

Community food banks can combat food insecurity

Excess and waste are usually considered symptomatic of the affluent West, but trained chef Elijah Amoo Addo knows these are problems too in his home country, Ghana.



Image by 123RF

One day he saw a homeless man collecting food scraps to feed others in the capital, Accra. Watching someone pick up food no-one else would eat for people no-one was helping, got him thinking.

Amoo Addo believed there was enough food in the west African nation to feed all of its nearly 27 million people, but more had to be done to educate and inspire people to help those in need.

The result was a charity, now called Food For All Ghana.

The process is simple and not unlike recent French legislation that forces supermarkets to donate unsold food to charities and food banks, which campaigners want to see spread across Europe.

Food manufacturers and suppliers are asked for unused and excess food or products approaching their best-before dates.

Every weekend volunteers visit orphanages, hospitals, schools and communities using donated goods to cook for those in need and hand over ingredients for future use.

"We have kids who are out of school just because they can't get food to eat," Amoo Adoo, 25, told AFP. "We have families who sometimes in the day can't even afford a plate of food. We have orphanages which serve as a shelter for homeless children, also running short of food."

At the New Life Nungua children's home in Accra's suburbs, the institution's founder, Nii Afotey Botwe II, said funding was a struggle and the help from Addo was welcome.

The donated food offered a change in the children's diets, providing them with variety the orphanage often couldn't afford to supply.

Among items recently donated to the home were potato chips, condiments and tomato juice for cooking. Food For All Ghana volunteers also cooked rice and meat for the youngsters.

According to the charity, more than 48,000 free meals have been supplied in this way in the last three years.

Food insecurity

Samuel Ato Aggrey, quality assurance officer at the Kwatsons food import and distributing firm which has been participating in the scheme, described the initiative as "a way of helping society".

Ghana was classed a lower middle-income status country after the discovery of oil in 2010, but still has poor development indicators, particularly in the north, where poverty heightens food insecurity.

Just under 25% of the population lives below the poverty line, according to the World Bank, with incomes stretched in recent years by rising inflation and a depreciating currency.

Like many countries in West Africa, Ghana lacks social welfare structures. Instead, family and friends are relied upon to step in when times get hard.

Amoo Addo, however, said this didn't always happen. Pregnant teenagers as well as people with addictions, mental illness or disabilities, are often disowned by families and forced to live on the street.

Regardless of how they got there, they deserve the right to food, he said.

A 2013 study conducted by the charity into waste in the supply chain and its economic and environmental impacts indicated that more than 25% of food in Ghana goes uneaten.

The report recommended that companies conduct regular "food waste audits", set targets to reduce waste, and called for the government to support recovery and public education programmes.

A 2016 Unicef report said 3.5 million children (28.3 percent) live in poverty in Ghana and 1.2 million of those live in households unable to provide even adequate food.

Food banks

But reducing food losses by about 15% would provide enough food to feed more than seven million Ghanaians every year, Amoo Addo's charity suggested.

For Amoo Addo, simply combating inefficiencies in the food supply chain could end hunger in Ghana.

"We are not far away from solving the issue of hunger but until we solve the issue of food wastage ... it might seem that hunger will always be in our society," he said.

In May, Food For All Ghana hosted its first conference aimed at cutting waste, linking suppliers and distributors, and encouraging more companies to help feed those in need.

Incentives to businesses who donate excess or unused produce were a key factor and government could play its part, he added.

In the next five years Amoo Addo wants his organisation to be rolled out across the continent, making it Africa's premier "food recovery" programme.

"There is a need for Africa to actually have these community-based food banks to ensure that feeding the vulnerable within our society becomes a possibility because Africa actually is producing enough food," he added.

"We are importing enough food. However the inefficiencies within our supply chain makes it look as if we aren't food-secure but ... Africa is food secure if we ensure efficiency within our supply chain."

Source: [AFP](#)

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