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LOOKING UP TO THE VICTIMS: LAND SCARCITY AND WOMEN'S ROLE IN FOOD PROVISIONING IN THE GHANA-TOGO BORDER AREA

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Abstract

This article has shown that even though women in a cash crop growing area on the Ghana side of the Ghana-Togo border played virtually no role in the transfer of land to migrant farmers, it was they who, either as wives or heads of household, faced the responsibility of dealing with household food insecurity that had resulted from the transfer of the land. Thus, the paper suggests that, in collaboration with its development partners, the Government of Ghana should assist these women to develop alternative income-earning enterprises that de-emphasize land as the only means of earning livelihood in the area.

Résumé

Les femmes qui se trouvent du côté ghanéen de la frontière Ghana-Togo, où poussent les cultures de rente, ne sont pratiquement pas impliquées dans le transfert de terre aux agriculteurs immigrés. Pourtant, se sont elles qui en tant qu'épouses ou chefs de ménage, prennent en charge la lourde responsabilité d'insécurité alimentaire du foyer provoquée par le transfert de la terre. Par conséquent, la communication propose que le gouvernement ghanéen, en collaboration avec ses partenaires dans le développement, aide ces femmes á développer d'autres entreprises génératrices de revenu afin de ne plus dépendre de la terre comme le seul moyen de gagner leur vie dans la région.

Introduction

Feminist writers on Africa have noted a paradox in gender relations in the region. The paradox is that although women, compared to their male counterparts, constitute the larger proportion of active labor force in agriculture, particularly in food production, and form extensive networks in the informal sector where they are noted for their entrepreneurial abilities and creative skills, they represent the weaker force in the marketplace and the political arena. The sources of this state of affairs can be traced to the pre-existing cultural and contemporary political and legal arrangements in the region. In other words, barriers to the progress and wellbeing of women in Africa can be traced to male political domination, the nature of the sexual division of labor[1], the burden of women's domestic labor and childcare, limitations on access to property and women's lack of choice over childbearing.[2] It is often believed that the modernization processes in Africa since the colonial period have done more harm than good to the welfare of women and in the region.[3]

[1] In this regard, the structural adjustment programs, which were underway in most African countries from the mid-1980s, have generally been considered as having disproportionate adverse effects on women through their insistence on removal of subsidies on social services and agricultural inputs, cost-sharing measures and overemphasis on export agriculture (Cornia et al. 1987; Kabeer and Humphrey 1991; Gladwin 1993).

[2] For more information on these barriers, Fred-Mensah (1993) and Moser (1993).

[3] For example, the colonial education and legal systems, with their preference for dealing with only men in the public spheres, have gone a long way to curtail the economic clout and political power of women in Africa.

Thus, as we move further into the twenty-first century, it is necessary to assemble and examine the existing case studies and statistical information on gender issues in Africa. In doing so, we may be in the position to reevaluate the conceptual tools and operational activities that have hitherto been designed to improve the welfare of women in the region (Adepoju and Oppong 1994).[4] In this chapter, I intend throw more light on the apparently contradictory status of women in most of Ghana's agrarian communities. Based predominantly on empirical materials from among the Buem of the Ghana-Togo border area (GTBA), I will show that even though women in this area have played little role in the transfer of their ancestral land to migrant farmers and, today, constitute a negligible proportion of cash crop farm owners in the area,[5] either as wives or heads of single-parent households[6] they face the inescapable responsibility of dealing with the increasing household food insecurity that has resulted from land scarcity in the area.[7]

The study focuses on cocoa cultivation, even though it is not concerned with the production of the crops *per se*. Cocoa as a perennial export crop, is discussed in terms of its role as agent of change in the indigenous land rights system in the GTBA. Introduced into the area at the turn of the twentieth century, the production of cocoa has engendered massive migration into the area, transformed the duration of the use of the land from transient regimes of annual cropping to perennial use; enhanced the value of the land; changed the income concept of peasant farming; thrown the traditional concept of property in land into disarray and, in some communities, eliminated the land frontier.[8] This shift from subsistence agriculture to cash cropping has altered the pre-existing production relations, where production relations are defined as the relationships among people as land grantors and land users, as farm owners and farm workers and as creditors and debtors.

One normative argument central to this study is that the denial of the women in the GTBA of their customary rights of access to their kin-based land by their male counterpart is a violation of their entitlement. As Sen (1981, 1982) noted, entitlement connotes rights, which define the "relationship between people and the commodities which they need to acquire in order to lead certain kind of

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[4] It must be recalled that there have often been shifts in vision on the strategies for dealing with issues regarding women and girls, particularly the contemporary shift from the concept of women in development (WID) to gender and development (GAD). The WID approach came under attack by researchers in non-governmental organizations who advocate a shift of focus from "sex" to "gender" as the conceptual tool for gender-sensitive planning and analysis. The resentment generally derived from the notion that the approach perceives women in isolation and focuses on women in terms of their sex, that is their biological differences with men rather than in terms of gender. Focus on gender takes account of the social relationships that exist between women and men, a relationship in which women have been subordinated. Gender-aware approaches are concerned with the manner in which male-female relationships are constructed: men and women play different roles in society, their gender differences being shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants (see Fred-Mensah 1993, for a summary of these views).

