



Research Report

Chiefs and the attainment of sustainable development Goal 1 in Ghana: The case of three selected traditional leaders

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Abstract - Though critics continue to question the relevance of the chieftaincy institution within a democratic dispensation, the instrumentality of the institution cannot be overemphasised. Chiefs in contemporary Ghana perform a multiplicity of functions, primarily to enhance the livelihoods of their people. The study employed a qualitative approach to examine the role of contemporary chiefs towards the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 1. The study identified that even though the powers and functions of chiefs have decreased thereby affecting their influence in Ghanaian society, they continue to play significant roles in development. They are regarded as agents of development who enhance human development. Chiefs are critical in the establishment of educational infrastructure, development of human resources through scholarship schemes, health advocates, and liaising with external bodies to promote business enterprises. Their significant role in development calls for partnership with other stakeholders who are inclined towards enhancing human dignity. It is therefore established that a partnership by social organisations and groups would help chiefs to enhance the living conditions of people within their various communities. The study recommends for partnership between chiefs, Faith-based Organisations, and other development agencies in alleviating poverty in Ghana.

Keywords: Chieftaincy, Development, Sustainable Development, Poverty, Partnership

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Introduction

Chieftaincy in Ghana and Africa is an ancient political institution that has been transferred from generation to generation albeit with modifications. The instrumentality of the political institution cannot be overemphasised; hence it is guaranteed in most African countries. Thus, the political system in modern Africa is characterised by the co-existence of modern and traditional structures, a political arrangement that political scholars have labelled as mixed government ([Afranie *et al.* 2023](#); [Boateng 2024](#); [Boateng and Bawole 2021](#); [Boateng and Afranie 2020a](#); [Boateng and Afranie 2021](#)). Chiefs occupy subordinate roles compared with officials of modern political structures. The latter is tasked with policy formulation and the implementation of programs aimed at reducing the rates of poverty which is highly endemic in the rural sectors.

International communities like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) among others, have assisted the government of Ghana to embark on poverty reduction programs. Global strides to end poverty in recent times led to the establishment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 with the paramount objective of ending extreme poverty once and for all. At the end of 2015, the MDGs had achieved mixed outcomes as millions of people were left behind especially the poorest ([UN 2015](#)). Where objectives of the MDGs were achieved, the successes were labelled as a by-product of the rapid economic growth of China and India for instance rather than the direct impact of MDG-oriented activities ([Curtis and Poon 2009](#)). The former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon relates the lack of progress to factors such as unmet commitments, inadequate resources, lack of focus and accountability, and insufficient interest in sustainable development (UN 2010).

Coupled with the above challenges, world leaders desirous to enhance the living standards of people, developed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also called Global Goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030, everyone in the world is protected from any form of harm and enjoys prosperity. The partnership between the government of Ghana and the international development organisation, coupled with the nation's return to democratic governance, witnessed significant economic growth ([World Bank 2020](#)). As a result, poverty was reduced between 2012-2016. Though vulnerability declined over the years, it was prevalent, especially in the rural sector where

poverty is endemic. Between 2019 to 2020, the poverty rate increased from 25 percent to 25.5 ([World Bank 2020](#)).

Chiefs have historically concerned themselves with policy formulation that is geared towards the enhancement of the livelihoods of their subjects. The roles that chiefs performed before and during the colonial era were essential to safeguard life and promote peaceful coexistence among citizens. Though the powers and functions of chiefs have reduced with time, contemporary chiefs have been crucial in enhancing the living standards of their citizens. The modern chief in Africa today is an important and indispensable player in the development process of the continent, particularly at the local and community levels. His role entails the development, implementation, and monitoring of development programmes and projects. Thus, the focus of chiefs in contemporary times is to combat poverty and marginalisation at the grassroots.

The above is an illustration that the contemporary chief is a major stakeholder in the materialisation of the SDGs by 2030. Despite the above, studies on chiefs and sustainable development are scanty. The closest study that comes to this was done by [Boateng and Larbi \(2021\)](#) who investigated the collaboration between chiefs and local government authorities in combating climate change. [Assanful \(2018\)](#) also investigated the role of chiefs in the attainment of SDG 16. It is against this backdrop that the study sought to investigate the role of chiefs in ensuring the materialisation of SDG 1. The paper is structured into four parts. Part, one discusses the literature on chieftaincy and sustainable development. Part two focuses on the research methods adopted in the paper. Part three is devoted to the findings and discussion section while the last section draws conclusions and recommendations.

