

## PRESS STATEMENT

### **The Minister of Food and Agriculture Should Not Downplay the Living Experiences of Farmers and Ghanaians – It Is Dangerous!**

The Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAG), Chamber of Agribusiness Ghana (CAG), the General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU), the Rice Millers Association of Ghana (RMAG), and Food Sovereignty Ghana (FSG) are appalled and disappointed by comments and responses by the Minister of Food and Agriculture, Dr. Owusu Afriyie Akoto, during an interview on the Citi Breakfast Show on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022. In the said interview, the Minister responded to questions relating to his performance as the sector Minister over the past five years. Needless to say that, despite broad efforts by the government to address constraints in the sector through consistent engagement of sector actors, the responses of the Minister for the most part were not only evasive and unaccountable, but clearly demonstrated high levels of intolerance, and an outright disrespect to the living experiences of farmers and other actors in the sector. It is this approach to policy making in the sector which has largely negated any serious results (if possible) from major interventions in the sector over the past five years and frankly not necessary in a sector as critical as agriculture with several stakeholders.

Firstly, the Minister, in his response to the current food security situation manifested by constant spikes in food prices and absence of relevant supplies, chided persons, institutions and data that pointed to this reality. In fact, in responding to a question on the state of food security captured in the 2021 Global Food Index where Ghana was ranked 82<sup>nd</sup> dropping from 76<sup>th</sup> in 2016, the Minister downplayed the content and significance of the report, disagreed and ‘poohpoohed’ the findings even though he could not provide any alternative report. The Minister continues to live in the thinking that all things are rosy in the sector when the reality is that we are saddled with unavailability of food coupled with high food prices. Don’t take our words for it! The government’s statistician, the Ghana Statistical Services (GSS) indicates that food inflation in Ghana has reached an all-time high of 17.40 percent as at February 2022. If this is not a reflection of the double whammy of escalating prices and weak food supplies which undermine food security, then we are not sure what is. Prior to the consistent reports from the GSS, several organisations monitoring food supplies across various markets had confirmed these risks, only for the sector Minister to refer to his domestic experience in an interview - *‘my wife has not indicated to me food prices have increased’*. How inconsiderate and disrespectful to Ghanaians? We hope his responses this morning, and in previous comments such as the reference to his domestic experience are not a reflection of official government position on the developments in the sector. That will be an unfortunate situation! In fact, forecast by analysts and economists suggest that the situation will get worse in the coming months due to existing weaknesses in our systems as well as global pressures. Policy makers at the highest level such as the sector Minister cannot be dismissive of these risks and reports. At the minimum, such reports should be seen as feedback to enable government and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to examine their policy toolkits to addressing the underlying risks in a collaborative manner.

Secondly, the sector Minister appears not to comprehend issues of fidelity in policy implementation at scale, and the cardinal need for generating evidence to improve policy design. The flagship Planting for Food and Jobs programme of government has indeed touched on several issues in the agricultural sector, which has contributed to the improved performance of the country in recent assessments on progress towards the Malabo Declaration. However, feedback from farmer associations and other actors in the sector, for the simple reason that the ministry does not have resources to engage all 11.3 million farmers across the country, should be considered seriously and not dismissed nonchalantly as the Minister did this morning. Any policy being deployed at scale, will suffer several implementation challenges which only constructive feedback can help manage and rectify. In fact, non-agriculture sector policy decisions can have profound implications on the success of components of the planting for food and jobs programme. Take the current increases in fuel prices as a caveat, transportation costs will not only

