

POVERTY REDUCTION IN NORTHERN GHANA
A Review of Colonial and Post-Independence Development
Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Poverty reduction has become so topical that it appears no proposal for multinational or bilateral funding receives any attention unless there is evidence of how the project would reduce poverty especially among women and children. The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) document revealed that the three northern regions of Ghana are still in the leading pack of administrative regions contributing approximately 40% of the poor in Ghana. This paper examines the nature, dimensions and failure of poverty reduction strategies in the three northern regions of Ghana. This paper, which provides an overview of policy interventions since colonialism to date, argues that from colonialism through nationalism where radical and liberal reforms have been undertaken, northern Ghana has not benefited on an equitable basis. Gains from the policies have not been able to tackle its poverty situation adequately due to the lack of understanding of the poverty situation in terms of its nature and dimensions. The paper concludes that northerners themselves must lead the crusade on poverty reduction through increased investment in education, collaboration with governments and community-based organizations and the cultivation of positive mindedness rather than resort to divisive tendencies. Such collaborative efforts, it is argued can result in comprehensive strategies that can address the core of northern Ghana's poverty.

KEYWORDS: Socio-economic Inequalities, Poverty Reduction, Northern Ghana, Development Strategies.

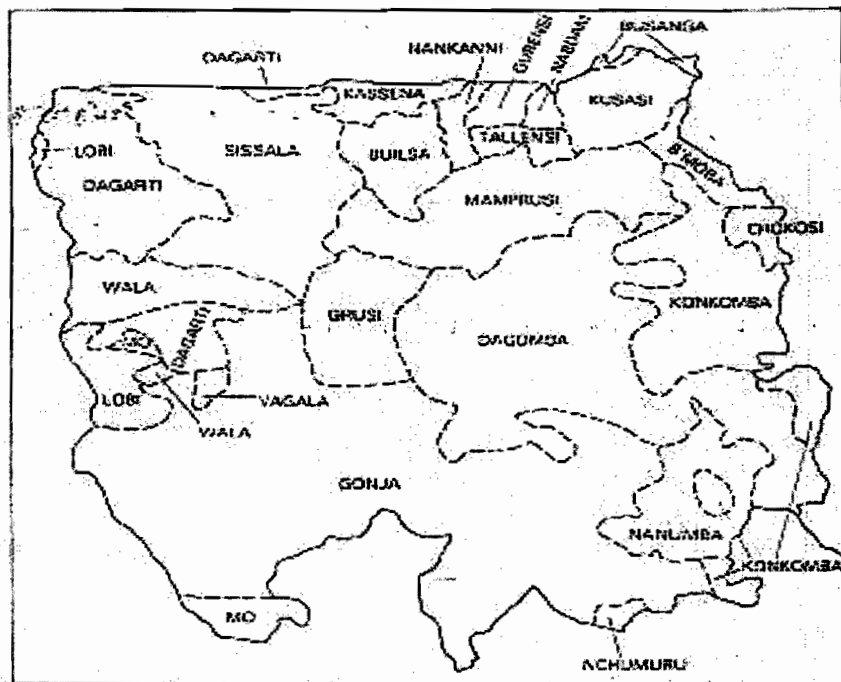
INTRODUCTION

Poverty, according to Walker and Walker, (1995) connotes "a fixed basic minimum income below which physiological efficiency can't be maintained." Kyereme, (1993) cites Walter Raleigh that: "the rich man (sic) eats when he pleases and the poor man (sic) when he can get it". Poverty manifests itself in many forms; from lack of basic needs to more complex dimensions such as finding oneself in an undesirable social, political and moral state. The poor person is not necessarily a beggar but suffers deprivation in one form or the other.

Poverty is not a recent phenomenon among the residents of northern Ghana. The lack of economic opportunities in Northern Ghana explains, in part, why the construction of railway lines has not been extended to northern Ghana. The Northern Scholarship Scheme advocated by politicians of the Northern People's Party, before independence, was to compensate for the disparities in education and development between northern and southern Ghana at the time. This study examines the special circumstances of northern Ghana; the environment, colonial policy and the lack of economic opportunities to explain why most Northern Ghanaians have remained poor peasants in spite of several post-independence strategies to reduce poverty.

Northern Ghana, as used in this text, refers to the area occupied by the three northernmost administrative regions of Ghana. These are the Upper West Region, Upper East Region and Northern Region. By this definition, communities such as Yeji and Prang, which were once part of the Northern Ghana Protectorate (i.e., the Northern Territories) are not part of the study. For the benefit of readers who are not familiar with geography of Ghana, a map of

northern Ghana (Ladouceure 1979) showing the major ethnic groups in the study area is reproduced for better understanding.



