

Moving towards HungerFREE Ghana by 2015

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Food is a basic Right: Kick Hunger out of Ghana

According to the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), in 1996, there were 796 million hungry people in the world and this figure rose to 815 million in 2002, and 854 million in 2006. This indicates an increase in the number of hungry people in the world of plenty. There are currently about 869 million people in the world who suffer chronically from hunger, and it is estimated that most of this number live in developing countries like Ghana. These figures show that the progress to reduce hunger made in the 1990s has been eroded.

Ghana’s assessment of progress made towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal One indicates that while achieving 50% reduction in extreme poverty by 2015 was assessed as *probable* and the supportive environment *strong*, reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015 was assessed as *unlikely* and the supportive environment *fair* confirm that hunger would not be reduced by 2015. The assessments showed that while incomes would potentially improve, many people would still be suffering from hunger in 2015.

Table 1: Ghana’s Progress towards Achieving the MDGs

Goals	Will goal be reached?	State of supportive environment
<i>Extreme Poverty and hunger</i>		
Halve the proportion of people below the national poverty line by 2015	Probably Potentially Unlikely Lack of data	Strong Fair Weak but improving Weak
Halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger (by 2015)	Probably Potentially Unlikely Lack of data	Strong Fair Weak but improving Weak

Source: (GPRS II, 2005; pg 8).

Ghana government’s assessment of the hunger situation in the country is also confirmed in ActionAid Ghana’s report on “Food for thought: hungry for solutions”. ActionAid Ghana (AAG) is a local NGO that works with the poor and vulnerable in deprived communities. As part of its programmes on Right to Food, AAG work with the aim of ensuring food and livelihoods security for underprivileged Ghanaians, especially

those in the rural areas. At the midpoints between the World Food Summit of 1996, and Millennium Summit of 2000, and the target date of 2015 to reduce hunger in the world, AAG assessed the food security situation of the poor and vulnerable in the country. Districts and communities in six out of the ten regions of Ghana were selected for the study and these were Greater Accra; Brong Ahafo; Central; Upper East; Upper West and Northern region including the Eastern Corridor¹. It was realised that food insecurity and hunger were increasing in the rural areas especially among farmers. Agriculture (crop farming, animal rearing, and fishing) were the main economic activities in the communities of all regions even though there was differences in crops cultivated or type of fishing done in different ethnic areas. Both men and women engaged in farming and fishing. There was however some gender variation in terms of the types of crops predominantly cultivated (especially as cash crops) or types of animals reared. The type of fishing done varied for the ecological zones. Common challenges faced by farmers were:

- Lack of extension services leading to low productivity
- High cost of agricultural inputs leading to high production cost
- Limited market access to sell produce & low prices of farm produce
- Out migration of youthful labour force
- Lack of/Limited land area for cultivation
- Environmental degradation (& dependency on weather)
- Lack of credit/capital or other forms of support for expansion
- Poor infrastructure
- Unsupportive government policies to promote small scale farming

The linkages between poverty, hunger and food insecurity were made clear, from community members' definition of hunger, its causes and outcomes. *Hunger is seen not only from the point of absence of food (sufficiency and quality), but also from the point of a socio-psychological effect on the person, family and community.*

3.1. Hunger is: not having enough food throughout the year

- It is a prolonged period of having no food in the family; not being able to afford food even when it is available in local markets;
- Having to eat food seen as degrading to humanity; or eating food reserved for “the poor”.
- A period of hardship and suffering; depression and state of hopelessness.

¹ North East is the AAG Programme area within the Eastern Corridor districts of Northern Region of Ghana (Saboba, Chereponi, Nanumba North and South, Zabzugu/Tatale, Yendi, Bunkpurugu-Yonyoo, West and East Mamprusi districts).

3.2. Various factors *cause hunger*. From natural ecological and socio-cultural factors to removal of subsidies from agricultural inputs and unsupportive government policies to promote agriculture development especially, small scale farming

3.3. Manifestations of hunger

The manifestations of hunger go beyond the immediate signs of what the person looks like. They include: stunted growth in children; children not willing to go to school; “dry household – no food even on the floor for fowls and ants”; children not playing – “sad, quiet household, not lively children”; and persistent quarrels in household (husband, wife, children), sometimes leading to breakdown of marriages

3.4. Persons most affected by Hunger

Children are the most affected, followed by women who most invariably deny themselves food in favour of their families.

3.5. Periods when hunger is felt most

Severity, extent and effects of hunger are unevenly experienced in the communities depending on geographic location, social group and regularity of rains, among others. In the Northern Regions, the period is from December through to May, whereas in the Southern Regions, communities experience major hunger from April to June.

