

## Climate Change: Uncertainty for Ashanti Farmers

By Nicholas Aboagye, MA

Ashanti Development runs a tailor-make scheme to help local farmers diversify into crops other than cocoa. The scheme was created, piloted and is now supervised by Nicholas Aboagye, our Country Director, who discusses the reasoning below.

Developing countries are increasingly concerned about climate change, particularly countries in Africa where it presents a major threat to sustainable growth and development and a growing obstacle to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The main long-term impacts include changing rainfall patterns leading to cuts in production and reduced food security; worsening water security; and vector-borne diseases, that is human diseases transmitted by, for example, mosquitoes, tsetse flies, snails and lice.

In the Mampong Municipality and Sekyere Central districts of Ashanti, where Ashanti Development operates, unreliable rainfall and increasing dryness have forced farmers to switch from traditional cash crops, such as cocoa, cola nut and coffee, to food crops such as root vegetables. The

farmers explain that they lost all their crops to the 1983 drought and accompanying wildfire. Since then, wildfire occurs every dry season, making the cultivation of trees and bushes impractical, and the farmers have no option but to make the switch. Despite their hard work, many continue to complain of low productivity because of poor rainfall and lessening soil fertility - factors which lead to the high incidence of poverty in the area.



Farmers assessing their crops

Another effect of climate change is the influx of people from the savannah and northern regions of Ghana and from the Sahel regions of West Africa,

resulting in a larger population and competition for land.

This competition can lead to conflict between individuals and ethnic groups and to clashes between food crop farmers and herdsman, whom the food crop farmer accuses of stealing and destroying their farms (see Hunger Comes South, below). Farmers who can no longer bear the frustration of this conflict are migrating to towns and cities to look for non-existent jobs, leaving behind the elderly who are not strong enough to produce much food.

Climate change, reduced rainfall and loss of original vegetation have brought in their wake diseases and pests such as fungi, army worm and locusts, which were previously unknown. Farmers find them difficult to control and just as they learn how to do so, new pests arrive, making crop production difficult and unpredictable and forcing farmers to use their little income to buy agro chemicals.

As more immigrants come south the culture and traditions of the indigenous people are under threat. Many farmers are now growing crops which were not common in their area before climate change - yams, cereals, and other tubers for example. Traditional food such as apreprensa (fried ground maize in palm soup), nptonpoto (cocoyam or red plantain in soup), nkyekyeraa (processed maize wrapped in broad leaves), fufu

(cassava mixed with plantain with soup) are giving way to, for example, tuozafo, banku, tubani and awakye which are not indigenous. Similarly, house-building methods are changing. Local building materials such as branches of raffia palms or bamboo traditionally used for roofing mud houses are disappearing and the people are now roofing their houses with grass.



**Groundnuts**

Last but not the least, the long dry seasons and loss of forest cover mean that water sources dry up or become heavily polluted. This is made worse by the influx of herdsmen and their cattle. Scarce,

polluted water means that people in the villages become susceptible to new diseases and illness. Many farmers end up spending their hard earned income on medical treatment.

The problems facing the Ghanaian farmer are due to failure to adapt to the changing environment and the socio-economic costs of climate change. Climate change has introduced numerous uncertainties into the lives of farming communities which depend heavily on the weather and climate. It negatively affects the basic elements of food production such as soil, water and biodiversity.

It is on this basis that Ashanti Development is supporting farmers in the area through its farm support programme to help farmers to adapt to problems associated with climate change. These include training farmers on:

- crops with short gestation period which can be grown and harvested within the short rainy season
- good methods of farming which conserve the soil water
- use of both organic and inorganic fertilizers
- disease and pest control
- farm product marketing strategies
- provision of cash and farm input support
- field support to farmers, including weather information from Ghana metrological services

## Hunger Comes South

**Month by month, new communities and tribes come south to Ashanti, anxious to find an easier way to make a living. Typically, they rent land from a village chief and set up their own farms.**

It's not easy to farm if you're unfamiliar with local conditions, and the newcomers are hungry. There are increasing incidents of violence. In Esereso, an Ashanti village, Fulani herdsmen recently started stealing food and letting their cattle trample Ashanti farmland. The Esereso community retaliated by attacking the Fulanis. Tragically one of the Fulanis was killed.

After this, the Esereso community worried about reprisals, and many decided to leave the village. Others were arrested by the police because of the killing.

For us in Ashanti Development, this is also a tragedy. We've raised the money to give Esereso clean water and sanitation and trained the community in health and hygiene. We've given them a kindergarten and a food-processing plant. It would be terrible if all these were abandoned. At present a fragile peace has been restored to the village, and we're hoping that absent members of the Esereso community will eventually return.

Versions of this story can be heard all over Ashanti, where the people are the victims of climate change

caused principally by countries and people many thousands of miles away. We're currently planning a joint farm training project for Ashantis and the Fulani. The aim would be not just to eradicate hunger, but also in the hope that as the two communities get to know each other better, they might even become friends.



**This is the view from Esereso. The Fulani homes can just be seen in the bush.**

## A Mask For All Seasons

Six years ago, Ashanti Development set up a dressmaking school in Gyetiase, our home village. Our trainer, Kofi, is an expert tailor and knocks up shirts and blouses and dresses at the drop of a hat, as indeed do many of his pupils.



The school is currently making masks for us to sell as Christmas presents. (£6 each plus £1 postage and packing.) They're very popular, and we've had orders in the hundreds. Please let us know if you'd like to order some (we'll give you discounts for quantity) and tell us your favourite colours. And if you'd like Kofi and his team to make any other item of clothing for you, they'd be delighted.

## A Poets' Village

Ruth O'Callaghan is going to spend the proceeds of her eleventh collection of poems, *A Rickle*<sup>1</sup> of Bones, in funding latrines and hygiene training for an Ashanti village. She's hoping her students will contribute to the project, and that a few readers of Ashanti News will help by buying the book.

Anne Stevenson has commented that Ruth's poems "confront the worst that life has to show and tell us with a dedication to truths most of us never have the courage to face up to. Only a poet, and probably only a woman poet who has looked unflinchingly at the extremes of evil and yet retained faith in an ultimate good, could have written them," she says.

George Szirtes adds "Sharp and compassionate, not in any easy, general way, but through an understanding of what confronts us both in nature and our lives, the language beautifully heard, packed and measured."

Ruth was awarded a gold medal at the XXX World Congress of Poets, holds a Hawthornden Fellowship and has read her work all over the world.

<sup>1</sup> Collins Dictionary defines a rickle as an unsteady or shaky structure, esp a dilapidated building, or a loose or disorganized heap.

**Rickle of Bones  
Shoestring Press 2020**

£10 plus p&p

You just need to drop us  
an email to order it.

**Keir at Camden**

Ashanti Development's Patron, Sir Keir Starmer MP, visited our new stall in Camden Market earlier this month.



**Ashanti Lullaby  
by Martha**

Inspired by the idea of a poets' village

Listen to the tree bird crying in  
the night.

Crying for his mummy in the  
pale moonlight.

What will his mummy do when  
she hear him cry?

She will take him a cocoa pot  
and sing him a lullaby.

She will take him a cocoa pot  
and sing him a lullaby.