

Maria Chickering
North Scott High School
Eldridge, IA

Gaining Food Security In Ghana: An Important Step Towards Complete Independence

Introduction to Ghana and Its Subsistence Farmers

March 6, 1957, Ghana declared its independence from Great Britain. Ghana was one of the first countries in Africa to accomplish this monumental feat (Ghana). With the role model of Ghana, other African countries began their bids for independence. By 1993, all fifty-three African countries were sovereign. This leadership and desire for self-reliance is also evident in the people of Ghana. From the fierce resistance the Government met from Ghanaian market women when they attempted to regulate market prices, to the confidence and friendliness visitors to Ghana are met with while visiting the people of show they Ghana are proud of their freedom. It is only natural for them to also desire food independence. If Ghana were to become completely self-reliant, the leadership and pride they would exhibit would lead other African countries to gain their own food security, contributing greatly to stabilization of the food problems in Africa, and hopefully the economic and social conflicts which plague Africa.

An effective way to accomplish the goal of self-sufficiency is to educate the subsistence farmers living in Ghana. Fifty-six percent of Ghana's population is employed in agriculture, and thirty-seven percent of its GDP is reliant on agriculture (CIA). If the majority of subsistence farmers are uneducated, Ghana is taking a risk in relying on rather primitive farming methods to produce yields that make up a substantial portion of their gross domestic product. If these farmers were shown how to use technology and were given the results of yield and research studies they could increase their productivity, which would lead to both food stability and economic stability.

The typical Ghanaian subsistence farm consists of four individuals: mother, father, son and daughter (Cotton). After nine years of school, our Ghanaian family's son and daughter would be expected to stay at home to help with farming or to start their own family. On their subsistence farm, meals consist of rice, meat, tomatoes, breads, eggs and the popular Fufu, or yam. This family makes twenty-five dollars every month, with which they buy the very basic necessities of life (Cotton).

Our family's farm would be one to two acres in size. Grown on it would be maize, sorghum, onions, tomatoes, soya beans, cereal grains, and rice. They would use farming technologies including intercropping, systematic row arrangements, and cultivation of sole groundnuts followed by planting maize or sorghum. These attempts to wisely use their land help farmers produce relatively larger yields, but are rather primitive techniques (Diehl).

For cacao farmers in Ghana, the Cacao Marketing Board sets a uniform price for beans, but for all other crops Ghana has no enforced market prices. Marketing in Ghana is not highly enforced because of past experiences the Ghanaian Government has faced. Under the rule of President Jerry Rawlings, the Government decided to regulate the prices of the food markets where Ghanaian women sell their crops. This regulation was met with much resistance; the Makola market women protested, and when the women would not adhere to the regulations, Rawlings ordered the market destroyed. The market women refused to let their market being bulldozed deter them from selling their goods; they returned to the market and sold in the ruins. Rawlings was given no choice but to repeal the regulations (Ghana). This showed the Government that Ghanaians don't want to be dictated to by the Government. Instead, it would be more effective to employ the adage, "If you give a man a fish he will eat for a day, but if you teach a man to

fish he will eat for a lifetime.” If the Government would educate and assist the Ghanaian people on how to choose fair market prices or how to use updated farming practices, the people would be able to use their knowledge to improve their existence.

The Challenges and Solutions

The major barriers facing our typical Ghanaian subsistence family in raising their productivity includes their lack of labor to work on the farm, lack of money, rudimentary education, and the soil quality on their farm (Diehl). Ghanaian subsistence farms only have family members available to work on the farms. Frequently the men are out hunting and the women are left at home to do the farming. Only recently has this been acknowledged and women have been recognized for their efforts. Ghanaian farmers do not have any surplus money to purchase expensive high tech seeds, fertilizers, or farm implements. This puts farmers at a disadvantage in utilizing new technologies. With very little education, most subsistence farmers are unable to read or comprehend research reports and yield studies. Soil in Ghana is fragile and erodes very easily. Therefore, farmers must consciously protect their soil or it will erode. In southern Ghana the soil is tropical and very fine and in northern Ghana it is very dry. This is quite a challenge to the agricultural productivity of Ghana.