[5] Discussions on women cash crop farm owners date back to Hill's seminal work in the 1950s among the migrant cocoa farmers in Akim Abuakwa farming district in the Eastern Region of Ghana, (Hill 1958; also Vellenga 1986).

[6] The term *single-parent households* in this context refers to households headed by women. As Migot-Adholla and John (1994) noted, the main factors influencing the incidence of female-headed household in much of Africa include widowhood, marital failure and premarital motherhood. A more extensive discussion of the concept can be found in Guyer and Peters (1984).

[7] The term land scarcity in the current study is considered a subjective one. It does not necessarily connote absolute land shortage. It may refer to either the inability to get land for food crop cultivation or the inability to expand existing export crop production. It may also refer to the quality of the available land. In this case, an uncultivated land can be available yet land can be considered scarce if the quality of the land is so poor that it cannot be used for food cultivation or the yield from it is low (Francis, 1984).

[8] Conceived of as property regime, land rights systems define relationships among persons with reference to the land. Property rights are not relations between people and things. Rather, they are behavioral relations among people that arise from the existence and use of things of value. It thus follows that changes in a system land rights are ipso facto changes in interpersonal relations, hence evidence of social change (Bentsi-Enchill 1964; Fred-Mensah 1987; Bromley and Cernea 1989).

lives."[9] However, as a relational issue, people's entitlement must be viewed with reference to the sociocultural context within which it is to be exercised. In other words, in applying the entitlement analysis to people in relation to an object of value, which in this case is land, attention must be paid to the fact that the sociocultural milieu within which the people operate can be a source of their vulnerability, irrespective of the statutory or customary laws that govern the land. This thinking was captured in Gore's (1993) review of Sen's works on entitlement when he noted that a person's command over the resources by which food is acquired can depend upon something more than legal rights. This view was corroborated by Gladwin (1993) when she, too, observed that there is gender vulnerability engendered by social stratification and imbalance in gender relations both at the community and household levels in most of Africa's agrarian communities.

The Local Economy

The GTBA marks the eastern limit of the Ghana side of the Koforidua-Akwapim-Akwamu-Togo mountain range, which has an average height of about 450 meters above sea level (Dickson and Benneh 1990). This area lies in the semi-deciduous rainforest that marks the central portion of the Ghana-Togo border. The GTBA is a cluster of communities that constitutes the eastern half of the larger Buem Traditional Area in the Jasikan District in the Volta Region of Ghana.[10] The main settlements of the GTBA are New Ayoma, Dzolu, Old Ayoma, Baglo, Odumase, Kute and Lekante. In Ghana's contemporary decentralization scheme, the GTBA is a semi-autonomous administrative unit known as the Buem-Kator Area Council, constituting one of the seven area councils of the Jasikan District.[11] The indigenous people in the GTBA are called Buem and their language, Lelemi. This language forms part of a linguistic community which Ring (1987) called the Ghana-Togo Mountain Group (GTM).[12]

Agriculture, including forestry, hunting and fishery is the most important occupation in the GTBA. It employs about 84 percent of the labor force. Darkoh (1964a, 1964b) noted that Buem people have been cultivators as far back as human memory can reach.[13] Until the introduction of cocoa and, later, coffee, agricultural activities in the GTBA were predominantly subsistence farming. Farms were relatively small and were designed to meet the needs of the changing demographic composition of the domestic groups. They were also planned to meet the food requirements of such rites of passage as birth, marriages and funerals. Food crops grown in the area are generally annual and the main ones are maize, yam, rice, cocoyam, plantain and banana. Vegetables are also grown. They include pepper, okra, tomatoes and garden egg. The crops are totally rain-fed, and the entire agricultural system is based on a simple technology, of which the hoe, the cutlass, the axe, the scythes, the knife and the basket are the most important farm implements. Poultry and livestock are kept alongside the arable agriculture. The main animals are goats and sheep. Fishing is of no economic importance in the GTBA as the area is inland and there are no large rivers or lakes.

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[9] For a summary and discussion of Sen's works on entitlement, see Gore (1993).

[10] The Buem Traditional Area is one of the most important indigenous political systems in the northern part of the Volta Region (see Fred-Mensah 1999b; Dorm-Adzobu 1974).

[11] The other area councils of the Jasikan District are the Jasikan Area Council, the Tapa Area Council, the Konsu-Ovi Area Council, the Buem-Ntete Area Council, the Bowri-Kwamekrom Area Council, and the Nkonya Area Council.

[12] The other members of the Ghana-Togo Mountain group identified by Ring are Boweri, Akapafu/Lolobi, Likpe, Logba, Avatime, Tafi and Nyagbo. Of these groups, Boweri, Akpafu/Lolobi and Likpe are Buem's closest neighbours.