Literature Review: Chieftaincy and Sustainable Development

In 1987, the Bruntland Commission provided the oft-cited definition of sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs ([Emas 1987](#)). [Needham \(2011\)](#) also defines sustainable development as the ability to meet the needs of the present while contributing to future generations ([Needham 2011](#)). It involves economic, social, and environmental development, which is geared toward meeting the current needs of humans while preserving the needs also for future generations.

Development theorists have been paying much attention to sustainable development in which the UN's description of sustainable development is frequently referenced. [Assanful \(2018\)](#) defines sustainable development as the procedures and guidelines that guide individuals to meet their present requirements without jeopardising their potential to meet future needs. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is a set of 17 sustainable goals adopted by 193 members of the United Nations for development ([Theron 2020](#)). It reflects the opportunity to work together to promote good change founded on the ideals of cooperation, respect for human dignity, stewardship of the environment, and inclusive involvement. In addition, it is a strategy for people, the earth, and prosperity. This ability to connect the relationship between social, ecological, and economic elements is what made it appealing. That is, it seeks to improve world peace and eradicate poverty to ensure higher liberty and equality.

Sustainable Development Goal 1- No Poverty

The agenda of No Poverty in 2030 is the emphasis of the first Sustainable Development Goal. This goal aims to ensure the eradication of extreme poverty, which is one of the greatest global challenges existing in the world. By 2030, SDG 1 aims to eradicate all forms of poverty globally. It is believed that 700 million people around the world still struggle to achieve even the most basic human requirements, such as access to power, clean water, sanitation, and decent health. Most people also believe that discrimination and rejection are part of a negative circle that cannot exist ([Theron 2020](#)).

Sustainable Development Goal 1, therefore, seeks to look at ways in which poverty can be eradicated, thereby improving the standard of living of people across the globe. There are a number of targets listed under SDG 1 to eradicate poverty by 2030. These include equal rights to economic resources and basic services, ownership and control over land and natural resources, the adoption of appropriate technology, and access to financial services like microfinance among others ([Theron 2020](#)). The active engagement of this policy ensures that the eradication of poverty becomes possible. This, therefore, calls for the active participation of all individuals, leaders, groups, and societies to solve this social problem.

Chieftaincy Institution and the Attainment of SDG 1

Chiefs are a crucial ally in assisting the state in bringing sustainable development initiatives to its people. A prominent aspect of Ghanaian culture is the chieftaincy institution in which the chiefs always organise events ([Assanful 2018](#)) aimed at mobilising resources for development. These efforts have primarily been supported by political elites and other developmental agencies. Since the start of colonisation, the chieftaincy institution, which has a history of resilience, has collaborated with the government towards development. Despite the fact the chiefs and their female co-rulers are restrained from participating in active state politics, their enormous resources, both human and economic, and their ability to control the community, provide a good mechanism for poverty alleviation, which Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) can better partner to ensure SDG 1 and its targets are actualised.

Poverty reduction entails raising the average income of the populace but also fostering the conditions necessary for all people to live happy, productive lives with access to enough food, clothing, and shelter of people. It also encapsulates promoting the freedom, dignity, and self-worth of people as well as protecting them from all forms of discrimination. Because poverty is a multifaceted problem, eradicating it calls for an all-encompassing strategy to strengthen the political, social, economic, personal, and protective capacities of the poor. One of the main goals of growth is to uphold the three fundamental principles of freedom, self-respect, and human sustenance ([Ibietan 2014](#)).

According to [Assanful \(2018\)](#), the chieftaincy institution has proven to be an important ally of the state in helping to bring sustainable development projects to their people. The institution is a very visible feature of the Ghanaian society and almost all activities within the society revolve around chiefs. The roles of chiefs toward sustainable development Goal 16 are seen in the promotion of a peaceful society, attainment of an inclusive society, provision of access to justice, and abolishment of cultural practices that infringe on the rights of people. The chieftaincy institution, therefore, plays an important role in the actualisation of sustainable development.

[Asamoah \(2012\)](#) contends that the chieftaincy institution is of tremendous importance to Ghana's local governance system concerning socio-economic development. Chiefs are thus instrumental in the materialisation of decentralised

objectives and plans that has poverty alleviation as their cornerstone. The chieftaincy institution is the embodiment of rich culture while catalysing change. For instance, statutory organisations like the National House of Chiefs is mandated to study and codify customary laws and lead the way for the removal of obnoxious ones that infringe on the fundamental human rights of people ([Republic of Ghana 1992](#)). In terms of local economic development, chiefs are instrumental social mobilisation agents who liaise with diverse development agencies to enhance the living standards of the underprivileged ([Boateng et al. 2024a](#); [Boateng et al. 2016](#)). Chiefs are capable of organising men, material, and money to achieve predetermined ends to satisfy the developmental needs of their subjects. Chiefs are a force to reckon with in local governance as they play a crucial role in it, and are allies of the government and other agencies in rural areas ([Boateng and Bawole 2021](#); [Boateng and Afranie 2020b](#); [Asamoah 2012](#)).