increase in the value chain as a direct consequence, but a pass-through effect which will chip away incomes of farmers and other actors will be threatened, and given the objective of the PFJ, a feedback on this should be considered. One of the main objectives of the PFJ was to ensure immediate and adequate supply of selected food crops across the country. A survey of markets and consumers do not imply that there is adequate availability of these food crops. Prices of some of these selected food crops have more than doubled in real terms (when we adjust for inflation) since 2016, and this has nothing to do with how sexy or otherwise, the PFJ programme looks in the eye of the sector Minister. It is the acknowledgement of the problem and consistent engagement with stakeholders that can produce outcomes desirable for both government and Ghanaians. The Minister's resort to 'window dressing' the facts and simply disrespecting the experiences of farmers will not fix the problem. Again, we have more than doubled our maize production from 1.8 million to 3 million tonnes, according to the Minister, but market price of 100 kg of maize has risen from GHS100.00 in 2016 to almost GHS290.00 in 2022. Unless the Minister doesn't have price points such as this or simply does not acknowledge the experience of Ghanaians and farmers, both results are not desirable for development of the sector. How come poultry farmers continue to lament on the price and availability of corn for their feed? How come prices of vegetables such as tomatoes and onions are rising daily and why do we keep importing them from our neighbours? It is not smallholder farmers and other sector players that issued a directive to ban the export of food to neighbouring countries due to existential risks a few months ago, is it? The government acting through the Minister did! It is for this reason that the undersigned organisations as key actors in the sector have long called for a shift in the country's strategy to organic methods of farming, most of which will rely on safe domestic agroecological techniques, to insulate the country from some of the current external geopolitical pressures. Sadly, we have a Minister who happens to have some 'holy grail data' manufactured by him, which runs counter to the real experiences of Ghanaians and farmers as well as the government's statistician.

Lastly, the President of the Republic called for Ghanaians to be citizens not spectators! The approach of the sector Minister – a complete disregard for real living experiences and credible data from institutions operating in the sector including the government's statistician, we are afraid suggests the contrary. The sector Minister is well within his rights to disagree with the views, data and experiences of actors in the sector. But to do that from an uninformed position, while not providing evidence, but vituperations and invectives for the simple reason of disagreeing and the insatiable desire to hear the sound of his own voice is simply untenable in a sector as important as Agriculture and particularly at this time with such risks in the sector. He can do better and frankly should do better! The undersigned institutions have at different forums acknowledged the work of the Ministry in the sector, and proceeded to point out blind spots, and areas of weaknesses which can be addressed given the varied experiences of different actors in the sector. The Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana for instance has in times past worked with the Ministry and created platforms for the leadership therein to engage with its community of more than 1.3 million smallholder farmers across the country on modalities for implementation of the fertiliser subsidy programme. This is significant, and comments such as that made by the Minister on CitiFM this morning that PFAG and other groups in the sector are "*people who hide behind big names to pretend that they are speaking for a certain group of people*" is very unfortunate. It is important to remind the Minister that while acting as the Ranking Member of the Food, Agriculture and Cocoa Affairs Committee of Parliament in opposition, these same organisations collaborated with him and the committee to advocate for several issues in the sector, which the then Mahama-led government had to address. We are simply interested in getting the attention of policy makers to critical issues that must be addressed to ensure sustainable food production and improvement in the livelihood and living experiences of Ghanaians. Our position has not changed! That of the Minister has changed and perhaps, a bit more openness and receptive engagement with the 11.3 million farmers and key stakeholders across the country represented by the undersigned organisations and their allies, will be better for the Ministry and the government!

We remain ever committed to working with government and other stakeholders in ensuring some respite is brought to farmers and Ghanaians, despite the unfortunate comments of the sector Minister. We are in no position to suggest to the Minister how to do his job – take feedback on his policies, adjust to fidelity in policy scalability during implementation and certainly conduct of public interviews when the living experiences of Ghanaians are in question, but we sure know that this current approach could generate negative externalities which are anti-collaborative to turn the fortunes of the sector around. Perhaps, the kitchen is too hot? Well, the Minister may well know what to do.

Sincerely,

1. Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAAG) – 0203035672
2. Chamber of Agribusiness Ghana (CAG) – Anthony Morrison - 0540742111
3. General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) – Edward Kareweh - 0244529484
4. The Rice Millers Association of Ghana (RMAG) – Yaw Adupoku - 0554024137
5. Food Sovereignty Ghana (FSG) – Edwin Baffour - 0244333095