NORTHERN GHANA
Source: Ladouceur (1979), p. 21.

The total land area of Ghana is 239,460 sq.km (Ghana, 1991). Out of this total, the three northern regions constituting northern Ghana occupy an area of 97,702 sq.km and forming approximately 40.8% of the total land area of Ghana. Northern Ghana exhibits complex demographic characteristics, which are important in understanding the spread and nature of its poverty. Table 1 shows the population growth pattern in Northern Ghana between the 1984 and the 2000 censuses.

Table 1: Population Figures for 1984 and 2000

Area	1984	2000	Growth Ratio Between 1984-2000
Ghana	12,296,081	18,912,079	54%
Northern Region	1,162,645	1,805,058	56%
Upper East	771,584	919,549	20%
Upper West	439,161	575,579	31%

Source: Author's Construct from Census Reports for 1984 and 2000 from Ghana Statistical Service.

The Northern Region, in particular, had a population growth rate of 56% between 1984 and 2000, higher than the national average growth of 54%. This places pressure on ability to save and social services. With regard to infant mortality rate, the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions, recording the worst rates, lie at the bottom of the hierarchy of development indicators (Ghana Statistical Service (2002). In August 2006, the Ghana Health Service/ Ghana Guinea Worm Eradication Project publication on guinea worm infection rates by districts showed that as many as twelve (12) northern Ghana districts were among the top twenty (20) guinea worm endemic areas in Ghana (Daily Graphic, August 16, 2006). This affliction severely limits the productivity of its victims. Table 2 shows the disadvantaged position of the three northern regions in respect of some development indicators.

Table 2. The Situation of Northern Ghana Using some Development Parameters

Sector	National	Northern	Upper East	Upper West
Constituencies	230	26	13	10
Districts	166	20	9	9
Illiteracy	45.9%	78.7%	78.7%	75.5%
Under 5. Mortality	110/1000	170/1000	157/100	157/1000
Pupil Teacher ratio (Primary)	43	58	0	62
Pupil Teacher ratio (J.S.S)	32	73	86	47
Doctor Patient ratio	20,450	60,095	74	53,889
			53,688	

Source: Author's Construct, December 2006

The 2000 Population and Housing Census Survey shows that Northern Ghana, as a geographical block, is lagging behind the rest of Ghana in its poverty reduction and development efforts (GSS, 2002). Low access to health services and poor education, together with the high concentration of northerners in rain-fed agriculture inhibit social mobility to more prosperous positions or occupations. Songsore and Denkabe (1995) assert that the feminization of poverty and the increasing vulnerability of children in Northern Ghana have meant that for majority of the peoples of those regions escape routes from a crushing poverty are blocked. The 2000 Census Report also showed that nine out of every ten people in the Upper East Region, eight out of every ten in the Upper West Region and seven out of every ten people in Northern Region are below the poverty line (GSS, 2002). These statistics show that the Upper East, in relative terms, is the poorest region in Ghana. What are the reasons for this high rate of poverty in Northern Ghana? Is the chronic poverty due to population pressure, resource constraints, production barriers, cultural inhibitions, policy biases, migration or some other phenomena not yet identified? This paper discusses these issues against the backdrop of the growing phenomenon of poverty in Northern Ghana. It examines efforts at addressing northern Ghana's poverty to argue that they have lacked the requisite impetus for addressing the situation. Consequently, it embarks on an examination of the nature and dimension of poverty as a way of illuminating the situation as well as offers suggestions for tackling northern poverty comprehensively.

POVERTY REDUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Colonial Development Policy

According to Bening (1975, 1990) colonial development policy in Ghana was designed around the development of places where cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, timber, rubber palm oil and other crops could be obtained for export. The colonialists in

Ghana also concentrated on the provision of roads, schools and health services to areas where mineral deposits such as gold, diamond, bauxite, manganese could be extracted. Such a policy explains why northern Ghana received very minimal attention. Northern has lacked the cash crops and quantum of minerals of interest to the colonialists. As noted by a British colonial governor, Sir F. M. Hodgson:

...the trade values of the Northern Territories are not favourable as to their future, and lead me to the opinion that they possess no natural resources to develop. The country as far as I know is destitute of mineral wealth, it is destitute of valuable timbers, and does not produce either rubber or kola nuts or indeed any product of trade value. For the present I therefore cannot too strongly urge the employment of all the available resources of the Government upon the development of the country to the south of Kintampo leaving the Northern Territories to be dealt with in futures. I would not at present spend upon the Northern territories a single penny more than is absolutely necessary for their suitable administration and the encouragement of transit trade. (Bening, 2005: 40)

Although Governor Hodgson suggested that the north could not stand on its own, he opted rather not to spend resources on it but rather support its secondary activities such as transit trade. Notwithstanding that situation, the north was further targeted to support the development of 'the country south of Kintampo.'