According to [Knierzinger \(2011\)](#), the most important roles of chiefs overlap the judiciary and the executive functions, though the role of chiefs as arbitrators is mentioned in the Ghanaian constitution. As agents of development, the activities of chiefs can be equated to the diverse social activities of the government. Chiefs are disturbance handlers ensuring sustainable peace which is essential for community development ([Boateng and Afranie 2020a](#); [Boateng and Afranie 2021](#); [Abotchie 2006](#)). Chiefs in Ghana are development brokers and patrons ([Knierzinger 2011](#)), especially in rural areas where poverty is highly entrenched. The chieftaincy institution provides an excellent case study for this analysis because, although it is restricted in terms of its powers and functions, the institution has long been tied to the eradication of poverty at the grassroots.

Study Context and Research Methods

Study context

In Ghana and other parts of Africa, chiefs coexist with state officials in a hybrid governance system. In this system, traditional political systems coexist with modern governance structures ([Sklar 2003](#)) with the mandate of the two systems emanating from tradition and legal frameworks respectively. Chiefs under this, fall behind modern state structures that have assumed much of the powers and functions that they hitherto possessed. Chiefs have thus, been consigned to the performance of advisory roles ([Afranie et al. 2023](#); [Republic of Ghana 1992](#)) and traditional functions and divorced from their local governance roles which they have historically performed ([Boateng 2024](#)).

This notwithstanding, some chiefs have undertaken steps to augment the efforts of central governments in the provision of social services aimed at enhancing the living standards of the vulnerable (Boateng 2024; Busia and Adjei 2020; Boateng and Afranie 2020b). We, therefore, purposefully selected three traditional areas and examined how traditional leaders contribute towards the materialisation of SDG1. The three eminent leaders within the traditional political system in Ghana namely, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the King of the Asante Kingdom, Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin II, Paramount chief of Akyem Abuakwa, in the Eastern Region, and Togbe Afede XIV, the paramount chief of the Asogli State, in the Volta Region. Centralised political system, characterises the traditional political system in the three areas. This system has differentiated office holders who perform diverse functions to assist their respective leaders within the political hierarchy (Boateng and Afranie 2020a).

Research design

A qualitative approach was adopted in this study by the researchers to examine the contribution of the three leaders towards the materialisation of SDG1. The purpose of qualitative inquiry is not to generalise to a population, but an in-depth exploration of phenomena under investigation (Creswell and Guetterman 2019). Findings in qualitative studies are rather to be generalised to theory and not the population (Bryman 2012). To this, the researcher(s) selected 19 individuals to facilitate the comprehension of the central thesis within the phenomena under investigation. Ten participants including four key informants with expertise in chieftaincy, local governance, and rural development, and six divisional chiefs were purposefully sampled. By virtue of their background and experience, the ten 'information rich' (Patton 2015) participants were in a better position to respond to the research questions (Abrams 2010; Collingridge and Gantt 2008). In addition, three residents within each study area were sampled using the convenience sampling technique. Table 1 provides the details of participants, the reason for selection, sampling techniques, and the number sampled.

Data was gathered through key informant and in-depth interviews with the aid of a semi-structured guide. The interview sessions which lasted about an hour, provided the exchange of knowledge between the researchers and the interviewees. Not only is this technique the most vital data collection tool in qualitative inquiry, but it enabled the researchers to know what is on the minds of participants and we were able to verify or refute impressions for instance (Fraenkel and Wallen 2009; Patton 1990; Fetterman

1989). Participants were oriented on the objectives of the research and their confidentiality was assured before the interviews (Creswell 2014). The interviews were transcribed, translated where necessary, and managed with NVivo 11.

Table 1: Details of participants, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and reason for selection

Category	Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Reason for selection	Sampling technique	Data collection methods
Key actors	4	KA 1-4	Males	Expertise in chieftaincy, local governance and rural development	Purposeful	Key actor interviews
Experts						
Divisional Chiefs	6	DC 5-10	Males	Traditional leaders who oversee the general wellbeing of their people.	Purposeful	
Community members				Beneficiaries of projects and activities initiated by chiefs in their traditional areas	Convenience	Telephone for participants in Ho and face to face interviews for participants in Kumasi and Abuakwa
Abuakwa	2	CMA 1-2	Males			
	1	CMA 3	Female			
Kumasi	2	CMK 1-2	Females			
	1	CMK 3	Male			
Ho	2	CMH 1-2	Males			
	1	CMH 3	Female			
Total	19					

