



PROFILE

Lydia Sasu – Hungry for a cause Twenty-four years ago, a women’s advocate spoke up and the technocrats listened

By **Peter L. A**
(pieroquz@gmail.com),
Member, ICSE, Ghana



The year was 1998. Lydia Sasu, the notable personality being profiled in this column, was then a civil servant in the Department of Women in Agriculture in the Ghanaian Ministry of Food and Agriculture and also the Coordinator of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Using the authority and privilege at her command, Lydia worked relentlessly to highlight the need for holistic and sustainable solutions to tackle the all-pervasive problem of hunger in Ghana. By drawing attention to the problems of illiteracy, unemployment, poor health and the under-representation of marginalized groups, including women, Lydia made the all-important connections that allow the root causes of hunger to be identified and addressed.

As a result, a campaign organization, the Development Action Association (DAA), was established in 1999, with Lydia as its Executive Director. Born and brought up in a farming household herself, Lydia’s efforts through the DAA were focused on the anti-hunger campaign and the promotion of education and skills training for farming and fishing communities. Twenty-four years have elapsed since the DAA was formed, and its impact on its members and on communities mired in poverty have been profound. In 2002, Lydia was invited to attend the FAO World Food Summit, where she joined forces with farmer groups and other stakeholders to create a national farmer’s platform in Ghana – the Farmers Organizations Network in Ghana (FONG). Subsequently, FONG became

a member of ROPPA – a small-scale farmers network in West Africa.

Lydia Sasu met Chandrika Shama and Nalini Nayak of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) at Tsokomey, Ghana in 2002. Through this meeting, for the first time in the sector, many hidden dimensions of human rights in small-scale fisheries were brought to light and the groundwork for an expanded focus on lobbying and advocacy in the sector was laid. Equally important were certain later collaborations with TESCOD and FAO on the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines.

With rural women at the forefront of her work, Lydia Sasu initiated World Rural Women’s Day celebration in Ghana on 15 October this year with the intention of bringing rural women together to share best practices and lessons learned on food security and make their voices heard. Under her leadership, DAA is currently operating as one of the eight partners for the Sustainable Fisheries Management Programme (SFMP), jointly run by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Ghana, which aims at rebuilding targeted marine fisheries stock in the country. Under the SFMP programme DAA was provided with an office complex and fish processing centre at Kokrobite in Ga South District of Accra where women fish processors are trained.

Lydia Sasu continues to play a key role in DAA as an advocate, skilled trainer and educator in both small-scale fishery and agriculture. She has been recognized with over a dozen national and international awards including the Women’s Creativity in Rural Life by Women’s World Summit Foundation in 2011, the Kleckner Trade & Technology Advancement Award as well as the Iowa USA at the World Food Prize in 2015; the FAO 40th anniversary award in Ghana in 2016; the USAID Ghana Women of Courage Award and the US Embassy of Ghana award for Woman of Courage in 2020. 📌