[13] This is also attested by the indigenous Buem Calendar. The calendar shows the main agricultural activities, crops normally cultivated, implements normally used and how agricultural practices relate to the various seasons of the year. The month of July (*Ububu*), for example, translates literally to mean "it is always wet". It is the month in which rice is planted. The major agricultural tool is the hoe (*kaklorkor*). Corn is harvested in August (*Oryafe*), a month whose name is translated literally to mean "sunshine from God" (Fred-Mensah 1999b).

In both of his works, Darkoh noted that hunting was a major economic activity in Buem, and it lasted until the late 1960s when uncultivated forests and the uninhabited bush began to disappear. The chief game consisted of bush pigs, leopards, antelopes, lions and monkeys. He noted that except for the pelt of the black monkeys, products of the animals were not traded. Instead, hunters normally preserved the skins and some other parts of certain animals for display as trophies on ceremonial occasions. There are also a few lumbering activities, which involve the felling and sawing of trees. The major tree species used in this trade include Sapele, Mahogany, Odum and Wawa. Since the mid-1980s, lumbering has declined as an economic activity in the GTBA. This is due mainly to two factors: firstly, most of the trees have disappeared as a result of overexploitation and agricultural cultivation and secondly, the stringent nature of the current national environment laws and policies has discouraged the felling and destruction of trees. Heavy taxes, court fines and, in some extreme cases, imprisonment are some of the penalties that can be imposed on any one caught felling trees in the area without a permit from the Jasikan District Administration.

There are commercial activities as well. These include private transport business, food processing and petty trading. Individuals run bush taxis. The vehicles involved in the transport business are mostly Nissan and Toyota mini buses and wooden Bedford trucks. These vehicles carry goods and passengers within the GTBA and between it and such more southern towns and cities such as Hohoe, Keta, Accra and Tema. There are also small shops, which sell such items as household wares, pharmaceutical products and stationery. The GTBA is also noted for itinerant traders who move their wares from one market to another. There are designated market days, of which those in Kute and New Ayoma are the best developed. Tuesdays are Kute market days and Thursdays are New Ayoma market days. The markets are predominantly outdoor and open-air, and attract traders from far away places as Accra, Ho, Hohoe and Jasikan and Togolese towns such as Bena and Ahlor. The items traded normally include farm produce, handicrafts, farm implements, textile products, stationery, earthen wares, aluminum and glass products, ornaments, cosmetics, and fish. The bulk of the trading activities are controlled by women. Male farmers who live within a radius of about four kilometers of a market town, too, do visit the market where they meet their counterparts to discuss business and share alcoholic beverages, of which palm wine[14] and a locally distilled liquor *akpeteshie*[15] are the most important.

Cocoa, In-Migration and Land Transfer

Land, called *kalo* in the Buem language, is obviously the most important productive resource in the GTBA. That is, the land tenure system traditionally conforms to the family land[16] concept of Ghana. The land is owned by lineages, and lineage heads are responsible for allocating it to households and individuals who need it for cultivation or establishing residence. Thus, attachment to of a lineage, based primarily on consanguinity, affinity or adoption, was the main means by which households gained access to land. Unlike the Akan (Bentsi-Enchill 1964) but like the Ewe(Kludze 1973), the power of Buem chiefs, including the paramount chief, over land is not proprietary. It is only political. That is, a chief of Buem has no right to control and or transfer land by virtue of his position. He can do this only when the land belongs to his lineage and he is entitled to its allocation. It is the responsibility of the chief to settle land disputes and impose fines where necessary. This oversight duty of chiefs expanded with the advent of cash cropping and the subsequent influx of migrants. Not only must chiefs cope with the increasing land-related conflicts, they must also append their signature and/or thumbprint to all documents—known locally as *land receipts*—pertaining to plots of land transferred in his chiefdom if the document is to be considered valid and tenable in courts of law (Fred-Mensah 1999b).

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[14] This is a frothy whitish alcoholic beverage extracted from oil palm trees.

[15] This a gin-like liquor distilled from such fermented beverages as palm wine, sugar solution and fruit juice.

[16] The term *family*, as understood in Ghana's statutes refers to a group of people who descend from "a common ancestor and they constitute a corporate entity," capable of holding ultimate titles to property, including land. It must, therefore, be distinguished from its ordinary usage in English, which simply defines it as a basic social unit, consisting of a husband and wife and their children (see Kludze 1973: 31-32).