Source: Field survey (2024)

KA= Key actors, DC= Divisional chiefs, CMA= Community Member at Abuakwa, CMK= Community Member at Kumasi, CMH= Community Member at Ho

Thematic analysis which comprises the identification, reporting, and interpretation of patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006; Liebenberg *et al.* 2020; Xu and Zammit 2020) was adopted as the analytical approach in the study. Both inductive and deductive codes were developed after reading the transcripts thoroughly. Deductive codes were developed from our research questions, while inductive codes emerged from the narratives. Some of the themes identified were health, education, employment creation, environmental protection, provision of other basic social amenities, and the call for partnership. The process of reviewing concepts to comprehend how they were defined (Morse 2016) and the depth of research findings (Naeem *et al.* 2023) were adopted to enhance the rigor of the study.

Findings and Discussion

The study unearthed that, chiefs played enormous roles in the fight to end or reduce poverty which is endemic in the rural areas. Since poverty is multifaceted, the role of chiefs to end it cuts across numerous fields which include health, education, creation of jobs, environmental protection among others. These efforts are discussed below.

Health

To reduce poverty, it is important to make sure that everyone, regardless of social, economic, or political standing, has an equal opportunity to access a healthcare delivery system that fulfils particular quality and local needs standards. Chiefs have played prominent roles in enhancing the well-being of people in Ghana. In terms of accessibility, quality, and equity, they have been crucial in obtaining universal health coverage. They seek to provide the vulnerable and impoverished people effective access to the healthcare delivery system, including financial risk protection for at least basic medical care. This is still crucial to ensure that society's citizens are properly well-off. Chiefs attain this by influencing lawmakers to ensure that healthcare services are available and reasonably priced. A divisional chief stipulated that:

Chiefs play a vital role in enhancing healthcare within Ghanaian communities. As traditional leaders, chiefs are not only custodians of culture but also essential facilitators in the promotion of public health and well-being. Their influence extends to mobilising resources, advocating

for improved healthcare services, and bridging the gap between traditional and modern medical practices. (DC 5)

Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) is a government of Ghana initiative to provide healthcare at the local or rural level. The overarching objective is achieved through working with individuals and households who are the eventual beneficiaries of health initiatives in the planning and delivery of healthcare services. The involvement of the stakeholders is to provide holistic and sustainable services that meet the needs of the rural folks. As leaders of their people, the support of chiefs is crucial in the materialisation of this government initiative. For effective involvement, the CHPS promotes systematic planning and dialogue with chiefs ([Bassoumah et al. 2021](#)). The improvement of maternal health services outcomes, as well as the strengthening and accountability of the public health system, are ensured by the engagement of chiefs in healthcare institutions. Before the construction of CHPS compounds, chiefs availed their palaces to be used by community and public health officials for vaccination and other health-related exercises. Chiefs as custodians of communal properties, provide large tracts of land for the construction of health centres across the country. A female trader in Ho argued that:

Chiefs often provide land for the construction of health centres, hospitals, and other medical facilities across the country. By making land readily available, they remove a major barrier to healthcare infrastructure development, enabling government agencies, NGOs, and private investors to expand medical services to underserved areas. This ensures that more people, especially in rural communities, have access to quality healthcare. (CHM 3)

In Asante Juaben, the initiative of the paramount chief resulted in the establishment of a hospital that currently serves millions of people within and outside the Juaben municipal ([Boateng et al. 2016](#)). Also, in New Juaben, Koforidua, [Boateng](#) and [Bawole \(2021\)](#) have established that through the Koforidua-Detroit sister city partnership, hospital equipment has been distributed to a number of health facilities in the New Juaben North and South Municipal Assemblies. Additionally, the Otumfuo Osei Tutu II Foundation (OOTIIF) under the able leadership of the Asantehene in partnership with the JOBerg Foundation, handed over the extension of the Manhyia Hospital Maternity to the management of the hospital. The Foundation again, through its collaboration with World Vision and Guinness Ghana Limited, and ‘Société Générale Ghana’, has provided boreholes to health facilities in rural areas as part of efforts to improve health and sanitation ([Fuseini 2024a](#)).

