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## DIVERSIFICATION OF RURAL LIVELIHOODS THROUGH THE METHODIST ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN THE ASHANTI REGION OF GHANA A NECESSITY OR CHOICE

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### ABSTRACT

Rural livelihood which is predominant in sub-Saharan Africa where most people live their entire lives has over the years proved to be stressful for many rural folks as they battle for their daily survival. Rural homes regulate their undertakings either to feat novel prospects produced via the liberalization of market or manage livelihood risks. Such changes are identified to possess significant effect on income, welfare and income distribution across rural households. This study sought to ascertain as to whether rural livelihood diversification was a means of choice or necessity for some rural households in Offinso North and Ahafo Ano South Districts in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The descriptive qualitative research design was employed for the study. In all, 58 beneficiaries in both Districts were selected for the study. Respondents were selected using the convenience sampling method. It was unveiled that majority of the beneficiaries which is 81% were already engaged in one business or the other but were seeking for alternative skills to enhance their livelihoods. Also all 58 valid responses gave representing 100 % declared it was a necessity to acquire skills through the MEDP to diversify their livelihoods and was in no wise a mere choice.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to (Hussein & Nelson, 1999.), livelihood diversification signifies the efforts by house holds and individuals to raise income and decrease ecological pressures which changes abruptly by the mark of liberty of choice of an individual or a person to diversify or not, and the and reversibility of the aftermath. Throughout the previous years, there have been an exceptional development of rural activity diversification in developing countries. A rich inter connected writings suggests that rural households modify their actions either to find out different prospects generated by market liberalization (Delgado & Siamwalla, 1997) or to survive livelihood risks (Barrett et al., 2001; Carter, 1997). These changes are known to have significant impact on income distribution, overall income and welfare across rural households (Block & Webb, 2001; Canagarajah et al., 2001; Ellis, 2007; Hoogeveen, 2010; Reardon et al., 2000). Different studies have shown that in Sub Saharan Africa, rural households derive their income from diverse sources with non-agrarian activities accounting for the significant share of the total income (Ellis, 2000).

Attracting the attention of social scientists to the study of rural livelihoods is the existing gaps in poverty in rural and urban sectors in Sub Saharan Africa (Nasa et al., 2010). Not being an exception, Ghana has for the previous dual decades been involved in a numerous reforms economically aimed at providing an enabling condition for a sustained growth and development. These reformations which commenced under the agreement of the structural adjustment programme earmarked the beginning of the deregulation of the economy and its uprising to a more expanded, exciting, effective and export oriented with a greater private sector involvement from and unproductive and import dependent economy (Aryeetey et al, 2000). It is also rational to be suspicious that the sectors lack of transformation might be an important contributing factor to the poverty challenges and food security in the country forcing many rural folks to diversify their livelihood given the fact that the largest sector in Ghana's economy which also provides livelihood for over 60 percent is agriculture. Ghana presently has almost two million people still exposed to food insecurity and food remains a grave concern in many parts of the country (USAID, 2010). It is gradually becoming obvious that the agrarian sector alone cannot be counted