The plantations, industries and the mines in the southern part of Ghana enabled some southern Ghanaians to amass wealth and send their dependants to good schools abroad for further education. The education so received gave some southerners some form of political and economic advantage and visibility in the job market. Northerners were mostly recruited into the mines and security services of the then Gold Coast. The low educational background of most northerners limited them to the lower rungs of whatever

employment they could obtain. There is corroborative evidence that under colonial development policies, northern Ghana was considered a fertile ground for producing manual labour for the fast growing cocoa and mining industries of southern Ghana (Saaka, 2001; Songsore, 2001; Bekye, 1998). Apart from starting late and well behind southern Ghana, the education system and education of northern youth was controlled for a long time by the colonizers (Quist & Apusigah, 2003; Der, 2001; Bening, 1990). But for the missionaries, specifically the White Fathers of the Catholic Church, formal education would have been completely neglected (Der, 2001; McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975). Realizing this situation in the early 1900s, the then colonial governor, Sir Gordon Guggisberg, began efforts, which were meant to bridge gaps in education such as the creation of the separate education board for the north.

Thus, development gaps which existed between northern and southern Ghana were exacerbated by colonial policies. These gaps still remain today even as efforts to bridge them remain dismal and continue to yield dismal results which are incommensurate to the enormity of the poverty of the area. The poverty level of northern Ghana remains unacceptably high in spite of the poverty reduction and growth efforts dating back to the early independence era. GoG/NDPC, 2003, 2006; Dittoh, 2008).

Nationalist Reform Policy

Since the nationalist era, dating back to the 1950s to date, a number of reforms have been undertaken to bridge development gaps created under colonial administration. These range from import substitution industrialization, export-oriented market development, state enterprise development, urbanization to infrastructural development, which have largely been rooted in agriculture. Socialist and liberal policies as well as a mix have been applied. Ghana has also moved from somewhat centralized to somewhat decentralized planning and from nationalist to open market as well as state to private sector development. While these efforts have yielded

significant positive results overall, which have been tremendous for the relatively better endowed southern Ghana, the same can not to be said of northern Ghana, whose poverty levels remain above national and regional averages.

Agrarian Reforms under Nkrumah

After independence in 1957, the first president of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, introduced the state farm and workers brigade systems. Under the "Grow What You Eat" policy, farming was boosted even as the state designed parallel initiatives to complement subsistent farming. The policy sought to make Ghana self-sufficient in food production and also reduce the import bill of the government. The import substitution policy eventually failed because of stiff competition from the countries which stood to benefit from selling to Ghana. For northern Ghana, its comparative advantage in cereals, livestock and vegetable production was harnessed resulting in the establishment of the Nasia Rice Mills, Pwalugu Tomato Factory and Zuarungu Meat Factories. These industries were part of the national campaign on import substitution industrialization. It did not only give farmers the much-needed markets and good money for their efforts but also jobs to the people. The communities that lived near and those that grew around the industries served to promote inter-cultural and economic exchanges that boosted development.

Operation Feed Yourself under Acheampong

When Nkrumah was overthrown in a military coup in 1966, no major shift in development policy occurred under the National Liberation Council (NLC). The second Republican Government of Ghana, the Busia Administration (1969-1971) adopted rural development as distinct from the urban development thrust of previous governments. The rural development programme was short-lived as the Progress Party (PP) administration did not stay long in power, about two years. The National Redemption Council (NRC), military

administration under General Acheampong, this was formed after the overthrow of the Busia Administration, introduced "Operation Feed Yourself" (OFY) policy in Ghana in 1972. Ghanaians were encouraged, like under Nkrumah, to "Grow what they eat and eat what they grow." Some early successes in food production were achieved.

In northern Ghana, this translated into massive irrigation schemes and development programmes based on its agricultural endowments. The Northern Regional Integrated Development Programme (NORRIP) and the Upper Regional Agricultural Development Programme (URADEP) were designed and established to lead the development of northern Ghana. To boost agricultural activities in the semi-arid regions, the regime introduced and expanded irrigation schemes to move the area from unreliable rain-fed and short-lived to depended all year round irrigation agriculture. The Tono, Veve and Bontanga Dams, to date, are important agricultural sites providing jobs for farmers, labourers, processors, retailers and porters as well as food and other agro-related activities. Farmer service centers and stores were opened in strategic locations that offered technical support and agricultural inputs at subsidized prices to farmers.

