

## PUBLIC POLICY AND THE FOOD QUESTION IN GHANA

By

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*«... major cause of food shortage in previous years is that never in our history has there been a purposeful plan for the growing of such crops as cassava, plantain and cocoyam».*

Col. F. C. Bernasco,  
Former Commissioner of Agriculture.

The Sahelian drought caught the news headlines of the world press. This was impressed upon the world with such drama that it could not be easily ignored. The conscience of the affluent world was aroused and a massive effort was made to provide some relief to the affected areas. Although the administration of the food was hampered by problems of administrative bungling, inefficiency and plain corruption, on the whole it did succeed in bringing much urgently needed relief to the affected areas. But relief indeed it was. Efforts to provide a more lasting solution to the problem in the form of programmes for creating food sufficiency have not yielded much results. And to all intents and purposes the problem is showing all signs of becoming intractable.

A look at the food situation in the Third World would indicate that although the food shortage was manifested in its most acute form in the Sahel region, many African and Third World countries are beginning to experience serious food problems. Even countries where there are no discernible climatic, ecological or social reasons why there should be food problems have also begun to manifest the tendency. And countries which a decade or so ago were exporters of food have now become net importers. Even Kenya for a long time regarded as a model of agricultural success is now beginning to experience food problems. (1) The seriousness of the problem can be appreciated when it is recalled that according to a report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and FAO, a study of 23 African countries, revealed that between 1966–1974 nineteen were either stagnant or declining.(2)

In certain countries the food problem has already begun to make itself felt in the form of political crises. It is perhaps significant to note that Egypt's worst urban riots in recent years was brought about by urban food prices. April 1979 saw serious riots in Monrovia which left, by the government's own admission, 37 dead and hundreds wounded. The riots were triggered off by a proposed increase in the price of rice, the staple food. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the bloody coup which toppled the TOLBERT regime soon after was not unconnected with the riots. In Sierra Leone the recent unrest which has led to the arrest and detention of many trade union leaders is not unconnected with the food problem. And in Ghana a few years ago there were near riots in Accra and Kumasi as workers surged to the

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markets to buy goods, mostly food at «controlled» prices. In Guinea-Bissau the coup which overthrew the administration of Louis Cabral in April 1981 was generally regarded as a rice coup. Nowhere were the far reaching political implications of Africa's food problem more forcibly manifested as in Zambia, whose precarious food situation, already worsened by the war in Zimbabwe, had to resort to the humiliating expedient of importing maize from South Africa in spite of the O.A.U.'s ban on all economic links with South Africa. Not only that. The maize had to be transported through Rhodesia, a country with which Zambia was technically at war. It is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that it was partly Rhodesia's decision not to allow transportation of maize through its territory to Zambia which forced KAUNDA to put pressure on the NKOMO wing of the Patriotic Front stationed in Zambia to seek a negotiated settlement to the conflict. This negotiation resulted in the Lancaster Agreement. We can quote many other examples. Suffice to leave it at this.

At a more general level the relationship between food and development should be obvious. All African countries claim a commitment to programmes of modernisation and development. At the practical level this involves measures to improve the living standards of the mass of the people and improve the quality of human life in general. This is the only realistic yardstick by which development can be measured. To achieve this it is necessary to mobilize energies of the broad masses of the people to meet the demands of such modernization and development. A minimum condition for such a state of development is the provision of adequate and high protein food to feed the growing population for without this no meaningful development can take place. The importance of food as a precondition for development has been underscored by Arthur LEWIS. He writes :

*...the most certain way to promote industrialization in the Gold Coast is to lay the foundation it requires by taking vigorous measures to raise the food production per person engaged in agriculture. (3)*

For almost a decade now Ghana has been struggling with food problems. Now the situation has reached crisis proportions. There have been serious shortages of food, particularly domestically produced food. The shortage is at two levels. First there is a shortage of staple foods, like cassava, plantain, yams etc... Secondly, there is a shortage of high protein foods like meat, fish, poultry, eggs and cereals like rice, maize, beans. So accustomed has the country got to these shortages that when recently there was a bumper fish catch the state was totally unprepared for it, having allowed its many cold stores to run down. Another feature of the food problem is that the shortages are not confined to specific local areas. Food shortages have been reported in both urban and rural areas. It is true that in certain specific areas the problem is more serious than in other areas but it would be wrong to dismiss Ghana's current food problem as a specific feature of the urban areas or as confined to particular areas not so well endowed in climatic and ecological terms. Ghana has in fact a *national* food problem. The results of a survey carried out in Ashanti in 1978 gave some startling revelations. When a sample of farmers in this predominantly food producing area were asked whether

they produced enough to feed themselves and their families almost 70 % responded negatively. And this was the time of «Operation Feed Yourself» (4). Whatever reservations one might hold about survey research such results cannot be easily dismissed. To make up the shortfalls in production Ghana has been importing food and now food imports amount to almost 20 % of all imports. (5) This is in spite of strict controls on imports. One thing which must also be noted is that contrary to popular belief food imports are not luxury foods. They are basic foods like rice, fish, maize, beans and even gari (cassava grains). For a country with over 60 % of the population actually working on the land and engaged in agricultural pursuits it is a clear indication that something is wrong somewhere. What is even worse Ghana has now no foreign exchange to pay for imported food not to talk of the increased price of food on the international market, and the near drying up of food aid.

