**Embrace Agrobusiness as Viable Alternative to Youth Unemployment**

* **NASPA Members Advised**

***By Rev. Justice Boffah Pokumensah, CSU***

The 2022 National Best Farmer, Oheneba Yaw Sarpong Siriboe who is the CEO of Siriboe Farms in the Ashanti Region has urged the National Service Personnel Association (NASPA) members to embrace agrobusiness as a viable alternative to youth unemployment confronting Ghana. He made this assertion when he addressed a youth development seminar organized by the Christian Service University in partnership with National Service Scheme (NSS) and NASPA as part of the ongoing CSU @ 50 Anniversary Celebrations.

The theme for the seminar was: Life after National Service: What Possibilities? and was meant to offer practical solutions to the problem of unemployment beyond mandatory national service. The seminar was addressed by two prominent speakers namely; Rt. Rev. Prof. Osei Safo Kantanka, a retired Methodist Bishop and a former Council Chairman of CSU and Oheneba Yaw Sarpong Siriboe, CEO of Siriboe Farms and 2022 National Best Farmer.

**Agrobusiness as Viable Option to Youth Unemployment**

In his presentation, Oheneba Yaw Siriboe argued that the problem of youth unemployment is real and pervasive in the Ghanaian society. Citing statistics from credible government and international sources, he observed that the challenge of unemployment among the youth required urgent attention not only from the government but industry and academia as well. He therefore commended the University for putting together such a programme to shape the perspectives of the NASPA members particularly as they prepare to exit the mandatory one-year national service. Based on his success story in the agrobusiness, he urged the youth to embrace sustainable agrobusiness to transform their economic circumstances. He re-echoed the popular view that University education only provides the platform for individual to “fit” into the world. Therefore, one should not be bound by the boundaries of the programme he/she read and see life from that narrow perspective.

On the contrary, he argued that irrespective of the programme one offered at the University, it could serve as a springboard to contextualize the principles to generate wealth through agribusiness. In short, any graduate can venture into agrobusiness and succeed!

In line with this thought and based on his definition of employment as “any job sustainable and satisfying”, he offered practical solutions to fresh graduates who may want to enter into agrobusiness. The advice covered how to build partnerships for start-ups, developing marketing strategies, and leveraging on theoretical knowledge for efficient management, access to grants, and government interventions such as Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ), among others. He explained that his background as a mechanical engineer has greatly impacted his agrobusiness and espoused that irrespective of one’s first-degree specialization, venturing into agrobusiness will not be a problem.

**Deal with your Mindset to succeed**

**Rt. Rev. Prof. Osei Safo-Kantanka** on his part, alluded to his academic background as an agronomist from first degree to professorial level to support the claims made by Oheneba Yaw Siriboe. He particularly supported the call to embrace agrobusiness as the benefits were enormous and sustainable. He however, challenged the youth to consciously deal with what he described as “entitlement mentality and dependency syndrome” that has work against the economic emancipation of Ghanaian youth. According to him, the sad and debilitating story has been that most youth of productive and creative age only see life through the lenses of “white collar jobs” and in the absence of it, waste away precious opportunity.

Even though he admitted that elected governments must create employment opportunities for the youth, he equally opined that the youth must create their own destinies without over relying on stop gap interventions that have been witnessed under succeeding governments in this 4th Republic. He noted, *“There has been attempts by all governments to create jobs but they have not been sustainable. It is critical that you have a vision for your life and work towards it even before you leave the university”*. Based on this conviction, he offered a three-prong biblically based success formular (founded on a character study of **Jacob**) i.e. **Strong Achievement Drive** + **Diligence** + **The Favour of God**. He urged the youth to embrace and actualize this formular to change their economic circumstances.

**Remarks by the Regional NSS Boss**

The Ashanti Regional Boss of the NSS, **Mr. Prince Kankam Boadu** expressed appreciation to the Christian Service University for such a timely initiative as they reflect NSS’s commitment of preparing the youth for successful transition from national service to the broader world. He commended the guest speakers for providing practical solutions to navigate the job market and explore entrepreneurial ventures. He ended by urging the participants to reflect on the values and the skills they have acquired to impact their personal and professional lives.

**Rationale for the Youth Development Seminars**

The Youth Development Seminar (YDS) is one of the initiatives of the current Vice Chancellor of the Christian Service University, **Professor Samuel Kofi Afrane** to address the problem of youth unemployment in Ghana. The **YDS** aims to engage continuing students (CSs), final year students (FYSs) and national service personnels (NSPs) to explore sustainable ways of addressing the challenge of unemployment.

To achieve this goal, **Achievers’ Summit** is organized once every year in partnership with the SRC to engage continuing students on exploring the opportunities that exist in the job market. Then again, **Exit Clinic** is organized for final year students to deliberate on firming up their plans as they exit the university into the world of work. The third initiative is the **NASPA OUTREACH** which is organized in partnership with *NSS Ashanti Region* to create avenue for national personnel to link the theory from the university and lessons from the field to chart to create sustainable jobs as entrepreneurs. To achieve the objectives of the YDS, experienced entrepreneurs and industry players are invited to address the participants.

**Appreciation by NASPA President**

The first female President of NASPA (Ashanti Region), Ms. Yaa Tweneboah Opoku Bandoh, expressed appreciation to the Christian Service University for such an initiative and hoped that the lessons learnt will be implemented beyond the forum. She urged her colleagues to develop positive attitudes towards such programmes so that they can equip themselves for life beyond national service. She further expressed that the world was fast changing affecting employment opportunities. As a result, she encouraged her colleagues to remain responsive to the changing dynamics and embrace opportunities that will earn them a living.