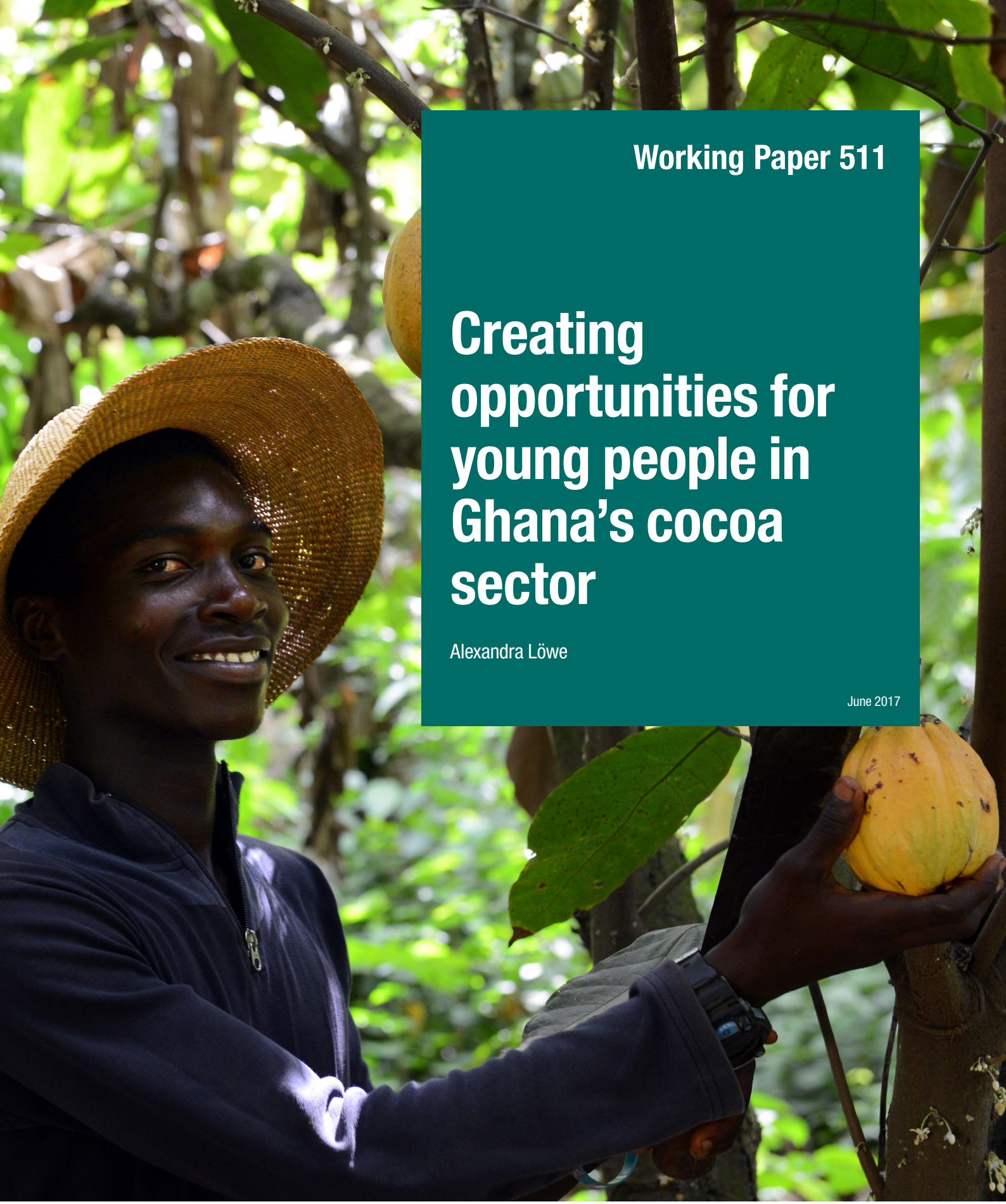

Working Paper 511

Creating opportunities for young people in Ghana's cocoa sector

Alexandra Löwe

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About Youth Forward

The Youth Forward initiative is a partnership led by The MasterCard Foundation, the Overseas Development Institute, Global Communities, Solidaridad, NCBA-CLUSA and GOAL. Its focus is to link young people to quality employment or to starting their own businesses in the agriculture and construction sectors in Ghana and Uganda. The Youth Forward Learning Partnership works across the initiative to develop an evidence-informed understanding of the needs of young people in Ghana and Uganda and how the programme can best meet those needs. The Learning Partnership is led by the Overseas Development Institute in the UK, in partnership with Development Research and Training in Uganda and Participatory Development Associates in Ghana.

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Cover photo: Luliana, child of a cocoa farmer in Ghana. Robert Harding/Alamy Stock Photo. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Contents

List of figures and boxes

Figures

Boxes

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Alexandra Löwe is Youth Forward's Learning Partnership Applied Research Lead and Research Fellow in the Overseas Development Institute's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme.

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Abbreviations

CHED	Cocoa Health and Extension Department
COCOBOD	Ghana Cocoa Board, formerly the Cocoa Marketing Board
FOB	free on board (price)
GDP	gross domestic product
ha	hectare
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
kg	kilogram
MASO	Name of a consortium led by Solidaridad
mm	millimetre
MOFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
MoFEP	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
MT	metric tonne
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
YIEDIE	Youth-Inclusive Entrepreneurial Development Initiative for Employment

Executive summary

Cocoa production is essential to the health of Ghana's economy, contributing 3% to its gross domestic product and supporting the livelihoods of approximately 4 million farming households (GSS, 2015). Ghana represents the gold standard for cocoa quality and is one of the world's largest producers, yet the sector's yields remain stubbornly low.

Young people are a key part of the solution to revitalising Ghana's cocoa sector. A total of 20% of the population is aged 15–24, and 27% of young people are not in education and do not work (Pasanen, 2016). Today, the average cocoa farmer in Ghana is over 50 years old – an advanced age in a country where the average life expectancy is just 62 years and cocoa is produced by means of manual labour. Rejuvenating the cocoa sector therefore has the potential to support youth employment, increase rural incomes and boost Ghana's economy at large.

The status quo raises important questions about why young people are seemingly not participating in, or benefiting from, the cocoa sector. This paper presents young people's experiences of growing up in Ghana's cocoa belt, by describing their transitions from childhood to adulthood. It then identifies key barriers to their involvement in the sector and highlights opportunities to promote their participation and increase their cocoa yields.

A sector in need of rejuvenation

Until the 1970s, Ghana was the world's largest cocoa producer. Production levels began to fall in 1964, after the state Cocoa Marketing Board (today the Ghana Cocoa Board, or COCOBOD) lowered the price paid to farmers for their produce. With reduced profits, farmers invested less in production, which lowered yields. Between 1964 and 1983, national cocoa production levels fell from 591,000 to just 159,000 MT.

It was only once the macroeconomic consequences of this decline were felt in the 1980s that serious measures were introduced to reinvigorate the sector (Williams, 2009). The Cocoa Marketing Board responded by increasing the price paid to farmers for their produce. Therefore, in the 1980s and 1990s, farmers began to increase their cocoa output by expanding land used for cocoa farming. Even so, yields remained relatively low owing to poor agronomic practices, declining soil fertility and limited access to finance to purchase yield-increasing inputs, such as fertiliser, insecticides and pesticides (Mohammed et al., 2012).

This history has important consequences for how the sector is structured today: expansion of land used for cocoa cultivation in the 1980s and 1990s means that there is very limited virgin land available today to establish new cocoa farms and farmers are working on soil with decreased fertility. Furthermore, almost 25% of cocoa trees are now around 30 years old and their productivity is declining (COCOBOD, 2015). Meanwhile, climate change presents further challenges. Given the scarcity of virgin land, the only way to increase Ghana's cocoa yields is to intensify production on existing farms, which requires significant capital investment.

Barriers and opportunities for young people

There is a general perception among older farmers that young people are lazy and not interested in farming. However, this research finds that, overall, this is not true. Young people in Ghana's cocoa belt are introduced to the sector at a very young age, when they start helping their parents on their farms. From these first experiences, through to their teens, young people are gradually introduced to all aspects of cocoa farming and contribute considerable amounts of labour to the sector (see the timeline of growing up on a cocoa farm, on page 23). This contribution needs to be recognised and further supported, by reducing the barriers to youth productively participating in the sector.

Access to land

The greatest challenge for young people in the cocoa sector is access to land. Fertile land that is suitable for cocoa production is largely held by older farmers. Young people may inherit land, but this does not generally occur until their 30s, and any land inherited is likely to have reduced fertility. Historically, sharecropping arrangements were a common way for young people to access land. Recently, the shortage of fertile farm land has rendered this less common and the terms less favourable. Therefore, young people need better farming skills to maintain and increase their cocoa yields, and to increase their earnings. For those unable to acquire land, providing services to land-owning

farmers, cocoa-buying companies and agro-enterprises presents the most promising livelihood opportunities.

Access to finance

For young people who do acquire land, rehabilitating it is becoming more expensive. As a result of soil degradation and climate change, greater investment in fertiliser, pesticides and other inputs is needed to achieve the same yields. Furthermore, cocoa trees can take up to five years to yield beans, leaving farmers with no cocoa income during that time. There is very little formal, or even informal, finance available to young people. Tailored, formal credit and savings schemes, as well as an increase in accessible village savings associations, are therefore crucial to supporting young cocoa farmers.

Skills training and education

Despite these challenges, cocoa farming in Ghana has the potential to be very profitable. In addition to financial investment, this requires more sophisticated cocoa farming skills to manage soil fertility losses and climate change. There is currently insufficient agro-economic education or skills training for young farmers. Without education, youth are limited to working as unskilled labourers. Formal accreditation of skills and training would allow young farmers to command better wages, seek credit and investment, develop a business plan and, ultimately, increase yields.

Perceptions of cocoa farming

Linked to all of the above are the perceptions young people have about cocoa farming. There are few role models for young cocoa farmers. They see older generations working hard for little return, meaning they do not recognise the profitable livelihood potential of the sector. Schools deliver mixed messages about cocoa farming; it is portrayed as integral to Ghanaian national identity, yet the economic benefits and how to achieve them are not taught adequately.

Young women face additional barriers. Most notable is the perception that cocoa production is not a suitable occupation for women, limiting opportunities for them in the sector – in particular, their ability to acquire land. At the same time, they are expected to look after younger siblings and perform household chores from a young age, reducing the time available to them to acquire farming skills or to earn a livelihood.

Photo: Cocoa plantation, near Obuasi Amantia, Ghana, September 2013 (jbdodane, Flickr).

Figure 1: Rejuvenating Ghana's cocoa sector by investing in young people

Rejuvenating Ghana's cocoa sector by investing in young people

Ghana's cocoa yields are low and youth unemployment is high. Investing in young farmers could be the solution to both. There are four interrelated areas that need to be addressed:

Better access to land

Older generations control most of Ghana's fertile cocoa land, with young farmers often only inheriting land in their 30s.

Sharecropping arrangements have become expensive as a result of climate change, land scarcity and soil degradation.

Young people therefore need access to credit to afford to buy or rent land, and better agricultural education to know how to rejuvenate infertile land.

Tailored credit and savings schemes

Young farmers need money to set up and run their farm, and cocoa trees can take up to five years to yield beans and provide an income.

Yet, there are no formal financial services available to young farmers, and informal money lenders charge high interest rates.

Tailored credit and savings schemes would help young people participate in the sector and make a sustainable living.

More skills training and education

Young people receive little formal education or skills training in cocoa farming. They learn about farming from their parents, whose skills are often limited.

Without knowledge, young farmers are limited to working as unskilled labourers and yields remain low.

Accredited skills training would allow young people to command better wages, seek credit and investment, develop a business plan and increase yields.

Change perceptions

Older generations and policy-makers perceive youth as lazy and uninterested in farming – but this is largely untrue. Young people see older farmers struggling to make a living, so they do not recognise the profitable potential of the sector.

Young women face additional barriers; they are seen as too weak to farm, and are assigned domestic chores instead.

Young people need positive farming role models, education and finance to be able to participate in and rejuvenate Ghana's cocoa sector.

