



INTERNATIONAL FOOD
POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
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GHANA'S TRANSFORMATION

JOHN AGYEKUM KUFUOR



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GHANA'S TRANSFORMATION

John Agyekum Kufuor

John Kufuor served two terms as president of the Republic of Ghana from 2001–08. During his presidency, he served as chairperson of the African Union (2007–08) and chairman of the Economic Community of West African States for two terms (2003–05). Earlier in his career, he was twice elected member of Parliament (1969–72 and 1979–81). He served as a deputy minister of foreign affairs, representing Ghana's delegation to the United Nations (UN); secretary for local government; and chief legal officer and city manager of Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana. He is currently a Global Ambassador Against Hunger for the UN World Food Programme; chairman of the UN Interpeace Program; member of Club de Madrid; director of the Brenthurst Foundation of South Africa; and director of the Sullivan Foundation. He received his BA and MA from Oxford

University and was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn, London. In 2011, he received an award from Chatham House, UK, for his exemplary leadership qualities.



More than one billion people throughout the world, the highest number in the past four decades, will go hungry this year. More than a million of them live in my home country of Ghana. And hundreds of millions more across the globe suffer from “hidden hunger”: they have food on the table, but that food—all that is available to them—lacks many of the nutrients essential to health.

This failure to provide sufficient and nutritious food has a devastating impact on health and development that starts in the earliest days of life. The physical and mental development of unborn children is badly damaged, often irreversibly, if their mothers cannot eat properly. Malnutrition stunts our children’s growth, increases their vulnerability to disease, and reduces their capacity to learn at school. Of course, all this feeds into the wider economy, with poorer productivity and performance. The

challenges we face today are not just about survival or fairness but are at the heart of hopes for long-term social and economic development.

Without solutions, and the commitment from political leaders to put them into action, our ambitions for a

fairer and stable world will not count for much.

When I became Ghana’s president in 2000, my country needed solutions for hunger, malnutrition, and a host of other problems. Long years of military rule had sapped the principles of good governance, accountability, and transparency from Ghana. Respect for human rights was at its lowest level, the rule of law was abused with impunity, and the people had little faith in the justice system. Like many other African countries, Ghana’s economy had stagnated for decades and its population had fallen further into poverty, even as the Western world and countries in the Far East developed robust economies built on new, innovative technologies.

Agriculture had been the mainstay of the Ghanaian economy for more than 100 years, producing a variety of crops, from cocoa and oil palm to staples like tubers, cereals, and fruits. Cultivation practices remained traditional and subsistent in nature. About 60 percent of Ghana’s population directly depends on rural agriculture. Yet those who work to provide food through farming are the most food-insecure people in the country. My administration aimed to ensure a more efficient and productive agricultural base that would become the engine of the economy by providing food security,

