

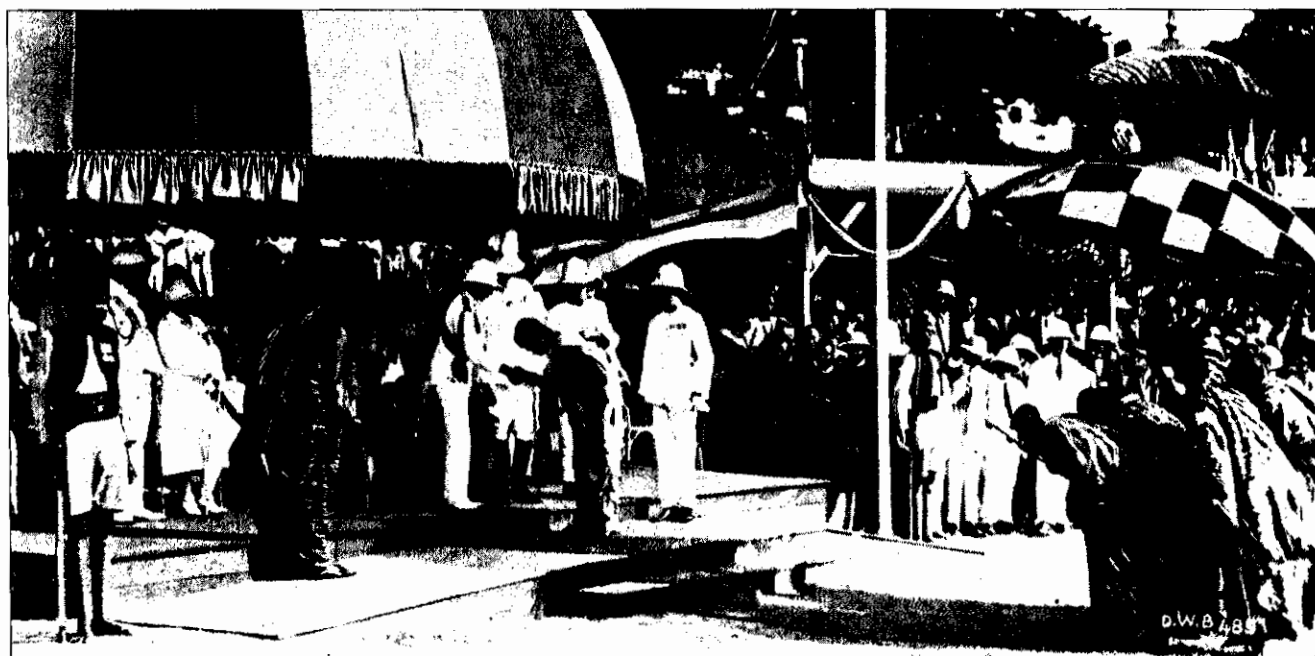
Crown government over the coastal forts was established in 1821, later relinquished to the British Africa Company of Merchants, and reinstated in 1843, providing protection and wielding authority over several coastal ethnic groups. From then on, British rule was extended through treaty and conquest. As a tax regime was introduced, economic exploitation became systematised. Revenue-raising began in 1852 in an agreement between the Governor and chiefs under British protection.

As Britain's exploitative imperial rule in the Gold Coast took hold, so a shared sense of patriotism began to evolve among the formerly divided Africans. Struggles over land were the first arena in which their ambitions were played out. After King Aggrey of Cape Coast was exiled by the British because he refused to cede land to them in the nineteenth century, an early nationalist movement was formed. The new education system bred an elite class who began to agitate for African rights. In 1896, members of this elite formed the Aboriginal Rights' Protection Society, again to protest against threats to traditional land tenure.

By the 1920s, the struggle had moved to a demand for elected representation on the Gold Coast Colony's Legislative Council. John Mensah Sarbah, a lawyer, was one of the movement's leaders. Although partial representation was granted in 1925, it was not until 1946 that elected members formed a decisive majority on the Council and African representatives from the Ashanti Protectorate were included.

Before the Second World War, the nationalist struggle was mainly confined to the educated class. Dr J. B. Danquah, also a lawyer, and others encouraged the formation of youth movements which became the forerunners of the popular struggle. But during the war, ordinary African soldiers were recruited to fight alongside their British counterparts, mostly in Burma. Their experiences of fighting had a profound impact on African

▼ *The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) meets Ashanti chiefs (many of them wearing kente) in the 1920s. The umbrella signifies chiefly authority.*



servicemen, yet after the war they were expected to resume dependant and subservient positions, with little or no compensation for their contribution. The resentment this caused led to the Ghanaian nationalist movement becoming nation-wide.

In 1947, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was formed, the first nationalist movement which had self-government as its goal. Its founders were called 'the Big Six': Dr J.B. Danquah, Mr Obetsibi-Lampsey, Edward Akuffo-Addo, Ako Adjei, William Ofori Atta, and Dr Kwame

Nkrumah. Nkrumah had been invited from London, where he was studying law, to be the UGCC's general secretary. He was arrested for activism, and later broke with the Convention, which aimed for independence only in the shortest possible time. Nkrumah, a charismatic speaker, formed the more radical Convention Peoples' Party (CPP), which demanded immediate self-government, and soon developed



*The Big Six: members of the nationalist elite Nkrumah, Obetsebi-Lampsey, Adjei, Akuffo-Addo, Danquah, and Ofori Atta.*

a mass following. He and his followers became known as the 'verandah boys', because they slept anywhere when campaigning, a symbol of their identification with the people.

The issue of the treatment of African ex-servicemen again altered the course of history in 1948: a peaceful march, organised to demand a resettlement package promised to ex-servicemen, was making its way to the colonial seat of government at Osu Castle in Accra when it was stopped at a police barricade. The British Commanding Officer at the barrier ordered his men to shoot at the marchers. When the African second-in-command countermanded the order and the police did not fire, the Commanding Officer shot into the crowd himself, killing three ex-servicemen. Their deaths sparked rioting in Accra and other cities and further strengthened the numbers and the resolve of the independence movement. The three men killed are still commemorated at Ghana's annual independence celebrations.

The CPP won the elections for a new Legislative Assembly in 1951. Nkrumah gained a seat despite being in prison for instigating 'positive action', strikes, and non-violent resistance. As imprisonment had given Nkrumah martyr status, the British had no choice but to release Nkrumah and invite him to form a government.

For another five years, control over defence and foreign policy remained in the hands of the British. In 1956, the CPP under Nkrumah as Prime Minister passed a motion calling for independence, which was quickly approved by the British parliament. Renamed Ghana, the country gained its independence on 6 March 1957, the first independent nation in sub-Saharan Africa.

