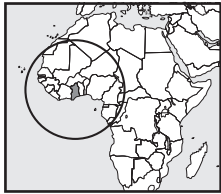


## The frightening picture behind the pin-up



Against the background of a region racked by civil wars Ghana is highly regarded as an enclave of “peace and stability”. However, mass formal unemployment, growing landlessness and insecurity of tenure and the upsurge in crime are growing threats to Ghanaians’ human security. A leading Ghanaian organisation has described aspects of the situation as “frightening.”

### Ghana Social Watch Coalition

Geographically Ghana sits in a West African region wracked in recent years by multiple civil wars and is surrounded by neighbours beset by political and social turmoil or volatility. Côte d’Ivoire to the west has been split into two political zones and is in an uneasy truce since late 2001 when a failed coup against the elected government degenerated into a civil war. To the north the Compoare regime in Burkina Faso has turbulent relations with opposition parties at home, who accuse it of electoral fraud and violence. It has also been widely accused of involvement in civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire. In Togo to the east, dictator Gnassingbe Eyadema, Africa’s longest serving ruler (in power since 1967), presides over a very volatile political situation and a serious economic crisis. By contrast Ghana has had three multi-party elections since the creation of the country’s Fourth Republic in 1992, amidst the Africa-wide wave of political liberalisation. In the last elections in 2000 the long serving government of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) was voted out of power.

### The former darling of the Bretton Woods Institutions

It is therefore hardly surprising that Ghana is highly regarded among African countries for its “peace and stability” as well as a multi party democracy, and that many Ghanaians perceive themselves to be a peace-loving people. In addition to its positive image, Ghana was the World Bank’s African pin-up model for the proclaimed merits of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) from the early 1980s. The overall Ghanaian reality is however more complicated than appears from comparisons with its neighbours.

Economic conditions represent one of the most important threats to human security. Past Ghana Social Watch reports on education, health and poverty highlighted the growing poverty and inequalities in access to social services resulting from years of neo-liberal economic reforms. More recent studies attest to the exacerbation of this trend.

According to a 2002 survey<sup>1</sup> by the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana)

two-thirds of Ghanaians face permanent economic uncertainty. This conclusion contrasts very sharply with the picture created by years of official celebration of two decades of neo-liberal economic reforms.

The CDD-Ghana study found, “a frightening picture of mass formal unemployment and underemployment” and a “widening of the gap between rich and poor”. Almost two thirds of those interviewed described their economic conditions as dire, more than half said they lived from hand to mouth. Job creation and the reduction of poverty and marginalisation ranked as the highest priorities of respondents in the survey. Three quarters of respondents felt market reforms have not narrowed the gap between rich and poor. Twice as many blamed the reforms for widening the gap than thought it had narrowed it.

The study concluded that Ghanaians have a “deep ambivalence over market-centred economic reforms, reflected in strong support for state interventions that offset the expressions of lukewarm preference for a market economy”. There were clear expressions of public opposition to some of the pillars of neo-liberalism. For example, two thirds of those questioned oppose trade liberalisation and would like trade policy to protect local industry and jobs even if it meant consumers paying more for goods. Nearly 80% oppose lay-offs in the public sector.

The New Patriotic Party (NPP) Government, which came to power at the beginning of 2001, has however shown a deep commitment to continuing the neo-liberal economic policies of the predecessor NDC Government. In its three years in power the NPP has been particularly proud of its “good relations” with the World Bank and IMF as well as bilateral creditors and donors. Its enthusiasm towards these institutions was clearly illustrated when in his presentation of the 2002 budget, Finance Minister Yaw Osafo Maafo proudly announced that Ghana, erstwhile darling of the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs), would soon reach an inflexion point within the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. The government benches in Parliament - apparently seeing no irony in the national insolvency that is an outcome of the decades-long “love affair” with the BWIs - cheered to the rafters.

