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NEWSLETTER



CULTIVATING RESILIENCE AND CREATING JOBS: HOW THE SOCO PROJECT'S AGRICULTURE-LED CIGS ARE TRANSFORMING LIVELIHOODS IN NORTHERN GHANA

IN THIS ISSUE

- Job Creation and Why it Matters in Northern Ghana
- The SOCO Approach — Agriculture as an Engine of Local Job Creation
- Strengthening Community Resilience Through Agriculture
- REAL STORIES OF IMPACT
- Dambai Vegetable Farmers Association
- Tuma Kavi Soya Processing Group - Yendi
- Suhulo Women Group in Rice Processing
- MAYATENG MAIZE FARMERS GROUP

Job Creation and Why it Matters in Northern Ghana

Northern Ghana faces an acute development challenge where poverty, climate vulnerability, and limited economic opportunity intersect. Job creation is especially urgent in Northern Ghana, where multidimensional poverty remains far above the national average. According to recent data from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), the national incidence of multidimensional poverty is about 24.3%. By contrast, several northern regions record much higher rates of deprivation: for example, the Savannah Region records 49.5%, the North East Region 48.1%, Upper East Region 43.0%, Northern Region 38.4%, and Upper West Region 37.4%. In many of these areas, more than half of rural dwellers remain multidimensionally poor, manifesting the depth and breadth of deprivation in these regions. This high level of poverty reflects not only low incomes but also deficits in education, health, living conditions, employment, and access to services, all of which limit household stability, livelihoods, and prospects.





Youth unemployment and underemployment add to the urgency. Women are also disproportionately affected. Structural barriers, including limited access to land, credit, training, and productive resources, restrict their ability to build income through agriculture or small enterprise. This deepens household-level vulnerability, reduces food security, and undermines the prospects of children and dependents.

Given this reality, job creation through agriculture and local enterprise, especially in rural areas, is essential to reducing multidimensional poverty, strengthening household resilience, and building stable, self-reliant communities.

The SOCO Approach — Agriculture as an Engine of Local Job Creation

Agriculture sits at the centre of life and livelihoods in Northern Ghana. For many households, it is the primary source of income, food security, and community stability. Yet for decades, limited infrastructure, low productivity, and climate-

related pressures have constrained the sector's ability to generate sustainable jobs. In a region where a large share of the population depends on farming, strengthening agriculture is one of the most powerful ways to expand employment and reduce poverty.



Mayateng Women Maize Farmers Group



Walewale Wungu Maize and Beans Farmers Group

The SOCO Project through the LED component of the project, Common Interest Groups (CIGs) receive grants, productive assets, and training to support local agricultural production and value-addition. Many of these CIGs are engaged in practical, community-based activities that directly strengthen resilient communities, diversify income sources, and mitigate food insecurity in Northern Ghana and other border zone communities.

The groups supported include women and youth farmers cultivating maize, beans, and other staple crops, as well as processors involved in rice milling, shea butter processing, and the production of 'gari'—a cereal made from cassava. Others add value through small-scale agro-processing and on-site economic activities that reinforce local agricultural value chains and expand income-generating opportunities for vulnerable communities.

The LED grant helps create economic opportunities, close the gender gap, and build resilient, cohesive communities capable of withstanding climate pressures and reducing the risks of spillover of conflict in the wider Sahel region.



Kpassah Timukii Sheep VSLA



Odo Shea Butter VSLA group

The SOCO Project's approach goes beyond providing tools or equipment. It invests in building viable local economies. Beneficiary groups are trained in business development, financial literacy, group management, and climate-smart production methods. This equips farmers and processors not only to produce more, but to link their products to markets, add value, and operate like small enterprises.



Supporting the construction and rehabilitation of rural markets, feeder roads, and other enabling infrastructure further strengthens the local ecosystem needed for agricultural activities to thrive. The result is practical and immediate job creation. Farming groups engage labour for planting and harvesting; processing groups create roles in sorting, drying, milling, packaging, and distribution; and value chains open up opportunities for youth in transport, aggregation, sales, and repairs. Women gain direct income from processing activities, while youth find alternatives to migration or irregular work.



Wungu Youth Farmers Group

Agriculture matters in Northern Ghana because it is the engine that drives household income, food systems, and rural economies. When strengthened and supported, it becomes a reliable source of jobs, stability, and resilience. Through its LED approach, SOCO is demonstrating that agriculture is not merely a way of life—it is a foundation for job creation, poverty reduction, and community transformation.

