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**"Breaking the Bank: A New Path to Food Security Through Bankability Metrics in Ghana"**

**Introduction:**
Roughly the size of Oregon, Ghana is often called the "center" of the world because it sits close to the equator and the Greenwich Meridian, representing 0° longitude. It is the halfway, the eye, and the equal. How is it that the most central country in the world still fails to recognize a strong middle-ground solution to one of the world's most taxing issues? According to an Oxfam International article, "Empowering Women Farmers to End Hunger and Poverty" (2025), worldwide hunger could be decreased by 17%, 396 million people simply by burying the societal gender disadvantages that impact all areas on the globe. If female agricultural producers have the potential to cut down world hunger by that large of a margin, imagine what they can do in a smaller, rapidly developing African country. Ghana needs an all-encompassing solution, and that is exactly what is on the brink of implementation. The future of agriculture, putting meals on children's tables, diminishing economic disparities, and stomping down starvation sits in the palm of their hand. Ghana's future is female, and the biggest key to demolishing the country's food insecurity lies in equalizing the banking world.

**Background/Problem:**
In a recent case study of food deprivation issues in Ghana, Yingxin Zhang, et al. (2023) reported that 12.9 million Ghanaians were affected by food insecurity in 2022. By comparison, this number is more than triple the population of Oregon and represents more than the entire population of Belgium, Cuba, or any of the 115 other United Nations-recognized countries. These comparisons do enough to highlight the severity of hunger even without the unending plethora of statistics surrounding the issue. A heavy contributor to this issue is poverty, despite the drop from 52.6% to 27% of Ghanaian people affected since 1991. Ghana has drastically improved this situation, but for many, especially women, it is still an unremitting issue. In rural Ghanaian areas, 52% of female-headed households are within the poorest quintile in all of Ghana. In urban areas, a striking 61% of these similar female-led homes fall within the same statistic and often fail to put any food on the table. Dating again to 2022, Zhang shares that 400,000 *fewer* men than women faced moderate to severe food insecurity. Not only were female consumers impacted heavily by agricultural discrimination, but so were millions of women producers.

In Ghana, female farmers make up over 50% of the workforce and produce over half of the crops. However, women still have been found to "exhibit lower agricultural productivity" (Zhang et al., 2023). This statistic is due to many factors, but a big one is the active restrictions on finding financial aid. Globally, about 36% of women working in ag have more barriers to attaining financing. For example, according to *SCOPEinsight's* "Leveling the Gender Playing Field" article (2021), in another sub-Saharan African country, Rwanda, over 10,000 farmers received grants or loans. However, only about a quarter of available funds went to women. One of the issues resulting in this disparity is the lack of collateral that almost all loans require. Nartey et al.'s "Ecological Perspectives" (2023) article for the *Journal of International Women's Studies* shares that it is not the outdated laws or policies *formally* disbarring women from financial service, it is more societal. Ghana's society is deeply patriarchal, so it is an infrequent occurrence if the land, animals, equipment, or homes legally belong to anybody except the husband or father in a family. Most often, it is a basic requirement for loans to have collateral to back them, and since women do not legally own hardly anything tangible, they forfeit their borrowing access. This lack of monetary help takes away women's access to the basics of successful farming like land, fertilizers, equipment, and employees.

**Changing Outlooks Through Bankability Metrics:**
SCOPE, an international business intelligence corporation that specializes in agribusiness insight and value trends in markets, has taken a huge step towards fixing this issue. This Netherlands-based company collaborates with the industry's front-runners to "foster a global agricultural sector that embodies professionalism and innovation" (*SCOPEinsight*, 2021) and has primarily focused on female farmer innovation. They hone in a bit more on the access, or lack thereof, of funding, which is step one in securing farm-eligible land. SCOPE's business administrators have decided that food insecurity and gender inequality issues are distressing enough, and it is beyond time for a massive shift in the way banks determine loan allowances.

This *SCOPEinsight* article shares that research shows women are better borrowers in microfinance, and the problem now is finding a way to give these ladies loans without having to back them up with collateral. SCOPE partnered with the Center for Financial Inclusion (CFI) in 2021 to develop the idea of bankability metrics. The development of the metrics would simply provide different stipulations lenders would look at when the basics, like credit scores and loan collateral, are not available. The idea is to create a bridge between lenders and Agricultural Small and Medium Enterprises (Agri-SME's), which in Ghana, consists heavily of women. This system can be used by all sorts of industry leaders, including but not limited to donors and business development service providers. After research and interviews, together SCOPE and CFI found data to support their idea of changing the requirements. They found the four most important dimensions that "drive positive loan conditions" (*SCOPEinsight*, 2021): Internal management, financial management, record keeping, and marketing strategy, and turned them into a process simple for both borrowers and lenders.

