

REDUCING POVERTY AMONG YOUTH WITH LABOUR INTENSIVE PUBLIC WORK (LIPW) PROGRAMME: EVIDENCE FROM THE DAFFIAMA BUSSIE ISSAH DISTRICT IN GHANA

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Abstract. In 2010, the Government of Ghana launched a Labor-Intensive Public Work (LIPW) program under the Ghana Social Opportunities Project (GSOP). It earmarked USD 56 million for the execution of the program in 60 relatively poor districts of Ghana. The program is intended to offer jobs and income-earning opportunities to some identified rural poor, especially the youth, during seasonal labor demand shortfalls through the rehabilitation and maintenance of public or community infrastructure like roads and dams. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the extent to which the program has reduced poverty among the youth in the Daffiam Bussie Issah District in Ghana as a case study. A mixed research method involving both qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed in the study. The authors adopted a matched case-control study design. 90 beneficiary youth in 3 beneficiary communities of the LIPW program were compared with 90 youth in 3 other non-beneficiary communities of the same district. Focus group sessions were also held with the youth to understand how the program has impacted their lives. The study revealed that beneficiary youth of the LIPW program were able to increase their livestock numbers by 79.1%, their monthly incomes by 24.26%, their food consumption by 16.75% and their farm size by 47.72%. The study therefore recommended that the government of Ghana should scale up the LIPW program to cover more communities in order to reduce poverty in Ghana.

Keywords: poverty, youth, labor-intensive, unemployment

INTRODUCTION

On December 17, 2010, a 26-year-old fruit seller in a small town in central Tunisia set himself ablaze in a desperate attempt to protest against the government. His action ignited a revolutionary youth movement which has come to be known today as the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring led to the overthrow of the Tunisian government and subsequently spread to other Arab countries, leading to the overthrow of governments in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen (Ibish, 2012). According to Mulderig (2013), the contagion of the Arab Spring revolutions was largely caused by the realization of youth in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere that their generation was living in an undignified liminal state of pre-adulthood characterized by unemployment and poverty. In fact, the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2011) reports that unemployment in the Arab world has been the highest of any region on the globe for many years. For example, 50% of the youth in Yemen were unemployed. The United Arab Emirates, which record the smallest youth unemployment rate in the Arab community, had 12.1% of their youth without job.

The Arab Spring has major implications for Ghana. This is because the circumstances that led to the revolution in the Arab World are faced by Ghanaian people right now. According to Baah-Boateng (2018), although

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Ghana's growth performance has been quite impressive in recent years, it has not translated into a sufficient creation of jobs to meet the rapid expansion of the labor force. Currently, the youth unemployment rate in Ghana stands at 23.1% (Baah-Boateng, 2018). Compounding the youth unemployment problem in Ghana is the fact that a significant part (40.1%) of the youth are unskilled and are therefore largely excluded from a productive economic and social life (ISSER, 2017).

This unemployment situation has resulted in many Ghanaians living in poverty. The hardest hit by poverty are those residing in the savanna zone of Ghana. The Ghana Statistical service report that the rural savanna zone has the highest poverty rate of 67.7% whereas the national figure is at 23.45% (GSS, 2018). Some scientists claim that the high poverty level in the rural savanna zone is as a result of low rainfall for farming. Indeed, the region experiences one rainy season while the southern forest zone has two (Pickbourn, 2018). This makes farming (the major occupation in Ghana) less productive in the savanna zone. Consequently, most youth in the rural savanna zones migrate to the south as a social protection mechanism to reduce the impact of poverty (Eshun and Dichaba, 2019a).

