

GOING TO THE MARKET—PART 1

Dear Friends,

Shopping ... going to the market ... getting groceries ... there are many phrases to talk about it, and in different countries, many different ways in which it is done. I'd like to tell you about the markets in Ghana; what they are, how they are set up, the kinds of goods and commodities that one would see, and those who participate in the market. The market is a significant part of the way of life of the people in the communities around Akrampa, and indeed an integral aspect of our way of life.

There are at least two different types of markets in Ghana. There is a village market and a town market. We'll talk about both in this article, and what makes them unique.

The typical village market is linked to the farms, and produce from the surrounding farms, and those farms will determine the location of the market. Most village markets have high patronage on non-farming days, or later in the day, because the people who bring their wares to sell are also farmers. Such people will go to the farm in the early morning and harvest what they want to sell on any particular day, and bring them to the market later in the day, like, from midday to dusk. This means that, in most village markets - like the type in Akrampa - the market really starts business when the farmers bring in the fresh produce from the farms. Needless to say, a village market does not stock its items for sale, nor keep them in warehouses. People bring what they believe could be sold the same day, or if any should be left over, it wouldn't spoil to be brought back and sold the next day. The most common village market produce would be peppers, tomatoes, other vegetables, cassava, plantain, and sometimes snails, rats, and other eatable rodents.

When the traders (and 99% of them are women) bring their items to the village market, they display them on very big wooden pallets shaped out wood to look like plates. Most of them put up produce like tomatoes, alone on these wooden plates, and therefore you'd find that one woman would only be selling tomatoes, and another woman would be selling only peppers. Although more recently however, you would find that same woman would have garden eggs (this would be called eggplant in America), peppers, tomatoes, and okra on her wooden plate. The garden egg, or eggplant, is different in Ghana than America. The garden egg, is much smaller, no bigger than a large size egg, while the American eggplant is huge.

The woman trader would be sitting on a very low stool, in the scorching sun and calling out to customers. Commodities like cassava and plantain and other food crop which can last some days are displayed on the ground in the market, because they cannot spoil easily or quickly. The village markets are very, very simple. They do not require organizing or set up with any detail or degree. The market is either at the outskirts of the village, or in the village center (like the one you would find in Akrampa), under a big tree which becomes the only source of shade from the vicious tropical sun. In a village market you will find that most of the items are perishable farm produce. The only means of effective control and order in the market place rests in one individual they refer to as the 'market queen'.

The 'market queen' is the one who sees to the enforcement of order and proprietary conduct in the market. She performs any other roles that make up the kind of person you would ascribe the meaning of 'the buck stops here' to. She is not only in charge, but is responsible for the traders and trading that goes on. She is an elected individual so she has tenure.

The town markets are very different from the village markets. The town market, is however a very organized set up, and in recent times, the administration of the District Offices have become involved in terms of location and administration of the market. In the town markets, one will find stalls purposely erected and allowed for traders to display their wares in, and sell from them. Most town markets have particular places where only vegetables can be found. Other stalls and places in the town market would be for other items, like hardware, electronic stores, clothes, jewelry, decorative items, handmade crafts, art, and other goods and services. You could say that a town market is complex compared to a village market.

Next month I will write more about the markets, and describe how the trading goes on in the markets.

Blessings, Pastor Ben