

## Chapter 2

### Youth and Vulnerabilities

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Over the past two decades, Ghana has made great strides in improving its social, economic and political structures, facilitating access to social services to reduce inequalities. Interventions aimed at mitigating the vulnerabilities facing Ghana's predominantly youthful population have had promising effects in enhancing the ability of this demographic to become active citizens and productive members of society today and in the near future. Nevertheless, there remain areas of vulnerability, with youth populations susceptible to a range of adversities and, as such, denied the fundamental freedom to make choices to enhance their lives without being compromised by deprivation or political-economic conditions (UNDP, 2014). These areas of vulnerability do not exist in isolation – that is, they are often intertwined and their impacts are compounded.

#### 2.1 Social protection strategy

*'Counselling should be part of our everyday life. But one problem is perception of Ghanaians. We have this perception that when you are going for counselling it is like you are really in need or you cannot actually use your [own] intellect to make good decisions.'* Female, 15–20 years

Ghana has made significant progress in relation to adopting social protection strategies aimed at reducing vulnerabilities among Ghanaians (including Ghanaian youth). Notably, a rationalisation study in 2013 that confirmed the need to develop a coordinated social protection sector gave rise to the National Social Protection Policy (2015). This policy, developed by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP), draws on Ghana's Shared Growth and Development Agenda 2014–2017 to produce a knowledgeable, skilled, productive and healthy population with the capacity to drive and sustain socio-economic transformation. It also builds on the Coordinated Programme for Economic and Social Development Policies 2014–2020 to reduce income disparities, enhance access to social security and develop social protection programmes for vulnerable groups such as children and youth. The Policy additionally aligns with Ghana's commitment to meet the SDGs through productive mechanisms that will empower and inform communities and work to protect youth from extreme poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

#### 2.2 Key vulnerabilities

##### 2.2.1 Poverty

Poverty remains one of the gravest threats to young people, as it is associated with a range of risks, such as malnutrition and health problems, exposure to hazardous environments, academic challenges (delayed enrolment, sporadic attendance, poor

**Box 2.1 The SDGs and measures to reduce youth vulnerabilities****SDG 1. No Poverty**

- Create income, jobs and decent work
- Increase social security and protection for the most vulnerable and disabled

**SDG 2. Zero Hunger**

- Facilitate school feeding programmes providing high-nutrient value food to pupils
- Modernise agriculture for increased local productivity and production
- Develop better land preservation and food waste practices to prevent food scarcity

**SDG 3. Good Health and Well-Being**

- Improve quality health care access, services and information
- Encourage youth-friendly, stigma-free and discrimination-free health services
- Raise awareness about the importance of healthy lifestyle practices

**SDG 4. Quality Education**

- Create well-educated citizens with skills to drive economy, science, technology and innovation through technical and vocational education and training programmes
- Ensure access to and equity of education to help youth and their communities in the future secure jobs and remain out of poverty
- Include reproductive health in the curriculum

**SDG 5. Gender Equality**

- Empower women and girls
- End violence and discrimination against women and girls
- Promote basic human rights, particularly around reproductive health in young women
- Ensure equity for women and men in access to education, work and equal pay, and participation in politics

**SDG 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth**

- Create sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the private sector
- Transform economies through diversification and resilience

- Improve working conditions and guarantee social benefits or health insurance
- Stop child and forced labour

### **SDG 10. Reduced Inequalities**

- Grant equal land access to youth and women for income generation and food production through farming
- Ensure economic and social policies are applied fairly across all populations and regions
- Employ qualified youth without discrimination based on disability, gender, ethnicity or religion
- Engage marginalised youth in governance, policy and decision-making processes

grades, early drop-out), engagement in violence or conflict and difficulties developing skills suitable for employment (UNDP, 2014). The Ghana Poverty and Inequality Report (2016) found that, between 1992 and 2013, Ghana's national level of poverty fell by more than half, from 56.5 per cent to 24.2 per cent (Cooke et al., 2016). The report also shows that urban areas have a lower average rate of poverty compared with rural areas (10.6 per cent versus 37.9 per cent). Although no specific data on youth exists, it is estimated that about 3.65 million children (28.3 per cent) live in poverty, increasing their vulnerability to negative life-course outcomes (ibid.).