Source: The Overseas Development Institute (2017).

1 Introduction

Ghana's average cocoa farmer is well over 50 years old – an advanced age in a country where life expectancy at birth is only around 62 years and healthy life expectancy is only 54 years (COCOBOD, 2015; WHO, 2016). Furthermore, cocoa farming as it is practised in Ghana is a labour-intensive endeavour and so, arguably, is more suited to younger farmers. It is often said that cocoa farming is profitable, an argument that can be backed up with calculations of potential yields, cocoa prices and input data. At the same time, half of young people aged 15 to 24 in Ghana are out of school and, of these, 27% do not work. Of those who are in employment, only 5% work in the cocoa sector and just over half of these do so in the Western Region (Pasanen, 2016).

The fact that the average age of cocoa farmers remains high despite the sector's positive medium-term outlook and the opportunities for young people, has led to a number of assumptions about why young people are not going into cocoa farming. These range from accusations of laziness to a belief that young people prefer white collar jobs and aspire to urban lifestyles, rather than being content to stay in their rural communities. This report explores the cocoa sector from the perspective of young people, in order to illuminate the opportunities and obstacles that influence their decisions. In other words, it looks at the roles young people perform in cocoa farming, and at what might prevent them from become farm owners – rather than assuming that they simply choose not to because of laziness or different aspirations. The focus of this report is cocoa production, as this is the sub-sector that young rural Ghanaians are most likely to be working in. This will allow for a better assessment of how the sector might be rejuvenated and for a better understanding of what lies behind this seemingly ageing population of farmers.

The question is an important one, not just for Ghana's youth but also for the health of the nation's economy. While the sector's overall contribution to national gross domestic product (GDP) is 3%, it makes up 20% of total export receipts, provides about two-thirds of cocoa farmers' income and supports the livelihoods of approximately 4 million farming households (GSS, 2015; EGEVAL, 2005). In addition, it has been very important to poverty reduction efforts in the past 25 years: in 1991/92 60% of cocoa farmers fell below the national poverty line but by 2008 this proportion had dropped to 24%, as a result of improved farming practices and increases in cocoa prices (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007). Continued investment in the sector is, therefore, likely to contribute both to national economic development and stability and to the living standards of rural Ghanaians. Thus, it is important to ensure not only that the sector continues to thrive but also that younger Ghanaians benefit from this growth too, in order to ensure their well-being. Ghana has a very young population, but has struggled to ensure that the benefits of growth trickle down to its younger citizens. While youth, aged 15 to 24, make up almost one-fifth of the population, the majority of underemployed or unemployed Ghanaians fall into this age group (GSS, 2014).

Box 1. Youth Forward and MASO

Youth Forward

The Youth Forward initiative is a partnership led by The MasterCard Foundation, the Overseas Development Institute, Global Communities, Solidaridad, NCBA-CLUSA and GOAL. Its focus is to help young people gain good jobs in the agriculture and construction sectors in Ghana and Uganda or to help them to start their own businesses. This five-year, $73.2-million initiative will reach more than 200,000 economically disadvantaged young people aged 15–24. The Youth Forward initiative takes a holistic approach that combines market-relevant skills training, mentoring, internships and access to financial services to help young people transition out of poverty and into sustainable livelihoods. In Ghana, Youth Forward comprises two consortia: Youth-Inclusive Entrepreneurial Development Initiative for Employment (YIEDIE), which works to create opportunities for young people in construction, and MASO, which focuses on the cocoa sector.

MASO in Ghana

The MASO consortium (led by Solidaridad and also including Aflatoun, Asheshi University, Fidelity Bank, Opportunity International, and COCOBOD, Ghana's Cocoa Board) seeks to empower young people as agents of change in the cocoa sector by making cocoa farming and businesses in cocoa-growing communities an attractive and economically viable career choice for them. MASO provides services to 10,800 young people aged 18–25 who are interested in working in the cocoa sector in Ghana's five cocoa-producing regions (Ashanti Region, Western Region, Brong Ahafo Region, Central Region and Volta Region).

The implementation of the programme is focused on three components:

- Agro-academies. These have been established in each of the cocoa-growing regions to equip and motivate the young people to acquire knowledge and to enter cocoa farming as a business.
- The Business Academy. This provides young people interested in becoming entrepreneurs with skills to start businesses in cocoa-growing communities.
- MASO Connect. This facilitates a youth exchange of best practices and learning, and creates a common voice for young people's issues.

The programme also aims to ensure that a supportive enabling environment is created, to increase young people's access to land, finance and markets and to help break down the barriers to success.

This paper was written as part of the Overseas Development Institute's work as Learning Partner to The MasterCard Foundation's Youth Forward initiative. Beyond providing an overview of the cocoa sector in Ghana, it seeks to offer contextual information that will be of use to the MASO consortium, which works with young people in the cocoa-growing regions of Ghana (MASO's work is described in Box 1). Much of Youth Forward's operational context is beyond the control of the initiative but it has the potential to affect the success of the programme and so needs to be well understood. Additionally, this research serves to highlight where lobbying and advocacy energies might yield the most results – not just for beneficiaries of the initiative but for all young Ghanaians in the sector.

In order to review the cocoa sector from the perspective of young people, the focus of this report is the typical transitions that take children into youth and adulthood in rural, cocoa-growing communities. Essentially, it looks at the question of how young people become cocoa farmers, so that we can better understand the obstacles they face and so that we can identify the opportunities available to them.

The report is structured as follows: after describing our methodology and explaining why we have chosen to study youth transitions in Sections 2 and 3, it introduces Ghana's cocoa sector in Section 4 as the backdrop against which these transitions take place. Section 5 introduces the political economy of cocoa production, while Section 6 discusses childhood and youth in Ghana's cocoa-growing regions and outlines how the lives of young people living there typically unfold. Finally, in its conclusion in Section 7, the report brings these sections together to identify the obstacles that prevent younger people from becoming cocoa farmers and to highlight some of the opportunities available to them.

2 Research methods

The research for this paper was conducted over a period of two weeks in July and August 2016. It consisted of focus group discussions with young people aged 15 to 25 in different districts in the cocoa-growing belt – Sefwi-Wiaswo (Western Region), New Edubiase (Ashanti Region) and Hohoe (Volta Region) – in rural and semi-urban areas (in the vicinity of a trading centre or town). Usually, we conducted separate focus group discussions with women and men – though on a couple of occasions they preferred to work together – and asked them to draw a timeline of the responsibilities they had taken on at each stage of their lives, along a number of dimensions. While we kept our questions as open-ended as possible, at least initially, we did usually suggest that they focus on issues such as how and when they first interacted with the market, livestock ownership, access to land, household chores and learning to farm.

Once young people had completed this process, the researchers discussed their timelines with them and asked for additional clarification where necessary. As the young people consulted varied in age, some were able to talk with a greater degree of knowledge about the process of becoming a cocoa farmer. The experiences of a 15-year-old in a cocoa-growing community are, naturally, very different to those of a young adult. Given that cocoa farming is something that is often only a full-time occupation for adults aged well over 25 years, we supplemented the experiences shared by young people with those of their traditional leaders, government officials and other experts, as well as conducting an extensive literature review.

While identifying young people who could take part in our focus group discussions, we attempted to get as broad an understanding of their experiences as possible and sought to speak to a wide range of young males and females, including those who were the children of cocoa farm owners as well as those whose parents were migrant labourers or caretakers. The timelines drawn by our young informants were analysed in order to draw out the experiences that young people have in common and, where possible, triangulated against available secondary literature and in discussion with key informants.

The second stage of our research consisted of key informant interviews, at the local level in Sefwi-Wiaswo, New Edubiase and Hohoe, as well as in Accra. We interviewed policy-makers, agriculture experts, farmers' representatives and representatives of donor organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with young people and/or in agriculture. (A complete list of interviewees can be found in annexes 2 and 3, on pages 37 and 38.) The aim of these interviews was to understand the context that influences young people's lives, including factors such as agricultural policies, the interest groups involved in implementing these and broader economic trends. Findings from these key informant interviews were complemented by a review of the secondary literature.

Photo: Young people drawing the timeline of their childhood and youth, Hohoe, Volta Region, Ghana (Alexandra Löwe, 29 July 2016).

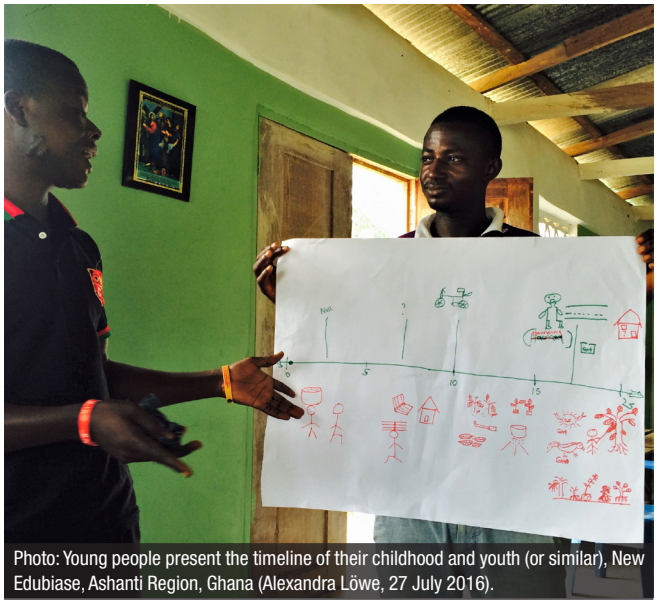


Photo: Young people present the timeline of their childhood and youth (or similar), New Edubiase, Ashanti Region, Ghana (Alexandra Löwe, 27 July 2016).

3 Why study youth transitions?

The notion of 'youth' as a social construct is a socially defined concept that describes the period of transition between childhood and adulthood. During this period, the social, personal, political and cultural responsibilities of individuals change, as does the role they play in their household and national economies. While youth is often defined in terms of age, this is a poor approximation of what this life stage entails, as the experiences lived by those belonging to this group vary greatly. The responsibilities of a 15-year-old, for example, are very different to those of a 25-year-old.

Further, many historical studies have shown that the concept of 'youth' has not existed in all cultures, or throughout history, and that many societies have not distinguished between youth and adulthood (Zelizer, 1985). This is not to say that the concept of life stages is not relevant everywhere, but rather that these stages are determined by how societies and economies are organised and are shaped by political institutions. Ideas about youth and childhood vary to such an extent across cultures that there is no 'single universal definition of childhood in both international humanitarian and human rights law' (Rosen, 2007: 297). Thus, a more useful starting point for studying 'youth' is the notion that young people are not yet completely independent but still take on some adult roles in society. As Deborah Durham writes, 'beyond the important observation that different societies do define and demarcate youth differently, even within a society people of a wide range of ages are often treated as youth, and people of a wide range of ages claim the space of youth, at specific times and in specific places' (Durham, 2000: 113). This approach, therefore, allows for questions of agency and resource control, which are important to this study, to be answered, including how and when young people are able to control economic resources and when they can make independent decisions.

Generally, however, young people or youth are seen as 'not yet adults' and incomplete in their transition to adulthood (Nandy, 1985). This view, in conjunction with the demarcation of youth as a category distinct from children and adults, has often resulted in this group being imagined as a threat to the stability of a society or culture. At its most extreme this manifests itself in the portrayal of youth – usually young men – as the source of violent conflicts and wars, as in much of the literature on Africa's 'youth bulge' (e.g. Urdal, 2004; Collier et al., 2006; Sommers, 2011). In its more everyday forms, this discourse endorses the disqualification of young people's opinions about the issues that concern them as their understanding of the world is seen as inferior and they are not yet afforded the status of full citizens (Hawkins and Meshesha, 1994 in van Eerdewijk, 2007).

The liminal status of young people and their political, social and cultural position in a society can provide useful insights into social conflicts and the changing nature of a political, economic or agricultural system. In the words of Deborah Durham: 'To pay attention to youth is to pay close attention to the topology of the social landscape – to power and agency; public, national and domestic spaces and identities, and their articulation and disjunctures; memory, history and sense of change; globalization and governance; gender and class' (Durham, 2000: 113). This applies to the question of young cocoa farmers too: by studying their transitions into adulthood, we can shed light on the changing nature of cocoa production in rural Ghana. Furthermore, it allows us to take a closer look at who controls resources within the cocoa sector, and how this affects on young people's opportunities and barriers to making a livelihood in the sector.