The various means by which precolonial communities in Ghana established initial possession and control over land have been discussed in the literature (Bentsi-Enchill 1964; Ollenu 1962). These included conquest, first occupation and voluntary transfer from one ethnic group to another. The people of Buem as a whole established claims of ownership to their present territory by the means of uninterrupted occupation. Their ability for expansion beyond the present possession was curtailed by the arrival of other ethnic groups, among which are the Akpafu to the eastern and northeastern areas, the Likpe in the southeastern corner and the Akposso Kubi to the northwestern corner. There is evidence to show that Buem had to fight a series of wars and court battles with their neighbors to prevent them from encroaching upon their land. For example, the people of Kute have been to war several times with their Akposso neighbors in Togo and the Buem in New Ayoma have fought many wars with the Akpafu over plots of land that lie on their common border. They have also embarked on a series of legal battles with Likpe Kukurantumi, their most immediate southern neighbor.[17]

The nature of migration into the GTBA was similar to that noted in the older cocoa growing areas in southern Ghana (Hill 1963; Hunter 1972), southwestern Nigeria (Berry 1975) and southeastern Ivory Coast (Hecht, 1985). The exact dates of migration into the GTBA are difficult to establish because information on migration to the area is very sketchy. However, based on Kotey's (1972) study in the Kute area and Dorm-Adzobu's (1974) surveys of Buem as a whole and pieces of information garnered from remembered histories of the farmers and dates on land receipts, four periods of the migratory processes have been identified. These were 1900 to World War I period, the inter-War period, the post-World War II period, and since the mid-1960s. In ethnic terms, the majority of the migrants to the GTBA were Ewe from Ghana and Togo. Most of the Ghanaian Ewe migrants were Northern Ewe whose homes of origin are to the south of the GTBA. These migrants were from Agortime, Akorme, Anfoega, Anfoeta, Anlo, Avatime, Gbefi, Gbi, Dakpa, Dzodze, Peki, Tongu, Ve and Vakpo. Non-Ewe Ghanaian migrants were from Anum and Boso in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The Togolese Ewe migrants originated from southern Togolese towns such as Agoe, Atakpame, Dayi, Gafe, Keve, Kpelle and Tsevie. There were also non-Ewe Togolese migrants, most of whom were the Kabre, the Kotokoli and the Kaboli. There were also a few Fon and Yoruba who migrated from southern Benin and southwestern Nigeria, respectively (Fred-Mensah 1999b).

Land acquisition by migrants for cocoa cultivation posed very little problem. The apparent land hunger of the migrants was equally matched by the willingness of the Buem landowners to transfer the land. The major means by which the early migrants acquired land were by purchase and share contracts known *dibi*[18]. Of 259 migrants farms studied over 50 percent were originally acquired through purchases and by the *dibi* contract (Fred-Mensah 1999b). However, since the end of the 1960s when the land frontier in the area had virtually disappeared, the sale and pledging[19] of self-acquired farms as well as inheritance of farms have become the most important means of land and farm transfer to the migrants. Farms were sold either directly to the migrants or they were originally pledged but

[17] For more information on these cases, see *Ghana Law Report* (1962), "Nana Akoto III of New Ayoma v. Nana Kwasi Agyeman I of Likpe Kukurantumi" (1), Accra, 29th June..

[18] The word *di bi* is derived from an Akan (a Ghanaian language) expression *–di bi na meso medi bi*, literally meaning, "eat some so that I also eat some". The di bi contract in the GTBA has a peculiar feature that makes it attractive to the migrants. In this share contract system, it is not only the harvests that are shared equally between the land grantor and the cultivator. The land on which the crop has been cultivated is also shared into two equal parts, and one half is given to the cultivator. This portion of the land becomes the cultivator's property in perpetuity (see also Robertson 1982).

[19] Pledging in Ghana dates back to the precolonial era when people pledged (that is temporarily exchanged) self-acquired properties such as beads, ornaments, and working implements for either money, goods, or services. The practice became more pervasive with the advent of cash cropping and introduction of modern forms of money which have made it possible for farmers to pledge their perennial cash crops. Contrary to the official negative attitudes towards farm pledging in Ghana, writers such as Hill (1986) believe that it has many "positive features" (1986, p. 91). In what she terms "The Need to be Indebted", Hill explains that "Because rural and tropical communities in which cash circulates are innately inegalitarian, so it is inevitable that the impoverished need to borrow and that the richer people should put their surplus funds at work" (p. 83).

ended up in sale. More than a qaurter of all the parcels that were acquired after the 1970s were acquired by this means. It must be noted that while the bulk of land transactions has been between the Buem lineage heads and the migrants, individual Buem household heads have also transferred their self-acquired farms either through direct sale or pledging to the migrants. In his study on the "competition between cocoa and coffee" in the Kute area, Kotey (1972) noted what he considered "steady increases in rates" at which the indigenous people were transferring their land to migrant farmers.

The contribution of cocoa to the social, economic and political transformations in Ghana in general and in the GTBA in particular has been phenomenal. As La-Anyane (1963) noted, if ever there was a golden age of agriculture in Ghana, that golden age was ushered in by cocoa. Cocoa production did not only convert peasant agriculture into a highly lucrative rural economy, it also became the chief source of income in southern rural Ghana and the major foreign exchange earner.[20]. In doing so, cocoa production enabled Ghana to lay the socio-economic foundation for an emerging modern society.

