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The Challenges Food Crops Farmers Face in the Ahanta West District: Friends of the Nation Demonstration Farm, a Possible Solution.

Meghan Crouch

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The Challenges Food Crops Farmers Face in the Ahanta West District: Friends of the Nation Demonstration Farm, a Possible Solution.

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Independent Study Project
School for International Training
May 15, 2001
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Kofi Manu first and foremost, for without him the idea for this project never would have blossomed. The fieldwork component was made possible by the tremendous generosity of Friends of the Nation. I can’t thank them enough for providing accommodation, contacts, translators and technical support.

To Naana and all of the new friends I have made here, I thank you for your constant support and encouragement. And finally to the Amo Broni family, who have opened their hearts and their home, making this experience truly meaningful.
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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the challenges food crop farmers face in the Ahanta West district and some of the programs in place to raise both the productivity and the living standards of the farmers and their families. Through the examination of their current practices, and the factors that hinder their work, the constraints farmers are confronted with will be more fully understood. The Friends of the Nation Demonstration Farm is a possible solution. Their objectives will be presented as well as examples of their current projects designed to educate farmers about new practices. Finally, I attempt to identify the challenges faced by those who provide the relief. There seems to be a missing link between the farmers and these organizations. In order for change to occur, cultural understanding, time and resources need to be dedicated to this crucial sector of Ghana’s economy and population.
Introduction

The Role of Agriculture in Ghana’s Economy

Every living organism needs food to survive, therefore those who produce this food are valued members of society who deserve respect. As with the case of many developing nations, Ghana’s economy is dependent on agriculture. Agriculture makes the largest contributions to the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP) (see figure 1). Despite the fact the numbers decrease slightly each year because of the fact the economy is attempting to shift to a more industry based models, dependence on the sector is significant.

Figure 1

Contribution to GDP by Sector 1993 – 98
At constant 1993 Prices (percentage)\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>ALL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yet, despite the statistical significance, the sector, especially the food crop portion, is ignored, neglected and left to fend for themselves employing traditional methods that do not always lead to higher productivity. Farmers are some of Ghana’s hardest working individuals, yet they have little to show for their efforts. Friends of the Nation, a Ghanaian based NGO, is attempting to rectify the situation through their educational sessions and demonstrations. The future of the sector is unclear, yet for increased productivity and higher qualities of life for farmers improvements must be made.

The Setting

Ahanta West District lies in the Western Region of Ghana, with Agona Nkwanta as its capital. It borders Shama-Ahanta East and Wassa West District to the South, Nzema East to the

west, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south.² With a total land area of 673 square kilometers, the district has 123 settlements that can be considered predominantly as rural but because of land use patterns the portion of the land allocated for living is densely populated.³ The people are mostly from the Ahanta ethnic group, but Wassa, Ewes, Nzemas, and Fantes also reside in the district.⁴

The area is very limited financially and developmentally. Seventy-eight percent of the population lives below the poverty line and all infrastructure needs improvement.⁵ There is a lack of clean water and toilets; at least three quarters of people get their water from rivers, streams, ponds, boreholes, and wells and more than half the population doesn’t have access to a toilet.⁶ Because such a high percentage of the population is of school going age, the facilities are stretched beyond their capabilities. Likewise available medical treatment is lacking; there is a hospital in Dixcove, but as of 1996 the doctor to patient ratio in the entire district was 1:2374.⁷

As one can immediately discover after entering the district, survival depends on agriculture. The oil palm and rubber plantations are sprawling and food crop farms are abundant.⁸ The market in Agona Nkwanta, the “breadbasket” of the district, serves as the central market for the region and on Wednesday, market day, the town is swarming with merchants and shoppers alike. Agriculture not only provides income, it sustains the region’s people. In fact, agriculture employs about 59% of the total population and about 66% of the actual labour force⁹ (see Appendices A). Therefore, as this paper seeks to suggest, time, resources and commitment need to be given to this sector, for it is the backbone of the district.

² District Planning Co-ordinating Unit. Five Year Medium Plan. (Agona Nkwanta: 1996), 6
³ Ibid. p.6, 10.
⁴ Ibid. p. 6.
⁵ Ibid. p. 19
⁶ Ibid. p. 21, 8
⁷ Ibid. p. 21
Methodology

Data Collection

Mr. S. K. Manu’s lecture on Traditional Agricultural Practices in Ghana\(^\text{10}\) inspired me on the very last day before the official beginning of the ISP period to change my topic to something I knew absolutely nothing about, agriculture. Obviously integral to the economy of Ghana and to the food consumption of its people, the agricultural realm had immediate appeal to me. My last-minute decision to switch topics left me with little time to become acquainted with the field of agriculture. The first few days of my research were spent narrowing the scope of my project from agriculture in Ghana in general to a more focused topic. After preliminary readings on Ghanaian development issues pertaining to agriculture and the economy I decided to devote myself to the challenges the food crop farmer faces and what steps are being taken to alleviate these hardships and increase productivity. Having worked extensively with nonprofit agencies in America, I was interested in seeing the role of NGO’s in Ghanaian society. Thus, it was a necessity to connect with an NGO working in the agricultural sector, particularly with food crops.

