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**The Contributions of NGOs towards Food Security and Poverty Reduction in Ghana: The Case of the Hunger Project-Ghana in the Fanteakwa District.**

Samuel Okae-Adjei<sup>1</sup> and Patrick Addai<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Koforidua Polytechnic, P. O. Box 981, Koforidua Ghana, Africa.

Email: [yawsammy1964@yahoo.com](mailto:yawsammy1964@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup>The Hunger Project-Ghana, Fanteakwa District, Begoro Ghana.

Email: [paddai278@yahoo.com](mailto:paddai278@yahoo.com)

<sup>1</sup>Correspondence: [yawsammy1964@yahoo.com](mailto:yawsammy1964@yahoo.com)

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**Abstract**

The study sought to assess the various interventions carried out by The Hunger Project (THP)-Ghana, (an NGO) towards food security and reducing hunger and poverty in the Fanteakwa District. It examines food security issues in the study area, analyzes THP's partnership with other agencies and ascertains how the organization economically empowers its partners. The study combined both quantitative and qualitative tools, particularly questionnaires and interviews to generate data for the study. Statistical tools like frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts were used to interpret data. The study revealed that THP's intervention in communities in the District has contributed immensely towards food security and economic empowerment. It has also enhanced the lives of community partners. Moreover, agricultural education and access to credit have helped farmers to adopt modern agricultural practices and increased their farm sizes. The study recommends that the approach of THP should be integrated into a National Policy for low cost implementation to achieve desired results and ensure sustainability. Partnership should be created between THP and the government to ensure a scale-up of its activities in other parts of the country.

**Keywords:** poverty, hunger, food security, NGOs, hunger project

## INTRODUCTION

In September 2000, leaders from 189 nations agreed on a vision for the future: a world with less poverty, hunger and disease, greater survival prospects for mothers and their infants, better educated children, equal opportunities for women, and a healthier environment; a world in which developed and developing countries work in partnership for the betterment of all. This vision took the shape of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which provides a framework of time bound targets by which progress can be measured. The targets of the MDGs are expected to be met in 2015.

In meeting the MDGs, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) 1 and 2 were developed to suit the Ghanaian situation. However, government cannot achieve these alone. There are various stakeholders whose contribution can help immensely to achieve the goals by the stipulated time. The eighth goal of the MDGs is to develop global partnership for development. It is against this backdrop that many governments and institutions have opened their doors to partnerships with other agencies and institutions who share in their vision and mission. The contribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to achieve the MDGs cannot be glossed over.

In this study, the role of The Hunger Project-Ghana (an NGO) in helping to achieve MDG 1 which is; eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, particularly in the Fanteakwa District would be critically analysed. The Hunger Project is an international NGO based in New York, USA and operating in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It has since its inception in Ghana in 1996, been involved in capacity building of communities towards the sustainable end of hunger and poverty through self-reliance for productive and healthy living (THP Annual Report, 2011).

According to the Global Hunger Index (GHI), in 2013, Ghana ranked 18<sup>th</sup> among other countries which are working hard to reduce hunger. The UNDP Human Development Report (2013) indicates that Ghana had an insignificant change of less than 0.2 in its poverty index. This presupposes that if Ghana has to achieve MDG 1 then there must be combined efforts by both government and private partners to tackle the issue of poverty and hunger.

It is worthy to note that NGOs reach out to the corners of communities with their interventions more than government agencies. However, in spite of efforts made by NGOs to national development, little empirical evidence exists to show the impact of their activities on the communities in which they operate particularly in reducing poverty and hunger. It is therefore worthwhile examining the contributions of the Hunger Project –Ghana towards food security and reducing hunger and poverty especially in the Fanteakwa District in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Since little research has been conducted in this area, this study attempts to fill the research gap.

The main objective of this study is to assess the contributions of The Hunger Project – Ghana towards food security and reducing extreme hunger and poverty in the Fanteakwa District in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

Specifically, the study seeks to investigate the various interventions carried out by The Hunger Project-Ghana to reduce extreme hunger and poverty in the Fanteakwa District. It also aims to assess the extent to which partner communities have been economically empowered by the activities of The Hunger Project-Ghana in the district. Again, the study analyses food security issues in the operational areas of The Hunger Project-Ghana in the Fanteakwa District. Finally, it evaluates partnerships that exist between The Hunger Project-Ghana and government agencies in reducing hunger and poverty in the District.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What interventions are carried out by The Hunger Project – Ghana to reduce hunger and poverty in the Fantekwa District?
2. To what extent have partner communities been economically empowered through the activities of The Hunger Project-Ghana in the Fantekwa District?
3. What is the state of food security in the operational areas of The Hunger Project-Ghana in the Fantekwa District?
4. Which partnership bonds exist between The Hunger Project-Ghana and government agencies in collaborating to reduce hunger and poverty in the Fantekwa District?