4 The cocoa sector in Ghana

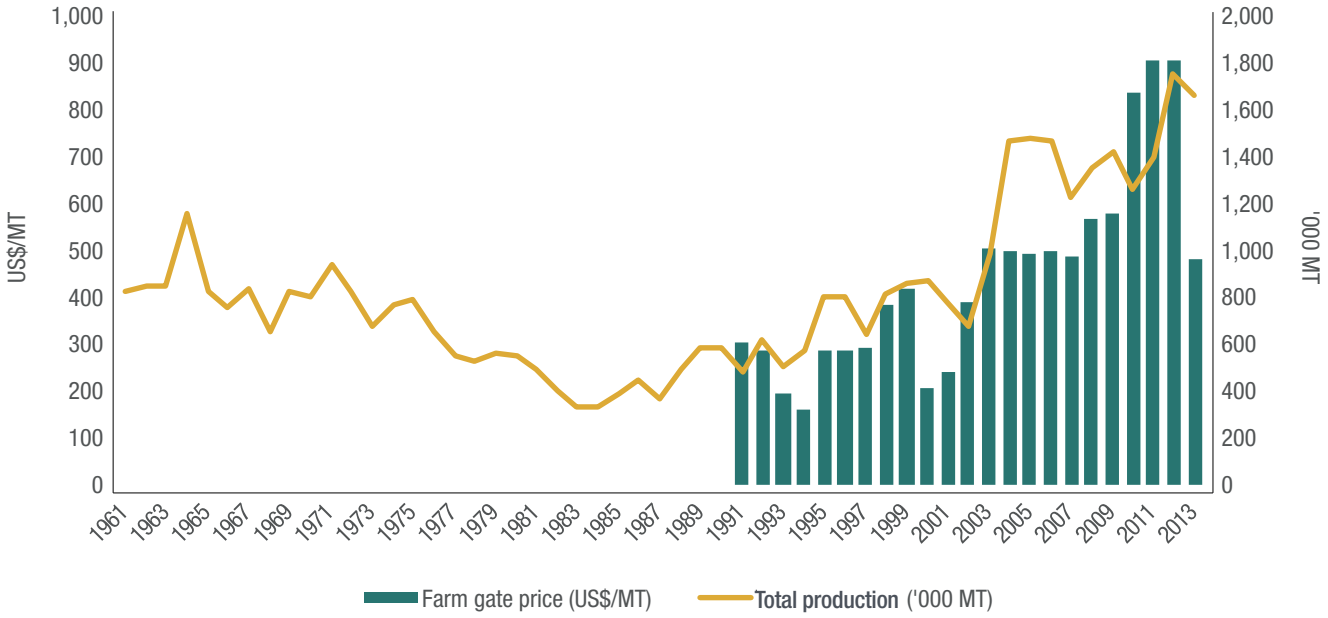
The process of growing up in Ghana's cocoa belt is structured by the social, political and economic environment of the cocoa sector. Young people face a particular set of circumstances in contemporary Ghana that result from the way in which the sector has developed in the past 100 years. Of particular importance here are the decline of the sector and its revival in the 1980s, the expansion of land under cocoa cultivation and total land availability, as well as the age of existing cocoa farms. This section therefore begins by outlining the history of the sector in Ghana, before looking at contemporary cocoa production and some of its challenges. The next section will look at the political economy of the sector, most notably the institutions that shape how the sector functions.

4.1 The history of the cocoa sector in Ghana

Ghana's relationship with cocoa began when it exported two bags of beans in 1891. From these modest beginnings, production expanded at a phenomenal rate, until the country became the world's largest exporter of cocoa less than 20 years later in 1910, and its cocoa output continued to grow until World War II. Not only did Ghana produce large quantities of cocoa, but also its cocoa was of very high quality and, to this day, Ghana's cocoa represents the global quality standard that other countries aspire to and, as a result, it commands a premium (Williams, 2009).

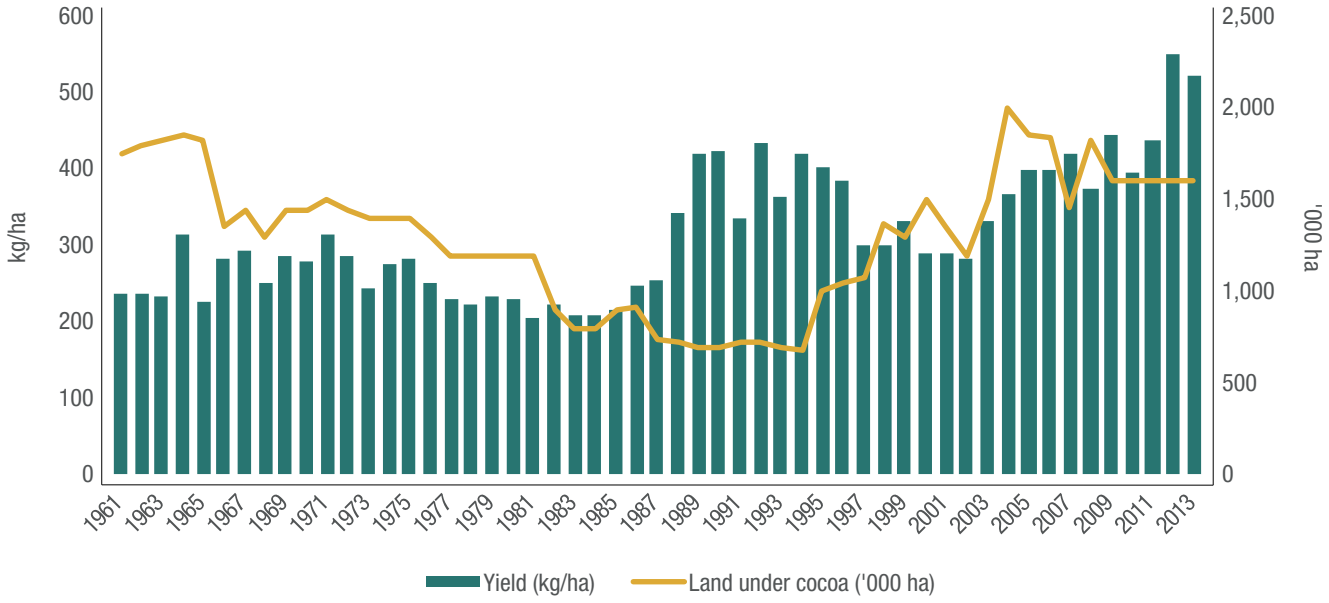
From 1947 onwards, its production and export were overseen by a powerful marketing board, which was

Figure 2: Cocoa production and farm gate prices, 1961–2013 ('000 MT and current US$/MT)



Source: FAOSTAT (http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data)

Figure 3: Cocoa yield and land under cocoa, 1961–2013 (kg/ha and ha)



Source: FAOSTAT (http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data)

initially called the Cocoa Marketing Board and today is the Ghana Cocoa Board (widely referred to as COCOBOD) (Laven, 2010). The marketing board's mandate was then, as it is today, to protect smallholder producers against the vagaries of world market prices, to ensure the quality of the cocoa produced and to manage the taxation of producers. Thanks to agro-ecological conditions and sustained efforts by COCOBOD, the sector resumed its expansion from the late 1950s onwards after a short period of decline and Ghana remained the world's largest cocoa producer for almost 70 years.

Ghana's cocoa sector began to decline significantly in the late 1960s and continued to do so throughout the 1970s, mainly as result of the marketing board's corruption and mismanagement, but also because of outbreaks of disease and bush fires. As can be seen from Figure 2, production fell significantly between 1964 and 1983, when total output fell from 591,000 to 159,000 tonnes. This drop was largely the result of a reduction in the prices paid to cocoa producers by the board, which in turn was caused by COCOBOD's inefficiency and the extraction of resources from the cocoa sector for political ends, as well as a fall in world market prices.

In sum, the resources generated by cocoa production were not reinvested in the sector, or even the Ghanaian economy more broadly. Farm gate cocoa prices declined to such an extent that by 1980 farmers received only 21% of the FOB price,[1] which effectively subjected producers to a tax rate of 79%.[2] Unsurprisingly, Ghana's cocoa farmers responded to this by reducing their cocoa output or, where possible, smuggling their cocoa to Côte d'Ivoire (Kolavalli and Vigneri, 2011). Given the sunk costs involved in establishing a cocoa farm, producers continued to supply cocoa but they discontinued pest control measures, applied less fertiliser and shifted their labour to other, more lucrative, crops (Williams, 2009). Eventually, when their cocoa trees aged, they did not replace them with younger ones and so national production levels declined. It was only when the economic consequences of the near-collapse of cocoa production in the early 1980s begun to be felt that serious measures were introduced to reinvigorate the sector as part of the World Bank-supported Economic Recovery Programme (as Ghana's first structural adjustment programme was called).[3]

What is important to young people today is that a significant period of cocoa revival began in the 1980s

1 FOB is the free on board price. This means that the costs of transportation up to the port are borne by the seller, while transport costs thereafter are borne by the buyer. In other words, the FOB price for cocoa is the price international buyers are willing to pay for cocoa in Ghana's ports.

2 Extremely high taxes on perennial crops have not been unusual in sub-Saharan Africa as they represent an easy source of tax revenue for governments (e.g. McMillan, 2001).

3 As is the case with structural adjustment programmes in other parts of Africa, the extent to which economic recovery should be attributed to the programme is disputed (see Brydon and Legge, 1996). As discussed below, the ability to resist the complete privatisation of cocoa – as advised by the international financial institutions – is certainly a part of the cocoa success story.

and then took off in the 1990s, with the restructuring of COCOBOD (discussed in more detail in Section 5.1). COCOBOD oversaw a sharp and sustained increase in farm gate prices; and today it strives to pass on 70% of the net FOB price to farmers, retaining the rest to provide services, to pay for transport and haulage and as a tax contribution (interview, MoFEP; see Annex 3). This has been facilitated by the partial liberalisation of internal cocoa marketing, which has reduced bulking and transport costs (Kolavalli and Vigneri, 2011). Importantly, taxes extracted from cocoa production are ring-fenced and spent largely on services that directly benefit cocoa farmers (Kolavalli et al., 2012). This has resulted in vastly improved extension and support services and producers have responded positively by increasing output and gradually expanding the amount of land under cocoa cultivation (Williams, 2009). Production levels continued to increase throughout the 1990s and peaked in the early 2000s, with cocoa output nearly doubling between 2002 and 2004 (see Figure 3).

While the expansion of output was partly driven by an increase in the land area under cultivation (see Figure 3), the gradual adoption of newer technologies has contributed to recovery since 2012 through increases in yields. These were made possible by the price increases discussed above and the improved services provided by COCOBOD. The technologies adopted include chemical fertilisers, hybrid cocoa trees and greater control measures for pests and diseases. Less than 10% of farmers applied fertiliser in 1991, while 50% did so in 2003, and only 10% of trees were of high-yielding varieties in the 1980s, compared to 57% in 2002 (Kolavalli and Vigneri, 2011). Further, in 2001 COCOBOD introduced a mass spraying programme to counter disease and pests. Nevertheless, intensification has been incomplete, and a great deal more needs to be done for yields to catch up with those in Côte d'Ivoire, for example.

While some problems remain, Ghana today has a vibrant cocoa sector, producing the world's best cocoa while coming second only to Côte d'Ivoire in terms of quantity. Côte d'Ivoire produces almost twice as much cocoa (approximately 1.7 million MT in 2015/16) as Ghana (0.84 million MT in 2015/16) (Statistica, 2016). While not as important as it once was, in terms of either tax revenue or total contribution to the economy, it still constitutes 3.4% of Ghana's GDP and 20% of total export receipts (COCOBOD, 2015). The next sub-section provides a brief introduction to how that cocoa is produced in Ghana today, before Section 4.3 discusses continuing challenges and threats to the sector.

