

CSO's and Farmer Groups in Ghana,
Accra,
6th April, 2020.

His Excellency, The President of Ghana,

Jubilee House,
Accra.

PROPOSAL ON HOW TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC ON FOOD SECURITY IN GHANA.

We, the Farmer Groups and Civil Society Organisations working in the Agricultural Sector write to draw your attention on critical issues that need urgent attention to avoid possible food crisis after the corona virus pandemic is defeated.

While we appreciate the measures put in place by government so far to address the issues at hand, we believe incorporating our concerns and propositions in your strategies would contribute to improving the livelihoods of Ghanaians and avert any threat of food insecurity.

Attached is our context and proposal for consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

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Charles Kwowe Nyaaba

Director of Programmes and Advocacy – Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana

(On behalf of the underlisted organizations)

Cc:

- His Excellency, The Vice President
- Rt. Hon Speaker, Parliament of Ghana
- Hon. Minister of Finance
- Hon. Minister of Food and Agriculture
- Hon. Minister of Local Government and Rural Development
- The Ministerial Committee on COVID-19

PROPOSAL FROM CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AND FARMER GROUPS ON HOW TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC ON FOOD SECURITY IN GHANA

Background

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus in China and subsequent spread to other nations, a number of policy interventions have been outlined globally to contain the pandemic and its impact on livelihoods. Similarly, the Government of Ghana instituted measures ranging from closure of all schools and external borders, ban on social gatherings and partial lockdown of Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi areas. These measures, though laudable and unavoidable, have also come with some constraints that might affect food security if effective measures are not put in place now.

The food chain in Ghana is a complex web dominated by smallholder farmers who face serious challenges in accessing production resources, basic social services such as healthcare, clean water and limited access to nutritious food that they themselves produce. At the moment, there is no existing evidence to suggest that there is demand and supply shocks as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19, but there are signals that can be relied on for making projections on future impact in the following ways.

- The obstructions in the transport system, the closure of schools leading to the halting of the school feeding programme that demand food items from farmers directly, the restrictions in movement of farmers in lockdown areas and slowdown in the activities of hospitality industries that demand fresh vegetables and fruits from farmers impede farmers' direct access to market and could lead to postharvest losses in most perishable goods in rural areas.
- Secondly, the disruption in agribusiness activities including input supplies, service delivery and movement of extension officers within and outside the restricted zones, ban on movement of people including seasonal labour migration from and to the restricted regions who form the major source of manpower needs for food production in Ghana and the quarantine measures may cumulatively affect food production.
- Though the exemption of movement of agro-inputs such as fertilizer is laudable, this may come with different constraints such as smugglers using the opportunity to smuggle or hoard the subsidized fertilizer and denying the right beneficiaries from getting it if effective monitoring mechanisms are not instituted. All these could lead to low food production and shortage of food in the near future.

- Given the inelastic demand for food commodities, a decline in domestic food production and possible reduction of importation of basic staples such as rice to Ghana that may arise due to restriction from source countries could lead to food price hikes, hoarding and smuggling. Overall, the poor, the neglected, women and children and the population with low purchasing power may suffer from access to nutritious food.
- While there is public education on the corona virus, most of it is focused on national and regional media platforms in the English language. As many rural communities have no access to televisions and could hardly understand the English language, their compliance with the WHO protocols could be compromised, thus exposing them to infections and further spread.

Proposals to government

- While public education on the corona virus in Ghana is widespread, most of the information is in English language and focused more on national and regional media platforms. As significant rural communities have no access to televisions and could hardly understand English language, the NCCE at the district level should be resourced to intensify community level sensitizations. Community radio stations should also be mandated to develop innovative information in local dialects to sensitize farmers and hard-to-reach populations. As farmers and organizations working in agriculture, we have already taken initiatives and are working with local health authorities and community radio stations to support the public education on COVID-19 with tailored messages for farmers in their local dialects within selected districts. In addition, we are ready and willing to offer any support that government may require of us in technical and other aspects that are within our means to fight the pandemic.
- In connection with this, government should recognize and support Traditional Authorities (Chiefs and Queens) and communities that have adopted self-imposed lock down (e.g. voluntarily closing down markets) to join the proposed education at the community level. CSOs at the community level should equally be encouraged and supported to do same.
- Secondly, the measures taken so far by the government and public response to those measures present different challenges and risks for food production and supply. For instance, the restriction in movement of people has implication on farmers moving from the restricted areas to their farms outside those areas. We propose special arrangements for farmers without the virus to be allowed to continue with their farming activities outside the restricted zones. Such farmers should be supplied with adequate protective equipment to guarantee their protection from the virus.

