Voice Africa`s Future
Citizens Hearings on the Sustainable Development Goals-SDGs

GOAL 4: QUALITY EDUCATION
GOAL 8: DECENT JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

The recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) make provision for an open, inclusive and transparent follow up and review process in the implementation of the SDG’s, where all stakeholders including youth can actively participate. Efficient and effective delivery of the Global Goals depends on a strong results-based monitoring framework, informed by feedback from the intended beneficiaries of development.

In Africa youth participation in data generation, use, monitoring and review is particularly important given that the majority of the population and hence beneficiaries on the continent are youth. Youth can play a lead role in data generation and its use in order to inform the delivery of the Global Goals, thus accelerating effective implementation of the SDGs during the 15-year delivery period. Furthermore, the weak state of official data in Africa also calls for strong additional systems to compliment and supplement existing data. Most of the available data has been supply driven (produced by governments) with significant time lags. Youth-driven data (especially on youth specific goals and targets) offers the possibility of timely and relevant data that can inform decision making.

The citizens hearings conducted was a great opportunity for citizens to share their lived experiences in their own words, with aim of ensuring that ordinary people’s voices, realities and experiences are expressed and documented and will have a practical advantage of informing policy and engaging policy makers.

It’s clear that the movement to hold leaders accountable and work with citizens to make sure commitments to improve education and increase access to employment for young people continues to gather steam, and strong recommendations are already emerging from the citizen hearings.

We hope that this initiative will set the tone and contribute to the conversation around citizen-led data and accountability mechanisms in the SDGs implementation. More importantly, this will also enhance the participation of CSOs in the SDGs domestication processes.
1.1.1 Teteli-Kesim(Elmina), Komenda Edna Eguato Abrem Municipality, Central Region

Elmina, the municipal capital of Komenda Edna Eguato Abrem Municipality hosted the Central Region’s citizens hearing. The population of Komenda Edna Eguato Abrem Municipal, according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, is 144,705 representing 6.6 percent of the region’s total population. Elmina was the locality of first point of contact with the early Europeans to Ghana, when the Portuguese, under the leadership of Don d’iago de Azambuja in 1482 arrived in Elmina to meet Nana Kobina Ansah, the chief of Elmina and his elders. This town has since then had lot of influence from the Europeans and therefore witnessed a lot western civilization and other economic activities over the centuries. Over 85% of the population is engaged in either fishing or production of food and cash crops. Salt mining and winning is identified to be one of the main emerging commercial ventures in Elmina, but this activity cannot be said to be on a very large scale now. Canoe and boat building and repair are also a booming industry in Elmina.

1.1.2 Fotobi, Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipality, Volta Region.

The citizens hearing for Eastern Region was held at Fotobi in the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipality. The Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipality is approximately 23km from Accra the national capital. The Municipality is situated in the south eastern part of the Eastern Region between latitude 5’.45 N and 5’.58 N and longitude 0.07’W and 0.27’ W. The Municipality has a total population of 86,000. It is bordered to the south by the Ga and Tema Municipalities of the Greater Accra Region, to the north by Akuapem North Municipality, to the west by Suhum Municipality and Upper West Akim District. The economy of the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipality used to be predominantly agrarian, as it previously employed about 40 percent and 37 percent of the working population in 1995 and 2000 respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). The major crops cultivated were pineapples, pawpaw, oranges, tubers, maize, and vegetables among others. However, the 2010 Population and Housing Census reveals a change of trend, agriculture has lost to other sectors especially commerce such as the wholesale and retail; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (26%) as compared to agriculture (22.5%).

Another economic activity of the people in the municipality is bakery mostly engaged by women. Close to two thirds (63%) of the employed population are self-employed without employees. The private informal sector is the largest employer in the district, employing 79.6 percent of the working population followed by the private formal sector with 11.2 percent. The public sector engages only 8.7 percent (Ghana Statistically Service, 2010).
1.1 Objective
- Set a baseline based on existing administrative data and generate additional qualitative data on youth focused interventions (Goal 4 and 8).
- To project the unheard voices into the national development agenda.