Initially a requirement for me was to work with an NGO based in Accra; Technoserve, was the obvious choice. Yet quickly I realized that my protect would be more both more feasible and rewarding if I were to work with a smaller grass-roots organization carrying out projects in rural areas. After returning from Accra, Mr. Manu helped to facilitate a connection with an NGO whose projects matched my interests. Chris Mevuta, executive director of Friends of the Nation, a Ghanaian based NGO, was of immediate assistance. I formulated questions to ask Chris and met with him soon after.

Questions for Chris Mevuta, Friends of the Nation Executive Director:

1. How many years has Friends of the Nation (FoN) been in existence?
2. What FoN’s mission statement?
3. Can you tell me about FoN’s staff? How many paid positions do you have?
4. From where do you receive your funding?
5. Could you briefly outline all of FoN’s current projects that deal with agriculture?
6. Is there one project dealing predominantly with food crops and/or the alleviation of food poverty?
7. Can you tell me about the history of the demonstration farm in Agona Nkwanta, focusing specifically on its goals and accomplishments?

\(^{10}\) Samuel Kofi Manu. Lecture on “Traditional Agriculture Practices in Ghana” (University of Cape Coast, 10 April 2001).
8. Is it feasible that I could live in Agona Nkwanta, the town in which the demonstration farm is located, in order to observe and to participate?

9. With whom will I be working directly with?

Once the plans finalized and after I clearly outlined my objectives, I was able to start the fieldwork component of my project in the Ahanta West Region district capital of Agona Nkwanta. Interviews, informal conversations, and observations with both Friends of the Nation workers and the farmers in Agona Nkwanta themselves were to be the chief methods in which I would elicit information. Knowing the people I needed assistance from were very busy I was forced to leave my schedule flexible. Thus, I did not have a specific order to my research. I conducted interviews at times convenient to the informants and during off times I quietly observed. As a result, each day was dedicated to various aspects of the project, and if one plan fell through I quickly changed gears in order to make productive use of my time.

Interviews proved to be the backbone of my fieldwork. While FoN provided the contacts for a few of my interviews with farmers, the others I just stumbled upon. Because of the large percentage of farmers in the area, my informal interactions with people in town and in the house in which I was staying led me to several food crop farmers who were willing to assist me. In order to acquire information about current farming practices and to determine the challenges the food crop farmers faced I devised a set of questions for the farmers.

Questions for the farmers:

1. What is your name and age?
2. What level of education do you have?
3. Describe your farming experience.
4. What types of crops do you grow?
5. Is farming your only source of income?
6. What is the size of your land? (in acres)
7. What do you use your harvested crops for? (ex. Food consumption, income etc)
8. Do you use the slash and burn method to clear the land?
9. What tools do you use when farming?
10. Do you use compost of fertilizer? (if so, what type?)
11. Describe your water source.
12. How do you control pests?
13. Who does the labour on the farm? What is the cost of this labour?
14. Do you receive credit? If so, from whom?
15. What is the annual cost of operations?
16. What do you see as the major challenges to food crop farmers in the Ahanta West District?
17. What do you think is being done to aid farmers? Do you have any suggestions for future projects?
18. Would you be interested in learning new farming methods that might help to increase your productivity?

After getting an idea of current farming practices in the area I made an observational visit to the demonstration farm of investigate the role it played in the alleviation of the farmers’ obstacles. Early the next morning I returned to begin the interviewing process. Below are the questions I concentrated on.

Questions for Lord Ennin, FoN Demonstration Farm Project Officer:
1. Can you tell me about your educational background?
2. How many years have you been working in the field of agriculture? Have you always practiced organic farming?
3. What are the main objectives of the demonstration farm?
4. What are the benefits of organic farming? (ex. Is it cost effective?)
5. Why was this district chosen for the farm?
6. Can you described the projects that deal specifically with food crops?
7. How do you control pests here on the farm?
8. What methods do you use to maintain soil fertility?
9. What is your source(s) of water?
10. Describe your interactions with farmers in the area? How do you plan to introduce these new methods? Have they or do you anticipate them to be receptive?
11. This farm seems to be quite a distance from town, how do you plan to make it accessible to farmers?
12. Are you planning visits to people’s own plots of land to perform demonstrations there in addition to your work here on the farm?
13. Can you tell me about the farm’s accomplishments in the past year? What are your plans for the future?