### ***Food Security***

The challenge facing world leaders today is how to reduce poverty and ensure food security. This challenge is due to the over growing population of the world, coupled with worsening climatic conditions as well as the high poverty rate among people. Though the world has made significant stride in the area of improved technology of farming leading to the improvement in the food production and food storage, this has not translated to ensuring food security to all people. Evidence available indicates that the number of people suffering from chronic hunger globally hit 1.2 billion in 2009 (FAO, 2009). The term “food security” became conspicuous after the World Food Conference in 1974 and was further highlighted by the commitment of world leaders to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Food security has been defined by the World Bank as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life” (World Bank, 1986, p.8). This definition was subsequently augmented by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to include the nutritional value and food preferences. Thus, according to the FAO (2009), food security is a situation when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy and active life.

Food insecurity on the other hand, is the absence of food security and applies to a wide range of phenomena ranging from famine to periodic hunger to uncertain food supply (Bokeloh et al., 2009). It also refers to the inability of households or individuals to meet the required consumption levels in the face of fluctuating production, price and income (Moharjan & Chhetri, 2006). The effects of food insecurity on individuals and a nation cannot be over emphasized since no country can develop with food insecure citizenry. Scientific evidences linking food insecurity to the deterioration in human, social, cultural and political wellbeing has been established in the literature. For instance, food insecurity is linked with wide range of poor health and nutritional outcomes in adolescents, adults, and children (Campell, 1991). Food insecurity also affects both psychosocial and physical health outcomes (Hadley &Patil, 2006; Hadley et al., 2008) and leads to overall poorer health among members of food-insecure households (Hadley et al., 2008), poor pregnancy outcomes, including low birth weight and gestational diabetes (Laraia et al., 2010), increased maternal depression and anxiety (Whitaker et al., 2006;), as well as reduced self-esteem (Laraia et al., 2006). Weiser et al., (2007) revealed that food insecurity was linked to high-risk sexual behavior among women in Botswana and Swaziland. According to Victora et al., (2008) inadequate nutrition before the age of two years could result in permanent effects on an individual’s physical, mental development as well as future potential. Thus, the literature portrays the negative effects of food insecurity on the citizens of a nation and the nation at large. It is against this backdrop that NGOs like The Hunger Project – Ghana are synergizing to ensure the achievement of food security thereby eradicating extreme hunger and poverty from the society.

### *The Role of NGOs in Reducing Hunger and Poverty*

NGOs are defined as civil society organizations that are formed independently of the State but register voluntarily under specified laws in order to gain official recognition to pursue purposes that are not self-serving but oriented towards public benefit (National Consultative Group (NGG), 2000). NGOs in Ghana may be national as well as international; secular as well as faith-based; and membership or non-membership based. They operate in fields such as health, education, rural and urban development, environment, population and social welfare (NCG, 2000). NGOs are also involved in employment creation, micro-credit financing, economic development, skills training, gender awareness and action, peace and human rights, informal economic activity, anti-corruption, poverty reduction and advocacy on policy reforms. They may operate across sectors, regions and at the centre in their service to the community, the deprived and underprivileged as well as the general public. NGOs are not homogeneous actors. They differ in activities, structure, organization, resources, leadership, membership, ideology and aspirations. However, almost all NGOs work to achieve either one or more of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (NCG, 2000).

An African Development Bank report notes that countries such as Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean are on course to fulfill many of the MDGs. But few African countries are likely to meet most of them (African Development Bank, 2002). What will it take to achieve the MDGs? This question preoccupies international donor agencies, developing country governments, policy think tanks, international and national NGOs, local communities, and citizens' groups. Actions at all levels, from the global to the local, are called for; and the recommendations for what needs to be done are numerous. Among the prescriptions that these various actors give is the need to create an enabling environment. Thus, putting in place conditions that will facilitate the efforts of actors in the public, private, and NGO/civil society sectors to take the various steps needed to reach the MDGs targets (African Development Bank, 2002). If the environment is not favorable to an organization, it would be difficult for the organization to operate effectively. It is against this backdrop that many actors within the NGO and civil society sectors have called on governments to create an enabling environment for NGOs to operate effectively to help achieve the MDGs.

