

Political Economy of Food Insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Structural Barriers and Empirical Insights from Ghana



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the economic and political governance dynamics of food insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with a focus on Ghana. The study problematised the political and economic governance power structure, as well as the effects of agricultural development policies and their implementation on food insecurity in Ghana. Employing an exploratory case study design, the study drew on both field and textual data from primary and secondary data sources. Drawing on textual and content analysis, the results established that politics and economic governance power in Ghana often determine access to state resources in terms of food security, under certain conditions in the country. Also, the results established that there is a political economy of agricultural development and food production policy inconsistencies and implementation gaps contributing to the political economy of food insecurity that has bedevilled the country. The key conclusion from the findings is that policy-driven accountability measures for the political economy of food security are desperately needed. Besides, the government of Ghana should meet the need to generate and diversify livelihoods, particularly in the innovative food production value chain in the country. Therefore, for food security, there is a need for pragmatism in the political and economic governance power structure balance, to emphasize the full participation of all in the political economy of the agricultural development agenda and food production possibilities frontier in the country.

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INTRODUCTION

Generally, agriculture is an important part of the national economies of most developing countries globally. Its impact on these economies has increased to the point that its contributions to overall economic growth, including its share of GDP, clearly illustrate its supremacy.¹ According to the Sarris, agriculture provides the majority of basic food, employs a large percentage of the labor force (between 40 and 90 percent in most cases), contributes significantly to GDP (between 30 and 60 percent in roughly

¹ Tony Killick, *Development Economics in Action: A Study of Economic Policies in Ghana* (London: Routledge, 2010); Michael P. Todaro, *Economic Development in the Third World*, 1981.

two-thirds of them), is a major source of foreign exchange (between 25% and 95% in three-quarters of the countries), and provides more than half of the population of low-middle-income countries.²

Africa is noted not to be on track to meet its nutrition objective, much less to eradicate all kinds of hunger and malnutrition as outlined in Agenda 2030.³ Natural resources abound in Africa, yet the continent still depends largely on foreign financial and technical support, nonetheless. Subsistence farming, which employs 60% of the workforce, mostly small landholders, and contributes around 40% of the GDP, remains the mainstay of domestic economies.⁴ Many of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa gain greatly from agriculture. The sector has given many households a means of subsistence (the bulk of the over 70% of the subregion's population living in rural regions work in some capacity in agriculture), and it accounts for the largest portion of the GDP (estimated at 41% and 47% annually). Agriculture is thus positioned as one of the most strategic and sensitive economic sectors due to these and other advantages.⁵

The political economy of agriculture and food insecurity often affects the general health status of the population and can contribute to substantial societal costs through direct and indirect means, including political instability. Consequently, there appears to be an emerging consensus that the fundamental principle of public policy should be to expand the social opportunities open to people.⁶ In this framework, state-sponsored public policies can be classified as market-complementary and market-excluding. Policies towards the agricultural sector have been for a long time, thus reducing opportunities for the rural population to develop and expand their capabilities.⁷ At the same time, states in SSA have often failed to “go beyond the market” and provide the essential supportive services that could prevent rural stagnation, decline, and poverty - rural infrastructure, education, health care and sanitation, child nutrition programs, agricultural research and extension.⁸ These activities are largely left to private initiative, with indifferent results affecting agricultural development, resulting in food insecurity, whereas in the East Asian countries, there was strong public action with a payoff in higher economic growth and poverty reduction.⁹ Governments in the sub-region, since the colonial era, have been making frantic efforts to pursue policies that will bring transformation to the sector and guarantee food security. However, there are increasing concerns among policymakers and scholars about the persistent merchandise balance of food deficits resulting from importing considerable amounts of food products.¹⁰

In Ghana, Beyuo and Anyidoho asserted that the fundamental components of food security encompass availability, access, utilization, and consumption. In other words, food insecurity is a consequence of poor food systems in societies that tend to stir up conflicts among people.¹¹ Therefore, formulating food security policies to ensure the availability, access, and utilisation of food systems can prevent social unrest and security threats. It is on this basis that this discussion is contextualized within the political economy framework of food security.¹² This policy framework underpins the relevance and analytical framework of this chapter. Food insecurity is one of the most pressing socio-economic

² Alexander Sarris, “The Role of Agriculture in Economic Development and Poverty Reduction: An Empirical and Conceptual Foundation,” *Paper Prepared for the Rural Development Department, The World Bank*, 2001; World Health Organization, “Occupational Health: Health Workers,” November 7, 2022, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/occupational-health--health->.

³ World Bank, *World Governance Indicators* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2021).

⁴ Killick, *Development Economics in Action: A Study of Economic Policies in Ghana*.

⁵ Todaro, *Economic Development in the Third World*.

⁶ Michael P. Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World* (Longman, 2012).

⁷ Sarris, “The Role of Agriculture in Economic Development and Poverty Reduction: An Empirical and Conceptual Foundation”; Todaro, *Economic Development in the Third World*; World Bank, “The World Development Indicators. Employment in Agriculture,” 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.Z>; World Bank, “Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune” (The World Bank, 2020); World Bank, *World Governance Indicators*.

⁸ Sarris, “The Role of Agriculture in Economic Development and Poverty Reduction: An Empirical and Conceptual Foundation”; Todaro, *Economic Development in the Third World*.

⁹ Sarris, “The Role of Agriculture in Economic Development and Poverty Reduction: An Empirical and Conceptual Foundation”; Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*.

¹⁰ Sarris, “The Role of Agriculture in Economic Development and Poverty Reduction: An Empirical and Conceptual Foundation”; Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*.

¹¹ Alexis Beyuo and Nana Akua Anyidoho, “An Impact Assessment of Farmer Participation on Food Security in Northwestern Ghana,” *The European Journal of Development Research* 34, no. 4 (August 13, 2022): 1831–56, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-021-00444-7>.