Initially I had planned to focus my study on these two parties alone, yet as I began to discover the complexity of the issue and depth of the challenges I decided I needed further interviews with related institutions. The ministry of agriculture was the first logical place to start. I chose to speak with an extension officer first in order to further educate myself on farmers’ practices as well as the goal of agricultural extension work.
Questions for Ben Nobi, Extension Officer, Agona Nkwanta:

1. What is the role of an extension officer?
2. How many workers serve in this area?
3. Can you tell me about the practices of food crop farmers in this area?
4. Can you explain why the slash/burn method is harmful to the soil?
5. Why is lining and pegging necessary?
6. Do you encourage the use of fertilizers either chemical or organic? Why or why not?
7. What are the benefits of intercropping?
8. Are there any irrigation systems in use on small scale to medium scale farms in the area? Do farmers partake in any water conservation practices? If so, what are they?
9. How are pests controlled?
10. How are farming ventures funded? Is credit through the rural bank available? What about informal saving practices such as susu?
11. What type of labour do farmers use? Is the high cost of labour a deterrent for expansion?
12. What effects have the large plantations in this area (Ghana Rubber Estates LTD. Etc) had on food crop farmers?
13. What challenges do the farmers face and what specific projects as an extension officer have you overseen that try to educate the farmers about more productive farming techniques?
14. Have you heard about the Friend of the Nation Demonstration farm? Do you feel that farmers in the area will benefit from instruction on organic farming techniques?
15. In the future do you think it would be possible to share resources and work together to increase farming productivity in Agona Nkwanta?

The next step involved contacting the ministry itself. Now that I understood the work of an extension officer I wanted to hear what was being done at a more institutional level.

Questions for the Deputy Director at the Ministry of Agriculture in Ahanta West District:

1. Can you tell me about food crop production in this district?
2. Please explain in detail the major challenges farmers’ face and what is being done by the ministry to alleviate these hardships?
3. What signs have the new government shown that indicate a commitment to the agriculture sector?

(Subsequent questions were unnecessary because of the depth of his answers)
Because the demonstration farm at the present time only serves the needs of the farmer up to harvest time I have chosen to focus on this part of farming as well. Certainly the food crop farmer to address many post-harvest issues, they lie beyond the scope of this particular research.

**Limitation**

The chief obstacles I encountered all related to time. Due to the fact I started with a completely new topic, I had no opportunity to build a knowledge base in the field of agriculture prior to “official” ISP time. Therefore, much of the time spent outlining basic agricultural practice during the interviews would have been used more productively. For example, instead of asking the details of the slash and burn method of clearing the land I could have spent more time focusing on their personal experiences and opinions. In addition to the week lost in Accra, my unstable health caused several more days of scheduled research time to be unproductive. I can think of questions now that if I had had the chance to have answered would have considerable improved the quality of my analysis. There are additional people as well that I would have liked to interview such as a representative from the Ghana Rubber Estates to discuss land issues an a member of the NPP leadership in the area to get feedback about the new government’s plans for the sector. After several visits I was unable to make contact with the representative at the rural bank to discuss there requirements for credit for the farmers. I also had planned to speak with more farmers who farm as their primary occupation. However, for convenience sake interviewing several part-time farmers at the location of their other job proved to be more feasible, for interviewing farmers who are busy at work is simply impossible. Although these interviews would have enhanced my study, I don’t think that this was detrimental to my research because I did have the opportunity to speak with a few full-time farmers during the evening.

Other limitations include lack of transportation in the area. Very few taxis and tro tros pass in the direction of the demonstration farm. Cars reach one of the villages I visited only on Wednesday, market day. Fortunately, due to the generosity of FoN I had access to a motorbike and driver/translator but this was only on one occasion. Telephone communication was a problem due to limited availability and several misunderstandings resulted.

Other than these logistical problems I faced very few limitations. Members of FoN as well as the ministry of agriculture were extremely generous with their time and resources and I was exposed as a result to a diverse number of perspectives. Overall, my main objectives were met and the experience will be remembered as rewarding and informative.
Main Report

Food Crop Farming in the Ahanta West District

Environmental Characteristics of the Area

The Ahanta West District lies within the South-Western Equatorial Zone, one of the wettest in the regions in Ghana. Instead of simply having one rainy season as some areas do, Ahanta West experiences a double-maximum rainfall or bimodal rain pattern. Despite the fact the district was once a primary rainforest, man has all but eliminated it. For the most part the soil throughout the district can be categorized as fertile and suitable for agriculture. The types vary from loose sand to clay. Below is a table presenting suitable crops for the various types of soil.\textsuperscript{11}

Figure 3

Soil Characteristics and Suitable Crops\textsuperscript{12}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soil Type</th>
<th>Suitable Crops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandy-Clay Loam</td>
<td>Cocoa, coffee, citrus, oil palm, rubber and food crops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately well-drained clayey loam</td>
<td>Cocoa, coffee, citrus, oil palm, rubber, and food crops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loamy Sand</td>
<td>Maize, vegetables, legumes, and other food crops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silty clay</td>
<td>Maize, vegetables, legumes, and other food crops and sugar cane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loose sand</td>
<td>Coconut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gritty clay</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>Sugar cane, vegetables, and rice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Landuse and Crop Types

Forty-percent of the land in the district is owed by large plantations, the national Oil Palm Plantation and the Ghana Rubber Estates LTD., limiting the space for food crop production to 20 percent of the total land space. Cassava and maize are the predominant food crops grown in the area, but vegetable production is significant as well (see figure 4). Generally the food crop

\textsuperscript{11} District Planning Co-ordinating Unit. Five Year Medium Plan. (Agona Nkwanta: 1996). 11

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. p. 12
farming can be thought of as semi-subsistence, for people eat their harvested crops and then sell the excess to generate income. The farms are small are generally between 1-3 acres.

