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Adra's Agroforestry Development Program in Ghana Gives Peasant Farmers New Chances

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Land Degradation in Ghana

Land degradation is a major concern of communities in the Savanna and Transitional zones of Ghana. It is generally acknowledged that the causes of land degradation are mainly human. In fact, land degradation is the cause and the effect of poverty in most rural communities. To combat land degradation effectively, we need to identify and understand its causes, which hinge on socioeconomic and cultural practices within communities.

Ghana has a total land area of 238,539 sq. kilometers. The area of closed forest is declining by an estimated 0.4percentage and the savanna woodland is shrinking by 0.5percentage per year. Approximately 280,000 acres of tree cover are lost every year through improper farming practices. (Forestry Department, 1998.)

Examples of improper farming practices which cause land degradation are shifting cultivation, short fallow period, bush burning, and indiscriminate felling of trees for use as fire wood, charcoal, rafters, poles etc. Other causes are over-grazing, uncontrolled logging and mining. The consequences are decreasing vegetative cover, loss of soil organic matter, accelerated soil erosion, poor soil fertility and siltation of water bodies. These effects result in low agricultural yields and increasing poverty in most rural communities of Ghana. To reverse the current trend in environmental degradation, ADRA has recommended that farmers adopt agroforestry practices as better and more sustainable alternatives to current methods of farming. Through interactive participation methods, ADRA GHANA has developed various agroforestry designs suitable for the different ecological zones found in Ghana. ADRA has educated and guided farmers to understand and to choose designs that best address their unique environmental problems.

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"Red Cross' Humanitarian Mission to Assist the Most Vulnerable"-- Safety Nets Programs and The American Red Cross

By Jindra Cekan PhD, Food Security Manager

Introduction

The concept of a safety net implies assistance to prevent people from falling below a certain standard of living. The necessity for safety net assistance can be a direct result of circumstances brought on by natural disasters, war, discrimination, and economic recession, or due to inherent social characteristics such as being elderly, ill (including HIV/AIDs), homeless, orphaned, or disabled. Populations specifically targeted by food safety nets are unable to access sufficient food to feed themselves and their families. The needs of safety net populations include not only food but also shelter, healthcare, rehabilitation, training, and new employment.

Most governments, PVOs, institutions, and individuals participate in such assistance. Many government programs include pension plans, national health schemes such as Medicare/Medicaid in the US, and national immunization days. Some PVOs assist with general food distributions for the most vulnerable segments of society, create public works schemes to build or improve infrastructure while providing a day's wage, or use subsidized food sales or animal purchases preceding famines. Large institutions such as the UN's WHO and UNICEF focus on health needs of specific groups such as malnourished children, those who are unvaccinated, and pregnant or lactating women. Finally, institutions and private individuals donate funds, goods, services, and time.

The American Red Cross (AmCross), through the International Federation of the Red Cross and through its Movement partners, has long assisted vulnerable populations -- both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and those with persisting and chronic needs -- by providing food aid interventions. These interventions started with direct food distribution programs using

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organizations to come to their assistance. One example is the Ministry of Education and Health, which is providing adult education to enable them to read and write in their local language. In the health sector, they benefit from messages on nutrition, sanitation, family planning and AIDS education.

Generally, clients continue to benefit in diverse ways from the various agroforestry practices they have adopted. Though the benefits are just beginning, living standards of farmers are improving. Clients are now able to buy simple assets such as radios and bicycles, pay school fees, medical bills and replace their thatch roofs with metal sheets. The pressure on the natural forest as the main source of firewood, rafters, poles, timber and other forest products is decreasing.

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New Micronutrient Standards for PL 480 Commodities

Submitted by: SUSTAIN

Each year the U.S donates millions of metric tons in food commodities worldwide. Under the Title II, P.L. 480 program alone, more than 1.9 million metric tons were distributed to 45 million individuals in 56 countries in fiscal year 1999. Over forty percent of these commodities (710,000 metric tons worth $237 million) consisted of micronutrient-fortified cereal products and vegetable oil. P.L. 480 food aid commodities not only address general protein-energy malnutrition, but also serve as an important vehicle for reaching undernourished populations suffering from debilitating micronutrient deficiencies.

In response to the need for improving nutrient standards of food aid commodities dispersed through the P.L.480, Title II program, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) commissioned SUSTAIN to conduct the Micronutrient Assessment Project (MAP). The primary objective of the MAP study was to assess the uniformity and quality of micronutrients in P.L.480 commodities and to determine if modifications are needed to improve the diets of mothers, children and refugees receiving food aid in developing countries.

The study traced the added micronutrients from the point of commodity manufacture, through shipping and storage, to the final point of distribution and food preparation in recipient countries. The MAP study was a collaborative effort with significant participation and expertise contributed by individuals from U.S. government agencies (USAID, USDA, FDA), the World Food Programme, NAS, industry (milling companies, ingredients companies, and analytic laboratories), and private voluntary organizations.

Findings included inconsistent uniformity of micronutrients in the end product, low levels of fortificants within some production lots, and the loss of highly labile micronutrients (such as vitamin A) in the manufacturing process and during cooking at recipient sites. These findings were confirmed in companion studies and reviews conducted by USDA and the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). Recommendations contained within the MAP study call for strengthening government specifications for micronutrients in PL 480 commodities and mechanisms for assuring quality control, monitoring and enforcement of those requirements.

Since the completion of the MAP study, significant effort has been made to improve the quality of micronutrient fortified PL 480 commodities. USDA issued several notices to manufacturers stating that: "*...cereal-based processed commodities procured for export assistance programs will be tested on a per lot basis for compliance to vitamin and mineral specifications contained in the purchase announcement*". Vitamin A and iron were also established as markers for monitoring compliance with micronutrient specifications. Deadlines for compliance with these requirements vary by commodity and fall between February 2000 and July 2000. New requirements for the addition of vitamin A to vegetable oil were also issued in November of 1998.

Table 1: Commodities to be tested and minimum values for vitamin and mineral markers

Commodity	*Vitamin A(IU/lb)*	*Iron (mg/100g)*	*Effective Date*
Corn-Soy Blend	8400	14.7	February 8, 2000
Wheat-Soy Blend	8400	14.7	February 8, 2000
Wheat Flour*	8800	N/A†	February 8, 2000
Cornmeal*	8800	N/A	February 8, 2000
Bulgur*	8800	N/A	July 1, 2000
Sorghum	8800	N/A	July 1, 2000

**Includes all fortified commodities in this category*
†Vitamins and minerals are added to these commodities in the same fortification premix, thus making it unnecessary to measure both vitamin A and iron levels. This is in contrast to CSB and WSB, to which minerals and vitamins are added as separate premixes

In addition to these new specifications, USDA is incorporating P.L. 480 commodities into their requirements for Total Quality Systems Audits (TQSA). Under this program, vendors are required to establish and maintain effective quality control procedures, tests, and records that verify each production lot's compliance with the vitamin A and iron fortification requirements prior to shipment. Products not found to be in compliance in all respects with the applicable commodity procurement specification shall not be delivered to the Commodity Credit Corporation without written authorization signed and executed by the Contracting Officer (USDA NTT EOD-64). These changes are expected to have a significant impact on the quality of P.L. 480 commodities and are part of an ongoing effort to improve nutritional status among vulnerable populations.

For more information on the MAP study or SUSTAIN, please visit our web-site at www.sustaintech.org.