Politicians, public officials and policy makers have been slow in admitting that Ghana has a serious food problem. This was particularly so during the military regime. A particularly notorious example of this was when General ACHEAMPONG, the executed former Head of State, declared publicly: «Ghana has no problems; it has only problematic people». When it is conceded that there is indeed a food problem (as it is now) the causes are often attributed to global inflation, climatic and ecological conditions, poor communications and bottlenecks in the distribution processes, activities of middlemen and speculators («nation wreckers», as they are called). Sentiments expressed in the two quotations below are not atypical of the attitude, in political circles about the food problems:

*There is adequate food in the country. The problem has been the failure of food agencies to get them to the market. I intend setting up a separate body within the Ministry of Agriculture to take up the distribution of food... (6)*

or

*The people (the saboteurs) buy up local foodstuffs produced under Operation Feed Yourself Programme and deliberately destroy or smuggling (sic) them across the borders. (7)*

Space does not permit us to go into point-by-point refutation of these given factors. Suffice it to say that although it has to be conceded that the above factors do indeed affect food supply, to attribute to them primary factors of the food problem is to assume that there is nothing wrong with the present structure of production itself; nor is there any need to raise questions about public policy with regard to food production and distribution. It would seem, however, that to get to the root of the problem one would need to look into the whole structure of agricultural production in the country and public policy towards food production. This has to be looked at historically. In addition, the whole problem should be structured against the background of an agricultural economy of a peripheral or dependent country. The contention of this paper is that the usual reasons given for the food production in Ghana are only contributory and that the root of the problem is structural.

African governments have not departed in any marked degree from the assumptions and structure of an agricultural economy which puts all premium on export crop production to the detriment of food crops. In such an agricultural economy food shortage is a logical and necessary outcome of the dialectics of growth and development. And this is what has happened to Ghana. Now let us go into the history of Ghana's agriculture and see how this bears out. But before we do this a word or two about Ghana's agricultural economy is in order.

There are certain facts about Ghana's agricultural economy which make it an interesting case for study, although we are not here suggesting that Ghana's case is unique. First let us look at the physical character of the country. Ghana is not in the arid or semi-arid zone or in the Sahel region like Niger, Upper Volta, parts of Senegal, or Somalia etc; nor has it large tracts of land which cannot be used either because they constitute desert or because of swampy conditions. There are hardly any problems of land reclamation in the country. Although soil fertility is not rated very high, it is good enough to support crop production and animal raising without much difficulty. There is relatively dependable rainfall, not very evenly distributed in the Northern and Upper Regions, but well enough to sustain life and a reasonable level of crop production. (8) The agricultural cycle has not been interrupted by natural disasters such as floods, long periods of drought (although the drought in 1977 in the Northern and Upper Regions did not help matters it cannot be used to explain an almost perennial food problem). Furthermore, there have been no civil disturbances like wars such as we have had in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Chad to interfere with agricultural production. It would, therefore, seem from the above that there are no ecological, climatic or physical reasons why Ghana should have such endemic food problems.

Let us look at the social character of the agricultural economy. Ghana's agricultural economy is based on the «peasant model». Over 90 % of food and agricultural production is in the hands of small peasants with average holdings of not more than about 3 hectares. Ghana has no settler agriculture like colonial Algeria, Kenya, Tunisia or Zimbabwe. Nor has it plantation agriculture as in the case of Mauritius, Camerons, the Ivory Coast or Liberia. Multinational involvement in agriculture is a relatively recent phenomenon in Ghana and its impact at present is very negligible. The significance of this is that historically there has been no land alienation as was the case in Kenya, Algeria or Zimbabwe. This meant that there was no ruthless displacement of peasants, although this is now beginning to take place especially in the Northern and Upper Region where capitalist rice farming is taking hold. (9) There has been very little rural proletarianization. Although the country has for a long time been known for its extractive industry – gold mining – this is a capital intensive industry, and its labour requirements are not such as to disrupt agricultural production. Ghana is not like Zambia. Besides, the gold industry produces only about 8 % of export receipts. It would seem therefore, that the peasant has control over production, though not, especially as in the case of export crops like cocoa, over marketing. What is significant about this is that the peasant enjoys relative autonomy,

and it is claimed that under such conditions he can attend to the demands of export crop production and food production at the same time. It would seem from what we have said so far that there are no physical, ecological, climatic or social reasons why Ghana should have such serious food problems. What then is the problem? One is tempted to agree with the statement with which this paper starts and to assert that we have never seriously questioned the assumptions underlying the colonial agricultural economy nor have we changed the structure of an agricultural economy which insists on putting all public investment into export crop production and leaving food production to go on by its own momentum. Arthur LEWIS' general observation about the agricultural economy of the tropical countries applies very well to Ghana. He writes:

*For the last eighty years the tropical countries have put practically all their agricultural research and extension funds and efforts into trying to raise the productivity of export crops like cocoa, tea or rubber and virtually no effort into food productivity. (10)*

This has been the character of Ghana's agricultural economy from colonial times until independence except for a brief period of the war years, 1939–1945. Since independence there has been no *national policy* specifically designed and efficiently implemented to meet the staple food needs of the domestic market.

