Small-Scale Rural Agro-processing Enterprises in Ghana: Status, Challenges and Livelihood Opportunities of Women

Richard Ampadu-Ameyaw1* and Rose Omari1

1Science and Technology Policy Research Institute (STEPRI) of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), P.O.Box CT 519, Accra, Ghana.

ABSTRACT

This paper explored the status, challenges and livelihood opportunities of women small scale agro processors in selected rural communities of the Ga East district of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It aimed at identifying the needs and options available to these women and the need to scaling up agro-processing in the communities. A total of seventy-five women were randomly selected to participate in the administration of the semi-structured questionnaire interview as well as the focus group discussions which were used to elicit information for the analysis. The study argues that achievement of the state’s objective of empowering women requires an assessment of the state of their activities (e.g. agro-food processing), contributions of small scale rural women’s enterprises, particularly agro-processing to livelihoods improvements. The empirical study results show that while opportunities for rural women entrepreneurs to expand production and penetrate existing markets (locally and internationally) exist there are some impediments which need to be removed in order to allow for growth and development of rural micro and small enterprises (MSEs)

*Corresponding author: Email: r.ampadu@yahoo.com, r.ampadu@csir-stepri.org;
for improvement in rural livelihoods. Based on the findings it is concluded that unless the constraints of the agro-processing industry are identified and corrected, Ghana’s dream of revitalizing trade in processed food may only remain a mirage. It is suggested therefore that a deliberate attempt at promoting agro-processing enterprises development that supports local entrepreneurs, particularly rural women should be encouraged aggressively.

**Keywords:** Small scale; agro processing; women; rural; Ghana.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The World Development Report acknowledges the enormous potential the agricultural sectors of developing countries possess (World [1]). Agriculture occupies an almost permanent position in national development agenda mainly as a tool for reducing poverty and sustaining livelihoods, especially among the rural poor people. Yet the sectors’ performance in terms of reducing poverty and hunger as well as improving livelihoods does not seem to be encouraging, given the low rate of performance in recent times. The case of women who are often cited as able to produce about 80% of basic food seems worst. In some developing countries, women are often categorized as the poorest of the poor and economically bankrupt. It is observed that economic prosperity of rural farmers is often linked to the achievement of effective integration and synergy between agriculture and agro-processing industries [2]. Yet, despite the large and diversified agricultural base of Ghana, performance of agro-processing industries, particularly small holder group enterprises is discouraging. This is in spite of women’s commitment to business groups. In many cases, women’s activities are seen to be unsuccessful especially in the long run. Accelerating reductions in hunger and poverty rates require some drastic efforts in expanding their economic activities.

Agro-processing is one of the critical sectors of the economy due to its enormous contributions to employment creation, reduction in postharvest losses, foreign exchange earnings, and shelf life extension among others. It ensures constant availability of food in various forms and facilitates product distribution and growth of the national economy. Processing of raw agricultural products for local and export markets is very much encouraged by the government of Ghana with priority given to the processing of commodities such as cocoa, pineapple, cashew, palm oil, vegetable (tomatoes, chilies, etc.), cassava (processed into starch under the President’s Special Initiative), floriculture, and seafood, particularly tuna processing. Due to its importance to the growth of development of Ghana, agro-processing features prominently in Ghana’s policies such as the Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy I and II (FASDEP I & II), national trade policy, and Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II). Furthermore, the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which was a five-year, approximately $547 million anti-poverty programme signed between the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Republic of Ghana in August 2006, also provided some policy framework for the development of agro-processing and agriculture as a whole.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