The role of NGOs in achieving the MDGs especially eradicating extreme hunger and poverty cannot be overemphasized. Suharko (2007) posits that NGOs contributions to poverty reduction are limited. Edwards & Hulme (1995 p.6) reports that it is difficult to find general evidence that NGOs are close to the poor. There is growing evidence that in terms of poverty reduction, NGOs do not perform as effectively as had been usually assumed by many agencies. More specific evidence is provided by Riddell and Robinson (1995) who conducted a study on sixteen (16) NGOs in four countries in Asia and Africa. Their study revealed that while NGO projects reach the poor people, they tend not to reach down to the very poorest. Their projects also tend to be on small scale. It is also rare for projects undertaken by NGOs to be financially self-sufficient. Due to the above limitations, the roles of NGOs in alleviating poverty cannot be exaggerated (Riddell & Robinson, 1995).

### **METHODOLOGY**

A case study design was used in the study to assess the contribution of THP towards reducing hunger and poverty in the Fanteakwa District. The researchers adopted the mixed method. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. The target population of the study includes Staff of The Hunger Project, Agriculture Extension Agents (AEAs), Agriculture Trainers of Trainees (Agriculture TOTs), and farmers within the communities of Fanteakwa District where THP interventions on food security are carried out. THP works with twenty communities in the Fanteakwa District with a total population of approximately twenty-one thousand (21,000) men, women and children.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select staff of The Hunger Project, Agriculture Extension Officers and Agriculture TOTs. Merriam (1998) opined that the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for in-depth study. The researchers therefore purposely selected these people to generate meaningful data that will help them to answer the research questions.

The simple random sampling method was adopted to select farmers from four (4) communities in the study area. In all, a total sample of seventy (70) respondents made up of two (2) extension agents of MOFA, four (4) Agriculture TOTs, sixty two (62) farmers and two (2) THP staff were used for the study. Two main types of data considered were secondary and primary data. Secondary data was obtained from various documents such as the 2011 Annual reports of THP, books, journals and the Internet. Primary quantitative data were obtained through questionnaire administration and face-to-face interviews. The questionnaires were answered by farmers and Agriculture TOTs whilst THP staff and Agriculture Extension Agents were interviewed. In order to give room for flexibility in data gathering, interview guides were used for the interviews. The semi-structured interviews (face-to-face) helped to compare the responses from the questionnaires to ascertain the validity, consistency and reliability of the data.

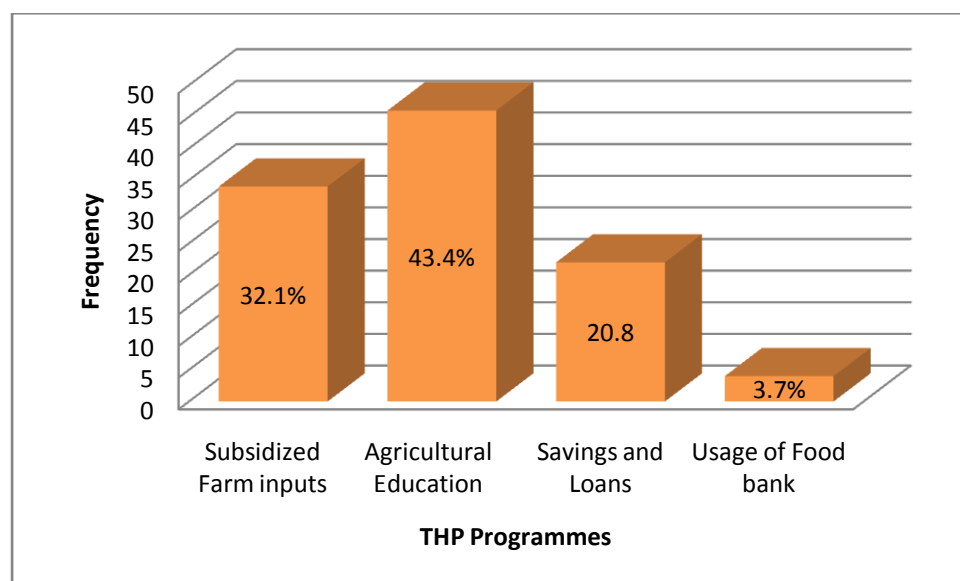
The questionnaires and interview guides were sub-themed to facilitate easy identification. This precaution was taken to ensure quick detection of any source of error when they occurred in the tabulation of the data. The responses to the various items in the questionnaire were coded, tabulated and statistically analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, percentages, charts and graphs were used to describe the quantitative data. The qualitative data gathered from the interviews were also grouped under common themes, coded and presented pictorially. Documentary data was analyzed using content analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Although seventy (70) people were expected to participate in the research, sixty-eight (68) participated, representing 97.1% response rate. Seventy eight percent (78%) of respondents were men while 22% were women. This reflects the generally low participation and involvement of women in farming activities and other development interventions in Ghana.