There are many methods that Ghana could employ to increase agricultural productivity so they could become a self-sufficient nation. As mentioned previously, the people of this nation do not like to be dictated too heavily by their Government. It would be effective to educate subsistence farmers. Ghanaian farmers need to increase and supplement their education with farming technologies as well as results from agriculture yield and sustainability research. If they were also provided with access and support to implement the methods learned, agricultural productivity on family farms would substantially increase. This would allow the farmers to understand how to achieve higher yields, use their land more efficiently, and they would be in control of their destiny. Instead of just handing them information, it would also be necessary to show them how to use this education and study results on their personal farms.

Without education, the lands used by subsistence farmers are not being used to their full capability. Farmers implement the technologies of which they know, but more advanced technologies that would greatly increase productivity are not known to most subsistence farmers. The land has the ability to produce higher yields, but as Dr. Norman Borlaug stated, “The potential is there, but you can’t eat potential.” If farmers are educated on how they can use their lands to increase their productivity, there will be higher yields resulting in food for their families to eat and additional food to sell at market. This education will not only contribute to a lowered famine and poverty rate, but also to a better economics for the whole country.

Taking Action To Improve Productivity

Attempts have been made, without sufficient success, to teach farmers updated farming practices.

“Several non-Governmental organizations offer training and financial support to assist farmers, but adoption has not been as widespread as hoped. Farmers seem to adopt [new farming practices] only when development agencies undertake significant efforts in training, extension, and repeated follow up.” (Diehl)

These non-Government led programs are not easily accessible to the average Ghanaian subsistence farmer. Many times this is because farm families do not have any money to invest in new technologies. With current economic struggles, money is scarcer than before, and farmers are reluctant to spend it on foreign technologies. However, it is now more important than ever to educate farmers so they can assure they are using their money as wisely as possible.

Farming families are faced with many challenges when it comes to increasing productivity of their land. Typical farming families produce enough food to feed themselves with little or no excess left to sell at market; so selling produce at market is not a steady source of income. The fragile Ghanaian soil is difficult to cultivate and easily harmed, though farmers try not to cause damage. Women, rural poor, and developing countries are all educationally disadvantaged. Women have just recently been acknowledged as equals with men in farming, and are still fighting to be recognized as legitimate farmers. Women, if educated, would be able to take control of their farms if they are now incapable. The poor and developing countries rarely have the resources to educate their farmers, and many times have other pressing issues to deal with before worrying about the education of their subsistence farmers. Farmers who only have small parcels of land would have the ability to increase their yields if they received knowledge of how to increase productivity.

Trends regarding education of farmers have remained the same for several years. Attempts to begin educating subsistence farmers have been unsuccessful. One can measure the success of educating farmers by assessing the number of new and educated farming practices being implemented in Ghana. These trends indicate the situation is not improving. Because of this lack of change the situation in Ghana is getting worse. With the recent economic downturn, subsistence farmers cannot buy as many seeds. If these same farmers could get greater yield per acre, perhaps they could sell their excess product at market and have more money to purchase seeds and home essentials.

Education would help Ghanaian farmers and their families economically, and would also positively affect the environment. Through the use of updated, informed and educated farming methods on their subsistence farm, our Ghanaian family would be able to preserve the soil and make educated decisions concerning their farm. In Africa, the environmental situation is dire, effects of global warming threaten to increase temperatures and raise sea levels. Perhaps the scariest threat is reduced rainfall. Ghana already is a country prone to drought, and if rainfall continues to decrease, agriculture in Ghana could become completely impossible without major financial aid.

Increased agricultural productivity of small-scale subsistence families would encourage more and more families to become educated and stay up to date on farming practices. This would cause education to become more supported within the network of small-scale farmers, and increased support would lead more farmers to utilize education to increase their yields. If enough of Ghana's farmers increase their yields, the country itself may be able to become completely self-sufficient and eventually be able to export crops.