4.2 Cocoa production

Cocoa is a perennial tree crop that grows in humid, tropical forest areas. It is produced in Ghana's forest zone, mainly in the Brong Ahafo, Ashanti, Western, Central, Eastern and Volta Regions. Over this forest zone, between 1.6 million and 2 million ha of land are given over to cocoa farms (FAOSTAT, 2016) and cocoa dominates livelihood strategies to such an extent that it represents between 70% and 100% of annual incomes for cocoa farmers (Läderach et al., 2013). Cocoa incomes have contributed significantly to poverty reduction efforts: while poverty rates among cocoa farmers were as high as 60% in 1991/92 this had more than halved to 24% by 2008 (Breisinger et al., 2008). Cocoa farmers are geographically concentrated in the southern part of the country, but they nevertheless represent approximately 20% of Ghana's farming households and reductions in poverty levels of this magnitude among cocoa farmers represent a significant reduction in overall poverty rates (EGEVAL, 2005). Young people in the region undoubtedly benefited from these reductions in poverty rates during their childhoods, but, as we will see below, whether they will benefit from these throughout their economically productive lives is unclear.

Cocoa trees prefer to grow in shaded areas and so are usually intercropped, most commonly with annual food crops such as maize, cocoa yam, cassava or bananas for the first few years, as they grow into mature trees. Adult trees also prefer, but do not necessarily require, shade. Cocoa trees are sensitive to variations in temperature and rainfall – if there is too little rain or too much heat, the productivity of the farm will decline. With too much rain (more than 2,500 mm a month) trees are likely to fall victim to diseases such as black pod or swollen shoot virus (Vigneri, 2008). In order to maximise yields, cocoa requires regular applications of insecticide and pesticide, as well as fertiliser. The need for pesticides and insecticides is increasing with climate change, while declines in soil fertility mean that trees need ever more fertiliser (see Box 3 for more on climate change).

Cocoa trees have a lifespan that fits quite well into the economically active life of a farmer: they require a great deal of work in the first five years or so, begin to yield cocoa after three to four years and reach full productivity at ten years of age. From the age of 25 they become gradually less productive but they generally continue to produce some cocoa even beyond the age of 30. COCOBOD recommends replacing trees once they are 30 years old, to increase the productivity and economic returns of a cocoa farm (Vigneri, 2008; COCOBOD, 2015). Mapped onto the life of a cocoa farmer, this means

trees start to decline in productivity when farmers are in their 50s. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Ghana's cocoa farmers and trees have aged in tandem, given the increase in land under cultivation from the 1980s onwards.

Cocoa is both a labour- and an input-intensive crop and in Ghana cocoa farming is done in the context of small, family-run plantations, over 70% of which are between 1 and 5 ha in size (Danso-Abbeam et al., 2012). While fertiliser and pesticide use has increased since the 1990s, largely as a result of COCOBOD's efforts, overall application rates of both types of chemicals remain below optimal levels. In addition, a significant percentage of Ghana's cocoa trees are unimproved varieties, old or both (Gockowski et al., 2011; COCOBOD, 2015). These factors combine to keep Ghanaian yields low, at about half of their potential, and concomitantly see farmers' earnings stagnate below their potential levels. It is in the closing of this yield gap that the growth potential for Ghana's cocoa sector is to be found as the supply of new land that is suitable for cocoa production has been largely exhausted (Gokowski, 2007; Läderach et al., 2013).

Growers of cocoa are not a homogenous group and how intensively cocoa is farmed varies greatly from one farm to the next. The Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana classifies farmers according to their level of productivity (high, medium or low). The high-productivity group, which produces only 5% of total output, attains yields that approach those on research farms, namely 1,400 kg per ha, through the regular application of fertiliser, regular weeding and pruning, good shade and disease and pest management practices, as well as frequent harvesting. Medium-level producers are responsible for 45% of Ghana's output but achieve yields of less than half of high-productivity farmers, at 650 kg per ha. They have fewer improved trees and apply fewer inputs (fertiliser and chemicals), but practise good management techniques, such as frequent pruning and harvesting. Those with the lowest productivity levels are the majority of cocoa producers and grow about half of the country's cocoa, with yields of 350 kg per ha. Their farming practices are both labour- and input-extensive (Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana, 2015). James Gockowski found that some of these households produced such low yields that they would be better off dedicating their scarce resources to the production of other crops (Gockowski, 2007).

Box 2. Sharecropping arrangements in cocoa production in Ghana

Abunu

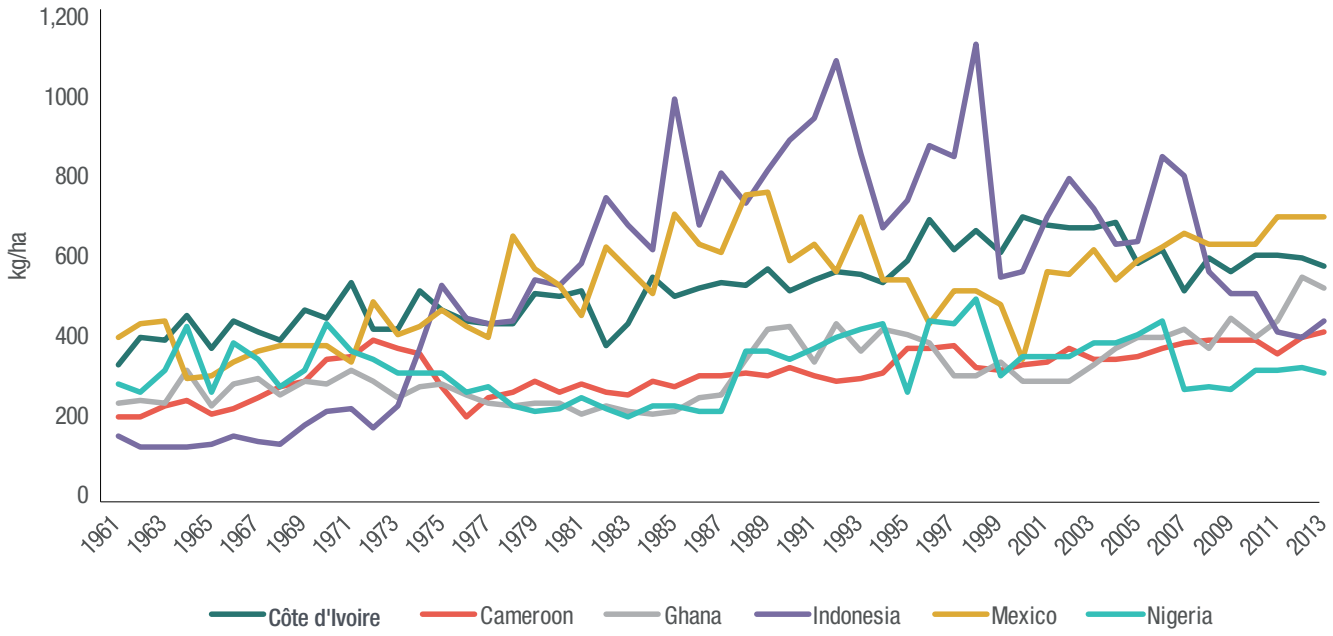
Sharecropping is the means by which landless individuals, frequently migrants, acquire land on which to cultivate cocoa. Through abunu an individual can acquire the right to use land or cocoa trees indefinitely, until the land either goes unused or he/she dies (Berry, 1993). Under this arrangement, the sharecropper clears the land, and plants and maintains a new cocoa farm without any assistance from the landowner. When the cocoa trees begin yielding beans (after three or four years), the sharecropper then retains half of the farm, while the other half is returned to the landowner to manage as he/she sees fit (Vigneri, 2008). This form of sharecropping places a heavy burden on the abunu farmer: he/she must not only do the very labour-intensive work of clearing the land and planting a new cocoa farm, but also find other sources of income until the farm begins to yield cocoa beans. In some areas, the institution existed prior to independence, with reports of this arrangement dating back to the 1930s, while in the Western Region, for example, the practice expanded rapidly from the 1990s, when the farm gate price for cocoa improved (Hill, 1963; Ruf, 2011).

The institution of sharecropping can be important in structuring incentives for replanting too: in some cases of abunu, the right to land usage is tied to the life of the trees rather than the land. This means that farmers benefit from keeping their trees alive for as long as possible and for much longer than they are yielding reasonable quantities of cocoa. Cutting the trees down and replanting them may mean renegotiating with the landowner or even giving up the farm entirely (Takane, 2000).

Abusa

Here, the tenant or sharecropper manages a well-established cocoa farm. He/she is responsible for tasks such as weeding, spraying and harvesting in return for a share of the harvest, usually ranging from one- to two-thirds, depending on the contract negotiated. As a rule of thumb, a tenant farmer who contributes inputs as well as labour to the production endeavour will be rewarded with two-thirds of the harvest, while those who provide only their labour receive one-third. While this arrangement allows those with fewer resources or social networks to move into cocoa production, it does make tenant farmers vulnerable to the whims of their landlords: a number of farmers engaged in abusa arrangements complained that their landlords did not source any additional inputs, over and above those provided by COCOBOD, thereby essentially reducing the remuneration for their labour.

Figure 4: Average yields in six cocoa producing countries, 1961–2013 (kg/ha)



Source: FAOSTAT (http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data) [4]

4.3 Challenges in cocoa production

Despite the progress made, the sector does not live up to its potential or make the most of the demand for its cocoa. As Ghana produces the world's highest-quality cocoa, it is able to sell most of its crop in advance of the harvest, which suggests that increases in production could be absorbed by the global market. In addition, demand for cocoa is growing, particularly in emerging markets, making an increase in prices a distinct possibility in the coming years (LMC International, 2016). Despite these very promising conditions and, since the 1990s, a very supportive parastatal that provides extension services and stable prices, Ghana's cocoa yields remain low and far below their potential. As Figure 4 shows, average cocoa yields in Ghana have increased in recent years but only exceeded 500 kg per ha in 2012, while in Côte d'Ivoire and Mexico they are 580 and 700 kg per ha (FAOSTAT, 2016). Further, estimates suggest that yields of 800–1,000 kg per ha could be achieved in Ghana (Mohammed et al., 2012).

These relatively low yields appear to be the result of a combination of factors – agronomic practices, low soil fertility and limited access to financial services – which have locked farmers into low-productivity cocoa farming (Mohammed et al., 2012). The low productivity of Ghana's cocoa trees depresses household incomes and so constrains farmers' ability to purchase yield-increasing inputs, including fertiliser, insecticides and pesticides (Ibid., 2012). These barriers have become more pronounced as climate change and declining soil fertility mean more inputs are required to achieve the same yields (interviews, cocoa farmers and chiefs; see Annex 2). These barriers affect new entrants to cocoa – young people – disproportionately compared to established farmers (these dynamics are explored in detail in Section 7.2).

COCOBOD supplies some of these inputs and spraying services for free, but its service provision is unreliable and farmers cannot anticipate the level of fertiliser and pesticide that will be required in any given year (ibid.). It is unclear whether this owes to poor communication by COCOBOD or whether it regularly falls short of the targets it sets for itself (interviews, cocoa farmers and COCOBOD; see Annexes 2 and 3). In addition, yields are depressed by the ages of both cocoa farmers and trees. The age of the average cocoa farmer in Ghana, at 54 years old, goes some way to explaining why such a large percentage of Ghana's cocoa is produced in a labour-extensive way (COCOBOD, 2015; WHO, 2016). Almost a quarter of trees, on the other hand, are over 30 years old and need to be replaced in order to increase yields (COCOBOD, 2015). The programme that COCOBOD has initiated in order to encourage the rejuvenation of cocoa farms is described in Box 4, on page 22.

Access to finance is very limited: farmers and local leaders reported accessing credit primarily through informal moneylenders, which they considered shameful, and which is also exceptionally expensive. The structure of informal loans provided by moneylenders follows the logic of cocoa production and so loans are issued for the

4 The large annual fluctuations in cocoa yields are likely to be caused by a number of factors, including world market prices and, in the case of Ghana, the smuggling of cocoa to Côte d'Ivoire for sale, as well as measurement errors, variations in climate, pests and price responses of farmers (in terms of labour and input application).