As a mitigating measure to address youth poverty and a likely Arab Spring-styled revolution, the government of Ghana launched a Labor Intensive Public Work (LIPW) program under the Ghana Social Opportunities Project (GSOP) in 2010. The program features a method of construction involving a blend of machines and labor. However, labor (based on the use of hand tools and light plant and equipment) is preferred to the use of heavy machines in areas of economic and practical viability (DPW, 2015, VIII). It earmarked USD 56 mln for the execution of the program in 60 relatively poor districts of Ghana. The program is intended to offer jobs and income-earning opportunities to some identified rural poor, especially the youth, during seasonal labor demand shortfalls through the rehabilitation and maintenance of public or community infrastructure. The objective is to reduce rural youth unemployment while rehabilitating productive infrastructure assets which have the potential to generate secondary employment in the targeted districts and cushion households and communities against external shocks (Eshun and Dichaba, 2019b). The GSOP-LIPW program engages beneficiaries in the construction of feeder roads, dams/dugouts and the planting of trees. They are engaged

from November to May, the period without rainfall in the northern savanna zone. They are paid GHS 7 for six hours of work a day. This wage rate is deliberately kept below the minimum wage for unskilled labor in order to attract the most vulnerable while discouraging other well-to-do people who are capable of securing a better job (Eshun and Dichaba, 2019b).

Studies on the GSOP-LIPW program have been scanty. A study conducted by Eshun and Dichaba (2019a) demonstrated that the GSOP-LIPW program has no impact on reducing the rural-urban migration. However, no study addressed the program's objective of reducing poverty among the youth. To ascertain the effectiveness or otherwise of this program, there is need for some empirical investigations. Therefore, the focus of this research was to empirically examine how the LIPW program of the GSOP contributes to the advancement of the rural youth.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the mixed research method comprising both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The authors adopted a matched case-control study design. Case-control is a type of study designs used in identifying factors that may contribute to a condition by comparing subjects who have that condition (the 'cases' or treatment group) with subjects who do not have the condition but are otherwise similar (the 'controls' or control group) (Hansson, 2001).

The treatment group was drawn from three beneficiary communities (Bussie, Tabiesi and Wugo) where the GSOP constructed a facility using labor-intensive methods in the Daffiama Bussie Issah District of the Ghanaian savanna zone. The controlled group were drawn from non-project communities in the same district; they include Touri, Daffiama and Kinkele. The Daffiama Bussie Issa District depicts a typical rural economy dominated by the agriculture sector with the commerce and industrial sectors being less developed. Agriculture alone accounts for about 85% of the labor force while commerce/services and industry account for 14% and 1%, respectively (GSS, 2014a). The district has a population of 32,827, including 47.7% males and 51.3% females. About 32% of the population are within the youthful age bracket of 15 to 35 years (GSS, 2014a).

In each treatment community, 30 youth (comprising 15 males and 15 females) who benefited from the

GSOP were selected using the snowball sampling technique. Also, 30 youth (15 males and 15 females) were selected with the same sampling technique from each of the controlled communities to respond to a questionnaire developed to assess the differences in poverty levels. Key poverty indicators used in the research include: livestock numbers, average monthly income, food consumption per day and farm size.

Table 1 depicts the characteristics of the respondents. The mean age of respondents from the treatment community is 26.9 while that of the controlled community is 28.1. A variance ratio test revealed no significant difference between the ages of the two groups ($P = 0.5742 > 0.05$). Also, majority of the youth in both

treatment (78.9%) and controlled (83.3%) communities are farmers with no statistical difference in occupation between the two groups ($P = 0.620 > 0.05$). Furthermore, the unemployment rate for the treatment group and controlled group is 11.1% and 15.6%, respectively. In this case, too, no statistical difference exists since $P = 0.0742 > 0.05$.

Three focus group discussions comprising six males and six females were conducted in the three treatment communities. The essence of the discussions was to understand how the public work program has contributed to improving the lives of the youth. Qualitative data was analyzed by observing the major topics raised during the discussions. Simple percentages, mean scores and pie charts were also used for data analysis and presentation of quantitative data.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Beneficiaries	Non-beneficiaries
Mean age	26.9	28.1
Occupation		
• Farming	71 (78.9%)	75 (83.3%)
• Craft	7 (7.8%)	1 (1.1%)
• Service	2 (2.2%)	0
• Unemployed	10 (11.1%)	14 (15.6%)
Total	90 (100%)	90 (100%)

Source: own elaboration of data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Impact of GSOP LIPW on youth poverty

Quantitatively, the impact of the GSOP-LIPW program on youth poverty was measured using four key indicators. These are: Tropical Livestock Unit (TLU), monthly income, food consumption per day, and size of farms owned by the youth (see Table 2).