Figure 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Acreage</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tree Crops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coconuts</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>721.48</td>
<td>22.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil Palm</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>1719.15</td>
<td>52.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocoa</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>85.40</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citrus</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>85.40</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Crops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassava</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>378.60</td>
<td>11.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>81.25</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize and Cassava</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantain</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>59.20</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar Cane</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables and Cassava</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocoyam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3244</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Farmers in the area practice traditional farming often employing only a cutlass and hoe. Hours of back-breaking work are put in on the farm each day, which often are quite a distance from farmers’ homes. Indigenous knowledge is crucial, for most of these farmers are unreached by relief agencies. Soil fertility is determined by the texture and the colour and seeds from the past harvest are preserved for the next year’s planting. Agriculture is almost exclusively rain-fed which leads to unpredictability and great variation in yields from year to year. Since most of the farmers live off of the food they grow, more than one crop must be cultivated. Furthermore, is something were to happen such as pest infestation of disease, the farmer would lose everything.

13 Ibid. p. 23
Multi-cropping is thus not only a method for insuring food diversity, it is a form of informal farm insurance. Trying to conserve space, traditional farmers scatter crops without a pattern sometimes making weeding even more tedious than it already is. Basically farmers practice the methods they have utilized for generations because they know no other way. The techniques, though not always the most productive, required skills and knowledge that should no be ignored.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Challenges Farmers Face}

High temperatures, rainfall, and soil fertility constitute the main environmental factors influencing food crop production in Africa. Despite the fact warmth usually promotes growth, crop yields in Africa are often less than in areas with cooler temperatures. K. A. Haizel outlines three reasons for this. High respiration hinders plant growth, crop development is accelerated and the crops turn to seed, and crop quality lessens in high temperatures.\textsuperscript{15} Rainfall, the main source of water for farmers in the area is of concern despite the fact that Ahanta West is one of the wettest regions in Ghana. Seasonal rainfall patterns are often unpredictable in onset, duration, and amount\textsuperscript{16}

The high cost of agricultural inputs can be said to be one of the chief hurdles. Even simple tools such as cutlasses and hoes are very expensive for small-scale farmers according to Peter Nunoo, a farmer and ministry worker.\textsuperscript{17} Chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and improved quality seeds are not an option for most. Mr. Kankem a worker at the agriculture store in Agona Nkwanta demonstrated the methods he has been forced to embrace so as to increase accessibility. He opens the packages of maize seed and pours it into smaller portions that are less expensive.\textsuperscript{18} Such items used to be subsidized mentioned Kofi Ayiah, yet no plan exists like that now.\textsuperscript{19} Another unmanageable expense for the farmer is labour. According to both farmers and professionals alike, labour costs more than farmers can afford. The Ahanta West District Assembly Five Year Medium Term Plan states that 97\% of farmers pay for labour with cash, therefore limited funds equal limited access to labour.\textsuperscript{20} Ben Nobi describes how the weeding costs of 1 acre of land can be as much as 80,000 cedis.\textsuperscript{21} As a result farmers are unable to both expand and have their fields properly weeded. On several occasions I saw gardens overtaken

\textsuperscript{14} Kofi Manu. Lecture on Traditional Agriculture in Ghana (10 April, 2001. University of Cape Coast)
\textsuperscript{15} K. A. Haizel. Agricultural Fundamentalism and the Capacity for Food Production in Africa (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1994), 3
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid 4.
\textsuperscript{18} Mr. Kankem. Agric Store worker. (Interview by author 27 April 2001. Agona Nkwanta).
\textsuperscript{20} District Planning Co-ordinating Unit. Five Year Medium Plan. (Agona Nkwanta: 1996). 6
\textsuperscript{21} Ben Nobi. Extension officer. (Site visits and interview by author. 27 April 2001. Agona Nkwanta)
with weeds, thus limiting the potential for high rates of success. As a result farmers are forced to resort to the slash/burn method for clearing the land which requires less labour but has damaging consequences for the soil. The inability to purchase more technologically advanced tools and machinery lowers productivity and increases labour output.