Chiefs were also crucial in enrolling people on the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Some chiefs went a step further from advocating for their people to register with the scheme to pay large sums for most people within their traditional area. During the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, chiefs were used as health advocates to create awareness about the pandemic. Chiefs were instrumental in the correcting misconceptions that people held about the spread and symptoms of COVID-19. Oguua Fetu Afahye which is celebrated by the chiefs and people of Cape Coast in the central region and the paragliding festival which is organised in collaboration with the Kwahu Traditional Council and the Ministry of Tourism were suspended ([Antoh 2020](#); [Cromwell 2020](#)). The rationale was to help minimise the spread of the pandemic and help protect life despite the revenue that the traditional councils could have raised. Additionally, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the Asantehene, fed thousands of people by distributing bags of rice, cooking oil, and other essential food items during the lockdown in Greater Kumasi during the pandemic ([Dzido 2020](#)) and inmates in the three correctional prisons in Ashanti Region ([Awuah 2020](#)).

Otumfuo Osei Tutu II and Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin II have been instrumental in health promotion, especially in the fight against HIV/AIDS ([Boateng and Bawole 2021](#); [Boateng and Afranie 2020a](#); [Boafo-Arthur 2006](#)). The latter for instance has participated in a marathon organised to create awareness of the spread of the disease and stigmatisation against affected people ([Boafo-Arthur 2006](#)). In addition to this, the Asantehene has established the Golden Development Holding Company intending to promote the general economic development of the Ashanti people ([Mawuko-Yevugah and Attipoe 2021](#)). This is believed to be a result of the collaboration between Asantehene and the World Bank. The rationale for promoting the health of people is to build a productive human resource that will increase productivity rates.

Education

The value of education is of keen interest to many communities. This is because, education is essentially aimed at attaining full human capabilities, increasing an equitable society, and stimulating nation-building. Education halts the poverty cycle, breaks the growth of inequality, and creates sustainable development ([Dzidza et al. 2018](#)). It remains a force used in enhancing the needs of humans and reducing poverty. In response to this,

chiefs have established educational policies and programmes which maximise the resources of society for individual and social benefits. A female merchant in Kumasi indicated that:

In contemporary times, chiefs have taken cognisance of the importance of education not only in an individual's life but the role it plays in national development. As a result, the Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II through his Foundation has distributed educational materials like books, computers, and construed teachers' bungalows and extended water supply to schools.

Another participant was of the view that:

Chiefs often establish scholarship schemes to support students pursuing higher education. By providing financial assistance, they enable talented individuals from their communities to enrol in academic and technical programs, reducing barriers to education. This initiative not only improves individual livelihoods but also strengthens human capital development across the country. (KA 4)

Chiefs and their traditional councils are now commonly seen instituting educational projects, which seek to improve the quality of individuals within the society. Chiefs have thus established foundations aimed at enhancing the human potential of brilliant but needy students within their jurisdictions ([Boateng et al. 2024a](#)). Otumfuo Osei Tutu II and Togbe Afede XIV have used their educational schemes to provide educational materials and scholarships to students and teachers to help promote education in rural areas ([Boateng et al. 2024a](#)). Traditional leaders also utilise traditional occasions to mobilise revenue to support their campaigns ([Boateng and Afranie 2020a](#)) such as the construction and rehabilitation of depilated school structures ([Boateng et al. 2024a](#); [Ferdinand 2023](#); [Mawuko-Yevugah and Attipoe 2021](#); [Boateng and Bawole 2021](#); [Boateng and Afranie 2020b](#)).

Chiefs in collaboration with governments and other organisations like NGOs set up educational projects, which include building classroom blocks, libraries, and computer laboratories for their communities ([Busia and Adjei 2020](#); [Boateng et al. 2024a](#); [Boateng and Afranie 2020a](#)). Chiefs have been concerned with education from its inception by Westerners, even though it is mostly seen as the responsibility of the central government. This in effect contributes to economic growth, social justice and equality, and scientific advancement. Chiefs, therefore, ensure proper implementation of policies to safeguard the quality education of their members. A case worth mentioning is the role played by Otumfuo Osei Tutu II in 2000 before the passage of the GETFUND law ([Brenya and Bossman 2011](#)) which seeks to assist in the financing of education in Ghana.

Employment creation

Though poverty rates fell between 2012-2016, there was a rising possibility of a reversal in the earlier trend of successful poverty reduction with the emergence of COVID-19 which was projected to send numerous people into poverty ([World Bank 2020](#)). Thus, the lockdown experienced during the pandemic, negatively affected person-to-person businesses namely hospitality, tourism, and commerce as well as remittance to the poor and vulnerable ([World Bank 2020](#)). Studies have demonstrated that households that receive remittance are more likely to save ([Quartey et al. 2019](#)) and invest more in children's education ([Abdul-Mumuni and Koomson 2019](#)). A reduction in remittance which is a significant source of income in Ghana during the pandemic implies that the pandemic pushed lots of the non-poor into poverty ([World Bank 2020](#)).

