

Organic Agriculture, Food Safety and Supply in Northern Ghana - CAOF's Strategy

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Abstract

Northern Ghana covers the three regions in the north of Ghana and parts of Northern Brong Ahafo Region and Northern Volta. It covers a large part of the Savannah vegetation of Ghana and suffers from declining soil fertility, food insecurity, climate variability and change. Organic agriculture has the potential to reverse these ills even though the advocates of conventional agriculture may disagree with this assertion. The Coalition for the Advancement of Organic Farming (CAOF) has seen organic farming as the way to tackling these challenges in a sustainable manner. CAOF has conducted various research, developed and implemented projects and has seen that this strategy is actually addressing these challenges. This paper presents CAOF's strategy in trying to address organic agriculture, food safety and supply concerns in Northern Ghana and highlights some of the successes so far. The paper also identifies some of the challenges so far in its work in the organic agriculture sector in Northern Ghana and concludes with the way forward for the coalition.

Introduction

The world today is facing a deep and growing crisis as a result of the way food is produced, processed and distributed, confounded by the ravaging effects of climate change. The planet's ecology, health of its inhabitants, societal stability, fairness and care are being threatened by the industrial revolution driven by greed and profits. Sustainability has been thrown to the back burner and children are born into an unsustainable future. The continent of Africa is not left out in this global industrial revolution as the multinationals see it as an untapped zone where huge profits can be raked-in. Unfortunately, this is done through African governments who trade the ecology, health, fairness and care of their people and the environment for self-profiteering and political capital.

The food economy is the biggest employer in West Africa. The various activities involved in producing food, from the farm to processing, packaging, transporting, storing, distributing and retailing, account for 66% of total employment, or 82 million jobs. While the majority of these jobs (78%) are in agriculture, off-farm employment in food-related manufacturing and service activities is growing in number and share¹. In Ghana the story is not different from other African countries. Ghana's agriculture sector continues to be a central driver of the economy despite the structural modifications that have occurred over the years. For a sector that employs 44.7% of the active labour force as revealed in the Ghana Statistical Services Report², a substantial growth is likely to have a huge impact on the economy considering the fact that the sector is also a major source of revenue for the government. The sector

¹Allen, T., P. Heinrigs and I. Heo (2018), "Agriculture, Food and Jobs in West Africa", *West African Papers*, No. 14, OECD Publishing, Paris

²Ghana Statistical Services 2014, Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6

according to the Ghana Statistical Services (2017)³ has expanded marginally from a growth rate of 2.8 percent in 2015 to 3.0 percent in 2016. Its share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), however, declined from 20.3 percent in 2015 to 18.9 percent in 2016. The crops sub-sector remains the largest activity with a share of 14.5 percent of nominal GDP.

The sector has witnessed continuous use of synthetic inputs mainly because of a growing loss in soil fertility levels and the need to increase food production levels, enhance food security and reduce poverty levels. Farmers have particularly adopted strategies such as intensive use of land, agrochemical usage, irrigation, disease and pest resistant varieties and so forth to increase crops yields and guarantee food security. Farmers are highly motivated to using these strategies due to the emphasis placed by most agricultural development policies in Ghana which suggest the use of external inputs such as machinery and agrochemicals as the panacea to increasing food productivity. This has led to increasing the use of synthetic agrochemicals instead of the biological, cultural, and mechanical method for boosting production, controlling pest, weed, and disease (Mabe *et al*, 2017). According to Savci (2012), some of these chemical fertilizers are agricultural pollutants that can pose health problems such as cancer.

According to FiBL & IFOAM report (2015)⁴, organic agriculture only uses 0.2% of Ghana's Agricultural land. This means that 99.8% of Agriculture in Ghana is inorganic and uses various chemicals that are hazardous to human health. The figure further reduced to 0.1% in 2016, meaning 99.9% of Ghana's agricultural land is inorganic. This development is very worrying and a lot of work needs to be done to change the trend.

Coalition for the Advancement of Organic Farming (CAOF)

CAOF, a membership coalition of organisations and individuals engaged in organic farming activities was formed in 2008/09 and is working with the Ghana Grows Organic project in order to create a “strengthened and vibrant movement of organic producers and consumers promoting Ghanaian organic products nationally and internationally.” The organizations making up CAOF have been working with their farmers, training and educating them on the benefits of organic farming both in terms of income and environmental sustainability. It is a coalition of individuals, private, non-profit, voluntary non-governmental organizations in Ghana. The aim of the Coalition is to enhance the development of individuals, Private and Voluntary Organizations and actively engage in policy dialogue with Government to promote an environment, supportive of the development initiatives of its members.

CAOF was started by a few members who tried to get their small holder farmers certified as organic producers through foreign certifying bodies. This however was an expensive and unsustainable way to go. CAOF was therefore formed to mainly advocate for the promotion of organic agriculture in Ghana. However, based on the experiences in implementing the Ghana Grows Organic (GGO) project since 2010 and in piloting the Northern Ghana Green Market in the Upper East Region, the new direction of CAOF looks at moving away from a purely advocacy focus to practical work in supporting farmers to grow organic food, find markets for the produce and the development of the entire vegetable value chain. Currently, CAOF has a membership of 17 Organizations working closely to promote organic farming in Ghana. The members work with over 17,000 small holder farmers with women representing fifty-nine (59%) of the total number. However the current project is targeted at transitioning 3000 farmers to wholly organic practices.