In Ghana, the agricultural sector remains the dominant sector employing most of the economically active labour force in the country. Currently about 56% of economically active labour force is employed in the agricultural sector and about half (48.7%) of the total female population is self-employed in agriculture, with the majority being engaged in food production [3]. Food processing in particular is important especially at the micro-level where 95% of the actors are women [4]. Expanding agro-processing activities as a way of reducing poverty and improving livelihoods requires policies that will fast-track rural industrialization. Already, the limited knowledge in post-harvest management, particularly of perishable produce results in high post-harvest losses of about 20%-50% for fruits, vegetables, roots and tubers, and about 20%-30% for cereals and legumes [3]. This is further worsened by inefficient food processing technologies and inadequate delivery of extension services to women in particular. Revitalizing the women-dominated agro-processing sector will require a good response and willingness of government and policy makers to the realities on the ground in order to spur agro processing among women, particularly those in collective action. While this is significantly covered in the literature, collective (group) action of women working together as
individuals in a group to produce a livelihood (producing food, goods, income, offering their labor, among other outputs) is yet to receive greater attention in research and policy [5]. As a way of spurring discussions for the development of a model that will help improve small scale agro-processing in Ghana, this paper explores the status of women’s collective economic activities, challenges and opportunities as well as impacts on their livelihoods [6]. This is to ensure a revitalization of women small scale agro-processing activities in the country. Generally, it describes the state of small scale agro processing in a case study community to ascertain the strengths of the agro processing sector, regarding how to expand and promote agro-processing among rural women. It focuses on women entrepreneurs processing various kinds of fresh farm produce, with a focus on fresh cassava roots into various food products for the market.

Given that agro-based industries play vital roles in rural employment and poverty reduction, governments (local and global) are beginning to pay greater attention to the sector by making good the deficiencies of the sector and fixing the challenges undermining growth of small scale agro-industries, especially in the rural economies of developing countries. In Africa, and for that matter sub Saharan Africa (SSA), it is argued that the poor and slow growth of the agricultural sector in terms of efficiency, sustainability and equity is as a result of the predominant practice of focusing training and resource allocation on men only [7]. This realization has spurred growing interest in issues of gender, particularly regarding women’s empowerment and their role in agricultural development. Although research on agricultural activities and women’s empowerment is considerable in the literature, a look at the literature suggest that little attention has been paid to empowerment issues such as employment types that sustains women. This is critical since not all economic activities are empowering or able to secure sustainability.

In Ghana, most development blue prints indicate a new and revived focus on women. For example, the Medium Term Agricultural Development Strategy (MTADS) and the Vision 2020 Development Plan, suggests that women should (i) have support services brought closer to them (ii) be involved in the formation and management of programmes affecting them (women) (iii) be the contact points in the delivery of support services [8]. These and many others suggest the need for strategies to deal with women as a matter of priority and also to correct the imbalances in the sector’s policies. In view of this, an accelerated growth that prompts a slowing down of current levels of food insecurity, poverty and unemployment as well as unsustainable income of the growing population should be considered a necessity. This requires the integration and promotion of the women’s activities in the sector. The current study therefore begs the question about the state and operations of agricultural women’s processing networks within the framework of Ghana’s economic development policy frameworks. It aims at exploring the state of agro-processing with a bid to improving agricultural products trade flows.

1.2 Objectives of Study

The study looks at the state of women in agro processing and marketing, as a way of exploring the internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats to processing and marketing activities of women. It concludes with some policy implications derived from the findings of the paper. This specifically looks at how to improve efficiency, productivity and competitiveness as well as reduce poverty among women in rural communities.

1.3 Performance of Agro-processing Enterprise in Ghana

As pointed out earlier, the Agro-food industry plays a fundamental role in the creation of income and employment opportunities in Ghana. It is important to sustain or improve the situation further. Considering the high rate of post-harvest losses in Ghana, agro-processing companies have a significant role to play by turning primary agricultural raw produce into consumable products. These companies are located at the center of the agro-food value chain and serve as a link between both producers and marketers in the agro-food industries. The sub-sector is by far the most important segment in the agro-food industry and covers a broad area of postharvest activities. Generally, agro-processing activities can be categorized into two major types- the primary and secondary activities. While the former involves those activities such as drying, shelling/threshing, cleaning, grading, and packaging, the latter entails value additions in commodity form or nutritional content. The primary form does not show much difference in shape and form from the original produce but the
secondary does show a clear transformation from the origin and the new form is close to the consuming stage. Examples of the secondary processes include milling, grinding, and extraction as well as pressing and mincing. This suggests that equipment and tools used during each stage of the processing will be different.