The key pathways for accelerating poverty reduction thus include job creation, human and physical capital development, and higher agriculture productivity especially in lagging regions ([World Bank 2020](#)). Improving jobs and earnings opportunities for the people is at the core interest of chiefs. They take a comprehensive strategy for economic inclusion to transform them into sustainable livelihoods. One strategy, chiefs adopt in their quest to create employment is the poverty-targeted approach. This strategy strives to assist the poor in improving their standard of living by gaining employment or creating sustainable self-employment ([Puerata 2018](#)).

Modern chiefs are expected to organise their people in the establishment of self-help activities and projects and programme aimed at improving trade and economic or social development to augment efforts by government and other development agencies ([Boateng 2024](#); [Boateng and Afranie 2020b](#); [Boateng and Bawole 2021](#)). Chiefs through collaborations with governments and other organisations establish skill set programmes like making soaps and beads, baking, and farming. An official of OOTIIF indicated that:

The Foundation has an entrepreneurship initiative for the youth under the Youth Apprenticeship Training Programme. Under this, the youth mostly between 17-24 years acquire vocational training in 16 skill areas. The rationale is not only to increase entrepreneurship skills in the country but also, to reduce unemployment rates in the country.

Another participant indicated that:

Through the MasterCard Foundation, OOTIIF has provided training in dressmaking, hairdressing, bakery and mechanics to many people in Kumasi and its environs under the Yiedie project.

Fuseini (2024a) postulates that about 600 youth have benefited from training in masonry, painting, electrical, and plumbing since the inception of OOTIIF. This in effect has enabled individuals who have undergone the training to acquire the necessary skills for future and economic purposes. Chiefs offer mentoring, technical skill development, savings accounts, financial literacy training, and a combination of consumption support and productive assets during graduation. This enables individuals to acquire enough skills and capital, which allows individuals to be either employed or self-employed.

Environmental Protection

Environmental sustainability is very important in the fight for poverty alleviation. To eradicate poverty, it is necessary to adjust incentives, taxes, laws, subsidies, trade, and public procurement in support of sustainable consumption and production patterns. Without taking action to relieve the severe demands on the environment and the natural systems that sustain human life, neither the well-being of people nor the eradication of poverty can be achieved. Chiefs ensure that environmental sustainability is achieved for poverty alleviation. By tradition and custom, chiefs are the custodians of communal property resources (CPRs) which include land, forest, grazing fields, and river bodies among others (Boateng *et al.* 2024b). Chiefs also manage natural taxonomic trees such as *dawadawa* and shea butter (Seini 2006). As a result, chiefs are mandated to ensure the sustainable utilisation of the environment and its resources as they belong to the ancestors, the living, and generations yet unborn (Boateng *et al.* 2024b; Boateng and Larbi 2021; Alhassan 2006). This enjoined the living and chiefs to ensure their judicious utilisation so as not to incur the wrath of the gods.

Chiefs in their quest to promote the sustainable utilisation of the environment have collaborated with local and international partners. Under the able leadership of Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin II, the Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Area established a partnership with the United Nations to promote sustainable utilisation of the environment. The Okyenhene has taken the initiative in the campaign against environmental degradation and other kinds of deforestation with the establishment of the Okyeman Environment Foundation, aimed at lessening the tide of the devastation of the Atewa Forest Range (Mawuko-Yevugah and Attipoe 2021). Thus, the Okyenhene has been at the forefront in the fight against deforestation, irresponsible mining, water pollution, and other harmful

activities that degrade the environment and hinder Ghana's desire to combat climate change (Agyeman 2024). By so doing, chiefs, through environmental protection have contributed to changes in tourism and recreational activities, infrastructural changes, changes in the ecosystem, which includes crop pollination and nutrient cycles, and more importantly hunger, which has been one of the serious threats to development.

To restore Ghana's lost forest, the government in 2021, instituted the Green Ghana Day (GGD). On June 7 each year, the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources and the Forestry Commission mobilise stakeholders including chiefs to plant trees across the nation. As social mobilisation agents, state officials solicit support from chiefs in mobilising the citizens to participate in the tree-planting exercises (Chipo 2023). Launching the 2023 Green Ghana Day, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II entreated Ghanaians to join the campaign as it presented an opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism and commitment towards sustaining the environment (Santeng 2023). A participant argued that:

The Green Ghana days cannot achieve the needed success without the involvement of chiefs. Chiefs as custodians of natural resources, are invited during the launch and are also actively involved in the tree planting. For instance, last year, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II was joined by religious leaders and other stakeholders to plant trees in Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti region. (KA 3)

Another participant indicated that:

During festivals and other national holidays, chiefs mobilise their people to undertake clean-up exercises in designated places. Sometimes, there is collaboration between the community members and the Assembly. The Assembly provides us with the logistics like skips, vehicles, and shovels among others that are needed to make the program successful. (DC 9)

Thus, through communal labour, chiefs and their people undertake activities that promote environmental sustainability. Activities of such nature were also organised when the National Sanitation Day was instituted. Thus, in conserving the environment for posterity, chiefs collaborate with multiple stakeholders such as local government authorities and other non-governmental organisations (Boateng and Afranie 2020b; Dawda and Dapilah 2013; Mahama 2009).

