

Engaging youth in agriculture amidst a global pandemic

The MADE internship pilot





The Market Development Programme (MADE) for Northern Ghana is a seven-year DFID-funded programme promoting growth and poverty reduction in the 60 districts covered by the Northern Savannah Ecological Zone (NSEZ).

The MADE internship pilot

From June to September 2020, the Market Development Programme for Northern Ghana (MADE), funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), ran a pilot internship programme. Thirty recent graduates from Ghanaian agricultural colleges were placed with selected agribusinesses operating across 58 of the 78 districts in the Northern Savannah Ecological Zone (NSEZ). The overall aims were to:

- Provide opportunities for recent graduates to gain first-hand experience of what it is like to work for the private sector
- Change perceptions within the industry of the value of recruiting young professionals to farm advisory positions
- Help reach out to rural farming communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pilot gave 30 selected graduates the opportunity to work alongside farm advisory agents, used by the private sector to optimise the application and use of input supplies and services by smallholder farmers. The pilot was launched within two months of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant the graduates were also able to support their host agribusinesses with the sensitisation of farming families on ways to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus.

MADE's internship scheme is believed to be the first of its kind in Ghana to help bring private and public extension service needs into greater alignment, whilst adopting a gender-conscious approach. The scheme also offers young agricultural graduates a potential first career step into the world of business. This report is a reflection on how the pilot was developed, what it achieved, what lessons have been learned, and how it might be built on to open up greater job opportunities for young professionals in the future. Where appropriate, the words of the

participating agribusiness owners and interns during the concluding feedback sessions have been reproduced to highlight their experiences.

How the pilot came about

The idea of placing graduate students with MADE's partner firms was first raised as part of a stakeholder engagement with young, degree-level agricultural extension students during the gender assessment and business case study undertaken in March 2019 to review why women's representation was so low.¹ While a near-equitable number of female and male smallholder farmers have received support through MADE, women are less well represented higher up the management chain in

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the agricultural sector. For example, only 13% of Farm Enterprise Advisors (FEAs) supported through the programme are women, and only 4 out of the 42 businesses that MADE worked with during Phase 3² are woman-owned.

Addressing the lack of opportunities in the private sector

The focus group interviewed during the gender assessment reported that most of their fellow female students struggle to find placements to complete obligatory practical coursework and

few succeed in entering the job market upon graduation. Male colleagues tend to have better access to casual opportunities but are more likely to seek and find work in the public sector, which they see as offering a more secure career path. For its part, the private sector does not routinely employ graduates, often seeing them as expensive and lacking in practical farm business management skills. The situation was said to be accentuated during times of high unemployment and economic downturn.

The assessment team recommended addressing this gap with an internship programme, specifically for female agricultural students, to put their knowledge to the test and to learn about farming as a business. The team identified three groups of businesses to be targeted:

- Those that already engage female FEAs and see their benefit

- Those that have worked with female extension staff but have been unsuccessful in retaining them
- Those that have had no exposure to the benefits of engaging female staff.

The internship would serve to showcase to agribusiness owners the benefits of having mixed gender support teams engaging with their mixed gender out-growers.

A concept note was prepared to launch a pilot with a small group of students and test the mutual benefits and market viability of such an activity.³ The proposal was put to Damongo Agricultural College administrators during the launch of their MADE-supported farm business management courses for FEAs in October 2019. The concept note also revealed how few agricultural students in Northern Ghana go on to seek work in the private sector and



Focus group students at Damongo College, May 2019.



reinforced the premise that closer contact with agribusinesses through an internship scheme would help expose students to potential career opportunities, as well as provide practical learning to satisfy course requirements.

The scheduled closure of MADE in February 2020 did not allow time to put the proposition to the test. However, FCDO subsequently agreed on a nine-month extension to the programme, from March to November 2020, to facilitate the deeper embedding of MADE's impact. Just as the extension was about to start, the first case of the novel coronavirus was confirmed in Ghana on 12 March 2020.

COVID-19 pandemic

The government responded to the COVID-19 outbreak by imposing certain restrictions, which coincided with the start of the 2020/21 farming season. MADE's priorities were redirected to help reduce the spread of infection (primary response) and wherever possible limit disruption to the livelihoods of rural farming communities (secondary response). It was decided that both could be best addressed by enhancing and directing the support given to partner firms to build additional capacity in their farm advisory services, which were struggling to reach groups of farmers because of the restrictions imposed on travel and gatherings.

The coronavirus pandemic led to the closure of college courses and posed a potential food security threat due to anticipated delays in the receipt of agricultural inputs. Supplies of agro-chemicals and specialist high-yielding seeds were particularly affected due to enforced

STAYING SAFE FROM COVID-19

Guidelines to prevent the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19)

WHAT IS COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new illness that affects the lungs and airways. It is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, which is transmitted person to person.

COVID-19 spreads easily and quickly in humans. We are all susceptible to catching it as we have no natural immunity.







WHAT IS THE RISK OF CATCHING COVID-19?

Since there is currently no vaccine for COVID-19, the only way to stop transmission is by people changing their behaviour. This means improved personal hygiene, avoiding crowds and adopting social (physical) distancing.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE COVID-19?

People with COVID-19 experience mild to severe respiratory illness that can last for several weeks.

Signs and symptoms can include:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  Fever |  Dry and persistent cough |  Shortness of breath |  Fatigue |  Muscle aches and headache |  In some cases, people lose their sense of smell and taste |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

These symptoms are common to MANY other infections and diseases.

The only way you know for sure that you have coronavirus is by receiving a positive test result.

Even if you have had the virus and have fully recovered, you MUST continue to follow social distancing guidelines.

border closures and internal transport restrictions. Producers were also experiencing a fall in the demand for and price of grain because of the impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality sector. A tightening of credit and problems securing working capital were also reported. This series of events highlighted the need and provided the opportunity for the launch of the internship scheme.