Colonial interest in Ghanaian agriculture arose out of demands to produce raw materials to feed metropolitan industries. In Africa two distinct methods were employed to achieve this depending on history and geographical and ecological factors of the given area and the needs of the Empire at the time. Raw material production for export was undertaken either through peasant agriculture by native peasants as was the case in most areas of West Africa with the exception of Liberia and Ivory Coast or was done by settler farmers on the basis of commercial agriculture or plantations ran by large multinational companies as was the case in East, Central and Southern Africa.

In cases where native peasant agriculture was preferred there was often no large scale alienation of land or harsh labour codes used to induce labour to work either on the European farms or on plantations. In many cases where the latter method was preferred the weight of the colonial state was invoked to support settler farmers or the plantations by the use of legislation forbidding any competition from potential native growers by designating certain crops as «European crops». Where no settler farming or plantation was undertaken the native peasants were «encouraged» to grow certain crops which had export outlets and the natives in such areas became grateful to the colonial authority for its «liberal» policies.

In Ghana due to ecological factors (the place was very unhealthy for white settlement), the long history of native resistance to land alienation which is crucial for settler or plantation agriculture, the failure of early experiments and attempts at plantation agriculture for export crops, the resistance to plantation agriculture from planter interests in the Caribbean and the phenomenal success of native peasant agriculture, peasant agriculture was preferred as the primary mode of producing export crops to feed British industries.

Initial colonial interest was in palm oil until it was overtaken by the first decade of the century by cocoa, the production of which rapidly set the country on the pattern of a mono-crop economy. Dependence on native peasant agriculture meant that the country was saved from massive land alienation, and a harsh labour legislation and initially all the social consequences associated with the development of a landless peasantry. It also meant that the British authorities in order to get the native peasants to respond enthusiastically to the production of the crop which came to be regarded as the economic life blood of the country had to get control of and influence over those who had control over the peasants, and in the political structures and authority patterns of Ghanaian society at the time, these were the chiefs. Hence the need to cultivate the chief, enlist his support and install him as a junior partner in the colonial administration. In course of time these practical considerations developed into an elaborate philosophy of rule called «Indirect Rule» by which colonial officials sought to give philosophical underpinnings to the system of their administration.

One consequence of putting production into the hands of native peasants was that it made it possible for some of the more enterprising to accumulate some capital which was used either to expand production or invest into real estate or trade. In course of time a differentiation of the rural community became clearly discernible on the basis of the position which a group occupied in the structure of colonial agricultural production (11).

In time four sectors of the rural community could be discerned. A small group of «rich» peasants who had a number of holdings and engaged wage labour and were in some way tied to the authority patterns of the traditional political structures emerged. Some of these were also partly in agriculture and partly in trade as «trader-farmers», or were engaged in usurious activities on the side. There was a second group of what might roughly be equated to MAO's middle peasants. These also had a number of holdings though their holdings were much less. They relied on wage labour but only to a limited extent. They grew mostly cash crops. Like the rich peasants they hardly grew any marketable food crops except in bad times. The poor peasants were those who had very few or small holdings, usually one or two, and were hardly in a position to engage hired labour. They relied mostly on family labour and grew mostly food crops both for subsistence consumption and for the market. Occasionally they also grew a few export crops. They often had no power in rural society, as they did not stand in any close relationship to the rural power structure. Most food growers were and still are to be found among this group. A fourth group has also emerged, the agricultural labourers or what could be called for want of a better term, a rural proletariat. This has developed largely on the basis of export crop production and initially they were alien migrants from Upper Volta or Togo but the situation has changed in recent times. Now they could be migrants from other parts of the country where land pressure has forced them to move. It can be seen from this that even at the very beginning food crop production did not attract the most enterprising of the African peasants.

The native peasant producer has been praised for his industry in building up the cocoa economy and Geoffrey KAY and Stephen HYMER have gone to the extent of arguing that he built the industry in spite of definite

obstacles in his way by the Department of Agriculture. (12) Although this praise is well deserved one must not forget the role of the colonial state in fostering, promoting and encouraging peasant interest in export crop production. Early in the century the government opened a botanical station at Aburi which later formed the nucleus of the Agriculture Department. From its nursery seedlings were distributed to farmers. (13) It has to be noted that the formation of the Department of Agriculture itself was tied to the promotion of export crops. The Department of Agriculture organised model farms from which peasants learned improved farming techniques. The Department also provided extension work and passed on the results of its research to farmers. Furthermore, cocoa and other export crop growers benefitted and were encouraged by the provision of a ready and guaranteed market though not price. This was to come later. Similar, though not the same level of support was given to other export crops like coconut, rubber, kola, palm oil etc. It has to be noted that even at the present time almost seventy years after the initial support and despite all the claims for promoting food crops hardly any food crop enjoys a guaranteed market and price except crops with potential for export or import substitute crops like rice and maize. We know of no case where encouragement was given to food production in the way the government tackled the production of export crops particularly cocoa. There are no cassava, yam or millet research stations. (14) Research into agriculture in the form of devising improved and high yielding seeds, control of pests and the provision of insecticides, and the passing on of general agricultural knowledge was all geared to the export crop producer. The food crop grower was left on his own as if production could be increased by its own momentum. On this point it is worth noting La ANANYE's comments:

