

Ghana's Sustained Agricultural Growth

At independence, Ghana seemed to have a bright future. Rich in land, timber and gold, it was also the world's leading cocoa producer. The country had one of the best education systems in Africa and, well before independence in 1957, was largely self-governing. The promise vanished as the economy declined, and then all but collapsed in the 1970s amid turbulent politics. Annual cocoa production, once at more than 500,000 tons, was down to less than 170,000 tons by 1983.

At that point, however, the country's fortunes turned around, in the overall economy in general and in the agriculture sector in particular. Over the past 25 years, Ghana has ranked among the top five performers in the world in terms of agricultural growth. Cocoa has recovered, surpassing its previous production levels. Staple food output has risen much faster than the population has grown: by 2005/07, production per person was more than 80% higher than it was in 1981/83. And growth in higher-value vegetables and fruit for domestic and export markets has been encouraging.

Overall sustained economic and agricultural growth has been accompanied by rapid poverty reduction. Growth has created a vibrant market for local farmers, and higher incomes have reduced poverty and greatly improved the demand side of food security.

The share of the population living in poverty fell from 52% in 1991/92 to 28.5% in 2004/06, with rural poverty falling from 64% to 40% over the same period. Child malnutrition has almost halved since the end of the 1980s. Ghana should soon become the first country in Africa to achieve the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1) of halving its poverty and hunger.

Ghana was able to turn its agriculture sector around primarily because of the country's economic reforms, which began in 1983. The government's determination and sustained effort, combined with consistent support from the donor community, have been remarkable and have ensured that the reforms have been deep and sustainable. Better technology for cassava and other food crops has helped as well.