### **Addressing poverty**

Many economic, political and social factors have contributed to the progress Ghana has made in addressing poverty. Included in these are Ghana's steady gross domestic product (GDP) growth; higher government budgetary allocations; debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative; an increase in foreign investment; and the introduction of social protection programmes aimed at targeting vulnerable populations. Initiatives include Livelihoods Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) and, most recently, the Free Senior High School (FSHS) Policy.

The LEAP programme was initiated in 2007 with the goal of providing cash transfers and health insurance to poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged households across the country to alleviate short-term poverty and encourage long-term human capital development. Notably, this programme targets children, pregnant women and persons with disabilities as beneficiaries. Independent research found that LEAP had contributed to a 16 per cent increase in national health insurance enrolment among children and youth (Handa et al., 2013). It had also increased school enrolment among secondary school children by 7 per cent and reduced primary school absenteeism, particularly among girls, by 10 per cent. The number of beneficiary households has

gradually increased, from 1,654 in 21 districts in 2008 to 213,048 in 216 districts across the 10 regions of Ghana in 2016 (MOGCSP, 2018). Despite its wide success, though, LEAP currently faces problems related to management coordination and administration of payments (Handa et al., 2013).

The LIPW programme, under the Ghana Social Opportunities Project, started in 2011 to provide targeted rural poor households with access to employment and income-earning opportunities, particularly during the agricultural off-season from November to March/April and in response to external shocks. The Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research conducted an evaluation of the programme in 2012 in 11 districts and confirmed that it had had a positive impact (World Bank, 2016). In relation to youth, the level of indebtedness for households with youth aged 25–34 years had declined by 4 percent and the likelihood of having savings (either at home or at financial institutions) had increased by 6 percent (ibid.).

Introduced by GoG in 2017, the FSHS Policy was designed to provide free public secondary education, expand infrastructure, improve the quality and equity of education and enhance the development of employable skills through a diverse curriculum (MOE, 2018). Its establishment has been recognised as a GoG achievement but it remains too early to determine the educational outcomes and financial sustainability of the programme.

### 2.2.2 Inequality and social exclusion

*‘There is still not equal access to resources and other stuff. Yesterday in class, we selected course reps – a boy and a lady... The lecturer [dictated] that the boy should be assisted by the lady.’* Female, 15–20 years

Inequality and social exclusion can be explained as being the result of ‘a cultural devaluation of groups and categories of people in a society by virtue of who they are, or rather, who they are perceived to be’ (Kabeer, 2005). Social exclusion and inequality in youth populations are associated with gender, disability, socio-economic status and religion, and can result in differences in access to basic needs and services such as health care and education. Ghana’s political, social and economic structures consistently privilege some while disadvantaging others, creating inequalities in income, assets and opportunities. For example, as a result of gender discrimination, females are often excluded from opportunities to secure jobs and earn decent wages based on the assumption that they should prioritise domestic work and early marriage rather than academic life (Jones and Chant, 2009). Likewise, youth in rural areas are often excluded from economic opportunities and social services as a result of their inaccessibility (Porter et al., 2011).

#### Addressing inequality and social exclusion

*‘We live in a community where people still perceive girls to be those who do house chores... After school you are supposed to be in the kitchen and your brother is supposed to probably go out there and play football.’* Female, 15–20 years

GoG and many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are playing a pivotal role in addressing the inequality gap across multiple indicators, through policy changes and initiatives designed to empower disadvantaged groups. For example, the project *Integrating Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in National Policies, Programmes and Commitments* (GESI), coordinated by STAR-Ghana, engages key stakeholders such as the Ghana Health Services, MOGCSP and civil society organisations to ensure national policies systematically integrate gender equality and social inclusion.