# From dream to despair



▲ From popular independence leader to one-party ruler: Kwame Nkrumah attending the 1965 Commonwealth conference in London.

At independence, Ghana started out with substantial sums in the national accounts and a flourishing economy based on cocoa and mineral exports. Nkrumah's vision was of an industrialised, 'modern' Ghana, to be achieved by putting in place his own brand of socialism, with state-sponsored industrialisation and government-led mechanisation of agriculture. National savings and taxes on the cocoa and mineral sectors were to fund the new investment.

In keeping with this vision, Nkrumah nationalised foreign-owned businesses and started the construction of factories from tomato-canning to sugar-refining. Capital-

intensive agriculture projects were initiated, such as rice farming with tractors. Collective farms based on socialist principles were organised, including the 'Workers' Brigade' farms.

Plans soon went awry for various reasons. There were shortages of trained management and technical personnel to run the new state enterprises; many projects were badly thought out and carried out for political rather than commercial reasons. For example, a meat factory was built near Bolgatanga to produce both meat and hides for shoe manufacture even though there was insufficient livestock available in the area for the factory to operate at anywhere near full capacity. Attempts at agricultural collectivisation and mechanisation turned out to be huge economic failures. Management was poor, and although large amounts of capital were spent on this sector, productivity at the collective farms was pitifully low compared to small-scale enterprises. Meanwhile, family farmers and small-scale industries were virtually ignored.

Other developments were more promising, however. The CPP administration invested in health and education expansion, roads, and in the Akosombo dam, a hydro-electric power generation project. Some attempts were made to address the disparities in levels of development between the north and south.

When national savings ran out, the CPP paid for essential imports through domestic and overseas borrowing. Mismanagement and corruption in state-owned enterprises and at collective farms became endemic; by the mid-1960s, debt and inflation were the order of the day,

He who fashions a  
footpath does not  
know that behind him  
it is crooked.

Akan proverb

and an overvalued currency discouraged other countries from buying Ghanaian goods. Earnings from cocoa declined, as foreign competition emerged and world prices fell. Local production fell as a result of the Ghanaian Marketing Board's bureaucratic incompetence and the low prices it paid to farmers. Economic decline had set in.

Meanwhile, Ghana was moving from a newly independent democratic nation to an authoritarian one-party state. Nkrumah had begun to clamp down on political opposition. He pushed through constitutional change which enabled him to be declared President for Life in 1960 and allowed him to appoint his supporters to positions of leadership in the administration, compromising the independent and meritocratic nature of the civil service. In 1964, all parties apart from the CPP were banned.

In 1966, Nkrumah's regime was brought to an abrupt halt. Officers who had felt increasingly dissatisfied with the economic and political situation, staged a coup, encouraged by successful military take overs in various African nations during the 1960s. Nkrumah was out of the country at the time; he never returned to Ghana, living in exile in Guinea. He died in Bucharest, Romania, in 1972.

### **Nkrumah and Pan-Africanism**

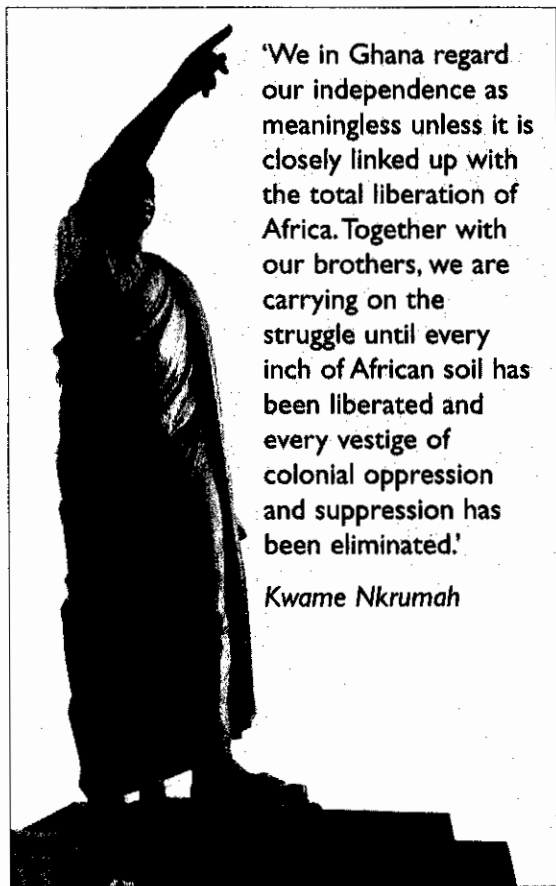
Nkrumah's vision extended wider than the achievement of independence for Ghana. During his stay in London, he had played an important part in the Pan-Africanist and anti-colonial movement and met the activists W.E.B. DuBois from the USA and George Padmore from the West Indies. Nkrumah dreamt of a federation of African States (in this context, he saw his own marriage to an Egyptian as a political act). This vision continues to resonate today, in Africa and throughout the diaspora.

Seeing Ghana as the 'Black Star' of Africa, which could spearhead the campaign for independence for all African states, Nkrumah committed national resources to this effort, another factor in causing Ghana's economic misfortunes.

Nkrumah also helped found the Non-Aligned Movement, a grouping of states that tried to pursue political directions independent of the cold-war division between East and West.

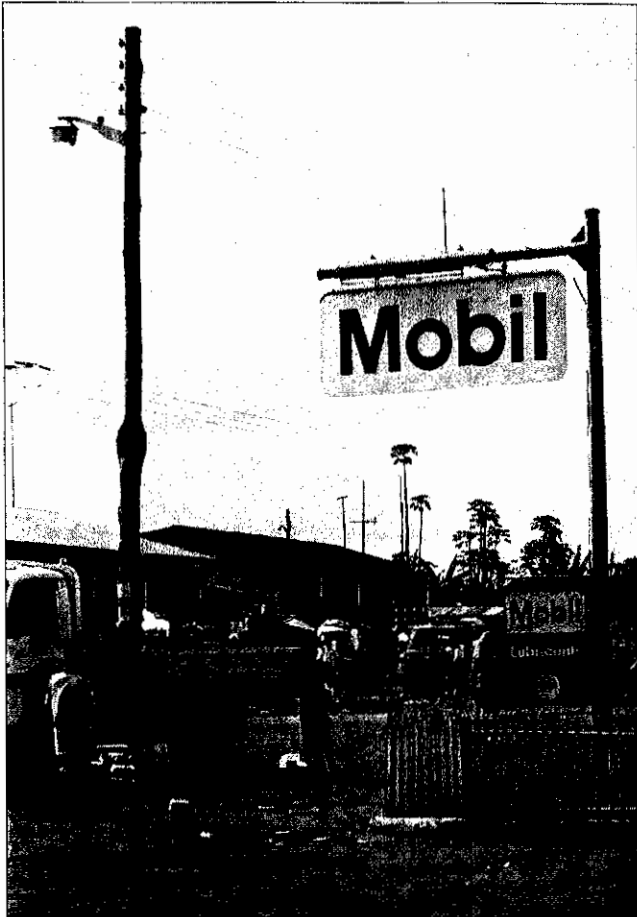
### **Changes of government and economic decline**

The military take over which toppled Nkrumah's regime led to three years of government by the National Liberation Council (NLC). The NLC included military personnel and civilians, whose policies were not substantially different to those pursued by the CPP.