*At the same time as the Government encouraged diversification it can be said that it contributed to making cocoa a sole crop of the future. Governor HUDGSON organised the marketing of cocoa on such a comfortable level that the cocoa farmer had no incentive for growing other crops.*

*...before the arrival of the firms on the cocoa marketing scene government had taken initiative in fostering the marketing system. HUDGSON's scheme was not only for cocoa, but also for coffee. (15)*

Nor has the situation changed much for the food crop grower. As late as 1968 the government was lamenting:

*Lack of capital to invest in food production has been one of the principal causes of small scale farming in the country. Food farmers have little to invest from their resources and need credits in cash or kind to secure the hired and mechanised services to procure the production of inputs. (11)*

Where any encouragement was made for the production of food crops as was the case with rice production in the Western Region in the 1920's with the establishment of the Esiama Rice MILLS it was more because such food crops had potential as export crops or because it was seen as a measure of import substitution more than a response to meet the demands of domestic food supply. The external orientation of the economy was amply reflected in the policy of food production. The interesting thing is that there has been no marked departure from this policy.

Quite apart from the fact that food production for the local market was not particularly encouraged or pushed, colonial policy of export crop production adversely affected local food production. Early in the century colonial records were full of warnings as regards impending food shortages as peasants began to destroy food farms to make way for the growth of export crops. The response of the colonial state to this was to exhort peasants to grow more food to alleviate possible food shortage as if that by itself was enough to stem the tide. What is more surprising is that the colonial state did not seem to see the contradiction between urging peasants to grow more food and at the same time urging them to grow more export crops, more so when export crops had a greater monetary value and guaranteed market. Colonial agricultural policy has been so successful that the cash crop culture has now become another rural fetish. It has taken on an autonomy of its own. Thus it is only in these days of acute food shortage when food prices have started to command much higher prices than export prices on the local market that peasants have begun to turn to food crops. (17) They found their anchor of safety in the production for the export market and became dependent on it. Their entire orientation and consciousness was to export crops. To venture into the production of food crops for the local market was for them to venture into the unknown!

This policy of structuring the entire agricultural economy of the country to the external demands for export crops and leaving food production to propel itself by its own momentum was rigorously pursued throughout the colonial period.

It was only with the coming of World War II that the policy was changed and anything near to a food policy was enunciated. It must be realised that the change was in response to the exigencies of the war. A statement from the Department of Agriculture makes the position clear:

*The influence of the war has been paramount in framing the policy of the Department. The main factors controlling this policy have been: the need to reduce imports generally, especially foodstuffs and to save shipping space, draw less on supplies vital to the United Kingdom and conserve foreign exchange... Consequently a growing proportion of the Department's efforts has been thrown into the campaign to increase the production of indigenous foodstuffs... (18)*

There was the need to increase domestic production of food to reduce imports and to satisfy the food needs of the large European population which had grown up as a result of the war: the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy, the Mercantile marine, the Army and Pan-American Airways. There was also the need to increase production to feed black troops the recruitment of whom had also reduced the labour requirements in agriculture. Here the state intervened in food at two levels: at the level of production and at the level of the market. At the level of production the state undertook to grow certain vegetables, particularly the ones favoured by the European community – green pepper, carrots, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower and radishes. Up till now these vegetables are still called «European vegetables». With respect to African



crops there was no direct intervention in production. The state merely encouraged the peasants to grow more food. At the level of marketing the state decided to buy up what could not be sold on the market at an agreed price. It also appointed a marketing officer who inspected local food prices and kept these under constant review. This policy achieved impressive results. It was the first time that the country had a purposeful plan to grow food for the domestic population. But as we have already indicated, the agricultural economy of the country had always operated in response to the needs of the external economy and at that time these needs demanded the restructuring of food production to meet domestic needs. It is therefore not surprising that soon after the war the policy was reversed to the pre-war state. The only thing which made the colonial government adopt some of the policies of the war period was a serious food shortage which hit the country soon after the war caused largely by maize rust. But this time the intervention was only at the level of the market but not at the level of production. But what has to be noted is that this policy of intervention in domestic food supply was seen by the colonial state, as it was during the war, as an emergency measure, and not a basis on which to form a national food policy.

It was during the time of the First Republic that the state initiated a policy of active intervention in food and agriculture in a more purposeful way. It was part of the CFP's policy of state intervention in the economy generally. What was strikingly novel about this (apart from the brief period of the war years) was the plan to intervene at the level of production. The mechanism for this was the establishment of state production units. Four main working units finally came into operation. These were the State Farms Corporation, the Workers Brigade, the United Ghana Farmers Council and the Young Farmers League. The plan was to transform agricultural production from the small scale peasant production units to large scale mechanized farms relying on heavy inputs like fertilizers and treated and improved seed varieties. One would hope that at long last a purposeful plan had been devised for solving the food and agricultural problems of the country. Besides, it was specifically provided that these production units and in particular the State Farms Corporation were to devote their attention to the production of food and other agricultural products. However, an examination of production records of the State Farms Corporation, shows that food did not figure as a priority in its plans. Only 40 % of the acreage was devoted to what could be called food crops and of these only rice and maize received any serious attention. In 1963 in response to the deteriorating food conditions in the country the state farms were instructed to turn their attention to food crops only to be instructed again almost immediately to revert to industrial crops to feed local industries. Hence in spite of stated declarations attention was still focussed on export and industrial crops. In actual implementation of plans there had been no departure in any meaningful way from the model of the colonial agricultural economy.