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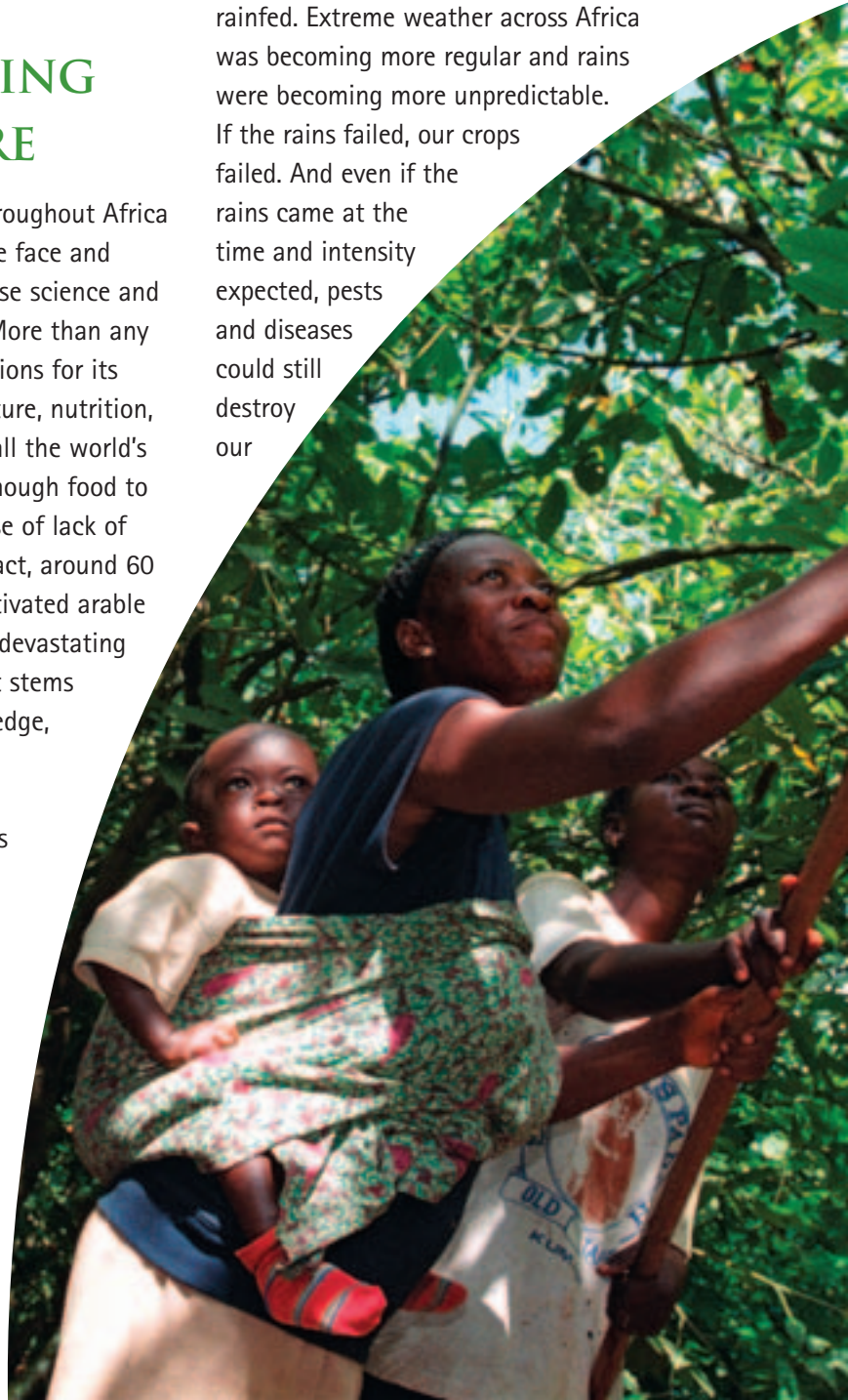
ushering in industrialization, creating jobs, and increasing export revenues. The critical need was—and is—for an agricultural transformation.

TRANSFORMING AGRICULTURE

I have seen in Ghana and throughout Africa the scale of the challenge we face and also how governments can use science and technology to overcome it. More than any continent, Africa needs solutions for its myriad challenges in agriculture, nutrition, and health. Africa alone, of all the world's continents, does not grow enough food to feed itself. This is not because of lack of will or shortage of land. In fact, around 60 percent of the world's uncultivated arable land is in Africa. Rather, the devastating food deficit on the continent stems largely from a lack of knowledge, resources, and opportunity.

In 2000, agriculture, as it was practiced in Ghana, looked much the same as it had for decades and even centuries before. It was back-breaking, with little joy or reasonable reward to attract educated youth. The revolution that transformed agriculture

around the world had largely bypassed Africa. The average farmer did not share in the advances in irrigation or improved crop varieties revolutionizing yields elsewhere. Our agriculture was overwhelmingly still rainfed. Extreme weather across Africa was becoming more regular and rains were becoming more unpredictable. If the rains failed, our crops failed. And even if the rains came at the time and intensity expected, pests and diseases could still destroy our



crops because farmers rarely used pesticides and fertilizers. There was hardly any diversification, which, together with outdated farming practices, reduced the fertility and quality of the soil. It forced families to move on, slashing and burning, causing severe and lasting damage to our environment. The educated youth, therefore, escaped and drifted from rural areas into towns in search of nonexistent jobs.