Box 3. Cocoa and climate change

Läderach et al. (2013) argued that climate change would have a devastating impact on cocoa production in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, with large parts of the cocoa-growing belt that spans the region becoming less suitable or even totally unsuitable for the production of the perennial. Their predictions suggested that climate change would leave significant gaps in both the national economies and the livelihood strategies of many farmers. However, a more recent paper, with a slightly different climate model, suggests that the effects may be much less detrimental (Läderach et al., 2016). This paper finds that, while changes in temperature and the resultant higher evaporation of rainfall will reduce the suitability of some areas for growing cocoa, this will not have anywhere near the impact originally expected. Instead, the authors argue that, with gradual adaptation, centred on the breeding of more drought-resistant crops and a change towards other cash crops, the economic and household-level impacts can be mitigated. It remains undisputed, though, that climate change will necessitate investment in breeding more resistant trees as well as in pesticides and fungicides.

duration of the cocoa season, and a blanket interest rate of 100% is charged for the loan, regardless of when in the season money is borrowed or it is repaid (interviews, cocoa farmers; see Annex 2).[5] Banks generally consider farmers a poor risk and so only 5% of cocoa farmers reported having access to formal loans (Mohammed et al., 2012), and microfinance institutions are not very prevalent or trusted (Nyemeck et al., 2008).[6]

Given the absence of virgin land, increasing production levels by putting more land under cocoa cultivation is not an option. When land shortages were not yet a major constraint to the production of cocoa, aspiring farmers could increase their production extensively, through sharecropping arrangements (see Box 2 on sharecropping). However, these institutions have come under pressure from land shortages and declining yields, such that they are now less common and their terms less favourable. Population growth has further complicated inheritance, as more and more young people have legal claims over land that belonged to their elders. This not only increases conflict over land itself, but also makes many potential cocoa farmers reluctant to invest labour or financial resources in their farms, where there is a risk that they may be expected to share proceeds with the extended family. Where once abusa sharecropping involved small gifts to the landlord, it now involves considerable deductions from the total harvest (interviews, farmers and focus group discussions; see Annexes 1 and 2). Where tenant farmers work on established cocoa plantations or are rehabilitating older farms, the sharecropping contract has become less lucrative because of declines in soil fertility: more labour and inputs are required to achieve the same yields. Climate change is likely to aggravate this trend somewhat (see Box 3).

Research conducted by the Land Resource Management Centre for MASO confirms our findings (MASO, forthcoming). Land is becoming increasingly scarce in cocoa-growing regions, owing to population growth and mining concessions. This has increased intergenerational conflict, as most land is held by older farmers, and has increased the price of land considerably. Young people are less likely to be aware of opportunities that might be available to them – for example through abunu or abusa – as they have smaller social networks, and opportunities for sharecropping are advertised and negotiated through such networks. In addition, when young people do manage to access land, it is frequently of poorer quality and smaller or fragmented. The report also points to the somewhat contradictory perceptions older generations have of young people: they are simultaneously decried as inexperienced in agriculture (and, therefore, not worthy of the land they are seeking) and lazy. This suggests that depicting young people as lazy may serve older generations, who are attempting to hold onto their land in the face of demands for access by the younger generation.[7]

Finally, it is often argued that both access to land and rates of investment in agriculture are slowed by poor documentation of land tenure rights (e.g. MASO, forthcoming). Acquiring land is made riskier for those who do have the resources to enter contracts for land sale or sharecropping as documentation is unreliable. Equally, insecure tenure results in farmers investing less in the land available to them, or limiting their investments to those that offer quick returns. However, Sara Berry argues that Ghana's cocoa-growing region has suffered as a result of attempts to formalise land tenure, particularly through increased conflict between indigenous communities and migrants. Without formal land arrangements, individuals and communities compromise and make more informal and flexible tenure arrangements. When land titling was introduced, however, this also increased the stakes involved in ownership of or access to land, making or disagreements more likely to escalate into more serious conflicts (Berry, 2009).

5 Moneylending is also considered a shameful occupation: in one community, it was only with a great deal of reluctance that interviewees disclosed that their priest was also the local moneylender.

6 Farmers have good reason to mistrust microfinance institutions: in one community interviewees reported that the representative of the one that they had banked with had run away with all their savings.

7 This issue requires further research and will form part of upcoming research project of the Youth Forward Learning Partnership.

5 The political economy of cocoa production

5.1 Ghana's Cocoa Board (COCOBOD)

As we have seen, Ghana's Cocoa Board, now frequently referred to as COCOBOD, and formerly the Cocoa Marketing Board, is central to the health of Ghana's cocoa sector. It is therefore worth looking at the political economy that sustains the institution and determines its success. The general consensus – not just across the political spectrum in Ghana but internationally too and among cocoa farmers themselves – is that COCOBOD benefits the sector, and so it is likely to continue to dominate the lives of young cocoa farmers for the foreseeable future. COCOBOD is an unusual organisation in the African context, not only for surviving the privatisation trend of the 1980s but also, more importantly, for its efficiency and effectiveness. As Tracy Williams writes: 'Given the dismal history of Africa's commodity marketing boards in general, and Ghana's cocoa marketing board in particular, this success demands explanation' (Williams, 2009: 3).

Prior to the 1980s, COCOBOD was notorious for its dysfunction and was a major contributing factor to the decline of the sector in the 1960s and 1970s. Jeffrey Herbst singled the marketing board out as particularly corrupt even by the standards of its contemporaries and wrote that 'none can claim quite the extravagance of waste that the Cocoa Board achieved' (Herbst, 1993: 63). The reform process began as a part of the Economic Recovery Programme in 1983 and one of its main successes was reducing the parastatal's staff of 100,000 by 40% between 1985 and 1986. This was achieved by striking ghost workers off the payroll and reducing non-essential staff in processing, plantation management and road building. Numbers were further reduced in the following two decades, to around 10,400 by 1995 and then to 5,140 in 2003 (Williams, 2009). This reduction in staff numbers of almost 95% freed up considerable resources and was one of the primary contributing factors to the price increases that ushered in the sector's regeneration. However, the board is not simply lean, it is also a relatively efficient institution, whose technocrats are given comparatively free rein to manage the sector so as to maximise production (Buur and Whitfield, 2011). The institution is tightly run and has an effective staff promotion and retention policy (interview, World Bank; see Annex 3).

Despite the continued temptation to (over)tax cocoa farmers, COCOBOD has maintained its disciplined ethos and the sector has been well governed since the 1990s. Lars Buur and Lindsay Whitfield argue that cocoa has received continued government support because the Ghanaian state depends on its tax revenues as well as foreign exchange earnings and as such there are strong incentives not to extract resources from cocoa for personal or political gain. It is, therefore, spared the corruption suffered by other parts of the Ghanaian economy from a ruling elite wanting to benefit from its (usually limited) time in power (Buur and Whitfield, 2011). In addition, cocoa farmers represent a significant political constituency where any political party must garner some support in order to win an election and so both parties have historically supported investment in cocoa production.[8] This cross-party support for COCOBOD has been essential in ensuring that pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to abolish the marketing board has been consistently resisted. Finally, COCOBOD has managed to survive as a result of the important role it has always played – even when it was at its least effective – in ensuring and guaranteeing the quality of Ghana's cocoa. This means the institution has enjoyed the support of international buyers, even when others, such as the international financial institutions, were calling for its abolition (Williams, 2009).

As COCOBOD is likely to continue to be central to the sector's success, addressing its weaknesses, particularly its ability to generate productivity increases, is essential. Our interviews suggest that the institution's biggest challenge is a combination of service delivery and managing the expectations of farmers. COCOBOD frequently falls short on its promise to deliver cocoa seedlings, fertiliser and sprays to farmers. Simultaneously, farmers are often ill informed about the level of service they should expect from COCOBOD. The combination of these two factors

8 Both the main political parties made promises to cocoa farmers, in the form of additional COCOBOD services, in their manifestos for the 2016 parliamentary and presidential elections.

makes it harder for farmers to anticipate the levels of COCOBOD service in any given year and so to plan their complementary investments (interviews, cocoa farmers, extension agents and COCOBOD; Annexes 2 and 3).

COCOBOD is central not just to the cocoa farming community as a whole but to young people in particular: it implements both the Youth in Cocoa and the Cocoa Rehabilitation and Replanting programmes. The former has young people as its primary beneficiaries, while the latter will indirectly provide opportunities for young people, who, if they are fortunate enough to inherit a cocoa farm, or if they work on the farm of an older family member, are likely to be dealing with aging trees. For more information on these policies see Box 4 on page 22.

Conversely, it is worth noting that COCOBOD depends on young people at least as much as young people will depend on the organisation as they establish themselves. As Ghana's cocoa farmers continue to age, it will become increasingly important for young Ghanaians to take up cocoa production. As we have seen above, the sector plays a very important part in ensuring the foreign exchange earnings of the country and receives a great deal of support from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, as a result. Policy-makers' cognisance of this fact has borne fruit in the form of the Youth in Cocoa programme as well as COCOBOD's collaboration with MASO. Whether these dynamics will result in continued, or even an expansion of, support for young people in the sector remains to be seen, but it certainly explains the concerted push for greater youth participation in cocoa, despite young people's seeming reluctance to join in.

5.2 Child labour in the cocoa sector

Children have worked on the cocoa plantations in West Africa since the crop was first introduced, without attracting much attention from consumers. This changed in 2001 after The New York Times published a series of articles about 'bonded labour' focusing on child slaves on cocoa farms in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire (Bøås and Huser, 2006). As a result, a number of interventions have been implemented since 2003 to eliminate the worst forms of child labour in the sector, despite a lack of empirical information about their prevalence. The issue has, as a result, become a concern for the industry following protests and boycotts of cocoa products by consumers (see www.slavefreechocolate.org).

It is generally accepted that not all forms of child work can or should be considered harmful or exploitative. The International Labour Organization (ILO), for example, considers 'light work' acceptable for children aged 12 years or older as this is not likely to be harmful to their health and development, provided it does not prevent attendance at school (ILO, 1973). Similarly, Ghana's Children's Act of 1998 protects children from exploitative labour that 'deprives the child of its health, education or development' and prohibits light work for children under the age of 13 and other work for anyone under the age of 15 (Republic of Ghana, 1998). Some academics have gone further and argued that children's work can help pay for their schooling, as well as helping them learn valuable skills (Bourdillon, et al., 2010). It is certainly the case, therefore, that the role of children in cocoa production needs to be better understood, before we can determine whether their work should be considered harmful or not.

The main sources of labour for cocoa farming activities are caretakers or sharecroppers, hired labour and family labour. Children are widely involved in various aspects of cocoa production and, besides the immediate value of their labour, this constitutes the traditional method for imparting cocoa farming skills to young people, as we will see in Section 6. As the cost of inputs for cocoa farming have increased, land has become scarcer and credit is not readily available, the pressure has increased on cocoa farmers to reduce the costs of their production. One way of doing this is to use family – including children's – labour to work on the farm and reduce the need to hire labour.

Campaigns to reduce child labour in cocoa production have, however, been effective at increasing the stigma attached to children and young people's work on cocoa farms. During our interviews, several young people initially claimed that they had never worked in cocoa because it was not allowed or because of its detrimental effects on young people's well-being. It was only when their peers pointed out that cocoa work was permitted provided it did not interfere with their schooling that they talked about their work. The result, nevertheless, is that young people are given a very clear signal that cocoa farming is potentially hazardous and a less valued occupation than education and, ultimately, white collar work (focus group discussions, Ashanti and Volta Regions; see Annex 1).

6 Growing up in Ghana's cocoa belt

It is against this backdrop, with the mixed fortunes that the cocoa sector has experienced in the past 40 years, that young people choose to become cocoa farmers, seek out other careers or, in some cases, remain in cocoa production for lack of alternatives. How young people's experiences are shaped by this backdrop is detailed in this section, which describes typical transitions from childhood to adulthood among young cocoa workers, on the basis of our focus group discussions (see Annex 1).

