

‘IT’S ALL WORK AND HAPPINESS ON THE FARMS’: AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN THE BLOCS IN NKRUMAH’S GHANA *

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Abstract

This study assesses the agricultural sector under the government of Kwame Nkrumah as a dynamic Cold War front. After Ghana’s independence in 1957, Nkrumah asserted that the new nation would guard its sovereignty from foreign influence, while recognizing that it needed foreign cooperation and investment. His government embarked upon a development program with an emphasis on diversifying Ghana’s agriculture to decrease her dependence on cocoa. Meanwhile, both the United States and the Soviet Union sought to establish footholds in Ghana through agricultural aid, trade, and investments. In the first years of independence, the Ghanaian state encouraged smallholder farming and American investment. Later, in a sudden change of policy, the government established large-scale state farms along the socialist model. This article brings to light the ways that Ghanaians in rural areas engaged with and interpreted the increasingly interventionist agriculture projects and policies of Nkrumah’s government.

Key Words

Ghana, agriculture, socialism, diplomatic relations, environment, development.

‘That’s a big question,’ replied Kwame Nkrumah, Prime Minister of Ghana, to a group of American investors gathered at the National Press Club in Washington, DC on 24 July 1958. One businessman had asked the prime minister whether his government would entertain proposals for the establishment of large-scale agricultural projects in Ghana. Nkrumah continued in his response: ‘I think the whole question centers around the plantation,’ then added wryly, ‘[a]nd I don’t want to bore you with the history of some of the results which plantations in other parts of the world have.’ Nkrumah, a pan-Africanist visionary who recognized the futility of political independence without economic self-sufficiency, proceeded instead to vaunt the unparalleled success of Ghana’s ‘ordinary farmers,’ who in the late 1950s were producing approximately half of the world’s supply of cocoa. Yet, Nkrumah told the group of investors, Ghana aimed to diversify its agriculture

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in order to avoid the perils of a monocrop economy. In view of this, the Convention People's Party (CPP) government he led did not see 'any harm at all' if American investors wanted to tackle agricultural enterprises, so long as plantations were established on mutually-beneficial terms to avoid the troubles manifest in plantation agriculture elsewhere.¹

Diversifying Ghana's cocoa-dependent economy and boosting the country's agricultural output were longstanding objectives of farmers and policymakers alike. In the decade after the Second World War, farmers around the then-Gold Coast demonstrated they were eager to seize opportunities to earn cash by planting new crops, provided they had access to markets, feasible means of conveyance, and affordable inputs. Nevertheless, cocoa and timber dominated export statistics. Non-cocoa agricultural exports generated a mere fraction of the revenue that the key exports did, despite the diminishing value of cocoa on the world market. Food imports, furthermore, were rising problematically.² Agricultural development was progressing too slowly by the state's standard, and there was cause for concern: by the late 1950s, the country was quickly approaching a fiscal crisis. The CPP faced pressing questions: How could the state accelerate agricultural growth to fuel its development goals? What role should rural populations have in building the new nation?

Meanwhile, people around the world scrutinized the political and economic affairs in sub-Saharan Africa's first postcolonial nation. On the eve of the disassembly of Britain's African empire, British policymakers gauged the danger of 'Soviet penetration' in Ghana in hopes of preventing the East from gaining a foothold in West Africa.³ American political leaders apprehensively watched Ghana's emergence into the Cold War international sphere to see what standard Ghana would set for how African countries could relate to both the British Commonwealth and the Eastern Bloc.⁴ From the East, within a week of Ghana's independence, Soviet, Czechoslovakian, and Romanian delegations all requested to establish consular missions in Accra.⁵ Across Africa and Asia, anti-imperialists and aspiring nationalists identified Ghana as a preeminent trailblazer on the path to a world free of colonial masters and imperial exploitation.

This article examines how the CPP utilized Ghana's prominent status in the eyes of Cold Warriors to diversify and develop the country's agricultural sector, as well as the ways in which rural populations interacted with the concomitant state projects. Initially, Ghana's government accepted technical assistance from the United States to help encourage small-holder farming and attempted to induce American investors to establish large plantations. This approach proved too cumbersome, and in 1962, the Ghanaian government began

1 Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) – Accra, RG 17/1/120, 'Questions and Answers Following Speech by Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana at the National Press Club Luncheon', 24 Jul. 1958.

2 B. Beckman, 'Ghana, 1951–78: The Agrarian Basis of the Postcolonial State,' in J. Heyer, P. Roberts, and G. Williams (eds.), *Rural Development in Tropical Africa* (New York, 1979).

3 The National Archives, London, United Kingdom (TNA), DO 35/6178, F. E. Cumming-Bruce, Office of Adviser to the Governor on External Affairs, Accra, 'The Danger of Future Soviet Penetration in the Gold Coast', 20 Jun. 1956.

4 TNA T 236/4463, 'Nixon's Report on Africa Visit', 8 Apr. 1957. P. Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (Oxford, 2012).

5 TNA DO 35/8657, telegram 34, UK High Commissioner, Accra, to Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) and Foreign Office (FO), 14 Mar. 1957.

emphasizing large-scale, state-run farms inspired and aided by the Soviet Union. The state farms were to generate employment in rural areas, feed the country's growing populace, modernize its agricultural sector, and fuel its rapid industrialization effort. They largely failed to achieve these stated aims, yet they profoundly unsettled rural life, in some cases for generations to come.

Historians of the US, Asia, and Latin America have shown that foreign aid in agriculture and environmental management was an important weapon during the Cold War.⁶ Yet scholars of Africa have lagged in considering the ways the Cold War affected African farm-scapes. Even as African socialism has regained the attention of historians, scholarship on postcolonial agrarian issues — with the exception of Tanzania's *ujamaa* — remains dwarfed by scholarship on rural policy during Africa's colonial era.⁷ For instance, in the colonial setting, historians Osumaka Likaka and Monica van Beusekom, among others, have provided insight into how rural Africans challenged and negotiated colonial agricultural policy.⁸ Similar questions must be asked of postcolonial agricultural policy, shaped not by imperial concerns, but by independent governments straining to guard their sovereignty in a hostile Cold War international environment. By paying attention to the ways in which postcolonial agricultural development projects were designed, engaged, and negotiated, historians can explore the multivalence of nation-building efforts and, furthermore, shed light on multiple and contesting visions of sovereignty and prosperity among African citizens and states in the formative years after independence.

The handful of scholars who have recently begun to excavate the history of African countries' state-led, postcolonial rural development efforts have considered various explanations for why they have long eluded historians' scrutiny to the detriment of our understanding of the postcolonial era. First, many rural schemes did not realize their goals and have been dismissed as failures. Priya Lal, for example, has argued that prognostic scholarship has elided the ways in which rural citizens experienced ostensibly failed schemes and has perpetuated the problematic trope of timeless African dysfunctionality.⁹ Second, agricultural projects commonly lack the allure and archival coverage that capital-intensive and highly centralized projects tend to generate. However, as John Aerni-Flessner has reasoned, costly and centralized development projects, such as urban redesigns or hydroelectric dams, affected only a fraction of the people that less spectacular schemes did.¹⁰ Lal and Aerni-Flessner both complicate conventional retellings of rural programs in Tanzania

6 N. Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, 2010); J. McNeill, C. Unger, eds., *Environmental Histories of the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2010); T. Robertson, 'Cold War Landscapes: Towards an Environmental History of US Development Programmes in the 1950s and 1960s,' *Cold War History* 16:4 (2016): 417–41.

7 G. Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry* (London, 1980); P. Lal, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania: Between the Village and the World* (Cambridge, 2015); L. Schneider, *Government of Development: Peasants and Politicians in Postcolonial Tanzania* (Bloomington, IN, 2014).