Selecting interns

All five of the main agricultural colleges in Ghana require students to undertake a 1–2 month internship to complete the requirements for a degree qualification. Given the closure of colleges in response to the pandemic and the scarcity of attachment places available during a normal academic year, it seemed sensible to offer the MADE internships to students to

mechanisation service provider then please contact us. The Market Development (MADE) programme funded by UK Aid is looking to recruit agricultural extension students, on a short-term internship basis, to support the work of its agribusiness partner firms in Northern, North East, Savannah, Upper East and West Regions.”

Regional extension officers supported many prospective candidates in completing and submitting the registration forms, and also assisted in the subsequent selection and validation process.

fulfil course requirements at the same time as preparing them for a return to classes. However, on 26 April 2020, MADE was advised by the government that students could be called back to re-commence studies at any time and that the placements should be restricted to graduates who had completed their coursework and were looking for employment.

Advertisement and selection process

MADE utilised publicly accessible outlets to advertise the pilot scheme, and promoted the internship on social media. Between 5 and 9 May 2020, the following announcement went out across four radio networks in the NSEZ:

“If you are a graduate of any of the Agricultural Colleges in Ghana who is currently at home, unemployed and looking for an opportunity to work with a farm enterprise such as a nucleus farmer, produce aggregator, input dealer or

Over the next week, a surprising total of 762 applications were received and 355 graduates (301 men and 54 women) who had expressed an interest in taking up the challenge were eligible and had their data entered and validated. Applicants were required to show proof that they had an appropriate degree, had completed national service, had experience in riding a motorbike and had their own means of transport. Regional extension officers supported many prospective candidates in completing and submitting the registration forms, and also assisted in the subsequent selection and validation process. Although the requirements were made explicitly clear in the advertisement, the team received many ineligible applications, particularly from those residing outside of the Northern Savannah Ecological Zone, and overqualified candidates.

The 355 pre-selected graduates were then mapped against the operational districts of the 42 agribusinesses that had shown interest in accepting interns. Selection was concluded on 29 April 2020. Although applications were disproportionately submitted by men (in the ratio 6:1), the selection panel sought gender balance.

The final list of 30 graduates included 16 men and 14 women. The average age of the selected interns was 28 years and 3 months, all having graduated from college between 2010 and 2019. Only one of the selected interns was over the age limit for the Ghanaian definition of youth (<35 years).

COVID-19 response

The first stage of the internship pilot ran for four weeks, starting on 14 June 2020. Each intern received orientation and training prior to taking up their appointment and was given a tablet loaded with an information pack containing an introductory video recorded by MADE senior staff and COVID-19 safety messages that could be shared with smallholder farmers. They were advised on the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and encouraged to respond to the concerns of farmers and dispel myths surrounding COVID-19.

Great care was taken in the preparation of the pack material to ensure it was appropriate and understandable by the target audience. The COVID-19 messaging was drawn from protocols being developed around the world in response to the epidemic, but the messaging was tailored specifically to rural farming families.

The selection criteria took into consideration the need for interns to speak the local languages in the districts in which they would be operating. The orientation training took the graduates through each of the protocols to ensure that they understood the key preventative measures that needed to be explained. All of the COVID-19 material was reviewed and cleared by the FCDO health advisor before it was added to the pack.

Attention was also given to ensuring the interns, and the people that they came into contact with, were kept safe. The interns were always provided with face masks and hand sanitisers, and encouraged to adopt safety procedures. All field activities were undertaken with the necessary social distancing observed.

Capturing learnings

Interns were instructed on how to complete a weekly activity and outreach log, designed to



Angela Awebu, Kesia Adombila and Rafia Laari (MADE interns placed with the following firms: Savanna Agrichains, Simple Prince and Faranaaya ABC firm) during orientation in Upper East.