There was a major contradiction in colonial agricultural economy which in Ghana began to be felt after the war. Over the years the country had maintained the structure and assumption of the colonial agricultural economy which in spite of its weaknesses and imperfections was able to maintain a

certain level of sustenance for its population. But as the country began to embark on a programme of modernization and development in the fifties in response to the dictates of decolonization the weaknesses of the system began to assert themselves and the logic of the developmental imperative brought the contradictions to the fore. This has been the crux of Ghana's agricultural problem. It is the failure to understand and appreciate this which has led certain writers to marvel at how a country which started with so much promise could be in virtual ruins today. We are not saying that there are no other factors to Ghana's problem but this is the central one.

Let us see how the problem manifested itself in Ghana. We have already seen how the demands of World War II put pressure on the agricultural labour force. During the actual war years the mobilization efforts yielded fruits and a reasonable level of production was maintained but the same level of frenzy could not be kept during peace time. Moreover, very few of the returned ex-servicemen went back into agriculture. They had learnt new skills like tailoring, driving, shoe-making, carpentry etc. in the army and preferred to practise these rather than go back to the backbreaking work of agriculture. It was only in the North that plans were made to rehabilitate the demobilized soldiers in agriculture. This was done through the bullock schemes but it was no success. At this point it is reasonable to assume the growth of an agricultural labour force in a relatively smaller proportion than the growth of the labour force as a whole in the country. That was not all. In 1951 the new African government in taking steps to create educated manpower which would be needed after independence, embarked on what was known as the Accelerated Development Plan in Education. In certain areas this raised the number of children of the school-going age enrolled in school by over 75 %. In Africa every investment in education is invariably a disinvestment in agriculture. The French agronomist, René DUMONT, was right when he declared: «If your sister goes to school you eat fountain pen». Besides the physical pressure on the agricultural labour force, there was, as many writers have pointed out, the impact of the norms and values which were being imparted from the school. They militated against agriculture. (19)

In addition to these there were further pressures on the agricultural labour force as the boom in the building and construction industry in the fifties and early sixties attracted a lot of unskilled labour to the urban areas. For an agricultural economy which relies very little on machinery and technology a pressure of such dimensions on its labour force is bound to result in reduction of production, all things being equal. (20) To make matters worse, at this time there were also pressures on demand occasioned by two factors: increase in wage employment and secondly increase in the number of the emergent elites consequent on the policy of Africanization. Another factor which also has to be remembered is that from the end of the war till about 1961 the price of cocoa kept going up. This is not the situation in which one should expect a major shift to food production. In fact to keep pace with demand was a problem. It is clear from the analysis above that Ghana's food problem is inherent in the contradiction of the colonial agricultural economy which cannot stand any major modernisation or development initiatives.

It is important to remember that as early as 1961 food imports had already reached 18 % of all annual imports. The only difference between 1961 and 1981 is that in 1961 Ghana at least commanded some foreign exchange to pay for food imports.

After the efforts of the First Republic the single most ambitious programme to respond to Ghana's food problem was «Operation Feed Yourself» (OFY). This was launched with great fanfare in February 1972 after the fall of the Second Republic. It was a crash programme aimed at increasing food production and increasing national self-reliance. Initially it enjoyed considerable popular support as students from the country's universities and youth organisations responded to the call of the new military leaders to help increase food production by voluntarily giving labour to harvest vegetables, sugarcane and rice on state farms.

What was significant about the OFY was that it set targets to be achieved although as it turned out they were unrealistically optimistic. It also for the first time directed attention to the production of staple crops for the domestic market-crop like maize, cassava, plantain, yams, tomatoes etc. And perhaps more importantly, it set up an institutional framework for the implementation of its plans.

The country was divided into several agricultural zones and in each zone the crop which could be most profitably grown was encouraged. Thus in the Eastern Region, the recommended crops were: cassava, maize, plantains, sugarcane, tea, avocado, citrus and yams. In the Central region it was maize, yams, cassava, plantain, rice, pineapple and sugarcane. In the Western Region it was plantain, palm oil, bananas, rice and coconut. In Ashanti Region plantain, maize, soya bean, yams were recommended and in Brong Ahafo tomatoes, plantain, maize, yams groundnuts, rice and soya beans. In Greater Accra, maize, cassava, vegetables, rice, water melons and cashew were encouraged while in the Volta region cassava, rice, maize, yams were the favoured crops. In the Northern and Upper regions, rice, yams, guinea corn, maize, groundnut, millet, rice were recommended.

The state made food a political issue and hinged its legitimacy on it. It sought to use mobilization methods to increase production; it ran agricultural programmes on the TV and the mass media and encouraged educational institutions, prisons, Armed Forces and private commercial firms both foreign and local to establish production units. The general citizenry were similarly encouraged to take up backyard gardening to supplement the family food by producing food crops and rearing animals like poultry, pigs and rabbits.