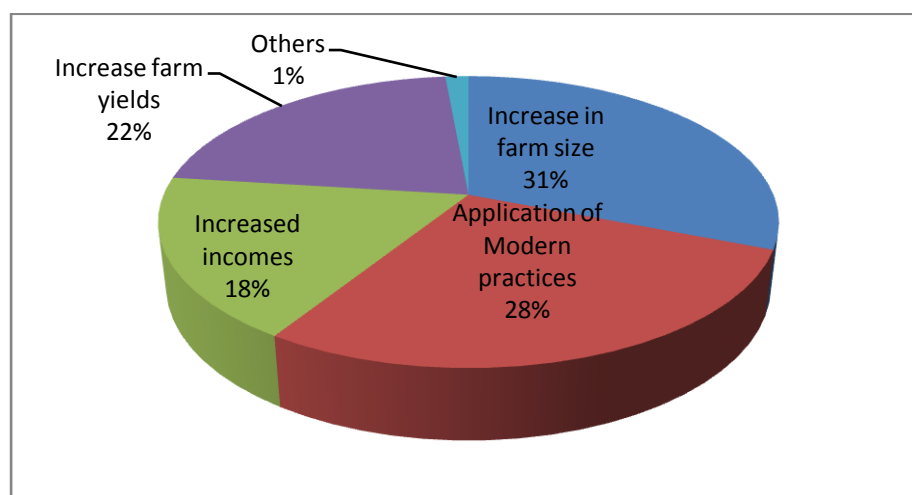
The age of participants in this research ranged from 21 years to 70 years. Respondents who were aged between 21 and 30 years were 13.4% while 28.3% of respondents were between the ages 31 and 40 years. 28.3% were aged between 41 and 50 years while 20% were between ages 51 and 60 years. Only 10% of respondents were aged between 61 and 70 years. From this data, it can be deduced that very few people among the youth in the rural areas are engaged in farming. The rural youth might have drifted to the urban areas through rural-urban migration.

Data collected revealed that 28.4% of respondents had no formal education, 55% had basic education, and 8.3% had secondary or technical education whilst 8.3% had tertiary education. From the statistics, it could be suggested that there is a generally low standard of education in the rural areas.

*Interventions carried out by THP to reduce hunger and poverty in the Study Area***Figure 1 Most Impactful Agricultural Programme of the Hunger Project**

Source: Field Data, 2014

**Figure 1** shows how respondents indicated the most impactful programme of THP in relation to agriculture and food security. From the chart above, it can be noted that respondents had received more impact through education on modern agriculture practices. This education has helped to transform farming activities from traditional less-productive practices to high-yielding modern practices. This affirms the literature provided by The Hunger Project (THP Annual Report, 2010), that agriculture education helps to improve the knowledge of farmers and their confidence in farming. The beneficiary farmers indicated that their farming activities have now improved tremendously with proportionate increase in yields and income.

**Figure 2: Benefits from THP's Agriculture Programme**

Source: Field Data, 2014

Participants in the research were to indicate what benefits have accrued to them as a result of THP's agricultural programs. Fig. 1.1.2 shows that 31% of the respondents noted that THP's agriculture programs have helped them to increase their farm sizes, 22% indicated that the agriculture interventions have helped them to increase their farm yields, while 18% mentioned that their income levels have improved through THP's agriculture programs. Moreover, 28% of the respondents specified that THP's agriculture programs have helped them to employ modern agriculture practices while 1% of respondents noted other benefits. These benefits have contributed to an enhanced living of THP partners in the communities under study.

### **Direct Benefits of THP Interventions to Families of Farmers**

The researchers examined how THP's intervention had been beneficial to families of respondents. It is worth noting that some respondents chose more than one benefit. It was revealed that 63.6% of the respondents indicated that they have been able to pay their children's school fees regularly as a result of the benefits they derived from agriculture programs. While 21.6% specified that they have been able to initiate and or complete building projects for their families, 10.2% of the respondents noted that they have been able to establish new businesses which also fetch them extra income to support their families' upkeep. Also, 4.6% of the respondents indicated other benefits accrued to their families. From the above data, it could be deduced that THP's agriculture interventions have contributed to supporting families to take care of their children and other family needs. This indicates the rippling effects of interventions that are carried out by agencies and NGOs.