8 O. Likaka, *Rural Society and Cotton in Colonial Zaire* (Madison, 1997); M. van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development: African Farmers and Colonial Experts, 1920–1960* (Portsmouth, 2001).

9 Lal, *African Socialism*, 10–15.

10 J. Aerni-Flessner, 'Self-Help Development Projects and Conceptions of Independence in Lesotho, 1950s–70s,' *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 50:1 (2017): 11–33.

and Lesotho, respectively, by incorporating oral historical findings to reconstruct how non-elite individuals in rural communities perceived and adapted development agendas.

Scholarship on Nkrumah-era projects represents a case in point that not all development efforts have received equal attention from historians. The CPP's most spectacular scheme, the Volta River Project, has prompted several notable studies, including those by Emmanuel Akyeampong, Stephan Miescher, and Dzodzi Tsikata, yet the hydroelectric project had an impact on rural communities within only a limited geographic area of Ghana.¹¹ Likewise, Jeffrey Ahlman has expanded our understanding of Ghanaians' engagement with some of Nkrumah's other ideas and institutions. Ahlman, however, focused on projects of which citizens opted to be a part, such as the Worker's Brigade, and mostly shed light on urban experiences.¹² In contrast, the CPP's state farms scheme, it will be shown, imposed the state's productive logic onto rural populations and landscapes in all regions of the country. However, as Alice Wiemers has shown in regard to self-help projects in northern Ghana, rural Ghanaians cannot be categorized as mere objects of development work.¹³ Yet, many other existing studies of the CPP's agricultural projects have reproduced the preoccupations of the Nkrumahist state by considering rural farmers and workers only in the abstract, while also overlooking the international context of Nkrumahist agricultural designs.¹⁴

This article examines development policymaking and praxis in order to explore the international context together with the local dimensions of Ghana's agricultural policies under Nkrumah. In doing so, this article asks: How did the Ghanaian government utilize its preeminent status in the Afro-Asian bloc to obtain assistance developing its agricultural sector? Who controlled the planning and execution of these foreign-inspired state projects? How did workers and farmers guard their own sovereignty as Cold War politicking unfurled in rural areas? To address these entangled questions, this article draws on oral historical research conducted in communities in western Ghana, where Nkrumah's state farms scheme operated on a greater scale than in any other region, as well as archival material collected from archives in Ghana, the US, and the UK. It will be shown that from independence until Nkrumah's overthrow in February 1966, Ghana's agricultural sector represented a Cold War battleground involving major world powers, while its farmlands concurrently became a civic space where rural Ghanaians made sense of the CPP's increasingly interventionist policies. While the CPP envisioned its largest agricultural development venture, the State Farms Corporation, as a cornerstone of the nation's modernizing

11 E. Akyeampong, *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana c. 1950 to Recent Times* (Athens, OH, 2002), 159–85; D. Tsikata, *Living in the Shadow of the Large Dams: Long Term Responses of Downstream and Communities of Ghana's Volta River Project* (Accra, 2012); S. Miescher, "Nkrumah's Baby": The Akosombo Dam and the Dream of Development in Ghana, *Water History* 6:4 (2014), 341–66.

12 J. Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana* (Athens, OH, 2017).

13 A. Wiemers, "When the Chief Takes an Interest": Development and the Reinvention of "Communal" Labor in Northern Ghana, 1935–60, *The Journal of African History* 58:2 (2017): 239–57.

14 M. Miracle and A. Seidman, 'State Farms in Ghana,' *Land Tenure Center* 43 (Madison, 1968); J. A. Dadson, 'Socialized Agriculture in Ghana' (unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1970); B. Beckman, *Organizing the Farmers: Cocoa Politics and National Development in Ghana* (Uppsala, 1976); B. Beckman, 'Ghana, 1951–78.'

mission, civilians' relationships with the corporation tended to be mediated by local and personal priorities that at times were directly at odds with — and detrimental to — Nkrumah's transnationally-inspired ideas for the making of a sovereign nation.

GOLD COAST ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE, 1951–57

Ghana's postcolonial agricultural reforms arose from the country's desperate need to diversify exports. Throughout the 1940s, with swollen shoot disease wreaking havoc on cocoa farms and with the 1937 hold-up fresh in farmers' memories, people in the Gold Coast acutely understood the disadvantages of their reliance on cocoa.¹⁵ In 1948, a commission of enquiry reported people's critiques of the colony's agricultural policy, including the lack of attention paid to foodstuffs and cash crops other than cocoa, the weakness of agricultural education, and the absence of plans for future development.¹⁶ Accordingly, in 1949, the government established the Agricultural Produce Marketing Board to induce farmers to diversify cash crops. The government also formed the Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC) with an initial budget of £100,000 to encourage the large-scale commercial production of new crops.¹⁷

The postwar period has been commonly characterized as an era of stagnation in the non-cocoa agricultural sector, but this representation, based on export figures and efficiency calculations, fails to consider farmers' initiatives.¹⁸ Along the western littoral, coconut cultivation expanded threefold, and the crop proved so beneficial to farmers they dubbed it *sika dua* — 'money tree.'¹⁹ Farmers in the central part of the country were also restoring banana exports to prewar levels. In the dryer northern areas, rice production increased significantly, and it was hoped domestic yields could soon eclipse imports of the grain. Farmers in forested areas were showing some interest in planting coffee and oil palm.²⁰ People who had planted rubber during the Second World War were requesting assistance in finding buyers for their crop.²¹ In the northwest reaches of the forested zone, farmers were utilizing timber roads and denuded areas to establish new cocoa plots.²² Around the country, farmers were actively indicating their desire to produce for the market.

15 For more on the hold-up, see R. Alence, 'Colonial Government, Social Conflict, and State Involvement in Africa's Open Economies: The Origins of the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Board, 1939–46,' *The Journal of African History* 42:3 (2001): 397–416.

16 PRAAD-Accra RG 5/3/63, A. Watson, 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast,' 1948, 57–8.

17 PRAAD-Accra RG 4/2/237, 'Report of Sub-Committee No. 8 on Industrial, Commercial, and Electrical Development, Including Mining,' 1949.

18 A. Seidman, *Ghana's Development Experience 1951–65* (Nairobi, 1978), 146–199; Beckman, 'Ghana, 1951–78,' 145–7.

19 K. B. Dickson, 'Development of the Copra Industry in Ghana,' *Journal of Tropical Geography* 19 (1964): 27–34.

20 PRAAD-Accra RG 4/1/130, 'An Interim Report by the Advisory Committee on Agriculture, On Agricultural Production in the Gold Coast,' Feb. 1957, with minutes from meetings in Oct. 1956 and Jan. 1957. 'Oil palm' refers to the tree crop that is cultivated, whereas 'palm oil' is the commodity that these trees produce.

21 PRAAD-Accra, RG 7/1/38, letters from rubber farmers, for example E. Frimpong to Commissioner of Commerce, 14 Mar. 1955, and Y. Boahene to J. Jantuah, Ministry of Agriculture, 1 May 1956.

22 S. Boni, 'Striving for Resources or Connecting People? Transportation in Sefwi (Ghana),' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 32:1 (1999), 67.