Furthermore, as we have said earlier a definite institutional framework was created to plan and implement the OFY programme. The Commissioner of Agriculture was the head of the OFY programme. Under him was a body called the National Operations Committee which was the instrumental mechanism for implementing the OFY programme. The Committee grouped together representatives from various government departments and agencies connected with food production and distribution. Important units dealing in one way or the other with food which were represented on the Committee were the department of Agricultural Economy, the department of Fisheries, the Seed Multiplication Unit, the Crop Production Unit and the Agricultural

Mechanisation Unit. At the Regional level there were similar institutional bodies dealing with the OFY programme. Here the programme was headed by the Regional Commissioner. Under him was the Regional Agricultural Committee which was responsible for carrying out policies and plans formulated by the National Operations Committee.

In addition to the bureaucratic structures, there were also state agencies for production. These were made up of such organisations as the State Farms Corporation, Food Production Corporation, Settlement Division, Food Distribution Corporation, Grains and Legumes Development Board, State Fishing Corporation, Cotton Development Board and the Pomadze Poultry Enterprises. Important as it was to formulate definite policies for the production of local staples and set up organisations to execute them, there were certain problems with the set-up. In the first place, as can be seen above the set-up was rigidly bureaucratic. The bureaucracy assumed a predominant position in the formulation and implementation of policies and the bureaucratic structure did not make provision to accommodate inputs into the policy-making organs from peasants or peasant organisations at both national and regional levels. The peasant was, as in colonial days, regarded as a passive agent whose only role was to obey orders.

In addition to these structures and production units certain programmes were put into operation designed to ease up the bottlenecks and obstacles in food production, and create further incentives for food growers. Import duties on agricultural machinery were removed and fertilizers, improved seeds and other farm implements were sold to peasants at subsidized prices. But this in itself brought certain problems. In the first place although heavy agricultural machinery was easily available for those who had the capital for it, simple farm implements like the hoe and cutlass were hardly available, and a flourishing «black market» in cutlasses ensued. So bad was the situation that in certain areas only Regional Commissioners were empowered to distribute cutlasses to peasants. This did not help matters. It only increased the power of the bureaucracy. This was particularly serious considering the fact that the hoe and the cutlass still constitute for the majority of the peasants and particularly food producers the basic instruments of production. Furthermore, although the peasant was to benefit from such extension services hardly if ever did the peasant, who in fact bore the major burden of food production, benefit from such schemes. The only beneficiaries were the big commercial farmers whose class ties with the petty bourgeois in control of the state (in some cases they were actually the same persons) enabled them to command such resources. With the exception of rice and maize these were in most cases not even food crop growers.

Another area in which the state sought to encourage food production was the provision of credit. Schemes were provided by which credit was granted on generous terms to senior civil servants and army officers who wanted to go into agriculture. In addition the state encouraged commercial banks and lending institutions to adopt more flexible lending policies and provide credit to aspiring agricultural entrepreneurs. Of all the financial institutions giving credit for agricultural purposes the Agricultural Development Bank was the most liberal. But even here the small food crop grower did not fare

any better. Until recently, before a farmer could qualify for credit from the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) he was expected to have cleared at least six acres of cultivatable land. If we remember that the average size of holding in the country is only about 3.5 acres and for food crop growers it might even be smaller, we realize that such a rule puts the food crop grower at a considerable disadvantage. The Bank itself must have realized this for it subsequently slightly modified its procedures to allow peasants with smaller holdings to benefit from its loans. The peasants had to group themselves into a unit, the total acreage of which satisfied the Bank's requirements. The loan was then given to the group as a whole. However, the cumbersome process which the peasant had to go through in order to get credit, the several forms he had to fill and the several trips he had to make to the head office to see the manager, all these were too intimidating and cumbersome for many to even make the attempt. (21) Thus the only real beneficiaries of the system were again the big commercial farmers, who capitalising on their knowledge and class relations with the petty bourgeoisie in control of these resources – they might have gone to the same elite schools or belong to the same social club or meet at the same pubs etc – managed to allocate themselves a disproportionate share of such resources. And as we have already stressed most of the time such large scale farmers were not even in food production except for rice and maize.

In addition to the above the state also intervened at the level of marketing and distribution. A number of state agencies were established to assist in the marketing and distribution of food. The best known of these were the Cattle Development Board later to be called (more appropriately I think) Meat Marketing Board, the Food Distribution Corporation (FDC) and the State Fishing Corporation (SFC) (although the genesis of this dated much earlier). They were to buy bulk food either from the rural areas or overseas and retail them in the urban areas at state designated prices. This was expected to help alleviate the severe food problem especially during the lean season. The assumption underlying the strategy was that inefficient marketing and distribution constituted one of the main obstacles to adequate food supply in the urban areas. However, the effectiveness of these agencies was hampered by three main factors. One was the lack of an adequate number of suitable transport vehicles. The other was the lack of adequate storage facilities and the third was bad pricing policies. The FDC had much fewer vehicles than it needed to do a half way decent job. In addition, most of its vehicles were huge articulators which were useful on the main roads but could not ply the feeder road which led to the farms. The main problem with food transportation was from farm to main road transport. For in many areas food had to be carried many miles by head portage which limits the amount of food which could be so transported. The result of this was that large quantities of food each year rotted on the farms. With regard to this particular problem the vehicles of the FDC few as they were, were not particularly useful. At one time during the military regime of General ACHEAMPONG there was even talk of using army helicopters to evacuate food and other agricultural products: Not even the US can afford such luxury. The agencies' less than adequate storage facilities meant that they suffered from a high spoilage rate. This was parti-