### *Economic Empowerment of THP Partners*

#### **Respondents' Participation in Alternative Livelihood Programmes**

Respondents were asked if they had participated in THP's alternative livelihood programs (ALP). While 56.9% of the respondents indicated that they had not participated in THP's alternative livelihood programs before, 43.1% of respondents had taken part in the program. The alternative livelihood program is aimed at helping farmers engage in other economic ventures. Thus, 43.1% of the respondents had acquired new employable skills which they could engage in to reap economic benefits. This therefore shows the contribution of THP in ensuring that farmers gain other jobs to economically empower them.

Most of the farmers engage in rain-fed farming and thus could only farm during the major season which lasts for four (4) months and sometimes the minor season which last for three (3) months. Thus, farmers were actively involved in farming activities for approximately seven (7) months in a year. The question is, what do they do during the five (5) months that they do not farm? It is against this backdrop that THP has educated farmers to learn other skills which they could engage in so as to reap in economic benefits all year round. The organization does not only create awareness but also train farmers in employable skills in partnership with other service providers.

While 28% of the respondents indicated they have learnt skills in soap production, 48% of them had learnt skills in bee keeping and honey production. Again, 16% of the respondents who had participated in alternative livelihood programs had learnt skills in grasscutter rearing whilst 8% had learnt skills in cosmetic production. Beneficiaries of these programs have indicated that apart from producing for commercial purposes, these skills have helped them to produce products like soap and cosmetics for domestic purposes. This helps them to save monies that they would have used to purchase these items on the market.

### Access to THPs Micro Finance

Participants were asked if they had been able to access loans under the Micro Finance program operated by the THP. It was revealed that 55% of the farmers had been able to access loans from THP to invest in their various economic endeavors. This indicates that more than half of the respondents had benefitted from the THP micro finance programme. Thus, THP has been able to reach out to more than half of their partners within the four communities under study. Staff of THP who responded to the interview guide noted that the micro finance loans are disbursed under group solidarity approach. The aim of the Micro Finance programme as noted by one of the staff of THP interviewed is “to inculcate a savings habit into our partners so as to improve their incomes and enhance their knowledge in financial management”.

Many financial institutions do not give credit to farmers because they claim it is too “risky”. Thus, this intervention of THP to provide credit to farmers and to also instill in them the savings attitude is a giant step that will boost agricultural production to ensure food security. This intervention is worth emulating by other NGOs, financial institutions and government.

### *The State of Food Security in the Operational Areas of the Study Area*

The researchers asked respondents how THP’s work in their communities have contributed to food security and enhanced their lives. From Fig 1.1.3, 71.7% of respondents indicated that it was extremely true that THP’s operations in their community have helped to improve food security while 26.7% of respondents noted that it was slightly true that the interventions of THP had contributed to food security in their communities. However, 1.6% of respondents were of the view that the statement was either true or untrue. None of the respondents disagreed with the statement. This statistics indicates that THP has contributed immensely to enhance food security in the communities where they operate.