However, agricultural growth during the 1950s was generally inadequate to support development goals, especially because few farmers took up commercial food production despite a rising domestic demand for foodstuffs.²³ West Indian development economist W. A. Lewis, who in 1953 had advised the Gold Coast government that it needed to improve foodstuff yields, lamented in the late 1950s that '[a]griculture is still the Cinderella of development programmes.'²⁴ Indeed, by 1956, the government had allocated less than 2 per cent of development funds to assisting farmers and had failed to create marketing institutions that would incentivize surplus food cultivation. Meanwhile, the ADC had squandered hundreds of thousands of pounds — mostly on the Gonja project in northern Ghana that was eventually abandoned — with negligible results. Moreover, the government had poured resources into the cocoa sector only to appropriate most cocoa revenue in order to finance expanded public services.²⁵ The rise of a cocoa-dependent public sector and an urbanizing population increased demand for marketed foodstuffs and imported goods. This situation turned perilous when world cocoa prices began to decline in 1956.²⁶

THE COLD WARRIORS

While Nkrumah asserted that Ghana would guard her newfound sovereignty from foreign exploitation, world powers in the West and East eyed its influential status on the tumultuous world stage. Policymakers in London were dismayed that the impending fiscal crisis was coinciding with the transfer of power scheduled for March 1957. British officials in Accra asserted that under normal circumstances, the Gold Coast government 'would have had to lie on the bed that it has made. . . . The process would probably not have been pleasant for the Gold Coast [but] we could have adopted a policy of wait and see.' Yet Cold War tensions distorted that plan, as Britain needed the Gold Coast to set the standard for decolonizing countries by remaining oriented towards the West. British intelligence officials judged that 'the idea of playing the West off the East would be a natural one for the shrewd West African,' and feared the Gold Coast, once independent, would seize offers from the East, for example grants of Soviet tractors, Polish technical expertise, or Czech factories.²⁷ British officials declared that the UK, with help from the US, would therefore have to fulfill the country's needs for aid, or at least let it 'believe that there are Western carrots worth chasing.'²⁸

In the US, the Eisenhower administration was mindful of the power vacuum that would exist in Africa following the withdrawal of colonial allies. The US government conferenced

23 Beckman, 'Ghana, 1951–78,' 146–7.

24 Princeton University Seeley Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton, New Jersey (SXML), MC092 W. A. Lewis Papers: Country Files / Ghana (formerly Gold Coast), Box 20, Folder 4, 'Report on Industrialization and the Gold Coast', 1953 and 'On Assessing a Development Plan', Jul. 1959.

25 PRAAD-Accra ADM 7/5/87, 'First Development Plan — Expenditures'; Seidman, *Ghana's Development Experience*, 158.

26 Beckman, 'Ghana, 1951–78,' 146.

27 TNA DO 35/6178, Cumming-Bruce, 'The Danger of Future Soviet Penetration in the Gold Coast', 20 Jun. 1956.

28 TNA DO 35/6178, telegram, Cumming-Bruce to G. Laithwaite, CRO, 21 Jul. 1956.

with Britain in March 1957 to coordinate their approach to maintaining Western influence in African nations.²⁹ That same month, US Vice President Richard Nixon traveled to Ghana, where he attended the independence ceremonies. Nixon reported that ‘We in the United States must come to know, to understand, and to find common ground with the peoples of this great continent.’ He recommended that the US government encourage American investment while financing development agencies to launch projects in African countries.³⁰

Also in attendance at the independence ceremonies, much to the dismay of the US, were representatives from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the People’s Republic of China. The leader of the Soviet delegation, I.A. Benedictov, also the Minister of State Farms in the USSR, requested from Nkrumah an exchange of diplomatic missions.³¹ Although Nkrumah’s cabinet persuaded him to reject this request, the UK High Commission in Accra did not trust the Ghanaian government to ward off the Soviet presence for long.³² Facing domestic fiscal challenges during the Cold War, Ghana’s struggles for self-determination were far from over.

AGRICULTURE UNDER THE SECOND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Under watchful eyes abroad, Ghana’s leaders fixated on how to strengthen the country’s economy. Nkrumah solicited the expertise of W. A. Lewis, who accepted a two-year post as Nkrumah’s Economic Advisor.³³ While Nkrumah negotiated the massive Volta River Project agreement, Lewis played a major role in drafting the Second Development Plan, which was to concentrate on expanding productivity. To this end, Lewis declared that Ghana should spend heavily on research into new crop varieties, diseases, and soils, and then disseminate findings to farmers, ‘flooding the countryside with Agricultural Assistants, stimulating technical discussion in farmers’ societies, putting regular farm talks onto the radio, and so on.’³⁴

Lewis also extolled the advantages of private plantations, which would alleviate pressure on the public purse while bringing expatriate capital and expertise into Ghana. Small farmers could profitably produce a new range of commodities once services and infrastructure related to processing, marketing, and mechanization were provided by large-scale enterprises. Areas of western Ghana, for example, Lewis suggested, could be ‘thrown open’ to private rubber, coffee, and banana farms. Depending on environmental suitability, other regions could produce maize, tobacco, sugar, poultry, dairy, or beef. The benefits of plantations for Ghana’s future prosperity, Lewis argued, outweighed their problematic

29 M. Montgomery, ‘The Eyes of the World Were Watching: Ghana, Great Britain, and the United States, 1957–1966’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Maryland, 2004), 19–27, 34.

30 TNA-UK, T 236/4463, ‘Nixon’s Report on Visit to Africa’, 14 Mar. 1957.

31 Montgomery, ‘The Eyes’, 63–7.

32 TNA DO 35/8657, telegram, UK High Commission, Accra, to CRO and FO, London, 14 Mar. 1957.

33 PRAAD-Accra RG 17/1/73, correspondence between Lewis and Nkrumah, 1957. For an account of Lewis’s relationship with Nkrumah, which became increasingly strained until Lewis resigned and left Ghana in December 1958, see R. Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics* (Princeton, 2005), 109–78.

34 SMML, MC092, Box 20, Folder 4, ‘Aspects of Development,’ lectures by Lewis, 1958.

history of slavery in the New World and of dispossession of Africans by European settlers in East, Central, and Southern Africa.³⁵

Nkrumah and the CPP followed Lewis's advice to support farmers while encouraging large-scale private enterprise. The plan, set to run from July 1959 until 1964, devoted £G 3,000,000 to creating demonstration farms, introducing storage and processing facilities, and participating in wholesale food distribution, all under the auspices of the ADC. The ADC, moreover, was also charged with inducing private parties to establish plantations in cooperation with the government. Nkrumah asserted that this was not merely economically crucial, but politically so; maintaining Ghana's independence would require 'continued expansion and diversification of our agriculture on which, in the final analysis, all our plans depend.'³⁶ To promote investment in Ghana, Nkrumah toured North America in 1958, and Lewis worked to woo American businessmen.³⁷

American involvement was not limited to investment; the US government identified agriculture as an easy area through which to expand influence in Ghana and to ensure access to strategic natural resources.³⁸ A survey team from the International Cooperation Administration thus traveled to Ghana in early 1958. By mid-1959, the US had launched a program in Ghana that would, over the next several years, devote over a million dollars per year to aiding the country's agriculture, particularly its rubber smallholders in the southwest.³⁹ Other projects included establishing cooperative plantations to produce cashews, avocados, and citrus in the Eastern and Central Regions.⁴⁰

But Nkrumah, in line with his position of positive neutrality, refused to engage exclusively with the West. He explained to Parliament: 'We do not discriminate against any nation. . . . We hope that more . . . governments, private institutions, and firms will come and investigate the possibilities of investing in Ghana.'⁴¹ A month later, in April 1959, a group of Soviet diplomats traveled to Ghana to discuss trade and the establishment of missions in Accra and Moscow. In September 1959 and May 1960, groups of Ghanaian leaders toured Soviet bloc countries. Krobo Edusei, an influential CPP member, reportedly returned 'a vociferous admirer of the Soviet system . . . and the way in which the Russians get things done.' Francis Yao Asare, the Minister of Agriculture, impressed by Soviet state farms, drafted a plan immediately following his trip for the launch of 15 collective farms in Ghana.⁴²

This impression of Soviet efficiency was made at a moment when Ghanaian leaders were frustrated by the slow progress of the country's agricultural development.⁴³ The Second

35 SMML, MC092, Box 20, Folder 5, 'Diversifying Ghana's Agriculture,' 26 Mar. 1958.

36 PRAAD-Accra ADM 7/5/88, speech by Nkrumah in Parliament, 4 Mar. 1959.

37 National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland (NARA) RG 469, Entry P250, Container 4, Folder: Commodities — Rubber, correspondences between A. Moffat, L. Reeves and E. Taylor, Jul. 1958.