FIGURE 1. ELIGIBLE GRADUATES EXPRESSING INTEREST IN JOINING THE INTERNSHIP PILOT

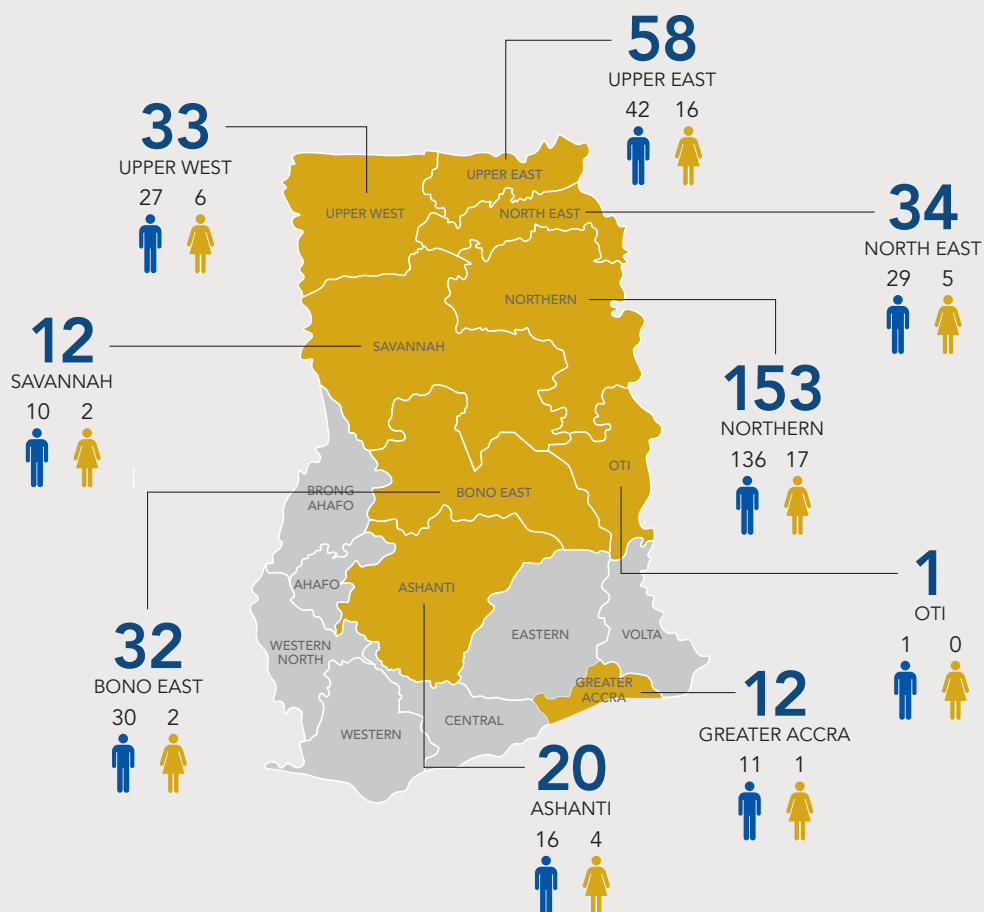
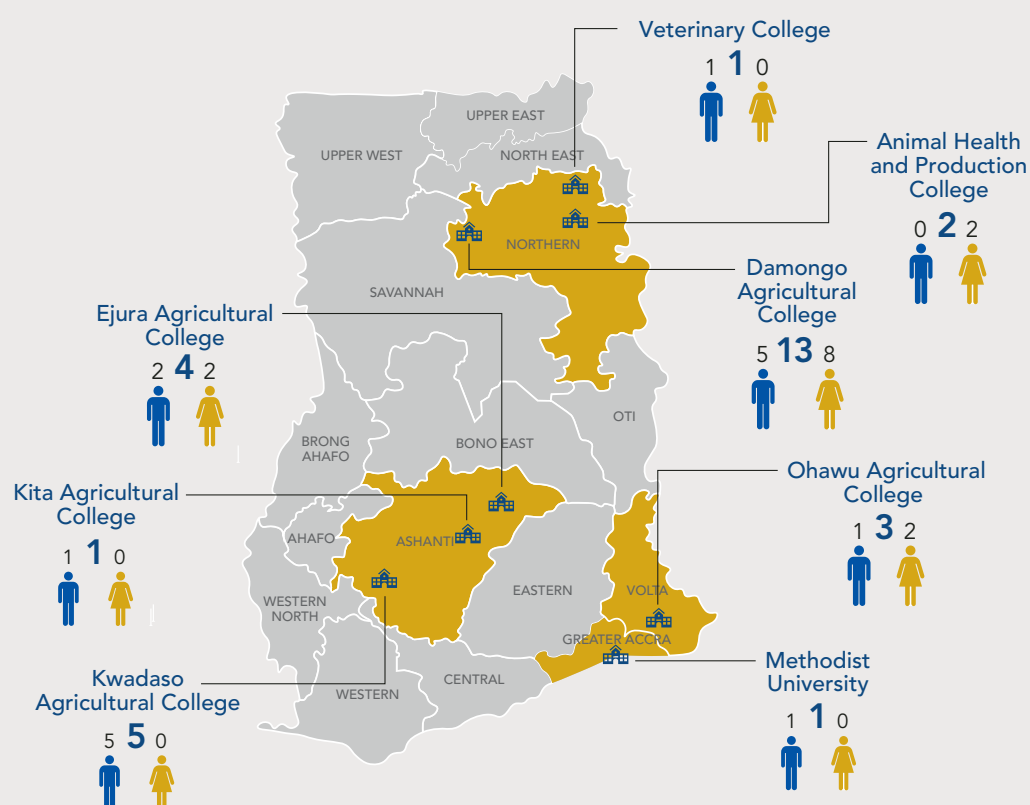


FIGURE 2. INTERNS FROM DIFFERENT AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES IN GHANA



register the numbers of farmers they interacted with for both extension and COVID-19 messaging and to record interesting incidents and anecdotes. In addition, interns were asked to create short articles in the form of a weekly blog/vlog to illustrate daily and interesting aspects of their placement and to complete a final social media project in the form of a short video (around 60 seconds) or a 400-word blog with photos. A list of potential topics for the social media project was proposed:

- A farmer or business who had changed their hygiene practices because of COVID-19
- A business that had introduced risk mitigation because of COVID-19
- Any issues with labour and transport due to COVID-19.

The host companies were reminded of their obligations to safeguard their charges during the internship period in a formal letter signed off by the MADE Team Lead and included as part of the responsibilities set out in the grant agreements. In addition, host companies were required to ensure a quality experience for the graduates. In accepting the interns, they were required to:

- Appoint a designated member of staff or officer to supervise the intern
- Have a formal check-in with their interns once a week to review activities and set new tasks
- Complete a daily registration sheet confirming attendance, signed by both the intern and the supervisor
- Complete orientation for their intern on their company's business practices and operational policies
- Ensure the safety of interns at all times (e.g. general security, accommodation, transport)
- Enable access and use of office facilities (e.g. computers, internet, bathroom, office space)
- Cover all business-related costs for the intern, such as travel costs to visit smallholder farmers.



Meri Akaribo (MADE intern placed with Sky 3 partner firm during internship) in orientation in the Bono East Region.

Stipends and allowances

Interns were provided, at an estimated cost to the programme of around GHS 400 per week, with a:

- Stipend
- Subsistence allowance
- Transport allowance to and from their workplace
- Tablet to record information for the duration of the internship
- Personal supply of masks and hand sanitiser.

In addition, and to mitigate the barriers facing many young women in the sector, MADE also included funds for childcare. Women with young children who would otherwise not be able to leave them by themselves while they worked were therefore not disadvantaged. Six of the selected female graduates benefited from this childcare allowance. All other operational costs were met by the host companies.