¹² Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*.

development challenges due to its social, economic, and ecological consequences.¹³ Enough food to nourish all, create jobs, and reduce poverty underpins the relevance of the political economy of analysis. The political economy of the power structure of the policy determines who has access to state-sponsored agriculture incentives, such as fertilizer subsidies and seedlings, under political conditions. However, the political economy context within which this function is not always apparent. Yet it contains the problem of unequal distribution of the policy initiatives, such as access to fertilizer subsidy, farm implements, e-agriculture, market opportunities, and free extension services that are reaching crisis proportions and inflicting suffering on hundreds of thousands of farmers.¹⁴

This study, therefore, examines the structural and systemic factors perpetuating food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa through a focused analysis of Ghana. It employs a political economy lens to understand how historical legacies, power dynamics, policy choices, and global economic forces interact to shape food systems and nutritional outcomes. Ghana provides a compelling case study due to its regional leadership in democratic governance and economic development, juxtaposed with persistent inequalities in food access, particularly across its northern regions. The motivation, essentially, is to evaluate the political and economic power structure and actions of the governments, and how they have impacted overall food security in the country. It discusses the relationship between political and economic power and food insecurity, and the effects of food security-driven policies on people's well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Political economy of food insecurity

Political economy offers different analytical lenses to analyze and understand societal problems and deals with the relationships and interactions of economic and political systems with the rest of society, recognising that economic and political systems are part and parcel of the society.¹⁵ Politics and economic governance in Africa did not gain momentum until the early 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, which ended the Cold War by 1991.¹⁶

The political economy of food insecurity is within the nuclear-family producing and consuming units and the local communities, which could be the result of the market failures related to information about the production, supply, consumption, and demand of food products.¹⁷ These market failures are asymmetric information, adverse selection, incomplete information, and moral hazard. International trade in agricultural goods and services, including food products, has been a driving force for the economic growth of SSA over the last six decades. Among other reasons, the political economy of agriculture is a major driver of socioeconomic development because of the enormous impact that the sector could have on raising the standard of living for all citizens due to its linkage and spread effects with other sectors.¹⁸ The dragged down "...global economic shocks and domestic policy failures in Africa from the 1970s, the region was falling sharply behind developing economies elsewhere, and by the late 1980s, nearly every African country had formally adopted a market-oriented reform agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank..."¹⁹

¹³ Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*; Beyuo and Anyidoho, "An Impact Assessment of Farmer Participation on Food Security in Northwestern Ghana."

¹⁴ Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*; Beyuo and Anyidoho, "An Impact Assessment of Farmer Participation on Food Security in Northwestern Ghana."

¹⁵ Daniel E Saros, *Principles of Political Economy: A Pluralistic Approach to Economic Theory*, 2nd ed. (Valparaiso University, 2019).

¹⁶ World Bank, *Governance and Development* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank Group, 1992); Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge university press, 2006); Samuel P Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century*, vol. 199 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

¹⁷ D.N. Balaam and M. Veseth, *Introduction to International Political Economy*, 4th ed. (New Jersey: Pearson and Prentice Hall, 2008); Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*; C., Sackrey, G. Schneider, and J. Knoedler, *Introduction to Political Economy*, 8th ed. (Boston: The Economic Affairs Bureau, 2016); Saros, *Principles of Political Economy: A Pluralistic Approach to Economic Theory*; Beyuo and Anyidoho, "An Impact Assessment of Farmer Participation on Food Security in Northwestern Ghana."

¹⁸ Jorge Braga de Macedo, *Development Redux: Reflections for a New Paradigm* (OECD Publishing, 2003); Gisèle De Meur and Dirk Berg-Schlosser, "Conditions of Authoritarianism, Fascism, and Democracy in Interwar Europe: Systematic Matching and Contrasting of Cases for 'Small N' Analysis," *Comparative Political Studies* 29, no. 4 (1996): 423–68; John F Hellwell, "Empirical Linkages between Democracy and Economic Growth," *British Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 2 (1994): 225–48; Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*.

¹⁹ Killick, *Development Economics in Action: A Study of Economic Policies in Ghana*; Kenneth A Bollen and Robert W Jackman, "Economic and Noneconomic Determinants of Political Democracy in the 1960s," *Research in Political Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1985):

“.... For cash-strapped governments, these agreements unlocked much-needed financial assistance, but with major strings attached. Recipients were required to reduce budget deficits substantially, devalue their currencies, and more generally scale back state intervention in their economies. Whatever the economic merits of these controversial reforms, they struck directly at the political foundations of African governments. Expenditures that the IMF and World Bank wanted cut were central to patronage networks that helped keep incumbents in power, while existing patterns of state intervention helped shield politically pivotal groups from the full brunt of the economic crisis. Squeezed between the policy demands of international financial institutions and the domestic imperatives of political survival, governments typically responded with varying degrees of “partial reform” delivering enough policy change to keep external donors at bay, while dragging their feet on the most politically sensitive items. Through the end of the 1980s, most governments maintained this balancing act, though doing so exposed them to mounting criticism from both sides. Highly urbanized countries with strong trade union movements faced particularly stiff domestic political opposition to policies that scaled back public-sector employment and raised the cost of living. On its side, the World Bank released a landmark 1989 report arguing that a “crisis of governance” was at the heart of Africa's economic problems, calling for institutional changes to enable fuller and more effective implementation of market reforms....”²⁰

Also, the influences of non-economic social factors such as culture, ethnicity, ideology, morality, politics, and religion interact with economic systems and shape economic events and the welfare of human beings. Political economy analysis emphasizes the use of various analytic lenses (theories) to complementarily assess societal problems rather than the overbearing use of one theory to explain these problems.²¹ It is the political power structure that assumes that it is within its right to determine who will have access to state resources under certain conditions. The political economy context within which this function is not always apparent. The dynamics of economic and political power play in agriculture and food production in SSA underpin the relevance and analytical framework of this debate. Consequently, the political economy dynamics of agriculture and food production policy formulation and implementation in the SSA aim at socio-economic development that will meet the aspirations of the broad segment of the population, which has attracted scholarly debate and discussions.²² The core elements of food security, according to the World Bank and the World Health Organisation, are availability, access, use, and consumption.²³ Or, to put it another way, food insecurity results from inadequate food systems in civilizations that are prone to war. Therefore, social unrest and security threats can be avoided by creating food security policies that guarantee the availability, access, and usage of food systems.

Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa Context

Towards the end of the twentieth century (20th century), in September 2000, world leaders came to recognize that a lot of great challenges must be overcome to actualize the promises of the twenty-first

27–48; Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith, *Economic Development* (Pearson education, 2009); Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*.

²⁰ Killick, *Development Economics in Action: A Study of Economic Policies in Ghana*; UNDP, *Sustainable Human Development and Agriculture* (UNDP Guidebook Series, 1994); World Bank, *Governance and Development*; Todaro and Smith, *Economic Development*; Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*; FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2019. Moving Forward on Food Loss and Waste Reduction* (Rome: FAO, 2019); FAO, *Report: World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development* (Rome., 2020).