Despite the reality that these enterprises proffer opportunities for poverty reduction, food security and community development, they are not without challenges. Generally, while interest in increasing output of agro-processed food products soars, studies show that fully mechanized processing plants, particularly among the small-scale groups are yet to be considered. This is in spite of the increasing number of local workshops specializing in metal fabrication and related activities in the country. Apart from the inability of the small scale businesses to compete with relatively large scale agro-processing firms, some factors were found to be constraining development of the sector and needs to be addressed. This study includes;

- Inadequate enforcement of agricultural and industrial policies
- Weak integration between agriculture and industry
- Technological inadequacies
- Lack of capacity to adapt to international markets sophistication
- Inadequate infrastructural development
- Weak financial capacity of MSME’s
- Quality assurance challenges

The focus group discussions and personal observation by the researcher reveals that in majority of cases, these women lack a suitable place or facility to process the food products. This has compelled most of the women to operate from their homes under small shed or their kitchens. These are often congested places or areas with household items competing with those that are used in the commercial processing activities for space. The lack of space or a facility for the processing activities affects productivity and may reduce profitability of such an important income generating activity in rural areas where poverty and unemployment have become endemic. The lack of space has restricted processors to focus on the main products and neglecting other by-products which could support the income regimes of these women [9]. For example in addition to the preparation of the cassava dough, other by products such as starch from cassava could be used in the making of snacks such as Tapioca. This could all generate added incomes for the processors as well as reducing the prices of the main products for consumers.

The study observed that networking among these enterprises are non-existent or weak. A general lack of marketing and entrepreneurial skills as well as information was found among producers and processors. They had little knowledge of their customers’ range of need and did not show any sign of evidence of deliberate effort to promote their products on the international map. In the main, marketing of processed food products was found to be traded informally and not based on contracts with any legal backing.

Awareness of these challenges has led to the retooling of Ghana’s agro-industrial sector through the introduction of new initiatives. The government of Ghana has proposed a revision of the Export Development and Investment Fund (EDIF) Act as a way to put greater emphasis on agro-processing. The EDIAF seeks to connect producers of raw materials and food processors in the country. This fund aims at accelerating value addition to raw agricultural products. The new direction is to turn EDIF into Export Development and Agricultural Investment Fund (EDAIF) in order to expand the mandate of the fund to provide financing for agriculture and agro-processing.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study is part of a larger study that examined Ghana’s agricultural sector’s efforts and its relationship with trade at the sub-regional level. It specifically focused on Ghana’s agro-industrial sub-sector where particular attention was given to women in agro-food processing and marketing networks. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to gather information from the industrialists and entrepreneurs (either as individuals or groups) in the formal and informal sectors of the economy in the Ga East District. The district was selected because of the farming nature of the communities and the number of women who process the fresh produce harvested into various food products for the urban markets. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered face-to-face to individual women and/or women groups who were actively involved in processing and marketing of agricultural products. These women who were selected for the study either owned by self- or co-managed
the enterprises with their husbands or male relatives and families. Agro-processing enterprises explored include those engaged in value-addition to raw farm produce, transportation, storage and haulage since these were critical in moving produce from one point or market to another.

The structured questionnaire data was complemented with focus groups and informal discussions with key players in agro-processing as well as secondary data sources, which largely involved literature review. In total seventy-five completely answered questionnaires, were used in the statistical analysis. The rest were not used because they were not properly answered. Three focus group discussions were also conducted to gather further details on the women’s operation in the communities.