38 Robertson, 'Cold War Landscapes', 421–2.

39 TNA DO 166/40, report for the Dominions Office describing UK Technical Aid, 20 Jun. 1963.

40 PRAAD-Accra RG 4/1/88, 'Progress During 1961 — Foreign Technical Aid to Ghana', 1962.

41 PRAAD-Accra ADM 7/5/88, speech by Nkrumah in Parliament, 4 Mar. 1959.

42 TNA DO 35/9346, Savingram 61 from Accra to CRO, 'East/West Relations and Ghana', 10 Jun. 1960.

43 NARA RG 469, Entry P 250, Container 4, Folder: Commodities — Rubber, letters exchanged between Reeves and Moffat, 1959.

Development Plan had intended for agriculture to be built up by smallholders and corporations. However, in the case of one of the government's top agricultural priorities, the rubber industry, American companies had hesitated to invest in Ghana due to advances in synthetic rubber production. Moreover, despite Ghanaian farmers' enthusiastic interest in the crop, American technical assistants in the southwest could only facilitate its cultivation as fast as planting material could be supplied. More generally, the government believed traditional land tenure systems stymied expansion of the agricultural sector and posed complications for foreign investments.⁴⁴ With cocoa prices plunging and capital dwindling, Ghana desperately needed alternative revenue sources.⁴⁵ The government thus decided to alter the Second Development Plan in favor of the Soviet-style approach by de-emphasizing support for smallholders and instead concentrating on large-scale farming, mechanization, and the rapid extension of a rubber industry.⁴⁶

To help finance and facilitate this agenda, Nkrumah wrote to Nikita Khrushchev, Premier of the USSR, in 1960. Nkrumah wanted 'As soon as possible... Soviet experts to come and start their work here without delay. My aim is to promote the industrialization and electrification of the country and to develop and mechanize agriculture with utmost speed.'⁴⁷ In August 1960, Ghana and the USSR signed pacts promising aid for large-scale farms in Ghana.⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, propaganda promoting Soviet agriculture flooded Ghana's *Evening News*, describing state farms as 'real "factories"' and boasting of the machinery used to sow huge swaths of state farmlands in the USSR.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, relations between Ghana and the US deteriorated. Ghanaians disparaged racism in the US and the Central Intelligence Agency's meddling in Congo's affairs. Condemnation of the US reached a boiling point when a US representative before the UN General Assembly accused Nkrumah of drifting toward communism. The ensuing anti-US press campaign in Ghana's newspapers attacked America's entrenched capitalism as well as its investments and aid in Africa. British officials construed this to mean that 'If the West dilly-dally over a request [for aid, investment, or credit, Ghana will] cock a snook at us and go straight to the Soviet bloc.'⁵⁰ Amidst this antagonism, the US government, not willing to lose Ghana to the Eastern bloc, continued to provide aid to Ghana, especially for its agriculture. Thus, in 1961, with the entrance of the Soviets, Ghana's farmscapes became a contested Cold War front.

44 NARA RG 286, Entry P346, Container 1, Folder: Commodities: Rubber FY-61, 'Large Scale Cooperative Farms', 30 Jul. 1960.

45 World cocoa prices dropped from £358 per ton in 1958 to £177 in 1961; NARA RG 59, Entry A1 3112A, Container 1, Folder: Despatches, 'Ghana: Guidelines for United States Policy and Operations (Comments and Original)', 7 Mar. 1963.

46 PRAAD-Accra RG 4/1/188, Ministry of Agriculture, 'Miscellaneous Information, 1961-1962'.

47 PRAAD-Accra, RG 17/1/211, Nkrumah to Khrushchev, 6 Jun. 1960.

48 TNA DO 35/8657, G. Marshall, Office of the UK High Commissioner, Accra, to V. Davies, Esq., CRO, 16 Sep. 1960.

49 'Exchange of Visits Between Ghana and USSR Will Bring Closer Relations', 'How [the] Soviet Union Became an Industrial Power', and 'The Success of USSR Agriculture', *Evening News*, 7 Nov. 1960.

50 TNA DO 198/6, CRO, 'Ghana: Achieving A Balance Between East and West', 18 Mar. 1961.

AGRICULTURAL AID BETWEEN THE BLOCS, 1961–6

The CPP evidently sought to involve the USSR in Ghana's agriculture due in part to the apparent efficiency of the USSR's mechanized, state-run farms, yet Ghana's collaborations with the USSR proved extremely slow to get off the ground. After Nkrumah and Khrushchev agreed to exchange expertise, machinery, and raw materials, interactions between Ghana and the USSR were uncertain, tense, and mostly unproductive for the next 18 months. Nonetheless, the USSR can be said to have led the Eastern charge into Ghana's agricultural sector, while Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and China offered credit and barter deals to support industrialization efforts.⁵¹

Ghanaian leaders first clashed with Soviet representatives over agricultural mechanization. Ghanaian and Soviet officers disagreed on the terms by which the USSR had brought tractors to Ghana: were they sent from Moscow as gifts, as an advertisement, as part of a barter deal, or for sale? The confusion began in January 1961 when a group of Soviet representatives asked if the Division of Agriculture would accept machines from Tractorexport, a Soviet agency. It seemed clear to Ghana's Principal Agricultural Officer, SB Nyame-Adu, that the Soviets meant for the tractors to serve as a form of advertisement only. But several months later, a trade representative of the USSR, VN Polikarpov, demanded payment for the tractors. Once Ghana agreed to purchase over £G 500,000 of machinery, officials in Accra insisted the 'advertisement' tractors should be treated as a gift; Soviet representatives disagreed. Compounding this debate was the fact that the 'advertisement' tractors could not even function due to missing parts which the Soviets had neglected to replace.⁵² Over the next few years, the USSR developed a reputation within the Ministry of Agriculture for selling obsolete equipment — sometimes repainted to look new — for exorbitant prices, and then refusing to provide service or spare parts.⁵³

Nevertheless, the CPP did not relent in its efforts to model Ghana's agriculture after Soviet examples. Nkrumah's government forged agreements with Khrushchev to guarantee the USSR's help in establishing large, state-run farms. Originally, these were only intended to produce rubber in the Western Region, but quickly this plan expanded to include palm oil, tobacco, yam, jute, maize, coconut, citrus, coffee, potato, cotton, rice, cassava, sugar, and livestock across the country.⁵⁴ The farms, ranging from 50 to over 500 acres each, seemingly offered a panacea for Ghana's development issues, designed to at once diversify agriculture, curtail imports (Ghana spent over £G 26,000,000 on food imports in 1961), cultivate virgin areas, employ Ghana's population, ensure cheap food supplies, provide industrial raw materials, and guarantee a sufficient quantity of crops to fulfil Ghana's barter agreements with Eastern countries. To realize these ambitions, in 1962, the government wholly reorganized the Ministry of Agriculture, liquidated the ADC, and incorporated the State Farms Corporation (SFC), which took over the country's existing agricultural stations, demonstration farms, and few plantations.⁵⁵

51 TNA OD 20/171, Acting British Commissioner, 'Technical Assistance from Britain', 12 Jan. 1962.

52 PRAAD-Accra RG 4/1/99, 'Meeting Held to Discuss Russian Agricultural Machinery', 22 Jan. 1962.

53 TNA FO 1110/1697, 'Dissatisfaction with Communist Aid and Services', 8 Apr. 1963.

54 PRAAD-Sunyani BRG 1/1/38, 'Meeting Held to Discuss the Establishment of State Farms', 15 Feb. 1962.

55 PRAAD-Accra ADM 14/2/115, Parliamentary Debates, 2–23 Oct. 1962, col. 323–4, 55, and 79.

This ploy did not have full support in Ghana's parliament. The CPP was seen to be imposing imported 'whiteman' systems on Ghana's rural populations. A Member of Parliament (MP) from the Upper Region, Jatoe Kaleo, argued:

We must not establish these state farms merely because certain countries have them... The Ghanaian mentality is that a person puts more effort into any undertaking which is his own... The Government will do well if they will help our individual farmers with money and technical assistance... These are the things we want, and not state farms.