This section also looks at the contributions that young people make to cocoa farming, which might be obscured by aggregate statistics such as the average age of cocoa farmers. Naturally, every young person's experience will be slightly different and will depend to some degree on their family's circumstances. Not every young person involved in the cocoa sector will necessarily go on to farm their own plantation; they may take up opportunities as sharecroppers or day labourers, reflecting the complex structure of land and tree ownership, as well as labour arrangements in the sector.

The opportunities available to young people depend not only on the broader dynamics within the cocoa sector but also on the resources that are available to them via their social networks, families and community. Their family's socio-economic status will, therefore, impact on how young people might be able to benefit from cocoa production, for example as a result of the resources (particularly land) that their parents are able to command.

Unfortunately, we do not have the data to be able to disaggregate how opportunities are structured by family resources, but we believe that this is a fruitful area for further research. The aim, nevertheless, is to describe what would be recognised as the norm for young people in cocoa-growing communities, in order to draw conclusions in the final section about the obstacles and opportunities young entrants to the sector habitually face.

Box 4. Policies to stimulate cocoa production

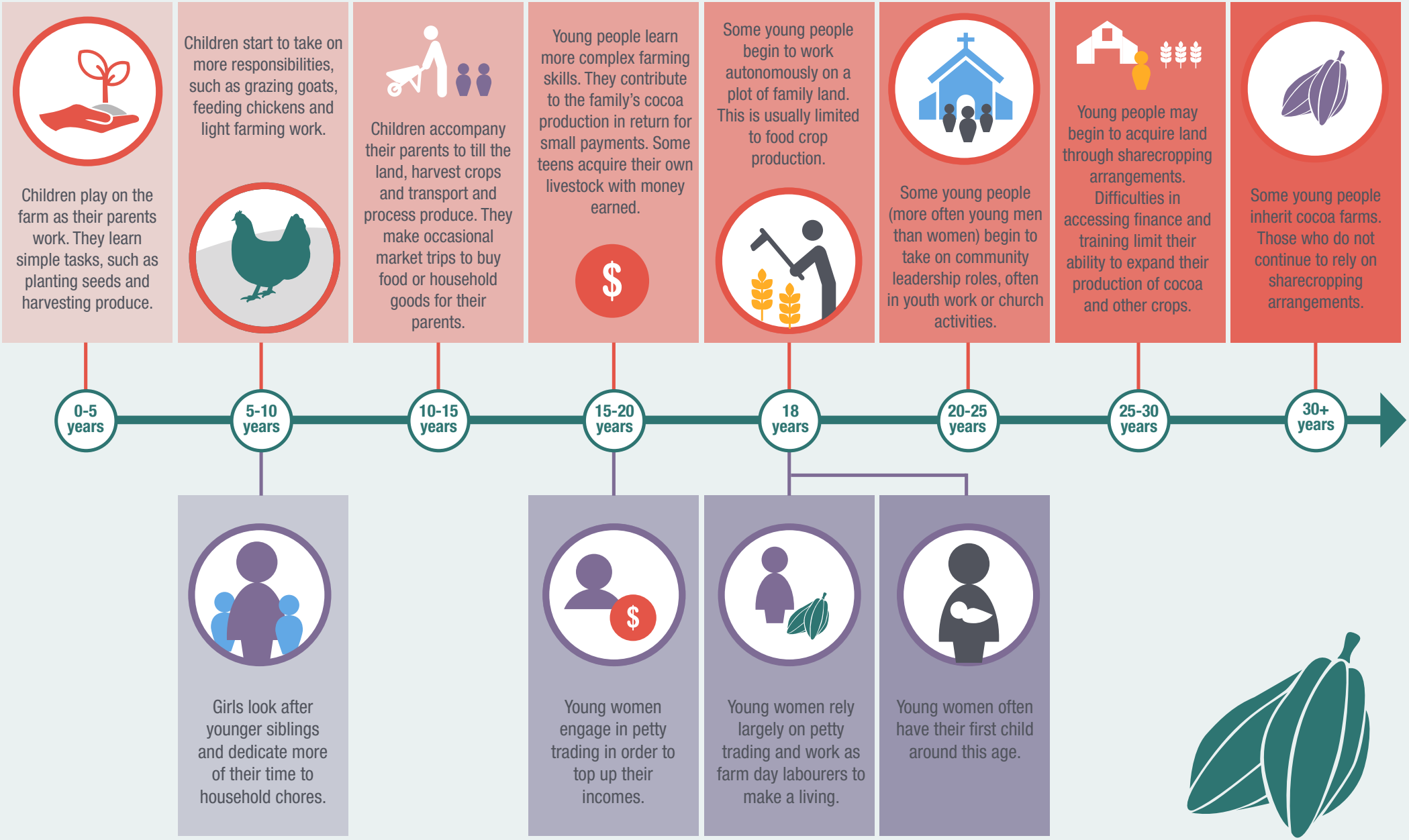
Youth in Cocoa programme

In an effort to encourage more young people into cocoa farming, to discourage rural–urban migration and to boost cocoa production, COCOBOD set up the Youth in Cocoa Programme in 2014, which is targeted at 30,000 young people aged 20 to 40. The hope is also that a younger, better-educated generation of farmers will be more likely to adopt improved farming techniques, helping Ghana improve its cocoa yields. The programme provides a package to encourage young people to try their hand at cocoa farming and includes extension support, free cocoa seedlings and free fertilisers. For the most successful young cocoa farmers there are also other incentives, such as study trips to other cocoa-growing areas and an annual award for the best young cocoa farmer, which is awarded at a celebration on National Farmers' Day. The programme has also attempted to engage chiefs, as custodians of the land, to provide land for young farmers. The programme has not been formally evaluated, so it is unclear how effective it has been. While certain media outlets have reported that between 13,000 and 45,000 young people have moved into cocoa farming as a result of the programme, others have suggested that the programme is much less effective and that it was largely an effort by the ruling party to encourage cocoa farmers to support the ruling National Democratic Congress in the elections of December 2016.

Cocoa Rehabilitation and Replanting programme

COCOBOD has been implementing a rehabilitation programme since 2012 (not to be confused with the Cocoa Rehabilitation and Intensification Programme run by Solidaridad). The programme's main aim is to encourage farmers to replace trees that are over 30 years old, as well as replanting diseased farms. COCOBOD will assist farmers by providing seedlings and the heavy machinery required to cut down trees, as well as the chemicals required to raise healthy and productive trees (COCOBOD, 2016).

Growing up on a cocoa farm in Ghana



Source: The Overseas Development Institute (2017).

6.1 Farming and household responsibilities

Young people in Ghana's cocoa-producing belt are gradually introduced to farming from a very early age, usually beginning well before they are five years old. As cocoa farming forms part of a broader agricultural livelihood strategy for families, this involves both cash and food crop production. This informal 'apprenticeship', during which farming is taught, takes place because children are still too young to stay at home alone. Though they are too young to work, they start to gain an understanding of their parents' farming activities and become acquainted with the simple tasks of farming, from weeding to collecting cocoa pods. From about the age of five or six onwards, girls look after younger siblings while their mothers work. At around the same age, children of both genders begin to take on responsibility for simple household chores, such as sweeping, fetching water and the washing of pots and clothes. While young people of both genders reported being involved in these kinds of activities, girls dedicated more of their time to them.

The harder work of tilling land and harvesting crops begins a little later, when children are around 10 years of age. At this age, they accompany their parents to their parcels of land[9] in order to work, rather than as a means of passing the time or because their parents lack other childcare options. During harvest time, they will also be involved in the process of fermenting and drying the cocoa and its transportation from the farm to drying/fermenting areas and to points of sale (the public or local buying corporation). The fermenting and drying of cocoa is particularly important to the quality of the final product, and contributes to the high quality of Ghana's cocoa. In this context, children work under the instruction of their parents and are gradually introduced to tasks requiring greater levels of skill or experience.

Our respondents reported being given greater levels of autonomy over their farming work between the ages of 15 and 20. At that age, young people expect to still be working on their parents' cocoa farms, unless they are unfortunate enough to have lost a parent at a very early age and to have inherited land, or unless their family has access to an unusually large amount of land. This also means that they are not free to experiment with different production techniques and that the proceeds of their labour go to their parents, bar small payments for their work. However, it is during this period that most of the important cocoa farming skills are transferred to the younger generation: young people learn how and when to apply fertiliser and insecticides/pesticides and how to manage a cocoa tree over its lifespan, as well as how the cocoa marketing system functions. At the same time, between the ages of 15 and 20, young people become increasingly involved in the production of food crops and their marketing. As much as this is a formative period for young people, their skills are only as good as those of their parents, and the majority of young people only learn about the technologies and techniques used by those farmers who achieve yields of only 350 kg per ha.

Some young people reported working a piece of land independently from the age of 20 or so. However, given the large investments (in terms of both finance and land) required to start a cocoa farm, this was usually limited to the production of food crops. Cocoa farms were acquired at a much later age, often through inheritance, when people were over the age of 30. Acquiring land through abunu and abusa arrangements (as described in Box 2, on sharecropping) is an arduous task, and so is something young people prefer to do when they have established themselves somewhat. They talked of doing this in their late 20s.

6.2 Livestock ownership

Unlike in some farming systems, livestock plays a comparatively small role in the livelihood systems of Ghana's cocoa-producing communities, compared to Uganda, for example (Löwe and Sanyu, 2017). Very few households own cattle or large livestock, and young people spoke of investing in small ruminants and fowl. These serve primarily as a means to invest and save money, for example, after an exceptionally good cocoa harvest. Unlike other investments, for example in fertiliser for cocoa trees or cocoa seedlings, they may be liquidated rapidly, while also providing investment returns. Young people reported being involved in the grazing of goats or feeding of chickens from a relatively early age. Between the ages of five and ten children were given responsibilities such as feeding chickens and herding goats. These tasks became less important as they grew older and took on heavier work.

When young people reach the age of 15 or so, they may begin to acquire their own livestock if they have earned some money working on their parents' land or as hired labour. This did not form part of a significant livelihood or investment strategy, as young people prioritised expenditure on clothes, household contributions and recreational activities over the purchase of livestock.

6.3 Marketing

Young people's interactions with markets are limited as they grow up, owing to the manner in which cocoa marketing and input procurement are organised. Their experience begins with occasional trips to the market for their parents to buy small amounts of food or household goods between the ages of 10 and 15. At a slightly older

9 The majority of households in Ghana's cocoa belt have several plots of land on which they grow their cocoa and/or food crops.

age, they might be involved in selling any excess food crops that their parents produce, such as cassava, yams or cocoa yam (all of which are inter-cropped with cocoa trees). At the same age, they will assist their parents in taking the cocoa harvest to purchasers. At this stage, they sometimes began receiving their first nominal remuneration: while the money obtained from selling cocoa went to their parents, they were remunerated with small sums for their labour. This labour in the familial farming enterprise is usually the first time that young people report earning an income over which they have some control.

However, young people report very little experience of interacting with markets in the production of crops that require inputs to be sourced; in other words, they do not learn how to calculate input prices and compare them to the likely market prices for their crops. They do not gain this experience through their work in cocoa either, because output prices are regulated and most inputs are supplied by COCOBOD. As a result, their ability to budget, ensure the profitability of their crops and make investment decisions accordingly is limited. It is possible that this is detrimental to entrepreneurial activities more broadly in cocoa-growing communities, as well as discouraging the adoption of improved farming techniques.

Women, on the other hand, often aspired to engage in petty trading in order to top up their incomes. This usually involved the wholesale purchase of soap, sugar or other household necessities that could then be sold on to consumers in smaller quantities. Where they could access the necessary starting capital, this allowed for reasonable profit margins to be generated fairly quickly and so was of great appeal to those who were excluded from other livelihoods (for example, because they did not have access to land) and did not have the skills for more sophisticated forms of entrepreneurship, such as tailoring.

