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A SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH TO ADDRESS THE COMPLEXITY OF
AGRIBUSINESS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA:
A CASE STUDY IN GHANA

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Dedicated to Mr Albert Kojo Banson, Sandra Banson and the late Cecilia Tornyedzi

Contents

Contents.....	i
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
List of Abbreviations	x
Abstract	xi
Declaration.....	xiii
Acknowledgements.....	xiv
List of Publications by the Candidate	xv
Published/under review Journal Papers (these papers form the main body of the PhD Thesis).....	xv
Peer-Reviewed Conference Publications	xv
List of Additional Publications	xvi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Importance of Agriculture in Africa	1
1.1.1 Study Area: Importance of Agriculture to Ghana’s Economy	3
<i>1.1.1.1 Interventions to Uplift the Agricultural Sector in Ghana</i>	4
1.2 Justification for the Research	4
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.3.1 Aims and Objectives of the Study	6
1.4 Theoretical Framework and Methods	6
1.5 Scope and Limitations	7
1.6 Significance to Discipline	9
1.7 Linkages of Published Papers	10
Chapter 2: Paper One: Systemic Interventions for African Agriculture	12
A Systems Thinking Approach to Address the Complexity of Agribusiness for Sustainable Development in Africa: A Case Study in Ghana.....	12
Statement of Authorship	12

Principal Author.....	13
Co-Author Contributions	13
2.1 Introduction.....	15
2.1.1 Economic Importance of Agriculture to the Economies of African Countries	15
2.1.2 Past Initiatives to Modernise the Sector	17
2.2 Systemic Approach to Sustainable Agriculture in Africa.....	19
2.3 Approach and Discussion	22
2.4 Key Variables of the Agricultural Sector in Africa	23
2.4.1 Ministry of Food Agriculture and Quality Loop	25
2.4.2 Export Loop.....	28
2.4.3 Agribusiness Loop.....	29
2.4.4 Bayesian Belief Network Modelling for Improving the Quality of Export Produce.....	30
2.5 Conclusion	33
2.6 Acknowledgements.....	34
Chapter 3: Paper Two: Systemic Structure, Conduct and Performance of Agriculture.....	35
A Systems thinking Approach to the Structure, Conduct and Performance of the Agricultural Sector in Ghana	35
Statement of Authorship	35
Principal Author.....	36
Co-Author Contributions	36
3.1 Introduction.....	37
3.2 Research Approach.....	40
3.2.1 Systems Theory	40
3.2.1.1 Evolutionary Learning Laboratory	41
3.2.2 Justification for the Methods and Techniques Used.....	43
3.3 Results and Discussions.....	44
3.3.1 Pressing Constraints and Challenges Affecting Agricultural Performance.....	44
3.3.2 Prioritisation of Systemic Intervention(s) by Stakeholders	46

3.3.3 Systemic Structure, Conduct, Performance Model.....	48
3.3.3.1 Structure	48
3.3.3.2 Conduct	50
3.3.3.3 Performance	50
3.3.4 Adaptive Conduct Mechanisms to Survive within a Failing System	50
3.3.4.1 Farmers.....	50
3.3.4.2 Traders	51
3.3.4.3 Firms	52
3.3.4.4 Government.....	52
3.4 Systemic Interventions Using the BBN	53
3.5 Conclusion	56
3.6 Acknowledgements.....	57
Chapter 4: Paper Three: System Archetypes for African Agriculture	58
Using System Archetypes to Identify Drivers and Barriers for Sustainable Agriculture in Africa: A Case Study in Ghana.....	58
Statement of Authorship	59
Principal Author.....	59
Co-Author Contributions	59
4.1 Introduction.....	60
4.1.1 Complex Agricultural System of Africa.....	61
4.1.2 Economic Importance of Agriculture in Africa.....	62
4.1.3 Behaviour over Time of the African Agricultural System	63
4.1.4 Pictorial Representation of the Complex Agricultural System.....	64
4.2 Case Study	65
4.2.1 Ghana’s agricultural web	65
4.2.2 Current Agricultural Policy in Ghana	67
4.3 Research Approach	68
4.4 Systems Archetypes	71