EK Dadson, an MP from Wassaw South, agreed, arguing that a farmer's 'failure if any at all lies in the fact that he has been denied adequate means of transport to convey his produce from his farm to the marketing center', which discouraged farmers from improving methods and expanding production. He and other MPs contended the government should instead construct feeder roads. SD Dombo, from the Upper Region, lamented the disjointedness of the country's agricultural policy under three agencies — the SFC, Ministry of Agriculture, and United Ghana Farmers Council. Still others feared state farms would be sited not according to suitability or need, but according to political considerations.⁵⁶

Opposition within parliament, however, did not thwart the government's plans, which were already underway. In late 1961, a team of Soviet specialists surveyed potential sites for state farms in Ghana. As the Ministry of Agriculture began meeting with Soviet representatives, poor communication about the terms of their partnership again led to confusion and contempt. For instance, whereas Ghana's Minister of Agriculture expected the Soviets to provide technical assistance for the expansion of its rubber plantations, the Soviet specialists insisted they 'could not help Ghana to grow *Hevea* [rubber trees] as they have no *Hevea* in the Soviet Union.' Rather, the specialists explained they intended to 'assess the necessary amount of machinery' and draw up a contract covering the cost to be paid by Ghana through credit extended by the USSR.⁵⁷ The Ministry of Agriculture abandoned hopes of obtaining help from the Soviets for its rubber industry, and instead accepted their assistance for maize, dairy, rice, and cotton farms in Afife, Adidome, Zongo Macheri, and Branam.⁵⁸ The Director of the SFC, Atta Mensah, asserted that the Soviets were to fully manage those state farms for three years while Ghanaian understudies learned the managerial aspects of running them. The leader of the Soviet agricultural team, V. Karamyshev, however, denied this responsibility, insisting the USSR would oversee the 'planting, ploughing, sowing, reaping, etc.' but that Ghana needed to appoint its own managers, administrators, and accountants. If Ghana's 'own people chose to defraud the country,' Karamyshev stated, 'it was not the concern of the Soviets.'⁵⁹ Even the Soviets' narrowly-defined 'technical assistance' proved disappointing, as their lack of knowledge about African environments led 'to such anomalies as their supplying completely unsuitable equipment, [for example] they have selected, for a farm in a particularly fly-ridden area, a breed of cattle especially susceptible to the Tsetse fly.'⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* col. 337–45, 378–9, 384–6.

⁵⁷ PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/617, 'Meeting Held with Soviet Specialists on Rubber', 1 Feb. 1962.

⁵⁸ PRAAD-Sunyani BRG 1/1/38, 'Meeting Held to Discuss the Establishment of State Farms', 15 Feb. 1962.

⁵⁹ PRAAD-Accra RG 4/1/84, 'Meeting Held to Discuss the Establishment of State Farms', 15 Mar. 1962.

⁶⁰ TNA FO 1110/1697, 'Dissatisfaction with Communist Aid and Services', 8 Apr. 1963.

As Ghanaian officials began to realize shortcomings and ulterior motives of the USSR, they altered Soviet proposals. For example, whereas Soviet-aided farms were originally scheduled to construct cinemas for workers, a cost-cutting committee elected to construct community centers instead. Additionally, Ghana reduced the number of Soviet experts and shortened their tenure in Ghana to save £G 26,000 in 1962.⁶¹ Rather than purchase new machinery, the SFC determined it would use equipment already purchased by the Division of Agriculture to save £G 230,000. Still, these alterations were minor, considering the expected cost of establishing the Soviet-run farms was £G 2,479,900 and the operating costs for the three years the Soviets were to aid the farms was £G 840,000.⁶² 'It is becoming increasingly impossible for the Ghanaians, however pro-East, to ignore the cumulative evidence,' a report to the Commonwealth Relations Office explained, 'that they are neither being treated as equals by the Russians nor receiving adequate supplies and services for their trust in Russian good faith.'⁶³

Even as archival evidence suggests rising disillusionment within government ranks, state-run newspapers praised the state farms — 'It's all Work and Happiness on the Farms!' the *Evening News* declared.⁶⁴ Beyond their economic functions, the farms were supposed to exemplify Nkrumahism in-the-flesh, made clear by the CPP's propaganda: 'If you think the working people are unable to live a fully disciplined democratic life, work together, and be happy together in peace, take a trip to . . . see the State Farms organization in the area.'⁶⁵ State farms across the country were to provide medical, educational, social, dining, and housing facilities for all workers, who during their leisure time were to build the laborers' quarters and social centers with materials provided to them.⁶⁶ This type of collaborative effort embodied the CPP's plan for Ghana to construct itself as a socialist nation. The *Evening News* reveled:

As long as the workers' buildings do not come under control of rural landlords, as long as no single group of workers starts to claim [a] monopoly over transport, housing, medical, or educational facilities, as long as there is no such thing as working below Government's minimum wage, then we can all say PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY IS AT WORK IN GHANA!⁶⁷

The state intended for the SFC to liberate Ghana's countryside from traditional structures and secure its resources for the sake of Ghana's national development.

Meanwhile, the US government did not believe the country had been lost to communism; it relished in Ghana's dissatisfaction with the Soviets and continued to provide aid to Ghana. The US government's motives were clear, as described in a 1962 report by the Department of State:

61 PRAAD-Accra RG 4/1/84, 'Meeting To Discuss the Cost of State Farms', 27 Feb. 1962.

62 PRAAD-Accra RG 4/1/84, 'Report of Sub-Committee Appointed by the Minister of Agriculture to Review the Cost Estimates of the Establishment of State Farms', 1962.

63 TNA FO 1110/1697, 'Dissatisfaction with Communist Aid and Services', 8 Apr. 1963

64 'State Farms Output will Eliminate Food Imports!' *Evening News*, 24 Apr. 1963.

65 *Ibid.*

66 PRAAD-Accra, RG 8/2/438, 'Second Annual Report, Ghana SFC, 1963-64'.

67 'State Farms Output', *Evening News*, 24 Apr. 1963. For a broader discussion of the CPP's promotion of socialist work, see Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism*, 115-47.

In Ghana, perhaps in few other countries, we have a unique opportunity through our aid to exert increasing influence on the policies of one of the most significant leaders of the non-aligned Afro-Asian bloc... To rebuff the Ghanaians by denying them Western assistance... would not only risk driving them into the Soviet camp but would have far-reaching implications for Africa as a whole and for the United States' position throughout the non-aligned world.⁶⁸

The US government saw agriculture as an ideal conduit through which it could advance American principles by emphasizing the value of free enterprise and the possibility of a mixed economy.⁶⁹ For example, in southwest Ghana, American experts built up a vast supply of rubber planting material, which was provided to individuals, cooperatives, and even state farms.⁷⁰ Likewise, the US encouraged Ghana's plans to establish an agricultural credit bank that would strengthen the role of private farmers.⁷¹

Moreover, whereas American involvement in the Volta River Project was expected to exert influence on senior policymaking officials and urban populations, aid for agriculture was thought to offer the US opportunities to 'maintain contact with all segments of the population.' The CPP tightly combatted the infiltration of Western propaganda in the press, but it did not so stringently resist the diffusion of American influence into its farmlands. When, for example, it seemed likely that the USSR would advance into remote parts of the Northern and Brong Ahafo regions by constructing the Bui Dam, the US planned to expand its agricultural programs in the area. It also tried to combat a Soviet monopoly over Ghana's mechanization by establishing three 'farming institutes' where American specialists trained Ghanaians to operate and fix tractors and by attempting to interest American tractor companies such as Caterpillar to build a factory in Ghana. Such efforts were undertaken despite the US government's recognition that the trainees and the American tractors could be used to improve Bloc-run state farms.⁷² Via agricultural aid, the US competed measure for measure with the Eastern bloc in Ghana through small-scale, free-of-charge, decentralized programs, in stark contrast to the Volta River Project.