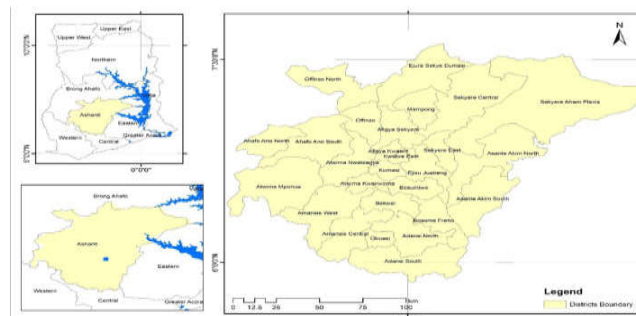
upon as the principal activity for rural folks and as a means of reducing poverty and improving livelihoods while identifying the crucial need to sustain a robust agrarian sector. Stifel (2000) states that the support and promotion for non-farm diversification opportunities is one phenomenon which is gaining much prominence in rural development literature. It was upon such a phenomena that the Methodist Entrepreneurship Development programme was established in July, 2014 to create more diversification opportunities for rural households (both on-farm and off-farm) to reduce poverty. The introduction of new crops into farming systems, investing in livestock, fisheries and hunting by farmers is classified as an On-farm diversification activity whereas Off-farm diversification activities encapsulates the various undertakings embark on away from household's own farm for example wage employment on other farms (Ellis & Freeman, 2004). Now, there is a confirmation that off-farm activities in both urban and rural areas are widespread in Ghana. The fifth round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 5) estimates that approximately three million, two hundred thousand households representing about (46.4%) of households in Ghana operate non-farm enterprises. Although, several extensive literature now subsists on the reasons and effects of livelihood diversification, the evidence is rather diverse and confusing (Stifel, 2010; Bezabih *et al.*, 2010). The Methodist Entrepreneurship Development Programme (MEDP) was established in July, 2014 by the Methodist Church Ghana (Kumasi Diocese) to intervene in the current unemployment situation in Ghana with the aim of addressing unemployment through capacity building, skills training and business financing that will enable individuals and groups build and grow thriving enterprises leading to improved standard of living with the target groups being the graduate unemployed, unskilled unemployed and the small scale self-employed. However, the question that remains unanswered is whether the apparent rural livelihood diversification happening in Ghana at a faster pace is a choice or a necessity to these rural folks. This research is therefore set out to investigate the livelihood diversification related opportunities created by the Methodist Entrepreneurship Development Programme and whether these opportunities have become a choice or necessity for adoption and the impact of the programme to beneficiary folks in some of its operational areas in the Ashanti region of Ghana.

**The study therefore seeks to find answers to the following questions:**

- What livelihood diversification opportunities have been created by the Methodist Entrepreneurship Development Programme?
- Has the livelihood diversification opportunities created by the Methodist Entrepreneurship Development Programme become a necessity or choice for adoption?

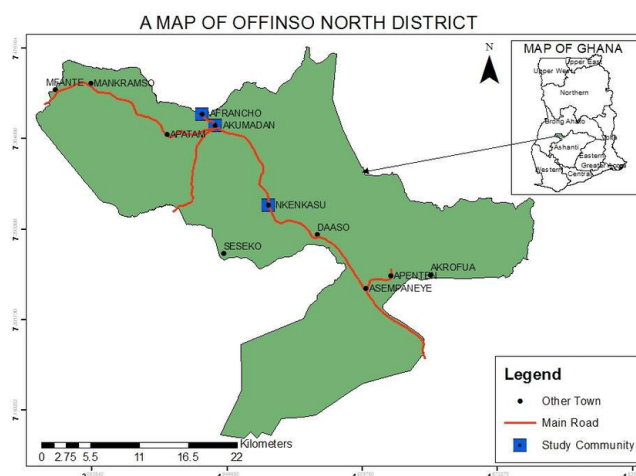
**Study Area:** Broadly speaking, this research was conducted in the Ashanti region of Ghana but specifically in the Offinso North and Ahafo Ano South Districts of the Ashanti Region respectively. With its administrative capital as Kumasi, the Ashanti region is located between latitudes  $6^{\circ}45'$  and  $6.750^{\circ}$  N and longitudes  $1^{\circ}30'$  and  $1.500^{\circ}$  W. With a total land area of  $24,389\text{km}^2$  ( $9,417\text{ sq ml}$ ) the region has a total population of 11,000,000 as at 2015 making it the most populous region in Ghana. The region is endowed with spectacular geography, lakes, forest, forest reserves, wildlife, national parks, waterfalls etc. The region shares boundaries with the Brong Ahafo region, now Ahafo, Bono East and Bono region respectively to the north, Western region to the west, Eastern region to the east and Central region to the south.