Some institutions related to the agriculture sector such as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture’s Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation and Women in Agricultural Development Departments and some experts on Ghana’s Agricultural sector were also interviewed to gather first-hand information from the various factors involved in the value chain processes. Questions and discussions primarily focused on production and availability of the selected crops, stakeholder institutions involved in the processing, marketing and transportation of the crops as well as marketing strategies adopted along the food value chain. The discussions also touched on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the food channel that may be encountered in the process of undertaking various activities along the value chain or flow of food products.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socio-Economic Data of Respondents

The study results showed that among those who responded to the study, majority (65%) of the women interviewed were married, while a few (14%) were single girls who were learning the trade of agro-processing not as apprentice in the Ghanaian culture or parlance but as people who were working on the job for a small fee. The rest were either divorcees or widows. The high rate of married women involved here could be attributed to the fact that such people needed to work harder to be able to support their husbands, take care of their homes and the children’s school fees. Education among the processors shows that majority of them had below six years of formal education. They attributed the low education to poverty and disinterest of some parents to school their girls. The low education of these women is consistent with a study by Spring (2009) which suggests that most micro and small business entrepreneurs in Africa have no or little education. It was obvious that most of the women were in their forties, except a few who were in their twenties and early thirties. It was realized that most of the elderly women started the trade as early as 6 to 8 years old. Majority of these women claimed they started the business of processing agricultural produce mainly because they wanted to support their husbands and also to keep the home alive and hence they strive to work harder.

3.2 Livelihoods Activities of Women Processors

While poverty continues as a rural phenomenon in many parts of the world, the study shows that livelihoods in the studied rural communities have and are undergoing some change, with a greater number of rural inhabitants focusing on non-farm rural activities. Some key economic livelihood activities identified among women in the selected community are enumerated in Figure 1. This was attributed mainly to the ‘moving away’ from farming by the youth. Some people claim that the shift is as a result of increasingly smaller plots of land, low agricultural productivity, volatile weather conditions and soil erosion as well as land degradation which compelled some rural families to seek additional sources of income in other non-farm enterprises. It is argued that farming as in tillage of land and cultivation of crops is no longer lucrative. The dwindling nature of opportunities in farming for rural households has shifted the interest of women more into other activities especially processing. These are said to be opening up new opportunities and challenges for enterprise development and wage employment in rural areas. Among the business opportunities identified, agro-processing, farming, petty trading and artisanal activities stand out as those that mainly engages these women. Although this study selected women agro-processors, it is clear from the statistics that there is a close relationship, in terms of numbers, between farming and agro-processing activities.

It was observed that in the case study community, women’s rural livelihood options
were limited to cultivation, keeping of few poultry birds, goat rearing and trading. Most of the women belonged to families that traditionally engaged in farming and that rather than selling the fresh produce to ‘outsiders’. They rather preferred processing the produce and selling them later in the local markets. While most of the women expressed the interest to have their own farms and therefore desired to cultivate their own crops, they were constrained by lack of several productive resources. Marketing of local agricultural produce is a self-employment activity that is carried out mostly by women since the men often feel shy to be seen as traders of food crops. This result is consistent with [10] study. Therefore almost all the women interviewed were either cultivators or had the desire to cultivate the crop they processed.

Figure 2 shows that among the respondents in the survey, about 34% claim to be involved in agro-processing while about 24% do farming, cultivating various food crops that could be processed into other food products for sale. This relationship is commendable and should be encouraged in the country, if agro-processing is to be allowed to lead agricultural development in the country.

3.3 Institutional Dynamics and Market Diversity

The study has revealed that various actors are involved and play different critical roles within the value chain or markets. Some of the immediate actors identified include producers, processors, handlers and distributors including wholesalers and retailers, who play critical roles in getting the products to the final consumer or end users of the products. From the focus group discussions and review of literature it was observed that while production or supply of raw materials in terms of farm produce is conducted by men and women, the remaining activities of getting the product to the end user is mainly the domain of women of all age and ethnic categories working at different scales of operation.