1.2 Target Districts / Regions
The citizens’ hearings took place at in three regions; Central, Volta and Eastern Regions of Ghana. More than 200 young people mainly out of school youth, small holder farmers, hairdressers, seamstress, students, fishermen, teachers, nurses, officials from Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) participated in the hearings. The districts are as follows:

1.1.1 “Have”, Afadzato South District, Volta Region
“Have” is located in the Afadzato South District of the Volta Region. The District has a household population of 94,029 with a total number of 22,529 households (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The District is one of the 46 administrative districts created in 2012 with its capital at Ve-Golokuati, about 58km from Ho, 20km from Hohoe and 200km from Accra. The District was carved out of Hohoe Municipality and legally backed and governed by two main Acts namely; Local Government Act, Act 462 of 1993, and PNDCL 327.

The main economic activity in the District is Agriculture. The major agricultural activities in the District are crop production (94.9% of households), livestock rearing (47.0% of households) and fish farming which also employs less than one percent (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). Some of the crops cultivated include cassava, maize, rice, plantain, cocoyam, yam, oil palm, cocoa, coffee, banana, avocado pear, citrus and mango among others. In addition to the crop production, some households rear animals like local poultry, sheep and goats at their backyard but potential exist for commercial poultry production as the District has adequate resource persons at the Agricultural directorate.
2.0 Method

The Citizen Hearings approach was implemented within a Focus Group Discussion framework taking into account the following methods.

- Scoping - Youth Advocates Ghana team through our regional representatives and community leaders selected participants by drawing community representatives from the various groups and associations. This was further refined in consultation with other stakeholders to ensure wide representation. The communities were selected randomly from purposely selected districts. In each community, 60 participants were invited to the Focus Group Discussions. The participants were further grouped into 15 members in each focus group discussion. Participation of participants was voluntary.
- Small holder farmers, youth, hairdressers, seamstresses, students, fishermen, teachers, nurses, officials from Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) participated in the hearings.
- Purposeful sampling was employed in each area in order to generate variations in the responses from participants, each group (structured according to gender, rural/urban, formal/informal, occupation/livelihoods etc.)
- After introductions and plenary discussions on focus areas (goal 4 and 8), the participants were divided into 4 groups of 15 people each. The groups took into account issues related to participants (students, out of school, unemployed, Farmers, informal sector, entrepreneurs etc.). Each group was chaired by a facilitator and a rapporteur to take note and provide feedback.
- The focus group discussions were done using the local language in each community. Some community leaders volunteered to translate and assist where necessary.
- YAG also identified and engaged community champions to leverage the process. The community champions include activists, faith leaders, elders, village heads, and chiefs among others. The purpose of involving community champions is to enhance mobilization, ensure community buy-in as well as ensure there is a core group to leverage follow up commitments.
The citizens hearing focused on the SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Jobs and Economic Growth). These goals were selected due to the high rate of youth unemployment in Ghana and the mismatch between education and employment. The African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET) has indicated that the greatest challenge facing Ghana is rising youth unemployment. The report further highlighted the impact of population growth on youth unemployment. “Historical evidence indicates that youth unemployment in Ghana is due to a more than threefold increase in the youthful population over the last 50 years, and also because of the failure of the economy to generate sufficient employment opportunities,” - Mr. Anuwa-Amarh, National Development Planning Commission, Ghana.

In the last two decades, educational experts, researchers and think tanks have proposed various educational reforms to improve upon Ghana’s educational system. For example, in 2013, The Forum for Education Reform (FFER), under the auspices of IMANI-GHANA made some recommendations on how the standard of Ghana education can be improved.

The above were some reasons which informed the choice of thematic focus of the citizens hearing. We believe education and employment are inter-connected and the relationship between the two cannot be ignored.