Managing and monitoring the pilot

Many successful interventions emerge from wider efforts to fire-fight exceptional and unexpected events. Although the concept for the internship pilot was in place before COVID-19 struck, it was MADE's response to the pandemic and the needs of the industry at a key time in the agricultural calendar that accelerated its introduction and made it come about when it did.

Getting the partner firms on board early was essential. The industry was facing a mounting sea of difficulties including transport restrictions, closed borders, shortages of key input supplies and a potential shortage of people to work the fields – more than enough issues to deal with without having to work through the logistics of an internship pilot. In the event, the pre-season business planning events that preceded partner selection provided an opportunity to build awareness of the advantages of bringing in specialist resources to engage with smallholder farmers on safety issues while allowing their

FEAs to focus on registering out-growers and ensuring access to inputs and services. All partner firms bought into the idea and it took just twelve weeks from the first case of COVID-19 being registered in Ghana (12 March) to getting the internship pilot underway.

The effort required to turn an idea into reality over a three-month period, was substantial. The development and design of tailored protocols was a major task. Material was not available within the country and had to be developed from an assortment of external sources. It had to be modified, checked, approved, and then produced in a form that would allow it to be shown at village level from a hand-held tablet while ensuring two metres of social distancing. The work of the Scriptoria team should be recognised in working through the many iterations and producing a well-targeted set of protocols on time and to budget.



Kogh Dery Solomon (MADE intern), taking farmers through how to use pesticides/weedicides. This image was taken by the intern participating in this pilot.

Then there was the selection process and the work required to ensure a worthwhile and quality experience (as highlighted in the earlier sections of this report). Stakeholders provided welcome support for this process. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture assisted with the applications and the validation of qualifications, and the Director of Agricultural Extension Services weighed in with his own personal support of the pilot. Damongo Agricultural College helped with the release of farm business management course notes that could be loaded onto the tablets and used by the interns as reference material.

A safeguarding officer had to be appointed to deal with any issues that the interns might have and that could not be resolved by the host companies. Fortunately, these services were only requested on two occasions and the issues were quickly resolved.

A monitoring structure had to be established to ensure the weekly activity and outreach logs were completed and returned on time. This allowed data on the numbers of farming families receiving advice on COVID-19 and the number of out-growers provided with extension advice to be released to the FCDO health advisor within 72 hours of the close of each week.

The weekly blogs/vlogs were also collected and uploaded to the MADE website to give interns an opportunity to capture learning and contribute to reflection on the programme. Given MADE's push for social engagement, this method of capturing learnings was chosen to see if

COVID-19 protocols were adhered to and also to gauge the interns' attitude towards the private sector. A healthy competitive edge developed among the interns to see who could achieve the most and come up with the best ideas and pictures.

Despite the difficulties created by COVID-19, the registration of farmers, selection of partners, issue of crop forecasts, signing of grant agreements and release of the first milestone payment were all achieved in record time.

In mid-July, six of the host firms requested an extension of the pilot for a further four weeks based on the successful integration of interns into their business and to allow more time to reach out to a larger group of farmers and their families. Given the success of the pilot and to take advantage of the opportunity to reach more communities, MADE extended the stipends of these six interns for a further 4 weeks. One of the women taking part in the extension returned after having to leave the pilot early in week one due to health reasons.

Key outcomes from the pilot

In the words of Paul Siame, Acting National Director of Agricultural Extension Services at the Ministry of Food and Agriculture:

“The [MADE internship] pilot is providing opportunities for young graduates to acquire field experience, including the tenants of private sector business operations.”

Overall, the pilot was successful, with 12 of the 30 interns accepting full or part-time employment with host enterprises. Seven of these are women. A further 9 participants are currently

discussing potential engagement later in the year during the aggregation and recovery stage with their host firms.