4.4.1	Systems Archetypes of the Horticultural Industry.....	71
4.4.1.1	Shifting the Burden.....	72
4.4.1.2	Limits to Growth.....	73
4.4.1.3	Success to the Successful.....	75
4.4.1.4	Escalation.....	76
4.4.1.5	Accidental Adversaries.....	76
4.4.2	Systems Archetypes of the Livestock Industry.....	78
4.4.2.1	Tragedy of the Commons.....	78
4.4.3	Systems Archetypes of the Fishery Industry.....	80
4.4.3.1	Limits to Growth.....	80
4.4.3.2	Success to Damage Archetype.....	82
4.5	Conclusion.....	83
4.6	Acknowledgements.....	84
Chapter 5:	Paper Four: Systemic Management to Africans Agriculture.....	85
	Systemic Management to Address the Challenges Facing the Performance of Agriculture in Africa: Case Study in Ghana†.....	85
	Statement of Authorship.....	85
	Principal Author.....	86
	Co-Author Contributions.....	86
5.1.1	Challenges in the Agricultural Domain.....	87
5.1.1.1	Need for a New Approach—from Reductionism to Systems Thinking.....	88
5.2	Methodologies for Managing the Complex Challenges of Agriculture Systems.....	90
5.2.1	Why Systems Thinking Approach?.....	90
5.2.2	Systems Thinking Approach.....	91
5.2.2.1	Causal Loop Diagrams.....	91
5.2.2.2	Evolutionary Learning Laboratory.....	93
5.3	Results and Discussion.....	97
5.3.1	Key Challenges of the Agriculture Industry of Ghana.....	97

5.3.1.1 Ministry of Food and Agriculture	98
5.3.1.2 Farmers.....	100
5.3.1.3 Actors	103
5.3.2 Bayesian Belief Network Modelling	104
5.3.2.1 Investment Decision Making	106
5.4 Conclusion	124
5.5 Acknowledgements.....	126
Chapter 6: Paper Five: The greater push model for growth and sustainability.....	127
A systems thinking approach: ‘the greater push model’ for growth and sustainability in Africa—evidence from Ghana	127
Statement of Authorship	132
Principal Author.....	132
Co-Author Contributions	132
6.1 Introduction.....	133
6.1.1 Importance of Sustainability Measurements.....	134
6.1.2 Why Systems Thinking?	136
6.1.3 Research Approach and Methodology.....	137
6.2 Results and Discussions.....	143
6.2.1 Causal Loop Diagram and the ‘Big Push’ Model.....	143
6.2.2 Systemic Development—The ‘Greater Push’ Model	147
6.2.3 Indicators for Sustainability.....	149
6.2.4 Monitoring and Evaluations.....	151
6.3 Conclusion	153
Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations	155
Consolidated List of References.....	160

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Key variables of the agricultural sector of Africa	24
Table 2.2: Outcome of possible strategies of Figure 2.9	33
Table 3.1: Intervention by stakeholders to agricultural constraints	46
Table 4.1: Key challenges and policies of Ghana’s agriculture	69
Table 5.1: Challenges impeding agricultural development by MOFA.....	100
Table 5.2: Farmers’ major challenges impeding agriculture sustainability.....	101
Table 5.3: Constraints faced by various agricultural actors	103
Table 5.4: Explanations of variables in Figure 5.4a BBN	108
Table 5.5: Explanations of some key variables in Figure 5.5a BBN.....	114
Table 5.6: Explanations of some key variables in Figure 5.6a BBN.....	121
Table 6.1: Bellagio principles for assessment and the BBN model similarities.....	141

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Photosynthesis loop.....	21
Figure 2.2: Basis of the systemic approach for managing complex issues (adapted from Bosch et al. 2013)	22
Figure 2.3: Africa’s agribusiness industry loop.....	25
Figure 2.4: MOFA and quality loop	26
Figure 2.5: Export loop.....	28
Figure 2.6: Agribusiness loop.....	29
Figure 2.7: BBN modelling for quality of export produce	31
Figure 2.8: Sub-Saharan share of agricultural exports 1970–2001 (source: Diao & Hazell 2004)	31
Figure 2.9: BBN simulated model of improving quality	32
Figure 3.1: Shifts in theoretical perspectives of agricultural innovation	39
Figure 3.2: Elements of the paradigm: a systemic approach (adapted from Bosch et al. 2013)	42
Figure 3.3: Major challenges encountered by large- and small-scale farmers (%) (from data)	45
Figure 3.4: Systemic SCP model	49
Figure 3.5: Bayesian networks showing factors determining business survival and growth (without intervention)	54
Figure 3.6: Bayesian networks showing factors determining business survival and growth (with intervention)	55
Figure 4.1: Agricultural systems web of Africa	62
Figure 4.2: Behaviour over time of some key agricultural variables in the system	64
Figure 4.3: Pictorial agricultural systems	65
Figure 4.4: Feedback learning laboratory (adopted from Bosch et al. 2013).....	68
Figure 4.5: Horticultural system	72
Figure 4.6: Shifting the burden systems archetype.....	73
Figure 4.7: Limits to growth systems archetype.....	74