1. **SDG4 – (Target 4.1; 4.4 and 4.5)**
   a. Access to quality education and skills development programme in communities
   b. Access to secondary and tertiary education

**Targets:**

- **4.1 by 2030,** ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
- **4.4 by 2030,** increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- **4.5 by 2030,** eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations
2. SDG 8 (Target 8.3; 8.5 and 8.6)
   a. Youth unemployment and solutions
   b. Youth entrepreneurship in the informal sector and support services

Targets:

- 8.3 promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises including through access to financial services
- 8.5 by 2030 achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value
- 8.6 by 2020 substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.
4.0 Emerging Issues

4.1 Goal 4-Education

A. Accessibility, Quality and Affordability of Education

“Have” in the Afadzato South District, basic schools are available but in most of the rural communities located in the hinterlands only kindergartens can be found. The implication for children in these communities is that they have to walk long distance often over 3km to get access to basic and primary schools in another community. Consequently, the pupils get to school very late, tired and dirty, very often they miss out on first and sometimes second lessons. As a result, they are being left behind. In some cases, teachers also have to travel long distances daily to attend school, which undermines teaching and learning in rural schools. The research revealed in “Have” how teachers report to school late or don’t show up at all due to long distance to school. “Teachers don’t come to school and at times don’t come at all because of the distance or their location from the schools, high transportation is also part of the problems” - (Participant, “Have”)

In Elmina however, access to basic education is not a problem but the class size and pupil to teacher ratio is very staggering. There was an increase in enrollment but with limited classroom facilities. Hon. Stephen Mensah, the people’s elected representative to the district assembly observed that “If you go to some schools, you see about four pupils using a dual desk, this makes the classroom very crowded and hot, teachers have been complaining to the assembly over and over as such situation affects teaching and learning but nothing has been done”. Teachers also complain about high teacher, pupil ratio. A worried teacher noted that “How can I effectively supervise 45 pupils in a class”.

It is also important to mention from the study that enrollment in primary education has increased but completion through junior and senior high school remained unmatched. In Elmina, it was revealed that young people are unable to further their education to senior high school level due to the costs associated with senior high school education. This is what one female participant had to say “Look at me, when I completed JHS I obtained good grades but I couldn’t further to senior high school because my parents didn’t have the money, now I have given birth and at home”. Another participant was emotional of her inability to further her education to the senior high schools despite her excellent grade obtained at junior high school.

Teaching and learning materials was another issue raised. The inadequate supply of teaching and learning materials such as reading books, text books and exercise books negatively impacted educational outcome. In “Have” for instance, a former pupil of “Have” D A Junior High School said in the school has only seven (7) text books for Mathematics. “Some of the problems I faced when I was in school was we were 38 students and we had only 7 text books. How can 38 students rely on 7 text books? She quizzed.
The subject of government educational policies attracted interesting comments from the participants. To what extend does government and district education directorate educate citizens on what constitutes government’s education social interventions such as school capital grant, Ghana School Feeding Program and the latest debate on the Free Senior High school (SHS). Throughout the hearings, citizens sought to know what constitute free education. Questions such as “Is “provisions” and school uniforms part of the free SHS? Does it mean we won’t pay anything at all? What about PTA and examination fees? These were some questions asked repeatedly throughout the hearings. The view that government free senior high school promise would affect the quality of senior high school education was expressed. “If it is free for all, then ministers children must also be part of those SHS system.” a parent at Have started. The basis of the argument is that the free SHS may not be quality. Coupled with the above is the grave concern of unfair distribution of government’s social intervention policies primarily aimed at assisting the poor. Participants were of the view that educational social policies such as the school feeding program were not directed to the right schools or beneficiaries as too much lobbying for such policies happens at different stages where rural schools do not have capacity to lobby.