In Ghana, the land tenure system is a synthesis of traditional laws, which are owned by chiefs (Campion and Acheampong 2014). As custodians of the lands and mediators between the people and their ancestors, chiefs ensure the protection and the efficient use of the land. The ancestors by tradition, are believed to have the power to

bless or punish people who either use the land and other communal properties judiciously or deplete it. Thus, the spiritual components of chiefs' roles aid in instilling fear in people who engage in behaviour that is against the rules of environmental management (Arthur and Dawda 2015). Boateng and Larbi (2021) postulate that the depletion of environmental resources to an extent, depends on how chiefs manage them or regulate their utilisation by their people. This notwithstanding, the environment in Ghana in recent times, has been degraded by the activities of Artisanal Small-scale Mining (ASM) popularly referred to as “*galamsey*”. Efforts by the central government to end the devastation of this menace have not yielded much leading to a nationwide strike by organised labour on October 10, 2024 (Owusu 2024). In an attempt to augment the government’s efforts to combat this menace and safeguard the environment, the Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II has destooled chiefs engaged in illegal mining (Boateng *et al.* 2024b), setting a precedent for the president of the republic to dismiss government appointees who have been culpable in the act (Mensah 2023).

Provision of other Basic Social Amenities

The provision of potable water and other social and economic amenities to communities’ aids in the quest to alleviate poverty among people. The availability of necessities like drinking water, sanitary facilities, power, adequate housing, and drainage systems is crucial to one's well-being since they improve one's level of material and physical comfort and quality of life (Kumar 2014). Access to basic social amenities ensures better environmental conditions, better health, and chances for meaningful activities (Kumar 2014). One such social service, which is essential for equitable, sustainable, and productive rural economies, is the supply of water. Water is an essential requirement for safeguarding food security, health, hygiene, and production within the agricultural sector, which is usually the mainstay of rural economies. Water is thus a human right and there is the need, therefore, to ensure that everyone has sufficient and affordable water for both domestic and personal utilisation (ECOSOC 2002).

The failure on the part of society therefore, to provide water to people may have negative ramifications on the fight against poverty and marginalisation. Chiefs have thus, collaborated with local government authorities and NGOs in providing water for people in deprived areas. A participant indicated that:

A lot of people in rural areas do not have access to portable drinking water. Sometimes, they have to compete with livestock for water. As result, some chiefs

have collaborated with other stakeholders to provide borehole facilities in deprived areas. This initiative is to promote personal hygiene and safeguard their existence.

[Fuseini \(2024b\)](#) postulates that Rotary International District 9104, has rolled out plans to provide 10 boreholes in deprived areas in collaboration with the OOTIIF. The provision of potable water will not only reduce the numerous water-borne disease infections, but also reduce the rate of attendance at hospitals, increasing productivity and the reduction of poverty.

Chiefs place a high value on the process of widening people's opportunities and improving their level of living. Chiefs, therefore, put in place systematic measures, which improve the level of well-being of people. Chiefs have collaborated with local government authorities for instance to provide footbridges and constructed police stations to provide peace and security, which are essential in promoting commerce ([Boateng and Bawole 2021](#)). As spokespersons of their people ([Abdulai 2006](#)) Chiefs are seen calling on governments and benefactors for aid in their quest to provide equal access to the basic needs of humans within the society. By doing this, chiefs improve the quality of living of people within the society; thereby, contributing to the alleviation of poverty.

[The Call for Partnership](#)

According to the United Nations, the number of people experiencing extreme poverty decreased from 36% in 1990 to 10% in 2015. However, the COVID-19 crisis poses a threat to reverse decades of advancement in the fight against poverty as the rate of progress is slowing ([UN n.d](#)). Poverty is one complex phenomenon that has engaged the attention of many stakeholders. Due to its nature, a collaborative approach among diverse stakeholders is needed in order to reduce poverty and marginalise vulnerability. A unified roadmap for world peace and prosperity was provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was approved by all UN Member States in 2015 ([UN n.d](#)). This agenda calls for an inclusive approach, which seeks to bring all groups together for the sustainability of development.

