



ENSURE
ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY

Targets:

- 7a:** Integrate the principle of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.
- 7b:** Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss
- 7c:** Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to drinking water and basic sanitation
- 7d:** Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100m slum dwellers

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aimed to improve the lives of the world's poorest people by 2015. Leaders of 189 countries signed the historic millennium declaration at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. This Brief takes stock of progress made towards achieving MDG 7 in Ghana, and reflects on what needs to be done as we transition to the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

PROGRESS

Integrating the sustainability principle into policies and reversing environmental resource loss: Environmental issues such as deforestation, soil degradation, air and water pollution, and lack of safe water supply have been the bane of natural resource management in most African countries. To address these issues in Ghana, the Government has incorporated sustainability principles and policies into a number of policy instruments, including the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda.

Notwithstanding the country's impressive economic development over recent decades, its sustained growth is threatened by high vulnerability to climate change. Floods have been a recurrent problem, while the northern and coastal savannah areas often experience severe drought due to irregular rainfall. In response, the Government has shown a commitment to shifting the national agenda from a disaster response approach to a disaster prevention and risk reduction approach. With support from UNDP, a number of environment-related policies, such as the National Climate Change Policy, were adopted between 2001 and 2015 with the aim of ensuring a climate-resilient economy with a low carbon footprint.

The UN system in Ghana, working with government partners, civil society organizations, academia and local communities, has helped to build the capacity of key national institutions to develop and implement climate-resilient development policies, plans and programmes. UNDP, for instance, implemented the African Adaptation Project between 2010 and 2012, which implemented capacity development programmes in 170 district assemblies across Ghana to enable them to mainstream climate change and disaster risk reduction into their district development plans.

Afforestation efforts have also been stepped up to replace depleted forests. Between 2005 and 2010, Ghana recorded an increase in areas planted with trees from 160,000 to 260,000 hectares, including 168,910 hectares of forest plantation.¹ In a project involving 428 communities and more than 9,600 farmers, UNDP supported the planting of more than 787,000 tree

cocoa farms between 2013 and 2015 to increase the number of shade trees and reverse the trend of forest degradation in cocoa-growing areas.



A forest cleared for agricultural purpose in Ghana. Photo: Modernghana.com

Improving access to safe water: Africa registered a remarkable achievement in increasing the proportion of its population using improved water sources from 33% to 48% between 1990 and 2012.² In 19 out of 49 African countries surveyed, more than 80% of the population had access to safe drinking water sources by the latter year. Ghana was one of the leading countries among those 19, with 87.2% of its population having access to safe drinking water – a considerable advance on the MDG target of 77%, reflecting a significant national investment in the provision of safe water supplies.³

A significant contributory factor in this achievement was the programme to eliminate guinea worm in Ghana, accompanied by the development of numerous safe drinking water sources for communities in areas where the guinea worm was endemic. As a result of this work by the Government and its partners, and supported by UNICEF, the WHO declared Ghana free of guinea worm in 2015. Other interventions by UNICEF, which provided water supplies to over 400,000 Ghanaians, also contributed to the overall national achievement.

Notwithstanding the early achievement and subsequent surpassing of the MDG target, there remains the challenge of providing clean water to all Ghanaians. About 3.5 million are still without access to safe drinking water, and about two out of every five water sources are polluted. Further pollution during



transport and household storage means that three out of every five Ghanaians are still drinking unsafe water.⁴

Improving access to basic sanitation: Globally, 64% of the population currently use improved sewage system and toilet facilities. Ghana, like many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, has struggled to make significant progress in this area, registering an increase in access to adequate basic sanitation over the 15-year period of the MDGs from just 6% to 15%. This leaves Ghana at present in the bottom seven countries worldwide. It is of particular concern that the rate has remained static at 15% since 2011. Open defecation remains prevalent in Ghana at a rate that dropped only slightly, from 22% to 19%, over the period of the MDGs.⁵

Ghana has made some progress in sanitation by providing public and shared toilets to increase access to improved facilities. Between 1990 and 2015, this has resulted in a 36% reduction in the use of unimproved facilities and a corresponding increase of 31% in shared improved facilities⁵. Though Ghana has not achieved the MDG target of halving the proportion of the population without basic sanitation, conditions have improved for many Ghanaians, thanks to the development of national sanitation strategies, including one to address rural sanitation challenges, particularly open defecation. The UNICEF supported community-led total sanitation strategy, a behaviour change strategy mobilizing communities to eliminate open defecation, resulted in a 2% drop in open defecation rates between 2011 and 2014, meaning that over 2,000 communities eliminated the practice entirely.

Improving housing and upgrading slums: Estimates by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) indicate that in 2012 the proportion of people living in slum conditions in urban areas was higher in Africa than in any other continent at 62% (excluding North Africa, where the proportion is 13%). In Ghana, a significant proportion of the population lacks secure housing and urban slums persist. The country's housing deficit is currently estimated at 1.7 million units.

The UN, particularly UN-Habitat, continues to support the country's efforts to address this lack of housing. For instance, financing facilities were established in Tema and Sekondi in 2008, under UN-Habitat's Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF) to open up access to funding for low-income housing. The establishment of these facilities has enabled the development of a mixed used housing facility, a combination of residential and commercial units, owned by a slum cooperative and market sheds for women to improve incomes for housing, as well as facilitating the acquisition of land for housing and improvements in the conditions of slum dwellers. UN-Habitat is also supporting the Government in establishing a national facility, based on the SUF, and a Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme, to fund bigger projects with wider coverage.

TRANSITIONING TO THE SDGs

The unfinished business of MDG 7 can be addressed over the next 15 years through SDGs 7, 11, 13, 14, and 15, which cover renewable energy, sustainable cities and communities, climate change action, marine conservation, and environmental protection. The key challenges to be tackled in Ghana include the following:

- inadequate consideration of environmental and sustainability issues in the mainstream economic sectors and the development planning process;
- weak enforcement of environmental laws;
- lack of incentives for reducing deforestation and conserving biodiversity;
- inadequate comprehensive and sustainable physical infrastructure plans;
- low commitment and weak monitoring and enforcement systems for improvements in sanitation;
- land disputes at local level;
- skepticism of slum dwellers towards upgrading, owing to fear of forced evictions; and
- insufficient quantity and quality of water supply for the poor, who bear a high burden of the cost of water.

Priorities in taking action in pursuit of the SDGs include:

- a stronger commitment on the part of national agencies towards the implementation of environmental protection laws and regulations, including the recently approved National Climate Change Policy, the Housing Policy and the National Slum Upgrading Strategy;
- behaviour change and social norms strategies, effective sanitation management systems and enforcement of sanitation by-laws at local level to improve sanitation coverage;
- putting in place a stronger framework of legal regulation to deal with land disputes in order to mitigate the housing deficit and address the issue of slums, especially in urban areas; and
- extending and replicating innovative programmes for low-income housing, home improvement and expansion, and slum upgrading.

In addition, the global environmental issues that have moved to the centre of the sustainable development agenda, such as climate change, sustainable consumption and production, and sustainable and modern energy, will require broader partnerships, better coordination and political will, as well as innovative approaches.

¹ Republic of Ghana and UN Ghana, *Ghana Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Report*.

² WHO and UNICEF, MDGs report 2014.

³ Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2014.

⁴ Ghana Living Standards Survey 2014.

⁵ WHO and UNICEF, *Progress on sanitation and drinking water: 2015 update and MDG assessment (Joint Monitoring Programme, 2015)*.