²¹ Jeroen J L Candel, “Food Security Governance: A Systematic Literature Review,” *Food Security* 6, no. 4 (2014): 585–601; Sackrey, Schneider, and Knoedler, *Introduction to Political Economy*; Balaam and Veseth, *Introduction to International Political Economy*; Saros, *Principles of Political Economy: A Pluralistic Approach to Economic Theory*.

²² Rod Alence, “Political Institutions and Developmental Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 42, no. 2 (2004): 163–87; Karim Hussein, “Livelihoods Approaches Compared,” *London, Department for International Development*, 2002; N. D. Chauvin, F. Mulangu, and G Porto, *Food Production and Consumption Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for the Transformation of the Agricultural Sector* (New York: United Nations Development Programme Regional Office for Africa., 2012).

²³ World Bank, *Investing in Education and Infrastructure for Economic Growth* (World Bank Report, 2021); World Health Organization, “Occupational Health: Health Workers.”

century.²⁴ At the UN Millennium summit in New York, a global consensus aimed at responding to the world's development challenges was reached. Regarded as the focal areas of intervention, the eight (8) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), drawn from actions and targets contained in the Millennium Declaration, were adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and governments in September 2000.²⁵ These development goals, each with quantified targets, present a renewed commitment to human development. To give meaning to this commitment, the goals and their specific targets, among other things, seek to motivate the international community and provide an accountability mechanism for actions to be taken to enable millions of poor people (most of whom are in developing countries) to improve their livelihood and "live lives of dignity, free from extreme want", and these targets were expected to be achieved by 2015.²⁶ An estimated 1.2 billion people are absolutely poor, living on less than US\$1 per day; nearly twice that number live on less than US\$2 per day. Currently, about 800 million people go hungry each day. These are not mere presentations of figures but rather a true report of the manifestation of abject poverty on the global scene.²⁷

Despite the political economy of agricultural development policies beginning in the 1980s, supported by Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) policies of the World Bank, food security in Sub-Saharan Africa is still poor, with serious ramifications for public health and sustainable development by 2030.²⁸ Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are expected to be the primary cause of death in Africa.²⁹ The rate at which they are spreading in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is concerning. According to a study conducted between 1975 and 2016, Africa has six of the world's 60 nations with the fastest escalating rates of adult obesity. While obesity and other diet-related NCDs are on the rise, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies remain prevalent. The continent also confronts a new challenge: a twofold burden of starvation.³⁰ Food value chains in SSA in the 21st century have experienced a great transformation in terms of mass production due to technological advancement. This development attracts good expressions from development economists and political actors. The harm that this mass production of food through food pathways leads to food insecurity is a concern being expressed. The usage of chemicals to enhance crop yield and reduce pests on farms, as well as the use of chemicals to preserve raw food against lean season for a long time, all these have negative consequences on the health of people. This phenomenon has greatly come in our time, and it borders on human life. Man must be strong and healthy enough to command and harness the naturally given raw material for the benefit of all, but the food system pathways encountered these days do not in any way ensure food security in sub-Saharan Africa.³¹ In sub-Saharan Africa, one out of every three women of childbearing age is anemic, which sets off a vicious cycle of child malnutrition, threatening the Zero Hunger Goal by 2030.³²

²⁴ Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*; Chauvin, Mulangu, and Porto, *Food Production and Consumption Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for the Transformation of the Agricultural Sector*; World Bank, "Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Improving SMEs' Access to Finance and Finding Innovative Solutions to Unlock Sources of Capital," 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/sme/finance>; Beyuo and Anyidoho, "An Impact Assessment of Farmer Participation on Food Security in Northwestern Ghana."

²⁵ Chauvin, Mulangu, and Porto, *Food Production and Consumption Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for the Transformation of the Agricultural Sector*; World Bank, "Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Improving SMEs' Access to Finance and Finding Innovative Solutions to Unlock Sources of Capital"; Beyuo and Anyidoho, "An Impact Assessment of Farmer Participation on Food Security in Northwestern Ghana."

²⁶ Chauvin, Mulangu, and Porto, *Food Production and Consumption Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for the Transformation of the Agricultural Sector*; Uris Lantz C Baldos and Thomas W Hertel, "Global Food Security in 2050: The Role of Agricultural Productivity and Climate Change," *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics* 58, no. 4 (2014): 554–70.

²⁷ Chauvin, Mulangu, and Porto, *Food Production and Consumption Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for the Transformation of the Agricultural Sector*; Baldos and Hertel, "Global Food Security in 2050: The Role of Agricultural Productivity and Climate Change"; Beyuo and Anyidoho, "An Impact Assessment of Farmer Participation on Food Security in Northwestern Ghana."

²⁸ World Health Organization, "Occupational Health: Health Workers"; Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*; FAO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022* (Rome: FAO, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0639en>.

²⁹ World Health Organization, "Occupational Health: Health Workers."

³⁰ World Health Organization, "Occupational Health: Health Workers."

³¹ World Bank, *World Development Report* (IBRD: Washington, DC., 2019).

³² FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2019. Moving Forward on Food Loss and Waste Reduction; The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023* (FAO; IFAD; UNICEF; WFP; WHO., 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>.

The Ghanaian Case

In Ghana, malnutrition is a widespread problem, while food instability and undernutrition (e.g., stunting, micronutrient deficiencies) remain prevalent, obesity and diet-related NCDs are fast increasing. For instance, the 2014 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) revealed that among Ghanaian children aged 6-59 months, 19% were stunted, 5% were wasting, and 11% were underweight. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in 2018 found almost equal rates of stunting (18%), wasting (7%), and underweight (13%). This implies that, while child wasting and underweight rates have increased over the last five to six years, stunting prevalence has marginally improved. Another prominent issue connected with undernutrition in Ghana is the high frequency of anemia in children aged 6 to 59 months (55%), adolescent females (48%), and women of reproductive age (42%).³³

The domestic production of food in 2002 was overall in deficit. Ghana was only 63% self-sufficient in cereals production, 60% in fish production, 50% in meat production and less than 30% in raw materials for agro-based industries. Root and tuber crops, the most widely used staple food crops, contributed to about 34% of agricultural GDP in 1999. In the year 2002, roots and tubers were in surplus production. In fruits, Industrial crops, pulses, and nuts, Ghana is a net exporter. In some vegetables, for example, Pepper, Garden eggs, and others, Ghana is self-sufficient and a net exporter. Whilst in Tomatoes and Onions, Ghana is a net importer.