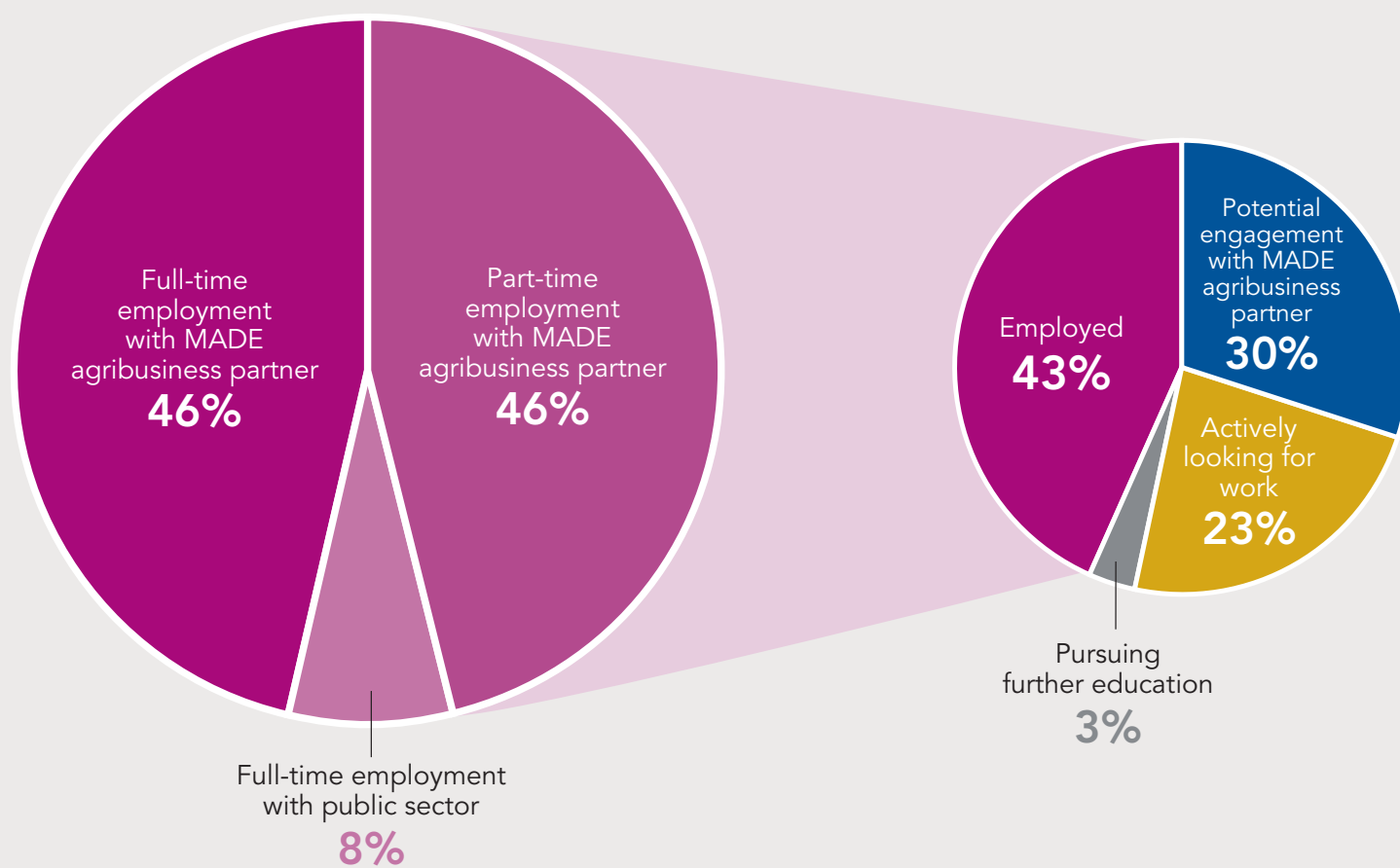
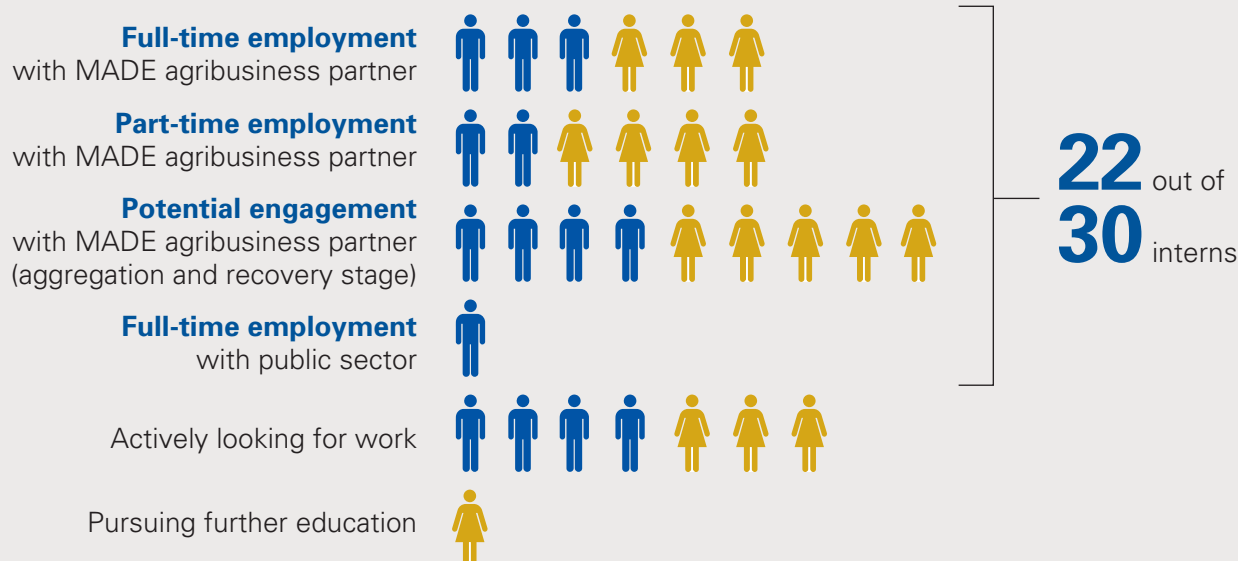
In addition to the direct result of employment or potential for employment for the placed interns, 6 host firms have requested an extension of the internship activity beyond the 30 interns and hosts. These firms have issued a wider call to roll out a nationwide internship scheme as part of a revamped extension course curriculum⁴ citing difficulty in recruiting professionals to strengthen their farm enterprise advisory service and lack of appreciation by graduates of the opportunities working in the private sector.

These results indicate that there is an appetite and need for similar interventions that link skilled youth with the agricultural private sector. They demonstrate that there was a market failure that the programme effectively addressed regarding breaking down existing and perceived barriers faced by youth, especially women, in accessing employment in the agricultural private sector. They also provide empirical evidence demonstrating that women are valued employees of agribusinesses, as female participants received the same, if not slightly more, employment offers from their hosts once the internships were completed. Partners were particularly enthused by female interns as they recognised that female farmers were more comfortable opening up to them as opposed to male interns, including on gender-related issues not only in business but also at home; this was particularly relevant during this scheme, as female farmers were more receptive to COVID-19 messaging.



Peter Kanu (MADE intern), engaging a client who purchased weedicides on the precautionary measures to take when using weedicides. This image was taken by the intern participating in this pilot.

FIGURE 3. POST INTERNSHIP SCHEME





SHFs and C19 training beneficiaries being trained by Awebu Angela (MADE intern) on how to observe physical distance.