Narrowing it down Having its capital as Akumadan, the Offinso North District is found between longitudes  $10^{\circ}60'$  West and  $10^{\circ}45'$  East as well as longitudes  $70^{\circ}20'$  North and  $60^{\circ}50'$  South. Its entire area of land is about seven hundred and forty one (741) kilometers square. Its borders are shared with the Municipal Assembly of Techiman to the North, that of Sunyani Municipal to the West, and bordered by Ejura Sekyedumasi District in the East as well as Offinso Municipal to the South (Ghana District. Com, 2021).



**Figure 1. Map of Ghana showing Ashanti region**

With its large forest stand, the most vibrant work found in the district is subsistence agriculture. From the 2010 population and housing census report of the Offinso North district, the population stood at 56,881 with a yearly growth rate of three point four percent (3.4%) and 50.2% being females and 49.8% being males. (Ghana District. Com, 2021).



**Figure 2. Map showing the Offinso North District. Data source: Department of Planning and Budget (Offinso North District Assembly) 2021**

The Ahafo Ano South district which has its capital as Mankranso also lies between latitude  $6^{\circ}42'N$ ,  $7.2^{\circ}N$  and longitude  $1^{\circ}45'W$  and  $2^{\circ}20'W$  its total land area is about  $1241\text{km}^2$ . It shares boundaries with the Tano district to the north, to the south by Atwima district, to the west by Ahafo Ano district and to the east by the Offinso South district. (Ghana District.com, 2021). The population of the district according to the 2010 population and housing census stood at 121,659 in 2010. The district is predominantly rural and like the Offinso North, the most vibrant work here is agriculture.

## Methods

**Research Approach:** Research approach comes in three forms namely the qualitative, quantitative and mixed method. Qualitative methods are suitable for the evaluation of situations in their natural settings. Some of the methods that are most common for qualitative research involves observations, focus groups, or interviews (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). For (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016), a qualitative research approach is proper to study people, phenomena, processes, and issues within their original settings so as to comprehend the meanings on the basis of the experience of the people with adequate knowledge about the phenomenon. This study therefore adopted the qualitative approach because it will help in understanding the context of the topic from different viewpoints from different respondents (Asumadu, 2019).

**Research design:** A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The intention was to tap into and describe the knowledge of

the trainees (respondents) concerning the livelihood diversification opportunities created for them by the Methodist entrepreneurship development programme and how they perceive the opportunities as to whether it was a mere choice or a necessity to them hence, individual trainees (respondents) were the unit of analysis for the study.

**Target population:** The target population consisted of all participants who have registered to undertake training with the Methodist Entrepreneurship programme under different skills training sections including confectionary making, soap making, agri- business, textiles and beads making. In 90 participants had registered to be trained in one of the aforementioned categories.

**Sampling procedure and sampling size:** The broader aim of sampling to enable the researcher to study a small proportion or parts of a bigger population which will enable the researcher to analyze it in order to make generalizations and conclusions about the target population (Neuman 2011). The convenience sampling of the non-probability technique was employed for this study. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure whereby participants in the study are selected based on their willingness and preparedness to partake in the study (Saunders & Thornhill, 2012). This was to ensure that participants who were readily accessible and prepared were interviewed. Again, due to the busy schedule of the training, the convenience sampling was used to give space to those who did not have ample time throughout the data collection process. In all, 58 respondents were interviewed to use them as an inference to make generalizations and conclusions about the larger population.

**Reliability and validity:** The issue of reliability assists in enhancing the degree of consistency/accuracy via which an instrument measures the purpose of its establishment. Hence, a pilot studies was done before the actual data collection process. This was done by using five of the respondents which was not counted as part of the actual sample to test the questions to eliminate all ambiguities and inconsistencies. This ensured that the original semi-structured interview administered was reliable and understandable.