Meat and fish production fall short of the estimated national demand. The combined meat and fish production is about 67% of the estimated annual demand of 681,000 metric tons.³⁴ Fish provides about 20% of the protein requirements of Ghanaians. The annual average production for the last ten years is estimated at 437,000 metric tonnes, which is about 60% of the potential demand. Production from traditional sources has steadily decreased because of the over-exploitation of the fisheries resources within the 200/300 nautical miles exclusive economic zone. In the case of poultry production, the high import cost of feed and layers, and the unrestricted importation of poultry products are the two main constraints restricting the sector's growth. On the physical supply side of food, sometimes inadequate and at times impassable road links between the urban and the rural areas create a situation of rural glut and urban scarcities in food. Also, about 20-30% of production is lost due to the poor traditional post-harvest management of food crops.³⁵ Losses of this magnitude have a positive effect on prices, which in turn restrict access to food at the household level.

Growing urbanisation (43.8% in 2000) has created slums in the cities where unemployment and low incomes appear to be the main constraints to increased calorie consumption. This state of affairs keeps worsening with the years, and the nutritional status of these city immigrants keeps deteriorating each year. The rapid urbanisation has increased the demand for imported food (wheat and rice), which in turn has helped to change the consumption patterns of urban dwellers from traditional staples to rice and wheat products. Financial access to food is determined by a combination of income levels, their distribution, and the purchasing power of the incomes earned. For example, in the three northern regions where the highest malnutrition is recorded, low incomes appear to be the main constraint to increased calorie consumption. Adequate access to foods like meat and fish is restricted to relatively high-income groups and households.

According to Ghana's Development Strategy for Poverty Reduction, published in March 2000 by the Ministry of Finance, poverty is widespread in the country, with 42.6% living below the poverty line. The incidence of poverty and extreme poverty is indicated to have declined in Ghana during the 1990s, taking the country as a whole. Nationwide, poverty has fallen from about 52% in 1992 to about 40% in 1999. The declines were not uniform across the country; however, poverty is widespread and needs to be addressed in all regions. Extreme poverty rose in the savannah and rural coastal regions and 58% of those identified as poor are among households for which food crop production is the main activity. Food and cash crop agriculture is predominantly rain-fed. Food production fluctuates both quantitatively and qualitatively, from year to year, due to the frequent occurrence of climatic stresses during the growing seasons. Sometimes, fluctuations of heavy rains within and between agricultural

³³ FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2019. Moving Forward on Food Loss and Waste Reduction*; FAO, *Report: World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development*.

³⁴ FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2019. Moving Forward on Food Loss and Waste Reduction*.

³⁵ FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2019. Moving Forward on Food Loss and Waste Reduction*.

seasons destroy both crops and livestock. Rainfall, whose control is beyond the capability of the small-scale farmer, is thus a major determinant of the annual fluctuations of total household and national food output. This situation creates food insecurity at household levels, which can be transitory in poverty areas and chronic in extreme poverty areas. It is frequent and more severe in areas with high population densities, for example, in the Upper East region. Gender is also an important dimension of poverty, especially in northern regions where there is a sharp distinction between the income-earning roles of women and men.

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory case study design was employed, and data for the analysis and discussions were acquired from both primary and secondary data sources. The design was chosen because its relevance involves an in-depth and holistic exploration of a specific instance or phenomenon within its real-life context.³⁶ It thus allowed for the in-depth analysis of the phenomenon through interviews. That is, a case study offers the opportunity to collect rich and diverse data from multiple sources.³⁷ It adopts content analysis based on the interpretive paradigm of the qualitative study approach. The data was drawn from both primary and secondary sources. In the former case, the sample population was interviewed in-depth. Both English and the Ghanaian common dialect (ie, Twi) were used for the interviews. Participants in the sample group were chosen from three major groups of people who have a direct bearing on food systems and food security from the Northern, Upper East, and parts of the Bono East Regions in Ghana. These were:

- i. A total of five (5) persons, including raw food vendors and cooked food vendors in Ghana;
- ii. Ten (10) persons consisted of farmers, food institutes, and health workers in Ghana;
- iii. Five (5) persons who include buffer stock officers and the Ghana Food and Drug Authority (FDA).

Purposive sampling was used to choose each of these categories.³⁸ Hejase and Hejase have argued that specific units are often chosen for a study when it is known that they will offer more and better information on a given topic due to their inherent qualities than units chosen at random.³⁹ The units were selected according to their established attributes. In essence, an interview guide was used to gather detailed information during the in-depth interviews. In addition to asking participants several semi-structured questions to get quick information. The researchers took the time to record the activities in different food classifications and food security-related pathways.

The secondary data was also sourced from books, journals, theses, the internet, and newspapers. The quantity and quality of food systems and food security in the sub-region were also discussed with representatives from the Ghana Food Buffer Stock (GFBS) and Ghana Food and Drug Authority (FDA). In particular, the study combined data from in-depth interviews conducted involving 20 key informants and secondary sources to provide information on how politics and economics interface impact food security in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on Ghana. The analysis began with a review of policy documents on policies and economic institutions in Africa and narrowed down to Ghana based on policy reports and other relevant documents explaining economic policies and food security, supported by information from participant interviews. The information gathered from the earlier works and the relevant documents, combined with the participant interviews, was used to demonstrate the nexus between food insecurity, politics, and economic policy choices by governments in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the analysis focused on Ghana.

³⁶ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, vol. 5 (sage, 2009); John Ward Creswell and John David Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018).

³⁷ Robert E Stake, "The Art of Case Study Research" (Sage, 1995); Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*; Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.

³⁸ Stake, "The Art of Case Study Research"; Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*; Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.

³⁹ Ale J Hejase and Hussin J Hejase, *Research Methods: A Practical Approach for Business Students*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Masadir Incorporated, 2013).

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the fieldwork in Ghana spanning Northern, Upper East, and parts of Bono East Regions highlight that food insecurity is driven by structural and governance failures, as well as by the politicisation of agricultural policy. Interviews and focus group discussions brought to light a deep sense of marginalisation, frustration, and mistrust in state-led interventions among key stakeholders in the food production system.