³Ghana Statistical Services 2017, Provisional 2017 Annual Gross Domestic Product

⁴FiBL & IFOAM (2015): The World of Organic Agriculture 2015, Frick and Bonn

Food Safety Issues in Northern Ghana

Consumers world-wide are becoming concerned about the quality and safety of their food, given the effects of pesticides, fertilizers, livestock effluent and veterinary drugs on their health and livelihoods. Inappropriate use of chemical inputs has become a big problem in Ghana. The situation is even worse in the northern part as most farmers are illiterates (43% in rural areas) and tend to misuse chemical fertilizers and pesticides resulting in fatal accidents and sometimes death. For instance a farmer had to lose his life and that of his wife and two children in Zebilla (in the Upper East Region) due to a pesticide spillage in the food they carried to the farm for lunch⁵.

Most of the irrigated lands have become acidic and cannot support all crops. According to the Upper East Regional Plant Protection and Regulatory Services Directorate (PPRSD) of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), Tono Irrigation area can no longer produce tomatoes due to over reliance on chemicals. The directorate also indicated that a Pesticide Regulation Policy exists but farmers were not adhering to it. However, consultations with farmers showed that they have little knowledge of the policy⁶.

As a result of some of these challenges, food safety has become an issue, access to the supply of safe foods has become a problem due to the under developed nature of organic farming in northern Ghana. CAOF is therefore working towards addressing these issues through its strategic approach.

CAOF's Strategy

In the quest to achieve the aims and objectives of CAOF, the Coalition uses three main strategies that run through all its programming. These include research, advocacy and awareness creation and extension service delivery to farmers. All these are achieved through the building of strong institutions and policies and participation of members.

Research: Since its inception, the coalition has been researching into the organic sector in Ghana to get better informed to undertake its advocacy and project activities. In 2008 a survey was conducted to identify the various organizations that are into the organic sector and could join the coalition to advance its objectives.

In 2014, CAOF, through its Northern Ghana Green Markets project, commissioned the Savanna Agricultural Research Institute to conduct a research on the vegetables produced by its farmers in the Bolgatanga area and its environs and the key actors involved in the value chain. This research informed the direction of the next phase of the project. This year (2018) another research has been carried out to assess the extent to which organic agriculture has been considered in current government's policies and programmes.

Advocacy and awareness creation: CAOF as a coalition has its main focus on advocacy and lobbying of Government to create a suitable environment for the production and promotion of organic agricultural produce in the country. The coalition also lobby grass root institutions such as land owners to remove barriers to organic agriculture sector as land tenure systems that militates against organic farmers. Recently CAOF started another advocacy action that is seeking appropriate inputs and certification for organic farmers in Ghana. One of the key activities of the coalition is consumer education to create awareness on the consumption of organic products and to create local market for organic farmers.

⁵Experienced shared by his fellow farmers during a farmers forum in Zebilla in 2011

⁶Stakeholder Consultative meeting organized by CAOF in 2015

Extension service delivery: As a network with most members being Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), there is therefore the need to raise funds to implement projects and deliver innovative extension services to farmers. CAOOF projects are designed using the Participatory Market Systems Development (PMSD) approach. PMSD is an approach designed by Practical Action to make markets more inclusive, reduce poverty on a large-scale and protect the environment. PMSD is designed to bring all of the key people (market actors) within a particular market together to build trust and a joint vision of change. They collectively identify obstacles and opportunities affecting their market system and come up with joint strategies and action plans that will overcome these obstacles. CAOOF through this approach has therefore put in place systems and structures that help to design projects and raise funds for implementation. The projects are often monitored strictly by the executive committee and the secretariat to ensure that donors and the coalition get value for money. Each project is often evaluated at the end of the project and the next steps taken to ensure sustainability.

Some successes so far

CAOOF over the years have undertaken various projects successfully, some of which include;

- Working with the Business Sector Advocacy Challenge (BUSAC) Fund to advocate on the dangers involved in the misuse of agrochemicals. This advocacy process was carried out to even the parliamentary select committee on Agriculture. This has contributed to the establishment of an organic desk at the Ministry of Food and Agriculture offices in Accra and there is hope that the next medium term agricultural policy of Ghana will include organic farming.
- CAOOF has also featured in the Time for Climate Justice and "We Have Faith" Conference and made contributions at COP17. Time for Climate Justice is a global movement led by Association of World Council of Churches related Development Organisations in Europe (APRODEV), the association of the 17 major development aid organizations in Europe and working in close partnerships in the global south.
- CAOOF has been working with the Ghana Grows Organic Consortium which is made up of Christian Aid, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and Concern Universal to implement the Northern Ghana Green Markets Projects since 2010. This project piloted the Ghana Green Label Standard in the north and contributed a lot to fine-tuning the Ghana Green Label scheme which was finally launched in September, 2015.
- CAOOF is currently working with Christian Aid to promote and develop the value chains of selected vegetables in Ghana and with BUSAC Fund to advocate for appropriate inputs and certification for organic farmers in Ghana.

Challenges

Funding has been a major challenge as very few donor institutions are willing to fund organic projects. Membership dues and the few donors are not able to support the huge impact that the coalition wants to create.. Another serious challenge is the government's fertilizer subsidy program which has given a lot of conventional inputs to farmers. This affects the coalition's work negatively as farmers increasingly try to go for these inputs. They rely on these inputs as a result of the lack of local market segregation that offers premium for organic farmers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that in addressing the issues relating to the organic sector, food safety and supply, CAOOF remains in a pole position to address them through its strategies. With the use of the

PMSD approach, CAOF is ready to develop various strong organic agricultural market systems in Ghana. The desire to engage government in dialogue (not antagonistic advocacy), is a high hope to get government support in the quest to increase the organic market share in Ghana. We will also continue to educate the consuming public, farmers and other key stakeholders on the benefits of organic agriculture to the environment, health and social justice (care and fairness). CAOF is looking forward to partners who share in this course and belief in our strategy.

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