The failure of agriculture forced Ghana to import food from outside our continent, stripping the country of resources needed for development. But too often this imported food itself was of dubious nutritional quality. Europe and Asia dumped inferior chicken parts and poor-quality rice in Africa, forcing down the prices of our home-grown crops. But the evidence shows that if our farmers gain the knowledge and resources their counterparts in other parts of the world take for granted, they can quickly increase yields. I have seen this in Ghana with important cash crops like cocoa and in food production.

As part of my administration's rural redevelopment plan, reactivated agricultural extension services paid special attention to educating cocoa farmers on best practices. Ghana is the second largest exporter of cocoa in the world, but it was always clear that, with the right government support and the spread of best practices, yields could be increased.

My administration adapted the latest knowledge from universities, research institutes, experts, and farmers across the world. Farmers' access to affordable credit underpinned our policy. The government sprayed cocoa farms with pesticides free of charge



and provided fertilizers where needed. Importantly, the government gave farmers a major incentive to expand production by increasing their share of the international export price from 40 percent in 2002 to about 70 percent in 2004. The result was dramatic. Between 2002 and 2005, cocoa production in Ghana doubled—from 350,000 tons to 734,000 tons, an all-time record in more than a century of cocoa farming in the country. The government successfully used many of the same techniques to improve production for food crops such as maize, yams, and plantains, as well as livestock and fish. My administration also strengthened the Grains and Legumes Development Board to supply quality seeds and planting materials to farmers as a strategy to improve the quantity and quality of Ghana's agriculture produce.

While increasing crop yields is vital, it is of little use if the product cannot be stored safely or transported to markets. Therefore, along with supporting irrigation, improved seeds, and crop diversification, the government pursued an integrated rural development policy, building feeder roads, silos, and cold stores for horticultural crops (such as pineapples, mangoes, and bananas). The government also made mechanization, like tractors, more affordable for farmers through favorable loan terms. Landing sites were developed for sea fisheries on the beach and for

aquaculture along the Volta Lake. The outcome was that, despite the problems the nation faced, especially through 2006, 2007, and 2008, food is now more plentiful in Ghana.

TRANSFORMING CITIZENS

For a country like Ghana, where more than half its people farm the land, transforming agriculture helps to transform everyone. The farmers' progress did not just result in increased exports; the government launched an ambitious program to give many kindergarten and primary school pupils a daily hot and nutritious meal made from locally produced food, which resulted in a monumental increase in school enrollment. The policy provided proper nourishment for the children and also support for the farmers.

The expectation of nutritious meals kept children in school, which has many advantages. One such advantage is reducing teenage pregnancy: the longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to get pregnant. Educated girls who become mothers later

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in life are better able to care for their children. Currently, more girls than boys are enrolling in schools in many parts of the country. Our comprehensive educational reform policy also upgraded all the teacher training colleges to emphasize the teaching of mathematics, science, and technology, and stressed vocational training and apprenticeship at the secondary levels.

To build on our education policies, huge investments were made in the health sector and the national health insurance scheme, which included free maternity care. Nearly 56 percent of the population was insured within the first three years, on an affordable premium of around US\$10 annually. The government invested in these policies because we knew that a healthy, well-educated population would make our country stronger.

TRANSFORMING THE COUNTRY

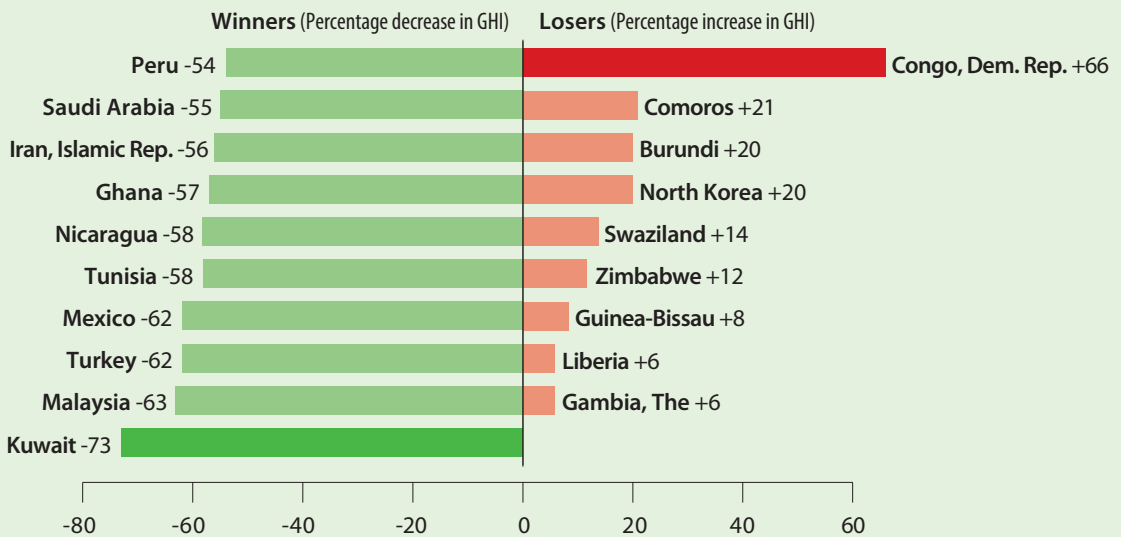
During the past decade, the many new agricultural, social, and economic policies have shifted Ghana's position in Africa. It is now considered one of the more