Under the terms of HIPC Ghana could have up to USD 3.7 billion of its USD 6.2 billion debt written off over a 20 year period, provided it fulfilled further stringent criteria of structural adjustment poli-

cies. Late in 2002, under strong pressure from the BWIs, a law liberalising public procurement was passed, effectively giving up the possibility of using the purchase of goods and services as an instrument for affirmative action in support of local economic activity.

### Land tenure: tensions in State-society relations

In rural areas, where the majority of Ghanaians as well as the overwhelming majority of the poor live, the generalised economic insecurity in the country has an important specific dimension: growing landlessness and insecurity of tenure. A 2001 study concluded that “insecurity of tenure affects a greater proportion of society than is generally recognised and probably the majority. This extends beyond the economic poor and those who hold derivative rights, that is, those who access land belonging to others: tenants and sharecroppers, youth and women... Those with least status, knowledge or means are least well served. Loss of rights is widely occurring. Given the centrality of secure access to the social and economic fabric of society, instability threatens and in some parts of the country has already spilled into violence.”<sup>2</sup>

The following sets of relationships are the main axes of the above-mentioned problems: the State and rural communities, traditional chiefs and their “subjects”, members of land owning groups and non-members (“natives” and “strangers”), landlord and tenants, farmers and pastoralists, and men and women.

While the spread of commodity relations and the emergence of the modern Ghanaian State have significantly changed the traditional character of land relations in Ghana, the theory and ideology of communal ownership and associated rules have not changed.

The tensions inherent in this situation exert increasing pressure, transforming the above relational axes into flashpoints for violence in some cases: between the State’s security apparatus and communities expropriated for the benefit of logging or mining companies, communal eruptions generated by

2 Alden Wily, Liz and Daniel Hammond. *Land Security and the Poor in Ghana. Is There a Way Forward?* A Land Sector Scoping Study commissioned by UK Department for International Development (DFID), Ghana’s Rural Livelihoods Programme. 2001.

1 CDD-Ghana. *The Growth of Democracy in Ghana Despite Economic Dissatisfaction: A Power Alternation Bonus*. CDD-Ghana Research Paper 11, 2002.

chieftaincy disputes or between “natives” and “strangers” and between farmers and state security on one side and pastoralists on the other.

Conflict in state-society relations over land have been mainly generated by government expropriation of minerals and timber resources in the countryside and building land in the urban areas. The State has controlled timber resources since colonial times and has served as the facilitator of the access of logging firms in exchange for revenue. The historic owners of these resources have had a long history of conflict with the State and loggers on account of their exclusion from the use of what used to be their commons. Draconian laws forbid violation of forest reserves by villagers even as in bits and chunks logging firms have been allowed to reduce the size of Ghana’s tropical rain forests over the last 100 or so years.

Since the mid-1980s there has been a new boom in large-scale surface mining by transnational gold companies, especially in the Western and Ashanti Regions, on concessions granted by the State that involved the expropriation of communities. People have been physically displaced from homes and farms to make way for mines. The destruction of community livelihoods is more than matched by the destruction of the ecosystem and water bodies. State policy has largely treated protests against the impact of mining as law and order issues that pose a threat to the attraction of foreign investment. The resultant community insecurity and discontent has occasioned cyclical violence involving the State and mining companies on one side and disaffected communities on the other.<sup>3</sup>

A much larger problem of insecurity is posed by the manner in which chiefs and family elders have evolved into de facto landowners dealing in communal land as if it were their private property. Serious accountability issues have arisen with respect to proceeds from sale and rental of land to strangers as well as royalties from mining and timber. As chiefs and family elders increasingly make “uncustomary” demands of entitled persons or sell off land to outsiders without due process, what is available for members of the community as a whole is sharply reduced, weakening the land rights and access of women in particular. While new migrants find it harder to access land, generations of migrants who have acquired rights and settled into communities increasingly find themselves objects of ex-

clusion. There have been cases of dispossession of some such groups.

