

# Agribusinesses in Ghana Need Support to Bounce Back from the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic



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**W**illiam Agyei-Manu is a Ghanaian entrepreneur with years of experience in the agribusiness sector. He has 50 acres of cassava farm in the Afram Plains in the Eastern region of Ghana. As a banker and an insurance broker, William left the corporate world to go into full time farming, a decision he proudly attests, is the best. At least, not until the COVID-19 pandemic.

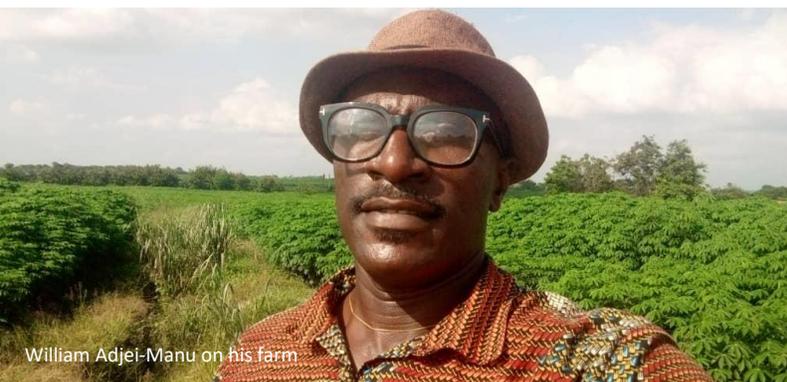
In March 2020, William arrived in the country from a business trip to Brazil, only to face a two-week lock down which had been declared by the government as a measure to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. His plans to export cassava to New York, to introduce a new cassava variety and expand his farming, came to an abrupt halt resulting in a 25 – 30 per cent staff lay-offs, salary cuts and reduction in yields.

Today, one year on, William says “things are picking up and we are working ahead of the clock to recover what we have lost. But the truth of the matter is that it is not easy”.

William is one of thousands of Ghanaian entrepreneurs whose businesses have been impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In a recent interview, he said he is anxious to see how the Government will support them to recover from the impact of the pandemic.

To better understand the challenges businesses are facing because of the pandemic in order to develop solutions to help entrepreneurs like Michael’s pick up and recover, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank launched COVID-19 [Business Tracker](#). It is an online survey that assessed the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on businesses in Ghana. According to the UNDP Economic Advisor, Dr. Frederick Mugisha, “the government can fashion out better approaches to respond to businesses when they fully understand how these businesses are affected”.

Launched in August 2020, the Business Tracker first covered some 4311 business establishments and household firms. Inspired by the knowledge and findings of the



William Agyei-Manu on his farm



William’s cassava farm

Business Tracker survey, the UNDP, GSS and the Governance for Inclusive Development (GovID) unit of the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) commissioned a second survey in 2021. This time it covered agribusinesses. This survey revealed that it may take more time and support for agribusinesses, including those in the production value chain (industry) and service sectors, to recover. Some 16,000 agribusiness firms remain closed, over 78,000 estimated staff have been laid-off and more than 267,000 workers have had their wages reduced post-lockdown in Ghana

Understanding why and how these businesses have been impacted by the pandemic will go a long way to determine the kind of support required to help them pick up and build back. To deliberate on the findings of the survey and the required policy actions to support the businesses to recover, UNDP, the GSS and the Governance for Inclusive Development (GovID) unit of GIZ organized a dialogue to engage policy actors. Over 30 participants from the agribusiness, insurance, public sector institutions, financial institutions and CSOs took part in the session. They discussed the findings of the study and made some recommendations to enable a vibrant and resilient agribusiness sector.

Participants further highlighted the need to leverage the opportunities that the pandemic presents, such as technology; ensuring access to finance for the sector's businesses; ensure data synchronization among public sector institutions to inform further studies and analysis; invest in the establishment of more coalition to advocate with one voice; and ensure digitalization of processes and activities. They also called for the establishment of progressive licensing schemes.

A participant, Mrs. Lucy Akua Kyeredede Quainoo, a business consultant, described the session as "timely and very relevant".

She expressed her delight for the opportunity to discuss things that affect the agribusiness sector and called on her colleagues in the agribusiness sector to leverage technology to engage more in the virtual space. "Though COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on all of us, I think it has also brought us closer regardless of distance" she noted on the new and emerging opportunities.



For Lucy, the engagement should continue after the UNDP-GSS-GIZ -led session. "We should follow-up and continue with the engagement to come up with more measurable, timely and achievable outputs that will help the sector to rebuild."

A key player like William in the agribusiness sector, though negatively impacted by the pandemic, is optimistic about the future. He believes agriculture holds the key to development, especially in a post COVID-19 era. He commended the UNDP-GSS-GIZ for the initiative which he recognizes as the right approach towards helping the agribusinesses to recover and rebuild. "I am glad to have attended this policy action session. We need to take it to another level and share these great ideas on addressing the impact of the pandemic on agribusinesses with policy makers", he noted.



To facilitate advocacy on the survey findings to inform policies, UNDP-GSS-GIZ also organized a session on effective data interpretation for about 22 journalists. The aim was to improve the knowledge and understanding of Journalists on statistical data, to enable them disseminate the results from the survey more accurately to facilitate policy uptake.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the challenges of meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating as tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of businesses affected continue to rise. Governments have reacted quickly, applying various approaches to policy responses, and implementing national and subnational measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis. However, it is critical to consider the views of the people affected in designing strategies to rescue failing economies. Of great importance for considerations are the recommendations that are emerging from the numerous studies on the impact of the pandemic. The profound changes that are needed in our economies and societies demand new ways of thinking.

Written by Ms. Cynthia Prah



Participants at the session



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