The focus group discussions (FGD) revealed that whereas majority of producers prefer to sell in the district, others also prefer to sell outside the district. There are other instances where producers sell in both in the district and outside of it. The survey shows that a significantly large percentage (93.0%) of entrepreneurs interviewed sold their goods and or services within the district. This leaves the rest of the 7% to probably sell their products and services outside and in both market outlets. Although it will be good for the respondents to sell their products within the district since they may reduce cost of marketing. It would also have been important if the produce were to be sold outside the district as that is what will expose the communities and what they do.

![Figure 1. Major economic activities of respondents](image-url)
From the FGD it was observed that certain privileges exist within the markets which give some categories of actors the opportunity to gain advantages over others. This had serious effects on reducing competition in the market and therefore provided the environment for others to cheat on the system and deprived others of their share of the market. Such opportunities were mainly employed by those who wielded power to prevent or tighten barriers of entry to new market entrants. Practices of this nature have the potential to greatly threaten those new entrants and thereby influence efficient performance of the groups. This power relation was also found to be exhibited between producers and traders in a bid to fix prices of the produce or raw materials for processing. In the main it was obvious that the producers had lower negotiation ability in terms of fixing prices and output for sale. The trader’s opportunity was that they often provide credits or soft loans to producers to undertake their activities. This single activity gave the traders the leverage to control commodity price fixing in the chain.

3.4 Sources Financing of Businesses

It is obvious that adequate access to finance by the agro-processors is a major key to ensuring success of a small scale business, particularly rural enterprises due to their often poor financial base. The challenges most small-scale processors, women especially, encounter when seeking credit even from the central government is overwhelmingly disappointing. In particular lack of concessional policies from government, lack of information; high interest rates; lack of collateral and prejudices about women and small scale processors and farmers make it difficult for such entrepreneurs to gain access to credits for their operations. In view of this the study sought to explore the case of the small scale processors in the community of study to find out the opportunities and challenges they face with access to credit for the business operations.

The result of the study shows that majority of the respondents use personal savings, and moneys borrowed from lenders to carry out their business. Figure 2, reveals that most often, money from these sources is not enough and could be the reason why many agro-food processors resort to traditional method of processing instead of going for more improved productivity enhancing technologies. In most cases loans are seldom large enough to enable any significant growth of enterprises. Figure 2 shows that majority (53%) of the respondents claim that the highest amount of loan they have ever gained from their financial sources, banks, microfinance or other private money lenders is between GhS 101.00 and GhS 200.00 Another 23% claim the highest amount of loan they have ever gained from their financial sources is between GhS 101.00 and GhS 200.00 Another 14% received between GhS 151.00 and GhS150.00. The rest received marginal amounts of loans for their businesses. This meager amount of loans received by the women entrepreneurs in the study community has been confirmed in other studies elsewhere. For example a study by [5] observed that women generally do not control more productive resources as a result of the limited access to and control of money.

Figure 3 above shows the weighted average analysis for loan utilization patterns of the
women processors studied. It shows that respondents used the loan contracted for several activities to satisfy their needs. Generally the women prioritize their children’s education over other social activities. Various studies also show that in rural area women are able to meet their children’s education first by paying school fees. This is followed by investing in income generation activities so as to make more money. The data shows that personal use and debt repayment are not major priority for these women. This could explain why banks are often reluctant to provide loans to agricultural producers. It also shows that loan utilization on productive activities which is likely to bring in some income streams presently or in the future is critical to the processors. It suggests that while loan advancement to processors is crucial for the development of local processing businesses, the micro finance organizations which supply credits to these local entrepreneurs should endeavor to follow up and monitor their clients. In the absence of that many local people will default in getting them to pay back could be a huge challenge to the bank.