Rice production in the Nasia, Fumbisi Valley and Nabogu areas were also boosted. Several dug outs and small dams were also constructed in rural communities some of which continue to provide water for gardening, livestock, construction and household use. The State Housing System, which led to the building of estate and low cost housing schemes provided affordable housing for low income workers, improved the spatial beauty of communities and served to hasten urban development. These highly commendable efforts of the Acheampong era, did not only improve socio-economic conditions of the people and areas but also helped to close gaps between the north and south. However, it was not for long that the agenda ran into crisis.

The projects were fraught with the debilitating diseases of misappropriation, mismanagement and nepotism. Also, corruption in high places, in government and abuse of the import license system soon crippled domestic agriculture as cheap imports made it impossible for farmers to sell their produce. The collapse of the agricultural sector worsened the plight of northerners as they had no alternative livelihoods – no mines or industries to offer them employment in the formal sector of the Ghanaian economy. What started in 1972 as the most promising era yet, in terms of indigenized, people-centered and nationalistic endeavors and for the northern, a concentrated effort at equity programme ended as the fatal era in Ghana's socio-economic history (Apusigah, 2002).

Revolutionary and Liberal Reforms under Rawlings

The nearly two decades of Rawlings administration in Ghanaian politics was marked by varied socio-economic reforms that have been radical, controversial and even oppositional. Starting as a socialist agenda based on populist politics, that was short-lived, the administration turned to the neo-liberal Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank and IMF, for respite, when it seemed that the populist agenda was not delivering the expected results timely enough. During the early era of radical revolutionarism, the populist agenda that was promoted was intended to address equity gaps. The sudden swing in politics from populist socialism to liberal capitalism, resulted in the structural adjustments that for some time seemed to have been delivering socio-economic benefits. However, after about a decade of adjustment, studies revealed that the poverty net was growing and equity gaps widening (GSS, 2002; GoG/NDPC, 2003). Abugre (1993) observed that the trade liberalization policy had made many Ghanaian products and their prices uncompetitive. Structural adjustment hardships have led many companies to retrench, wind up or import cheaper products for sale in the local markets. For the masses, who had formed the support base of the Rawlings revolution the liberal

capitalist economics was a complete deviation from the radical revolutionary intent of the early Rawlings era.

Under such liberal reforms the ailing Ghanaian economy whose growth rate of negative 10% by the end of the 1970s, was greatly boosted. The inflation rate was reduced significantly, although it remained high. Mass infrastructural development in the water, roads, markets, schools, hospitals and electrification have resulted in marked improvement in living conditions. The cocoa and mining sectors were rehabilitated and supported to become the leading foreign exchange earners in Ghana. A human-centered pricing policy for cocoa and gold sought to improve the balance of payment difficulties that Ghana was experiencing at the time. Privatization and liberalization, however, exacerbated the plight of the poor and/or largely rural farmers and led to the resurgence of a buying and selling regime in most of Ghana's cities. In 1985, the government introduced the National Best Farmer award policy in December to annually reward hard-working farmers nation-wide. Vision 2020 and the Medium Term Development Plan sought to consolidate the gains made in the era of the Structural Adjustment Policies. The Medium Term Development Plan appeared to have been ended or shelved by the end of the year 2000, with the change of political leadership.

For northern Ghana, rural electrification and expansion of health and educational facilities had resulted in the extension of services to hitherto unreached places. The creation of the Upper West Region and districts such as Bongo, Zabzugu-Tatale, Saboba-Chereponi, among others, extended services to these hitherto neglected rural areas while the establishment of the University for Development Studies and Tamale Polytechnic (with the opening of Wa and Bolgatanga Polytechnics in process) extended higher education to northern Ghana for the first time. However, these were not enough to impact on the poverty situation in any significant way. The introduction of cash and carry in the health sector, facilities user fees in tertiary education and removal of subsidies includ-

ing those for agricultural inputs coupled with cutbacks on government subventions to state enterprises and civil/public service tended to affect the poorest of the poor. It is not therefore surprising that Poverty studies for the 1990s found the three northern regions to be the poorest (GSS, 2003).

Poverty Reduction under Kufuor

When the New Patriotic Party (NPP) came to power in the year 2001, under J. A. Kufuor, they implemented the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I) from the year 2003 to 2005 and the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II) from 2006 to 2008. These programmes, which were directed at directly targeting poverty by reducing and gradually eliminating as growth is promoted resulted in major reforms in Ghana's development agenda. One such was the declaration of a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) status which resulted in benefits such as debt forgiveness, were arguably invested in projects throughout the country.