3.6. Coping with hunger: Strategies

Strategies communities employ to cope with hunger were revealing. These include use of dry season gardens in localities with irrigation facilities; sale of livestock, hunting; charcoal burning and borrowing from relatives/neighbours, using farms as collateral/mortgage and out migration of active labour force.

3.7. Constraints to food security

Constraints to food security are attributable to both national and international practices and policies, namely, Government’s over-emphasis on macroeconomic development and unfair international trade and clout which undermine support for small holder agriculture in Ghana.

Right to Food

The right to adequate food has been recognised and affirmed in several instruments among which are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Ghana ratified the ICESCR in 2000. Therefore, it is under obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the rights provided for in that ICESCR, including the right to adequate food. Ghana ratified the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights in January 1989, and also signed on to

the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, all of which protect the right to food. Therefore Ghana must take immediate and urgent steps to ensure that “*the fundamental right to freedom from hunger and malnutrition*” is achieved. It is sad to note that food crop farmers are the poorest group of people in the country even though they produce the bulk of food consumed. Consequently, it is difficult for such producers to have enough livelihood sources to meet basic needs like food. The high imports in Ghana have negatively affected the levels and stability of incomes realized from domestic food production. The rather low incomes realized by local food crop farmers imply that they also lack the purchasing power to access food all year round. Thus, their right to food is being infringed upon. The government recognises that “the majority of Ghana’s population continues to depend upon farming activities for their livelihood, and typically they cultivate small acreages”. It also acknowledges “it stands to reason therefore that no significant progress can be made in raising the average real incomes of Ghanaians as a whole without significant improvements in the productivity of the small-scale farmer and farm labourer”(GPRS II, 2005). However, in designing policies and strategies to achieve a reduction on poverty and hunger especially among poor agricultural producers in rural areas, focus is on export-led agriculture as a private competitive sector with little involvement of small scale farmers who are in majority and who also produce the bulk of the food consumed in the country. Trade and investment liberalization have constituted the core areas of Ghana’s policy reform during the past two decades including the IMF/WB conditionalities under Structural Adjustment Programme; and the National trade and agricultural policies.

Limited Socio-Economic Development

The FAO (2005) study on Food Insecurity in the World clearly showed that eradicating extreme poverty and hunger has the following implications and ramifications for all governments:

- Without rapid progress in reducing hunger, achieving all the other MDGs will be difficult, if not impossible;
- The fight to eliminate hunger and reach the other MDGs will be won or lost in the rural areas where the vast majority of the world’s hungry people live;
- Economic growth alone in the absence of specific measures to combat hunger, may leave large numbers of hungry people behind for a long time – particularly in rural areas;
- Economic growth has a far greater impact when it occurs in rural areas;
- Growth in rural areas and in the agricultural sector has a greater impact on reducing poverty than urban and industrial growth

Statistics available in Ghana indicate that poverty is highest in the three northern regions, and there is differential inequality in income-earning prospects for men and women, with many women drawing lower remuneration than men. Poverty is also higher in the rural areas than in the urban centres. According to GLSS 4 and GSS 2007, food crop farmers are also the poorest group in the country. Thus, a female food

crop farmer, residing in a rural area of any of the three northern regions of the country, would statistically almost certainly be in extremely poverty.

Divergence of Policy and Practice

According to ISSER report (2007), although the constraints to agricultural transformation are common to all the agro-ecological zones, there are indications that the savannah or 3 northern regions tend to be the most affected and this accounts for the higher incidence of poverty in those areas. There have been attempts by the government to bring the poor and excluded groups onto the development agenda but little progress is made, and the desired impact has not been made. As a result, the people in the northern sector of the country remain poor and face constant food insecurity.

Land is an important productive resource that has great potential for improving farm and other economic and non-economic productivity but women's access to and control over land is dwindling in the country. According to information available from GLSS, in 1998/99 women headed agricultural households owned slightly more land compared to households headed by men in 2005/6, only a third of households headed by women owned land compared to 47% of households headed by men. Indicating a reversal has taken place in favour of men. Meanwhile the surveys also reported that overall farming household ownership of land has slightly increased during the period from 40% in 1988/99 to 43% in 2005/06.