Strengthening Community Resilience Through Agriculture

Agriculture does more than provide food and income; it is a powerful driver of social cohesion in rural communities. When farmers come together to plant, harvest, process, or market their produce, they create shared routines and goals that unite households. These group activities build cooperation, deepen trust, and reduce tensions, helping communities work together more effectively. Through agriculture, community members strengthen their relationships and collective identity, laying the foundation for more peaceful, resilient, and supportive local networks



Songtaba soya bean farmers

Improved livelihoods also play a stabilising role. When families earn a steady income from agriculture and related value-chain activities, they become less vulnerable to external shocks, fragility pressures, and negative coping mechanisms. This stability enables communities to withstand climate stresses, economic disruptions, or social risks, creating a more resilient and united environment where people can thrive.

REAL STORIES OF IMPACT

Dambai Vegetable Farmers Association

The Dambai Vegetable Farmers Association is an example of how the SOCO Project's Common Interest Group (CIG) grant model is transforming rural livelihoods and strengthening community resilience. Formed in 2021 with 27 members: 20 of whom are women, the group began with very modest production, cultivating cayenne and green pepper on a single acre of land. Their earnings were low, crop variety was limited, and expansion opportunities were out of reach. However, everything changed after they received support through the Local Economic Development (LED) grant.



With the grant from the SOCO project, the group expanded their farmland from one acre to four acres and gained access to high-quality hybrid seedlings they previously could not afford. This investment immediately boosted productivity. Instead of harvesting a maximum of **5 bags**, the farmers now expect up to **15 bags** per harvest, a threefold increase. They have also diversified their crops, adding onions and cabbage to their production. This broader market offering strengthens their income base and positions them for more stable earnings throughout the year.



The group's progress goes far beyond increased yields. The grant has deepened unity and social support among members. They now act as one, helping each other through illness, funerals, financial emergencies, and celebrating milestones such as marriages and childbirth. Their Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) has become a lifeline. Through it, members access small loans that have changed the trajectory of their lives.



One inspiring example is **Vida Kunji**, who used VSLA support to complete her secondary education. The group even provided her with a bicycle to ease her daily commute. She graduated with distinction and dreams of pursuing higher education—dreams she never imagined possible before joining the association.



“Members intend to reinvest profits into purchasing more hybrid seeds, expanding their land, and improving irrigation.”

Vida Kunji, a beneficiary of the Dambai Vegetable Farmers Association’s VSLA scheme

Two other young members have secured apprenticeships in fashion design through the group’s encouragement and plan to start their own businesses with continued support from the association. The association is already planning its next steps. Members intend to reinvest profits into purchasing more hybrid seeds, expanding their land, and improving irrigation.

Tuma Kavi Soya Processing Group - Yendi

Formed by 12 women in 2018, the Tuma Kavi group has rapidly grown into a strong agribusiness enterprise. With grant support, their production of soybean Tom Brown cereal jumped from just **2 bags to 6 bags** per production, enabling steady profits and expanding their markets to schools, restaurants, and nearby towns.



Membership has increased to **22 women**, many of whom now earn additional income by producing “Suya Khenbab” and other soy-based snacks.





The group is also supporting local farmers through regular off-take and plans to acquire its own farmland to reduce costs and scale up production. The story of Tuma Kavi is a clear example of how small grants can empower women, boost local agribusiness, and create meaningful livelihood opportunities

Suhulo Women Group in Rice Processing

The Suhulo Women Group, formed in 2016 by 30 women, has transformed its rice-processing enterprise through support from the SOCO LED grant. Previously producing small quantities with low profits, the group now processes up to **40 bags per production**, significantly boosting sales and income on market days. This growth has strengthened both livelihoods and social well-being. Through their VSLA, one member secured a loan to fund her son's tertiary education—showing how increased earnings translate directly into improved household opportunities. The group also provides a reliable market for local paddy farmers, often offering advance payments to support farmers facing urgent needs. Looking ahead, the women aim to cultivate their own rice to reduce reliance on external suppliers and strengthen business resilience. Their journey demonstrates how targeted support can turn a modest community initiative into a thriving, empowering enterprise for women and their families.



MAYATENG MAIZE FARMERS GROUP

The Mayateng Maize Farmers Group is a remarkable all-women association of 35 members, 34 women and 1 male (group secretary) who dared to dream beyond traditional roles. In their small community, most women depended entirely on their husbands, and those who farmed did so only on a very small scale because they lacked the resources to expand. Determined to change their future, they formed a Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) to support one another—and their perseverance opened the door to greater opportunity.



With support from the SOCO Project, the women were finally able to cultivate 10 acres of maize, a feat that once felt impossible due to a lack of capital. Their dedication on the field, despite age, labour intensity, and limited means, stands as a powerful example of resilience and collective strength.

HAPPY FARMER'S DAY

Today, we join the nation in honouring all farmers across Ghana, especially the hardworking men and women in our SOCO project communities. Your dedication, strength, and resilience continue to nourish families and keep our local economies alive. We are proud of the progress you make every day, on your farms, in your groups, and within your communities. Your work matters, and we appreciate all that you do.



Wishing you a joyful and well-deserved Farmers' Day.

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