'We in Ghana regard our independence as meaningless unless it is closely linked up with the total liberation of Africa. Together with our brothers, we are carrying on the struggle until every inch of African soil has been liberated and every vestige of colonial oppression and suppression has been eliminated.'

*Kwame Nkrumah*



▲ Dependence on oil imports worsened the state of Ghana's economy in the 1970s.

From the start, the NLC planned for a return to civilian rule. In 1968 the ban on political parties was lifted, and democratic elections were held in 1969. The Progress Party headed by Kofi Busia, a brilliant academic whose party had opposed Nkrumah in parliament, won and formed a new civilian administration.

Busia's government inherited a dismal economic situation: large foreign debts; even larger domestic debts which fuelled inflation; falling cocoa revenue. Busia drew up well thought-out austerity measures, including cuts in defence spending, but these were widely unpopular, especially within the armed forces. After two years in government, continued economic problems led to a second coup in 1972, staged under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Acheampong.

Acheampong's new National Redemption Council was a wholly military government, reorganised as the Supreme Military Council (SMC) in 1975. They saw an imposition of military organisation on every aspect of life as the solution to Ghana's problems. All ministries and state-owned enterprises were put under the

direction of military officers, and no timetable for a return to civilian rule was put forward until 1977.

The SMC regime earned popularity initially because Busia's austerity measures were revoked. When Operation Feed Yourself, a programme to stimulate national self-sufficiency in food, was launched, even students appeared in large numbers to assist at harvest time. But the reversal of economic restraint compounded economic woes: the trend towards decline continued, partly due to external factors. Steep hikes in world oil prices during and after 1974 meant that Ghana was left without fuel, because the country lacked foreign exchange and credit. Food production declined while the population grew. Although world cocoa prices rose later in the 1970s, many cocoa farmers had stopped investing in their farms and could not respond by increasing productivity. Patterns of smuggling across borders, which developed because of low prices paid to farmers in Ghana, also diminished government revenues from cocoa.

Accusations of government corruption began to fly, and the SMC initiated a crackdown on criticism. Independent newspapers were closed down, and journalists detained. The universities, which had become centres of opposition to the regime, were repeatedly closed; student protests were broken up by armed soldiers. There were calls for the restoration of civilian rule, although other shades of opinion were in favour

of 'union' government, a mix of military and elected civilian leaders. In a referendum in 1978, the people voted narrowly in favour of union government. But later in the year, the SMC forced Acheampong to resign and placed Lieutenant General Frederick Akuffo in power.

This change of government was prompted by the economic crisis into which Ghana was entering. Basic commodities were in short supply, inflation was estimated at 300 per cent, and cocoa production had dropped to half of the 1964 output. Calls for political freedom continued, as did strikes protesting against the economic and political situation. The government responded by planning for a return to civilian rule, and the ban on political parties was lifted in 1979.

Barely a month before the planned general elections, the first violent coup in Ghana took place: spearheaded by a young Flight Lieutenant, J.J. Rawlings, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) took power in the name of purging corruption. Heads and close associates of former military governments were executed, but the elections were held at the appointed time, and the AFRC sat back to monitor Dr Hilla Limann's new civilian regime.

Despite improved economic plans, Limann's attempts to turn the crisis around were ineffectual, and corruption continued unabated. Trade Unions began to protest that wages no longer covered even basic food needs. The stage was set for yet another coup.

### **The revolution and economic crisis**

J. J. Rawlings staged his 'Second Coming' on 31 December 1981. This coup was declared a 'revolution' after a radio broadcast in which Rawlings stated that he 'wanted a chance for the people, farmers, workers, soldiers, the rich and the poor, to be part of the decision-making process'. He immediately formed a government known as the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), whose cabinet members were mostly civilian, and whose aim was the transformation of Ghanaian society. It was the eighth government since the fall of Nkrumah 15 years earlier.

The new regime pursued a new set of policies, self-styled as 'socialism', which included the formation of revolutionary defence and development committees at village and workplace level, the enforcement of price controls which led to violence against market traders, and the confiscation of money from the bank accounts of the better-off. Partly out of fear of a counter-coup, the PNDC dealt ruthlessly with people it regarded as opposition. Political murders included the famous killing of four high court judges; a committee was later set up to investigate the executions, but its findings did not come to light. This was a time of fear, when people 'disappeared' and no one dared speak out.

Meanwhile the precipitous decline in all sectors of the economy continued, and hardship increased. Basic necessities, agricultural inputs, and spare parts for industry and transport were scarce, because the lack of



▲ *Explaining his policies: Rawlings addressing the crowds in 1983.*

foreign exchange curtailed imports. Workers could not make ends meet because inflation drove up prices faster than wages could keep up with. Thousands of professionals left Ghana for greener pastures. Productivity in all sectors dropped, and social services ground to a halt. In 1961-66, Ghana had been 83 per cent self-sufficient in food, but by 1982 this had declined to 23 per cent. By 1983, the country was in economic crisis. A drought year, there were severe food shortages, and the dry conditions contributed to serious bush fires which decimated trees used in industry. This was also the year in which Nigeria chose to expel foreign workers: one million Ghanaians, extra mouths to feed, arrived home. The protruding collar bones characteristic of the era came to be christened 'Rawlings' chains'.

During the first few years of Rawlings' regime, Ghana's foreign policy sought close relations with Colonel Gaddafi in Libya and Thomas Sankara, the populist leader of Burkina Faso. As economic crisis continued, the government sought and failed to obtain help from the socialist bloc. In desperation, it was forced to U-turn and in 1983 began negotiations with the IMF and the World Bank. Subsequently, official foreign policy sought to distance Ghana from socialist or populist regimes.