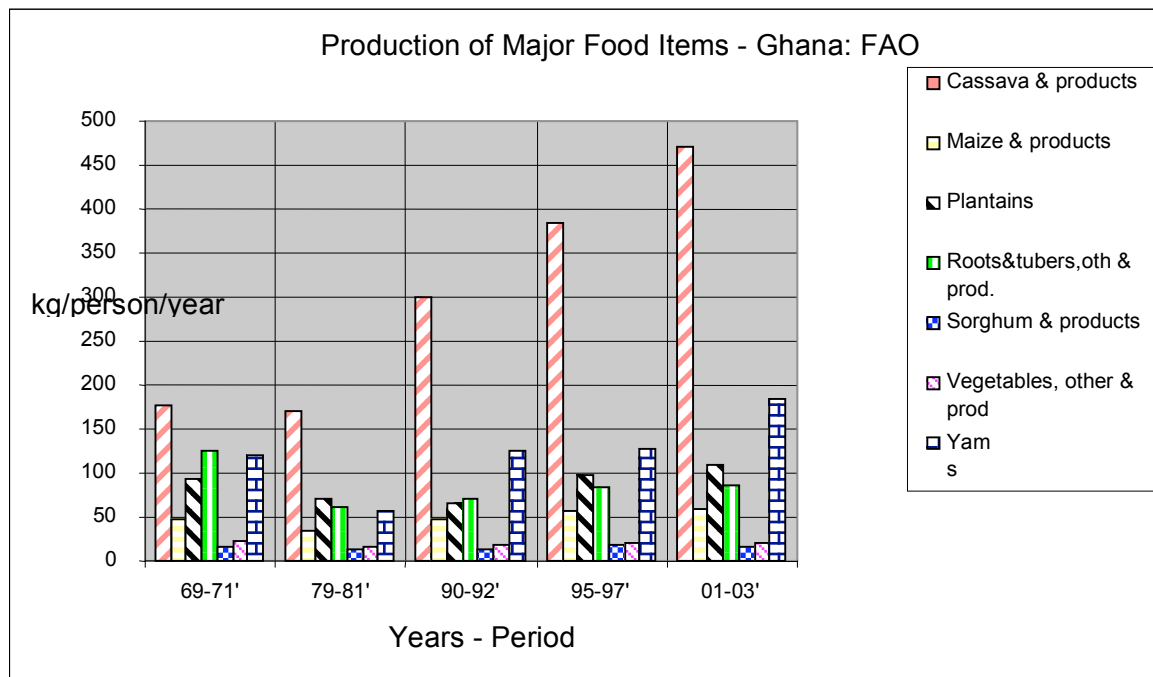
During the first 5 years since the MDGs were ratified there have been no concrete policies, strategies or actions to address poverty and hunger focusing on quantitative targets of achievement. The main thrust of government's policy initiatives under the GPRS I were directed at maintaining macroeconomic stability. Emphasis was placed on fiscal and monetary policies aimed at reducing inflation, reducing interest rates maintaining stable exchange rates, and maintaining a fiscally sustainable debt regime (GPRS II, 2005; pg 2). Also, during this period emphasis was placed on sectoral level interventions through the Agricultural Services Sub-sector Investment Project (AgSSIP). Most strategies were directed at human resource development of staff of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), and institutional support, with very little direct support to farmers for increased productivity and lowering hunger in the deprived areas of the country especially the rural communities where the poor reside.

Whereas hunger and food insecurity are critical issues at individual smallholder family level, the government has in the main pursued a policy of promoting private sector investment referred to as "*private sector competitiveness in the agricultural sector in the medium term and in the industrial and other sectors over a long term*" (GPRS II, 2005; pg xxiii). To this end the "institutional" and "technical" constraints informing the policy interventions of government do not seem to have any direct linkage with promoting eradication of poverty and hunger.

Which Way Out?

A way of analysing the trend towards elimination of hunger is through observing the change in major food crop production levels. Figure 1 presents the results from data of FAO country surveys. The figure shows that there has not been a significant increase in production levels of most of the staple food crops over the period.

Fig. 1 Production of Major Food Items in Ghana: FAO statistics



Source: FAO statistics

The production of the main food items is given per person and is the amount produced, in terms of quantity, for each individual in the total population. Figures are shown for major staple food items only as show in figure 1.

Cassava and cassava products have realised remarkable increase over the period. Unfortunately cassava is not the major food crop for the large sector of the Ghanaian population – especially amongst the large urban population, and cereal-based diet cultures. The increase in cassava cultivation has also been realised mainly through the drive to produce cassava for export starch under the PSI. Yams follow in terms of increase in production, and more people would eat yam as a choice because it is not seen as an “inferior or low class food”. Notwithstanding this, there is evidence that most of the increase in yam production is for export. This has made yam still an expensive food item, resulting in not significant increase in consumption rates,

especially amongst the large urban market. For the other food crops and items there has been very little increase over the data period.