The most prosperous period of cocoa production in Ghana began immediately after World II and lasted until the mid-1960s, when it attained its peak. Though the country as a whole recorded the highest peak of cocoa production of a total output of 571,721 tons in 1964/65 cocoa season, the Volta Region, including the New Ayoma Cocoa District[21], had reached its peak earlier. The district reached its peak of 31,780 tons in the 1956/57 cocoa season. Thus, until the later part of the 1960s, both the Buem and migrants made enormous gains from investments in cocoa. The lineage and household heads were able to amass vast tracts of their family land, which they generously sold to migrants. They also made part of their wealth from relatively large farms which they developed through the *dibi* contract and use of familial labor.[22] However, most of these farms have either been sold or pledged to migrants. One important question, however, is: What are the probable adverse effects of increased production of cocoa on food security on the households in the GTBA, considering its significance in the transformations of the local communities and the competition it inevitably would engender between it and food crop production in the area?

Land Scarcity and Food Insecurity

Since the 1960s, and in the past two decades in particular, research on the relationship between agricultural commercialization and food security in the producing communities in developing countries has become one important approach to assessing food security needs in these countries. There have been tremendous efforts in this direction to assess the extent, if any, to which agricultural commercialization has had negative effects on local food supplies and nutritional statuses of communities that produce these cash crops. Critics of agricultural commercialization generally assert that if the resources that are diverted into the production of agricultural exports are used to promote local food production the problems of malnutrition in most developing countries would be reduced, if not eliminated. It is further argued that to improve nutrition, scarce resources such as land and labour, should be shifted out of export crop production into the production of food for the local economy. Advocates of commercialization of agriculture, on their part, contend that

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[20] It must be recalled that just before the outbreak of World War I, Ghana (then the Gold Coast) had become the leading producer of cocoa and at the time of its political independence in the late 1950s, it was producing about 40 percent of the world's total supply of the crop (Hill 1963; Beckman 1978).

[21] Before the advent of the reform of the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Board (GCMB), the New Ayoma Cocoa District office was responsible for organizing the purchase and storage of cocoa and coffee in the GTBA on behalf of the GCMB.

[22] Being predominantly patrilineal, the use of familial labor, including the labor of wives by Buem household heads for developing their cocoa farms is not surprising. Vallenga (1986) showed that there was a higher probability of the use of familial labor, including the labor of wives, among patrilineal groups than among matrilineal groups in Ghana.

by exploiting comparative advantage and generating faster growth for the overall economy, export cropping can raise incomes and improve nutrition.[23]

Obviously, cocoa production competes with the production of other crops, including food crops. However, the opportunity cost involved in the production of cocoa in relation to the cultivation of food crops depends on different factors, among which are the nature of the farming system used for cultivating the cocoa, the developmental stage of the cocoa trees and the cocoa variety that is under cultivation. For example, in the farming system whereby food crops can be, and usually are, interspersed with the young cocoa plants, the opportunity cost of producing cocoa to food production is close to zero, implying less negative impact of cocoa production on food production. But as the cocoa trees, particularly the Amelonado variety (also called "Tetteh Quarshie"[24] by the local farmers), which can be as tall as over 20 feet, continue to grow the opportunity cost for growing cocoa begins to increase. This is because, except in the case of a particular yam variety and tall stemmed-food plants such as banana and plantain, which can be interspersed with the cocoa plants, it is virtually impossible to continue to grow food crops on the same plot with cocoa. One other thing to take into account in the analysis of opportunity cost in cocoa cultivation vis-à-vis food production is that it requires extensive use of the land in order to achieve a profitable investment. The crop must be planted at intervals of about 12 feet apart to enable it to grow and develop well. Because of this extensive use of the land in the cultivation of cocoa, most farmers have acquired wide areas of land in order to expand their profit-making opportunities. Most of the farmers whom I spoke to had more than one parcel of land under cocoa cultivation.

It follows, therefore, that the increasing disappearance of the land frontier in most parts of the GTBA from the later part of the 1960s was bound to have a serious negative impact for food production in the area. Throughout all my four visits to the area, beginning in the fall of 1992, I witnessed steady declines in quality of life of the people, particularly the majority of the indigenous group. Personal incomes of the farmers declined, thus affecting even the non-agricultural enterprises. This is because demands for goods and services accordingly declined. Households with limited access to land found it difficult to purchase food and meet other obligations such as paying for their health costs and their children's educational bills.[25]

It should be recalled that by the 1970s, output of cocoa in the country as a whole had begun to decline steadily and by 1981, the country had recorded its lowest output of about 150,000 tons. Even though cocoa output began to increase again in the mid-1980s in the country as a whole, the increase in the Volta Region, including the GTBA, has fallen far below the national average. For example, between 1984/85 and 1989/90 cocoa seasons, the period for which district-level data on outputs became available, the New Ayoma cocoa district recorded an increase of only 38.4 percent, whereas the country as a whole recorded an increase of 76.3 percent over the 1981 level.[26] By the mid-1990s, the situation had become so frustrating to the farmers in the Region that an appeal was made to the

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[23] Since the mid-1980s the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington, DC in particular has been undertaking such studies in Africa. The countries include The Gambia, Kenya and Rwanda. For summaries of the arguments and the findings, see, Pinstrup-Andersen 1983; von Braun and Kennedy, 1994

[24] Tetteh Quarshie was the Ghanaian who was said to have smuggled the seeds of the Amelonado variety into Ghana from the island of Fernando Po in 1879.