Livestock holding

Livestock size owned by the youth was measured in Tropical Livestock Units (TLU). A metric developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization, the TLU

Table 2. Group statistics of poverty indicators

Header	Community name	N	Mean	Percentage change in mean	Std. deviation
Tropical Livestock Unit	Treatment	90	0.1201	79.1	0.22234
	Controlled	90	0.0671	–	0.12475
Food consumption per day	Treatment	90	3.1156	16.75	0.95187
	Controlled	90	2.6689	–	1.59442
Monthly income	Treatment	90	132.9333	24.26	30.43054
	Controlled	90	106.9778	–	43.38490
Farm size	Treatment	90	1.7889	47.72	1.69927
	Controlled	90	1.2111	–	1.14406

Source: own elaboration.

allows multiple species of livestock to be combined into a weighted measure representing the total body weight and potential market value. A single animal weighing 250 kg represents one TLU; the weighting factors are 0.7 for cattle, 0.1 for sheep, 0.2 for pigs, 0.1 for goats, and 0.01 for chicken (Otte and Chilonda, 2002)

Common livestock owned by the youth in both the treatment and controlled communities include goat, sheep, pig and fowl. Beneficiary youth of the LIPW program recorded a mean livestock holding of 0.120 TLU, compared to 0.067 TLU for non-beneficiaries (see Table 2). In illustrative terms, it could be said that each beneficiary of the LIPW has an equivalent of 12 poultry birds while the non-beneficiaries have 7. This represent a difference of 79.1%. The implication of the above is that the LIPW program assisted the youth from beneficiary communities in a nearly twofold increase in their livestock size.

The qualitative information obtained from the field also confirmed that youth in treatment communities had actually increased their livestock numbers. According to the beneficiary youths, implementing officers of the program advised them to invest their monies in livestock, so as to extend the duration of the project's benefits. The following are some testimonies given by the youth:

"I joined the manual work because I had no work to do at that period. The work engaged me for three months and some few days. I earned close to GHS 500 after the work. Before the start of the work, officials from the District Assembly advised us to invest our monies so that the impact of the work could be felt for a longer period. I took that advice. I bought a female sheep and a female goat. I also purchased three female fowls. My sheep and goats have multiplied, so now I can count three sheep and five goats. I also have 7 fowls and they have been laying eggs for me. Any time I need money to buy food items I do not have, I sell some of my animals during market days so I can purchase them. I am actually happy that this manual work came to our community. I thank the government."

"I am a junior high school graduate. I could not continue to senior high school because my parents had no money. I had wanted to study agriculture at the senior high school because my best result in the junior high school certificate examination was in that very field. When the LIPW came to our community, I was selected as a beneficiary. By the end of the construction, I had earned about GHS 350. I used part of the money to build

a pen. My uncle had earlier promised to gift me a female pig as big as my size. True to his words, he gave me the pig but unfortunately, it was not as big as me. I kept the pig in my pen and fed it for some time. Gradually, it was growing big like me. The pig delivered 6 piglets, and they are all growing well. Although I am not studying agriculture, I am practicing it. I hope to sell some of these pigs soon and use the proceeds to expand my business" – female beneficiary, 21 years.

This finding is in consonance with an earlier assertion made by Hartwig (2014) on the Rwandan LIPW program. Hartwig revealed that beneficiary households were able to increase their livestock holdings by roughly one goat in the short run. Debela and Holden (2014) also reported an increase in livestock holdings of beneficiaries of the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) in Ethiopia. Based on an econometric model, they concluded that beneficiary households showed a significantly greater average increase in livestock holding (of 2.68–2.69 TLU) than non-beneficiaries.

With this increase in livestock holdings by beneficiaries of the GSOP-LIPW program in the Daffiama Bussie Issah District, it could be anticipated that the beneficiaries could gradually move out of poverty. However, the results from Hartwig (2014) on the long-term impact of the VUP on beneficiaries quell this hope. He mentioned that beneficiary households reverted to livestock holdings similar to that of the non-beneficiaries in the long run. Some information obtained from the field suggest that the trend reported by Hartwig could also be true for the beneficiaries of the GSOP-LIPW program. Some of the youth indicated that they have been selling off their livestock to cater for their daily needs without replenishing it. Below are some statements made by the youth from treatment communities.