Lack of available credit and funds is a reason behind the difficulties with capital. Every single person I spoke with during my research cited this as a major concern. Farmers have problems putting up the required collateral and because of the risky nature of farm work, banks shy away from lending. Though there is a rural bank in the area, there is no Agricultural Development Bank. Some farmers engage in susu savings, a practice involving a partnership of people all contributing to the common fund and taking turns collecting. Despite the fact this has been a successful method of saving for centuries, some informal lending options are not secure and often the person is forced to pay unreasonably high interest rates. Kofi Kyereme proposes a plan, he recommends, “(providing) how interest loans through the Agricultural Development Bank and other rural Banks to farmers, particularly small scale farmers. Such credit could be used to buy needed farm machinery, chemicals, and other inputs.”

Another solution could be to base the loan on cash flow rather than commercial interest rates. I was unable to speak directly with the rural bank to determine loan requirements, but from the impression I receive from community members, most farmers are unable to access them.

In order for the people of Ahanta West to eat, they need to farm, and in order to farm, they must have people interested in the occupation. Youth in the area are frustrated with rural life and to seek out other more profitable opportunities they leave. Many are discouraged by the lack of income generated from farming, and others do not even have the capital to begin farming in the first place. As a result the numbers of able-bodied youth are dwindling. K. A. Haizel states, “The high urbanization rate has had the effect of depleting the rural sector of its energetic youth and offset the sex ratio in favour of females. The implications of these are that the increasing numbers of city dwellers, divorced from farming have to be fed by a farming community which is becoming increasingly aged and predominantly female.”

22 (Observation by author 25-27 April 2001, 1 – 3 May 2001 Ahanta West District)
And not only do these farmers need to provide for the increasing number of those in urban areas, the growth rate in Ahanta West itself is growing rapidly, with a projected doubling time of 2020. Food security will be in jeopardy if productivity is not increased, voiced Sylvanus Kofi Ocloc, a concerned farmer.

To make matters worse, there is no available land space because of the domination of the plantations in the district. With a rapidly growing population this is a major concern. A farmer told me of how scarce land has negatively affected his productivity. In the past he was able to leave a land to regenerate nutrients after it was exhausted, yet now that is simply not an option. Slash and burn practices continue, further exacerbating the situation. For an area that lives off of the food that it grows, issues of food security are a nightmare. In the village of Apemenyin, which borders the rubber plantation, people have to buy their vegetables at the market because they are not able to grow them in their backyards. In addition the plantations encourage farmers to release their land to them in exchange for funds. If this practice continues, further shortages could ensue.

Receiving technical assistance from outside sources is often a problem the farmers mentioned. There are 10 extension officers in the area who are required to set up contact groups and demonstrations. Despite the fact hundreds of farmers are reached, some are inevitably left behind. A farmer in an isolated village described an incidence of when an extension officer came to teach a group of farmers about alternatives to slash and burn agriculture such as composting, but failed to make his scheduled follow-up visit for whatever reason. The farmers had started to collect chicken droppings but then were unclear about how to proceed with the project. These farmers were quite disappointed and seen to harbour resentment. Such occurrences though I was unable to detect their frequency seem to leave lasting impressions, thus hindering the goal of increased productivity.

Providing help can be a burden according to the ministry of agriculture because of low levels of education and poverty. Farmers are often illiterate and unable to adapt easily to new techniques. Because many can not read or write, using chemical fertilizers without supervision for example, could be very dangerous because they would be unable to read the amounts etc.

The Friends of the Nation Demonstration Farm: a Source of Relief

Established in 1993, Friends of the Nation, a non-governmental organization based in Takoradi, is attempting to preserve the environment while improving the conditions of

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27 District Planning Co-ordinating Unit. Five Year Medium Plan. (Agona Nkwanta: 1996), 15
29 Informant. Farmer. (Interview by author translated by Emmanuel Konondo, 2 May 2001 remote village).
Ghanaian’s lives. As stated on The Background on Friends of Nation Information Sheet, its mission statement is,

“…To create an awareness of the deplorable state of the environment and to promote ecologically sound practices to rejuvenate and sustain it. It further seeks to empower disadvantaged persons and underserved communities in practical ways through education, training, and the acquisition of life skills.”

Some of the organization’s projects deal with matters such as sustainable agriculture, reproductive health, natural resource and land management, and poverty reduction. To broaden its resource base, FoN has joined prominent coalitions in the humanitarian sector, Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisation in Development (GAPVOD), Ghana HIV/AIDS Network (GHANET), and the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS), as just a few examples.

The Household Food Security Integrated Program, seeks to “promote sustainable agriculture and increase income levels, while enhancing the natural resource base so as to address poverty and food insecurity.” The organization’s demonstration farm is a key component to its goal for ensuring food security in the Ahanta West District. Food security can be defined as the ability to provide each member of the family no matter what their sex, age, or physical conditions with an adequate supply of nutritious food on a sustainable basis. The permaculture training farm, a 10 acre space, with 2 acres under cultivation, tries to accomplish this through the education of organic farming techniques which will help to increase productivity and results for the farmer. According to Lord Ennin, the farm’s officer, the ultimate goal is “to increase food production and also to diversity the types of crops farmers grow.”

