

Today, 17th August, I had the privilege of being interviewed by Asempa FM, who called me on the phone from Accra to seek my views on how Ghanaians in the Diaspora can contribute to the development of Agriculture in Ghana. I felt very much honoured and humbled by their decision to call me in Lusaka to share my views with them. Even though I am not an expert on agriculture, I think I have some nodding acquaintance with the subject as it is a practical field of study. It does not need rocket science for any Ghanaian, whether educated or not, to share views on improvement of our agriculture.

Recently in Ghana, there has been a lot of debate concerning goings-on in SADA (Savannah Accelerated Development Agency), a project which was initiated in the northern parts of Ghana by the NDC as part of the government poverty intervention programme, and also as a means of bridging the development divide between northern and southern Ghana. Personally, I have never been to Northern Ghana, yet I know about the abject poverty there and the severe living conditions there.

It is alleged that SADA has consumed a lot of taxpayers' money but there is not much to show for it, because of alleged corruption and mismanagement. That said, we need to examine ways and means by which to improve agriculture in Ghana. During the 70s, the late General Ignitius Kutu Acheampong launched Operation Feed Yourself (OFY) as a nationwide programme to sensitise Ghanaians to grow their own food, spin their own clothes and become self-reliant. When are we in Ghana going to achieve self-sufficiency in food production?

Every year, Ghana imports about 1 billion dollars' worth of food items, comprising items such as rice, flour, beef, pork, fish, fruits, among others. If we become self-sufficient, we can save the colossal foreign exchange spent and use it for infrastructural development and investment in human capital. Making agriculture the leading sector in Ghana requires national leadership, intervention and provision of incentives. We will need to diversify our agriculture from rain-fed agriculture to all-the-year-round agriculture based on irrigation and use of water stored in tanks during the rainy season. The CPP and PPP parties have vowed to make agriculture the centre-piece of their agenda if voted into power.

Currently, I have knowledge that the cocoa farmers in Ghana are smiling because of the Kuapa Kookoo project initiated under Kufour's regime in partnership with Cadbury-Schweppes, to pay fair prices to peasant farmers. I have three friends here in Zambia who engages in farming in places such as Solwezi, Kasempa, Mazabuka and Kabwe. They grow maize and beans on a large scale. Another teacher friend who teaches agriculture is planning to relocate to Ghana to establish a cocoa farm in Ghana. The two of us have plans to buy hybrid seeds in Zambia which we hope will do very well in Ghana.

Some of my Ghanaian friends here in Zambia are planning big to buy trucks to take home for farming. It is very interesting that these very people refused to do farming in Ghana, but now, they have seen the great potential in farming because of the rapid increase in population and the high demand for food items. It is hoped that when Ghanaians in the Diaspora relocate to Ghana, they will bring with them their expertise, capital, networks and experience to help improve the ailing agriculture sector in Ghana. It is hoped that they will be able to acquire land to implement their plans. Land acquisition is currently a problem in certain parts of Ghana, because of corruption and litigation.

In the past, successive governments have tried to develop the Afife rice project with the support of the Chinese. I do not know how far the project has gone. Currently in Ghana, there is a big problem with marketing and distribution of farm produce, because of the huge obstacles posed by poor road infrastructure. The farmers often do not find market for their produce which are locked up in the food producing and food surplus areas. Transport fares are quite high and they do not have good storage facilities, as well as preservation methods. We need to build food silos, granaries and storage depots across the country.

We need to explore ways to process and preserve our food surplus. Our farmers can be organised into cooperatives so that they can access loans and farm inputs, and have effective marketing strategies. This is where Ghanaian Diasporians can step in to fill the market gap of poor marketing and procurement systems, by organising the farmers and using the internet and mobile phones to link them up to global markets.

Diasporians can go into ventures such as fish farming, to breed tilapia, prawns, and catfish, among others. They can also set up agro-based industries such as food processing and canning to create markets for farmers, and create jobs for school leavers. Diasporians can set up cocoa, coconut, palm oil, cashew nut, shea butter and banana plantations for export. Along the coastal areas of Ghana, the climate and soils are conducive for growing vegetables, water melons, pumpkins, pineapples, tomatoes, groundnuts, bambara beans, carrots, garden eggs and okra.