# Structural adjustment

Government discussions with the IMF and the World Bank over Ghana's economic crisis led to a new lending agreement conditional upon Ghana following a structural adjustment programme. This Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) was implemented in two stages. The aim of the first phase was to stabilise the economy through various austerity measures. User charges were introduced into social sectors such as education and health, restrictions were imposed on public spending, and subsidies on items such as agricultural inputs were removed. The results have been long-lasting: mothers, many already extremely impoverished by economic decline, now have to pay for the health-care of their children. Students struggle to pay education fees. Fishermen have to cope with prohibitively high fuel costs, and farmers have to stump up steeply increased fertiliser costs, or do without. Banks saw restrictions imposed on lending, and inflation was tackled by devaluing the cedi, which made imported goods more expensive. There were gains for some ordinary people under this

*\* Most primary schools in Ghana have no desks and chairs. The costs of school fees, uniforms, and books place education out of reach for many children.*



phase of adjustment, although they do not outweigh the losses. For example, prices paid to farmers for certain cash crops were increased in an attempt to stimulate exports.

The second phase of the ERP concerned economic restructuring, involving changes in the state's institutions and practices, in order to slim down the scale of state activities while increasing their efficiency. Public ownership was reduced through privatisation. Many sectors in which the state had held a monopoly were opened up to private competition, and public-sector employment was slashed through mass redundancies. A programme to decentralise the organisation of government services was planned, and services began to be restructured. The financial sector was also opened up in an attempt to stimulate investment and the manufacturing sector, and foreign exchange markets were liberalised.

During the first phase of the ERP, official overseas assistance averaged US\$ 430 million annually, more than double that of previous years. In practice, the Ghanaian government was able to compromise on some of the original

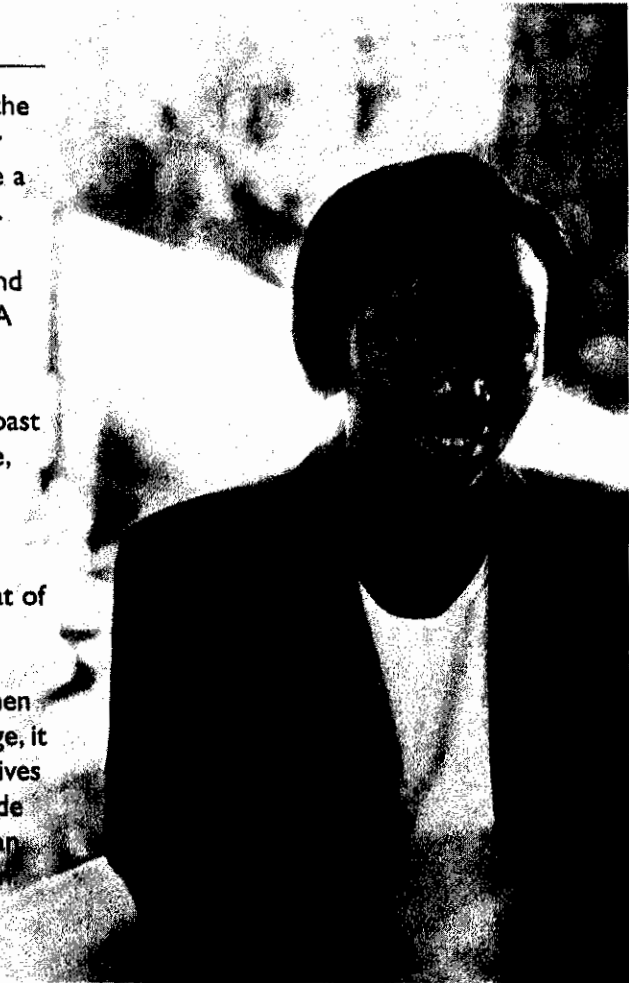


## STOCKS AND SHARES: FATI'S STORY

Fati Yakubu is a stockbroker with Sterling Securities at the Ghana Stock Exchange. Brought up in a village in the far north of the country where girls' education tends to be a low priority for the community, Fati is certainly unusual. Supported by parents who encouraged their sons and daughters to pursue an education, Fati was able to attend secondary school in the north and then read for her BA and MBA degrees at the University of Ghana.

Fati says, 'I was the first local stockbroker with Gold Coast Securities, one of the four licensed brokers in existence, when I started the job in 1994. Now almost all floor traders are Ghanaians.'

Fati contrasts the world of the stock exchange with that of her experience of village life. 'Women dominate floor-trading in Ghana, and no man has ever made me feel inferior at work. It is only a matter of time before women get onto the Boards of Directors. When I visit the village, it is a different ball game: women and men lead different lives there. When you are educated, you take one step outside the women's world but you do not join the men. You can sit with the men, but they will change their conversation. They will not discuss things with you, like local politics, which they feel women should not know about.'



dictates of the structural adjustment plans and go its own way in implementing them. For example, state-owned industries and marketing boards have not been sold off in nearly the numbers or at the rate as envisaged in the IMF's and World Bank's plans. But there was general satisfaction with the progress of the ERP, and in return, US\$ 575 million dollars were pledged for the next stage of the programme by international agencies and donors.

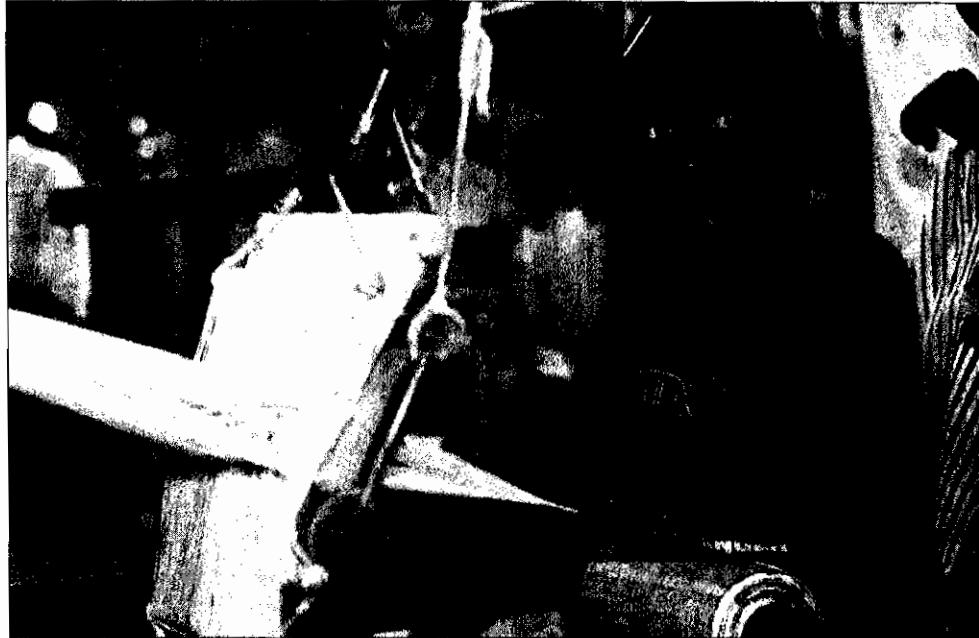
### **The consequences of adjustment**

Ghana has been lauded internationally by the IMF and the World Bank as a 'flagship' of success for structural adjustment. Economic indicators have been encouraging since adjustment was introduced: between 1983 and 1987 the economy grew by 6 per cent annually, and inflation fell to 20 per cent. Ghana was even able to pay off more than US\$500 million in loan arrears dating back over 20 years. Part of the financial liberalisation were plans for a stock exchange which opened in 1990, creating new investment and fund-raising opportunities.