Typically at Fotobi, participants were much concerned about how most of the facilities meant for their school have been channeled to other places just because they could not lobby at the District Ghana Education Service (GES) level. Consequently, there is a neglect of rural communities who really need these interventions. The clearer citizens can become on government policies, the more they can be prepared to receive it and help it succeed.
Participants bemoaned the inadequate attention for Vocational and Technical Education and the low level of 'respect' accorded Vocational and Technical certificates. They also unanimously mentioned society's negative perception that those who attend vocational and technical schools are people who are not successful in life. One passionate participant was actually of the view that "Vocational and technical students are not dumb". Often technical and vocational education is associated with failure and that students who could not get admission to the mainstream senior high schools find themselves in technical and vocation schools. According to a participant, "There is low level of respect and reward accorded Vocational and Technical certificates" and further maintained that "Vocational and technical students are intelligent, let us imagine the world without technical and vocational people" (Technical school teacher and a pastor, "Have").

Another issue of concern is availability of skills training centers. There are skills development and rehabilitation centers in all the 10 regions in Ghana but these facilities are neglected and under resource. The costs of enrollment and equipments are expensive. They are no more attractive to young people.

\[c\] Gender Disparities

Enrollment in education has increased at different levels as revealed by the participants. The completion rate remains a huge challenge as both boys and girls are at risk of dropping out from schools. Typically, boys drop-out from school to engage in economic activities- "Some of the boys who drop out of school and wouldn't like to go into fishing also move to the cities to sell fan-milk and coconut, even one of my nephew is currently in Accra selling fan-milk", a participant in Elmina noted. Girls on the other hand drop out mostly due to early pregnancy. "School dropout is very high especially with the girls, even at the age of 13 and 14 years, they give birth and eventually marry", a participant in Elmina explained.
Gender-based violence from male teachers against girls came out strongly throughout the three communities visited. Teachers have been named among the top culprits responsible for teenage pregnancies. CitiFM, an Accra based radio station, reported similar cases in their 23rd February 2017 news bulletin. In some cases, teachers go unpunished for being responsible for impregnating school girls. The worst punishment that can happen to a teacher offender is to be transferred to another school. In Fotobi, a case was shared as to how a teacher impregnated a girl and was secretly transferred by the school authorities. “The teachers who are the models are sleeping with the children and the worst punishment from GES is transfer” (a youth at Fotobi)

D. School infrastructure (Water and Sanitation Facilities)

Improving access to water and sanitation facilities has been a priority on the international development agenda (Arku, 2013). Access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities remain a huge challenge for schools within the visited communities of the hearing. Urinal and toilet issues were concerns in the various schools. The results of the study show that community-dwellers at Fotobi also use the school’s toilet facility. This puts so much pressure on the facility. At Teteli-Kesim (Elmina) the result was positive. The school has a toilet and hand washing facilities for children. These facilities were mobilized by the community. Interestly, despite the availability of the facilities, some children prefer using the seashore for open defecation. This practice as was told is deeply rooted in their culture hence the choice for “free range” defecation.

Childhood is an important stage to promote healthy lifestyle therefore sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene practices must be taken seriously at that level especially within the educational systems
E Persons with Disability in Education

The lack of enforcement of the PERSONS WITH DISABILITY Act 2006, Act 715 was a major discussion point and concern for participants, especially for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). According to a teacher at Have Technical Secondary School who is a disable himself, "no one cares about the welfare of PWDs and several governments have paid lip service to PWDs. I struggled to educate myself and I see other PWD students and I cry". Others also expressed varied concerns. "There is a pupil in my class at the primary school who cannot hear or speak but there is no facility to support him and the teachers around are not experts too" said a female teacher at Have. "Mostly what is done is to position him at a strategic place for him to hear what the teacher is saying through reading of lips, we have reported to the GES but nothing has been done", she added.

Discrimination and stigmatization against Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were also cited as a major bottleneck in educating PWDs. A disabled student stated that "when we the disable have to concentrate in class during studies, we rather think of how to deal with the discrimination after school".

