

Question 4: what is the “Ghana We Want” story according to Mahama? How would it solve unemployment and generate sustainable growth?

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“The youth see no future in their country of birth. They see no silver lining at the edge of the clouds, which often appears dark and gloomy, with no ray of sunshine seeping through. Who is to blame them when after years of struggling to earn an education, they are condemned to unemployment and acute lack of opportunities?”

-John D. Mahama, “Building the Ghana we want together” Campaign Launch Speech

Background

“Building the Ghana we want” is not just one man’s vision for this country. It is the culmination of the hopes, aspirations and the desire of every Ghanaian young or old, privileged or underprivileged, to see the fortunes of this country improve. It is a clarion call, a reminder of a single undying duty and responsibility that every patriotic citizen owes to this nation. It is the future.

Indeed, this is a time when every Ghanaian must rise to the occasion. The past seven years have witnessed an unprecedented stagnation in our country’s economic woes due to cyclical debt, record-level unemployment, skyrocketing inflation, and a 17th bailout by the International Monetary Fund since independence in 1957².

Introduction

It is trite that the main obstacle to the adoption of policies that would reduce market failures and encourage economic growth is the willingness and incentives of the ruling political class from the

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² Thomas Naadi, ‘Ghana IMF Loan: Will \$3b Solve the Economic Crisis’ (BBC News, 18 May 2023) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65622715>> accessed 9 April 2024

various political and economic institutions in this country³. Policies are adopted because they are good for politics and electoral incentives, enabling a transfer of resources to politically powerful groups. As a result of this, governance is ultimately not for the people but one that has eroded the trust of Ghanaians through corruption and an increasing gap between the realities of Ghanaian society and the Ghanaian political system.

John Mahama's vision for Ghana encapsulates a system of truth that seeks to repair the cracks in the fabric of Ghanaian society. This mission is grounded in respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms and the establishment of inclusive institutions that will drive economic growth. By moving away from the current extractive political and economic system, this vision offers every Ghanaian the opportunity to achieve the "Ghanaian dream," thus, the freedom to succeed and attain a better life. This essay will closely explore the 24-hour economy and the establishment of Free TVET as critical components of the "Building the Ghana We Want Agenda".

Building the Ghana We Want?

At the heart of what his vision represents is the future of the young people of this country. Rising unemployment is a significant challenge facing African governments. While some have attributed it to the youthful population, a more in-depth analysis of the trend across sub-Saharan Africa highlights poor governance and inadequate investment in the productive sectors of the economy as the root cause.⁴ Ghana is not exempt from this issue.

Unemployment is a threat not just to the economy but also to the future of our nation's youth. A cursory look into the data released by the Ghana Statistical Services indicates that unemployment is a major marker of the government's subpar performance, with a staggering

³ D Acemoglu and J Robison, *Why Nations Fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty* (1st Supp, 1st ed, Crown 2012) 75

⁴ Kofi B Quansah, 'Solving the Youth Unemployment Problem: Government Responsibilities' (Africa Supreme 2022) < <https://africasupreme.com/post/solving-the-youth-unemployment-problem-government-responsibilities>>

unemployment rate of 14.7%, with urban areas experiencing nearly double the rate of unemployment compared to rural areas.⁵ Despite a steady uptick in the labor market's ability to accommodate job seekers from 2022 to Q3 of 2023, a significant challenge remains to be resolved.

Recognizing that employment creation is not just the work of the government, John Mahama's administration embarked on policies that sought to strengthen local businesses and diversify the economy to intensify job creation. This was done through offering stimulus packages for persons in the agro-processing, agricultural, and pharmaceutical industries. Significant among the sectors that were impacted by the government interventions was the poultry industry through the 40% poultry import reduction policy and the Ghana Broiler Re-Visitation Project. The project was launched in 2014 and approved a total of Ghc 14,972,802.92 for fourteen farming companies including the Greater Accra Poultry Farmers Association and the Dormaa Poultry Farmers Association⁶.

The real drivers of job creation are businesses and not the government. This is because the government does not create wealth⁷. As such, job creation efforts must focus on the complicated relationship between companies and the government⁸. It is up to the government to create a conducive environment where businesses can thrive and not stifle their operations. This John Mahama knows and understands very well. On this backdrop, Ghanaians are thus brought to the forefront of the "Building the Ghana We Want" agenda which serves as an active lens through which John Mahama's wits, strengths, and vast experience will be leveraged.