Politics and Economic Governance

It can generally be said that the relationship between agriculture and food security in Sub-Saharan Africa exists only in the framework and the policy documents of successive governments in Africa following the fall of colonialism in the early 1960s. This is demonstrated by the poor political and economic governance, coupled with a slow pace and the lip service that is being paid to support agricultural development.⁴⁰ As a result, the continent exports much of its agricultural produce in a raw state. However, since there has been very little or no value addition by way of processing, they command ridiculously low prices at the world market, apart from being subjected to the vagaries of price fluctuations.⁴¹

In areas where there has been some progress in processing, most of the developed capitalist countries, which have a monopoly of processing, have ensured that their market is protected; hence these locally produced goods find it difficult to enter and compete favourably in the economies of these countries and where provisions are made, they are restricted by quota systems. Additionally, capitalist monopolists control the creation of processing structures in underdeveloped countries, including those in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴² Consequently, these Western multinationals have a monopoly on industrial processing and marketing and leave little scope for the country to secure most of the economic surplus of its oil palm and cocoa production, especially as the African market for these products is limited. In Ghana, politics and economic governance in Ghana significantly shape the landscape of food security. Since the return to multiparty democracy in 1992, Ghana has made substantial progress in political stabilisation, peaceful power transitions, and institutional development. However, food insecurity persists, largely due to deep-rooted structural and governance-related challenges.

Political decisions in Ghana often reflect short-term electoral considerations rather than long-term developmental goals. Successive governments have prioritised politically rewarding infrastructure and urban-focused policies over comprehensive agricultural development.⁴³ The agricultural sector, which employs over 40% of the labor force and is crucial to food security, suffers from underinvestment, policy inconsistencies, and politicization of interventions such as fertilizer subsidies and extension services.⁴⁴ These interventions are often deployed as tools of patronage, particularly during election cycles, undermining their effectiveness and sustainability.

Decentralisation, while theoretically intended to improve local governance and service delivery, has had a limited impact on agricultural policy implementation due to weak fiscal autonomy at the district level and continued central control over resources.⁴⁵ Political clientelism further erodes accountability in food and agriculture-related institutions, weakening transparency and responsiveness to the needs of smallholder farmers.

On the economic governance front, Ghana faces challenges with fiscal discipline, debt sustainability, and public sector efficiency. Macroeconomic instability marked by inflation, currency

⁴⁰ UNDP, *Sustainable Human Development and Agriculture*; UNDP, *The Sustainable Development Agenda*, 2016; UNDP, *Sustainable Human Development and Agriculture* (UNDP Guidebook Series, 2020).

⁴¹ G. M. Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Dani Rodrik, "Institutions for High-Quality Growth: What They Are and How to Acquire Them," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35, no. 3 (2000): 3–31; Todaro and Smith, *Economic Development*.

⁴² Augustin Kwasi Fosu and Dede Woade Gafa, "Economic Neoliberalism and African Development," in *Economic Neoliberalism and International Development* (Routledge, 2020), 111–26; Augustin Kwasi Fosu, "Growth of African Economies: Productivity, Policy Syndromes and the Importance of Institutions," *Journal of African Economies* 22, no. 4 (2013): 523–51.

⁴³ L. Whitfield, *Economies after Colonialism: Ghana and the Struggle for Power* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁴⁴ Samuel Benin et al., "Revisiting Agricultural Input and Farm Support Subsidies in Africa: The Case of Ghana's Mechanization, Fertilizer, Block Farms, and Marketing Programs," *Fertilizer, Block Farms, and Marketing Programs* (November 2013), 2013.

⁴⁵ Richard C Crook, "Decentralisation and Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Politics of Local–Central Relations," *Public Administration and Development: The International Journal of Management Research and Practice* 23, no. 1 (2003): 77–88.

depreciation, and high public debt undermines the purchasing power of households and limits public investment in agriculture and rural infrastructure. Furthermore, structural adjustment policies in the 1980s and 1990s led to the liberalization of markets and withdrawal of state support for agriculture, leaving smallholders vulnerable to global price shocks and exploitative middlemen.⁴⁶

Corruption and weak regulatory institutions also exacerbate food insecurity. For example, mismanagement of food buffer stocks, irregularities in food import permits, and monopolistic practices in agricultural trade networks distort market access and food prices. These governance deficits limit the ability of the state to effectively intervene in food systems and ensure equitable access to food.

In sum, political and economic governance in Ghana is intricately tied to food insecurity. The interplay of electoral politics, weak institutional capacity, and inconsistent economic management has created a policy environment where food security remains precarious, especially for rural and marginalized communities. Addressing these governance challenges requires strengthening institutions, depoliticising food policy, improving public investment in agriculture, and ensuring more inclusive and accountable governance at all levels.

Politics of Food Production

In the political economics literature, every development decision is a political decision.⁴⁷ The governance and economics of food production, its sustainability, the extent of food waste, how food production affects the natural environment, and the impact of food on individual and population health" are among the issues about the food system.⁴⁸

The lack of control of the political economy of agriculture over food-producing resources by those who most need food helps to explain why food production and hunger can increase simultaneously.⁴⁹ These types of considerations help to put the issue of population growth in SSA countries in some kind of context. According to the World Health Organization, "high birth rates are symptoms of the insecurity and poverty of the majority resulting from the monopolizing of productive assets by a few" in societies such as those in the SSA countries.⁵⁰ Also, attention to some important aspects of globalised agricultural trade and their impact on food security remains unclear. Such trade will often exclude the smallholder farmer and herder, as it requires knowledge, capital, and quality assurance levels, as well as access to marketing networks that most smallholder producers cannot attain on their own.⁵¹

Food production in Ghana is heavily influenced by political dynamics that shape agricultural policies, resource allocation, and institutional performance. Rather than being purely technical or economic, food production is deeply politicized, reflecting patron-client relationships, electoral incentives, and bureaucratic inertia. Historically, Ghana's post-independence agricultural strategies, from state-led production under Nkrumah to liberalised markets under structural adjustment, have reflected broader ideological and political shifts.⁵² Since the 1990s, successive governments have adopted populist approaches to food production, emphasizing subsidy programs and mechanization schemes, often with limited efficiency or sustainability. For instance, the *Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ)* initiative, launched in 2017 by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government, was widely publicized and politically instrumental but faced criticisms of poor targeting, elite capture, and limited impact on

⁴⁶ Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, "The Best of Times and the Worst of Times: Structural Adjustment Programs and Uneven Development in Africa: The Case of Ghana," *The Professional Geographer* 52, no. 3 (2000): 469–83.

⁴⁷ Balaam and Veseth, *Introduction to International Political Economy*; Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*; Sackrey, Schneider, and Knoedler, *Introduction to Political Economy*; Saros, *Principles of Political Economy: A Pluralistic Approach to Economic Theory*.