3.5 Contribution of Women’s Agro-Processing Activities

The respondent provided a number of responses (Figure 4) to the question on contribution of their agro-processing activities to livelihood improvement in their communities. As indicated (Figure 4), majority of the respondents agreed that agro-processing eminently creates employment for the rural folks, some of whom for the lack of job opportunities in their communities would have migrated to the cities and towns for greener pastures, which may not be available in the cities. It was also realized that involvement in agro-processing enables the processors to feed their households, providing the food requirements of the household members and thereby helping such households to escape hunger and poverty, which is becoming endemic in some African countries. Provision of sources of income and minimization of post-harvest losses were also pointed out as some of the important beneficial contributions of agro-processing to the livelihoods of the respondents.

3.6 Access to Agro-processing Technologies

A needs assessment of the respondents indicated that one of such constraints critical to the development of small scale agro-processing is access to improved technologies for the processing of agricultural produce. As pointed out earlier agro-processing is by and large the major economic activity among rural women and processing activities are quite restricted and mainly carried out on small scale basis.

As indicated in Figure 5 this may be due to lack of knowledge and skills in modern technologies as well as access of the rural women processor to affordable processing methods and know how. In addition, other factors that hinder and make it difficult for poor rural processors to expand their operations include selection and acquisition of suitable equipment and tools. Figure 5 show that majority of interviewees cited inadequate access to technologies for processing as one of the major technology constraints. This is followed by low consumer perception of products from such local small holder enterprises. Some people claim that products from such enterprises are unhygienic and unsafe and therefore pose major health risks to consumers. All these suggest that access to key technologies in processing is lacking or difficult among the processors. This will require urgent attention by government if rural agro-industrialization in Ghana is to make any meaningful contribution to Ghana’s development efforts.

3.7 Emerging Business Constraints

While agro-processing is found to provide several opportunities for securing sustainable development there are other constraints which needs to be addressed. Figure 6 shows that there are several factors that limit agricultural development, for that matter food and agricultural processing in Ghana. Key among these factors includes infrastructural development and output and input prices.

It shows that a number of the relevant constraints facing the development agro-food processing enterprise operated by women in selected rural communities in Accra, Ghana need urgent solutions. It shows that the most important constraining factors to agro-food processing enterprise include inadequate capital or finance, inability to gain access to modern processing facilities or technology, inadequate governmental support in terms of infrastructural development, and low levels of education. Others include poor market integration (locally and internationally), weak producer organization and others. Inadequate finance for agro-industrial processing is a major
constraint in agro food processing enterprise development. Provision of financial supports in diverse areas of business, could help solve most of the problems identified in the study.

![Pattern of respondents' loan utilization](image)

**Figure 3. Loan utilization culture**

- Promote agro-industries
- Provide nutritive value
- Create new products
- Meet food requirements
- Provide employment
- Good returns to farmers
- Stabilize raw materials price
- Extension of food shelf-life
- Minimize post-harvest losses

![Figure 4. Contribution of women's agro-processing activities](image)

**Figure 4. Contribution of women's agro-processing activities**

![Figure 5. Factors affecting the use of technology](image)

**Figure 5. Factors affecting the use of technology**
This is because financial support is required for the purchase of processing equipment, storage facilities and for expansion of the business in order to enjoy economies of scale by these women.

4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

As an aspect of the manufacturing sector where value addition to agricultural raw materials are achieved through processing and handling activities, agro-processing industries are an important source of employment and income generation globally [11]. In many agro-based economies, this sub sector alone contributes about 66% [12]. This study explored the agro-processing activities of a women’s group in the greater Accra region of Ghana to ascertain the status, performance and policy implications of the women’s activities for sustainable livelihoods and policy. The study shows that there are policies on the ground to support women’s income generation activities and the integration of women into national economic development programmes, yet on the ground the story is different. The processes of transforming the policies into actions are slow. The findings of the study indicate that rural agro–processing are mostly traditional, employing local skills and indigenous knowledge which are often less scientific. This has the potential of reducing efficiency and productivity and should be looked at critically by policy makers.