However, there have been worrying signs on the wider economic front since the mid-1990s. Economic growth has slowed; inflation has increased,

peaking at 74 per cent in 1995; the devaluation of the cedi continues. The limited successes have been achieved at the expense of taking on a huge debt burden, storing up problems for the future. While Ghana's debt was a relatively small US\$ 1.4 billion in 1980, it had risen to US\$ 6.2 billion in 1996, almost as large as the nation's gross national product.

Structural adjustment is largely export-oriented, and it has been successful in boosting gold, cocoa, and timber exports. But this is basically



► Joe Manyanu, eight years old, works on Saturdays weaving kente cloth in order to afford school fees, his uniform, and some books. After work, he likes to play football with his friends.

a reversion to the pre-independence economy, with little concern for investing in high-return industries which add value to raw materials. The government had hoped to stimulate the manufacturing sector, but it has met with little success – rather, opening up businesses to foreign competition has resulted in many local firms closing down. But the government continues to support industry over agriculture, despite the importance and relative success of the latter.

Despite structural adjustment, the economy has not recovered to 1965 levels. The gross national product per head was US\$558 in 1965 and only US\$370 in 1997. At independence, income per head in Ghana was three times that in Tanzania and double that in Zambia; both countries now outpace Ghana.

At the human level, some things – including food availability – have certainly improved since 1983. As *South* magazine put it in 1997: 'Protruding collar bones, known as Rawlings' chains, have been replaced by protruding stomachs, now known as Rawlings' coats'. It is debatable how far these changes are due to adjustment. In agriculture, for example, farmers have certainly responded to higher prices paid for their export products by increasing output. But the change in weather patterns from the drought year of 1983 to relatively good successive years is also behind

improvements in yields, and this increased production has been achieved *despite* new constraints associated with adjustment, which include inflated input prices resulting from subsidy withdrawal and higher prices of imported goods. Constraints also include reduced public spending on agriculture: from 1982 to 1988, spending declined by 4.7 per cent each year.

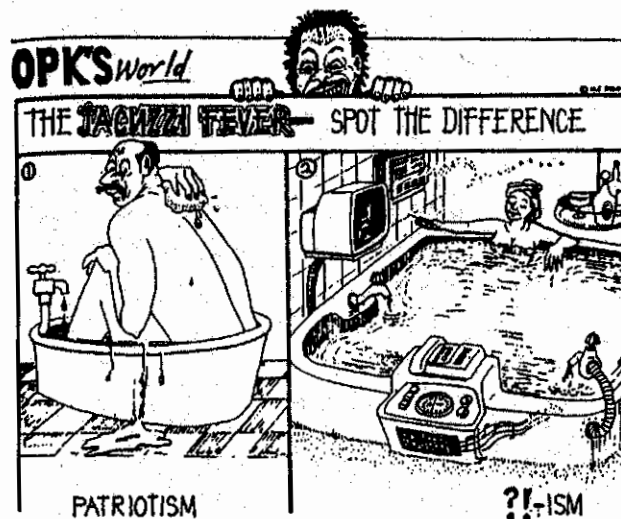
Most ordinary Ghanaians are yet to see benefits of adjustment in their daily lives, and for many, the economic recovery programme has added to their problems. User charges in the social sectors, such as health-care and school fees, have increased the burden of the poor and reduced service usage. Redundancies, or 'redeployment', in the public and private sectors have led to great hardship amongst the unemployed. It is true that the export sectors that have been stimulated – gold, cocoa, and timber – have expanded and taken on new employees; but the benefits of this opportunity fall mostly to men because few women are employed in these areas. Due to devaluation, costs for vital imported products such as medicine have risen to unaffordable levels, causing serious hardship.

The recent resurgence of inflation has caused suffering especially among wage workers. The value of salaries has been eroded. Because bank interest rates are far below the rate of inflation, savings in cedis are rendered worthless.

Two observations on the government's attitude to poverty: in 1987, the PNDC introduced a programme to help those in poverty; seven years later, popular cartoonist Ike Essel comments on the 1994 story that state funds were used to pay for a Jacuzzi for Ghana's First Lady – for health reasons.

'... it is the intention of the Government not to allow perpetual pain bearing to be the core characteristic of the process of adjustment especially as it recognises the considerable length of time over which people have been called upon to endure hardship [...] We believe that adjustment is for the people and not the people for adjustment.'

P.V. Obeng, PNDC member and Chairman of the Structural Adjustment Team, writing in the PAMSCAD policy document, 1987.



### Opposition

The early years of the Rawlings' regime bred what became known as a 'culture of silence': little opposition was voiced. Political parties had been banned when the PNDC took power, newspapers were strictly controlled, and the media was state-run and always followed the government line. The government also attempted to curb union and student activity and was accused of political intimidation and human rights abuses. An attempted coup, discovered in June 1982, led to the execution of those implicated.