⁴⁸ Balaam and Veseth, *Introduction to International Political Economy*; Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*; Sackrey, Schneider, and Knoedler, *Introduction to Political Economy*; Saros, *Principles of Political Economy: A Pluralistic Approach to Economic Theory*.

⁴⁹ Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*.

⁵⁰ World Health Organization, "Occupational Health: Health Workers."

⁵¹ Daniel Belay, "The Effect of Trust on Farmers' Milk Market Participation in Dairy Cooperatives in West Shoa, Ethiopia," *Agrekon* 59, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 287–302, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03031853.2020.1734036>; Eunice Adu Donkor et al., "Determinants of Rice Farmer Participation in the Direct Marketing Channel in Ghana," *Sustainability* 13, no. 9 (April 30, 2021): 5047, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13095047>.

⁵² Konadu-Agyemang, "The Best of Times and the Worst of Times: Structural Adjustment Programs and Uneven Development in Africa: The Case of Ghana."

actual yields.⁵³ Food production policy is also shaped by electoral cycles. Governments tend to increase agricultural input support during election years, using these programs as political tools to gain rural votes. This politicisation often leads to hasty implementation, inefficiencies, and a lack of long-term commitment to structural reforms such as irrigation expansion, land tenure security, and climate-smart agriculture.

Furthermore, bureaucratic fragmentation undermines coordination among key agencies such as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), the Ghana Irrigation Development Authority (GIDA), and district assemblies. Political appointments and interference dilute technical decision-making, while local farmers' voices are often marginalized in the policy process. The dominance of urban-based elites in national politics also contributes to the neglect of rural agricultural priorities. Access to land and productive resources is another politically charged issue. Traditional authorities, who control most land in rural areas, often allocate land based on social ties and political loyalty, not on agricultural productivity or equity.⁵⁴ Women and migrant farmers are particularly disadvantaged, reducing their contribution to national food production. International donors and development partners also influence the politics of food production, often promoting policy models that may not align with local realities. Their funding priorities can create dependency and reduce local policy autonomy, while contributing to fragmented and projectized food governance. In essence, food production in Ghana is governed less by evidence-based strategies than by political expediency, elite interests, and fragmented institutional arrangements. Addressing these political barriers is essential to enhancing food sovereignty, productivity, and resilience in Ghana's agri-food system.

Many participants expressed that access to subsidised inputs, such as fertilizer and seeds under the *Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ)* programme, was often skewed by political affiliation. A farmer from Sissala East lamented: *"If you are not part of the ruling party, it is hard to get the subsidized fertilizer. Those who are connected get everything even when they don't farm seriously."* (Male farmer, 42, Upper West). This perception was echoed by extension officers, one of whom stated: *"We are told to distribute based on need, but in reality, party people call the shots. It's frustrating for us as professionals."* (Agricultural Extension Officer, Bono East).

A recurring theme was the limited access to irrigation facilities, especially in the face of erratic rainfall and climate variability. A woman farmer from the Upper East Region explained: *"When the rains delay or stop early, everything we plant dries. There are no dams or canals. We depend on God and guesswork."* (Female farmer, 36, Upper East).

Despite promises from successive governments, many participants reported that proposed irrigation schemes remained incomplete or were mismanaged.

Land access and tenure insecurity emerged as a major constraint, especially for women and migrant farmers. One respondent shared: *"The chief can take the land anytime. We just beg and farm, but we are not sure if next year we will still be here."* (Migrant farmer, 39, Northern Region).

Another noted: *"For women, we depend on our husbands or brothers to get land. We cannot make long-term plans like planting trees or investing in soil fertility."* (Female farmer, 41, Bono East)

Participants also highlighted how market intermediaries exploit producers, especially in harvest seasons when prices drop drastically. A young maize farmer observed: *"We farm hard, but when we harvest, they (middlemen) buy cheap because we have no choice. Government talks about storage, but there is nothing real on the ground."* (Male farmer, 29, Upper West). Stakeholders frequently complained about exclusion from meaningful participation in policy formulation and monitoring. A district assembly member revealed: *"Decisions are made in Accra. We only hear of programs when they arrive, often too late or unsuitable for our needs."* (Assembly member, Northern Region). This exclusion fosters mistrust and weakens the implementation of policies designed to improve food production.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing both the technical and political-economic dimensions of food insecurity in Ghana. Farmers' lived experiences reflect systemic issues of

⁵³ Beyuo and Anyidoho, "An Impact Assessment of Farmer Participation on Food Security in Northwestern Ghana."

⁵⁴ Beyuo and Anyidoho, "An Impact Assessment of Farmer Participation on Food Security in Northwestern Ghana."

political favoritism, weak institutions, and inadequate infrastructure, which collectively undermine the right to food and agricultural resilience.

Economics of Food Production

Known in history as one of the earliest occupations of man, agriculture began in its crude form as hunting and gathering, where people depended on nature for their means of livelihood. Today, it is still recognized as one of the most important economic activities in the world, playing a major role in the economies of both developed and developing countries. In the majority of the less developed countries, including those in sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture has become almost synonymous with the national economy. It has established so much dominance in these economies that its unmistakable primacy can be seen manifested in the contributions to the overall economic growth, including its share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture accounts for a large share of the GDP, (ranging from 30 to 60 percent in about two-thirds of them), employs a large proportion of the labour force (from 40 percent to as much as 90 percent in most cases), represents a major source of foreign exchange (from 25 percent to as much as 95 percent in three-quarters of the countries), supplies the bulk of basic food and provides subsistence and other income to more than half of the LDCs' population.⁵⁵ The strategic role of agriculture as a major catalyst to the country's development, among other things, stems from the significant impact that the sector could make on improving the quality of life or otherwise of the entire citizenry as a result of its spread and linkage effects with other sectors. In this regard, governments since the colonial era have been making frantic efforts to pursue policies that will bring transformation to the sector. The political economy of agricultural development policies of the government in SSA on/in this all-important sector, and how it has affected overall growth, was supported by the MDGs in 2000, and endorsed as the "minimum requirements for socio-economic development and poverty reduction."⁵⁶

However, the economics of food production in Ghana reveal a paradox: despite agriculture being the main livelihood for a large share of the population, the sector remains undercapitalized, inefficient, and vulnerable to systemic shocks. Field data gathered across the Upper East, Northern, and Bono East Regions provides insight into the economic constraints that perpetuate food insecurity, especially for smallholder farmers.