Chiefs in their quest to mitigate the repercussions of poverty collaborate with government officials and their agencies within the nation's decentralised setup and other developmental partners like Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) and Non-governmental Organisation (NGOs). Though chiefs are not legally part of the local governance system in Ghana, they have nonetheless, collaborated on an ad-hoc basis with local government

authorities for developmental purposes (Boateng and Bawole 2021; Boateng and Afranie 2020a; Arthur and Dawda 2015; Seini 2006). The collaboration has resulted in the construction of educational blocks, hospitals, boreholes, and the establishment of police stations to promote peaceful coexistence among others. As social mobilisers, chiefs liaise with multiple development actors to raise resources for development at the grassroots (Boateng *et al.* 2024a; Boateng *et al.* 2016). Chiefs use traditional durbars not to only project the economic potentials of their communities but to also solicit financial and technical assistance in the completion of community-initiated projects which have been stalled due to lack of funds.

The connection between the chieftaincy institution and Christianity has been characterised by tensions since the institution is seen as a fetish, and pagan and contradicts the core values of Christianity. As a result of this, Christians who are to assume traditional roles are in a dilemma since their church holds the view that a member should not be allowed to become a chief. For them, the institution is interwoven with traditional religious practices and these practices are not compatible with Christian values and doctrines. Christian churches, therefore, seem not to have anything good with the Akan traditional religion. Hence the call for Christian partnership with the chieftaincy institution is very important since they are all concerned about the well-being of human beings. As a result, the Church of Pentecost, has established the Chieftaincy Ministry within its governance structure to help reduce misconceptions about the two institutions and promote effective partnership with chiefs in Ghana.

The partnership between religious organisations and the chieftaincy institution becomes a necessity since they are concerned about improving the quality of life of members of society. The chieftaincy institution in collaboration with FBOs can establish an equal and accessible educational institution for members within the society. Chiefs with FBOs can come together as supportive agents to yield positive implementation of policies geared toward the development of education. This in effect would contribute to human development through education and impartation of knowledge. The chieftaincy institution has been committed to advancing the common good by meeting the necessities of humans, ensuring the preservation of human rights, and advancing global development in its entirety through the utilisation of educational policies declared. The partnership between the chieftaincy institution and FBOs can help promote educational development, thereby eradicating poverty within society. FBOs can assist the chiefs with strategies for the community for the implementation of projects and also propose economic plans for

community members to undertake. Chiefs can make parcels of land available to FBOs for the construction of schools and hospitals which will provide job opportunities for members of society and help in the eradication of poverty.

Chiefs have partnered with FBOs in environmental campaigns to safeguard wildlife. During the 2024 Green Ghana Campaign, Otumfuo Osei Tutu was joined by the Chairman of the Church of Pentecost, Apostle Eric Nyamekye to plant trees in Kumasi and its environs ([Donkor 2024](#)). This collaboration is a way of alleviating poverty in that if serious pressures on the environment and the natural systems that sustain human life are not addressed, neither the well-being of people nor the elimination of poverty can be accomplished. FBOs, through their values, can help members of the society ensure the proper management of resources within the society.

FBOs can partner with chiefs towards the provision of basic amenities for members of the society. The provision and access to basic amenities are of great essence in the eradication of poverty. Access to necessities like drinking water, sanitary facilities, power, decent housing, and drainage systems is crucial to one's well-being as these things improve one's level of material and physical comfort and quality of life. This is because having access to the above necessities and more is crucial to one's well-being as these things improve one's level of material and physical comfort and quality of life. Access to basic social amenities ensures better health and wellbeing which are essential catalysts for motivating people to work, thereby reducing the poverty rates at the grassroots.

Conclusion and recommendations

The chieftaincy institution remains an important institution within Ghanaian society in contemporary times. Amidst the restraint on their powers and functions and the lack of institutional recognition of the institution in contemporary Ghana, chiefs continue to play important developmental roles. The study affirms that their continuous contribution toward sustainable development is radiated in the eradication of poverty. Chiefs are seen as providing quality and accessible education, healthcare facilities and protection of the environment. The developmental efforts of chiefs in this regard, are geared towards ensuring that members within and outside their traditional areas live long and healthy lives, and acquire knowledge that is essential for their empowerment and emancipation as well as enabling their members to live a dignified life. Thus, in the fight against poverty, developmental efforts must be directed at increasing the standards of living for the poor who mostly reside in the rural areas where the influence of chiefs is strong. The

increasing phenomenon of poverty across the globe calls for an all-inclusive approach toward its eradication. Having justified the place of the chieftaincy institution towards poverty eradication, the task is on FBOs and other developmental agencies not to consider chiefs as their competitors but as allies who have symbiotic developmental roles to end poverty and marginalisation at the grassroots.

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