"I also bought animals to rear. But unfortunately for me, my mother felt sick and we needed money to take care of her. Although she has health insurance, her sickness was not covered by the insurance scheme so I sold my animals to assist in paying her bills. After spending all my money on her, she still died. Now I am back to nothing" – male, 24 years

"I sold all my birds because I needed money to learn a trade" – female, 21 years

Monthly income

Youth in treatment communities recorded an average monthly income of GHS 132.93 (USD 26.6) while the

controlled communities recorded an average monthly income of GHS 106.98 (USD 21.4) which means a daily amount of USD 0.89 for beneficiaries and USD 0.71 for non-beneficiaries. This represents an increase of 24.26% in income for the beneficiaries of the project. Although the above suggests that the project has increased earnings in treatment communities, it cannot be said that youth in treatment communities are out of poverty. This is because both communities fall below the income poverty line of USD 1.90 per day, as set by the World Bank (Jolliffe and Prydz, 2016).

In the Liberian Cash for Work Temporary Employment Program (CfWTE), Subbarao et al. (2013) reported a similar result. They indicated that while the beneficiaries of the program were still poor after its completion, there had been a 21% increase in incomes among beneficiaries. Devereux and Guenther (2007) also found that the impact on incomes of beneficiaries of the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) has been positive. However, the studies discovered no statistically significant difference in income growth between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries

Per capita food consumption

The 1996 World Food Summit defined food security as “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for healthy life” (FAO, 2003:313). Although food production worldwide has recently increased multiple times, some people continue to live for several days without food. It is estimated that about 821 million people worldwide (approximately one out of nine people) are undernourished (FAO et al., 2018). The effect of hunger and malnutrition is manifest in several spheres. The World Bank (1986:4) maintain that “inadequate diets increase vulnerability to disease and parasites. They reduce strength for tasks requiring physical effort. They curtail the benefit from schooling and training programs. And they result in a general lack of vigor, alertness, and vitality. These outcomes reduce the productivity of people in the short and long terms, sacrifice output and income, and make it more difficult for families and nations to escape the cycle of poverty.”

On the average, youth in beneficiary communities spend GHS 3.12 on food per day, compared to GHS 2.67 for non-beneficiaries. This indicates that beneficiaries of the LIPW program are able to increase their expenditure

on food consumption by 16.75%. Unfortunately, this result does not actually tell the quality of food consumed by the youth. In order to obtain an indication on the quality of the food consumed, the authors asked the respondents whether they have consumed proteins in the last three days. Figure 1 indicates that 73 beneficiaries represented by 81.1% responded they have consumed proteins in the last three days. In non-beneficiary communities, a lesser percentage of 56.7% mentioned they consumed protein during the same period.

According to Mozdalifa (2012), poverty and food insecurity are both the cause and consequence of each other. Therefore, an improvement in food security will mean a reduction in poverty levels. During focus group interviews, participants gave some testimonies to the effect that they have more food now as compared to the pre-LIPW period. Below is a testimony given by a beneficiary of the project:

“I have a wife with three children. Although I do not earn a lot of money, I make sure I feed them each day. Before the LIPW, I could not have confidently say this. As I said earlier, my fowls have been laying eggs for me. Every Sunday evening, my wife fry some of the eggs for us to enjoy” – male respondent (29 years old)

A conversation with AA, a 35-year-old beneficiary of the LIPW project, also gave an indication that the food situation in the beneficiary communities has changed for the better.

Researcher: what work do you do?

AA: I am a fishmonger. I feed this community with fish.

Researcher: How did you start this business?

AA: After the construction of the LIPW program, I had some money to buy a second-hand deep freezer. I also used part of the money to purchase fresh fish from Wa to store in my fridge and I have been selling ever since.

Researcher: How is business?

AA: Business is very good. When I started it was difficult, I could not even sell half a box per week. Now, I am able to sell two boxes and sometimes I sell more a in a week.