The GPRS II sought to increase access to irrigation agriculture, a marked departure from high dependence on rain-fed farming system in the past. It also sought to increase access to credit for agricultural inputs, develop selected crops and increase access to mechanized agriculture. Additionally, GPRS II sought to increase extension services to farmers, improve agricultural marketing and increase access to the global export market. The seven aims of the GPRS II did not transform northern Ghana as envisaged.

Also, as part of poverty reduction efforts worldwide, the Kufuor administration also benefited from the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), however this growth oriented package did not favor the most impoverished parts of Ghana. Consequently, only selected districts were able to benefit from the MCA. Programmes such as School Feeding Programme, Capitation Grants, LEAP and MASLOC were aimed at improving education, providing micro-credit for enterprise development and supporting poor households

to meet basic needs. In the health sector, the introduction of health exemptions, replacement of cash can carry with a National health Insurance Scheme all delivered positive results. However, there were no targeted schemes for northern Ghana. In 2006, when the poverty survey for 2000 to 2005 was issued, it was made clear that the level of had reduced from 36% to 18% but the trends remained with northern Ghana still recording the worst rates. Furthermore, when in October, 2007, the then President of Ghana, J. A. Kufuor, announced the creation of 25 new districts and upgraded the status of 26 others, only four were from the entire northern Ghana. They were Chereponi, Kpandai, Lambussie and Kassena-Nankani West, which were inaugurated on February 29, 2008 as autonomous districts and thus qualifying to attract separate budgetary support from Central Government (Daily Graphic, October 26, 2007:6).

From the above overview, one finds that a combination of policies have been initiated to promote development. However, the starkly biased policies, had pushed reform directions that resulted in governance processes and resource allocations that had not served northern Ghana's needs and interests. This situation explains, in part, why the north has remained underdeveloped. The strategic policy papers such as *Making People Matter (1991)*, *National Development Policy Framework (1994)*, the *Vision 2020*, the *Medium Term Development Programme, GPRS I & II* and the *Millennium Development Goals* seem to have all failed to address the inherent biases against northern Ghana and its development. The discriminatory resource allocations that have tended to favor urban sectors have failed to address the development needs of the largely rural northern Ghana.

Inarguably the policy reforms have been informed by policies that have lacked the requisite meanings and mechanisms for understanding and addressing questions on regional inequalities and their attendant socio-economic injustices. Their continued inability to provide strategies that address the problems of northern devel-

opment comprehensively, and the continued spread of poverty at unacceptable levels require a revisit of the nature and dimensions of northern poverty. The following sections are devoted to such explorations.

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY IN NORTHERN GHANA

Efforts to understand and tackle poverty have and continue to attract various debates. One such, which focuses on the locus of poverty, is the internal/external debate. Ayittey (2002) explains that African scholars are divided into "internalists" and "externalists" over how Africa came to be poor and has remained poor. Ayittey (1992) and Achebe (1985) think that Africans have failed to develop due to lack of good leaders. To these scholars, poor development is squarely in Africa and can only be solved by Africans. These scholars are the "internalists." Following from their stand, northerners in Ghana must take their destiny for development into their hands and refrain from the "externalist" view that the colonialists caused their poverty and nothing can ever be done about the present sorry state of affairs. There is the need for northern chiefs and politicians to act in concert on their development aspirations. "Internalists" such as Ayittey and Achebe argue that African leaders betrayed African aspirations after independence and perpetrated chaos instead of solving the development challenges imperialism brought in its wake. The debate between the "internalists" and "externalists" is still raging on while poverty is deepening in most parts of Africa. If colonialism is not bad, will Africans prefer a re-colonisation over self misrule?

According to Dittoh (2008: 3-4)

Despite of the complexity of poverty as a concept and a problem, there is the need to have a working definition and indeed a measure or measures if the problem is to be tackled systematically and effectively. There must be a reference point and that point could be obtained on the basis of economic,

social, cultural, religious, political, technological etc criteria. Sen (1987) defined poverty as "the lack of certain capabilities, such as being able to participate with dignity in society" while Dietz (2000) has defined it as "a lack of capability to lead a decent life, as defined by the cultural norms of a particular society". He points out that "capabilities are based on human capital (health, education and fertility), personal income, accumulated assets, security/vulnerability of life and assets, freedom to express ideas and act, and a network of effective support, which all give status, dignity and a feeling of belonging". These two definitions are clearly philosophical though encompassing. They however do not allow for measurements which can be used to determine and monitor poverty levels.

