

A STUDY ON YOUTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOME COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN REGION, GHANA

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1. Background of The Study:

This research focused on young people's understandings of climate change, their involvement in adaptation and mitigation projects and the strategies they have chosen in adapting to climate change impacts.

2. Site selection:

Fieldwork was carried out in two sites in the West Mamprusi District in Northern Region. The sites were chosen to reflect one dimension of vulnerability to climate change: floods and droughts in the Northern Savanna Region of Ghana. This was also based on availability of an NGO adaptation project involving young people (intervention). Boanyini (the intervention site) is one of the communities in Northern Ghana where Care Ghana is implementing a four year climate change project called Community Land Use Responses to Climate Change. The main goal of the project is to reduce the negative impact of desertification and climate change vulnerabilities on poor rural communities. It aims to enhance community land use management for greater resilience to desertification and climate change vulnerabilities. The project seeks to facilitate community engagement in livelihood activities which build and manage the natural resource base in the long term, thereby strengthening their resilience to the negative effects of climate change. Mimima (the control site, which has a similar level of vulnerability but no NGO intervention) is about 4 km away from Boanyini They both share similar characteristics in terms of economic activity and living standards. The Northern Region is the largest though least densely populated area of Ghana. It is also one of the least developed with more than 70% of the economically active population engaged in agricultural activities.



2.1 Overview of Research Methodology:

- Key Informant Interviews -at national level with civil society, policy makers, national and international agencies and at local level with youth leaders, community leaders, district officers and NGO workers.
- Focus Group Discussions- (9 FGD were conducted), 2 with young females aged 20-25 years, 2 with young males aged 20-25 years, 2 with young males and females aged 14-19 years, 1 with young people involved in an activity impacted by climate change, 1 with young people with knowledge of CARE's project, 1 with young people with little knowledge of CARE's project.
- Life History- 7 with young people who have either migrated to the sites or have emigrated from the sites and are involved in local economic activity.
- In-depth interviews- 16 with young people aged between 15 and 25 years.

3.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts of Climate Change on The Youth:

- Low returns from agriculture production leading to less household resources which causes school dropout. *'Extreme weather events affect household economic activities and parents find it difficult to pay school fees'*. (Young Male FGD, Mimima).
- Seasonal migration to the south to engage in employment like head potter (kayayoo), to work on cocoa farms and to engage in surface mining. The following is a response from a young male during a FGD in Bonyini; *'As a result of drought there is poor harvest leading to reduced food consumption. This increases migration to the south to work and earn money for the family'*.
- Lost of social network/social capital due to migration.
- Changes in cultural norms: for example marriage ceremony that takes seven days, now takes one day due to low income from farms.
- Wild fruits like cashew and Shea nuts trees cannot bear fruit during the drought which is sometimes sold to earn income for the family.
- Low yields leads to hunger among young people in the low season.
- Extremely hot temperature causes an increased incidence/prevalence of Cerebral Spinal Meningitis (CSM) disease



3. Results of The Study-Knowledge of Climate Change:

Young people in both the NGO intervention site and the control site understood climate change to mean:

- Absence of trees causing heavy wind storm.
 - Indiscriminate burning of the bush which has led to soil infertility.
 - Emission of gases from bush burning into the atmosphere.
 - Drought (dry streams) and floods are experienced resulting in displacement and migration.
 - Changes in the weather pattern affecting farming.
- A young male respondent noted during a FGD in Mimima *'We experience early rain but it does not rain as it should; we experience more drought'*.



A young female in Boanyini also noted: *'The impact of flood halts all farming activities which reduces produce from the farm'*.

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3.2 Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies Used by The Youth:

- Raising/Creation of earth bunds (this is a practice where heaps of sand or stones are put along the contours of a slope to reduce the speed of running water to minimise soil erosion and to increase soil moisture retention) on farmlands.

- Preparation of fire belts at the edges of farms to prevent the spread of fire into farms when bush/wild fire occurs.

- Tree planting/ agro-tree planting as an environmental management practice to improve the vegetative cover as well as provide a micro climatic condition.

- Praying to the gods to reduce the effects of climate change impacts on the communities. A young female noted during a life history interview in Mimima: *'...my family contributed money which was given to the chief priest for prayers to be said to reduce the effects of climate change...'*



- Engaging in alternative/ livelihood support activities such as livestock rearing, beekeeping, dry season gardening and batik , tie and dye/ local cloth making. *'Climate change has affected the decision made by young people on migration and employment. The youth are taking training in batik, tie and dye as an alternative source of employment in the community'*. (Young Female, In-depth Boanyini).

- Others do other jobs such as thatch weaving, rehabilitation and construction of houses for a fee from those who hire their labour and skills.

4. Conclusion:

The youth in the study area are aware of the effects of climate change on their livelihoods and are concerned about the possible future consequences on their lives. These young people are involved in rain-fed agriculture and therefore rely on good weather for their activities. They are, thus, very vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather conditions. The National youth Council (NYC) has recognised the importance of youth and environment in the National Youth Policy, however, there is no specific mention of the relationship between the youth and climate change in the policy possibly because it is a new phenomenon. There is no government programme that focuses on youth and climate change according to the NYC which leaves the task to couple of International agencies and Non Governmental Organisations. Young people are unable to contribute to climate change adaptation programmes because the channels and mechanisms are not clear and they are faced with socio-cultural barriers that hinder any meaningful contribution from them.



Perceptions of the youth such as views that young people have no experience, greatly impact negatively on the capacity of the youth to participate in climate change programmes that have a bearing on their livelihoods. The Ministry of Youth and Sports as well as other relevant agencies and institutions need to be more proactive on issues of climate change and create space for the voices of young people to be heard and incorporated into

national climate change policy and programme development. If the negative effects of climate change on the youth are to be reduced there is the need to commit time and resources to support youth livelihood and skills development, especially in rural areas.