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ALLIANCE FOR SCIENCE GHANA

Ghana needs a “Covid-19 Emergency Food Security Preparedness Plan”

The world is sitting on the edge now as a result of the spread of the Corona virus (Covid – 19), creating difficult moments for all countries. Covid-19 has killed more than 14,704 people world over with more than 339,697 cases recorded. In Ghana, there are 24 cases and 1 death.

As science people, we believe the directives given by the President and measures being taken by the government as a whole are necessary in fighting the disease. We also commend the government for its kind attention and investments in the health sector which appears the most important sector in these times. However, we think it will also be prudent if the state took a look at other important sectors which would equally play vital roles in these hard times. The agricultural sector stands out in this.

The hard reality facing us all is that Ghana is virtually sitting on a food security time bomb that some attention needs to be paid to. Ghana has made a lot of progress in ensuring food for all over the last few years but this virus threatens to erode the massive gains that have been made.

The effect of the recent notice issued by the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) last Friday, directing closure of all markets in the capital on March 23 for a fumigation exercise has sent us all a clear warning that our food supply in these difficult times is in trouble.

Markets have recorded higher numbers of people. Unscrupulous traders have unfortunately taken advantage of the situation and increased the prices of some food items like cereals, vegetables, tuber crops, fruits and eggs. Buyers appear not to have a choice but to buy at the hiked prices to get enough to feed themselves and their families. The situation will only get worse if the situation persists.

In these difficult times, Ghanaians need to hear from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture on what it’s “Covid-19 Emergency Food Security Preparedness Plan” is. This plan should clearly spell out details of;

- The quantum of available food in stock at the Ghana Buffer Stock Company and private warehouses.
- A strategy to release more food into the system based on needs in particular towns at specific points in time.
- A strategy to ensure prices of food do not spiral out of control and to avoid hoarding.
- A strategy to ramp up food production in these times when some farmers are not going out to the fields to harvest and traders are not transporting products because people are staying home.
- Safety mechanisms to ensure the food supply systems do not become a source of spread for the Corona virus across the country as food is moved from one point to another.
- A collaborative strategy among the different players in the food security value chain that ensures food supply does not cut even in times of a potential lock down, and that it would be possible to get food delivered to the homes of people even if they are forced into quarantine or isolation.

- A strategy on how Ghana will substitute for the more than US\$100 million worth of food we import into the country on monthly basis now that we cannot depend on countries from which we import major agricultural products such as rice, wheat and poultry.
- A strategy to increase investments in local agriculture, commercial farming and green house set-ups and operations for increased production, marketing and storage.
- A strategy to enhance postharvest operations and technologies, as well as and storage facilities to store food for future use.
- A strategy by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to increase farmer access to planting materials, fertilisers, farm equipment as well as protective gears.
- A clear policy direction on major agricultural innovations such as genetic engineering and genome editing which has the potential of helping produce crops which are high yielding, early maturing, drought tolerant, disease and pest resistance, among others for the benefit of Ghanaians.

We need to see action to keep Ghanaians food secure in these times. Let us not forget that food is an essential component of our daily lives if we can be able to overcome this virus. A good immune system is the surest bet to recovering in case of an infection and nothing boosts the immune system of human beings better than a balanced, good and safe food. It is highly possible that food and nutritional related challenges could cause more illness and deaths in these difficult times than the real virus itself if care is not taken. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture should act now.

Signed

Farmer Evans Okomeng (0544363126)

Abigail Akoto (0241273208)

Dennis Baffuor – Awuah (0276938495)

For Team Alliance for Science Ghana (<https://allianceforsciencegh.org>)