Figure 4.8: Success to the successful systems archetype	75
Figure 4.9: Escalation systems archetype	76
Figure 4.10: Accidental adversaries systems archetype	77
Figure 4.11: Livestock system.....	79
Figure 4.12: Tragedy of the commons systems archetype	79
Figure 4.13: Fishery system.....	81
Figure 4.14: Limits to growth systems archetype.....	81
Figure 4.15: Success to damage systems archetype	82
Figure 5.1: New business development model	92
Figure 5.2: Steps in an evolutionary learning laboratory for managing complex challenges (adapted from Bosch et al. 2013).....	93
Figure 5.3: CLD of the agricultural industry of Ghana—demonstrating factors influencing system output and sustainability	98
Figure 5.3a: CLD of MOFA	99
Figure 5.3b: CLD of farmers	102
Figure 5.3c: CLD of actors	104
Figure 5.4a: BBN modelling for increasing access to extension/veterinary service (current situation)	107
Figure 5.4b: BBN modelling for increasing access to extension/veterinary service (with intervention: recruit extension agents).....	107
Figure 5.4c: BBN modelling for increasing access to extension/veterinary service (with intervention: recruit extension agents and making logistics and mobilities availability).....	110
Figure 5.4d: BBN modelling for increasing access to extension/veterinary service (with intervention: recruit extension agents, improving research-extension agents’ linkages and creating access roads to farming field)	111
Figure 5.5a: BBN modelling for increasing agricultural productivity (current situation).....	113
Figure 5.5b: BBN modelling for increasing agricultural productivity (with intervention: dam construction)	115

Figure 5.5c: BBN modelling for increasing agricultural productivity (with intervention: construct access roads).....	116
Figure 5.5d: BBN modelling for increasing agricultural productivity (with interventions: construct access roads and making farm implement available).....	117
Figure 5.5e: BBN modelling for increasing agricultural productivity (with interventions: construct access roads, making farm implement available and dam construction)	118
Figure 5.5f: BBN modelling for increasing agricultural productivity (with interventions: construct access roads, making farm implement available, dam construction and input subsidy).....	119
Figure 5.6a: BBN modelling for enabling environment to induce entrepreneurship (current situation).....	120
Figure 5.6b: BBN modelling for enabling environment to induce entrepreneurship (with intervention: accessible roads).....	122
Figure 5.6c: BBN modelling for enabling environment to induce entrepreneurship (with intervention: accessible roads and research and development)	122
Figure 5.6d: BBN modelling for enabling environment to induce entrepreneurship (with intervention: accessible roads, research and development and new market competitive markets).....	123
Figure 6.1: ELLab: the basis of the systemic approach for managing complex issues	139
Figure 6.2: Competitive development model	144
Figure 6.3: ‘Big Push’ model.....	146
Figure 6.4: ‘Greater Push’ model. Adapted from the ‘Big Push’ model	148
Figure 6.6: Bayesian network showing the agricultural development indicator system related to community wellbeing in Ghana	152

List of Abbreviations

AAGDS	Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Development Strategy
AGRA	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
BBN	Bayesian belief network
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Plan
CBBR	Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve
CLD	causal loop diagrams
CPT	Conditional Probability Table
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
ECOWAP	Economic Community of West African States Agricultural Policy
ELLab	Evolutionary Learning Laboratory
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FASDEP	Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
MESTI	Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation
MOFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	non-government organisations
NTFP	non-timber forest products
PSIA	poverty and social impact analysis
R&D	research and development
SCP	structure, conduct and performance
RQs	research questions
US	United States

Abstract

African countries have comparative advantages in the production and export of primary commodities; however, they face many sustainability challenges in the agricultural sector. Since the democratisation of many African countries—notably Ghana—a number of interventions, costing billions of dollars, have been implemented to overcome the challenges facing the agricultural industry, but with little success. The agricultural industry is characterised by complex challenges such as famine, food insecurity, poor soil and quality standards, political instability, inappropriate agricultural practices, and the depletion of natural resources. These challenges have worsened the plight of African farmers. The increasingly complex nature of the agricultural industry in Africa has led to an urgent need for the use of a systemic rather than traditional approach to solve agricultural problems.

Capacity building using a systems thinking approach and the concept of an Evolutionary Learning Laboratory during a series of stakeholder workshops in Ghana, has had a remarkable effect on the ability of the agricultural industry to evolve, improve and increase its efficacy. Causal Loop and Bayesian Belief Network (BBN) modelling were used to develop systems models to determine the components and interactions between the policy and the social, environmental and economic dimensions of the industry. Insights were made into potential system behaviours and leverage points for the systemic interventions required for sustainable agricultural development.

