Poverty reduction trends: Sub-Saharan Africa as a region is off track in terms of poverty reduction. Although poverty declined in 24 out of 30 countries between 1910 and 2010, overall it fell only from 56.5% to 48.4% of the total population, considerably short of the target of 28.25%.

Ghana was one of the few sub-Saharan Africa countries to meet the MDG 1 target of halving extreme poverty. The proportion of its population living below the poverty line of US$1.25 a day declined from 51.7% to 28.5% between 1991 and 2006, and the poverty level was estimated to be 24% in 2012/13.

There remain, however, significant disparities in poverty levels between social groups, between urban and rural areas, and between the northern and southern regions, while rising income inequality has the potential to undermine gains in poverty reduction. Ghana is also susceptible to environmental, social, financial and health-related shocks that could hinder growth, reduce food security and increase poverty.

The achievement of full and productive employment in Ghana for all remains elusive, particularly for women and youth. Owing to the lack of decent jobs, most of Ghana’s working population is engaged in vulnerable employment. Having said that, the national vulnerable employment rate did fall from 82.5% to 65.2% between 1991 and 2013, indicating some improvement in the quality of employment.

International hunger targets: A total of 72 developing countries had achieved the MDG 1c hunger target by 2014. However, about 795 million people remain undernourished.

Ghana reached the MDG 1c target of halving the number of hungry people by 2015. The proportion of the population who are undernourished (experiencing chronic hunger) declined from 47.3% to 5% between 1990–92 and 2012–14. Considerable progress has also been made in reducing the proportions of stunted, wasted and underweight people, which currently stand at 19%, 5% and 11% respectively. Persistent concerns include “hidden hunger” – the lack of, or inadequate intake of, micronutrients, resulting in conditions such as anaemia or vitamin A deficiency. While both the prevalence of undernourishment and the proportion of underweight children under 5 years of age have declined, the former has fallen more quickly than the latter, suggesting room for improvement in dietary quality, hygiene conditions and access to clean water, particularly for poorer population groups.

Role of the Ghanaian Government: Key factors in the reductions achieved in poverty and hunger in Ghana include national policies to foster economic growth and increase agricultural productivity, along with infrastructural development linking producers to markets and targeted social interventions.

Contribution of the UN system in Ghana: The UN system in Ghana has played a critical role in providing technical, policy and financial support for various policies and programmes, including:

- support for national development strategies, such as the Ghana Shared Growth Development Agendas I and II, and the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategies I and II (including tracking of MDGs);
• promotion of good practices in agriculture and aquaculture to enhance productivity and incomes;
• promotion of resilience to shocks in the agricultural sector;
• promotion of better nutritional practices;
• expansion and enhancement of the Ghana School Feeding Programme; and
• development of Ghana’s flagship Social Protection Strategy Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme and its expansion to target pregnant women and women with children under 12 months old to improve nutrition.

The UN system in Ghana has also played a critical role in providing technical and financial support to:

• the Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises programme;
• knowledge generation on rural employment and decent work issues;
• policy advice and strategy options on rural employment and decent work;
• local enterprise development;
• job creation through labour-intensive public works;
• protection of women’s livelihoods through maternity support;
• collection of labour statistics to inform policy; and
• development of a national employment policy and sustainable and competitive enterprises with the aim of providing full and gainful employment.

TRANSITIONING TO THE SDGs

The pursuit of inclusive growth strategies, social protection policies, and initiatives specifically targeting the extremely poor and vulnerable, including the creation of decent jobs, will sustain progress towards ending poverty, hunger and malnutrition. At the same time, implementing SDGs 1 (“End poverty in all its forms everywhere”) and 2 (“End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”) presents additional policy challenges and opportunities, such as:

• how to better link agricultural development – in particular, inclusive and smallholder-based agricultural development – to improved nutrition;
• how to link universal access to food to the reduction of rural – urban discrepancies and the development of the economic potential of rural areas, in a context of rapid urbanization; and
• how to increase agricultural productivity sustainably, while maintaining biodiversity and improving resilience and adaptation to climate change.

The policy response will involve confronting the challenge of providing adequate diets in ever more populous cities, while recognizing that most of the poor and hungry live in rural areas.

This requires boosting the productive and economic potential of rural areas, while also addressing the rural effects of urbanization, including rural ageing, the feminization of agriculture, and the economic marginalization of small-scale agricultural producers that may result from market failures and other factors. Decent work for all, as prescribed in SDG 8 (“Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”) remains a critical component of poverty and hunger reduction.

The recent decline in poverty took place in an era of high growth rates and commodity prices. With the slowdown of global and Ghanaian growth rates and falling commodity prices, sustained progress on poverty reduction will require concerted efforts to ensure that growth and development are inclusive and generate decent jobs, and that quality education is provided so that the growing numbers of young people will be better placed to find jobs. It will also require that social protection is scaled up to reach greater numbers of the extremely poor and vulnerable.

With a rate of poverty reduction that has slowed dramatically in recent years, Ghana will need to ensure the effective integration of social and economic development, promoting a transformation of its economy that gives the poorest and most vulnerable both protection and opportunity to participate actively. To this end, both revenue and expenditure policies could be improved to better target the poorest and redistribute the proceeds of growth.

Ghana faces substantial challenges in respect of agricultural productivity, rapid urbanization, climate change and other environmental stresses, and hunger and other forms of malnutrition. Meeting these challenges while achieving sustainable development will require that they be addressed in an integrated manner and with adequate resources.

5, 6 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and World Food Programme (WFP), 2015, The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015. Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: taking stock of uneven progress.
7 Ghana Statistical Service, 2014. Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2014.

This brief was compiled from information provided by FAO, WFP, ILO, UNDP and UNICEF.