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY AT WORK? AGRARIAN REALITIES UNDER NKRUMAH, 1962–6

As Ghana's state crafted its own strain of socialism, Nkrumahism, and took up Soviet-inspired approaches to accelerate development, it indicated that citizens would be feeling government's rule to a new degree. 'Socialism has to be worked for and even sacrificed for,' Nkrumah announced at the launch of the Seven Year Development Plan of 1963–70. He proceeded: 'The revolution taking place in Ghana is chiefly a revolution

68 NARA RG 59, Entry A1 3112A, Container 1, Folder: Despatches, 'Confidential: Ghana', 8 Jun. 1962.

69 NARA RG 59, Entry A1 3112A, Container 1, Folder: Visits and Meetings, 'American Foreign Policy (Ghana)', n.d. [1962?]

70 NARA RG 286, Entry P 349, Container 8, Folder: Rubber, W.-G.-S. Aggrey, Agricultural Officer, to F. Pinder, US Operations Mission/Ghana, 29 Aug. 1962.

71 NARA RG 59, Entry A1 3112A, Container 1, Folder: Visits and Meetings, 'Confidential: Briefing Paper, Governor Williams's African Trip', 22–26 Jun. 1963.

72 NARA RG 59, Entry A1 3112A, Container 1, Folder: Visits and Meetings, 'American Foreign Policy (Ghana)', nd. [c. 1962].

of the workers and the tillers of the land.' Of the four agricultural agencies that acted as rural extensions of the CPP, the SFC was allotted the lion's share of government resources — £G 9,200,000 — and had the greatest impact on rural livelihoods, especially in the vicinity of its 105 farms.⁷³ The corporation thus offers a useful lens into how ordinary people in rural areas of Ghana were affected by and engaged with local articulations of global and revolutionary forces of the 1960s.

Rural communities' initial responses to the SFC were mixed. Some actively invited the SFC to cultivate their lands. In Western Nzima, for instance, traditional leaders wrote letters to their district commissioners offering up swaths of virgin forest to the SFC.⁷⁴ In the Brong Ahafo Region, the Omanhene of Namasa offered 6,000 acres to the SFC, writing 'We are only too pleased to offer you all the land... This state farm if established will also help inhabitants to stay and settle in their homes rather than immigrate to other places.'⁷⁵ In the Eastern Region, the Ohene of Abonse asked the government 'to take over this gift of land as soon as possible in order to give employment to the citizens of Abonse and the unemployed youth of Akwapim.'⁷⁶ Whether for the sake of earning the government's favor, bringing opportunities for employment, or contributing to Ghana's development, some chiefs welcomed the SFC to cultivate stool lands. It is unclear whether these chiefs understood that the corporation would not pay rents or royalties.⁷⁷

However, many rural people objected to the establishment of state farms once the corporation began its operations. In Western Nzima, one stool head emphatically disagreed with the government's acquisition of farmland, writing to the district commissioner at Half Assini:

I am very sorry... to tell you that perhaps you have just heard the word 'socialism,' but you were not actually taught its meaning. Socialism... does not imply that somebody's property should be taken by force or through abusive, threatening, or illegal means.

He proceeded to explain that he supported state farms in theory, but was protesting the fact that the corporation was establishing them alongside roads and on disputed lands, rather than in virgin areas.⁷⁸ In Ahanta and Wassaw areas of the Western Region, chiefs who originally supported the scheme became alarmed at the expansiveness of the corporation's land grab: 'The plantation extension did not stop. [The SFC] went into the other areas, and the Government was all over,' explained one contemporary paramount chief who learned the history from his predecessor.⁷⁹ People in Ahanta attempted to prevent the SFC from encroaching where farmers had planted crops and, in some cases, families had already constructed homes. One man, for example, uprooted rubber seedlings after the SFC planted them too close to his village; others harassed SFC officials when they

73 PRAAD-Accra ADM 7/5/89, 'Seven Year Development Plan, 1963–1970', x, xv, and 75.

74 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 38/1/99, letters to district commissioner, Half Assini, Jul. 1964.

75 PRAAD-Sunyani BRG 1/1/38, 'Establishment of State Farm at Namasa', 16 Jul. 1964.

76 PRAAD-Koforidua ADM.KD 22/6/519, 'Granting of Abonse Stool Land For State Farm Corporation', to commissioner, Eastern Region, 25 Sep. 1962.

77 PRAAD-Accra RG 8/2/438, 'Second Annual Report, Ghana SFC, 1963–64'.

78 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 38/1/66, J. E. K. Dickson to district commissioner, Half Assini, Jul. 1964.

79 Interview with Nana Kwesi Agyeman IX, Lower Dixcove, 30 Oct. 2017.

came to survey the area.⁸⁰ In the Brong Ahafo Region, a chief complained that the corporation had selected land for a tobacco farm where people had previously had access to their only source of drinking water.⁸¹ Another requested that the corporation select a different area for its oil palm plantation, one where people were not already farming cooperatively.⁸² In the Central and Eastern Regions, too, village leaders petitioned to the government complaining that the SFC had entered and begun using land without permission.⁸³ Much like those examined by Ahlman, these letters to the state featured highly choreographed, conciliatory rhetoric that couched complaints in Nkrumahist terms, pleading for communities' basic welfare so that they could contribute to Ghana's nation-building efforts by working, farming, and sending their children to school.⁸⁴ In one case, for example, a group of farmers from Akwapim assured the Director of the SFC that 'we pledge our continued and unfailing loyalty to and support for our Great Leader Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah,' but they feared 'if we are deprived of our cocoa farms, we will be impoverished to the extent that our future and that of our dependents will be doomed.'⁸⁵

Most tension arose from the fact that the SFC upended customary procedures for acquiring land and did not follow its original plan of cultivating only disused areas. Rather, to cut clearing costs and save time, the corporation expropriated, via the State Lands Act of 1962, farmland and secondary bush easily accessible by road, even when it required destroying crops, for which the corporation then needed to compensate owners.⁸⁶ Farmers whose land was seized described in interviews feeling helpless in the face of a seemingly omnipotent state. As James Donkor, whose coconut farm was destroyed by the SFC, described: 'It was by force. [Whether] you like it or not, you have to obey.' He lamented: 'They scattered everything... It reduced the town's progress. All of a sudden, everything [was] destroyed.'⁸⁷ Other evidence suggests farmers found some ways to reap benefits from the situation, for example by bribing surveyors to exaggerate the value of their ruined crops so they could collect inflated settlements.⁸⁸ The state did not, however, reimburse stools and landowners for its use of land. In all, the SFC acquired 206,000 acres, including about 90,000 acres in the Western Region, just 9,000 acres in the Ashanti Region, and an average of 18,000 acres in all other regions.⁸⁹ Nearly half of the acreage acquired was in the Western Region, in part because it featured conditions ideal for oil palm and rubber, the two crops of most interest to the government.