COVID-19 outreach

Purely in terms of numbers of farmers receiving COVID-19 messaging and advice on agricultural best practice during the June–July secondment, the pilot was highly successful. The data in Figure 4 was compiled from weekly logs submitted by the 30 interns.

On average, each intern reached out to over 60 farming families per week during the pilot, across 41 of the 58 districts covered by the partner firms.

On average, each intern reached out to over 60 farming families per week during the pilot, across 41 of the 58 districts covered by the partner firms. This represented approximately 10% of the total outreach of the host organisations.

In addition, the interns supervised the distribution of over 27,000 items of PPE at an estimated cost

to the host enterprises of £23,000, either directly through the input dealerships or during visits to farming communities (see Table 1).

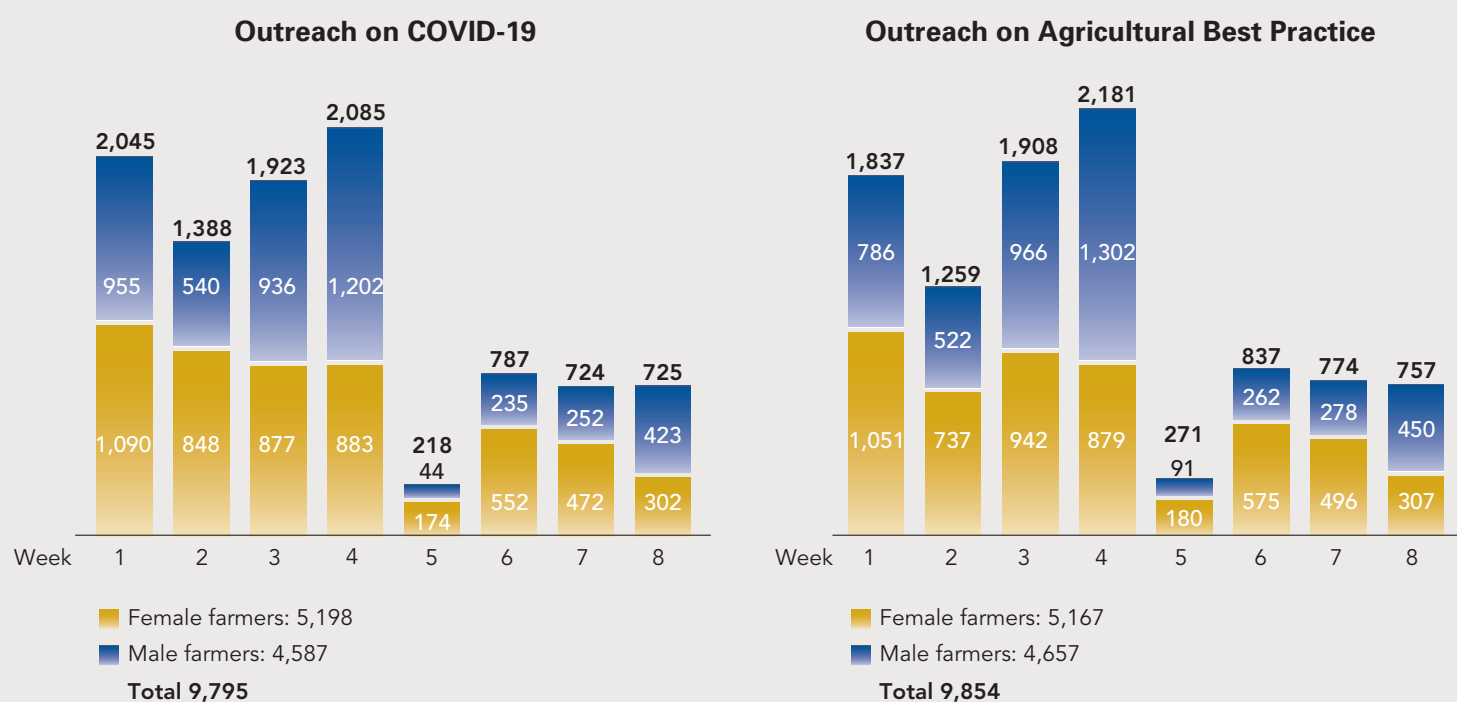
It is difficult to say precisely what behavioural change has been brought about by the COVID-19 messaging, but anecdotal notes from interns' activity logs provide some interesting observations:

- Women were more likely than men to be following COVID-19 protocols, particularly with regard to wearing face masks and handwashing, although nearly everybody had stopped shaking hands.
- The restrictions on gathering meant that most people were praying at home and most churches and mosques were either closed or operating with minimal congregations.
- There was much less travel in general and people were staying at home.
- Communities had become more sceptical about strangers from outside of their area.

Items of PPE distributed by Partner agribusinesses during the internship



FIGURE 4. SMALLHOLDER FARMERS REACHED BY INTERNS



Feedback from the field

The feedback from the interns as measured in their weekly blogs/vlogs and their final project questionnaire, and from the partners through their end-of-pilot assessment reports, was overwhelmingly positive.

All of the interns expressed gratitude that they were given the opportunity to help fight the pandemic.

Interns' perspective

From the interns' perspective, one of the best features of the internship was the interaction with smallholder farmers. Comments from graduates mentioned how much they learned from farmers and FEAs on how to deliver extension services, as well as how to relate and

engage with farmers and farm management. Comments on working with farmers included "[I enjoyed] educating farmers on how to manage their farms", "I learnt how to start an enterprise" and "[I learnt how] to write a business proposal and budget". These are all vital business skills.

With regard to COVID-19 messaging, all of the interns expressed gratitude that they were being given the opportunity to help fight the pandemic. They enjoyed engaging with farmers to dispel the myths they heard in the field. These included the idea that COVID-19 was a hoax; that it was brought by spirits; and that it only affected people in the city. When asked at the end of the project whether they had seen behavioural change in farmers, the interns cited some instances that included the introduction of face masks and the increased use of tippy taps or Veronica buckets to improve handwashing hygiene.