Rating agencies, economists, and the IMF have diagnosed the Ghanaian economy with two major economic challenges - debt and deficit - which have caused serious solvency problems and

⁵ Ghana Statistical Service, *Ghana Annual Household Income and Expenditure survey: Quarter 3, 2022 Labour Statistics Report* (March 2023) 21

⁶ John Dramani Mahama, *State of the Nation Address*, Presented to Parliament (25 February 2016) 27

⁷ Thomas Sowell, "It is Impossible for the Obama Administration to 'create' jobs" (2009) <<https://www.deseret.com/2009/12/10/20357783/thomas-sowell-it-is-impossible-for-the-obama-administration-to-create-jobs/>> accessed 15 April 2024

⁸ Jennifer Robison, 'Who Really Creates Jobs?' (2012) <[Who Really Creates Jobs? \(gallup.com\)](https://www.gallup.com)> accessed 10 April 2024,

eroded public confidence.⁹In order to achieve a brighter future for Ghana, John Mahama has rightly emphasized the critical importance of reducing public debt and debt service obligations. Numerous proposals have been suggested to address this issue, including cutting government expenditure by 40%, reducing the size of government by eliminating unnecessary ministries, secretariats, and agencies, suspending non-essential projects, increasing transparency in public procurement, expanding the Ghana Gas Company to leverage the petroleum sector, revitalizing TOR, and reevaluating Operation Feed Yourself¹⁰

However, these suggestions are still ancillary to the conducive business climate that the government must deliberately create for public-private sector cooperation which will spur economic growth and provide meaningful sustainable jobs for young people. Critical to achieving this are policies that will expand industrial activities and create a continuous integrated economic environment.

- ***The role of the 24-hour economy in job creation and economic growth***

John Mahama's vision for Ghana proposes a three-shift economy as the future for building economic and institutional resilience. A 24-hour economy refers to the extension of business and service operations beyond traditional working hours, effectively allowing for around the clock activity.¹¹ Also known as the "late-night economy" or "evening economy", 24-hour economies across the world have been recognized for making a significant contribution to national economies.

⁹ Rachel Savage, 'Why Ghana has returned to the IMF' (Reuters, 8 July, 2022) <[Explainer: Why Ghana has returned to the IMF | Reuters](#)> accessed 11 April 2024,

¹⁰ Thomas Sowell, *Trickle Down Theory and Tax Cuts for the Rich* (1st supp, 1st ed. Hoover 2012), John Dramani Mahama, 'Building the Ghana We Want' (UPSA, 2022) <[John Mahama's full speech on 'Building the Ghana we want' \(citinewsroom.com\)](#)> accessed 14 April 2024

¹¹ Andreina Seijas, 'Rethinking 24-hour Cities: Nighttime Strategies to Address Urban Challenges and Thrive' (World Economic Forum 2024) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/24-hour-cities-night-time-strategies-urban-challenges/>

In the United Kingdom alone, London's night-time economy is reported to have employed 1.6million people¹², accounting for a third of the city's working population while contributing £66 billion a year to the national economy. ¹³ A similar pattern can be noticed in New York City where a report found that in 2016, the nightlife industry supported 299,000 jobs and contributed \$35.1 billion in total economic output¹⁴.

This is possible because 24-hour economies create room for a purposeful expansion of industrial activities such as manufacturing and allied services, architectural services, and financial services beyond day and night to meet the rising domestic and international demand. This is why night economies boost a city's reputation for competitiveness in the world economy in order to attract visitors, talent, and capital.

These factors however do not work in isolation. The creation of a 24-hour economy requires a strategic coordination of the supply and demand relationship of corresponding services. This is why government policies and incentives are crucial for strengthening infrastructure development in places that have a deficit. ¹⁵In Australia, to address this problem and build a vibrant night-time economy, the New South Wales Government (NSW) embarked on the creation of a comprehensive 24-hour Economy Strategy policy framework for Sydney. Some of the suggestions proposed include the establishment of a 24-hour Economy Coordinator-General to lead the implementation of the strategy and the roll out of an acceleration program that will support plans for activating a 24-hour economy hub within the city. ¹⁶

¹² Greater London Authority (GLA) Economics, "London at Night: an evidence base for a 24-hour city Executive report" (November 2018) 5

¹³ TBR Ltd, MAKE Associates Ltd, Longview Partners & Philip Hadfield Consulting (2011), Sydney Night Time Economy: Cost Benefit Analysis

¹⁴ Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, "NYC's Nightlife Economy: Impact, Assets and Opportunities" (June 2017) 3