80 Interview with Moses Kudjoe, Abura, 17 Jul. 2015; interview with Esta Ofori, Mpatase, 21 Jul. 2015.

81 PRAAD-Sunyani BRG 1/1/38, N. K. Kesi, Kojokeseokrom, to district commissioner, Dormaa, 26 Nov. 1962.

82 PRAAD-Sunyani BRG 1/1/38, N. A. Sasraku II, Ankobia, to commissioner, Brong Ahafo Region, 18 Jun. 1964.

83 PRAAD-Cape Coast RG 1/5/49; PRAAD-Koforidua ADM.KD 22/6/519.

84 See Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism*, 184–7.

85 PRAAD-Koforidua ADM.KD 22/6/519, L. Aboagye, et al., Akropong-Akwapim, to the Director of State Farms, Accra, 23 Dec. 1964.

86 PRAAD-Accra RG 8/2/1244, 'State Lands Act (Act 125) of 1962.'

87 Interview with James Donkor, Adjumako, 15 Mar. 2017; Interview with Esta Ofori.

88 Interview with Joseph Kayans, Takoradi, 21 Jul. 2015.

89 PRAAD-Sunyani, BRG 1/1/38, 'Annual Report 1967–68'.

As the SFC went about cultivating this expropriated land, inefficiencies and unrealistic targets set by central state planners mired the viability of the corporation, which prioritized farm expansion over maintenance. Consequently, farms tended to go un-weeded, resulting in lower yields. In other cases, amidst pervasive litigations, the corporation hastily accepted any volunteered land, and only realized after planting that some sites lay in flood basins or on poor soil.⁹⁰ Exacerbating these issues was that most farms were never supplied with machinery or else frequently experienced tractor breakdowns; without mechanics and spare parts, the machines sat inoperable. In other cases, forests were too dense for tractors, and in savanna zones, Soviet machinery overheated.⁹¹ The SFC attributed some of this inefficiency to poor management, so in 1963 it proposed focusing its managerial manpower on only fifty farms. The State Planning Commission rejected this solution, requiring the corporation to achieve national targets that did not permit expansion to slow.⁹² Nevertheless, the SFC only managed to cultivate a third of its acquired land.⁹³ Additionally, due to the SFC's emphasis on tree crops, the corporation appeared more wasteful than it was, since the trees provided no returns until they matured after six years. Revenues were also diminished by middlemen, contracted by the government, who purchased food items from the SFC and resold them to public institutions, absorbing the SFC's potential profits.⁹⁴

HAPPINESS ON THE FARMS? WORKING FOR THE STATE FARMS CORPORATION

With stool heads, community leaders, and farm owners objecting to the SFC, one constituency still appreciated the corporation: its workers. The corporation often hired far more laborers than necessary in a deliberate effort to alleviate unemployment, and former workers affirmed that anyone could be hired, even if they were not CPP members. By the end of 1965, the SFC had a total of about 22,000 workers on payroll.⁹⁵ This number, however, overrepresents the corporation's true workforce. It was common practice for supervisors to enter 'ghost names' on their rosters in order to collect surplus wages, and typically, chiefs on whose land state farms operated were paid as supervisors without setting foot on a farm, as a means of preventing remonstrations.⁹⁶

Although the press exaggerated the amenities on state farms — former workers denied that social, housing, educational, or dining facilities existed — Ghanaians valued the opportunity to earn regular wages in rural areas where waged employment was otherwise scarce. As a young man, John Niako worked as an SFC field laborer, first clearing land and later planting rubber trees. He earned six shillings and six pence a day, which he could not

90 Dadson, 'Socialized Agriculture in Ghana', 167, 265.

91 PRAAD-Cape Coast RG 1/5/49, 'Monthly Progress Report', Jun. 1967.

92 PRAAD-Accra RG 8/2/438, 'Second Annual Report, Ghana SFC, 1963-4'.

93 PRAAD-Cape Coast RG 1/5/49, 'Monthly Progress Report', Jun. 1967.

94 PRAAD-Sunyani BRG 1/1/38, R. O. Amoako-Atta, commissioner, Brong Ahafo Region, to Nkrumah, 5 Mar. 1965.

95 PRAAD-Accra RG 8/2/438, 'Second Annual Report, Ghana SFC, 1963-64'.

96 Interview with Comfort Tom, Agona Nkwanta, 17 Oct. 2017.

have done without leaving his hometown if the government had not established plantations.⁹⁷ Abena Owusu, who traveled with her brother to the Western Region and began working with the SFC, emphasized the advantage of collecting earnings each month, rather than reaping rewards just one season a year as she had from her family's farms.⁹⁸ George Baidoo pursued steady work with the SFC in 1964 when the market for local palm wine and *akpeteshie* [locally distilled liquor] slowed and his father no longer needed help tapping palm trees.⁹⁹

The work performed on state farms, however, was nothing new to most workers, and usually did not prove beneficial in the long-term. Each day, gangs of workers reported to an overseer, who assigned tasks to workers depending on the area's vegetation; on average, each worker cleared (with cutlasses or axes) or ploughed (with hoes) about an acre before earning that day's 'mark', at which point, around midday, they could leave or rest until a truck arrived to transport workers back to their villages.¹⁰⁰ Much of the clearing, ploughing, planting, and weeding was performed manually. Generally, supervisory roles were held by people already in some position of power, and promotions to higher-paid roles were often determined not by merit but by social connections.¹⁰¹ Conventional social hierarchies, therefore, were often replicated within the ranks of the SFC. Workers could earn cash and help support their families, but most workers gained no transferrable skillset or status. Their long-term security, moreover, was jeopardized by the fact that the government's seizure of large swaths of accessible stool land served to reduce the availability of land on which people could establish their own farms for the production of food and cash crops.

Young female workers offered a slight exception to this pattern. Whereas men in rural areas had been able to earn cash as carpenters, masons, cash crop farmers, contract farm workers, laborers in mines or on railways, etc., women were commonly barred from these formal employment opportunities. To learn a craft, such as seamstressing, or to try her hand at trading, a woman usually needed some expendable initial capital, which was not always forthcoming. On state farms, however, men and women earned equal pay and worked in gangs together. Employment was contingent on one's physique, though; all workers needed to be deemed fit, and women's bodies were especially scrutinized. When Grace Cobbinah wanted to work when she was a teenager, she was hired only after she stuffed her shirt to appear mature.¹⁰² Assigned tasks commonly adhered to traditional gendered divisions of farm labor; men performed 'heavier' slashing and felling tasks, and female workers did 'lighter' tasks, including pruning, carrying drinking water, and weeding thinner vegetation.¹⁰³ On occasion, women were able to rise above low-level positions. Mary Yeboah, for example, recalled that her gang highly respected their female

97 Interview with John Niako, Essaman, 24 Jul. 2015.

98 Interview with Abena Owusu, Adiewoso, 14 Mar. 2017.

99 Interview with George Baidoo, Bokoroh, 8 Nov. 2017.

100 SFC originally mandated 7AM–3PM workdays, but it switched to a 'piece-work' system to halt alleged laziness. PRAAD-Accra RG 8/2/438, 'Second Annual Report, Ghana SFC, 1963–64'.

101 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 24/2/505, R. H. van Drooge, SFC Manager, to Western Region Administrator.