Some of the farm’s projects delve into other areas of agriculture such as agroforestry, nursery management, and animal husbandry, but they lie beyond the scope of this paper and will not be addressed. The main projects on the farm that deal in the food crop sector are as follows: water management, fertilization techniques, crop diversity, pest management, the concepts of intercropping, and crop rotation.

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31 Background of Friends of the Nation Informant Sheet.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
35 Ibid. p.2
**Water Management**

Water is a scarce resource to farmers and learning ways to fully utilise it can help overall production on the farm. The demonstration farm has a variety of such methods they wish to share with neighbouring farmers. Lord uses small clay pots immersed into the soil to their rim to collect rainwater. Then the water seeps out of the pot into the soil at a more gradual rate than it would otherwise (see picture #1 in Appendix B). Another new technique they plan to introduce is a drip irrigation scheme. The technology is simple and involves only a bucket and some tubing, again allowing the water collected from rain or other sources to go to those crops which most need it in a more reduced speed over a longer period of time. FoN plans to distribute this apparatus and hold training sessions for the farmers. The farmhouse, not yet completed, will be equipped with rain gutters and a collection tank to store excess rainwater. There are also two wells present, yet at this time neither is functioning properly.  

**Fertilization Techniques**

Keeping the land fertile is of utmost importance and certainly can be categorized as challenge farmers in the area. Rather than introducing chemical fertilizers, which according to Lord can make the soil acidic, and be harmful to people themselves if they are not used properly, organic techniques such as composting and animal droppings are the methods of choice. Nearby, a chicken farm sells chicken droppings that can be scattered on the soil (see picture #3 in Appendix B). Lord uses this technique and claims that it would be cost effective for the farmers. Composting is also encouraged, cabbage leaves and other decomposing organic matter is scattered round the crops. According to Kofi Kyereme, this practice needs to become widespread. He states, “compost is cheaper, indigenous source of plant nutrients that could be used on a large scale if extension workers (or others) could adequately educate.” The organic mater serves as a sponge, soaking up moisture and retaining it so the plants can use it when they need it.

**Crop Diversification**

The FoN staff grows sweet potato, cowpeas, cabbage, carrots, onions, groundnuts, pepper, okro, plantain, maize, watermelon, mango, guava, papaya, and pineapple. Some of these crops are not typically grown by local farmers and could increase their nutrition as well as income if they were able to grow them in addition to cassava and maize, the most common

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37 Ibid.  
38 Ibid.  
40 Institute of Rural Reconstruction. A Bio-Intensive Approach to Small-Scale Household Food Production (Cavite, Philippines).
crops. According to Lord farmers simply do not have the skills to grow some of these crops and that it why it hasn’t been done before. Much of the land is suitable and while some of these new crops are more difficult to grow because of long gestation times like cabbage for example, sweet potatoes and carrots are simple and only take 25-30 days.\(^{41}\)

**Pest Management**

Again discouraging the use of chemicals, inorganic pesticides are avoided on the demonstration farm. Instead they use natural materials and practices based on indigenous knowledge. NEEM trees are abundant and are said to be good deterrents to pests because of their bitter leaves (See picture #4 Appendix B). Another method taught on the farm involves a mixture comprised of garlic, tobacco, oil and pepper. Every 1-2 weeks this liquid is sprayed on the leaves of crops. Admittedly pest management has been a problem for Lord and the other farm workers. Cabbage, okra, and onion plants have been infested in the past. To rectify the problem, Lord planted pepper nearby and tried changing the locations of some of the plants (see picture #5 in Appendix B). It will remain to be seen how effective these measures will be. However, they are certainly healthy and cost effective.

**Crop Placement**

Inter-cropping not only serves as an age-old form of food security, it deters pests and keeps soil fertile. On a farm adjacent to the Coconut Research Institute extension officer Ben Nobi demonstrated how inter-cropping saves land. Different crops have specific rooting depths and combinations of those requiring different depths keeps the soil from being exhausted as well as conserving land. For example cassava grows very deep whereas maize doesn’t, this combination is suitable for inter-cropping.\(^{42}\) On the demonstration farm, Lord and the assistants will advise farmers about which combinations will be successful.

Crop rotation helps to build stable soil because of the fact different plants require specific nutrient levels from the soil. Rotating crops tries to equalize the nutrient extraction. In addition, some plants fix nitrogen in the soil whereas others don’t. Groundnuts and Kesia trees are considered to be nitrogen fixers which Lord plans to use while demonstrating (See picture #6 in Appendix B).

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) Ben Nobi. Extension officer. (Observation and interview by author. 27 April 2001. Farm adjacent to the Coconut Research Institute. Agona Nkwanta)
Another aspect of crop placement involves conserving land by planting shade tolerant plant species underneath oil palms. Pineapple is an example of such a plant. This encourages land conservation as well as resource management in a district covered with oil palms.\textsuperscript{43}

Lining and pegging before planting seeds in order to form straight row is important for the growth of the plant (See picture #7 in Appendix B). Otherwise if plants are grown too close together, they will be overcrowded and decrease in yield. (See picture #7 in Appendix B).

