

GHANA

Free markets and the threat to basic food rights



The current food crisis highlights the fundamental conflict between the need to promote basic human rights and economic policies based on free trade and investment. Every woman, child and man, individually and in community with others, has the right to adequate food. In Ghana, state intervention in the market is urgently needed to facilitate local production and distribution of food, as well as to ensure basic rights for all citizens.

Social Watch Ghana Coalition

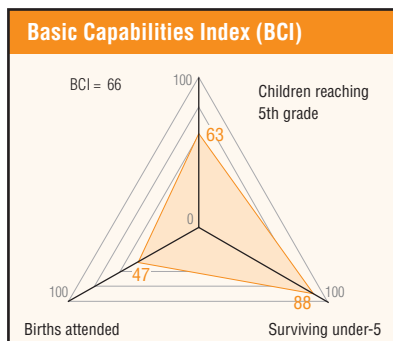
Some years back, the resilience of Ghanaians and their ability to cope with crises won them the nickname “magicians”. But “magic” can only do so much. So far, Ghanaians have not surged into the streets like the people of Senegal, Burkina Faso and Cameroon, but hunger, anger and discontent are boiling higher, fuelled by sharp worldwide and domestic increases in the cost of many basic foods since the beginning of 2008.

Prices of maize, rice, millet, yam, cassava, plantain, palm oil, tomato, cowpea and groundnuts jumped between 7.95% and 124.54% from January to April alone, according to figures obtained from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) and published in the *Daily Graphic* on 1 April 2008. Although many of these staples are produced locally, the Government’s determination to speed integration into the globalized economy has opened the floodgates to imported basic food products, particularly rice and sugar. The global market determines the price of these products, not local buying power.

An inadequate promotion of basic rights for women

Eradication of hunger and poverty is particularly crucial to securing the basic rights of women. Like other signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Ghana is obligated to promote the rights of its citizens by complying with the obligations established under the United Nations Charter and the many treaties, covenants and agreements derived from it. The country has also ratified international conventions and agreements specifically dedicated to promoting women’s rights, such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. At the regional level, Ghana’s adherence to agreements such as the Africa Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and its Optional Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa entails additional commitments. The 1992 Constitution includes specific provisions designed to promote women’s rights and gender equality.

The Government has attempted to demonstrate its commitment to the women’s rights stipulated in these agreements by establishing a Ministry of



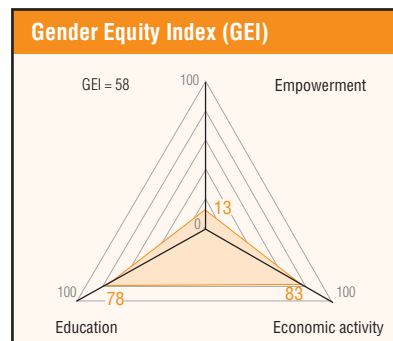
Women and Children’s Affairs (MOWAC), to advise government on policy issues affecting women’s rights and promote gender equality initiatives that advance women’s status and well-being.¹ Unfortunately, in the eight years since MOWAC was created, the ministry has done little to advance the socio-economic well-being of women.

The sums allocated to MOWAC do not indicate strong Government support for women’s rights. In recent years the ministry has been awarded 0.1% of the total budget, according to a study on “Aid Effectiveness and Gender Equality in Ghana 2004-6” (Pobee-Hayford and Awori, 2007). “The small size of the budget for the MOWAC has implications for the mandate of the Ministry and its ability to carry out its duties,” the authors comment. The effects of low funding are compounded by the absence of gender budgeting to monitor public expenditures for other purposes, including social welfare.

Food production and women’s rights

Unbridled pursuit of neoliberal economic policies coupled with the unsustainable nature of globalization policies has reduced possibilities for addressing social, economic, cultural and environmental rights of women. Even more worrying, when economic policies are implemented, women’s rights are the first to be sacrificed, on the premise that they have a “natural capacity” to cope with poverty, particularly in times of crisis.

Agriculture is the primary source of economic growth, responsible for 40% of the total (GLSS 4, 2000). However, closer examination reveals a strong



gender bias in this expansion. Government investments have spurred a boom in export industries, primarily timber and cocoa production, where the workforce is predominantly male. At the same time, the Government has offered little support to basic food industries that are traditionally women’s responsibility. As a result, crops for domestic consumption, livestock and fishing have all stagnated (Amu and Gockel, 2005 cited in ISODEC, 2006). This policy shows a preference for products over people. In the period under study, two million households were growing maize, 604,100 harvested peanuts and 361,400 had a rice crop, while only 584,400 households grew cocoa.

As shown in Chart 1, agriculture is a main source of livelihood for persons living in rural communities, however much of the production is consumed by the families themselves. Households get only 30.6% of their income from agriculture, notes GLSS 4. Unpaid labour is common, 9.6% of the total for men and 20.15% for women. The table also shows that the burden shouldered by women varies according to ecological zone, indicating that climate change could have significant gender repercussions: Women do 53% of the agricultural labour in the rural coastal zone and only 36% in the rural savannah zone (ISODEC, 2006).