102 Interview with Grace Cobbinah, Nkwanta, 3 Apr. 2017.

103 Interview with Esta Dofor, Gyebunkrum, 21 Jul. 2015; interview with Elizabeth Atta, Mpatasi, 4 Sep. 2017.

overseer, 'Aunty Akua', who was well known for being a female in a position of power over men.¹⁰⁴ Comfort Tom, a former secretary for the SFC, proudly recalled the jealousy of her male colleagues whose salaries hers exceeded.¹⁰⁵

But did the SFC workers see themselves as taking part in a revolution, as imagined by the CPP? Evidence from former SFC workers' testimonies indicates that most did not identify with the objectives of the corporation. George Baidoo, for example, considered himself an adamant Nkrumah supporter, yet he worked for the SFC only as long as it took him to accumulate money to establish his own oil palm plantation.¹⁰⁶ Others worked because their parents or siblings told them to. In some cases, parents saved the wages to pay for their daughter's coming-of-age ceremony or their son's marriage, but in other cases former workers laughed when asked what their parents did with the surplus income — disposing of it was the father's or mother's prerogative, not that of the young workers.¹⁰⁷ Workers with children used wages to support their families by, for example, purchasing clothes and goods from traders who brought their wares to farms on paydays.¹⁰⁸ Whereas the CPP envisioned state farms as a means through which citizens would contribute to the nation's socialist revolution, workers understood their employment as an avenue through which they could enhance their family's livelihoods and fulfill their duties not as citizens but as family members.

When the one-party state set out to protect Ghana's sovereignty by dismantling traditional structures of rural economies for the sake of developing the agricultural sector, in reality it undermined rural populations' sense of security and negated its own claim that 'people's democracy is at work in Ghana.'¹⁰⁹ With the establishment of state farms, people living in rural areas of Nkrumah's Ghana felt firsthand the real repercussions of the CPP's revolutionary agenda, shaped in part by global superpowers. In this way, the Cold War — far from being an abstract conflict between distant powers — instigated new, more invasive state actions that altered Ghana's rural landscapes and economies and, in some areas, affected family's livelihoods for generations to come.¹¹⁰

LEGACIES OF GHANA'S COLD WAR FARMSCAPES

Shortly after Nkrumah's overthrow in February 1966, the National Liberation Council (NLC) began a complete overhaul of the SFC, which declared about 10,000 workers redundant within a year of the coup. Thirty-three farms were immediately abandoned, and a committee was set up to determine how to reallocate the unused land. Ghanaian supervisors took over the formerly Soviet-aided farms. By July 1968, the corporation

104 Interview with Mary Yeboah, Nkwanta, 3 Apr. 2017.

105 Interview with Comfort Tom.

106 Interview with George Baidoo.

107 Interview with Esther Kwaw, Ewusiejoe, 1 Nov. 2017; interview with Emmanuel Nketsia, Anibel, 17 May 2017.

108 Interview with Nana Duku II, Kedadwin, 7 Apr. 2017; interview with Kwesi Duku, John Akyeampong, and Yaa Mensah, Nsuaem, 24 Jul. 2015.

109 'State Farms Output,' *Evening News*, 24 Apr. 1963.

110 Interview with Nana Kwesi Agyeman IX, Lower Dixcove, 30 Oct. 2017; see also 'Chiefs Scramble for GREL Lands,' *Ghanaian Chronicle*, 29 Jan. 2014.

was responsible for 66 farms on 32,494 acres worked by 5,493 people.¹¹¹ The Western-oriented anti-Nkrumahist government, directed by the International Monetary Fund, sought to rapidly liberalize Ghana's economy, drastically cut government spending, and scrub away legacies of Nkrumahism from all corners of the country.¹¹²

Letters and petitions poured into government offices from rural communities pleading for the return of their land. 'We are living in very deplorable and untold hardship conditions, and earnestly, therefore, pray that the New Government (NLC) would give us comfort by releasing our lands back to us,' wrote traditional leaders in the Central Region.¹¹³ Echoing the tone of Nkrumah-era treatises, petitions used adulatory rhetoric to gain the NLC's favor: 'We congratulate you for your able statesmanship... and also your unflinching endeavours to see that all Ghanaians live freely and happily to enjoy real democracy [free] from the clutches of Imperialist imaginations', read a petition from traditional leaders in the Western Region.¹¹⁴ One village outside Takoradi requested that the SFC give back a portion of its acquired land, lamenting that refusing to do so would lead to the village's extinction by emigration and starvation.¹¹⁵ The press, too, portrayed the rural unrest in its headlines: 'Release Land — Corp Told' stated an article about farmers' demands in the Eastern Region; 'State Farms are a Waste' declared another about unprofitable state enterprises.¹¹⁶ Whether people were truly pleased by Nkrumah's overthrow varied considerably, but in any case rural communities affected by the SFC seized the opportunity to air their grievances and, so they hoped, to gain back stool land.

The NLC criticized Nkrumah and the CPP as it attempted to ingratiate itself to the West, but it did not completely liquidate the Soviet-inspired SFC. The new regime, after all, faced many of the same challenges as the CPP. In 1968, Lieutenant General J. A. Ankrah, Chairman of the NLC, alluded to 'the depressing history of the state farms in this country,' yet announced in the same breath that 'The State Farms Corporation has a very important role to play in the achievement of... agricultural objectives.'¹¹⁷ The SFC thus obtained formal land titles and continued to operate under the next several governments. Communities and landowners sought to reclaim land and collect compensation with varying degrees of success.¹¹⁸ In the Western Region, where the SFC expropriated three times more land than in any other region, people continued for the next several decades to resent and occasionally resist multinational companies producing palm oil and rubber operating on lands originally acquired by the state for the sake of Ghana's national development.

111 PRAAD-Sunyani BRG 1/1/38, 'Annual Report, 1967–68 SFC.'

112 E. Hutchful, *The IMF and Ghana: The Confidential Record* (London, 1988).

113 PRAAD-Cape Coast RG 1/5/49, Odikro of Gomoa-Simbrofo, et. al, to J. A. Ankrah, 22 Sep. 1966.

114 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 24/2/505, Ohene of Nsuaem, et. al. to Ankrah, 8 Jun. 1968.

115 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 24/2/505, letter from Secretary of the Chief of Apowa-Yarbiw, 4 May 1966.

116 'Release Lands, Corp Told,' *Daily Graphic*, 29 Jul. 1966; 'State Farms are a Waste', *Daily Graphic*, 26 Jul. 1966.

117 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 24/2/505, speech by Ankrah, 14 Mar. 1968.

118 PRAAD-Koforidua ERG 1/3/31, SFC progress reports, 1968–9; PRAAD-Cape Coast RG 1/5/49, petitions and reports regarding SFC at Essarkyir, 1966–73.

CONCLUSION

State farms emerged from a specific historical moment: an era when the world and Ghanaian citizens alike expectantly awaited Ghana's rapid rise, and when the Convention People's Party believed that only a jet-propelled economic push could protect the new nation's sovereignty on the hostile international stage. As conceived, the SFC responded directly to the nation's needs for food, jobs, and a diversified agricultural sector. The scheme drew resourcefully on ideas and aid from both the East and the West, for example by utilizing American-aided nurseries to plant its Soviet-inspired farms, and by tailoring Soviet plans in order to cut costs.

Yet in designing its agricultural plans, the CPP only selectively drew on the input of its own electorate, disregarding those who refuted the suitability of state-run farms in Ghana, those who opposed their establishment on already-cleared stool lands, and those who demonstrated their desire to cultivate private farms for the benefit of their own families. Between 1961 and 1966, several contingencies constrained state farms' viability: the State Planning Commission set overly ambitious targets, the USSR sold Ghana expensive and faulty equipment, and most importantly, Ghanaian citizens never wholly bought into the large-scale, government-owned agricultural scheme. By 1966, rather than having defied the problematic history of large-scale agriculture in Africa, as Nkrumah had deemed in 1958 that Ghana would do, the CPP had written yet another chapter on oppressive plantations. Ghana's agricultural output had not improved, and instead the CPP's agricultural venture had been a critical rural stage for the rehearsal of state-citizenry relations in Nkrumah's Ghana, where under the auspices of socialism, chiefs, supervisors, traders, farmers, and families prioritized their own wealth and welfare at the expense of national aspirations.