Nindor Patrick, Rashid Bamonbey and Solomon Kogh (MADE interns placed with the following firms: Crop Care, GAB Services – SupportEnterprise under Agrisolve and Great River Business Limited firm) equipped with nose masks and tablets at an orientation meeting.



Training of community lead farmers on the usage and application of selective weedicide for rice. This image was taken by the intern participating in this pilot.

One intern even started producing face masks and distributing them within the communities that she was visiting. A few interns suggested that it would be a good idea to visit farmers at intervals of two weeks to check on how well COVID-19 measures had been adhered to.

In terms of changing perceptions of the private sector among graduates, the project seems to have had a positive effect – captured by the comment “it is my first time working in the private sector and I really enjoyed it”. The interns also enjoyed interacting with colleagues and learning to be part of a team.

Regarding access to partner resources, there were noticeable differences. Some interns had access to computers and Wi-Fi while others did not. This exposed the variation in company resources, sophistication and head office location, and their ability to support some of the modern data management systems that programmes like MADE are trying to introduce. A surprising number of interns lacked basic IT skills and considerable time was taken to help them learn how to use a tablet. As a result, activities slowed down by two weeks. Partners were encouraged strongly to support interns with IT skills. This, together with more guidance on the practicalities of the social media project,

should be considered for future schemes. This could be achieved through a more hands-on and longer orientation process for participants. However, the majority of interns felt that the induction, information pack and resources supplied by MADE were of high quality and all interns felt that these equipped them well for their placement.

The overall picture from the interns was extremely positive: all would repeat the experience, and all would recommend it to others. These are epitomised by comments such as “it may prepare me more towards my future career” and “it prepares you to take up more challenging opportunities”. The only factor they would change was the length of the placement, with some suggesting up to a six-month placement.

Partners’ perspective

From the partners’ perspective, the most welcome observation was how well the graduates fit into their organisations. The response to the pilot was broadly positive, with all speaking highly about the interns’ politeness and knowledge. Many have been facing difficult times recently, with inputs held up due to COVID-19 and fears about problems with the



Rita Zanlerigu (MADE intern placed with Alokodongo & Sons – Support Enterprise under Simple Prince) during the orientation in the Upper East Region.

year's harvest. Businesses were also holding a lot of stock, as they had a bumper harvest in 2019/20 and it was difficult to find buyers due to COVID-19 and the downturn in the hospitality industry.

Partners particularly appreciated the clear and comprehensive pack of COVID-19 information that the interns arrived with. This meant that the intern could lead on the COVID-19 messaging and train their staff without supervision. This left the partner and FEAs free to work on the backlog of input and service supply activities.

Other areas of expertise that partners valued in the interns included their agronomic knowledge and in some cases IT skills. One intern was able to help with data organisation and entry, and there are many positive accounts of interaction and extension knowledge in the field, such as "he was good in educating farmers about good agronomic practice. The FEAs were very much amazed at the level of understanding and practicality". One intern also managed to use his skills to map the partner's farms with GPS. The collection, analysis and use of data for business

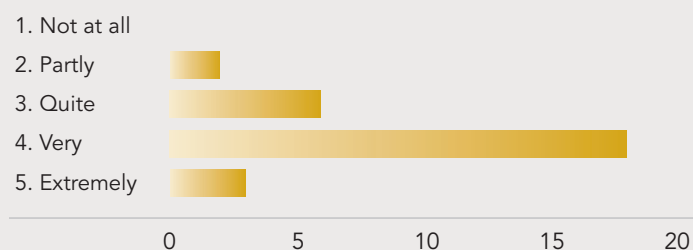
improvement is seen as a vital service that graduates could bring to the private sector.

The timing of the placement was not ideal, however. Vital pre-season activities start in March and April of each year when farmers are being registered and crop production forecasts undertaken. Many partners had an issue with the scheme not being aligned with the production calendar. They observed that if the pilot had been synced, the interns could have helped more farmers with activities. Most partners would have preferred a placement to start in March to maximise the impact and expose the intern to the fullest range of experiences during the growing season.

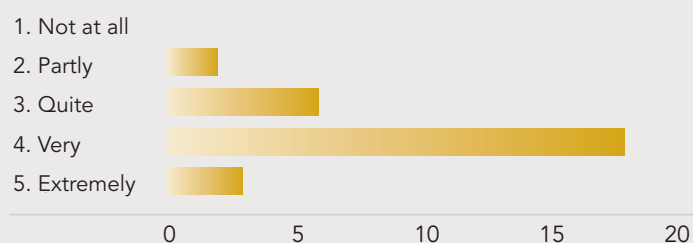
Finally, seven of the partners said they would consider offering their interns a job (including four male and three female graduates) immediately, and many others spoke of taking their graduates back on for the season, depending on financial circumstances. Another intern secured a job with a tractor company as a result of the internship scheme.

FIGURE 5. PARTNERS' PERSPECTIVE

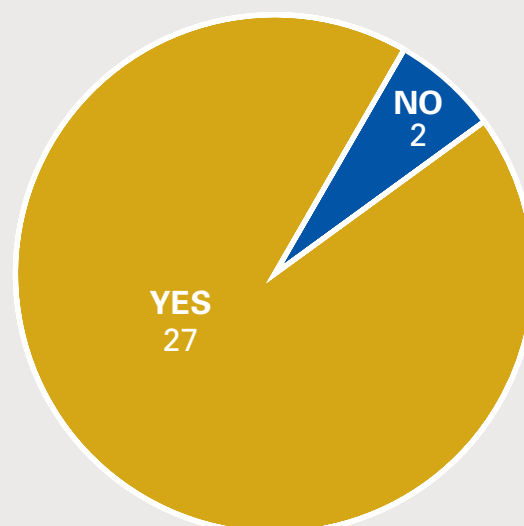
**How helpful has the intern been to your clients?
(farmers, customers)**



How helpful has the intern been to your organisation?