GESI has led to the creation of several programmes.<sup>1</sup> One example, *Youth Speak Out*, a project in collaboration with Youth Empowerment for Life, aims to develop inclusive governance and leadership through youth parliaments, by empowering and providing platforms for youth voice regarding issues and concerns with local authorities. To date, there has been an increased response from various authorities, leading to positive on-the-ground change in communities. Also, *Mission Ghana on TV* works with the media and civil society organisations to influence action by local authorities through public broadcasting on social exclusion issues facing the youth demographic. Already, there have been documented improvements in access to and delivery of health and educational services for youth populations. However, despite these and other efforts to narrow the inequality gap, there is still significant work to be done and further strategic action is required.

### 2.2.3 Unemployment

Ghana's remarkable economic growth over the past decade, including its transition into lower-middle-income country status, has not necessarily translated into more job opportunities for its rapidly expanding labour force. The World Bank has estimated that 48 per cent of Ghanaian youth aged 15–24 are unemployed (Honorati and Johansson de Silva, 2016). With the youth demographic consisting of more than half the country's population, current and future generations are at risk of not being able to maintain sustainable livelihoods, not overcoming delayed life transitions and/or not developing necessary capabilities regarding family, child-rearing, lifestyle and well-being, and further contributing to a cycle of poverty. According to the NYP 2010, youth face specific labour-related challenges, including inaccessibility of labour markets, a lack of experience and skills, and inability to secure better-paying jobs (MOYS, 2010). Unemployment rates appear to be higher among females than males, and among rural youth as compared with urban populations. Recent estimates suggest that, by age 20, 26 per cent of all females are unemployed with no education or training, compared with only 13 per cent of their male counterparts (GSS, 2014; Honorati and Johansson de Silva, 2016). Females, particularly in rural areas, are also more likely to leave school early, thereby reducing their level of access to the labour market, and are more likely to find employment in risky situations (GSS, 2014; Honorati and Johansson de Silva, 2016).

#### Addressing youth unemployment

Many programmes and initiatives have been developed to tackle the growing youth unemployment rates in Ghana. However, even after years of capital investment and

implementation, it is clear these are not adequate in supporting the youth demographic. The World Bank estimates that public and private programmes cover less than 4 per cent of the approximately 9 million youth in Ghana (Babongte Avura and Ulzen-Appiah, 2016). Some of the inadequacies of these programmes and initiatives can be attributed to the growing nature of the youth population and increased participation in higher education – which is leaving educated youth unemployed as a result of limited job opportunities.

GoG first introduced the *National Youth Employment Programme*, later known as the *Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency*, in 2006 as an initiative to address high youth unemployment and to empower youth to contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation. Its strategy consisted of offering essential services such as health and education, promoting good governance, providing employment and training youth in specific skills using a wide range of modules. Nevertheless, by the end of 2011, the programme had offered jobs to only about 108,000 Ghanaians, which was not much given the amount of capital investment involved (Attipoe-Fitz, 2010). Both the National Youth Employment Programme and the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency collapsed as a result of major shortcomings in producing long-term jobs, corruption, increasing expenses and, most importantly, inability to address the specific interests of youth as a result of lack of consultation of key stakeholders in their creation and implementation (Donkoh, 2010).

Subsequently, in 2015, the Youth Employment Agency was established under the Youth Employment Act to facilitate employment by providing training and entrepreneurial skills to youth through the use of modules and internships. This programme has received international recognition, and yet it too has directly employed only 100,000 young people out of 1 million applicants per year (Babongte Avura and Ulzen-Appiah, 2016). This speaks to the on-going need for further evaluation and analysis to design more effective initiatives.