¹⁵ Yan, G.; Zou, L.; Liu, Y. The Spatial Pattern and Influencing Factors of China's Nighttime Economy Utilizing POI and Remote Sensing Data. *Appl. Sci.* **2024**, *14*, 400. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app14010400>

¹⁶ Global NSW, "Sydney 24-hour Economy Strategy" (September 2020)

In Ghana, a holistic view is necessary to realize the potential of our cities for 24-hour economies, particularly in addressing unemployment and fostering economic growth. This is because a 24-hour economy can generate employment opportunities for both highly skilled and unskilled workers, across both the public and private sectors because of the need for additional staffing to cover extended hours. As businesses adapt to new operation schedules, they would require more workers to manage the increased workload and customer demand. Research has already shown that a successfully implemented 24-hour economy in Ghana could create approximately 3 million jobs within five years, in various sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and fishing, entertainment and hospitality, manufacturing and the service sector ¹⁷.

Equally, it would foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation because entrepreneurs will be incentivized to explore new business ideas that would cater to the needs of the society at all hours. This will also lead to the creation of new industries that would further expand the job market directly addressing unemployment in the country.

This is why John Mahama's vision for Ghana through the 24-hour economy, will prioritize public sector reforms, aggressive investments in power supply, support for SMEs, agricultural modernization, expand Ghana's export capacity, and implement a big push for infrastructure to enhance road networks and logistics. These measures will create robust infrastructure, address security concerns and establish regulatory frameworks to ensure the safety and well-being of Ghanaians while tackling the challenges that arise during implementation.

¹⁷ ABDUL-SALAM, YAKUBU, 'Evaluating the Impact of a 24-Hour Economy on Ghana's Economic Landscape: A computable General Equilibrium Approach'. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4703620> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4703620>

- ***Free Technical and Vocational Education (TVET)***

One prevalent problem in Africa is the mismatch between the skills African students obtain at school and those required by employers¹⁸. Ghana is no exception to this, and it has contributed to mass unemployment among graduates from our universities. Unfortunately, this is because African societies have valued a few professional fields over others. Fields like medicine and law are highly regarded, so parents push their bright children to pursue these courses for the prestige associated with them.

Recognizing the need to align graduate skills with labor market needs, John Mahama's vision for Ghana includes making technical and vocational education available to all individuals. This is necessary because people need adaptable skills in the face of evolving labor market needs, such as those driven by globalization and technological advancements. Some of the skills include web development, programming, software proficiency, as well as vocational skills like craftsmanship and graphic design.

By ensuring young people have access to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), they can acquire practical skills that will allow them to adapt to changes in the job market and stay relevant in a rapidly changing world. The establishment of a 24-hour economy, which is an important aspect of John Mahama's vision for Ghana, makes free TVET particularly valuable. It will empower unemployed graduates to seize the numerous opportunities and potential that this economy offers.

When individuals are employed in our economy, it results in a rise in consumer spending. This, in turn, leads to an increase in production and diminishes the necessity for government spending to address poverty. Moreover, it generates higher tax revenues as employed individuals

¹⁸ Audrey Donkor, 'Africa's Youth Unemployment Crisis is a Global Problem' (Foreign Policy 2021) < <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/19/africa-youth-unemployment-crisis-global-problem/>> accessed 15 April 2024

contribute to taxes, which can subsequently be allocated to public services and foster further economic growth. This cycle of employment, increased spending, and investment ultimately culminates in both economic and social stability. It enhances the well-being of individuals by reducing crime rates and volatility.¹⁹

These benefits all tie into the vision John Mahama has in helping Ghana build a resilient yet prosperous economy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, John Mahama's vision in building a prosperous Ghana is intrinsically linked to job creation and the promotion of sustainable economic growth. Throughout this essay, I have explored what the "Building the Ghana We Want" agenda truly means, Ghana's unemployment situation and how the 24-hour economy and Free TVET will foster public-private sector cooperation that stimulates job creation.

"Building the Ghana We Want" requires perseverance, collaboration and a steadfast dedication to sustainable practices. By harnessing the collective talents and resources of our people through intensive Technical and Vocational training, Ghana can achieve a thriving economy as a testament to the indomitable spirit of its citizens.

¹⁹ Steffica Warwick, '12 Experts Explain why Good Job Creation is Needed and what Leaders Can do About it' (World Economic Forum 2023) < <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/09/12-experts-explain-world-needs-more-good-jobs-leaders/>>