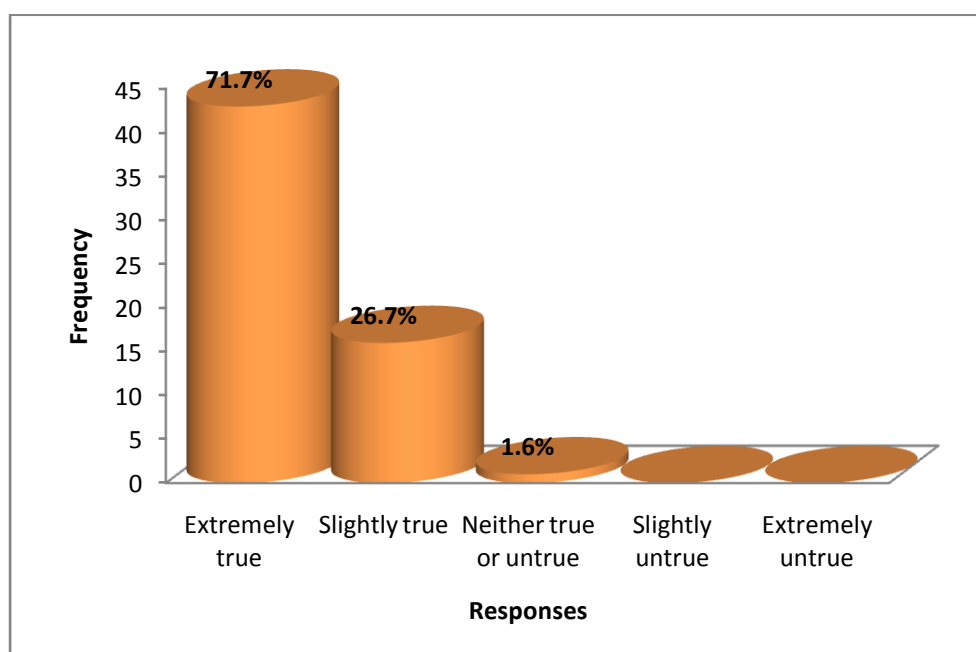


Figure 3 Respondents' impression of THP's work



***Partnerships that exist between THP and Government Agencies in Reducing Hunger and Poverty in the Study Area***

The Agriculture Extension Agents (AEAs) that were interviewed indicated their knowledge of THP programmes especially activities related to crop improvement. They had knowledge of THP's distribution of subsidized farm inputs, micro finance, and alternative livelihood project and agriculture education in communities. They hinted that they had participated in some of the educational sessions of THP. One of the respondents iterated that "I have had the opportunity to educate farmers with the Agriculture TOTs. Their work compliments my work and I will continue to partner with them". They indicated that they would want to partner with the Agriculture TOTs and support them in their activities. They however emphasized that prior notice should be given to them to prepare and support the TOTs.

The AEAs indicated that THP's performance in helping communities in the District to reduce hunger and poverty was excellent. This shows that the work of THP has achieved positive results. This is not only seen by staff and volunteers of THP but also other stakeholders.

The AEAs noted that partnership arrangements between THP and the Agricultural Unit in the Fanteakwa District needed to be improved and strengthened. They suggested that regular meetings and forums should be organized to provide stakeholders the opportunity to share information and plan activities together.

One respondent suggested that "THP should also invest in buying farming implements like irrigation pumps and sell them to farmers at a subsidized price with a flexible repayment mode". This, he stated, would help farmers to farm all year without solely depending on the rains.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are key players in socio-economic development of nations. The study assessed the contributions of NGOs towards food security and reducing hunger and poverty with particular interest in the activities of THP-Ghana in the Fanteakwa District. The study revealed findings which suggest that THP's operations in the Fanteakwa District has improved food production and contributed towards reducing hunger and poverty in the District. The involvement of community volunteers who carry out community-level education has also contributed to the success of THP's programs.

There are however, some weaknesses which THP-Ghana needs to address. Pertinent among them is improving partnership with stakeholders, for example the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. Also, the usage of the epicenter food bank should be critically examined. To strengthen THP operations and also promote food security in Ghana, the researchers recommend that farmers' access to quality information should be enhanced. Thus, the government should develop a policy where literate or semi-literate community members are trained as Trainers of trainees (TOTs) to educate other members of the community. This could be achieved at a relatively lower cost with desired results. Resources should be provided to Agricultural Extension Agents to monitor these TOTs to carry out their duties effectively.

Moreover, the food bank which is a component of a multi-faceted epicenter building should be re-examined. The Hunger Project in partnership with stakeholders should provide means of transporting food produce from communities that are distant from the epicenter. The ventilation in the food bank should also be improved to prevent foodstuffs from going bad. On the other hand, the usage of the food bank could be redefined if the afore-mentioned recommendations are not implemented. The food bank could be used as a depot for chemicals, fertilizers and other farming

inputs. This will bring quality farming inputs closer to farmers who have to travel to urban centers and markets to purchase inputs for their farming activities.

Furthermore, the government and stakeholders should liaise to create an enabling environment for farmers to get access to credit. This would help farmers and unemployed youth to be encouraged and motivated them to farm. This initiative would help reduce the high rates of unemployment especially among the youth and also boost food and animal production to guarantee food security in Ghana.

Lastly, in order to deepen partnership with stakeholders, it is recommended that a quarterly or bi-annual review meeting is organized by THP to share information with stakeholders so that they will be in the know of activities, challenges and successes of community volunteers and THP. This would also provide the stakeholders opportunity to provide technical advice to volunteers so as to improve their service delivery.

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