Inequitable access to a key agrarian resource has engendered violent conflict centred primarily on chiefs (succession, scope of authority and accountability), family elders, boundary disputes between and within communities, and between natives and strangers. The latter has acquired the status of an endemic low intensity conflict in a number of peri-urban areas. Around Accra, the national capital, the indigenous people, now mainly squeezed onto narrow strips and extremely poor high density areas along the coast are increasingly trying to assert their control over land against years of government expropriation and sale by unaccountable family heads.

In 1999 a National Land Policy (NLP) was announced. Unfortunately its evolution, like so many areas of policy-making in Ghana, has involved more donor and creditor agencies - especially the World Bank, the UK Department for International Development and the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit - than Ghanaians. The core weakness of the NLP is that it approaches the land issue as a technical issue that primarily requires administrative reforms rather than as an issue of social relations and politics.

Thus, it does not address the concerns of those with secondary interests in land - the poor, that is, tenants and sharecroppers (therefore the large body of migrant settlers) and women. This failure is not unconnected to the fact that the policy-making process has been dominated by the elite land-controlling groups, mainly chiefs and their allies in the state bureaucracy. Governments have tended to deny the inherent problems in chieftaincy within a republican setting, opportunistically using chiefs as their political agents, very much in the same way as the British colonial power had done.

There is no systematic response to the appropriation of community resources by chiefs in a manner that defends community interests. The status of the poor, especially sharecroppers and tenants, are not properly acknowledged or seen as a basis of poverty. There is also a failure to acknowledge the dangerous logic of the distinction between “natives” and “strangers”, and therefore a failure to protect the property rights of the latter, within the logic of the rights created by Ghana’s Constitution.

### **Possible links: economic liberalisation and upsurge in crime**

More often than not when communal violence has erupted there is an appeal to all concerned to see how such conflicts led to civil war in neighbouring countries. The lessons from Africa’s civil wars, of which Ghanaian governments and the population are acutely conscious, are reflected more at the level of public exhortation than public policy.

But the conflicts and instability in the West Africa region have a more substantive effect in Ghana than merely as salutary lessons. Ghana has tens of thousands of refugees who fled from the upheavals in the region. Their presence has generated xenophobic attitudes among some Ghanaians, with the blame ascribed to “foreigners” and refugees for the unprecedented wave of violent crime that Ghana has experienced in the past three years or so.

While there is anecdotal evidence that the proliferation of small arms in the region has fed the wave of crime, the evidence emerging from the arrests of suspected robbers show that they are overwhelmingly Ghanaians.

Economic insecurity is likely to be a factor in the crime wave, as indeed has been found in many other cases of the growing divide between rich and poor and unemployment. The wealthy neighbourhoods in Ghana’s main cities have been aptly described as “ghettos” in which the rich live behind high fences topped by barbed wire reinforced by prowling guard dogs and security staff. One side effect has been the boom, in an otherwise thin employment market, in security service companies and companies advertising guard dog training services.

The policing response has two worrying dimensions. On the one hand it has heavily targeted the poor and on the other it is entrenching a role for the military in policing, contributing to assault type policing methods and the growing militarisation of Ghanaian policing.

Hundreds of young males were routinely rounded up in raids on poor neighbourhoods and showcased with media headlines blaring a presumption of guilt. Some looked as if they had been assaulted. Among the poor, police violence is unlikely to improve the public perception of the police force, which according to the CDD-Ghana survey is regarded (by 79% of respondents) as the most corrupt public institution in Ghana.

Yet because of the public anxiety about the wave of violent crime there is very little discussion either of the human rights issues raised by police methods or of the larger issues of the possible links between economic liberalisation, economic insecurity and the upsurge in crime. ■

3 Minerals are Ghana’s largest export earner. Since the liberalisation of the mining sector in the mid-1980s it has been by far the greatest avenue for foreign investment inflows, attracting more than USD 5 billion in the period since. In 2003 Anglo-Gold took over the Ghanaian registered Ashanti, by far the biggest player in the Ghanaian mining industry, to create the largest gold mining company in the world. Newmont, the next biggest, is also active in Ghana.