Dittoh (2008) argues in reference to poverty in northern Ghana that the inability to define poverty in its complexity and specificity poses a grave challenge to poverty reduction and retards efforts in the area. For him, then, unless poverty reduction measures reflect an understanding of the depths and breadths of the poverty of northern Ghana and involve the design of the necessary strategies to counter the phenomenon, its reduction and eventual elimination would be far-fetched. This position requires that policies and programmes define poverty, recognize who the poor are and the causes of such grave deprivations in northern Ghana.

In his seminal work, *Sociological Imagination*, Mills (1959) describes the general disenchantment among poor people thus:

Men (sic) often feel that their private lives are traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct. What ordinary men (sic) are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by their private orbits in which they live. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.

It is this crippling feeling of helplessness that makes some northerners to lose hope, believing that work cannot change their state of wretchedness. The average northerner is likely to be below the poverty line of Ghana. They tend to live in slum, rural and deprived areas, where they work as subsistent food crop farmers, street hawkers or hired labourers; identified among the poorest in Ghana (GoG/NDPC, 2003). Able and youthful ones, men and women, are likely to migrate from the homes of origin during the off-farm season to urban and more prosperous farming communities elsewhere, where they engage in menial jobs such as waiting, gardening, housekeeping, portering and hawking in order to supplement their incomes. They are also likely to be poorly educated, have recurrent attacks of malaria, have too many children and live in compound housing in urban slums, rented apartments or even on the streets of urban centers instead of an own house.

Admittedly, approximately 10% of people in Northern Ghana live above the official poverty line in Ghana (World Bank, 1990). This lucky 10% are assailed by the many poor relatives through demands. A moderately successful person in northern Ghana is compelled by unending family demands to increase his or her expenditure beyond his/her income, leaving no savings to deal with contingencies. When one falls under the weight of limitless financial demands, the previous dependents cite not one's largesse but the occasions when one was unable to help as the cause of one's predicament.

DIMENSIONS OF NORTHERN POVERTY

What then are the causes of poverty in Northern Ghana? A number of factors can be identified as causal factors including social, political, economic, medical, cultural and technological interfaces which conspire to keep most people in northern Ghana down with no hope of escaping.

Morbidity and Mortality

In the northern part of Ghana, malnourishment is very common due to food insecurity. Studies in poverty in the United States and other regions in the world battling with development have made interesting revelations which appear also true about northern Ghana.

Harrington, (1963) observes that:

The poor get sick more than anyone else in the society. That is because they live in slums, jammed together under unhygienic conditions; they have inadequate diets, and cannot get decent medical care. When they become sick, they are sick longer than any other group in the society. Because they are sick more often and longer than anyone else, they lose wages and find it difficult to hold a steady job. At any part in the circle, particularly when there is a major illness, their prospect is to move to an even lower level and to begin the cycle, round and round towards even more suffering.

The sordid health statistics, presented earlier in this text, point clearly to such a picture in northern Ghana. The three regions constituting it are always the worst in terms of health or are among the worst hit in Ghana.

Accident of Birth

The argument of accident of birth as partly the cause of the poverty in northern Ghana makes considerable sense. It may be argued that the ancestors of northerners in Ghana who chose to settle in the savannah and not the forest belt are partly to blame for the pitiful indigent state of most northerners. To a large extent, the present lands in northern Ghana were not as barren or degraded as they are today when the first Northerners settled on them. Some villages in northern Ghana to this day still have very

fertile soils. However, the first northern settlers are blamable for the choice of the savannah for a permanent settlement. The argument is that if the first ancestors of northerners had settled elsewhere, the fate of northerners could have been different. Harrington (1963) captures the incidence of accident of birth vividly as follows:

The real explanation of why the poor are where they are is that they made the mistake of being born to the wrong parents, in the wrong section of the country, in the wrong industry, or in wrong racial or ethnic group. Once that mistake has been made... most of them would never even have a chance to get out of the other Americaë. The poor are caught in a vicious circle....

This observation was true about American poor, but it is even truer about Northern Ghana. Many northerners in Ghana are industrious without being prosperous due to their circumstances of birth. Dreze (1999), Freire (1972) and Frank (1967) in their works reiterate that the social conditions of a person circumscribe his or her economic opportunities. The fact that some people and regions without natural resources were eventually able to change their miserable circumstances at birth does not mean that those debilitating conditions did not inhibit their attempts to break these shackles. Also, political issues and events have conspired to keep Northern Ghana poor. Colonialism, ethnic conflict and policy biases have each and varying contributed immensely to the seemingly insurmountable poverty of the Northern Ghana.

