CSOs JOINT MEMORANDUM TO THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE ON GOVERNMENT OF GHANA'S "YOUSTART" PROGRAM

Introduction

The Government of Ghana (GoG), through the Ministry of Finance (MoF), on Wednesday 15th June 2022, engaged Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in a brief discussion on the implementation of the "YouStart" Program. Following a series of incomplete deliberations and lack of clarity on some issues raised during the engagement, Africa Education Watch[1] and eleven other critical CSOs, on Friday, 17th June 2022, held a virtual stakeholder engagement to deliberate on key issues surrounding the implementation of the Program and firm up the following recommendations to the MoF.

CSOs commend GoG's commitment and initiative towards reducing youth unemployment by strengthening Micro Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) through the YouStart Program. Concerns were however raised about mechanisms to guarantee:

a. access and inclusion;
b. transparency and accountability;
c. program sustainability.

In exercising our civic responsibility to ensure that the YouStart Program achieves its overall goal of creating at least 1 million jobs for the youth over the next three years, the undersigned CSOs wish to submit this joint memorandum to the MoF for urgent attention and further action. We believe that for the Program to receive appreciable public support and goodwill and encourage maximum participation and attainment of its goals, the following calls from critical CSOs must be urgently addressed;

Our Call

1. The MoF must collaborate with relevant stakeholders to embark on a massive sensitization drive targeting prospective graduates from Technical and Agric Institutes, Tertiary Institutions, and apprentices in the informal sector.

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2. MoF must leverage on existing decentralized operational structures and create a "YouStart Desk" in all District Assemblies to enhance awareness and access.

3. MoF should liaise with the respective District Assemblies to designate spaces for beneficiary MSMEs to set up or expand farms, workshops, and other production and commercial units.

4. The MoF, YouStart Secretariat, and implementing agencies must be transparent in selecting beneficiaries. Beneficiaries' details, including projects being funded and grant amount approved, should be published on the YouStart webpage.

5. The MoF must map out existing skills development and youth entrepreneurship programs in the country and explore opportunities for synergy to avoid duplication.

6. The MoF must create a peer learning environment through small cooperative unions for beneficiaries of the YouStart Program to share ideas and provide relevant support.

7. The MoF must develop and share a Project Appraisal Document with a monitoring framework and clear guidelines on the mandates of all implementation agencies to enable CSOs and other stakeholders to play relevant partnership and accountability roles.

8. The MoF must integrate market access support as part of the YouStart programme.

9. MoF must institute a mechanism to ensure that the rollout of the YouStart Program is sufficiently inclusive with the input and consideration of females and Persons With Disability and adopts a non-politicized beneficiary selection approach.

10. In the area of agriculture, the MoF must institute insurance policies to insulate agric start-ups under 'YouStart' from the risks of the weather and other natural factors.

Conclusion

The successful implementation of YouStart hinges on an inclusive, transparent, and accountable programme implementation with sustained funding, inclusive access by the youth, micro, and small businesses to technical, financial, and infrastructure support, including market access.

Respectfully submitted by Africa Education Watch on behalf of the underlisted organisations.

The Undersigned Organisations

1. Africa Education Watch
2. Oxfam in Ghana
3. Foundation for Security and Development in Africa
4. SEND Ghana
5. ActionAid Ghana
6. Centre for Active Learning and Integrated Development
7. African Center for Economic Transformation
8. Strategic Youth Network for Development
9. Youth Advocates Ghana
10. Network of Empowered Youth for Development
11. Institute for Democratic Governance
12. Centre for Community Livelihood Development