The same applies to Northern Ghana. They can adopt labour-intensive methods to create jobs, especially among women. Capital-intensive methods can be practised on large commercial farms, while the labour-intensive methods can be practised among small scale peasant farmers, who can be organised into cooperative societies. One area in which Ghana is lacking is livestock farming. Diasporians can come in big with capital to set up livestock farms or ranches in Northern Ghana. They can also set up huge modern poultry farms near the densely-populated cities like Accra, Kumasi, Tema and Takoradi. In these areas, they can practice market gardening and truck farming.

They can also enter into wheat, rice and maize production in Northern Ghana, with capital support from IFAD and the ADB. ECOWAS provides a huge market for farm produce. Perhaps, our government should consider farm input subsidies for our farmers, on the scale such as the

CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) in the EU, and the practice in the USA. We do not have to wait and be reactive to encounter a repeat of the food crises which rocked the nation in 1977 and again in 1983, when we had critical shortages of food, leading to what was popularly dubbed, Rawlings Chain. Ghanaians suffered a lot in those exceptional years, so we have to be proactive because once bitten, twice shy.

To encourage returnee Diasporeans to take to farming, the Ghanaian government should provide incentives to them such as providing tax exempt or zero rating for all agricultural inputs brought into the country by the returnees. There could also be designated areas in each of the 10 regions of Ghana as Diaspora Returnee Farm Blocs (DRFB), where returnees can access land for farming, and pay some reduced rents. Some returnees can set up agricultural clubs to whip up the interest of the youth in farming.

Those who have acquired expertise outside the country in agriculture can share their knowledge at agricultural fairs, during school visits, and during radio and TV shows. Some of them can produce books on agriculture for our schools. I know of a Ghanaian horticulturist, who is British-trained, and came to Zambia in 1967, after his training in the UK. He has done a lot in Zambia, and has produced a book on horticulture in partnership with a Nigerian professor. I will like to call upon all the Ghanaians in the Diaspora to team up and network, by re-directing foreign investors and counterparts to consider investing heavily in both organic and non-organic farming in Ghana.

Our own son of the soil, Busubrum Dr Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General, has been campaigning vigorously at several fora in Africa for African governments to pay serious attention to food security, by investing heavily in sustainable agriculture. This clarion call must also be heeded by Diasporeans, by stepping in and complementing government effort by directing some of their investment into agriculture. They can investigate into farming practices which help preserve our ecosystem.

They can, for example, research into organic farming by either cropping at landfill sites or digging up the compost soil in landfill sites or old and abandoned refuse dump sites, what is popularly known in Ghana as 'boola'. I remember about 57 years ago, my late father harvested super maize and cassava from his farm behind where we stayed at 'Quarters' at WACRI (now CRIG) in New Tafo. The site was dug up in the 1940s when they were constructing landcrete houses for staff of the then West African Cocoa Research Institute (WACRI). The area became a landfill for rubbish from those residents there.

Diasporeans may engage in drip-irrigation methods to conserve water, using highly efficient methods of intensive farming. They may also engage in truck farming or market gardening to raise assortment of vegetables for city dwellers. They could use ground charcoal; saw dust, wood clippings, mulching, and droppings from chickens and cow dung, among others to enrich the soil for organic farming. They could plant hybrid seeds to increase crop yield per hectare. They could

engage in aquaculture or hydroponics, whereby crops like tomatoes can be raised in water which is saturated with crop nutrients.

They could also engage in crop rotation, intercropping and other soil conservation methods, considering the soil catena or profile and the acidity, alkalinity and ph values of the soils. They could employ lime and top basal fertilizer to enrich farinaceous or sandy soils. Diasporeans can set up fertilizer plants in Ghana to produce urea and nitrogen compounds for agriculture. With cattle, they could engage in invitro fertilization or artificial insemination to increase yield.

Ghanaian agricultural science teachers who went to Nigeria learnt how Nigerian farmers can vegetate yams by using fresh yam cuttings to increase yield, by using some strange mechanism unknown in Ghana. What Tetteh Quarshie did in 1876 to bring cocoa seeds from Fernando Po (Equatorial Guinea) to plant at Akropong Akwapin, we in the Diaspora can also do. Marco Polo journeyed on foot for thousands of kilometres to China from Italy in 1271, and brought the knowledge of silk and spices to Italy. Among Ghanaian Diasporeans are lurking many Tetteh Quarshies, Marco Polos, Mungo Parks, David Livingstones, Mary Slessors, Sir Walter Raleighs, Francis Drakes, Jim Hawkins and Captain Thomas Cookes.

Contact: [kwesiattasakyi449@gmail.com](mailto:kwesiattasakyi449@gmail.com)

The author is a Senior Lecturer at ZCAS, Lusaka.