F Citizens Knowledge and Awareness on the SDGs

To what extend has knowledge and awareness on the SDGs reached citizens and rural communities? Are citizens at the center of the conversation around the SDGs and its implementation? The citizens' hearings conducted at the three regions revealed a low knowledge and ownership of the SDGs by citizens. At “Have” in the Afadzato South District, the citizens showed very low level of understanding of the SDGs. Typical question of how many goals are there in the SDGs went unanswered correctly. Some answers given were 14, 8, 4 and 6. However, only one person demonstrated actual knowledge by providing an answer to the question of when the SDGs were adopted. Unawareness of the SDGs was not different at Elmina and Fotobi, but perhaps most revealing as none of them proved any knowledge at all on the subject matter. For the SDGs to succeed citizens must own and drive the process of holding duty-bearers accountable to their responsibilities.
4.1.1 Recommendations

i. The SDGs must be translated and captured in appropriate local languages to enhance communication with citizens and rural dwellers.

ii. Extensive education on the SDGs and government educational policies at the community level.

iii. Revamp and equip the technical vocational schools to effectively address the issue of youth unemployment.

iv. Civil society organizations and stakeholder participation in education should be strengthened.

v. Curriculum and text books must satisfy the local context and should be practice oriented.

vi. Government should demonstrate full commitment to the enforcement of the disability act and further provide assistive devices for persons who cannot walk.

4.2 Goal8-Decent Job and Economic Growth

A. Youth and Employment

Most young men and women stated that life in their villages, describing it as very difficult resulting from unemployment, making some of them to engage in deviant activities such as drug abuse, theft, gambling, and smoking. A youth participant at Elmina “We the youth have major problem, and that is employment, we are unemployed and that is why you have been able to meet us in the house on Thursday afternoon like this”.

The major economic activity at “Have” is farming. Even though the area is endowed with fertile farmlands, the youth are reluctant to take up farming as an occupation. The terms and conditions to lease land and cost of farm inputs remain a challenge for young farmers. Some are of the view that farming is not rewarding enough despite the physical efforts that go into it. From the discussion it showed that, parents advices their children from childhood that farming is not a profitable venture. “You have seen how I am suffering, do not grow and become a farmer”. An advice received by a participant from his parents. The narrative about agriculture among the youth needs to change. “No one must be left behind when celebrating farmers day, the small farmers must also be recognize and not leave them behind” noted by a participant at Have in Volta Region.
In Elmina, economic activity is mainly fishing and many young people engaged in this economic venture complained of high cost of owning a fishing boat and premix fuel. The participants in Elmina also revealed the area is endowed with salt deposit but the cost of winning and processing the salt remain a barrier. Only few individuals employed as laborers in the mining industry.

In Fotobi, farming is the main economic activity with youth deeply involved in pineapple farming. Crops such as okro, pepper, cassava and maize also cultivated on large scale. Non-agriculture employment remains an alternative pathway for youth employment. Vocations such as hairdressing, dressmaking, carpentry and other skills professions are viable options for employment. Participants with skills background shared their frustrations about their jobs. The lack of business support from the district assemblies, high interests on loans and high cost of equipments are barriers to succeeding in their field of profession.

B. Persons with Disability and Employment

Employment opportunities do not exist for PWDs and in places where such opportunities exist, they are very limited. “The only way to move from lamenting on the problem to actual action is to by law compel all employers to reserve at least 10% vacancies for PWDs’, contended by a participant at Have. Other views expressed indicate that special incentives must exclusively be set aside and given to PWDs who venture into self-employment aside the support from the MMDAs.

C. Access to Input and credit Facilities

The cost of self-employment is high. Small business owners shared their frustration in securing credits or loan to finance their businesses. "I have taken a loan of 2000 cedis from a micro finance and I pay 110 cedis every week for 6 months" shared by a trader. According to her, the meager income from her trade goes into servicing the loan. For her, financial institutions like MASLOC should be able to expand their operations to indigenous people and give soft loans to young traders and to provide business support so that they can succeed.
At Fotobi where pineapple production is done on a large scale, participants shared their frustration in securing inputs for their farms. The subsidized fertilizers supplied by government are inadequate and not released on time. The distribution process also lacks equity. Eventually farmers have to spend huge amount to buy fertilizers and this have negative implications on their yields.