This result is partly in agreement with earlier findings by Hartwig (2014). He revealed that the Rwandan VUP was able to increase per capita food consumption in beneficiary households by 22%. However, he also indicated that there were no significant differences in protein consumption between beneficiary households and

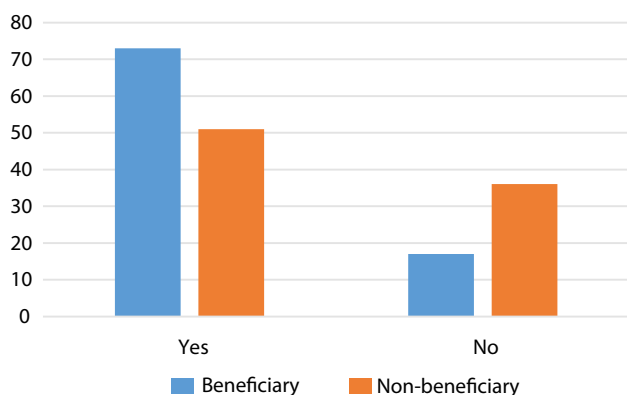


Fig. 1. Number of people consuming proteins in the last three days

Source: own elaboration based on field data collected.

non-beneficiary households. In Ghana, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2014b) indicate that individuals who spend less than GHS 3.60 on food per day are considered to be poor. Therefore, although there has been an increase in the value of food consumption in beneficiary communities, they are still poor because they do not meet the poverty threshold for food consumption.

Farm size

According to Fan and Chan-Kang (2005), there is a positive relationship between farm size and reduction in poverty. People with larger farms are likely to be richer than those with smaller farms. With this in mind, the

author compared the farm sizes between beneficiary youth and the non-beneficiaries. The author asked the youth in both communities to indicate the size of the crop farm they cultivated during the last farming season. To enable a comparative analysis of the two types of farms, the author also looked at the type of crops cultivated by the youth in both communities (see Fig. 2). It is worthy to note that most of the youth employed as farmers in both beneficiary and non-beneficiary communities are involved in the cultivation of groundnuts and maize. Beneficiaries of the LIPW program cultivated an average of 1.79 acres while the non-beneficiary group cultivated an average of 1.21 acres. This is an indication that project beneficiaries were able to increase their farm size by approximately 47.72%. This suggests that the youth in beneficiary communities are financially sounder than those in non-beneficiary communities.

Other welfare benefits of the GSOP LIPW program

Drajea and O’Sullivan (2014) conducted a study in rural Uganda on the influence of poverty on children education. They revealed that an improvement in parents’ income has a positive effect on education levels of their children. Parents are able to pay for their children’s school fees and buy books for them to study. Qualitative evidence gathered from the beneficiary communities revealed a similar trend. Some of the youth mentioned that they were able to re-enroll in school while others were able to purchase essential items for their children in school.

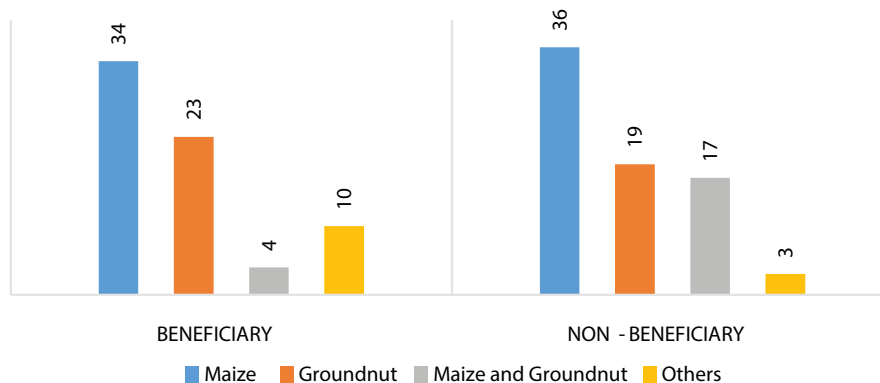


Fig. 2. Type of crops grown by the youth

Source: own elaboration based on field data collected.