Opposition to the adjustment programme was initially strongest among unions, lawyers, and students. In 1987, the government planned

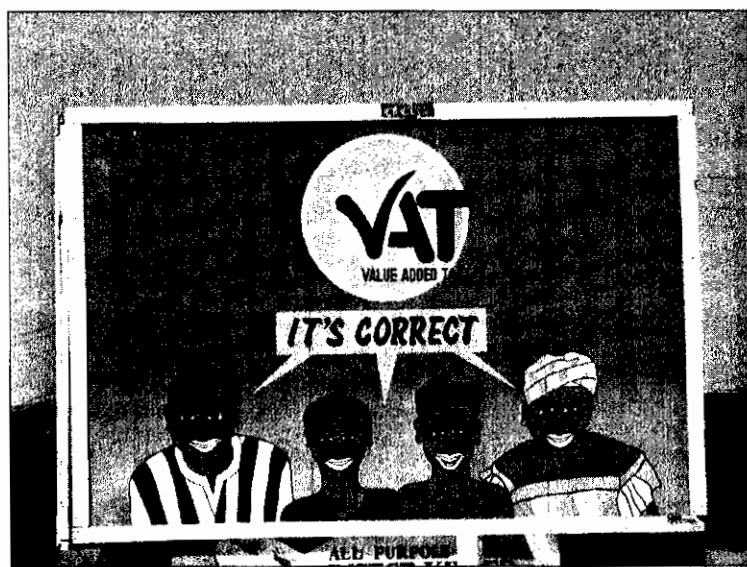
the Programme of Actions to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD), which was designed as a short-term programme and included community, employment creation, basic needs, and education projects. Although PAMSCAD was supposed to tackle the problems of the nation's poorest, who are concentrated in rural northern Ghana, the southern urban areas received the largest share of the funding in order to appease the highly vocal opposition. Rural farmers, especially in the north, find it difficult to organise because of their ethnic and linguistic diversity, lack of unity, dispersed locations, and poor communications.

Protests against taxes perceived as unjust are nothing new: in the nineteenth century, Ghanaians took to the streets to protest against a poll tax introduced by the British colonial government.

In the early 1990s, more Ghanaians started to demand a voice. Independent newspapers sprang up and have remained in print more or less ever since, although the government has always prosecuted if it considered a publication libellous. 'Radio Eye', a focus of opposition to government media policy, began broadcasting without a licence. It was immediately shut down. Union membership has been decimated by the level of redundancies. Students continue to protest against government policies, holding major anti-government demonstrations in 1990 and 1993. The universities were closed for a year in 1995, because of a lecturers' dispute over pay.

A particularly contentious adjustment measure was the attempt to increase government tax revenue by introducing value-added tax (VAT). First implemented in 1995, this measure increased prices of basic commodities by 17.5 per cent and sparked off huge inflation. This galvanised opposition in the cities, culminating in massive protests. Two demonstrations in Accra were the largest since Rawlings took power: the first was called Kume Preko, which means 'kill me now', referring to the high level of deprivation. At Kume Preko, security forces shot into the crowd, killing a boy. The second demonstration was then called 'if you've killed me, bury me'. Marchers included teachers and civil servants who felt that the new tax was more than they could bear. There were open calls for

Three years after the big demonstrations, the government is promoting VAT to its voters via vast billboards.



Rawlings to step down, which turned the peaceful protest into a battleground between pro and anti-government supporters. Nine people were shot dead and 27 injured. The government withdrew the new tax, but it was reimposed at a rate of 10 per cent at the end of 1988, accompanied by an information campaign explaining the need to raise more taxes. This time, the government exempted certain items including foodstuffs and medicines. These measures made the tax more palatable, and although there have been calls to lower the rate to 5 per cent, VAT has been largely accepted.

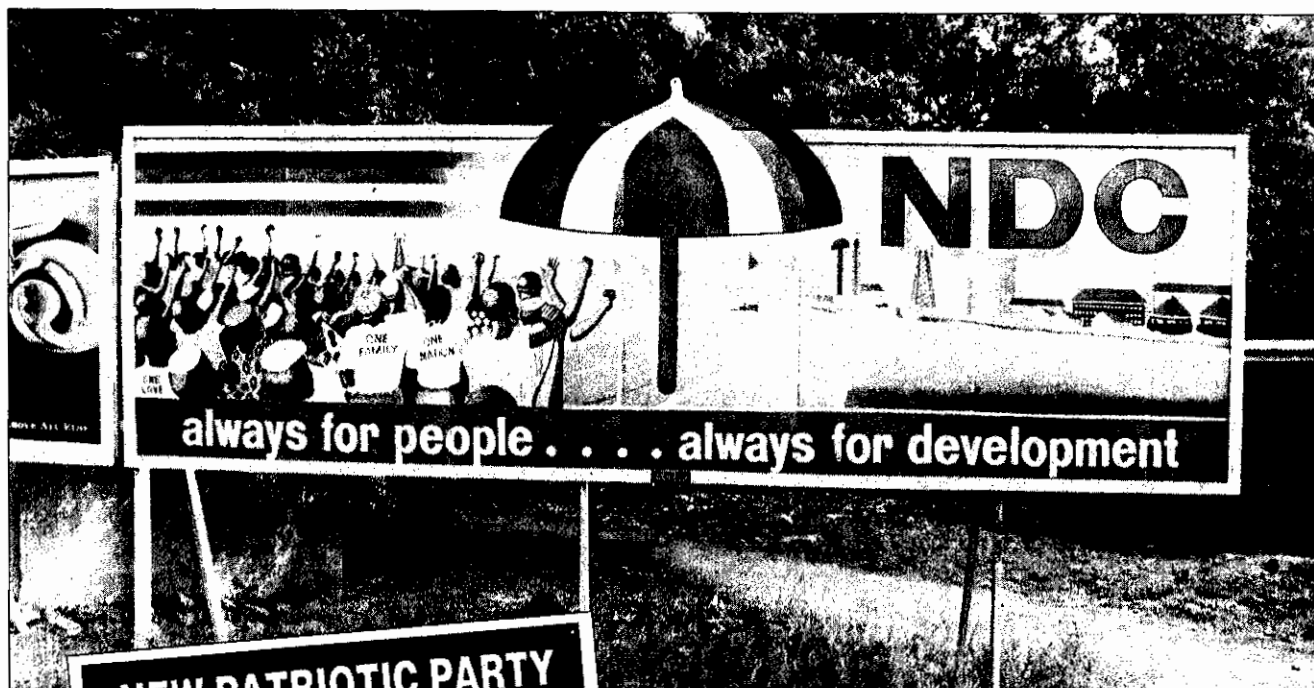
# Democracy, decentralisation, and development

The PNDC regime developed a remarkable reputation for honesty in its early years. Rawlings waged what he called a 'holy war' on corruption and smuggling, an action which earned him a high degree of popularity. At the same time, he tried to encourage broad-based support: in villages and workplaces, the government fostered the formation of grassroots committees which became known as the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). These were involved in community development projects, anti-corruption surveillance, and in political work in support of the ruling party. Militia wings were also formed, and the government set up public tribunals, outside the ordinary legal system, in order to try those accused of anti-government acts. The transparency and accountability of these tribunals have often been questioned.

At first, Rawlings received much popular support because of his anti-corruption and pro-poor stance. He was thought of as a man of the people, and the media captured this in showing him helping ordinary people to clean drains and to farm. Through the CDRs and their forerunners, he gradually built up a power base at grassroots level.