Bankability metrics allow companies to attain exactly what they need to become loan eligible without stressing over tangible collateral they simply do not have. This allows for lenders to check other data points to be confident the business they are loaning to is work their risk, and makes the screening process for lenders much more efficient and quick (Hub, 2021). Researchers on this topic have actually gone further to create a template for borrowers to complete about the general information of their operation. This template is sufficient enough for most lenders in the pre-deal stage, which can help fast forward the loan process even more. The bankability screening comes next in this process, which determines the credit worthiness of the business using the dimensions previously mentioned. Additionally, researchers have simplified these into three categories: Business activity, governance, and financials. To make the idea even more transparent, they broke down business activity into three sufficient categories including proof of top three clients, top three products, and contract and pricing. For governance, they ask for proof of staff turnover, time commitment of managers, and separation of board and management authority (Hub, 2021).This way, small-scale farmers, mainly women, in Ghana would be able to utilize the methods they have found to run their businesses effectively, and basic data they could easily collect. Women can employ their methods to manage their financial records and budget revisions, to produce modern advertising plans, and to create detailed business documentation to prove their credibility. These metrics could show lenders that these ladies are valid business owners, and are more than capable of paying loans back quickly and as a whole.

According to the 2021 AGRA article, together CFI and SCOPE have identified this bankability metric solution capable of unlocking over 65 billion dollars for Agri-SME's in Africa. Eda Dolke in her February 17th, 2021 article "The Challenge of Bringing Agri-SME's and Lenders Closer Together," shares the story of a female, central African farmer. Saida is the founder of an agricultural enterprise growing sorghum, millet, and rice. As demands for her products increased, she looked to grow her business with employees, equipment, and more products, but inevitably ran into a financial brick wall. For a long time she was unable to find a lender who loans to Agri-SME's like hers. ABC Finance is one of those lenders, who tends to loan to large scale businesses that can easily prove sufficient collateral through the typical

screening process. They look toward companies that can provide long-lists of documentation that Agri-SME's cannot provide due to their participation in more informal markets. The bankability metrics previously described were presented to ABC Finance, and Saida was able to provide the lenders with the information they needed to quickly and fairly analyze her request. Bankability metrics provide the clarity and consistency needed to increase capital flow and financial aid to Agri-SME's like hers (Dolke, 2021).

The drawback of bankability metrics is that they are still in the beginning stages. Testing the validity of the metrics in large-scale areas like South & Central America is one of the next steps. In order to test this however, humanitarian groups, leaders, service providers and lenders must be educated on the potential impact bankability metrics could make. Educating people across the globe is no small feat, but in her article, Eva Dolke highlights a tie that binds the entire world together; the internet. Dolke has suggested building an online portal that uses metrics to link Agri-SME's to lenders. This would provide visibility to businesses and information to the rest of the people in the world who will learn more about the possible revolution at hand. Building this website does not have to be on a massive-scale, it can simply be a collaborative project done by students in a university class. A good place for this to occur would be at Babson College in Babson Park, Massachusetts. This college is a relatively small university, with an average of 3,000 students. It is home to the Diana Project, a project stemming back to 1999, that focuses on female entrepreneurship and capital growth for business expansion. Diana Project scholars focus on legitimate research and impact for women experiencing financial roadblocks for beginning or growing their businesses. The Diana Project hosts an annual Impact Day focused on three initiatives, including multi-stakeholder dialogue exchange of evidence-informed practices, collaborative ideation for sharing across sectors and geographies, and strategic insights for future engagements (Babson, 2025). Everything about the Diana Project and its Impact Day align with what bankability metrics would be doing; helping female entrepreneurs with research based, collaborative engagements for bettering monetary support in a different sector of the world. The Diana Project would be how step one, an internet accessible informative page for both women in need of loans and lenders comes together. Babson College holds the resources of both female innovation interest, and web technologies curriculum to be a beyond adequate host for what could be the beginning of a massive movement.

**Conclusion:**

The idea of entirely closing the financing barrier is nearly impossible. However, standardization of loan requirements is a solution readily available and the opening move in eliminating significant problems in a small, sub-Saharan African country. Just imagine the impact that providing the *option* of a loan to 50% of Ghana's crop producers (women) could have on the country's hunger crisis. Ghana's societal banking system has room to grow and equalize on all fronts. Female farmers should be able to grow their businesses, escape poverty, feed their families, and do it on their own, without cycling restraint. Starting small, and local with the Diana Project in the United States, to create informational, internet access for female-intended attainable loans is step number one in solving the issue. After all, the domino effect still plays out how it's supposed to with a relatively small first piece. Giving globally accessible informative linking software to female farmers boosts their Agri-SME's, who *will* be the reason Ghana, the center of the world, sees hunger decrease or cease in the future. One day, bankability metrics impact could target the rest of the globe, and what better place to start than Ghana, the geographical bullseye?

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