[25] The current situation in this area was predicted by Dorm-Adzobu when in the mid-1970s he observed about the Buem Traditional Area as a whole that virgin lands in the area were becoming exhausted, thus posing a threat to food supply. He went on to caution that the gradual decline in cocoa yields in the absence of other viable income-generating enterprises could lead to a downward trend in the social and economic lives of the people.

[26] Attacks by parasitic fungi called *phytoptora palmivora* and *phytoptora megakarya* (referred to as "black pod" by the farmers) are the main cause for the relatively low performance of cocoa in the Volta Region. The fungi attack the cocoa pod and infect the beans in it.

government by the Volta Region branch of the Ghana Cocoa, Coffee and Shea Nut Farmers' Association (CCSFA), requesting it to "declare the Volta Region a cocoa disaster area."[27]

The declines in cocoa output in the GTBA coincided with the continuing deterioration in the real value of the Ghanaian currency, the Cedi, which was due to the successive currency devaluations embarked upon by the government under its austere economic programs. It must be recalled that after the mid-1980s, the government was implementing country-wide austere socio-economic measures under its neo-liberal programs, technically dubbed structural adjustment programs (SAPs). In line with its emphasis on cost-recovery and cost-sharing, as in any part of the country, costs of all socio-economic services, including education and health increased, thus aggravating the hardships unleashed by the steady decline in incomes from cocoa. The Buem were hit harder because they, contrasted with the migrants, had less access to land due to their massive transfer of the land to the migrants. The migrants thus appeared to be in a better position to deal with the emergent hardships than the Buem.[28]

The food situation in the GTBA, however, began to improve from the mid-1970s when residents could supplement their own production with food imported from the neighboring Togolese villages of Bena, Kpete, Welikorpe and Tormegbe. This too did not last long. Due to a steady expansion in coffee and, to a lesser extent, cocoa production in this area, after the 1970s, the food supplies from the area to the GTBA markets, too, began to dwindle. Consequently, food prices began to increase again in the GTBA. Though the people of the GTBA as a whole have been devising strategies to cope with the deteriorating economic conditions in the area by resorting to nonfarm income-earning activities, the greater proportion of these non-agricultural activities are owned and operated by migrants and their offspring. Today, migrants have largely taken over from the Buem the operation of businesses such as transport, lumbering, petty trading, food processing and corn milling. For example, in Kute, apart from two palm wine sellers, no other significant business in the area was owned or being operated by a Buem. Also, apart from Dzolu, where two families from the indigenous group owned and were operating transport businesses, none of the transport businesses I encountered in the area was owned or being operated by Buems. In New Ayoma, none of the 6 passenger trucks and buses that I came across were owned or being operated by a Buem. They were all owned and operated by one migrant Kotokoli family from northern Togo.

Aggravating the already deplorable conditions of the Buem was the problem of indebtedness. The presence of migrants and their better financial position made it attractive for the generally impoverished Buem to contract loans from the migrants. As a consequence, they have become indebted to the migrants. This indebtedness was, in turn, aggravating the distressing economic conditions of the Buem debtors, thus accelerating the sale and pledging of their farms to the migrants in order to meet their debt obligations. With their relatively good financial situation, the migrants have continued to purchase these farms and as a result make extra profits to cushion themselves against the hardships brought about by the deteriorating Ghanaian economy. Because the migrants in general are able to eke out some food and/or income from the land under their use, their socioeconomic conditions appear to be better than those of the Buem, validating a basic postulate that in agrarian communities, where there are limited nonfarm employment opportunities and a general lack of formal social security systems, it is better to have access to a piece of land, no matter how small, than have none at all (von Braun 1989). The key question, therefore, is: How have the Buem been coping with the increasing food insecurity?

The search for the answer to this question directs attention to the role of women, either as wives or as heads of single-parent households in ensuring household food security and welfare in the

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[27] *Daily Graphic*, December 20, 1994, p. 3 and July 27, 1995, p. 7.

[28] Some of the migrants also embarked upon what I will call onward migration, a practice whereby the migrants continue to migrate to areas where land frontiers still exist, even as they retain their holdings in the GTBA. Since the mid-1970s, some of them have migrated to areas such as Salifu, Bontibor and Ahamansu, all to the north of Buem in the Jasikan District. Others, mostly sons of the early migrants, have moved to new frontiers in the other Ghanaian cocoa growing regions such as Western and Brong Ahafo Regions.

GTBA. Our investigation has shown that more women than men are active in the struggle to ensure household food security in the area.[29] This is primarily because it is women, who shoulder the greater burden of spending time at home. It is the women who are closer to the children and their dependent relatives. It is common scene in Buem towns to find men sitting under a tree enjoying their pastimes even when those activities are at the cost of more gainful ones.