politically stable countries on the continent and has made some of the greatest progress in reducing hunger, poverty, and malnutrition. In recognition of this progress and based on a compact developed to modernize agriculture and attract and retain the youth in the sector, the US government awarded a grant of \$547 million to Ghana under the Millennium Challenge Account. The development priorities set by my administration aligned with many of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. One goal for both the government and the UN was that the nation attain middle-income status by 2015. By 2007, multilateral organizations determined Ghana had reached middle-income status, with a per capita GDP of more than US\$1,300. This happened eight years in advance of the target, and even before the crude oil find in the same year. In fact, even in the teeth of the international financial and economic crisis, Ghana's GDP grew 8.4 percent in 2007–08, reaching its highest level in the country's history. The latest Global Hunger Index (GHI), which measures children's undernourishment, underweight, and mortality in developing countries, showed that Ghana had one of the 10 greatest percentage reductions in GHI scores since 1990 (see Figure 1).

None of these advances, or the reforms that precipitated them, would have been

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Figure 1—GHI winners and losers from 1990 GHI to 2010 GHI



Source: K. von Grebmer, M. T. Ruel, P. Menon, B. Nestorova, T. Olofinbiyi, H. Fritschel, Y. Yohannes, *2010 Global Hunger Index, The Challenge of Hunger: Focus on the Crisis of Child Undernutrition* (Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, 2010).

Note: Countries with both 1990 GHI less than five and 2010 GHI less than five are excluded.

as successful if the Ghanaian people did not have true democratic freedom. The government took the furthering of democracy very seriously. One of the first things my administration did was to repeal the criminal libel law, which successive governments since colonial times had used to muzzle the media. We opened up the licensing of media houses. The number of FM radio stations mushroomed around the country; there must be around 200 in the country now. Ghana deserves—and now has—an accountable government that respects the country's constitution, including free speech and due process of law. Because the government insisted on

due process, people felt free to express themselves without having to look over their shoulders. My administration gave a great deal of attention to furthering freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of belief, allowing people to practice the religion of their choice.

As Ghana's position in Africa improved, my administration worked to help our neighbors promote democratic values as well. We needed to pursue policies that relaxed tensions. Along the way we became aware that most of the countries looked up to Ghana. We felt self-conscious to get it right. Some countries experienced

unrest: Cote D'Ivoire, Togo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Ghana played a lead role in resolution of problems in all these countries. We talked not only about peace but also about legality and constitutionality. Preaching this elsewhere, we couldn't practice differently at home. Feeling accountable to those around us contributed to the practice of good governance over the last decade.

Because we are dedicated to democratic principles, we are also dedicated to fairness and to justice. But in a world as technologically advanced as ours, widespread hunger is not justice. Farmers must be transformed by educating and empowering them to maximize quality food outputs using science and technology. A healthy and happy future for mankind demands such farmers because food is the most basic of needs. It decides not just the health of individuals but also the health of communities. Yet, shortages of nutritious food condemn millions of our fellow human beings to far shorter lives than those in more food-secure countries. In the twenty-first century, this is a scandal that must shame all of us. The forces of globalization, if they are to be seen throughout the world as benign, must be harnessed to tackle this most basic of inequalities.





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