The story at Elmina was no different. A fishing community like Elmina was very much particular about input like canoes, boat, premix fuel etc. Most of them indicated how to get access to loan facilities that can help them to expand their businesses and also empower the youth.

D. Market Access

Access to direct traditional market was a major challenge to many farmers. The use of middle men in marketing agricultural produce was unfavorable to the farmers. Prices of farm produce are therefore, very low especially during bumper harvest and this serves as disincentive to the farmers. "How can you tell me farming is profitable when 20 okras are selling at 20 pesewas" (a farmer at Fotobi). "The youth in this community do not farm because it is not profitable, even if someone cultivate no one will buy from them" (stated by a participant at Have.)

Also Fotobi, participants showed how pineapple exporters bought their pineapples and failed to pay them. A narration from a participant show how a pineapple exporter owned him an amount of GHC30,000.00 for more than 7 years. He said several young farmers whose monies were not paid by the exporters left farming with some even selling off their properties such as houses to meet their family demands and upkeep.

E. Technical and Vocational gaps

There currently exists a serious mismatch between academia & industry owing largely to the over-emphasis on reading programs to the neglect of vocation and technical subjects. Our present educational system which is the product and the legacy of the colonial administration must be radically reformed if we can ever address the widening unemployment gaps. "Employment in Ghana is all about certificate and not about the capabilities of the individual" (a participant at Elmina in the Central Region.) Graduates from technical and vocational institutions very often are unable to start their own businesses and put their skills to use.

F. Climate Change

The impact of climate change on rural livelihood and agricultural showed in the study results. A participant maintained that 'The rain doesn’t fall, often predictions using local knowledge is no more working'. Changes in the weather variables have made
venturing in agriculture more uncertain. What does this mean for food security and poverty eradication? The high uncertainties in agriculture have also limited the participation of financial institutions in agricultural activities which has reduced agricultural productivity.

4.2.1 Recommendations

i. There should be a deliberate effort of government policies that will place more emphasis on employable skills at all levels of education, especially at the second cycle.

ii. Business support services including financial support should be expanded to reach young people and young entrepreneurs.

iii. Government should consider an increment in the 2% of the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) allocation to the People with Disability (PWDs) and further strengthen its monitoring of the fund disbursements and utilization, with much emphasis on the economic empowerment of PWDs.

iv. Active Stakeholder monitoring and participation for activities of PWDs should be encouraged to ensure proper accountability and prudent usage of the funds as disbursed. Consideration should be given to making the head of the Department of Social Welfare of MMDAs part of the signatories to the disability accounts since the current status which exclude them has exposed the fund to abuse by the various assemblies.
5. One District, One Factory

Our team took the opportunity to solicit their views on government one district one factory promise. Below are some views from the communities.

5.1 “Have” – Afadzato South District, Volta Region
Participants identified cassava as a major crop produced by almost every household and was identified as the single investment area for government’s ‘One District, One Factory’ project. According to them several products can be produced from cassava such as “tapioca”, Ruut Wine, starch, ‘yakayake’, cassava chips, cassava biscuits, etc. Therefore any investment in this single area will generate massive employment for several idle young men and women. “If government can fulfill its promise in this area, even the farmer will get a job, the people who will harvest will get a job, drivers who will transport the produce to the factory will get a job, the main factory workers will get jobs, those who will buy from the factory and sell will also get jobs. Even those of us who are disabled can also get a job’, (indicated by a young SHS drop-out with a hunchback).

5.2 Elmina, Tetelim-Kesim-Komenda/Edina/Eguafo/Abirem Municipal, Central Region
At Tetelim-Kesim in Elmina in the Komenda/Edina/Eguafo/Abirem District in the Central Region, the participants proposed a salt industry despite the fact that the area is known for fishing activities. The participants were of the view that the area is endowed with salt resources and efforts to harness that will create jobs and open up more opportunities for youth employment.