**Data Collection Techniques and Analysis:** The in-depth semi-structured interviews was employed in order to create room for enough probing and also serves as a mechanism for cross-checking information. An in depth semi structured interview guide during the interview process is used through a framework of relevant themes and proposed questions that merits consideration Kvale (1996). In view of this, the semi- structured interview technique gave room at some points in time to allow respondents to give extra information and clarifications according to their knowledge on the research questions asked. The content analysis was employed to analyse the data obtained. In terms of data analysis, Krippendorff (2018) argues that content analysis is “a research technique for making reliable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful material) to the context of their use” (p.29). The goal of content analysis is to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study. This included data assembling from variety of sources, data reduction which involved organization and structuring of qualitative data, data display which involved summarizing and presenting the structure that is seen in qualitative data and finally data verification involving seeking alternative explanations and interpretations of qualitative data. This was done in order to make meaning out of the information collected.

**Ethical consideration(s):** Obviously, research ethics is aimed at protecting participants anonymity, rights, privacy as well as confidentiality and ensuring appropriate collection of data by declaring suitability of the methodological approaches used in the study for addressing the objectives of the research without causing harm to any respondent (Artal *et al.*, 2017; Mckenna & Gray, 2018). Hence, approval was sought from the programmes coordinator before embarking on the study. Also, the confidentiality of respondents were respected and their consent were sought before the interview process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Livelihood diversification has become part of the daily lifestyle of most Ghanaians. The results of the study are as follows:

**Table 1. Socio demographic characteristics of respondents**

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Gender	Frequency (N=58)	Percentage (%)
Male	17	29.3
Female	41	70.7
Age	Frequency (N=58)	Percentage (%)
15-35	26	44.8
36-60	27	46.6
60+	5	8.6
Religious orientation	Frequency (N=58)	Percentage (%)
Christians	57	98.3
Muslims	1	1.7
Marital status	Frequency (N=58)	Percentage (%)
Married	34	58.6
Single	16	27.6
Co-habitation	4	6.9
Divorced	3	5.2
Others	1	1.7

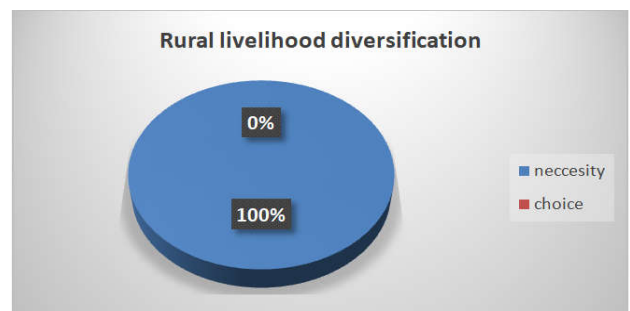
**Table 2. Number of dependents on respondents**

Number	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	7	12.1	12.1
	1	7	12.1	24.1
	2	7	12.1	36.2
	3	5	8.6	44.8
	4	9	15.5	60.3
	5	9	15.5	75.9
	6	6	10.3	86.2
	7	3	5.2	91.4
	8	2	3.4	94.8
	9	3	5.2	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3. Why do you want additional skills?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	diversify my livelihood	45	95.7	96.5
	for more income.			3.5
	To serve as a shock security	2	3.4	100.0
	Total	47	99.1	100.0
Total		47	100.0	

**Socio- demographic characteristics:** From the study, 44.8% were between the ages of 15-35, 46.6% between the ages of 36-60 and 8.6% for 65+. The trend was not deliberate since respondents were selected using the convenience sampling method, hence these were the respondents at our disposal. This revealed that majority of the respondents were in the active age group and can therefore be regarded as active and physically disposed to pursue economic activities. It can be seen that females unarguably are the majority compared to the males.



**Figure 3. Diversifying your livelihood through MEDP a necessity or a choice**

Out of the total 58 respondents, 41 of them representing 70.7% were females whereas 17 representing 29.3 were males. This shows how keen women in the Offinso and Ahafo Ano south district have become in terms of diversifying their livelihoods. With regards to the marital status of the respondents it is obvious from table 1 above that more than half of the respondents interviewed were married thus 34 individuals representing 58.6% were married. Followed by the singles with a frequency of 16 and a percentage of 27.6, 4 of them representing 6.9% live in cohabitation with 3 divorced representing 5.2% and others representing 1.7%. This finding is very instructive as it could mean a lot for the household labour availability and even size and extent of farm cultivated by those who are farmers and were willing to divert. Although, the Methodist entrepreneurship development programme (MEDP) has been established to promote financial and economic empowerment of church members, it is not limited to the church only but the entire Ghanaian society such that any interested person could be trained and offered support for his/her livelihood. From table 1 above, it can be realized that that Christians from any interested denomination form the majority of the respondents thus 57 individuals representing 98.3% and 1 Muslim representing 1.7%. This describes the attitude of the programme as a church based one with full responsibility to the whole society in which it finds itself.