These women strive to ensure their household food supply in two principal ways; firstly, by tilling the marginal lands and, secondly, by purchasing food from the local markets. Women cultivate the plots that have been considered unsuitable for cocoa and coffee cultivation and thus abandoned. It has often been noted that self-provisioning through household production is the major means by which the rural poor households attempt to ensure their food security (Whitehead 1988). As Toulmin (1991) reminded us, richer rural households normally have a more diverse portfolio of assets and sources of income, which enables them to buy food and/or deal with any negative impacts that may emanate from changes in agricultural resource allocation or adverse ecological conditions such as drought, soil infertility, and incidence of pests. It is a usual scene in the GTBA to see women on their way to or from farm (sometimes accompanied by their children), with a wooden tray or a load-carrying pan balanced on their head. The crops cultivated include rice, plantain, banana, maize, yam, cassava and vegetables such as okra, pepper, garden eggs and tomatoes. Because these plots are generally poor in quality, usually wet or rocky, or due to overuse, and given the rudimentary character of the production techniques, the yields are normally very poor. The women thus try supplement their farm returns by engaging in non-agricultural activities like trade in cooked food, alcoholic beverages, and household wares. Returns from these enterprises are generally low, too, due to the low level of capital investment and the generally low income of the residents.[30]

A more comprehensive understanding of the burden which Buem women face can be gained when other services that they perform in addition or as a supplement to food supply are taken into account. Unlike their male counterparts, it is the women who ensure the supply of firewood, the main source of household energy in the area. The search for firewood in the GTBA is a laborious and toilsome task. Because the woods in the surrounding bushes have been depleted due to overexploitation, the women and their children have to walk long distances usually along narrow and winding paths, some of which entail the crossing of streams and/or climbing of hills. Even in a situation in which the man accompanies his wife to the farm after the day's work,[31] while the man may have only a rifle on his shoulder and cutlass in his hand, it is the woman who carries the firewood on top of any other item she may have in the container (usually a carrying pan) and, in the case of a nursing mother, with a baby tied in a cloth on her back. Furthermore, the man has the option to stop over at a friend's or relative's farm or house for a chat and drinks, whereas the woman has to continue to the house in order to embark on her multiple tasks—notably cooking and bathing the children. In addition to all these, it is the woman who does the family laundry and makes sure there is water in the house, adequate for all to use. In the absence of energy- and time-saving devices such as washing machines, pipe-borne water and modern cooking stoves, these tasks are by any measure arduous and wearisome.

It may be of interest to know that even though most of the women I talked to expressed grief regarding their predicament and wished their men could offer more help, they never failed to adorn our conversions with smiles and expressions of hope for a better future. The hope that these women

[29] Household food security is defined as the ability of households to secure enough food at all times in order to ensure adequate dietary intake for all members (von Braun et al. 1993).

[30] Based on a study on rural growth linkages in Malaysia and Nigeria, Hazell and Roell (1983) noted the effect agricultural growth had on the growth of the non-agricultural sector. They noted, among other things, that the effect arose from "increases in household expenditures on consumer goods and services as a result of increased farm incomes."

[31] Women in rural Ghana do not at all times have control over their own labor. A woman's husband can deny her the right to use her labor on her farm or enterprise by being made to work on the man's farm, though with no guarantee that she will be a full beneficiary of the fruit of that labor (Vallenga 1986).

expressed was usually tied to their children's future, based on the assumption that their children would grow up and be better off than them and, if possible, take care of them.

This notion of children being considered a source of future security for their parents is not peculiar to the Buem, though in their case, most of these dreams are not realized. As contrasted with the youths of the migrant families, Buem youths have made little socioeconomic progress both at home and in the urban areas. One major problem among the young Buem men is alcoholism. Both casual observers and researchers have linked loafing and alcoholism among Buem men to the apparently unfettered manner in which they have sold their land and pledged their self-acquired farms. The sale and pledging of farms was more pronounced in the Kute, Old Ayoma and New Ayoma communities and these are the communities in which alcoholism is most rampant.

The excessive land transfers in the GTBA have been a matter of interest to all and sundry, particularly researchers and local administrators. As early as the 1930s, the British Colonial Office responsible for the United Nations Trusteeship Colony of the TransVolta Togoland, of which the GTBA was part, expressed concern about what they considered to be an indiscriminate disposal of land by the Buem to "stranger" farmers. Also, in an attempt explain the excessive land transfer in the Kute area in particular, Kotey (1972) noted that,

> ... The impression given is that the Buems ... are not commercially oriented; they prefer their meager subsistence to hard farm work that could improve their future life; they prefer an Epicurean type of life (p. 14).
>
> ... Land was sold indiscriminately, to the extent that now there is no land left to cultivate food or start a new cocoa or coffee farm ... The irony is that many second and third generation Buems have become landless and unemployed (p. 15)...