Ethnic and Chieftaincy Conflicts

Ethnic and chieftaincy conflicts have also been cited as major causes of poverty in northern Ghana (Maasole, 2007; Awedoba, 2005; Bacho; 2005). Northern Ghana was once fertile grounds for slave raiders like Samori, Babatu and Amrahi before Ghana became independent in 1957. During conflicts, vital communal re-

sources such as water, food reserves, cattle were pillaged to compel families and villages to surrender and negotiate peaceful pacts with the raiders. Periodic fighting created insecurity and fear in Northern Ghana. Into the 21st century, ethnic clashes and bloody chieftaincy conflicts are still prevalent in Northern Ghana. Conflict over land and chieftaincy still drive away potential investors bearing opportunities for alternative sources of livelihood. The murder of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II, King and head of the Dagbon State of the Northern Region of Ghana has in no doubt affected the development potential of Northern Region in particular and Northern Ghana as a whole. Other conflicts spots such as Bawku also play considerable roles in drawing northern Ghana back to its development.

Colonialism

Bening (1990) and Songsore and Denkabe (1995) think that colonialism also partly explains why the northern Ghana has remained undeveloped to this date. Colonial policy in Africa for British colonies hinged largely on developing first those areas that had great potential to produce primary raw materials such as rubber, cocoa, oil palm, coffee, minerals and others. As northern Ghana lacked these, not much effort was made to develop its infrastructure. Roads and railways were built to only the places where raw materials could be bought and sent to Europe to feed the factories brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

Northern Ghana was used mostly as a cheap labour reserve to serve the colonial governments (Der, 2001; Saaka, 2001, Bekye, 1998; Bening, 1975). Commissioners in charge of northern Ghana were tasked to provide labour to work in the plantations, railways, ports, mines, roads and factories located in Southern Ghana. Servicemen for both internal and external defence of British interests such as the First and Second World Wars were recruited mostly from northern Ghana. Many young men from northern Ghana in their primes, were pushed to the war front, and were gunned

down. Little or no benefits were paid to the survivors or dependants of the war casualties.

Colonial policy on education gave as little education as possible to northern Ghana, just enough for pupils to become useful citizens to themselves and their communities (Der, 2001; Bening, 1990). The education given was not adequate for beneficiaries to gain social mobility or amass sufficient wealth to influence the economic well-being of their dependants. The barely-educated northerners went for only jobs at the lower rungs of most organizations; in times of modernization and re-organisation these were often the first casualties in retrenchment and redeployment programmes. Needless to say, poorly paid northerners' problems are aggravated by large extended families constantly assailing them with demands in the mistaken belief that they were luckier than those in subsistence agriculture.

Credit and Farm Inputs

Majority of the people living in northern Ghana are peasant farmers; categorized among the poorest of the poor in Ghana (Gog/NDPC, 2003; Dittoh, 2008). Where even the land is fertile, the use of crude implements like the cutlass and hoe do not allow for large plantation farm holdings in order to enhance benefits from good seasons. Access to credit and/or access to bullocks and donkey ploughs or tractors remain difficult (Dittoh, 2008). Where credit is available, the interest rates and precarious rain-fed agricultural system make many northern youth shy away. Hand to mouth small-holder schemes make northern farmers reluctant to take big risks. The average northerner sees farming as a way of life; northern farmers will farm no matter the losses envisaged ahead of them. Poor road network makes staple food prices high due to transport costs. Due to their poverty, the subsistent farmers of northern Ghana are not able to access requisite technologies for more efficient production. They continue to rely on manual labor,

which is energy and time demanding and hardly result in commensurate yields.

Environmental Degradation

Population pressure has reduced fallow periods in the Upper East Region and Upper West Region of northern Ghana. Shorter fallow periods, overgrazing, bush burning and deforestation have resulted in serious soil erosion and degraded lands. In 2007, the Upper East Region and parts of Upper West Region experienced severe floods requiring massive humanitarian support to alleviate the suffering of people whose houses, farms and properties were affected. Degraded lands yield very little, little yields mean food insecurity, food insecurity leads to poor health, poor health leads to little production and an endless cycle of deprivations.

Under-employment and Migration

Since there is only one rainfall season in the north, farmers are not engaged throughout the year. During the dry spells, they migrate to places in the forest belt to supplement their incomes. The lack of small scale dams or irrigation facilities prevents hardworking peasants in northern Ghana from using their full talents. Unemployment and under-employment have meant reduced income to buffer northern households in bad times.

