for others and the environment and to educate ourselves and others about the unsustainability of not protecting the environment.)

- 7) What are your thoughts about this definition of green jobs? Do you have any different views or opinions on what is meant by a green job?
- 8) When thinking about your own future, do you consider a green job to be a 'good job' for you?
 - a) What would be some of the reasons for you to remain in a green job or to seek a green job?

- b) What would be some of the reasons for you not to pursue a career in a green job?
- 9) Does the gender of a person i.e. whether they are male or female, make a difference to them being able to pursue a career in a green job? Why is this so?
- 10) What support do you feel is needed to increase access to green jobs?
 - a) What should the government do to support? (e.g. education, training, funding, etc.: please explain)
 - i) What can others also do to help? (e.g. religious groups, civil society organisations, NGOs, family, friends etc.

The Journey Pathway Mapping

We are now going to give you each a sheet of paper and we would like you to draw pictures and map out your career journey so far whether this is in a green job or in other jobs that you have undertaken. We would like you to indicate where your career pathway has contributed to preserving and protecting the environment and / or to adapting to the effects of climate change (if it is relevant). You can draw pictures and use words to describe the pictures they have drawn or speech bubbles/ thought bubbles to write your experiences and thoughts.

We want each of you to be able to tell us through your mapping, how and when your career started, what helped you or supported you to pursue this career and also what were the challenges you encountered on your career journey. We would also like you to show us what your future career aspirations are.

Demographic Questionnaire

Kindly fill this demographic questionnaire. The information from all participants will be combined to provide a profile of the whole group. Kindly note that we will never use any identifying information such as your name in any of our reports.

1. Identifier (eg. A, B, C... R1, R2, etc): _____

2. Town/city: _____

3. District: _____

4. Region: _____

5. Age: _____

6. Sex: _____

7. Highest level of education: _____

8. Marital status: _____

9. Employment status:

Employed full-time

Employed part-time

Unemployed

Other (please specify): _____

10. If employed, what is your occupation: _____

11. Do you consider yourself to be a person living with disability? If yes, please specify:

Key Informant Interview- GHANA GREEN JOBS PROJECT

Date of interview:

Names of interviewers:

District:

Brief for the researcher

Hello, our names are [...]. We are researchers from CAMFED/ISSER working on the Ghana Green Jobs Research Project. We are here to learn from you on your insights, experiences, and opinions regarding youth employment and opportunities in the green economy in Ghana. This will help us to explore various dimensions of green jobs including their definition, scope, barriers, opportunities, and potential impact on youth employment and development. We are particularly committed to hearing from marginalised (“unheard”) young people and better understanding what can support them to thrive in green jobs.

Thank you very much for granting us the opportunity to speak with you. We know that you have given consent to participate in this interview today, but at any time you feel you do not want to participate then please let us know. We want to assure you that any information you provide during the interview process will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and respect for your privacy and we will not use your names or refer to you individually in the report so please feel free to share your thoughts, opinions, and ideas with us freely today.

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. What does your role entail on a day-to-day basis?
2. What role does your organisation play in relation to youth employment or climate-related issues?

SECTION B: POLICIES ADDRESSING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

3. Over the years, the government has put many programmes and policies in place to address youth employment challenges. How have these policies addressed this problem/challenges?
 - a. (IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED) What has worked and what has not worked well?
(PROBE FOR: disadvantaged backgrounds, living with disabilities, from disadvantaged rural areas etc.)

SECTION C: OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS FOR GREEN JOBS

4. Are there green job opportunities in Ghana? Please elaborate.
IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED
 - a. What sectors of the economy have the greatest potential for creating green jobs?

- b. What kinds of young people are currently engaged in green jobs? (*e.g. gender, educational level, socio-economic background, rural/urban etc.*)
 - i. (IF “NO” #4) What kinds of young people will be engaged in green jobs in the future?
5. Do you think green jobs can help address the youth unemployment problem in the country?
 - a. (IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED) Please explain the reasons for your answer.
6. What barriers are young people who want to go into green jobs in Ghana likely to face?

SECTION D: ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND NON-STATE ACTORS

7. What measures has the government put in place in an attempt to promote green jobs in Ghana?

IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED

 - a. What strategies/trainings/policies/programmes are there to support young people to access green jobs?
 - i. Do they pay attention to vulnerable/marginalised groups (i.e. young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, living with disabilities, from disadvantaged rural areas)? Please elaborate.
8. Which of these measures have worked or hasn't worked?
9. Apart from government, what roles do other stakeholders have to play in the promotion of green jobs in Ghana? (*e.g. the private sector, NGOs, CSOs, religious organisations, communities, family and friends etc.*)

SECTION E: GREEN JOBS AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

10. (IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED) Can green jobs be found in traditional sectors such as education, health and farming? Please explain.
 - a. (ONLY TO CIVIL/PUBLIC SERVANTS) Is the government exploring options to make these sectors more climate resilient and / or environmentally friendly so that there are green jobs available across many more sectors?

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MAKERERE UNIVERSITY



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