#### 2.2.4 Early marriage and parenthood

Young people in Ghana experience many social transitions during adolescence that can have significant consequences for their growth and future capabilities. These transitions are typically influenced by social and cultural norms, which may include choices and responsibilities such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy and early parenthood. The Ghana Maternal Health Survey 2017 shows that 8 per cent women aged 25–49 were first married by age 15 and 26 per cent by age 18. Furthermore, 14 per cent of women aged 15–19 have begun child-bearing. Women in rural areas marry about three years earlier than urban women, which also makes them prone to earlier child-bearing. Moreover, the age of first marriage, first sexual intercourse and start of child-rearing increases proportionately in relation to wealth and education status (GSS and MOH, 2018). Evidence has shown that investing in females can have large economic and social benefits, as females who stay in school longer tend to marry and have children later, thus decreasing the risk of maternal and child mortality as well as that of lower educational and employment status (de Groot et al., 2018).

A study in the suburbs of Accra found that, out of 50 respondents, 82.8 per cent believed that pregnancy affected their academic performance through reduction of study hours, and 94 per cent believed there was no possibility of them returning to school after delivery (Gyan, 2013). Overall, 66 per cent agreed that teenage pregnancy could be caused by school drop-out and 67 per cent that it could lead to school drop-out (Gyan, 2013; Amponsem-Boateng et al., 2018). For females in school, pregnancy and motherhood pose additional issues, including discrimination and condemnation from family, educational institutions and government officials. There is no policy or law protecting adolescent mothers' rights to education and, as a result, many girls are left to face economic hardship, violence and challenges in obtaining decent jobs and developing their capabilities (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

### Addressing early marriage and parenthood

Levels of early parenthood and child-bearing have decreased in Ghana as a result of multiple programmes aimed at raising awareness of sexual and reproductive health rights and services. One major example is the Ghana Adolescent Reproductive Health Programme. This programme, coordinated by the National Population Council and Ghana Health Service (GHS), works to improve reproductive health knowledge and behaviour for up to 350,000 adolescents and to strengthen family planning services in Brong Ahafo region. Brong Ahafo, known for its high teenage pregnancy rates, has since shown a significant drop in pregnancies compared with the national average (GHS, 2016). The programme has also implemented over 50 adolescent-friendly/youth corners to encourage youth to seek reproductive health and family planning services, and established nine health clubs in schools to promote peer education training and activities encouraging healthy sexual and reproductive behaviour. It is estimated that 200,000 adolescents had benefited from this programme as of 2016 (ibid.).

#### 2.2.5 Sexual exploitation and abuse

*'We had students sleeping with teachers for marks in our school. So, you could take a student's exam paper, read a whole essay he/she has written and then it does not make sense... but that person has a higher score than you do. When you report them to the school authorities, they do nothing about it.'* Female, 15–20 years

Sexual exploitation and abuse, growing concerns in Ghana, include prostitution, trafficking, sex tourism, pornography and early child marriage, among others. Ghanaian law, including the 1992 Constitution, the Criminal Code (amendment) Act of 1998, the Children's Act of 1998, the Human Trafficking Act of 2005 and the Domestic Violence Act of 2007, prohibits most types of sexual exploitation of children and contains detailed provisions on children's rights, processes and procedures (Department of Social Welfare and UNICEF, 2011). There is also the Ending Child Marriage Campaign by MOGCSP, which has developed a 10-year National Strategic Framework to provide an integrated vision and a clear direction to all stakeholders related to the campaign (MOGCSP, 2016).

### Box 2.2 Agenda 2063 and measures to reduce youth vulnerabilities

Agenda 2063 calls for ‘an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena’. To this extent, it presents a set of seven goals, a comprehensive analysis of progress made to date, key issues to be addressed and a working framework with strategies to approach and attain these goals in the next 50 years.