HIV/AIDS

Another component of FoN’s project in this area is to coordinate a peer education system on organic farming and the risk of HIV/AIDS to productivity. This is a way for community outreach on the organic methods mentioned above the people’s own plots of land as well as to address the threat of the disease. After preliminary questioning it was clear to FoN staff that knowledge of preventative measures was inadequate. While many of the communities were completely ignorant about the disease, others do not have the ability to prevent it. No clinics or chemist shops are present to sell condoms. Twenty-five peer educators, young adults familiar with these communities have been trained for the HIV/AIDS prevention campaign.\textsuperscript{44} The youth have been advised to abstain from premarital sex. Those who are sexually active are strongly cautioned to practice safely.\textsuperscript{45}

Emmanuel Kondonu, the FoN staff member in charge of this part of the project coordinates meetings and training sessions for the peer-educators. In the towns of Chavini and Dixcove I was able to meet peer educators and see the role Emmanuel plays in this intervention. In Dixcove, a fishing village that also relies on farming, HIV/AIDS is being transmitted at alarming rates.\textsuperscript{46} Reportedly, during the evenings some men and women meet at the castle and have unprotected sex, often without protection, and sometimes with multiple partners. Consequently, the disease has the potential to snowball out of control in this area.

For farmers to be productive a clean bill of health is a necessity. The outreach component on this project deals with many dimensions of a farmer’s life. Not only is organic farming and good nutrition focused on, the overall health and well-being of the farmer is addressed.

Missing Links

\textsuperscript{43} Lord Ennin.  Project officer (Interview by author, 26 April 2001.  Agona Nkwanta)
\textsuperscript{44} Chris Mevuta.  FoN Executive Director. (Interview by author 21 April 2001. Takoradi)
\textsuperscript{45} Emmanuel Kondonu.  Peer education coordinator. (Interview by author. Translated by Emmanuel Kondonu 2 May 2001, Chavini).
\textsuperscript{46} Nana Achempong. Chief fisherman. (Interview by author. Translated by Emmanuel Kondonu 2 May 2001, Dixcove)
Several limiting factors directly influence the demonstration farm’s ability to reach the constituency it wishes. As of now, the farm is progressing towards full functionality, yet connections with the community have yet to gel. For the demonstration component of the farm, its reason for existence, to begin, several projects must first be completed. Finishing the construction of the farmhouse is of utmost importance, for several other projects are related to its presence (See picture 9 in Appendix B). The house will be staffed throughout the night and therefore will be secure. Since farm theft has been reported a major concern by the project officer once someone is keeping watch over the fields, FoN can invest more heavily in its equipment. Several crops ready for harvesting have already been taken as well as a few seedlings. Drip irrigation sets have been purchased but have yet to be installed because of the threat of theft. This is a major problem because acquiring water in general has been very difficult for the FoN staff. The commissioned two different wells to be dug and cemented, yet both remain ineffective for one reason or another. One is completely dry and the other only a minuscule amount is collected at the bottom. The staff is afraid to have a Poly Tank on the premises. The completion of the farmhouse itself will aid in water conservation for both benefits of the demonstration farm itself and the farmers learning from the demonstrations. A rain gutter will encircle the outer perimeter of the roof and a receptacle will receive the runoff. Since this area receives heavy rainfall this practice will be important.47

Lord emphasized on several occasions the exhausting nature of his work. Commuting from Takoradi every day, about a 45-minute trip often with delays due to road construction, he reaches the farm in the early morning and stays until the work is complete, sometimes into the evening.48 Reaching the farm is a problem and walking the distance from the main circle in Agona Nkwanta to the farm not only wastes time but also adds to the exhaustion he feels. The lack of tro-tros and taxis traveling toward the farm is an obstacle that lowers productivity.49 In addition the outreach component of their work takes the peer education coordinator to villages that do not even have access by public transportation more than one day per week. If FoN had full time access to a motorbike or other various vehicles their goals would more easily be met.