5.3 Fotobi-Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipality, Eastern Region
Fotobi is known as the hub of pineapple production for export in the country, has over 400 farmers engaged in large scale pineapple production. Fotobi also supplies pineapple to Blue Skies factory at Doboro. The participants proposed setting up fruit factory at Fotobi will increase youth participation in pineapple production and also create more opportunities for job creation in the area.

Youth Advocates Ghana convened a multi-stakeholder dialogue in Accra on 10th March 2017 to share the outcome of the hearings and to inform policy decisions at the highest level. The dialogue was jointly convened by National CSOs Platform on SDGs Ghana, The International Child Development (ICDP Ghana) which is the convener on SDG 4 and Trade Union Congress (TUC Ghana) also a convener of SDG 8.

The national dialogue received a big buy-in and representation from the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF Ghana, representatives of civil society organizations, policy makers, students, youth leaders and community leaders.

The event was also graced by the Executive Director of African Monitor, Cape Town-South Africa and representative from Southern African Trust, South Africa.

- **Highlight of the National Dialogue**

Participants and invited guests to the national dialogue were officially welcomed by Mr. Emmanuel Ametepey, the Executive Director of Youth Advocates Ghana (YAG). This was preceded by a keynote address and overview of the Voice Africa’s Future (VAF) project by Miss Namhla Mniki, the Executive Director of African Monitor. Miss Namhla Mniki explained that the VAF project is a youth driven and youth led initiative implemented in 10 African Countries since 2013 with purpose of pushing youth priorities to influence decision making across Africa. “For too long African youth believe that our salvation will come from only political leadership and have neglected our roles as citizens” she stated. She further congratulated the Government of Ghana for the one district one factory policy. She said that the policy has a great potential of opening up the country for industrialization and creating job opportunities to the teeming unemployed youth of Ghana. She further stated that the essence of the SDGs is anchored on the principle of leaving no one behind by reducing inequalities in nations, among nations and globally” she stated. The citizen hearing is a great contribution to the monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs because it will inform decision making” she concluded.
The Trade Union Congress (TUC) and National CSOs Platform on SDGs Ghana also gave their fraternal messages on the event. Mr. Andrews Tagoe, Deputy General Secretary of (General Agriculture Workers Union- GAWU) of TUC said, achieving the SDG 8 on decent work requires every worker be unionized in order to have a say in the work they do and demand for better condition of service, "We are very happy to be part of this national dialogue and we congratulate YAG for the work done. Especially towards SDG 8 which has great concern of the TUC" he added.

The National Coordinator for CSOs Platform on SDGs Ghana Rikke Hansen also spoke on behalf of the platform and said, "The CSO platform was created to bring together all organizations to rally behind the SDGs for it implementation, monitoring and evaluation".

Panel Discussion
Mr. Emmanuel Angmor, the development consultant who mentored the YAG Youth Champions in conducting the citizens hearings presented the findings of the hearings as outlined above. The presentation received comments such as:

Mr. Kwaku Asante from Agency for Health and Food Security expressed appreciation to the research team. "I congratulate the team. The work done comes to bear with my daily experience as everyday people call me for employment. And what I will say is that, this must not be the end but also convene activities to link and engage the various communities".

Rexford K. Asiama from Center for Democratic Development (CDD) said they have done a qualitative work around education and they will need the final report of the citizens hearings to support their claims.

Emmanuella Ontohim from SYND Ghana asked of the total sampling size and also recommended adding quantitative data to support the final report. Emmanuel Angmor responded the sample size was 180 comprising 60 from each region and further maintained that validity of qualitative research is significantly dependent on the methodology used. In response to his question on the sample size, Dr Grace Bediako stated that she does not understand why some people are always looking for sample size. "The concept is to leave no one behind, so despite the number of people in a particular situation it is still worth research".