1. **A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development:** End poverty and inequality of income and opportunities, create more jobs, improve quality of life and access to basic services, improve infrastructure, provide social security and protection and transform Africa’s economy through industrialisation, modernisation and sustainable use of natural resources
2. **An integrated continent, politically united, based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance:** Seek continental unity and integration through trade, exchange of goods and services, free movement of people and capital, expansion of ICT and development of transportation infrastructure to unite the continent
3. **An Africa of good governance, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law:** Practising good governance and democracy, compliance with human right laws and facilitating the emergence of development-oriented leaders to exercise justice and anti-corruption
4. **A peaceful and secure Africa:** Strengthen governance, accountability and transparency, practise peace prevention and conflict resolution/reconciliation and address any emerging threats to Africa’s peace and security using self-financed means
5. **An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics:** Restoring and preserving Africa’s cultural heritage, promoting creative arts and culture in Africa’s transformation and instilling the spirit of Pan-Africanism among generations
6. **An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children:** Ensuring and practising gender equality in all aspects of life, eliminating discrimination and violence towards women and girls, encouraging safe and responsible livelihoods, creating opportunities and improving access to health, education and employment
7. **Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner:** Improving Africa’s global governance and contributions by refocusing its partnerships and establishing its financial independence in priority areas for growth, transformation and development

**Source:** Adapted from AUC (2015).



Yet, despite legislative efforts, constraints related to funding, resource allocation, data, training of enforcement officials and regulation of child protection laws have resulted in an increase in the number of children exploited (UNICEF, 2009). A study on sexual exploitation in Ghana found that, in most areas, child prostitution was believed to be the most common form of exploitation, with victims mostly female between the ages of nine and sixteen, operating independently; poverty, poor access to social services, family separation, lack of support, peer influence, the media and perpetrator coercion were identified as reasons leading to exploitation and abuse (Ghana NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child and ECPAT, 2015). It is important to address these factors in order to be able to protect children and youth and ensure a healthy population. This can be done through restrictions on pornography, increased training for law enforcement officials, support services for children and the enforcement of legislation. Under the coordination of a National Secretariat, for example, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Units – a nationwide network of 11 regional police units and 75 local police units – have been tasked with the responsibility of investigating, prosecuting and supporting all domestic violence and child abuse cases in Ghana (Alhassan, 2007; Training Resources Group and Play Therapy Africa, 2012).

## 2.3 Summary points

1. Key factors affecting youth in Ghana include poverty, inequality and social exclusion, unemployment and early parenthood.
2. The National Social Protection Policy 2015 was formulated to produce a knowledgeable, skilled, productive and healthy population with the capacity to drive and sustain socio-economic development, reduce income inequality and develop social protection programmes.
3. Poverty is associated with risks such as poor health and malnutrition, exposure to hazardous environments, problems in school, engagement in violence, difficulties finding employment and ineffective citizenship. To this end, programmes such as LEAP have been developed.
4. Ghana's political, social and economic policies consistently privilege some groups of people and disadvantage others, creating inequalities in income, assets and opportunities. To this end, initiatives such as GESI have been formed.
5. Youth face challenges in the labour market, including in accessing opportunities and networking, attaining experience and skills and securing better-paying jobs in the formal sector. The Youth Employment Agency has initiated various programmes to equip youth with skills to enter the labour force prepared.

## 2.4 Recommendations

1. Expand and improve coordination between social protection programmes to prevent overlap and enable equal distribution. This can be done by developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to track performance and impact.

2. Develop policies designed to reduce youth vulnerability that address underlying structural inequalities, remove constraints for more disadvantaged youth people and enable the realisation of potential. To this end, economic policy and social policy must be integrated.
3. Most vulnerabilities facing young people are shaped by the circumstances in which they live. Poverty, inequality, social exclusion, hazardous environments, etc. can be addressed by improving living environments (e.g. expanding coverage of basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, safe housing and rural roads), which will grant young people access to more services and social and employment opportunities.

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## Note

- 1 <http://www.star-ghana.org/index.php/our-work/gender-equality-and-social-inclusion>

