**U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights calls for submissions from civil society on Ghana**

Ghana has achieved the first Millennium Development Goal, to halve between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than $1.25 a day. This was achieved by decreasing the rate of poverty from 56.5% in 1992 to 24.2% in 2013. The rate of occurrence of extreme poverty has been consistently going down; In fact, it was at 16.5% in the 1990s and reduced to 8.4% in 2006. However, there has been little progress for those living close to the poverty line.

Also, the average rate of poverty in urban areas is at 10.6%, which is much less than in rural areas, where poverty rates are around 37.9%. Thus, there is a wide gap between the two and rural poverty is almost four times that of urban poverty. The Savannah regions of the North (the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions) are the most rural areas in Ghana, where chronic food insecurity is widespread, and livelihoods are very vulnerable. There is a huge income disparity between the population living in the drought-prone northern plains and those living in the urban fertile southern regions, where there are more economic opportunities.

Thus, high levels of poverty reflected in low incomes and poor provision of infrastructure by local and central governments in rural areas, negatively impact rural households’ decisions on consumption and access to basic services. Consequently, for a range of services such as education, health, water and electricity; the proportion of rural households deprived tends to be disproportionately higher than urban areas.

In 2013, 50.4% of the population in the Northern Region was living in poverty, compared to 55.7% in 2006. This region had a very small decline, compared to the Upper West, which went from 89.1% to 70.7% and; the Upper East, which went from 72.9% to 44.4% between 2006 and 2013.

Regardless, the poor in these three regions have the highest rates of poverty depth and severity in Ghana. For example, people in the Upper West Region live on average, a third below the poverty line. Note that although the percentage of poor people has declined by a quarter since 2006, the number of poor has only gone down by 10%. As a result, Ghana still had a population of 6.4 million people under the poverty line in 2016, a small difference compared to 7 million in 2006.

Considering the distribution and prevalence of poverty in Ghana, the Special Rapporteur should visit the Northern Region, Upper East Region and Upper West Region, which combined account for 2.3 million of all the poor in Ghana (of which 1.3 million are found in the Northern Region).

Those living in poverty in Ghana often lack good drinking water, access to hospitals, basic sanitation and quality education. Poverty is characterized by low income, malnutrition, ill-health, illiteracy and insecurity. The most vulnerable individuals in Ghanaian society are abused women and children, poor women heads of households, people with disabilities, people with HIV and Aids, unemployed youth and those in vulnerable employment without social protection. These individuals face multiple vulnerabilities because of poverty, negative impacts of macroeconomic policies and the denial of their rights on accounts of socio-cultural belief systems and practices.

Issues relating to the right to basic education, children’s rights, the right to health, and women’s rights largely affect Ghanaians living in poverty and extreme poverty.

Quality educational institutions have not been established on a large scale throughout all the regions of Ghana. There is also a lack of adequate learning materials and of trained teachers available in public schools. In fact, less than 60% of primary school teachers have professional training and qualifications. Although, there is a Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education policy in Ghana, in 2010 the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) inspected 211 basic public schools and found that 60% of them continued to charge fees. Thus, effectively creating an insurmountable barrier for school aged children living in poverty.

In Ghana children are about 40% more likely to live in poverty than adults, which is a major rise since the 1990s, when children were only 15% more likely to live in poverty than adults.

CHRAJ has found that many vulnerable children suffer abuse and are involved in child labour due to these circumstances. Many poor children, must work to help support their households and to provide for themselves. Engaging in exploitative farming, fishing, trading and artisanal small-scale mining. These circumstances are further aggravated by the fact that poor children are often renegaded to other family members when their parents no longer have the resources to support them, exposing them to more instances of abuse.

Poverty also intersects with the right to health as there is unequal distribution of health infrastructures and limited access to health facilities within Ghana. For example, there have been consistent complaints regarding the state of maternal clinics and hospitals in the northern regions, where there is a lack of medical tools and inadequate treatment for women and babies, resulting in high incidences of infant death.

Poor women also find themselves very vulnerable within the patriarchal Ghanaian society. For example, ritual servitude is commonly practiced in the Volta region. Often in the form of a practice named *trokosi,* a tradition that involves virgin girls being delivered as shrine slaves to priests as a form of restitution for a sin committed within the family. This was outlawed in 1998 but is still widely practiced. Additionally, widows, especially poverty-stricken ones are at a huge risk of undergoing widowhood rites where they are made to undergo dehumanizing rituals. They are also vulnerable to having their property and inheritance rights infringed upon. In Ghanaian tradition, married women, are not considered as part of their husband’s families and despite laws in place to protect their land rights, when their husbands pass away, many women suffer abuse and exploitation by family members regarding property and land. Widows lose their social status, are excluded from social life and are often evicted. Those with children sometimes resort to withdrawing their children from school to rely on their labor. The poverty of widows increases even more due to illiteracy and a lack of education, which restricts their access to income generating opportunities. Also, cultural taboos, negative stereotyping, seclusion, mourning dress codes and the burden of childcare may impede young widows from participating in public domains.

Having recognized poverty as a major issue, the government of Ghana announced “Ghana: Vision 2020” in 1995, this project aimed to make Ghana a middle-income country in 25 years. So far: The First Step (1996-2000); the First Medium-Term Plan (1997-2000); Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (2003-2005); and the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (2006-2009), have been strategic programmes undertaken by the government to reach macro-economic stability and reduce poverty within the context of this vision. In addition to this, the World Bank launched the “Ghana Local Government Capacity Support Project” in 2011, which has a focus on urban development. Additionally, in 2016 Ghana received official development assistance (ODA), in the form of grants and loans, from the International Development Association of the World Bank Group, for social infrastructure (USD 168 million), economic infrastructure (USD 73 million), multi-sector (USD, 32 million) and production (USD, 31 million). The same year, the IMF, also provided USD 231 million in loans, from concessional trust funds towards programme assistance in Ghana. Apart from this, the United States, France and the United Kingdom were the largest bilateral donors towards ODA in Ghana.

To conclude, the Special Rapporteur should meet the Honorable Otiko Afisah Djaba, who is the current Minister of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. This ministry oversees the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) Programme that is being implemented in all 216 districts of Ghana. The Special Rapporteur should also meet, Mrs. Mavis Hawa Koomson, the Minister of the Ministry for Special Development Initiatives who oversees the government’s Infrastructure Poverty Eradication Programme (IPEP).

The Rapporteur should also meet with the Northern Development Authority (NDA), a governmental organisation that has been created to support livelihoods, access to education and climate-smart agriculture. The Rapporteur should also meet with SEND Ghana, an organisation which does policy research and advocates for pro-poor policy, and the promotion of livelihood security. Also, Trade Aid Integrated (TAI), works in the Upper East Region to help poor individuals create and manage endeavors for sustained poverty reduction and wealth creation. They also promote sustainable rural livelihoods and strengthen off-farm alternative livelihoods. Lastly, considering the influence religious organisations have in Ghana, the rapporteur should also meet with the Association of Church-Based Development NGOs (ACDEP), which is a network of 40 NGOs in northern Ghana that work in agricultural development, micro-finance, rural enterprise development for women’s groups and value chains / market access, among others. It is focused on socio-economic development in northern Ghana and its objectives are to improve livelihoods, household food security, health and contribute to poverty reduction in northern Ghana.

**SUBMITTED BY: LEGAL RESOURCES CENTRE, ACCRA, GHANA.**