6.4 Access to finance

Discussions about the struggle to access finance frequently arose spontaneously during our focus group discussions with young people. However, only when prompted did young people discuss the sources of financing that were available to rural cocoa-growing communities. While very few young people had accessed any type of credit, they reported that the main sources of credit available to them and their communities were informal moneylenders, who charge extremely high interest rates. In addition, accessing their services carries social stigma. The advantage of moneylenders is that they work in rhythm with the cocoa production cycle and provide loans that are to be repaid with earnings from the first cocoa harvest, which usually takes place in October. The downside is that these loans are exceptionally expensive: 100% per cocoa season, regardless of whether the loan was taken out 11 months or 1 month before it matured. These loans served the purpose of covering consumption shortfalls or emergency expenditure until the next harvest.

Village elders and chiefs reported that COCOBOD used to provide loans to farmers but that this service was no longer available. These long-running credit relationships with COCOBOD and its buying company also meant that borrowers had been able to open bank accounts and make use of other formal financial services. Young people, on the other hand, did not have access to these sources of finance as, where they were involved in cocoa marketing or farming, this was generally on their parents' land as labour rather than as sellers of their own cocoa.

Young people displayed a very limited understanding of informal, community-based savings schemes and rarely had any experience of them. Only in the Volta Region did a few young people mention their involvement in a Plan International Village Savings and Loan Association. That said, this initiative provided only fairly small amounts of credit for a limited period of time. It was therefore ideal for investing in petty trading or small livestock, but not for the demands of cocoa production, which requires a much larger investment and where repayment is only possible after three or more years. Repayment time periods were, in fact, so short that they were not suited to the production of most annual crops either.

6.5 Formal education

Formal schooling complements the informal learning that takes place on the farm and young people considered primary school enrolment from the age of six or so the norm.[10] Here, respondents stressed that their farming activities did not interfere with schooling and that farming, particularly cocoa farming, took place after school and at weekends. This message was voiced so often and so vociferously that it is safe to assume that the child labour messages of government and NGOs have reached communities. Most young people had completed primary school and voiced the desire to continue schooling for as long as possible; the completion of secondary school was considered an important goal and the desire to continue on to tertiary education was frequently mentioned, even though it was well beyond the means of the majority. In this context, the scholarships offered by COCOBOD for secondary school students were frequently referenced.[11]

10 This statement is corroborated by national statistics that put the enrolment rate in cocoa-growing districts at 70% or above (http://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Ghana_coreusaid.pdf).

11 COCOBOD offered 5,000 scholarships for young people in cocoa-growing communities to attend secondary school in 2014/15. Unsurprisingly, the consensus among young people was that this was insufficient and that more scholarships should be provided (http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/regional/More-students-enjoy-cocoa-scholarship-373467).

Young people rarely talked of choosing to leave school, but rather expressed the decision not to continue with their education as being the result of financial constraints, the need to work or having children to look after.

Schools gave mixed messages around agriculture and its social and economic value: the value of cocoa to Ghana's economy and sense of national identity are widely taught and often repeated by young and older people. At the same time, agricultural tasks are the most common form of punishment for children and teenagers who misbehave at school, and so livelihoods in farming are associated with lower status. It seems that cocoa has gained a reputation of being a worthy crop for reasons of national pride, but not one from which to make a good living. Despite this, some young people felt that they had learnt valuable agronomic skills in school, which complemented the skills they had learnt from working with their parents, and that they were able to apply this knowledge in their farming activities.

6.6 Extension services

Unfortunately, young people did not have access to extension services and generally thought that they would be unlikely to do so until they were fully independent, which they defined as working on their own cocoa farms. Prior to this, their main sources of information were their parents, community elders and sometimes chief farmers.[12] It is worth noting that young people felt under-served and would have greatly appreciated more access to extension services, both from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture for their food crop production and from COCOBOD. The Youth in Cocoa programme does not appear to have done much to change the status quo, at least in the communities we visited. This is, at least in part, a result of the shortage of extension agents working for COCOBOD, which currently has only 480 cocoa extension officers to implement all of its programmes, meaning that each extension agent is responsible for well over 5,000 cocoa farmers. The board is aware of this problem and is establishing partnerships with private sector cocoa buyers so that these can deliver some extension and support services to farmers.

6.7 Access to land

Acquiring control over the use and, eventually, ownership of land is a long and difficult process for aspiring farmers. Young people worked very hard to make the money necessary to rent land, and to purchase seeds, inputs and tools. Typically, young people begin to work independently on a plot of land over which they have autonomous control from about the age of 18. Except in the case of a parent's untimely death, young people do not own this land, but are given the right to its use. These arrangements might involve the loaning of land by parents or members of the community, or less frequently a commercial rental agreement. As they acquired land on which they could work independently, young men were able to draw on community and family labour to assist with their farming endeavours when necessary. Young women, on the other hand, less frequently had access to their own parcel of land, even if only borrowed, and so they relied more heavily on petty trading and on work as day labourers on cocoa farms to make a living.

The acquisition of land for cocoa farming is something that happens much later in people's lives, very often after the age of 30. In most communities, there was no virgin land for chiefs to make available and families did not have adequate land resources for their children. Young people can circumvent this through sharecropping (see Box 2 in Section 4.2). Abunu allows young people to acquire land but requires them to forego income for three to five years and so is generally preferred by young men over the age of 25, who have some financial security or, at least, the labour of a family to draw on. Those who can afford to engage in this type of sharecropping contract are able to establish their own cocoa farm and so secure an income source for themselves that will last 30 years or so. It is important to note that older people often function as gatekeepers to cocoa land: in many areas it is traditional for older people to negotiate abunu or abusa on behalf of young people. It is also through these gatekeepers that young people hear of land sales or sharecropping opportunities, which means that they are reliant on the networks of their elders, as they generally do not have the same connections as their parents' generation. In areas with land shortages, they may also find their interests at odds with those of their elders, who may be seeking to expand their own landholdings (MASO, forthcoming).

It is important to acknowledge that this pattern of acquiring land later in life is not entirely new: historical accounts of cocoa farming in Ghana suggest that ownership of cocoa farms was more common among slightly older farmers, owing to the investment required to establish a farm and earn land rights (see Hill, 1963; Beckett, 1947: 197; Berry, 1993). The important difference for today's youth, however, is that the barriers to entry that they need to overcome are becoming ever greater. In the area of land access, this is driven mainly by the fact that virgin land is no longer available and so even abunu and abusa arrangements have become skewed in favour of landowners.

12 Each village in Ghana has a 'chief farmer' who receives training from the district chief farmer and is charged with sharing his agronomic knowledge with farmers in his village (interview, chief farmer; see Annex 2).

6.8 Markers of adulthood

A number of other social transitions are important in the journey to adulthood and to becoming a full member of any community. These include acquiring a home or household of one's own, starting a family, accessing public services such as health care and holding community leadership positions. However, there seemed to be much more variation between individual experiences along these dimensions than in other aspects of youth and childhood in Ghana's cocoa-growing regions. Young male respondents reported that they generally moved into their own housing and lived independently in their early 20s or later. Young women, on the other hand, usually only moved out once they were married. That said, they often began having children in their late teens but continued to live with their parents for several years after this. In this set-up they received assistance both from their parents and from the child's father. In fact, young women often talked of choosing to have children in order to access the resources of their child's father. Young men complained about women engaging in this strategy and said that, as a result, they tended only to be able to marry later.

Young people spoke of taking on a variety of roles that came with responsibilities or leadership duties from about the age of 20 or 25, depending on the individual and the role. A number mentioned being involved in youth work and organising the young in their communities, either for farming, for activities for out-of-school youth or for church activities. Those who were a little older were involved in cooperatives or other economic associations, as secretaries or similar. Young women were far less likely to be engaged in these activities.

6.9 Gender

Our focus group discussions highlighted certain gender-based differences between the lives of young men and women. As one might expect, young women carried out more domestic tasks, particularly those associated with childcare. Young women were also much younger when they became parents themselves, typically between 15 and 20 years of age. This affected their ability to take up both formal and informal educational opportunities, to access resources such as land and to save up to fulfil personal and professional aspirations. However, young women's reduced access to resources, compared to their male peers, seemed to predate their childbearing. Young women frequently said that they had become involved with a man and had a child because they needed to access resources. Young women frequently cited the decision to become involved with a man and to have a child as being the result of the need to access resources. These findings are confirmed by MASO's gender analysis (see MASO, 2017).

Young women also remain in their parents' homes more often and for longer. Once they have children, they typically continue to live with their parents until they marry. This happens much later, often around the age of 25 or so. Some young women were living with their parents until they were able to acquire a cocoa farm or other means of making an independent living. When asked about how or when this might happen, our respondents were uncertain. Several said that this was unlikely to be in their 20s.

Photo: Volta Region, Ghana (Alexandra Löwe, 31 July 2016).

7 Barriers and opportunities for young cocoa farmers in Ghana

Sections 1–5 of this paper looked at the social, economic and political dimensions that shape cocoa production in Ghana and that will form the basis of young people's livelihoods should they follow in their parents' footsteps. Section 6 then followed the trajectories of children and young people in farming communities in Ghana's cocoa-growing belt as they become economically independent adults. In this last section, these two parts are brought together to help us understand the realities that young people face when entering the cocoa sector.

7.1 Young people play a central role in cocoa farming

Our focus group discussions with young people in Ghana's cocoa-growing communities provide a much more nuanced picture than the assertion that young people are not interested or involved in cocoa farming. The often-reported fact that cocoa farmers are 54 years old on average obscures the fact that young people are actively involved in the production of cocoa. They may not have their own cocoa farms, but they clearly contribute a great deal of labour to their family and community's production efforts. Young people spoke of helping out on the family cocoa farm from a very young age and, later on, earning some income from working as day labourers on cocoa farms. While they clearly struggle to access land that they can call their own, or even sharecropping arrangements that give them some security of tenure, this does not mean that they are not integral to cocoa production. Given that young people often are not heads of households or land owners, their role is not fully accounted for in statistics that appear to show that farmers are ageing.

7.2 Barriers to entry

The barriers to entry for cocoa producers are considerable, especially for young people who are not fortunate enough to inherit an established cocoa farm or land on which they can plant their own. Even those who expect to inherit land are unlikely to do so until they are in their 30s, unless they are in the unfortunate position of losing their parents at a relatively early age. Where land has been secured, cocoa farms require significant investment, particularly in the first few years, before they begin to generate any income. Finally, this period, which requires investment in capital and labour, lasts for three to five years without returns, which is a considerable period in the life of any young person.

Access to land for cocoa

During our focus group discussions, young people expressed differing views on the question of land and how to acquire it. Many young people will find it difficult to access land as increasing life expectancy coincides with an absence of virgin land. Those farmers who benefited from the regeneration of the sector in the 1980s and 1990s, when they were in their youth, now have a hold on the land suitable for cocoa production. This means that land is not available for purchase and/or it is much less affordable to young people. Moreover, it suggests that young people are unlikely to inherit land for the production of cocoa until they are well into their 30s.

If they are in the fortunate position of having parents who own a farm, young people usually expect to inherit or otherwise acquire land that has already been used for cocoa production and, therefore, the soil is much less fertile. Given the length of the cocoa tree's life cycle and

that it corresponds roughly to the economically active years of a farmer, young people usually inherit farms that are in need of rehabilitation. So, where they find themselves in the relatively fortunate position of inheriting a cocoa farm, they are still faced with the task of gradually regenerating it. This means a much reduced income as they wait for the cocoa trees to mature. During this period, farmers must also invest a great deal of labour and inputs in their plantation, in order to maximise its productivity over its life cycle. This is becoming ever more expensive as a result of declines in soil fertility and because of the increasing prevalence of pests and diseases resulting from climate change.

Young people, like their parents' generation, have the option of sharecropping as a means of making money from the cocoa sector. Yet sharecropping arrangements also have their downsides for tenant farmers: the yields of established cocoa farms are, as discussed above, quite low, at around 300–400 kg per ha. Investment in yield-enhancing technologies will still yield benefits on an older farm, but the maximum yield that can be achieved is, at least in part, determined by the investment made during its establishment. As a result, it is much harder and more expensive for young people to raise the yields of farms that they are managing as part of an abusa arrangement. It is worth noting that, for 2016/17, farm gate cocoa prices have been set at $1,919 per MT and so a 1 ha farm would earn around $770. This would leave a tenant farmer between $255 and $510 per ha in cocoa revenue, depending on the nature of the contract with the landlord. In a country with a GDP per capita of $1,860 in 2013 and where the average cocoa farm is between 1 and 5 ha in size, it is unsurprising that young people are drawn to options that they perceive to be more lucrative or, at least, easier.