Education

Education does not necessarily lead to employment. It, however, opens opportunity for those who have the right kind of education for the job market. Freeman (1976) points out that one can indeed be overeducated and in the process find oneself unemployed. Education, however, has great potential to unlock the doors for social, political and occupational mobility. The resulting equalization can reduce hostility towards the rich. In life, good health, good education, good character and resourcefulness constitute

handsome social capital to achieve a rich and comfortable life-style. Toffler (1974) points out that those who have the right education for the labour market land good jobs. The accompanying honour, respect and confidence allows there to enjoy social and economic mobility. Hill (1981) cites Defoe that "the rich man with a gold ring and gay clothes may swear before the justice or at the justicee and no man take notice of him; but if a poor man gets drunk or swears an oath, he must to the stocks without remedy". The rich obtains justice or subverts justice; the poor man is denied justice even when it is his due.

Attitudinal

Farming is still a way of life rather than a business for most farmers in northern Ghana. Farmers prefer to do things the way their ancestors did them. Yahie (1993) and Tirfe (1999) observe that although agricultural extensionists have been urging modernization, many farmers still rely on indigenous ways of cropping and farming are suspicious of new ways. Peasant world-views are informed by past failures of trials. Farmers look out carefully for certain features before adapting the use of higher-yielding seeds and animals. Among these are observability, triability, compatibility, and reliability. Northern farmers also spread their risks by farming bits of almost everything as everything is unlikely to fail in one cropping season. Chambers, (1983) points out that interventionists fail to bring development when they fail to see things from the farmer's viewpoint: the farmer first approach.

Above all, it would appear that many poor northerners are happy with their state until they meet peers who are far better-off than them. They then begin to challenge themselves why they are not like other people. A family may be happy with a black and white television set but upon seeing a neighbour's 24-inch colour television, they suddenly feel God has been relatively unkind to them. Their perceived lower social status begins to worry them. Poverty comes in many forms.

To raise sufficient income, moonlighting is a common but not exclusive pastime among northerners. A person works as a garden boy somewhere, is a labourer at another organization and ends up as a watchman during the night at another place. Can a rat catcher, grave digger, street sweeper or dishwasher exploit other opportunities that can move him/her to better paying jobs? Just as wealth begets wealth, so poverty also often begets poverty.

CONCLUSION

This paper has entailed the examination of the prevalence and persistence of poverty in northern Ghana in spite of several intervention measures by governments. The paper concludes poverty reduction and development strategies from colonialism through nationalism to date have not been successful in addressing the poverty situation of northern Ghana. They have failed to understand and programme to deliver equitable results and benefits. Concerned that poverty is still widespread in northern Ghana for argues for a better analysis and understanding of northern Ghana's peculiarities; socially, politically, economically and even attitudinally as the basis for policy and programming..

RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce poverty in Northern Ghana, greater emphasis must be placed on providing quality education as a firm basis of ensuring social and economic mobility of children from Northern Ghana. Governments in Ghana must continue to pursue fairer distribution of teachers, educational infrastructure and teaching aids so that children from northern Ghana would be competitive in the job market.

The School Feeding Programme in Northern Ghana should be strengthened and extended to all northern schools. The modest increases in enrolment as a result of the capitation grant should be sustained with the feeding programme to reduce the dropout rate

in schools in the study area. More national service personnel should be sent to Northern Ghana to improve the pupil-teacher ratio in rural schools.

Government can reduce north-south migration by providing more dams and dug-outs to promote alternative livelihoods during the dry season. Large dams like Veve, Tono and Bontanga Irrigation Projects in northern Ghana were not very successful because most of the dam users were not the indigenous people, but urban top public servants and businessmen who could meet the cost of water, land and other irrigation inputs. Small scale dams will be cheaper, reduce rural-urban drift and provide all year round incomes to local inhabitants. Small scale farming slots will lose the incentive to attract elite urban dwellers.

Tomatoes, guinea corn, groundnuts and soya beans should be added to the crops supported by Special Presidential Initiatives. In particular, Government could empower women through, Sheabutter, soybeans and gari processing to enhance rural incomes.

Government should as a priority tar all the major trunk roads linking the three regional capitals of the north. The poor state of these trunk roads contributes to the high cost of foodstuff produced in northern Ghana as well as foodstuff from southern Ghana.

Furthermore, District Assemblies in northern Ghana should in addition to the education drive also mobilise their people to subscribe heavily to the Health Insurance Schemes. Better access to healthcare services in northern Ghana would not only increase productivity but enable those who are lucky to have jobs to perform satisfactorily.

Government should continue to provide potable water to especially endemic guinea worm communities so that farmers would be

healthy to cultivate their farms during the wet season, and obtain handsome incomes to meet their civic obligations.

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