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Off-farm work and food security status of farming households in Ghana

John K.M. Kuwornu, Evelyn Osei, Yaw B. Osei-Asare and Mohamed Porgo 

ABSTRACT

This study assessed the effect of participation in off-farm work on the food security status of farming households in the Northern Region of Ghana. Primary data were solicited from 324 farming households in the Tamale metropolis and Tolon district using semi-structured questionnaires. The treatment effects of both income and food security status were estimated using propensity score matching and double-robust methods. The empirical results suggest that participation in off-farm activities increased household daily calorie consumption. These results have implications for the development of off-farm ventures for the benefit of the farming households.

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Environment (built and natural); Agriculture; Food security; Labour and livelihoods; Economics; Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

The economy of Ghana grew by 4.9% during the first quarter of 2016, compared to 4.1% during the same period in 2015, due to strong services sector performance. However, overall gross domestic product (GDP) growth for 2016 could be below the 3.9% growth in 2015 due to production problems in the oil sector (World Bank 2016). Generally, Ghana's economy depends heavily on agriculture and about 50% of the country's workforce is employed in this sector, with households earning about 35% of their incomes from agricultural activities. The sector keeps performing poorly but is nonetheless a key player in meeting both national and international targets in ensuring food security and poverty reduction (ISSER 2013).

Food security is an important indicator of human welfare and development. Farming households in Ghana are mostly affected by poverty, in comparison with actors in other sectors, with about half of farming households (46%) falling below the poverty line (World Food Program 2009; Kuwornu, Demi, and Amegashie 2013). As a consequence, Ghana has implemented the Food and Agriculture Sector Development Programme (FASDEP II), with policy objectives to improve food security and incomes as well as emergency preparedness. Diversifying income-generation activities and creating off-farm employment opportunities for farming households could be a solution to address the issue of food security. It could help these farmers to purchase appropriate inputs to improve the profitability of their farm activities and also empower them to purchase food for consumption when stocks decline.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger was the first of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Ghana has broadly met the MDG of halving the proportion of hungry people in 2002 and was scheduled to achieve its MDG poverty target in 2015, even though the northern regions were still on course to achieve this target as of 2013 (IFPRI 2015; Zereyesus et al. 2017). The Millennium Development Goals ended in 2015 and the world have moved to an era of sustainable development. The first three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on ending poverty and hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, promoting sustainable agriculture, and ensuring healthy lives