**Number of dependents and its implications:** As part of the study was the number of dependents on the various respondents as this is also a contributing factor to why they were trained to diversify their livelihoods through the Methodist entrepreneurship development programme. From table 2 above, out of the 58 respondents 7 of them had no dependents representing 12.1%, 7 of them had 1 dependent each representing 12.1%, another 7 of them had 2 dependents each representing 12.1%, 5 had 3 dependents each representing 8.6%, 9 had 4 dependents each representing 15.5%, another 9 had 5 dependents each representing 15.5%. 6 of them had 6 dependents each representing 10.3%, 3 of them also had 7 dependents each representing 5.2%, 2 of them had 8 dependents each representing 3.4% and 3 of them had 9 dependents each representing 5.2%. It is worth noting that almost all of them had at least a dependent. This was revealed to be a major substantial reason why most of the respondents have decided to diversify their livelihoods and for that matter their sources of income. As their number of dependents continues to increase, the greater the need and desire for them to look for alternative means to increase their income and the most credible option available to them is to have multiple alternative livelihoods so enable them survive out of poverty. One of the respondents said:

*“ I am a subsistence farmer, my source of income continues to remain the same but my family size has increased than previously therefore, the same amount of income can no more cater for my family again, hence the need to diversify my livelihood to enable me get extra income to cater for my family”*

This is a confirmation of study by Stifel (2000) which states that the support and promotion for non-farm diversification opportunities is one phenomenon which is gaining much prominence in rural development literature.

**Livelihood diversification opportunities created by the Methodist Entrepreneurship development programme:** It was revealed through our study that the opportunities which were mostly referred to by the respondents as skills training were basically more of off-farming activities meaning they could be done outside the normal farming settings. All opportunities created by the programme and identified were those which have ready markets in Ghana and beyond and they included the following categories:

- **Soap making category:** In this category, participants are trained in the following skill areas of soap marketed in Ghana and elsewhere (Long bar soap popular referred to in Ghana as key soap, mini bar soap, liquid soap and the local “gyewoboo soap”) which could be used both for bathing and washing of items.

- **Confectioneries:** In this category, various confectionaries for which participants were trained on included “Tea bread”, sugar bread, short bread biscuit, meat pie, rake cake, yeast doughnut, sausage rolls, pastry chips, sweet burns, spring roll, cake and “polo” in local dialect which if taken seriously by participants could be a huge source of income for the participants because of the high patronage of the confectionaries on the Ghanaian market.
- **Agri-business:** here the main areas for which participants were trained included mushroom farming and rabbit rearing.
- **Textile:** this section has to do with the making of materials which is most often referred to as African wear including batik, “tie and dye” as it is known in Ghana.
- **Beads making:** this section also had the name of bead making which involved the making of necklaces, wrist bands, ear rings, sandals from traditional beads in Ghana.

It must be noted that for every category chosen by a participant, him/her was trained in all the skills available in that category to create more options for them. For example if the person chose beads making, it meant he/she was supposed to learn how to make necklaces, wrist bands, ear rings, sandals from the traditional beads.