Abunu arrangements, on the other hand, provide young people with the opportunity to establish cocoa farms that will have much higher yields, provided that they have the necessary skills. Nevertheless, this presupposes a level of skill that young people are unlikely to have acquired, given that most inherit their parents' skill levels. Unless they are lucky enough to have exceptionally talented cocoa producers as parents, or have received additional training, they may struggle to maximise their yields.

Access to finance

The barriers to entry into cocoa farming could in part be overcome through access to finance that would support young people as they begin either as tenant farmers on an established farm or the process of planting and, more often, regenerating an existing cocoa farm. The financial services available in rural Ghana are, as we have seen, very limited and more often than not consist solely of informal moneylenders who charge interest rates of 100% for loans that mature after a few months. These are not an option for anyone wanting to finance input investments, either for one season or for several years when a cocoa farm is being established. As a result, credit options do not feature in the ideas and aspirations of young people about how their future will unfold.

In addition, there does not seem to be a culture of saving among young people to enable them, for example, to save up for the investment expenditure that would be required for a new cocoa farm or even for an abusa contract that involves the tenant farmer contributing to chemical inputs (and so is usually more lucrative). In addition, young people do not know how to access financial services and have no experience in the administration of village savings schemes that might allow them to provide partial solutions to their lack of finance (MASO, forthcoming).

Access to services

The main service provider to cocoa farmers is COCOBOD and the institution has created the Youth in Cocoa programme in order to support young farmers. However, this programme does not appear to be having a significant impact on the average age of cocoa farmers. Many young people reported that COCOBOD's services were focused on those who already had cocoa farms, rather than on winning over young people who were struggling to make a living farming other crops or working in other sectors.

The main complaints heard about COCOBOD and their Youth in Cocoa programme, when we asked young people about their experience of the institution, were about the inadequacy of cocoa scholarships. These scholarships are intended to provide young people in cocoa-growing communities with the opportunity to attend secondary school, rather than directly enticing young people into the sector. The fact that they are seen as COCOBOD's most important intervention by young people is, perhaps, indicative of the board's failure to reach young people with their more positive messages about cocoa.

Role models in cocoa

One of the main strategies of the Government of Ghana to persuade young people into cocoa farming is to attempt to make the sector as lucrative as possible. Much has been done to increase producer prices, and farmers responded well to this in the 1990s and 2000s. However, as living standards have risen in Ghana, so have young people's expectations, and their aspirations may have risen faster than profits in the cocoa sector. While cocoa farming can be very lucrative, most young people have no direct experience of the type of farming that makes this possible and instead are familiar with their parents' and peers' low-yielding cocoa farms. Young people assume that, all things being equal, cocoa would afford them the same living standards that they see producers in their community achieve, rather than the living standards that are in fact possible.

7.3 Opportunities for young people in cocoa

Rejuvenating the sector

Despite the many obstacles faced by young people entering cocoa production, there are opportunities available to them. The sector is clearly in need of rejuvenation: both cocoa farmers and trees are relatively old, which means that farmers are insufficiently responsive to the messages and input supply campaigns of COCOBOD and trees are seeing their yields decline. There is room for a great deal of improvement and the potential exists for increases in living standards for cocoa communities through yield increases. A doubling of yields, to reach levels achieved in Côte d'Ivoire, should be within reach for Ghana's youth. The focus must necessarily be on the rehabilitation and replanting of cocoa farms inherited or otherwise made available by older farmers, as virgin land is very limited.

Improving access to land

The most pressing issue here, nevertheless, remains ensuring access to cocoa land. This has been achieved on a small scale by both MASO and COCOBOD's youth projects, which have interacted with local leaders, including chiefs, in an effort to ensure that young people have access to land. Without an expansion in such activities, it is unlikely that young people will benefit from opportunities in the sector until they are well into their 30s. Furthermore, the sector's potential will not be reached by attempting to persuade ageing farmers, for whom cocoa is akin to a pension, to take up new farming practices, to rehabilitate their farms or to take out loans in order to finance these improvements. On the other hand, making savings products or even credit schemes available to young people now will allow them to benefit from opportunities in the sector in a few years' time.

Beyond cocoa production

Finally, opportunities for young people in cocoa are not limited to the production of cocoa. Should productivity in the sector increase, this will owe at least in part due to farmers investing in inputs and extension services over and above the levels currently provided by COCOBOD. The opportunity to provide services to the sector might offer an additional source of income to young people who are unable to access land or who are in the process of establishing a cocoa farm and cannot yet fund their livelihoods through the sale of cocoa beans alone. Nevertheless, young people will need sustained support from COCOBOD, non-governmental actors and their communities – particularly chiefs – if they are to be able to take advantage of the opportunities in the sector.

Photo: Young people in a cocoa-producing community sharing their youth timelines, Sefwi-Wiaswo, Western Region, Ghana (Alexandra Löwe, 25 July 2016).

Box 5. Implications for Youth Forward

The findings of this review of the cocoa sector have a number of implications for Youth Forward's work in Ghana. These are outlined below.

Skills and training

Young people need to be equipped with the skills necessary to make a living in the cocoa sector even if they are unable to gain access to land. For some this might be a means to make ends meet during a transitory period until they can inherit land or while they save to purchase a plot, while for others it might be a more permanent livelihood strategy.

In areas where land is very scarce, the most promising opportunities might be in providing services to land-owning farmers, cocoa-buying companies and other agro-enterprises. This means developing innovative business and farming models, where cocoa experts trained by MASO can provide advice and extension services to farmers, give them additional or superior inputs or, most likely, some combination of these.

It is important to find ways for young people to increase their earning potential as day labourers, not only as landowners. For example, with the right skills, they might be able to command higher incomes for their work pruning trees. Where possible, the training provided should also focus on providing young people with the skills that private sector actors in the sector look for. In order for such a system to be successful, it is important that the skills young people acquire in cocoa production are accredited in a way that is recognisable to landowners and private sector actors.

Again and again, young people said that they were aware that COCOBOD believed that cocoa farming was lucrative but that they did not experience this in their own communities. MASO's approach of stressing the need to create positive role models is certainly needed.

Likewise, training a cadre of young, professional farmers who can advise established farmers and provide technical services to them should help improve the status of the sector in general.

Access to financial services

MASO is working closely with financial service providers to improve the availability of financial services for young cocoa farmers. Nevertheless, in the short term, this area of work should focus on ensuring that young people are able to save – through a dual approach of both increasing incomes and encouraging village savings associations. This would allow cocoa entrepreneurs to build up the funds necessary to expand their businesses or, eventually, to acquire their own land and to invest in their trees in those crucial early years.

Meeting the challenge of climate change

The cocoa sector is likely to change in the coming years, as a result of climate change and further pressures on land. That means young people need to learn not only the skills that allow them to farm cocoa profitably now, but also those that will enable them to remain adaptive in their practices as the environment changes. That means equipping young people with the skills that they need to continue to learn better farming techniques and connecting them to networks of experts who can give them regular advice on better farming techniques, beyond the lifespan of Youth Forward.

Gender awareness

Women have much more limited access to land, farm inputs, extension services and technologies than men in Ghana's cocoa-growing belt. This poses a number of challenges for Youth Forward. MASO will need to work closely with communities and husbands to persuade them of the value of giving land for cocoa to women as well as providing childcare, so as to facilitate the participation of young women in MASO's training programmes (MASO, 2017). For the Learning Partnership, these gender disparities should be kept in mind and explored further in future research on young people's career aspirations in cocoa-growing regions.

Changing perceptions about young people

The discourse around young people – particularly the somewhat contradictory statements that they are both 'lazy' and 'not worthy of investment' because they do not have any experience in farming – speaks to the existence of intergenerational conflict. The young people we interviewed were not lazy, though they were sometimes demotivated by the lack of lucrative opportunities. Older generations, on the other hand, have a vested interest in painting a picture of lazy young people, in order to justify their preferential access to land and other resources. This area requires further research and should form a part of ongoing work by the Youth Forward Learning Partnership.

MASO is working closely with community elders and chiefs to facilitate access to land, change perceptions of young people and challenge the notion that they are not interested in cocoa farming. More could be done by national actors, such as COCOBOD and the National Youth Authority, to celebrate and raise awareness of the contributions young people are already making to cocoa farming.

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Annex 1: Focus group discussions with young people in cocoa-farming communities

Village	District	Region	Interviewer	Female	Male	Date
Nkwadum	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	Edem Agbe		10	25 July 2016
Nkwadum	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	Alex Löwe	9		25 July 2016
Kamokrom	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	Edem Agbe		8	26 July 2016
Kamokrom	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	Alex Löwe	11		26 July 2016
Bia Kwaso	New Edubiase	Ashanti	Edem Agbe & Alex Löwe	4	7	27 July 2016
Musahkrom	New Edubiase	Ashanti	Edem Agbe & Alex Löwe	7	8	28 July 2016
Lekweli	Hohoe	Volta	Edem Agbe		8	29 July 2016
Lekweli	Hohoe	Volta	Alex Löwe	7		29 July 2016
Lekweli	Hohoe	Volta	Alex Löwe		8	30 July 2016
Lekweli	Hohoe	Volta	Edem Agbe	4		30 July 2016

Annex 2: Key informant interviews in cocoa-farming communities

Village	Town	Region	Position	Organisation	Date
Nkwadum	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	Chief	Traditional leader	25 July 2016
Nkwadum	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	Assemblyman	Local authority	25 July 2016
Nkwadum	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	opinion leader/retired soldier	N.A.	25 July 2016
Wiaso	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	Municipal Coordinator	National Youth Council	26 July 2016
Wiaso	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	Agricultural Development Officer	MOFA	26 July 2016
Wiaso	Sefwi-Wiaso	Western	Coordinator	Youth Council	26 July 2016
Bia Kwaso	New Edubiase	Ashanti	Assemblyman	Local authority	27 July 2016
Bia Kwaso	New Edubiase	Ashanti	Chief	Traditional leader	27 July 2016
Bia Kwaso	New Edubiase	Ashanti	Unit leader	Local authority	27 July 2016
Bia Kwaso	New Edubiase	Ashanti	Facilitator	MASO	27 July 2016
Musahkrom	New Edubiase	Western	Chief	Traditional leader	28 July 2016
Musahkrom	New Edubiase	Ashanti	chief farmers	N.A.	28 July 2016
New Edubiase	New Edubiase	Ashanti	Agriculture Officer	MOFA	28 July 2016
New Edubiase	New Edubiase	Ashanti	Head of District Extension	Coco Health and Extension Service	28 July 2016
Hohoe	Hohoe	Volta	Head of Extension	COCOBOD	29 July 2016
Lekweli	Hohoe	Volta	chief farmer	N.A.	30 July 2016
Lekweli	Hohoe	Volta	Assemblyman	Local authority	30 July 2016
Lekweli	Hohoe	Volta	Chief	Traditional leader	30 July 2016
Lekweli	Hohoe	Volta	Village elders (3 men, 2 women)	Traditional leader	30 July 2016

Annex 3: Key informant interviews, Accra

Position	Organisation	Date
Manager, Sustainability	Touton	February 2016
Marketing Officer	Cocoa Marketing Company	February 2016
Project Coordinator	MASO	February 2016
Senior Agricultural Economist	World Bank	1 August 2016
Deputy Director – CHED	COCOBOD	1 August 2016
Chief Executive	Youth Employment Agency	1 August 2016
Chief Executive	National Youth Authority	2 August 2016
Cocoa Desk Officer	MoFEP	2 August 2016
Former Director	National Land Reform and Administration Project	3 August 2016
National Chief Farmer	CoCoShe	3 August 2016
Deputy National Chief Farmer	CoCoShe	3 August 2016
Cocoa Project Officer	International Fund for Agricultural Development	4 August 2016
Ghana Country Manager	AgDevCo	4 August 2016

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