How to Increase Productivity

Education of farmers would need to begin with a Ghanaian Government or non-Government sponsored program specifically aimed at aiding subsistence farmers. This program would have to be relevant and easily accessible and if it proved to be an effective program, word about it would spread with attendance and acceptance increasing. Farmers who attended would be able to apply the newly learned techniques to produce higher yields, directly improving their family's and their country's food security. Programs such as the US led Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) have already implemented programs aimed directly at subsistence farmers.

“In Ghana, we are witnessing the future of development assistance through the transparent, country-led, results-driven work of MCC, which is already training farmers to strengthen food security, providing credit to farmers to grow their businesses, rehabilitating roads to help farmers access markets, and building schools to educate the next generation.” (Grant With Ghana)

ActionAid is also active in Ghana, providing subsistence farmers with productive resources, extension programs, and ways to get their excess crops to markets (ActionAid). If programs like these would become widespread and accepted throughout the country, Ghana would see a substantial increase in agricultural productivity.

It would be necessary for loans to be available for Ghanaian subsistence farmers. These farmers do not have any extra money to invest in technology, but if they could secure small loans they could implement new technologies. If microcredit, or small loans that are reimbursable after a year, would be extended to subsistence farmers, they could purchase fertilizers, plant higher yielding seeds, and use results from yield studies to use their land to its full potential (Microcredit).

Not only would the Ghanaian Government need to be supportive of education, but rural communities would also have to accept the programs. It would be directly beneficial to the whole community if subsistence farmers were taught new farming methods based on data from past research. The Government and other organizations should willingly sponsor these educational programs because they would be improving the status of people in their country. Additionally they would be helping the environment by informing farmers on sustainable techniques that do not harm the fragile Ghanaian soil. The many economic benefits of educating farmers, from the farmers themselves to the whole country, would also encourage organizations and the Government to play an active role in supporting the education of subsistence farmers.

A success story and possible model for Ghana to follow would be the actions of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Wangari Maathai, who received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in Africa helping women subsistence farmers plant banana trees to supplement their income and improve the environment. A native Kenyan, she knew the hardships faced by African women, and was determined to help others through showing them how to help themselves (Wangari). If a Ghanaian individual would take initiative such as Ms. Maathai took, they would have a role model to look up to and from which to learn. Farmers are more likely to use information they are taught from a person they can relate to than a person who came from a privileged background.

Conclusion

In this current time of crises and changes, it is more important than ever to have a stable agriculture system implemented in countries. Ghana could greatly improve their agricultural productivity through the education of small-scale subsistence farmers. If these Ghanaian farmers were exposed to results from crop and yield studies and were shown how to use advanced farming techniques, they could use their knowledge on their farms. However, the farmers would need assistance.

It would be necessary for small loans to be extended to these farmers so they could purchase more expensive seeds or equipment. The Ghanaian Government would have to be supportive of these educational programs, as would non-profit aid organizations, and rural communities. Support of programs would be essential to their success, if they were not working as well as expected, efforts should be made to improve them. It would take hard work and determination to implement these programs throughout the entire country.

However if these programs were successful, Ghana would be rewarded. The small farmers would be able to adequately feed their families on their crops, and excess product could be sold at market. With this money Ghanaian subsistence farmers could purchase food and other essential items. The now meager income of Ghanaian subsistence farmers has the potential to be raised through the use of updated farming practices. Surplus yield could be bought by the Government and placed in storage to prepare for years when crop yields are reduced. Ghana could be prepared for future challenges.

Most importantly, the Ghanaian subsistence farmer would feel empowered by their new knowledge. They would have to put effort into implementing new practices and knowledge to increase agricultural productivity, but they would be directly benefiting themselves and their families. Through education, Ghanaian subsistence farmers would not be ordered, but would be informed and would have the ability to use updated information and technology on their farms to help not only themselves and their family, but their entire country of which they are so proud.

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