The cost of agricultural inputs, including seeds, fertilizer, and machinery services, remains a significant economic barrier. Many farmers reported that subsidized inputs under state initiatives like the *Planting for Food and Jobs* program were either insufficient or inaccessible due to political interference and delays. *"They say fertilizer is subsidized, but by the time it gets here, it's either finished or sold at full price by private people. We can't afford it without loans, and banks won't give us credit."* (Male farmer, 45, Northern Region).

Financial institutions view smallholder farmers as high-risk due to a lack of collateral and the unpredictability of yields. Microcredit programs are often poorly tailored to the agricultural calendar, making them economically ineffective. The lack of access to mechanised services increases the cost of production and restricts farm size. Farmers still rely heavily on manual labor or animal traction, limiting productivity and creating bottlenecks during peak farming periods. *"We still use hoes and cutlasses. The tractor they promised hasn't come in two years. We can only farm small plots because we are tired."* (Female farmer, 37, Upper East).

Even where mechanization centers exist, affordability and maintenance issues hinder regular access. A major economic inefficiency in the food system is post-harvest loss. Due to inadequate storage facilities, lack of processing equipment, and poor roads, a significant portion of food produced never reaches the market. *"I lost half of my maize last year to mould because there was no storage. Nobody bought it, and I couldn't move it to town in time."* (Male farmer, 33, Bono East)

Moreover, market volatility affects income predictability. Prices drop drastically during harvest seasons due to oversupply and the absence of state-led market stabilisation measures. This depresses returns on investment and discourages scaling up of production. Most farmers cultivate small, scattered

⁵⁵ FAO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022*.

⁵⁶ Romain Wacziarg and Karen Horn Welch, "Trade Liberalization and Growth: New Evidence," *The World Bank Economic Review* 22, no. 2 (2008): 187–231; Don J Webber, "Policies to Stimulate Growth: Should We Invest in Health or Education?," *Applied Economics* 34, no. 13 (2002): 1633–43; Todaro, *Economic Development in The Third World*.

plots due to traditional land allocation practices, limiting economies of scale and mechanization efficiency. Migrant and female farmers are particularly disadvantaged in accessing larger and more fertile plots. *"I rent land yearly. Every year I move. I can't invest in good seeds or manure if I don't know if I'll be there next season."* (Migrant farmer, 28, Northern Region).

Without land security or formal ownership, long-term productivity investments such as irrigation, soil improvement, or tree crops remain uneconomical. Although government spending on agriculture has increased marginally over the years, much of it is consumed by administrative overhead and politically motivated programs, rather than long-term infrastructure or research. A policy analyst in Tamale observed: *"We spend more on conferences and banners than on actual irrigation projects. The economic planning behind agriculture is short-term and headline-driven."* This undermines the productive potential of the sector and constrains inclusive economic growth.

In summary, the economic structure of food production in Ghana is characterised by input-cost constraints, weak capital markets, limited mechanisation, land fragmentation, and post-harvest inefficiencies. These challenges are further compounded by political and institutional failures that reduce the sector's capacity to ensure food security. Addressing the economic roots of food insecurity requires structural reforms targeting input access, financing, land tenure, mechanization, and market infrastructure.

DISCUSSION

Food insecurity, which spans from unavailability and inaccessibility of food among others, should be tied to the pollution of the natural environment. The first day the natural environment is polluted marks the beginning of the unavailability of food and inaccessibility as well. The outmoded farming systems, which are an integral part of the problem of the environment with regard to food production, ought to be reviewed and replaced with the best farming practices.

Yet, there is a strong connection between agriculture and its contribution to the attainment of food security in SSA. This is because the sector provides critical inputs to realising the goals. The vast majority of people whose lives need to change the most depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. It could be observed from the earlier analyses that poverty has a strong rural and, hence, agricultural dimension: approximately 70% of the poor live in rural areas and primarily pursue agriculture-based livelihood strategies. Improving the productivity of and the economic returns of agriculture for farming households will have immediate effects in eradicating extreme poverty and reducing hunger. Increased agricultural income will directly improve both household consumption levels today and household asset levels to improve production and better weather economic shocks in the future. More importantly, agriculture can serve as the basis for broad pro-poor economic growth to bring about permanent reductions in poverty.

It is interesting to note that in spite of the strong direct and indirect impact that the agricultural sector has on achieving food security, performance in the sector is not encouraging. Peasant and subsistence farming with the use of rudimentary technologies has been very predominant in the agricultural sector, resulting in low levels of production. Smallholder farms (with an average farm size of less than 1.2 hectares), which account for 80 percent of total agricultural production in SSA, are mainly rain-fed, and traditional methods of production tend to dominate, with the farmer-tractor ratio of 1:180,000 as against the target of 1:90,000 in the year 2002.⁵⁷ Again, it was noted that the average food crop farmer has limited contact with the product market and is unlikely to use fertilizers, insecticides, high-yielding seed varieties, or irrigated-based techniques of production. The gross effect of the situation described above is that most of these farmers lack economies of scale as a result of the small-scale nature of their production, resulting in a high per capita cost and generally low production levels. The analyses presented give a clear indication that the continent's production level has not been at its optimum.

Although extremely broad in scope, good economic and political governance in Africa has important implications for agriculture and food security in Sub-Saharan Africa. First, it is under this framework that an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system is

⁵⁷ World Bank, *The Climate Change Portal* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2020); World Bank, "The World Development Indicators. Employment in Agriculture"; World Bank., *World Governance Indicators* (. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2020); World Bank, *Investing in Education and Infrastructure for Economic Growth*.

called for. Given the demonstrable centrality of the agricultural sector to people whose conditions of life must change if the economic and development policies are to be attained, agriculture should be among the focus sectors of initial efforts in this area. Global agricultural trade must be harmonised and rationalised in a manner that includes consideration of the special needs of poor agricultural producers and how they might derive maximum benefit from such trade.⁵⁸ Even with attention to these important aspects, the poverty impact of globalised agricultural trade remains unclear in Africa, particularly in the SSA region. Such trade will often exclude the smallholder farmer and herder, as it requires knowledge, capital, and quality assurance levels, as well as access to marketing networks that most smallholder producers cannot attain on their own. Smallholders may be uncompetitive and unable to participate in many of the most profitable sub-sectors under a wholly free-trade system. Establishing appropriate institutions is necessary to enable broad welfare gains to be achieved through trade.

The findings from the field underscore the central thesis of the political economy approach that food insecurity in Ghana is not simply the result of low productivity or natural factors, but is deeply embedded in political and economic structures that perpetuate inequality, inefficiency, and exclusion. As observed in the interviews and focus groups, access to land, credit, inputs, and market opportunities is mediated by power, privilege, and political alignment rather than need or merit.