cularly so with the FDC. Sometimes it had to put food on the market when it could not be sold to cover even costs so as to avoid spoilage. But perhaps the worst problem of these agencies which completely undermined their effectiveness, was their pricing policies. The assumption was that these agencies were to sell at prices at which the poor wage earner could afford. But the prices were so infrequently reviewed that there existed at one particular time a huge disparity between the agencies prices and the commercial market prices. A particularly notorious example of this was the Meat Marketing Board which continued to sell meat at about C 4.20 (four Cedis and twenty peswas) per Kg when the going commercial price was about C 15 (fifteen Cedis) per pound. It was the same with the State Fishing Corporation. The result of this was that there was such a pressure on these agencies that only the very highly placed members of the petty bourgeois with interlocking ties to such agencies were able to satisfy their food needs from such bodies. One had to be rich and powerful enough to be able to buy food at control prices. The poor wage earners for whom the scheme was to benefit ended up subsidizing food prices for the rich and powerful. Furthermore, the huge price differential encouraged speculative activities on the part of the managerial class in control of such agencies as they diverted stock to private vendors for huge profits. Thus these agencies, the Meat Marketing Board, the Food Production Corporation and the State Fishing Corporation all became mechanisms for personal appropriation and enrichment on the part of the petty bourgeois and their hangers-on in control of the state apparatus.

It was, therefore, not surprising that after the initial modest success OFY began to falter and by 1976 it was being quietly admitted that the programme had failed. By 1977 the failure of the programme was clear to everyone as Ghana had to accept International Food Aid ostensibly for the famine-stricken areas of the Northern and Upper Regions but in reality for the entire country.

Thus the programme which, contrary to previous programmes, was specifically designed to address itself to the food situation failed. One reason for the failure was that in spite of the public declarations to the contrary, the primary consideration was still on export and industrial crop. (22) It is perhaps not too farfetched to suggest that many public officials probably saw the whole OFY programme as an emergency measure for barely two years after the inauguration of the programme the government declared it a success, announced that the country had achieved food self-sufficiency and launched what came to be known as «Operation Feed Your Industries».

Thus the concern for food took a back seat. The divided attention failed and in the long run the country was unable to feed either her industries or her citizens. As for the members of the petty bourgeoisie located in the bureaucracy, the armed forces or the distributive sectors of the economy they saw the whole venture as an opportunity for personal enrichment. Some of those who benefited from the huge loans from the state failed through inefficiency and bad management or rather lack of it as they still kept to their air-conditioned offices in the capital and only made occasional visits to the farms. A successful first generation absentee farmer is a rare commodity. Others used their farms merely as agricultural fronts and continued to engage in those

speculative activities in which they were well at home. FANNON's description of this class is as true today as it was when it was written:

*The national bourgeoisie of underdeveloped countries is not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labour; it is completely canalized into activities of the intermediary type. Its innermost vocation seems to be to keep in the running and to be part of the racket. The psychology of the national bourgeoisie is that of the businessman, not that of a captain of industry. (23)*

To think that one could build up a rural capitalist class from the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie presently located in the bureaucracy, the army or the distributive sectors of the economy is a socio-economic illusion. This can only be done from the ranks of the farming community but so long as they do not have any influence or control over the state agencies responsible for making available the capital for such purpose it is difficult to see it happening.

The failure of food agriculture contributed in no small way to the removal of the military regime and a return to civilian government in September 1979. The civilian government of Dr. LIMAN introduced a Two Year Crash Programme in agriculture under the direction of a former member of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ghana, Legon. In less than two years it became evident that the programme had ended in a crash failure and the hapless minister was quickly removed to another ministry. Now under the New Investment Code a thinking seems to have emerged that the solution to the problem of Ghana's food and agriculture was to hand it over to the transnationals. Although it is too early to tell, it is difficult to envisage how this could be successful. Even if Ghana were able to attract foreign investment into agriculture to any significant extent it is difficult to see how it can solve Ghana's food and agricultural problem when their long stay in Latin America has not.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Victor Nyanteng, Andrew Shepherd and Tony Berret for their useful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. For an illuminating discussion of Kenya's food problem see Yash Tandon, «New Food Strategies and Social Transformation in East Africa», *Africa Development*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1981.
2. US Dept. of Agriculture, *Indices of Agricultural Production in Africa and Near East, 1956-75* (Washington DC, 1976 Statistical Bulletin, No. 556); FAO Production Yearbook 1974 (Rome, 1975) Vol. 1, pp. 29; 30, tables reproduced in Norman K. Nicholson and John D. Esseks «The Politics of Food Scarcities in Developing Countries» *International Organisation*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Summer 1978.
3. Arthur Lewis, *Report on Industrialisation in the Gold Coast*.
4. Janet Girdner, Victor Ohvovsola, Myrna Froning and Emmanuel Hansen, «Ghana's Agricultural Food Policy: Operation Feed Yourself» *Food Policy*, February 1981, p. 21.