From the community discussions and information available, rural small scale farmers are hungrier than before because they are not getting the needed support for production. The local market too is flooded with cheap subsidized agricultural produce that is competing with locally produced food items that they depend on for both their food and livelihood security. Consequently, they are driven out of employment, and poverty is thus increased in their communities. Government has withdrawn all forms of support for the small scale producers, with no protection and has allowed the local markets to be flooded through their policies. Therefore the government is not living up to its obligation by respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to food of rural small scale farmers.

Data available shows that whereas the support of government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) for food production and thus food security and eradication of hunger has been showing little progress. The efforts of NGOs have shown remarkable progress. The communities visited have benefited from the following interventions, which were found to be contributing to food security and reducing hunger in areas surveyed:

- *Provision of donkey carts and donkeys for use in haulage and farm work*
- *Dams and dug-outs, and pumps for irrigation*
- *Grain banking for storage of community grains and cereals*
- *Micro-credit schemes*
- *Support for agro-processing and small scale businesses of women*

Recommendations for Action and Change

To rapidly reduce hunger and poverty by 2015, Government of Ghana must act to:

- 1) Have the right policies that will support rural small scale farmers and regulate importation of cheap subsidised agricultural produce coming into the country;
- 2) Promote food security through support for agriculture and small scale farmers. These can be done by removing the bottlenecks of inertia at the field level of the MDAs engaged in extension services and other input service delivery to smallholder farmers;

- 3) Have strategies to be adopted to re-orient to the smallholder rather than the current focus on the large scale commercial/ export farmers.

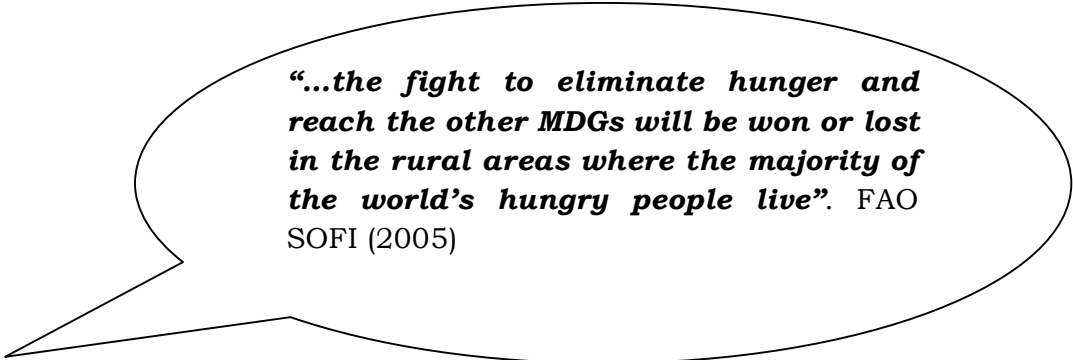
The country needs to re-strategise, to address the following, among others:

- Focus on hunger hotspots
- Promote sustainable agric growth and rural development to target small scale producers esp. women:
 - the technological and information gaps of smallholder farming systems;
 - direct research at innovative technologies for smallholder agricultural production systems;
 - Improve rural infrastructure: roads and markets;
 - support women in accessing productive resources including land;
 - Provide appropriate safety net programmes for the poor;
- Government must increase tariff or impose levies on imported food items and the funds acquired through this means be used to support local farmers
- ensure trade agreements promote food security and rural development agenda,
- protect local food industries and local farmers;
- Make it mandatory for state institutions to use only domestically produced food items
- Plan for emergencies - natural and man-made disasters
- Coordinate sector ministries and harmonise their policies: Agriculture, Trade, Finance and Local Government etc
- Stock pile grains and cereals for the lean season and emergency
- Monitoring team (composed of government officials, Civil society including farmers, NGOs, TUC, human right activists etc) to monitor progress made in reducing hunger and
- Have bill of rights to include Right to Food.

Conclusion

Hunger is a symptom of poverty. The majority of the poor are rural farmers, who obtain the bulk of their livelihood from staple food production. Targeting them will be the sure way of decreasing poverty substantially and ensuring a steady elimination of hunger in the country.

Poverty in Ghana continues to be disproportionately a rural phenomenon, with 86% of the total population living below the poverty line residing in rural areas (GSS 2007).



“...the fight to eliminate hunger and reach the other MDGs will be won or lost in the rural areas where the majority of the world’s hungry people live”. FAO SOFI (2005)

Government must therefore act NOW to eradicate poverty and hunger in the rural communities of Ghana by living up to its obligations by respecting, protecting and fulfilling the Right to Food!