Drawing on the political economy of institutions, Acemoglu and Robinson argue that extractive institutions, those that concentrate power and resources in the hands of elites, undermine inclusive development.⁵⁹ This perspective is evident in the Ghanaian context, where agricultural input programs and land allocation mechanisms are often controlled by political elites, traditional authorities, and bureaucratic gatekeepers. The reported favoritism in fertilizer distribution and political interference in mechanisation schemes reflect what Boone refers to as “territorial politics,” where state resources are strategically deployed to secure loyalty rather than development outcomes.⁶⁰

Moreover, the clientelist nature of governance, as discussed by van de Walle, explains why food production policies are frequently short-term and geared toward electoral gains.⁶¹ Programs like *Planting for Food and Jobs* may offer short-term visibility, but lack sustainability and impact due to politicization, poor targeting, and weak accountability mechanisms. These findings align with Whitfield’s critique that policy in Ghana is often implemented through informal networks that prioritize loyalty over competence, weakening state capacity.⁶²

Economically, the findings echo Konadu-Agyemang’s analysis of Ghana’s structural adjustment legacy.⁶³ Liberalization without adequate institutional support dismantled marketing boards and agricultural extension systems, leaving smallholders exposed to market risks, high input costs, and unregulated pricing systems. The field evidence of exploitative middlemen, post-harvest losses, and volatile prices highlights the failure of market mechanisms to deliver food security in a liberalized but institutionally weak environment.

The discussion also reinforces the theory of agrarian political economy, which emphasizes the unequal control over productive resources, particularly land, as a key determinant of rural poverty and food insecurity.⁶⁴ As the data show, insecure land tenure for women and migrant farmers reduces incentives for investment and expansion. This is especially critical in northern Ghana, where land is communally controlled and access depends on social status, ethnicity, and gender.

In addition, the absence of effective decentralization, as discussed by Crook, limits the responsiveness of local governments to the unique food security needs of rural communities.⁶⁵ The evidence that district assemblies lack autonomy or capacity to influence agricultural planning reflects a broader failure in governance, where centralization undermines local innovation and accountability.

⁵⁸ World Bank, “Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Improving SMEs’ Access to Finance and Finding Innovative Solutions to Unlock Sources of Capital.”

⁵⁹ Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (Crown Currency, 2013).

⁶⁰ C. Boone, *Property and Political Order in Africa: Land Rights and the Structure of Politics* (Cambridge University Press., 2014).

⁶¹ N. van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–1999* (Cambridge University Press., 2001).

⁶² Whitfield, *Economies after Colonialism: Ghana and the Struggle for Power*.

⁶³ Konadu-Agyemang, “The Best of Times and the Worst of Times: Structural Adjustment Programs and Uneven Development in Africa: The Case of Ghana.”

⁶⁴ Henry Bernstein, *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change*, vol. 1 (Kumarian Press, 2010).

⁶⁵ Crook, “Decentralisation and Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Politics of Local–Central Relations.”

Importantly, the mismatch between donor-driven priorities and local needs also surfaced in participant narratives. This validates Ferguson's notion of the "anti-politics machine," where development interventions depoliticize structural problems and mask the political roots of poverty and food insecurity.⁶⁶

In sum, the discussion reveals that food insecurity in Ghana is a manifestation of politicized governance, structural economic constraints, and institutional inefficiencies. Addressing it requires moving beyond technical fixes to engage with the power relations and political interests that shape agricultural policy and rural development.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the agricultural sector's significant contribution to Africa, its performance has not been particularly promising. Food and agricultural raw material output are insufficient to meet demand; thus, the continent imports a lot of food to augment domestic supplies and feed its people. Food insecurity is just one of several problems that have led to this. The political economy of agriculture and good production in a more sustainable way has not been able to drive growth and provide food security.

First, through the application of creative and suitable modern technology, the political economy of agricultural production and modernisation could increase agriculture's competitiveness in both the domestic and international markets. Modernising agriculture should include all post-harvest operations, including distribution, processing, packing, and storage, rather than just production. It is acknowledged that in order for other economic sectors to absorb the surpluses produced by the agriculture sector, agricultural transformation cannot be successful without comparable reforms in those sectors. These could include more agricultural produce for processing, extra labor that is released from farms to industry, and saved capital from agricultural income.

Also, the introduction of new technology and supply, as well as the infusion of fresh funds from agricultural revenue. New technology development and provision, as well as the infusion of fresh money to support the agricultural transformation process, will be essential elements in raising the sector's productivity and making it more responsive to rural development and poverty alleviation. The goal is to establish and strengthen the necessary connections between industry and agriculture through a robust public-private collaboration.

Besides, tackling the challenges related to agricultural policy, land tenure, credit, information generation and flow (including through research and ICT), and institutional reforms is essential. This will create a more enabling environment for the development of agriculture in SSA, and for that matter, Ghana. The goal should be to ensure food security, reduce or eradicate poverty, and foster growth and development. It is now more obvious than ever that addressing food insecurity on multiple fronts at once is necessary to ensure that no group in society is left behind as the process of change takes place. This is especially crucial because agriculture involves a wide range of stakeholders, some of whom are among the weakest and most vulnerable members of society. The poor peasants and landless farmers may not be able to benefit from interventions that directly target them without outside help. There is therefore a need to establish transparent and participatory frameworks for policy formulation in the agriculture sector, including farmer-based organizations and civil society. Finally, the government of Ghana, through state-sponsored institutions, curbs elite capture by ensuring that agricultural subsidies and inputs target poor and marginalised rural communities in the country.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the structural, political, and economic factors contributing to food insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa, with Ghana as a case study. The findings revealed that food insecurity in Ghana is not merely a result of agricultural underperformance but is deeply embedded in the political economy of resource allocation, institutional inefficiencies, and socio-economic marginalization. Structural barriers such as land tenure insecurity, politicised agricultural subsidies, underinvestment in rural infrastructure, and elite capture of food-related policies significantly constrain food production and

⁶⁶ J. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development", Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

distribution. Moreover, climate variability and poor adaptive governance mechanisms further exacerbate vulnerabilities. These challenges are perpetuated by a lack of policy coherence, weak inter-sectoral coordination, and the marginalization of smallholder farmers in national development agendas. Addressing food insecurity, therefore, requires a shift from short-term relief approaches to long-term structural reforms anchored in political accountability, inclusive governance, and sustainable rural development.

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