The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper I (GPRS I) and the Growth and Poverty Strategy (GPRS II) both concluded that most Ghanaians who live in poverty are women and that poverty is greatest among farmers who grow basic foods, a majority of whom are women.² Addressing disproportionate

¹ Ghana first established a National Council on Women and Development to meet its UN commitment in 1975. This body was transformed into the Department of Women when the Ministry of Women and Children was set up in 2000.

² Ghana has had to produce Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers as a condition for accessing funds from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative which has been pushed by donors.

CHART 1: Distribution of households owning or operating a farm or keeping livestock and national estimates by locality

Locality/Ecological zone	Households operating a farm or keeping livestock. Sample	Women's share of agricultural activities
Urban Area	32	38
Rural Area	85	44
Rural Coastal	75	53
Rural Forest	6	46
Rural Savannah	93	36
Ghana	66	43

Source: GLSS 4 (2000).

deprivation will require policies and programmes that increase women's access to factors of production such as land, labour, credit and agricultural technology (Women's Manifesto Coalition, 2004). Inadequate credit is a major problem. It appears that lack of collateral often prevents women, the poor and persons with disabilities from expanding production. This compels them to rely on informal credit and loan arrangements, which usually charge higher interest than facilities commercial banks.

Policy responses and women's food rights

The Government's failure to enact any significant measures to address women's food rights has its roots in the neoliberal economic framework, which assumes that the country's development strategy will be based on aid flows and production for export, while many basic products and services, including food items, will be imported. Enhancing local food production and resource mobilization are not considered important. To succeed, this strategy requires a system of governance that limits political and technical opportunities for effective participation, and for promotion of human rights and women's rights.

Under its first President, the late Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana pursued a strategy of promoting development based on local food production. However, since his overthrow in 1966 (and subsequent death in exile), succeeding governments have executed a fundamental shift in agricultural policy. Under the country's Structural Adjustment Programme i.e. the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP), fashioned according to World Bank guidelines, the Government has reduced the role of the public sector and given the private sector greater responsibility for providing goods and services. The Government eliminated subsidies for fertilizers and other agricultural inputs, and has attempted to reduce its role in the market. For example, the Cocoa Marketing Board disengaged from pricing and marketing. In 1991, the Ghana National Association of Farmers and Fishermen was replaced by the Ghana Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives, funded by farmers themselves, which functions as a cooperative venture at the district, regional and national levels. This reform benefits relatively large, wealthy farmers growing cash crops.

Their financial support to the cooperatives allows them to wield disproportionate influence and power. Poorer farmers, predominantly women who are subsistence producers, are largely absent from the cooperatives, and have suffered the most from the policies these organizations advocate.

The basic framework of the ERP has been maintained under GPRS I and II. Despite some attempts to address biases against women, largely in response to protests by women's groups, the economic sectors where women predominate are still neglected, and gender inequality in the agricultural sector has not been addressed systematically. Budget allocations to the MOFA are heavily dependent on donors and woefully inadequate. The Government established a Women in Agriculture Development Department (WIADD) to address women's concerns, however it provided no funding for investment initiatives in 2002; in 2003 and 2004 WIADD did receive funding – but only from international donors (ISODEC, 2006).

The New Patriotic Party Government of John Agyekum Kuffour recently announce a program to "mitigate the hardships Ghanaians are facing as a result of escalating food and fuel prices" by reducing import duties on widely consumed food products and waiving levies on some petroleum products (*Daily Graphic*, 2008, p. 1). This measure is expected to tamp down prices of rice, wheat, yellow corn and vegetable oil. The report added that "the government was already in consultation with its development partners to import and stock-pile additional supplies of rice and wheat to enhance food security" (*Daily Graphic*, 2008, p. 3). However the Government failed to offer any strategy to bring more locally produced foods to market, even though investments to reduce post-harvest losses, improve transportation and modernize inadequate road networks, particularly in poor rural communities, would benefit both consumers and farmers.

Civil society initiatives

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have consistently called for a concerted Government effort to eradicate hunger and poverty. CSOs have seized opportunities such as the development of the GPRS I and II

to express vigorous opposition to the Government's reliance on a free market economy to eliminate poverty. Women's rights organizations, particularly the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT) have spoken out for gender sensitive policies to address poverty.

At a Civil Society Forum held in Accra on 17-21 April 2008 as a prelude to the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development XII (UNCTAD XII) Ministerial Conference in Accra, activists called for new policies that address poverty. The General Agricultural Workers' Union of Ghana's Trades Union Congress (GAWU of GTUC), the Third World Network Africa (TWN-Africa) and ActionAid Ghana declared that the trade and investment relationships developing countries have with the Bretton Woods institutions and transnational corporations are not the solution to poverty, and called for a shift to policies that protect producers and create employment. As they have in other venues, activists denounced the European Union trade proposals, which would compel the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries to lower tariffs that protect local food producers.

The most direct civil society critique of the current food crisis, hunger and poverty, particularly among women, has been developed by "Hunger-FREE Ghana by 2015 Campaign". The Campaign is a joint effort of FoodSPAN (a coalition of more than 50 farmer-based organizations, including GAWU of GTUC), community-based and policy advocacy organizations such as ABANTU for Development and media outlets. In a statement issued on May 27, 2008, the Campaign expressed support for the Government initiatives to address the food crisis, but noted that they were woefully inadequate and "will not benefit small scale producers, mainly women, who produce 80% of food in Ghana". ■

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