5. Ghana imports 70 % of all its meat requirements and imports between 30–40 % of all food needs. This is for a country where agriculture and forestry products make up 75 % of all exports.
6. *Ghanaian Times*, July 13, 1965, quoted in Tony Killick *Development Economics in Action* (London, Heinemann, 1978), p. 188.
7. *Daily Graphic*, March 13, 1973.
8. For detailed discussion about Ghana's agricultural economy see: K. Dickson, *A Historical Geography of Ghana*, (Lond. Cambridge Univ. Press 1971); K. Dickson and G. Benneh, *A New Geography of Ghana* (Lond. Longman, 1970), E.A. Boateng, *Geography of Ghana* (London. Cambridge University Press 1967); S. La Anyane, *Ghana Agriculture* (Lond. OUP 1963); J. B. Willis, *Agriculture and Land Use in Ghana* (Lond. OUP 1962.).
9. Andrew Shepherd, *Capitalist Rice Farming in Northern Ghana*, (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979).
10. Arthur Lewis, *Aspects of Tropical Trade, 1881–1965* Stockholm: Almqvist and Wicksell, 1969, quoted in Clive Thomas *Dependence and Transformation* (N.Y. Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. 145.
11. For the early beginning and development of cocoa agriculture see Poly Hill, *Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana*, (Lond. Cambridge University Press, 1963).
12. Geoffrey Kay, *The Political Economy of Ghana* (Lond. Cambridge University Press, 1972), Stephen Hymer, *The Political Economy of the Gold Coast and Ghana*, (New Haven, Yale University, Occasional Paper No. 73, 1969).
13. For details of this see La Anyane, *Ghana Agriculture*.
14. One must not get the impression that the argument being made here is that there is no research whatsoever on local crops. There are certain individuals at the universities or the various research institutes conducting research into food crops and the Food Research Institute has been doing useful work in the area of preservation, but there is nothing like the coordination and concentration of effort given to cocoa and other export crops, and at the moment this predominant attention to export crops still obtains.
15. La Anyane, *Ghana Agriculture*, P. 73.
16. Ghana, Ministry of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1968, p. 8.
17. Although peasant reaction has been slow public officials have already began to panic and are doing everything to keep peasant interest in export crops.
18. Gold Coast Department of Agriculture, *Annual Reports*, 1941–2.
19. See Margaret Peil, *The Ghanaian Factory Worker* (Lond. Cambridge University Press, 1972). «The influence of Formal Education on Occupational Choice», *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1973. The position that the school militates against agriculture has recently been challenged. See J.W. Hanson, *Is the School the Enemy of the Farm?: The African Experience*, (Dept. of Agricultural Economics, Michigan State University, East Lansing, African Rural Economy Paper, No. 22).
20. Since 1960 the agricultural labour force has been growing at a rate lower than the labour force or the population, see F. Stoces, «Agricultural Production in Ghana, 1955–1965», *The Economic Bulletin of Ghana*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1966; Victor Nyanteng, «Ghana: A Country Paper» (Mimeo July 1979), Presented to World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, (Hague 1979).
21. Many of these processes have now been simplified.



## RESUME

*Dans cet article, l'auteur essaie de voir dans quelle mesure la politique publique telle qu'elle a été et est toujours pratiquée au Ghana n'a pas pu et ne pourra pas résoudre le problème de la crise alimentaire. Il nous décrit d'abord l'économie agricole du Ghana avant de nous parler de l'histoire de l'agriculture du Ghana.*

*Parlant de l'économie agricole du Ghana, il fait remarquer que le Ghana est l'un des rares pays où il ne devrait pas y avoir de crises alimentaires parce que les caractéristiques physiques du sol ainsi que le caractère social de l'agriculture représentent un avantage pour le développement d'une agriculture vivrière. Pour l'auteur si la crise alimentaire que traverse le Ghana actuellement est si aiguë, c'est que les différents gouvernements qui se sont tour à tour succédés à la tête du pays n'ont pas pu comprendre que les programmes de modernisation et de développement dans lesquels ils se sont engagés impliquaient aussi des changements profonds de structures.*

*Le secteur agricole tel qu'il était organisé par les pouvoirs coloniaux ne pouvait pas supporter les mutations que les autorités voulaient lui faire subir. En réalité, elles n'ont jamais vraiment accordé la priorité qu'il fallait aux cultures vivrières sauf peut-être pendant les premières années de «l'Opération Nourris-toi Toi-même» qui virent l'Etat intervenir à la fois au niveau de la production, de l'octroi des crédits, de la commercialisation et de la distribution. Mais certains facteurs auxquels l'Etat n'avait pas prêté suffisamment d'attention sont venus limiter la réussite de cette opération. Il s'agit notamment de l'influence «démotivante» de la scolarisation sur l'agriculture et du développement des travaux de construction qui ont arraché à l'agriculture ses agents les moins qualifiés.*

*En conclusion, l'auteur estime que, si les différents programmes de développement de l'agriculture vivrière ont échoué parce que les changements structurels nécessaires n'ont pas été opérés, ce ne sont certainement pas les entreprises multinationales auxquelles le gouvernement ghanéen a l'intention de confier l'agriculture vivrière, qui vont résoudre ce problème au bénéfice de la masse.*