**Would you consider engaging your intern
in the future?**



The way forward

Overall, MADE believes that this intervention is extremely adaptable to other countries and can also be piloted in other private sector-led initiatives outside of the agricultural sector.

Attracting and retaining youth

The positive responses from the parties involved in the pilot⁵ suggest strong buy-in to the idea of internships or apprenticeships. Additionally, it presents an opportunity to take this forward and make the experience more mainstream in future programmes from the outset.

This pilot has demonstrated that host companies benefit from access to young professionals with knowledge of new technologies and modern

This pilot has demonstrated that host companies benefit from access to young professionals with knowledge of new technologies and modern agricultural practices.

agricultural practices, and who are able to share ideas and support capacity building across out-grower networks. Graduates get the opportunity to experience farm business management first-hand and supplement their book and course learning with exposure to the realities of commercial life.

The future status of commercial farming in Ghana depends on the private sector being able to attract and retain youth – and the opportunities for direct exposure under current agricultural course requirements are few and far between. Many students are never able to apply the theoretical knowledge gained at college; many

face real or perceived barriers in accessing jobs in the private sector. Women in particular are less likely to be selected for commercial farming roles given the high level of competition and significant social barriers.

Cost barriers

The cost of intern placement, even without the direct support of MADE, is small relative to the benefits gained by host companies, students and the agricultural sector as a whole. Yet this is often viewed as a potential barrier in the eyes of the private sector, as it represents another cost or overhead that needs to be absorbed without any assurance that it will lead to productivity gains or an immediate return on investment. The pilot helped highlight the benefits of access to interns but did not entirely dispel the concerns over cost. Without the promise of further support from MADE, only 6 of the 30 host enterprises submitted formal requests to have the period of secondment extended, even though ultimately 12 firms offered full or part time employment once the internships had been completed.

Cost is always likely to be factor in securing private sector buy-in especially one involving graduate students rather than those recently graduated. With students returning to their studies the possibility of securing the services of the intern at the end of secondment will be lost. Some form of cost sharing will be necessary in the roll out of any future programmes.

Ensuring gender equity

To continue to promote gender equity, two things are crucial in an internship intervention:

- Early recognition of the barriers that women face
- The identification of mentors.

Although MADE's gender assessment clearly identified childcare as a key barrier for women in the workplace, especially when schools are closed as was the case at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme did not have the resources or time needed to fully plan how it would overcome this barrier. Therefore, the childcare allowance for young mothers was a reactive response instead of a proactive measure. In future interventions, it will be vital to understand the needs of participating women and ensure that the programme can support them. Any future placement must be mindful of this, meaning that host firms must be engaged to work with women and find private sector-led solutions. For instance, if a business has multiple young mothers who are employed and working, the firm may wish to hire a carer to mind the children during work hours. This is a low-cost solution for the firm that ensures women can continue working after childbirth. Another solution might be flexible working hours that allow women to work while their children are at school; women might then be paid a prorated salary.

Mentors are key for women to rise within a company. In the internship scheme, mentorship should be available for all participants; this was something that MADE had initially envisaged but was unable to implement due to COVID-19 restrictions in Ghana at the time. Depending on the length of the internship, a group could be formed for female interns, where they can discuss their experiences and barriers and encourage each other. During these sessions, panellists should be invited to speak; this could include successful female lead farmers, senior managers within firms, as well as female business owners themselves. This will enable interns to see themselves in these roles and indicate a more transparent pathway for development and professional success. Mentorship is a fundamental component in addressing structural barriers and social mobility and a transformative practice for both mentees and mentors.



Merr Akaribo (MADE intern placed with Sky 3 partner firm) in the Bono East Region. This image was taken by the intern participating in this pilot.



Nuhu Bahia, a member of the Sakai farmers cluster in the Sakai Community. This image was taken by the intern participating in this pilot.

In both cases, sensitising male colleagues on the importance of women's empowerment, equitable practices in the firm and targeted mentoring for women is crucial to ensure no harm to the female participants and the success of the internship overall.

Rolling out future schemes

Now that the private sector has been exposed to the idea of internships, it should welcome future opportunities. There is a proven opportunity to catalyse on these findings and build a longer-term intervention that demonstrates to a wider group of private sector actors the benefits of hosting young graduates or graduate students. In the absence of development programmes willing to step into this space following the closure of MADE, the government could build an internship scheme into its course curriculum and meet the associated costs involved. The

extension service would benefit from graduates joining its ranks with a practical understanding of the industry it is supporting – and by helping to strengthen the farm advisory capacity of the private sector, the need to build its ranks to service government smallholder farmer development policies will be negated.

This pilot is the first step in what has the potential to be a successful long-term activity. Future programmes geared to the seasonal needs of agribusinesses offer an important route to aligning the graduate course curriculum to the needs of industry, building the capacity of enterprises through the injection of new ideas and technologies and helping to modernise the sector. Also, this would provide valuable space for the government extension service to focus on key regulatory matters and the enforcement of quality standards to protect producers and consumers.

Endnotes

- 1 Gender-Sensitive Business Case, MADE, 2019.
- 2 MADE was originally designed as a four-year programme; however, it received two extensions, making it a seven-year programme. The original four years are described as Phase 1, the first two-year extension as Phase 2 and the additional nine months (including the COVID-19 response) as Phase 3.
- 3 Concept Note: Private Sector-Led Internship Scheme for Female Students in Ghana, MADE, 2019.
- 4 See “The way forward” section of this report for recommendations from MADE on how this could be developed in the future.
- 5 Including all but one of the graduates, all of the host firms, the agricultural colleges and government extension services.

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