#### **Below is the skills preference of participants according to their categories**

**Skills Preference of participants:** From the study, out of the 58 valid responses, 24 which is 41.4 % were been trained in soap making, 19 of them which is 32.7% were been trained in confectionaries, 3 which is 5.2% were also been trained in “tie and dye”/beads making, 12 which is 20.7% were also trained in agri-business. It must be noted that participants were trained in each category of their choice according to their capacity. Majority of the participants had their interest in soap making, followed by confectionaries and the least in tie and dye/beads making. This is affirmed in the study of (Ellis, 2000) that many researchers have revealed that rural households obtain their income from several sources with non-agrarian undertakings accounting for the largest share of total income in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Reasons for preference of skills by participants:** From the study, beneficiaries of the programme were inquired as to why each of them chose the category of skills they were been trained on. 24 of the thus 41.4 % testified that it was just their area of interest, 14 of them representing 24.1% also testified that skills was to get them into their preferred choice of business, 1 of them representing 1.7% said it was just for pleasure, 2 of them thus 3.4% said it was to upgrade their knowledge in that area, 15 of them that is 26% also testified that they chose their area of skills category because it makes more money and another 2 of them representing 3.4% further said they chose their category because of other personal reasons other than the aforementioned. It must be noted with certainty that apart from these skills acquisitions being more of their interest the next and most important factor walked hand in hand with their interest was money thus to make more income. The implication here is that they needed a skill of their choice to make money to cater for their needs and family. The beneficiaries confessed that the skills they chose and for that matter were trained in was exactly the skills they have been waiting for in order diversify their various livelihoods and for that matter the programme had not missed its target.

**Employment status of employees:** It was unveiled that majority of the beneficiaries which is 47 of the beneficiaries representing 81 % were already engaged in one business or the other with many of them involved in farming and others like trading, etc before acquiring their respective skills. 11 of them representing 19 % had no job at all and thus were given skills to start something. This gives us the information that majority of people who go in to entrepreneurship here in Ghana in order to diversify their livelihoods to earn more income to make a living and escape the shackles of poverty are mostly employed in one way or the other. Only that their income is not enough to survive them throughout the month. Most of the



respondents who responded yes were farmers who were seeking an off-farm diversification opportunities.

**The intent of additional skills acquisition:** Here, those who were already engaged in one business or the other, thus 47 as seen in table 3 from the beneficiaries who were assessed, out of the total 47 beneficiaries, 45 of them with a percentage of 95.7, said they acquired the skills in order to diversify their livelihood and to earn more income. With this many of them preferred both off-farm and non-farm diversification, thus some intend to employ the skills acquired hand in hand with their farming and others businesses since the income they were already accruing was not enough to support their households. Some also intend to altogether stop their farming activities in order to employ the skills acquired to start their small scale businesses. 2 of them which is 3.4% also acquired their skills to serve as a shock security for them in turbulent times as affirmed by (Delgado & Siamwalla, 1997) and (Barrett *et al.* 2001a; Carter, 1997) that rural households adjust their activities either to exploit new opportunities created by market liberalization or to cope with livelihood risks.

**The necessity of diversifying ones income:** All 58 valid responses gave declared it was a necessity to acquire skills through the MEDP and was in no wise a choice. Which is an attestation to the fact that most rural households are ready to diversify their livelihoods at any given opportunity not by virtue of the fact that they can do well without diversifying. The diversification of rural livelihood here as a necessity is an indication that the economic life of the respondents are not well and it would therefore be difficult to survive and thrive without another income source preferably an off-farm income diversification opportunity.

## CONCLUSION

The study revealed that participants were trained in areas such as soap making category which included (Long bar soap popular referred to in Ghana as key soap, mini bar soap, liquid soap and the local ‘gyewoboo soap’) which could be used both for bathing and washing of items. Again, there were also trained in confectioneries: where they learnt baking skills such as the baking of ‘Tea bread’, sugar bread, short bread biscuit, meat pie, rake cake, yeast doughnut, sausage rolls, pastry chips, sweet burns, spring roll, cake and frying of ‘polo’. Agri- business: was also part with areas such as mushroom farming and rabbit rearing while textile included including batik, ‘tie and dye’ as it is known in Ghana and beads making involved the making of necklaces, wrist bands, ear rings, sandals from traditional beads in Ghana. All 58 valid responses gave declared it was a necessity to acquire skills through the MEDP and was in no wise a choice.

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