The results reveal that the behaviour over time of agricultural productivity is declining, although new agricultural lands are being exploited, leading to environmental degradation. System archetypes as diagnostic tools have contributed to understanding the cause of a fix ‘now’, which gives rise to a much bigger problem to fix ‘later’. The results illustrate how the structure, conduct and performance elements of the agricultural industry interact together to influence the survival and growth of the sector. The study identifies that stakeholders adopt several strategies to survive and compete, leading to overexploitation of the ecosystem.

Results from the BBN models indicate that the implementation of systemically determined interventions, policies and strategies could result in the chance of raising ‘agricultural productivity’ as high as 92.2% from 57.5%, and it might be plausible to reduce poverty levels from 44.9% to 10.0%. This would also lead to a significant increase in farmers’ yields and profits. These BBNs are used for scenario testing to determine the potential outcomes of different systemic interventions by observing what happens to the system as a whole when a particular intervention/strategy or combination of interventions/strategies is implemented—that is, before any time or money is invested in implementation.

This approach provides clarity on dealing with complex sustainability challenges and should gradually replace the reductionist approach (e.g., short-term quick fixes and treating the symptoms) in dealing with challenges and developing policies. The systems models will help governments to anticipate the long-term consequences of their decisions and actions, as well as help to avoid significant unintended consequences of policies and strategies such as ‘silo mentality’ and ‘organisational myopia’.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without prior approval of the University of Adelaide and, where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*. The author acknowledges that copyright of published works contained within this thesis resides with the copyright holder(s) of those works. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

I hereby certify that this thesis is submitted in the form of a series of published papers of which I am the main author. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement from each co-author, and endorsed by the Faculty Assistant Dean (Research Training), attesting to my contribution towards the multi-authored publications.

Signed:

Date: 9th September 2016

(Kwamina Ewur Banson)

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List of Publications by the Candidate

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3. **Banson, KE**, Nguyen, NC & Bosch, OJH 2016, 'Using system archetypes to identify drivers and barriers for sustainable agriculture in Africa: a case study in Ghana', *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 79–99. doi:10.1002/sres.2300.
4. **Banson, KE**, Nguyen, NC & Bosch, OJH 2015, 'Systemic management to address the challenges facing the performance of agriculture in Africa: case study in Ghana', *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*. vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 544–574. doi:10.1002/sres.2372.
5. **Banson, KE**, Nguyen, NC & Bosch, OJ 2015, 'A systems thinking approach: “the greater push model” for growth and sustainability in Africa: evidence from Ghana', *International Journal of Markets and Business Systems*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 289–313.

Peer-Reviewed Conference Publications

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2. **Banson, KE**, Nguyen, NC & Bosch, OJH 2015, 'Systemic structure, conduct and performance of the agricultural industry in Africa: evidence from Ghana', proceedings of the 59th Annual Meeting of the International Society for Systems Sciences, 2–7 August, Berlin, Germany,
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3. **Banson, KE**, Nguyen, NC & Bosch, OJH 2014, ‘Systemic intervention to tackle the constraints and challenges facing stakeholders and the performance of the agricultural sector in Ghana’, paper presented at the 9th Annual System of Systems Engineering Conference, 9–13 June, Adelaide, SA.
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5. **Bosch, OJH**, Nguyen, NC, Ha, TM & Banson, KE 2015, ‘Using a systemic approach to improve the quality of life for women in small-scale agriculture: empirical evidence from Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa’, proceedings of the Business Systems Laboratory 3rd International Symposium ‘Advances in Business Management. Towards Systemic Approach’. January 21-23, 2015, Perugia

List of Additional Publications

1. **Banson, KE**, Bosch, OJH & Nguyen, NC 2015, ‘A systemic intervention to assess resource impact on the quality of life among women farmers in developing countries: evidence from Ghana’, *Academia Journal of Agricultural Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 15–22. doi:10.15413/ajar.2015.0108.
2. Nguyen, NC, Bosch, OJH, Ong, FY, Seah, JS, Succu, A, Nguyen, TV & **Banson, KE** 2015, ‘A systemic approach to understand smartphone usage in Singapore’, *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 360–380. doi:10.1002/sres.2348.
3. Nguyen, NC, Bosch, OJ, **Banson, KE**, Ting, OLJ, Xuan, JG, Hui, MS & Lim, Z 2015, ‘A systems thinking approach to address the complex issue of plastic surgery in South Korea’, *International Journal of Markets and Business Systems*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 108–135.
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