At the same time, Rawlings developed a group of trusted people who worked in the PNDC administration. Many of these people remain as advisers to the president: they are given official recognition as presidential advisers as members of the Council of State. Set up under the Ghanaian Constitution, appointments to this Council are controlled by the President, and none of the current members are opposition supporters. As public figures associated with the President and the ruling party, members of the Council of State have considerable influence over events in Ghana. Members include Alhaji Mahama Iddrisu, until recently Rawlings' Minister of Defence, and the Chairman Alhaji Mumuni Bawumia.

As opposition grew to the human suffering which accompanied economic adjustment, criticism became more focused on the legitimacy of the military regime itself. During the revolution, Rawlings claimed that his aim was to stamp out corruption, raise the living standard of the poor, and prepare Ghana for democracy. As Ghanaians started to indicate their readiness to participate in politics, the PNDC government saw that transition to democracy was the only long-term option.



▲ Party slogans and vivid representations of development will return in the 2000 election campaign.

### Democratisation

In 1985, against the background of the beginnings of opposition to the Rawlings regime, the National Commission for Democracy was reconstituted to discuss ways of introducing democracy to Ghana. The first stage of democratisation was implemented at the local level: the number of districts was increased to 110, and non-party elections were held in 1988/9 for one-third of the

membership of the new District Assemblies. Traditional authorities or their representatives constitute another third, and the final third is made up of political appointees. The political head of the district, the District Chief Executive, is appointed by central government. Because Chief Executives have the final say and former CDR members, committed government supporters, are selected to be prominent in Assemblies, the government can in practice push policy through the Assemblies. The concentration of power in the hands of Chief Executives also permits a lack of democratic accountability.

Meanwhile, as the articulation of political opposition to the government increased, a new national constitution was being drafted. National parliamentary and presidential elections were planned for 1992. Six months before they were held, the ban on party politics was lifted, giving the opposition little time to organise. The opposition parties contesting the elections were basically a continuation of those formed before independence, broadly split along regional and ethnic lines.

The elections were declared free and fair by international observers. Rawlings was elected President, completing the remarkable transition



▲ The former Flight Lieutenant in front of the Ghanaian flag, wearing a kente pattern that denotes unity and democracy, as well as a pilot's watch.

'...for us, democracy cannot simply mean holding ... elections periodically whilst we continue to endure poverty, misery, illiteracy, hunger and poor health facilities and whilst many of our able-bodied citizens are unable to find employment.'

*J.J. Rawlings, address to the opening seminar of the National Commission for Democracy, Sunyani, July 1990.*

from upstart junior officer to democratically chosen head of state. Allegations of irregularities in voter registration led the opposition to boycott the parliamentary election; as a result, Rawlings' newly renamed party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), secured almost all the seats. The opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) branded the result the 'stolen verdict'. Only a minority of independent MPs dared to voice strong criticism of government policy, so this parliament became known as the 'rubber stamp'. A one-party state with Rawlings firmly at the helm remained in place.

The NPP is the largest opposition party and is led by J.A. Kuffour. The NPP opposes the political style of the NDC, regarding the NDC as anti-democratic in the way that opposition marches have been suppressed. Although it agrees that economic adjustment and reform are necessary, the NPP also criticises the NDC's management of structural adjustment, education reform, and the size of the debt burden which is being created.

The general elections in 1996 were less controversial and contested by all parties. Rawlings retained the presidency, and the NDC won a majority in parliament. However, the presence of opposition parties helped foster democratic debate. In a country with widespread illiteracy, using suggestive symbols as markers in advertising and on ballot papers is particularly important. The NDC's symbol is the umbrella which denotes chieftaincy in Ghana, conveying the idea of authority. The symbol of the NPP is an elephant, chosen for its connotations of power and authority (the elephant is seen as chief of jungle animals).

The elections in 2000 will be both presidential and parliamentary: Rawlings is due to stand down at these elections, since under the Constitution an elected President may only serve for two terms. His deputy, Ata Mills, is due to contest as the NDC presidential candidate.

### **Ethnicity and regional allegiance in Ghanaian politics**

There is an ethnic factor in Ghanaian politics in two senses. In terms of voting patterns, the NPP has strong support in the Ashanti and coastal Akan-speaking areas; the NDC has its stronghold in the Volta Region but also attracts wider support. The parties also tend to attract different classes of voter: the NPP is the favoured party of many intellectuals and academics. At the same time, Rawlings is often accused of favouring his mother's ethnic group, the Ewe, in appointments to high office. But many other groups are represented in the cabinet, and the ethnic factor should not be overplayed.

Things are looking good for the future of democracy in Ghana. At the same time, the country's human rights record continues to improve, and the independence of the Ghanaian judiciary has been reasserted.

## Decentralisation

The purpose of decentralisation is to replace a centralised system of administration with a form of government that is closer to the people in order to promote their participation in decision-making. It is hoped that this participation will both strengthen democracy and ensure that decisions about development are made in the interests of people at the grassroots. As part of this process, and hand-in-hand with the process of democratisation, government functions are being decentralised. Major decisions on matters such as education are to be made at the district level, rather than by the

relevant ministry. Government departments at district level are supposed to co-operate in designing development plans according to local need, in conjunction with District Assemblies and District Chief Executives. In practice, the process of change is slow, since the culture of centralised decision-making is difficult to transform quickly. Moreover, the changes have increased the District Chief Executives' influence on the decentralised departments.

Central government allocates up to 5 per cent of Ghana's total annual income to a District Assemblies' Common Fund, intended to finance development activity. Each Assembly must raise 5 per cent of the funds allocated to it through local market taxes and other revenues, so Assemblies situated in the more prosperous areas of the country are able to raise more development funds and gain greater allocations of central funding. This has resulted in wider development gaps, particularly between the north and the south.

The government has made some notable new departures in infrastructural development in all areas of the country. Most of these are co-financed with donors or are part of donor programmes associated with structural adjustment priorities. They include the National Electrification Scheme, started in 1989, which aimed to take power to the rural areas. By 1998, most district capitals and towns of similar sizes were linked to the national grid. The government has also rebuilt airports and rehabilitated principal trunk roads between major towns, some of which used to become impassable during the rainy season. All these developments have spread the popular appeal of the NDC government. They have also led to narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas and the north and south in terms of infrastructure. But the progress has done little to assist people living in poverty directly – for example, most of the rural poor cannot afford electricity.



▲ The roads might have been improved, but the style of travelling reflects the price of transport to most Ghanaians.