He went on to observe that

> ... It will be naive, however, to explain the habit of land sales purely by economic motives. [These discordant elements cannot be explained solely by reference to cocoa/coffee cultivation]. There must be more behind it, which a sociologist will be more competent to study (p. 22).[32]

Issues of Policy

Though GTBA is a small area, lying in an obscure area in rural Ghana, the findings from it provide an insight into the persisting barriers that continue to militate against the advancement of women in Ghana's agrarian communities. Discrimination against women's access to land in the GTBA results from the persistence of traditional barriers to access and weak implementation of national development policies. Like in some other areas in Africa, women's access to land is generally restricted and even in instances in which they have acquired rights of access,'such rights are tenuous and ephemeral and, as a result, their security is limited compared to their male counterparts (Migot-Adholla and John 1994).[33] In the GTBA, the men were able to use their position to acquire land and deny their female counterparts access in the rush for land simply because it is men who, as heads of the lineages, are the administrators of the kin-based land. This situation is a matter of concern, not only because women generally produce the bulk of food in most of these communities, but also because effective access to productive property is a matter of social justice and a means for the women to improve their well being (World Bank 1992).

At the level of policy, the key question is: if, as shown above, membership of a kin group was traditionally fundamental to one's eligibility for access to land in the GTBA, irrespective of gender, why then have women been disadvantaged in the transfer and allocation of the land with the advent of cash cropping in the area? The policy usefulness of this question lies in the assumption that the

[32] For a detailed explanation to land transfer in Buem-Kator, see Fred-Mensah (1999b).

[33] See Stamp (1990), too, for summaries of some of the earlier works on this issue.

mere incorporation of gender components in development programs will not necessarily translate into improving the welfare of women and girls. In other words, in applying the notion of entitlement to the contemporary gender-sensitive development programs in Ghana and, indeed, Africa: in what way can it be assured that gender-sensitive components in contemporary development programs can be translated into opportunities which will improve the living conditions of women and girls in Ghana?[34]

The major welfare priority in the GTBA is must be the search for means by which the food situation in the area be ameliorated. From both analytical and empirical points if view, land redistribution in the area does not offer the most viable option in dealing with the household food situation among the Buem. Not only has the land been extensively transferred to migrants (reaching over 90 percent in the Kute area in particular), the investments made in the land are relatively fixed and permanent and there is no evidence to show that the farmers aere ready to convert their cocoa farms into food crop farms, even if the cocoa farms are exhausted as a result of age. Unlike the transient annual subsistence crops such as cocoyam, cassava and corn, cocoa is a perennial crop. The Amelonado cocoa, which is the commonest variety in the area, takes four to five, or even six years to begin to bear fruit. And once established, it may occupy the land for about 60 years before it begins to die out. Even when the older trees die out, there is no guarantee that the land will be used for food production.[35] This is because in the areas where the older trees had died, farmers were either replanting cocoa or converting the land into the cultivation of other perennial crops, notably oil palm and kola nut trees. Furthermore, even if the exhausted cocoa farms are converted into food crop farms, the bulk of them will remain with the migrant groups, particularly in the Kute and Old Ayoma areas. This thus leaves little room for the Buem women to increase their food supply through their own production.

Thus, one potentially viable option for improving the food security situation for the poor households in the area is by enabling them to improve their income-earning capabilities. This calls for the need to develop policies that would change occupational structure in the area and, in doing so, enable the people to transcend the notion that social and economic security can be assured only by having access to land (Siddle and Swindell 1990). The Ghana Government, in conjunction with interested non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can provide land-deficit poor households with skill training in trades under the auspices of the country's Non-Formal Education Division of the Ministry of Education and the National Council on Women. This may include dressmaking, knitting and pottery. The international donor community can assist by making available small loans through their microenterprise development programs and social development funds. It must be noted that there already exists in the country a program in which handicraft industries are receiving both financial and moral support from the Ghana Export Promotion Council (GEPC), the Ghana Tourist Board (GTB) and a section of the international donor community, particularly the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Through joint programs by these organizations, Ghanaian handicraft makers are being assisted to supply orders from large foreign retail firms, notably JC Penney, Pier 1 Imports, and American Merchandizing Company, all in the United States.[36] With increased income, poor households, too, can ensure food

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[34] In a review of 15 World Bank's development projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, it was found out that there were wide discrepancies between project objectives and project outcomes. Many of the components that were designed to improve the welfare of women were not mentioned anywhere in the project supervision and completion reports (Fred-Mensah 1993).

[35] Retaining the depleted cocoa trees instead of replanting them or planting other crops evokes the image of the "irrational peasant." Explanation for this behavior can be found in economic decision-making that is guided by risk aversion. As an article in Ghana's *Daily* Graphic of 17 May, 1995 noted, it is not always easy to persuade farmers to cut down their cocoa trees because no compensation can be adequate to make up for any possible returns. As the trees die gradually and can continue to bear some fruit, farmers do not understand why they should sacrifice a small yield by cutting down existing trees for the future of those they are not sure of.

[36] *Ghanaian Times* (Accra) March 10, 1995.

security by purchasing food from the local market or by importing it from other food-producing areas (Fred-Mensah 1993b; 1999a, 1999b).

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