According to [6] livelihoods can be described as sustainable when it is able to cope with shocks or show some resilience, while not undermining the natural resource base. A critical resource for ensuring sustainable livelihood is finance to support the women’s operation. Although this is not a natural resource in the definition of Scones, it plays a key role in determining the success of a business. This single resource base was found to be tight as the women had fewer opportunities in terms of access to funding. Those who were able to access productive loans had meagre amounts from their funding sources. In spite of these challenges these women were able to make some head way in their processing activities. The inadequacy of finance and raw materials for processing had affected the performance of these agro-processing enterprises. Processing is yet to pick up in terms of cleaning, packaging and grading just to mention a few. This however does not indicate a total collapse of the industry. There is a potential for the businesses to support the women if the needed environment is built.

The use of modern technology and scientific methods of processing and packaging is inadequate and underdeveloped in the region. Inadequate business capital, infrastructural development and entrepreneurial skills as well as poor market integration limit the development of the industry therefore its potential to provide employment and sustainable income for the local people. This does not suggest that the sector has not seen any improvement in growth. There is the need for policy makers to make frantic efforts to develop the sector further. With the technological and scientific pacing in development, Ghana and for that matter, our policy cannot close their eyes and pretend not to see what is going on around us. There is the need to provide a more efficient productive
technology for the local processors since they play a major role in the only sector on which much of the country's development depend. This will enable the local processor to compete at the national and international levels.

4.2 Implications for Policy

Agro processing activities or enterprises form an important linkage between agriculture and industry and therefore plays a major role in curbing post-harvest loses. Generally, agriculture and for that matter agro-processing supports households, particularly rural households in diverse ways. Majority of the over 60% of the population living in rural communities of the country, depend on this single important sector for survival. This suggests that the failure of government to develop and promote the sector could have serious repercussion on Ghana’s economy. The agriculture sector’s contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) which is already falling, could take a catastrophic turn if serious efforts are not taken to reverse the current trend. It is therefore crucial that policy makers get to understand the nuances of the constraints and opportunities of the small scale agro-processing sector from a systematic study as this.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that a deeper understanding of the institutions and processes that interacts with the local people’s business opportunities should be considered. Therefore in addition to the conventional or some of the well know constraints such as inadequate access to capital and market as well as poor supply of raw material for processing that may limit the progress of business performance the study reports on the limitations posed by the institution arrangements along the value chain. This requires understanding of power dynamics that are inherent within the value chain.

Rural financing of businesses is a critical issue that policy makers need to look at if the businesses in such communities are to develop. This is especially when several reports and authors have reported of financing as one of the major delimitating factors when it comes to the growth and expansion of rural businesses. This study suggests that improving access of rural women to concessionary loans could give a fillip to the performance of their productive activities. This would enable them to expand their businesses, create more value added products, develop new products and increase food availability, and hence bring improvement in their livelihoods.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, small scale agro-processing in the country’s rural communities, particularly in the case study community lacks capital, market access and other entrepreneurial skills as well as adequate access to productive resources and technology. These are critical to the development and expansion and enhancement of development in the rural sector. This requires the active involvement of the public and private sector institutions and processes that binds and mediates processes and activities which engages people and provides a livelihood. A laboratory and recruitment of food inspectors in such communities to help test the quality of the food products processed is essential as it will build confidence in potential consumers and hence help improve business activities the more.

Generally, this study has shown the need for the government of Ghana and other stakeholders of the agricultural sector to double efforts to enhance livelihoods through the improvements in women’s returns from their small scale economic activities, especially the female stereotyped activities such as agro-processing and marketing of processed products. It must be emphasized here that local food markets are crucial and therefore needs to be developed as a short term measure to encourage food processing.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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