“The SDGs communications can be integrated into our religious activities and that means engaging all religious leaders about the importance of this process”- Student, University of Ghana
A student, Accra Technical University also noted that “There should be an online platform where young people can take SDGs test to educate and inform themselves and get some incentives like pocket data at the end.”.

This was followed by a panel discussion which received technical inputs from the government being represented by the National Development Planning, UN System and Civil Society Organizations. The following constituted the panel.

- Dr. Grace Bediako –Sr. Technical Adviser, National Development Planning Commission
- Mr. Kordzo Sedegah-Inclusive Growth Manager, UNDP Ghana
- Munamuzunga Sikaulu, Education Specialist, UNICEF Ghana
- Namhla Mniki-Mangaliso, Exe. Director, African Monitor, South Africa
- Joyce Larnyoh-Country Director, ICDP Ghana & Convener on SDG 4

Dr. Grace Bediako in her opening remarks mentioned that although sample size is important in research the individual experiences are also important. In furtherance she stated that, "The concept is to leave no one behind, so despite the number of people in a particular situation it is still worth investigating". She was of the view that whiles conversation has started on the SDGs, it is equally important to integrate Agenda 2063 and the 40 years long term development plan into these conversations. "If we are talking about the SDGs and so must we also talk about the other development agenda like the Agenda 2063 and the long term policy framework from NDPC".

On the subject of

Mr. Kordzo Sedegah commended the YAG team and said there are challenges in communicating the ambitious SDGs to local people at all levels in the whole world and not just in Ghana and that the UNDP-Ghana is not sleeping at all and making efforts to translate the SDGs into seven local dialects in Ghana. "Currently translations are in progress and some dialects are available, that’s Twi and Dagbani". He further noted that the SDGs are not for the United Nations as some people perceived it. It is for the whole humanity in the world with no one left out of the equation.

Commenting on the SDGs communication, Mr. Munamuzunga Sikaulu Education Specialist from UNICEF said communicating the SDGs is the most important aspect of the SDGs. "There are two ways of communication and that is communicating to the policy makers and communicating to the local communities and it’s good that the talking has started and so the question is how to sustain it". He further made an input on the situation of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in schools as captured in the report. "If better sanitation facility is not put in schools, girls’ participation will keep declining". He also commended the Government of Ghana for setting up a whole ministry for water Housing and Sanitation and hope it will contribute to improving the situation in schools.

Mrs. Joyce Larnyoh, the Country Director for International Child Development Program (ICDP) congratulated YAG for the initiative and further observed that civil society organizations must lead the way in domesticating the SDGs and that citizens-led initiatives are critical to ensuring no one is left behind."We must come out with a strategy to spread out the information by using all dialects through the media and any other possible avenue” she stated.
6.1 **Way Forward**

One key outcome of the national dialogue was the issue of feedback and further engagement at the community and district level. The question of how to report back and ensure the trust with citizens can be maintained and that the findings in the report finds its way into short and medium term planning at the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly (MMDAs) levels remained critical. The following actions were proposed:

- Hold community feedback sessions in all the communities visited to collect the data
- Organize policy meetings with MMDAs to share the findings and solicit their inputs into the report.
- Engage policy makers at all levels of engagement
- Use media to raise awareness and voice of the citizens
- Expand the citizens hearing nation-wide
- Citizens hearing on all goals should be conducted.

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7. **Conclusion**

Data is key to successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and sustaining the gains Ghana has chalked from the Millennium Development Goals. The role of citizens and in particular the unheard voices of rural communities and young people cannot be overlooked. Despite the significant progress Ghana has made towards education, access to quality and affordable education in rural areas still remained a challenge. Creating opportunities to tackling the high rate of youth unemployment requires an urgent, innovative and political attention. We hope that the emerging issues captured in this report will inform decisions at the highest level and contribute largely to our national policy and development agenda.

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i Have is a name of a town. It is pronounced “ha-ve”


iv * Provision refers to items such as Milo, Milk, Sugar, Biscuits, Sardines, etc given students in boarding houses/hostels.

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