The dedication of the FoN workers is obvious yet I have concerns about the feasibility of their project in the long run without connecting with a pre-existing institution that the farmers are already familiar with. It is difficult to convince someone to change his/her practice after a lifetime of doing something a certain way, and from my observations and comment form those with experience in these matters, it seems that farmers are no exception. In addition the distance is great to the farm, and I’m not sure busy farmers would have the time nor the motivation to

seek out the assistance of FoN without the FoN organization itself, but because of limited staff I am not certain that the farm will be utilized up to its full potential if the organization does not branch out. Ben Nobi, extension officer for Agona Nkwanta confirmed my theory and offered a possible solution. In his own experience farmers are much more likely to change their methods when they see positive results from their peers. While this is the idea behind the demonstration farm, it is possible the project could be even more successful if farmers themselves learned from each other. Mr. Nobi explained how as part of his work as an extension officer he leads contact groups that test seeds and other various new techniques and then teach their colleagues. Now that rapport has been established with this group he finds more success when introducing fresh ideas. Mr. Nobi made the suggestion that perhaps if FoN would be willing to work directly with him, the project would have a greater possibility of being successful.\textsuperscript{50}

The most difficult problem of all will be selling the farmers on the practice of organic farming itself. Several people including farmers, ministry of agriculture workers needs elaboration and most definitely of all the passionate FoN workers themselves told me that they believe organic farming is the best practice. Yet as mentioned before, this type of farming is labour-intensive and tedious at times. In some cases it remains to be seen if it is even cost effective. The farmers need to understand the benefits of composting and crop variety before they will be convinced. In addition, follow-up assistance will be needed to encourage those who encounter setbacks to persuade them not to revert to practices such as slash and burn. This all takes time, commitment, and most of all resources.

Similarly, the ministry of agriculture is not able to function as it should either. Ministry workers as well as many extension officers commute from Takoradi each day because of lack of living quarters in Agona Nkwanta. This traveling is not an unproductive use of time it takes the workers away from the community members they are trying to serve. Office space is another concern, for crowding is a problem. Lack of funds however, is the largest constraint the ministry faces, limiting the work they are able to accomplish. For example, in the past they were able to distribute government-subsidized seedlings and fertilizers on a credit basis, now that those subsidies have been removed, prices are higher and affordable for many.\textsuperscript{51} Staffing is inadequate, and it seems that if more time could be dedicated to each project, success rates would be higher and the farming community better served. However, in order for this to occur, government support is crucial. The Minister of Agriculture has begun preliminary trips to the area to identity problems and map out solutions, but substantial plans have been released.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{50} Ben Nobi. Extension officer (Interview by author 27 April 2001. Agona Nkwanta)
\textsuperscript{51} Kofi Ayiah. Deputy Director of Agriculture. (Interview by author, 2 May 2001. Agona Nkwanta)
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
It is still unclear what the new government’s priorities will be, but the agricultural sector, particularly small and medium scale food crop farmers, need attention so as to raise productivity and increase living standards. In the past as Nyanteng shows in policies and Options for Ghanaian Economic Development this commitment has been lacking. He states,

“…In 1996 of the total budget of 86.8 billion cedis for the agricultural sector 91% was expected to originate from donor sources. This situation does not demonstrate a high commitment in the part of the government to developing the agric sector which dictates to a large extent the pace of the economic development in the country.”

Priority needs to be given to this sector. There must be a shift away from focusing on the plantation and perceived money making crops. It just does not make sense to give all of the fertile land to the plantations at the expense of the food crop farmers. Development will not occur if the people are not given the chance to be self-sufficient. The government needs to prioritize, for Ghana’s people will continue to expend great amounts of energy with little return if no intervention is made. Without any attention, how can changes be expected to be made on the part of the farmer? Considering the fact farmers practicing traditionally have been virtually ignored by those with influence and funds, one is able to see the true ingenuity they employ in order to survive.

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Conclusion

Food crop farmers dedicate their entire selves to their work, yet so many obstacles stand in the way of success. The production of food, something the people of Ghana need to sustain themselves, must be recognized as important. Appropriate technology and relief needs to be introduced in order to increase productivity and improve the quality of life. The farmers themselves are hardworking and dedicated and need to be perceived as important members of society. The land is capable of producing high yields, if measures are taken to conserve and sustain it.

Friends of the Nation are trying to accomplish these goals. Each project on the demonstration farm seeks to educate and inform farmers about practices that are suited to their needs. Change is not easy, and will not come suddenly, but with the help of such organizations one can hope for a better future.
Questions for Future Study

1. In one years time what progress have projects made on the demonstration farm?
2. How is community outreach going? What challenges has FoN experienced?
3. Is FoN working in conjunction with any other relief organization?
4. What commitment has the new government made to the agriculture sector?
5. Have any specific projects been designed for this area? Tool improvement? Machinery? Fertilization? Irrigation?
6. What is some evidence that these communities are being served?
7. With the rate of population growing so quickly, is the area food secure?
8. Is the goal of food self-sufficiency any closer to being reached?
9. Have any more efforts been made by institutions to provide credit for the farmers?
10. Have the plantations grown in size? How is this affecting the growth of food crops?
11. What are the challenges women face specifically in the area of food crop farming?
12. What factors lower productivity after harvesting? What is being done to address these problems?
Appendix A

Occupational Distribution by Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No. of Males</th>
<th>No. of Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried Employment</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agro-based industry</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Agro based</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>1162</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B

1 District Planning Co-ordinating Unit. Five Year Medium Plan (Agona Nkwanta: 1996), 16
Bibliography


Friends of the Nation. Background of Friends of the Nation.


