

Possibilities and challenges for sustainable development in West Africa: Ghana in Focus  
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Ghana is a medium sized West African nation which straddles three agro-ecological zones- coastal savannah, forest and guinea savannah and their transitions. The country's population estimated at 29,614,337 with a labour force of 12,260,000 in 2018. Ghana is now classified as a lower-middle income country following a rebasing of the economy in 2010 in which its GDP per capita exceeded \$1,300. Labour force participation rates in Ghana are very high for both men and women, partly because of how employment is measured. Unemployment rates are therefore very low-6.8%; 7% males and 6.6% females. Poverty in Ghana reduced from 52% in the 1980s to 24% in the 2018. Ghana's economy has consistently grown an average of 6% in the last two decade, reaching double digit figures in 2011 with the oil industry begun production. Social indicators in Ghana have been improving steadily over the years. Also, the country has a youthful population with the possibilities of reaping demographic dividends. Ghana has been relatively stable politically since 1992 when it embarked on multi-party constitutional rule which has seen alternation of its two main political parties in power and an incumbent president losing power in the last elections. Not surprisingly, commentators have suggested Ghana is doing well politically and economically, with good prospects for structural transformation and sustainable development. This is in keeping with Ghana's reputation as an exemplary follower of neo-liberal economic policy prescriptions since the 1980s. The above, together with the optimism, however, is only one side of the Ghana story.

Ghana is a primary commodity dependent country and is vulnerable to cyclical collapses in commodity prices. It has failed to make a classical agrarian transition in which a thriving agricultural sector support industrialisation and the transformation of the economy. Instead, Ghana is undergoing what has been described as perverse structural transformation in the sense that a low capital low productivity services sector has overtaken a stagnant agricultural sector as the highest contributor to GDP and employment (52% and 45% respectively) compared with 17% and 41% for agriculture; and 24% and 14% respectively for industry in 2017. This suggests that Ghana's agriculture is low productivity and stagnant and its services dominated by low income insecure employment. The majority of Ghanaian workers are self-employed (68%) and operate in the informal economy (86.2%- 81.2% males and 91% females) as at 2017 and are in precarious employment. While income poverty has reduced in percentage terms, more people are poor today than ever before, and growing inequalities between income groups, between rural and urban areas, and between northern and southern Ghana and between men and women in social development indicators such as education, health, housing, employment, water, infrastructure and infrastructure. Poor quality education and high levels of youth unemployment are wasting the demographic dividend and creating a generation of alienated young people, trapped between childhood and adulthood, whose responses to the crisis of work involves strategies such as migration which deprive of agriculture and other segments of the economy with much needed labour.

Ghana's political landscape is increasingly polarised and showing cracks in the elite consensus that has run Ghana since 1992 under a constitution. Increasing incidents of vigilantism, attacks on journalists, electoral violence and an increasingly fractious public discourse about the country's history and future. These make Ghana's prospects for achieving sustainable development not very promising.

The prospects and challenges of sustainable development are most apparent in the agricultural sector which remains of critical importance to countries such as Ghana. My presentation will examine the fortunes of smallholder farmers who dominate agriculture in Ghana, and produce 80% of total agricultural output, but who face challenges of land and labour, input and produce markets, technologies, credit and climate variability, and also suffer policy neglect and exposure to the vicissitudes of the global economy in which they are adversely inserted as primary commodity producers.