## **JOSHUA AND THE GHANA SOCIETY OF THE PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED**

Joshua Asiedu, 32, is a tailor and embroiderer. As a disabled person, he faced a lot of discrimination in his early life. 'My parents did not look after me in the same way as they looked after my brothers and sisters. I was able to pass the entrance exam for secondary school but they refused to sponsor me.'

Joshua joined the Ghana Society of the Physically Handicapped, a membership-based NGO, which helped Joshua to train at the Jachie Training Centre for the Handicapped. He is now Head of Tailoring at the Production Centre there.

'The Society was founded by disabled people 18 years ago. It is a national organisation with offices in every region. We don't want handicapped people to have to beg or to be sorrowful so we come together to combat our problems', explains Joshua. The Society also organises sports and other social events, and campaigns for the rights of disabled people. Its members seek to change discriminatory attitudes through educational work: 'Parents disown disabled children in Ghana because they feel the children won't be able to look after them in their old age', comments Joshua. 'It's not true. The Society approaches parents to educate them about this, and attitudes are changing. Disabled people also find it difficult to get accommodation in Ghana because of prejudice. We approach landlords to encourage them to rent rooms to disabled people.'



## **Supplementing the state: non-government organisations (NGOs)**

There are many types of non-government organisations working to alleviate poverty and further development in Ghana. Local organisations range from community-based groupings, such as village women's self-help groups which are found all over Ghana, to formally constituted NGOs. These organisations' scope and capacities differ widely: community self-help groups often concentrate on undertaking traditional work tasks and on mobilising savings, but often lack access to credit and skills such as book-keeping and leadership. Local NGOs tend to specialise in particular areas such as health, water, education, disability, or income-generating projects. Some are strong organisations with professional staff; many are affiliated to religious organisations, which informs their approaches to development. This is a very dynamic sector. New organisations appear all the time, and existing agencies change. Grassroots organisations may grow and become formal organisations while others disappear over time.

A number of church-based, Islamic, and secular international NGOs also work in Ghana, operating development projects as well as funding local partner organisations. Again, these are engaged in a variety of areas and have a range of objectives.

### **Relations with government**

NGOs have often operated in isolation in Ghana, but recently, networks of NGOs have begun to appear. The overall umbrella organisation, the Ghana Association of Private and Voluntary Organisations in Development (GAPVOD), keeps a register of NGOs in Ghana and seeks to defend NGOs' interests. Other NGO networks have been created in order to exchange ideas on specific topics and to promote learning. The Northern Ghana Network for Development, for example, works to strengthen the institutional capacity of its member organisations through

information-sharing and research. Church-based agricultural projects network to co-ordinate action on a regional basis.

The relationships between these agencies and the state vary: at the local level, where development services are delivered, collaboration between individual agencies and particular government departments is often very good. It is at the national level, in the arena of policy-making, that relations have become strained. In recent years, the government has attempted to introduce a new framework for the registration of NGOs and a new forum for government-NGO dialogue through a new NGO Bill. The government says that this is necessary because of the numbers of 'bogus' NGOs, organisations which operate under the cover of NGO status in order to benefit from tax-free imports and other advantages enjoyed by the charitable sector.

NGOs have resisted these proposals, seeing them as a way in which the government desires to increase its political as well as financial control over the sector. They argue that the Bill proposed changes which conflict with various clauses of the 1992 Constitution, including those which guarantee freedom of association. NGOs claim that the existing registration and regulatory framework would be adequate were it put into practice. GAPVOD does, however, wish to see measures put in place which will improve government-NGO communication, to facilitate NGO activity rather than regulate it.

Although the Bill is no longer officially on the cards, the government continues to put forward the same ideas. At the centre of this debate is the question of the role and identity of NGOs. The government wishes them to fit into its vision of development and complement its own resource-limited development work, while NGOs lobby for alternative development policies. Many NGOs seek to implement donors' visions for development rather than support national policies, and some lack the sensitivity to see that they are encroaching on the domain of an elected government in doing this.

The backdrop to the controversy is the search for funds which inevitably brings NGOs and the government into conflict. NGOs tend to have strong links with international donors and claim that their methods are cheap and effective, so they have often been very successful in contesting for funding. This can cause resentment and grievances in government departments.

Relationships at the national level inevitably vary according to the nature of the NGO. Given the diplomatic and financial backing from some countries to international NGOs operating in Ghana, the government is led to treat these agencies with more respect. There is some positive co-operation. Currently, the World Bank, NGOs, and the government are collaborating on a major review of structural adjustment in Ghana.

It is notably difficult to separate a particular set of local NGOs from the government apparatus itself. The largest of these, the 31st December Women's Movement, formed in the wake of the 1981 revolution, is headed by the First Lady, Mrs Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings. The Movement

runs many development projects, assisting large numbers of women, and promotes gender equality practically and ideologically. But it is also politically partisan and has helped shore up the political regime through mobilising women's votes.



✦ Languages and cultures cross national boundaries: A hair salon near Kumasi with Akan and French slogans, using the US flag to draw in fashion-conscious ladies.

✦ Adiza Bashiru has come to Ghana from Lagos, Nigeria, to look for work. At a 1999 summit, ECOWAS leaders decided to eliminate obstructions to travel such as border checkpoints between member countries.



### Ghana's role in West Africa

Ghana is a founder member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which includes her immediate French-speaking neighbours Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso. This is a grouping of 18 countries established in 1975 to promote development through trade, co-operation, and self-reliance. Co-operation achieved in practice does not always live up to the aim, and there is little funding for ECOWAS projects, partly because membership dues are rarely paid. Trade

relationships with Western developed countries remain more important to the West African economy than intra-ECOWAS commerce. Ordinary Ghanaians benefit little from ECOWAS, and since Ghana is not part of the francophone West African 'franc' zone, they do not have the advantage of a stable currency either. People find it difficult to save in cash when inflation is high – in Ghana, many people prefer to save in assets from crops to livestock, but these are difficult to convert quickly into cash when needs must be met. In 1999, ECOWAS made a start on the long road to a common currency by announcing the development of a community-wide currency cheque. But although larger traders will be able to take advantage of this, it is having little impact on the majority of Ghanaians who do not have bank accounts.

ECOWAS also sees its peace-keeping role as essential to the development of the region. Ghana has contributed troops to ECOMOG, the peace-monitoring group which played a significant part in the restoration of peace in war-torn Liberia, and the Ghanaian military had crucial roles in peace-keeping efforts during this eight-year long civil war. As the Chairman of ECOWAS towards the end of the conflict, Rawlings also played a key part in bringing all sides together to negotiate a peace deal. Ghana is currently making a significant contribution to ECOMOG peace-keeping work following bloody civil violence in Sierra Leone.