- We propose that government should consider the food sector as a critical infrastructure sector along-side others like health care, emergency and all the other important sectors. In this connection.
- Related to the above and obviously missing from the various interventions announced by government is how the country will position herself to be food sufficient during these extraordinary times. We call on government to announce clear policy interventions to ensure that there is sustained local food production and supply. This presents an opportunity for Ghana to become self-reliant in food production and wean ourselves from excessive food imports. Only a pragmatic policy with a focus on sustainable farming practices such as the adoption of agroecology will lead us to food sovereignty and transform Ghana's agriculture and food systems as well as protect the environment and farmers.
- The slowdown in marketing and transport activities has negative implication for farmers and there is no clear information on incentives or support mechanism to cushion them to remain in business. Whereas the government has been clear with the nature of stimulus support it is providing for the services sector, manufacturers, hospitality industries, among others, same cannot be said for agriculture and the smallholder farmers on whom the nation depends for its food supply. Given the critical importance of the agricultural sector for the stability of the Ghanaian economy, we call on government to elaborate its stimulus support for farmers in the form of grants to improve their farming activities as this is not clear from government policy so far.
- We note that budgets are currently being shifted and all possible sources of finances being sought to create room for more resources to fight the corona virus and to avoid its further spread so we anticipate that the Ministry of Finance will soon submit supplementary budget to parliament for approval. Historically, when it comes to reallocation of budgets, agricultural sector budget usually suffers. Whiles the CSO's in agriculture sector support any move to contain the spread, caution is needed to ensure that enough resources are allocated to support value chain activities in the agricultural sector, particularly, the essential inputs such as subsidized fertilizer and seeds to facilitate food production.
- Fertilizer subsidies under the planting for food and jobs is the major support farmers are benefitting from government. Notwithstanding, there were several reports in 2019 farming season of smuggling in most parts of the country. There are already reports as at early April 2020 in some places in Kumasi and Brong Ahafo Regions where fertilizer retailers are selling subsidized fertilizer higher than the government agreed prices.

- We foresee a situation where the exemptions of restriction on movement of fertilizer could be abused leading to fertilizer smuggling and hoarding across the country. This could lead to low access by farmers. We call on government to as a matter of urgency, institute measures to prevent the possible smuggling and ensure that fertilizer is delivered to the target beneficiaries at the right time. In this vein, we offer to collaborate with government to effectively monitor the distribution of subsidized fertilizers from the national through the regions to the retail points at the district levels and also ensure that only farmers are offered the opportunity to purchase the subsidized fertilizer.
- The National Food Buffer Stock Company's procurement approach of purchasing agricultural commodities has always focused on non-perishable agricultural commodities. Considering the importance of eating nutritious food and perishability of most commodities, alternative arrangements for purchasing and distributing perishable food beyond farming communities should be considered.
- Some countries are currently providing grants to vulnerable groups such as farmers, resources mobilized as part of the COVID-19 fund raising should be extended to poor famers alongside starter grants in support of the youth who may be displaced of their jobs and interested in farming to have access.

Whiles the issues raised in this submission may not be exhaustive, we believe considering them could be useful for the sustenance of future food security in Ghana.

For any clarification on this release, kindly contact the following:

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List of CSO's who sign on this statement include:

1. The Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana
2. SEND Ghana
3. International Budget Partnership
4. OXFAM in Ghana
5. Ghana Federation for Forest and Farm Producers
6. Africa Centre for Energy Policy
7. IMANI Africa
8. General Agricultural Workers Union
9. Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development
10. Coalition of NGO'S in Nutrition and Food Security
11. Northern Development Association
12. Center for Initiative Against Human Trafficking
13. United Force for Development part
14. Elizka Relief Foundation
15. WUZDA Ghana
16. Charles Ashie of Christ Soldiers Foundation
17. Renel Ghana Foundation
18. Vision for Action Foundation
19. Offinso Partners in Sustainable Developmental
20. ABAK Foundation
21. Organization for Indigenous Initiative
22. Agency for Health and Food Security
23. CSO Platform on SDG 2