“I have been farming since I was 15 ears old. Anytime the dry season sets in, I do not get work to do in this community. Most often I travel to Wassa community to do galamsey (a local term for illegal mining). In 2016, an official from the District Assembly came to inform us about the labor-intensive project. I went and registered my name. In two month time, the work started. I earned a total of GHS 700 after the project has ended. I bought five bags of fertilizer for my farm. I was able to increase the number of acres I farm from 2 to 5. Fortunately for me, I had a good harvest that season. Although my kids are already enjoying the free education provided by the government, they did not have books for their homework. Their uniforms were also torn. Those days, I was always ashamed when my daughter left for school. I was not worried much about the boys because they are boys and they can survive any form of ridicule from their peers. After the harvesting of my crops, I bought new uniforms for all of them. I also purchased their homework books. Now, they all have reading books that they read at home” – a male beneficiary, 34 years.

“I dropped out from school when papa died. I did so because it was difficult for my family to raise money to feed us. It was my first year at the senior high school. When the LIPW came to our community, I was selected as a beneficiary. By the end of the construction, I had earned about GHS 350. I used the money to enroll back in school. I want to study hard so that I can become a minister in the future” – female beneficiary, 19 years.

In his article entitled “Poverty and Health,” Rowson (2001) mentioned that poverty is the number one killer in the world today, outranking smoking as the leading cause of death. He explained that most of the sicknesses that are recorded especially in developing countries are attributed to lack of funds to seek proper healthcare and prevention of diseases. Therefore, it is safe to suggest that any development intervention designed to empower people to acquire resources in order to seek healthcare is geared towards reducing poverty.

Most of the beneficiary youth of the GSOP LIPW program mentioned that they were able to renew their health insurance package using funds from the public work program. The focus group interview revealed that beneficiaries were encouraged by the project implementing officials to save part of their monies from the project toward the renewal of their health insurance. This has resulted in many of them accessing health facilities.

“My health insurance registration expired almost two years ago. During this period, I have been unable to go to the clinic when I am sick. I always treat myself with local herbs. During the LIPW program, officers at the District Assembly advised us to use part of our money to register and renew our health insurance. I was able to renew my own. Since then, I have been able to visit the clinic for treatment. This year alone, I have been there twice.” – male beneficiary, 26 years.

“The first thing I did with my first pay from the public work program was to renew my health insurance and that of my three kids. I was always worrying about how to get money to treat my kids any time they are sick. The other time my daughter was sick, I had to sell my pig to be able to take care of her. This made me poorer. I pray my kids do not get sick, but if they do, I will not suffer much” – female, 34 years.

Others also narrated how the LIPW assisted them in mobilizing resources to marry the love of their life.

“My name is OB. This work has brought a lot of happiness into my life. Before the GSOP work, I needed money to complete my room and also pay for the bride price of the woman I intended to marry. In this community, bride prices are very high. One needs to produce two calves before you are offered a woman to marry. When the work came, I was lucky to be registered. I worked for four month and had over GHS 550. I used some of the money to complete my room and also bought the two calves for the bride price. I am now happily married and living with my wife. It is my prayer that more of such projects come to my community to help the young ones” – OB, 23 years.

One young man also narrated how the project helped him pursue his passion as a photographer:

“My name is IF, I am from Konzokalaa community in the Jirapa district. When I completed the senior high school, there was no work for me in my community. Personally, I have an interest in photography but have no equipment to start. So when the GSOP LIPW project came, I participated. I used the money I had from the project to purchase a camera and started a photography business. Now I am happy taking nice pictures of this community and its people” – IF, 25 years.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlighted the contribution of the GSOP LIPW program to reducing poverty among the youth of

the Daffiama Bussie Issah District in Ghana. Key poverty indicators used in the study include income, farm size, livestock numbers and food consumption. A comparative analysis between the youth who benefited from the program and those in other communities who did not benefit from it revealed that the beneficiary group have been able to reduce their poverty levels. The study revealed that beneficiary youth of the LIPW program were able to increase their livestock numbers by 79.1%, their monthly incomes by 24.26%, their food consumption by 16.75% and their farm size by 47.72%. It is therefore recommended that the government scale up this program to cover more communities to ensure that poverty is reduced in Ghana. This will go a long way to improve the condition of other social sectors, including health-care and education, as the study suggests the program has a positive impact on rural health and education in beneficiary communities. Although other earlier studies by Eshun and Dichaba (2019a) indicate that the program has no impact on rural-urban migration of the youth, the positive effect on poverty alleviation could be leveraged to strengthen the program so it may serve the specific needs of the youth in order to change the migration narrative in rural Ghana.

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