

Impact assessment of storage management in the poverty alleviation programme: a case study in Ghana and lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Abstract

Poverty is now a global issue and all efforts are being made by world leaders to forge a global partnership for development to set people free from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty. So much work has gone into the development of frameworks, resolutions, pacts, reviews and other documents with the view of alleviating poverty. Countries of Sub-Saharan Africa have been actively involved in these processes without appreciable success. The deepening woes of Sub-Saharan African countries calls for much concern for storage facilities and storage management and the need to re-strategize to include them as a major core of the poverty alleviation programme. This paper therefore assesses the impact of the poverty alleviation programme so far in the Sub-Saharan African countries using Ghana as a case study to draw lessons for other countries.

Introduction

Food storage in the tropics is associated with a lot of problems, but two outstanding problems that must be given greater consideration are the development of micro-organisms (notably moulds) and the spread of stored product pests (predominantly insects, with rodents and birds also playing vital roles). The nature of storage structures and the type of storage management practices leave much to be desired. It may be safe to store food for a month but if food is to be stored for much longer periods in the Sub-Saharan Africa, special precautions must be taken to ensure that the quality does not deteriorate.

Storage of food allows continuous supply of materials for processing and distribution. Most agricultural commodities are produced seasonally. Harvesting is normally done during a short period of two to three months while their consumption is constant throughout the year. For this reason, storage becomes necessary (Semple *et al.*, 1992). The primary aims of storing food commodities are to effect a uniform supply of food throughout the months of the year, either for domestic use or for export, to provide a reserve for contingencies such as droughts, floods, and war. It also speculates on high prices either in domestic or in the export market (Semple *et. al.*, 1992).

This is an indication that, storage of food and storage management practices should form a core in the poverty alleviation programme for Sub-Saharan Africa. On the contrary, all the poverty alleviation programmes so far in Sub-Saharan Africa offered just a little or virtually nothing to storage of food and storage management practices. It must be acknowledged though, that The Food and Agricultural Organization under the United Nations has done a lot of work in on-farm storage of grains on the small scale level, but it was not enough to alleviating poverty.

Definition of poverty

The word poverty appears in the vocabulary of the people living in the Sub-Saharan Africa daily. The concept of poverty must be understood and why Africa in general is stricken with poverty. The issue whether poverty can be alleviated or eradicated must be addressed.

Poverty could be defined as lack of shelter, hunger, being sick and not being able to see a doctor. It could also mean joblessness, inability to go to school and not knowing how to read. It could be the fear for the future, powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom (WWW-1). Poverty has so many causes that no one solution will solve all the problems in every country (WWW-2).

Plans to alleviate poverty

Each nation needs its own programme to eradicate such root causes of poverty as hunger, illiteracy, inadequate medical and child care, lack of employment and population pressures. The actions of individual governments must receive support, including financial assistance, because the struggle against poverty is the shared responsibility of all countries (WWW-2).

Globally, a lot of summits, conferences, workshops and seminars has been organised with the hope of coming out with framework, policies, or documentation and strategies to alleviate poverty. According Mr. Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on **September 17, 2002** (WWW-3), world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit recognized the global progress that had been achieved in the struggle for human development. But they also identified some of the serious impediments and threats such as HIV/AIDS, conflict, and terrorism which still stand between humanity and the realization of its hopes for freedom from want and freedom from fear (WWW-3).

Priorities of the summit were to set people free from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty. More specifically, they resolved that by 2015 they would halve the proportions of the world's people living in extreme poverty, hunger and without safe drinking water. They pledged to achieve universal access to primary schooling and gender equality at all levels of education. To also reduce child mortality by two thirds and maternal mortality by three-quarters, halt the spread of HIV/AIDS and reduce the incidence of other major diseases. Above all, to integrate the principles of sustainable development into their policies; and forge a global partnership for development (WWW-3). Unfortunately, world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit did not recognize the importance of storage of food and storage management practices.

The Seventh Special Session of the UN Special Assembly in September 1975 resolved that, further reduction in post-harvest losses in developing countries should be undertaken as a matter of priority with a view to reaching at least fifty percent (50%) reduction by 1985 (FAO, 1983). This stimulated the interest of various governments in this area of grain conservation but is now a thing of the past.

Twenty-seven years after passing this resolution, poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa has worsened and people are now found to be in dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty. This is so because all the framework, pledges and policy implementations did not in-cooperate storage of food and storage management practices as an element in any of the poverty alleviation programmes.

The development of poverty alleviation in Ghana

Ghana has had a very long history and tradition of planning for national development: Ghana was reputed to have completed the first development plan in the world, the Guggisberg Plan, in 1919. This was more of a public investment programme than a comprehensive development plan but it provided the framework for the first efforts to develop the Gold Coast up to 1926. This very first plan was developed by the colonial administration without any participation by the people and was implemented largely by the administrative service (Report, 2001). As at 1995, Ghana could boast of twenty-one completed development plans after the Guggisberg Plan, in 1919. Notwithstanding, Ghana is now classified as a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC). The vision on agriculture did not include pragmatic implementation of storage management practices, and this has contributed to unavailability of food.

Poverty alleviation was initiated in Ghana in 1983 to arrest the economic decline, with the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP). Strictly, this programme of stabilization, rehabilitation and liberalization was not a long-term strategic plan in the real sense. It did not provide a long-term development vision for the essentially short-term interventions to achieve (Report, 2001). ERP then went through some metamorphosis, and resulted in a far-reaching Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which increased the hardships facing the ordinary Ghanaian.

Ghana today

In his opening session of Parliament in 1998, the President lamented that; agricultural growth averaged less than 2 per cent for over a decade. He also said that, agriculture has not played its role even though its long seen as the base for industrial development (Bentsi-Enchill, 1998). Admittedly, he confirmed that, the sector operates far below potential, with poor storage and processing facilities contributing to post-harvest food losses of 20 per cent (20%) (Bentsi-Enchill, 1998). He recognized that farmers' problems include high input prices, marketing bottlenecks, the lack of affordable credit and low earnings, and put the blame for the poor results on government's reliance on market forces to increase the efficiency of resource use and allocation (Bentsi-Enchill, 1998).

Almost all the good storage structures built after Independence are nothing to right home about. Due to neglect and lack of culture of maintenance, most of the storage structures in Ghana are dilapidated, harbouring squatters. The problem of storage and processing facility with good management practices has been recognized. Unfortunately, it is still not a core of the poverty alleviation programme. Hence deepening the woes of the country.

Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa

The situation in Ghana should be a lesson to all the countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa. The framework of development programmes must be tailored to the basic needs of a country. Having identified a country to be stricken with poverty, working documents or framework should incorporate construction of good storage facilities and include good maintenance and storage management practices.

The concept of implementing development programmes within the framework of a long-term vision is very critical. It must be viewed as important as the identification of the problem and the development of the working document programme.

Conclusion

It is inevitable that storage facilities with good maintenance and storage management practices form a major core of every document developed to alleviate poverty. This forum therefore must adopt a working document with that embodiment and resolve to work at it to make implementation less burdensome.

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WWW-1 <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/mission/up1.htm>

WWW-2 <http://www.iisd.org/rio+5/agenda/chp03.htm>

WWW-3 <http://www.un.org/news/>

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