

Speech: DFID Ghana Country Director's speech at the Northern Ghana Development Summit

Your Excellency, the Vice President of Ghana, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, Senior Minister, Hon. Nana Yaw Osafo-Mafo, Regional Ministers, Your Excellencies, Ambassadors Chief Executive Officer of Northern Development Authority, Traditional Authorities, Representatives of Civil Society Organisations and the media, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today to represent Ghana's development partners at this important forum.

On behalf of the Heads of Development Cooperation in Ghana, I wish to express our gratitude to the organisers of this event and our congratulations to the five Regional Ministers for their efforts to revive the Mole Series and host this maiden Northern Ghana Development Summit.

This event provides an important opportunity to discuss the challenges that face Northern Ghana and to understand how we, Ghana's international friends, can support efforts to transform the North.

Rising inequality

We all know that Ghana was one of the few sub-Saharan African countries to achieve the MDG target of halving extreme poverty between 1991 and 2015.

But the latest data shows that poverty reduction has stagnated, and inequality is increasing, with the majority of the extreme poor located in the northern regions.

Ghana's progress on poverty reduction has mainly been a story of the South, while poverty levels in the North remain, for the most part, stubbornly high.

More recently, there have been development reversals in areas which previously showed progress, which is of concern to all of us.

Development partners have over past decades supported the development of the northern regions in diverse ways – through support to agriculture, health, education, infrastructure and social cash transfers as well as by supporting civil society actions to strengthen public institutions and improve service delivery.

But while Ghana has progressed impressively on many human development indicators, the North still lags. Poverty levels in the northern regions overlap with the lowest levels of educational access and attainment.

One in three children are still stunted, compared to the national average of

one in five.

And – despite a disproportionately high concentration of agriculture-related development interventions – Northern Ghana still has the highest prevalence of food insecurity.

In short, decades of investment by development partners in the North have been less than transformational.

Rising inequality presents a huge challenge for government and for Ghana's progress. High levels of inequality create a vicious cycle of higher population growth, poorer education outcomes and less development progress.

And high inequality means that economic growth is not as efficient in reducing poverty.

We applaud the government of Ghana's commitment to doing something about this. The recently published Ghana Beyond Aid strategy sets a target of reducing the poverty rate in the region with the highest rate to no more than three times that of the region with the lowest poverty rate.

This is ambitious – poverty rates in the northern regions are currently up to 12 times higher than down south in Accra.

We are, though, already seeing examples of how Ghana can move beyond aid, even in Northern Ghana. Yesterday in Gonja, we visited a programme aimed at getting out-of-school children back in to school. This is a programme previously delivered by DFID and USAID which is now being led by, and funded directly by, the Ghana Education Service.

We are happy to be supporting the transition of this programme from aid-funding to government-funding. It is a really tangible example of Ghana Beyond Aid.

We also visited Avnash Rice Processing plant in Tamale. It was encouraging to see that Avnash, with support from UK and US, has been able to address quality issues and supply shortages, and has now more than tripled its production compared to 2016. This shows that private sector led, commercial agriculture is possible in the North, and that this can significantly increase incomes and job opportunities for smallholder farmers. To build on this and other success stories, farmers need the right skills, business support and infrastructure to help them to access finance for business development and link up with national and international buyers.

Conflict and Security

Excellencies, As well as trapping people in poverty, leaving populations behind, and undermining growth and prosperity, inequality can also cause violence, radicalisation and extremism.

Growing terrorism and insecurity in neighbouring countries – and especially in Burkina Faso – is of great concern.

We look forward to today's discussions to consider how significant this threat is to Ghana's internal stability as well how it might be addressed.

We commend all stakeholders – government and the Committee of Eminent Chiefs – for bringing to closure, the protracted Dagbon conflict and restoring peace. The significance of this progress for the development of Northern Ghana cannot be overstated. Development can only happen when peace and security prevail.

We encourage government to continue to adopt appropriate strategies to deal with other inter-regional conflicts which remain unresolved. [e.g. Konkombas vs Chokosis in Chereponi, the Bimbilla, chieftaincy clashes in Bolgatanga and the long-standing ethnic and chieftaincy conflict in Bawku, among others]

Ghana Beyond Aid

Ladies and gentlemen, Today we are at a point of decision and opportunity, where in the 11 remaining years of the Sustainable Development Goals, we still have time to realise their full ambition to address the root causes of poverty and inequality and achieve development that works for all people. The timing of this Summit comes at a critical moment for Ghana – hot on the heels of the publication of the Ghana Beyond Aid Charter and Strategic Document.

As Development Partners we welcome the government's focus on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and we also applaud His Excellency the President's vision for a self-reliant Ghana Beyond Aid.

Ghana beyond aid may be a mindset change for Ghanaians, but it also demands an attitude adjustment from western countries.

It requires from us a different kind of approach, recognising that Ghana Beyond Aid changes the motor of our relationship from one based on aid to one based on enterprise, mutual economic benefit and strategic political cooperation.

As your international partners, we are keen to adopt a new partnership with Ghana to jointly tackle the big global challenges of our time: ensuring opportunity for all, tackling poverty and inequality, maintaining security, stability and peace, combatting climate change and promoting inclusive growth.

And we congratulate Ghana for showing impressive global leadership in tackling many of these big global challenges: on regional stability, on cleaner cities, on child marriage, on combatting anti-microbial resistance, on tackling mental health to name but a few.

However, Ghana Beyond Aid doesn't mean "no aid". Development partnerships are still important to help Ghana to achieve its self-reliance.

- Development Partners are supporting Ghana to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection that can – given the right political will – generate sufficient national revenue to finance health, education and social services for the people.

- We are helping Ghana to build resilient systems to help protect people from shocks (macro-economic, climate, epidemics).
- We are working with government and the private sector to increase economic development and help create jobs.
- We are helping Ghana to leverage R&D and new technology (as we've seen in the past weeks with new vaccine delivery drones).
- And we can do more to help Ghana to protect its borders and tackle extremism.

The Ghana Beyond Aid strategy recognises that there is a broader shift away from aid in lower middle-income countries like Ghana already happening. Away from Development Partners directly funding service delivery towards helping Ghana to spend its own money better.

Increasingly, development partners will offer advice and expertise where it is needed, rather than aid money to fund basic services.

So we look forward to a renewed partnership with Ghana. A partnership to support Ghana to tackle inequality, seize the economic opportunities and to harness its leadership role in fostering stability within the West African region.

In conclusion, both myself and my fellow Heads of Development Cooperation are looking forward to engaging in the discussions here today.

We have been asking ourselves:

- what role can we play to support accelerated sustainable development in the North?
- how can we work with government to ensure that the gap between the haves and the have-nots does not widen further?
- what are some of the building blocks for inclusive socio-economic transformation that we can help to put in place to achieve the very ambitious targets to reduce the poverty gap?
- moreover, as over 90% of Foreign Direct Investment into Ghana takes place in the South, how can we find space within our private sector work to drive investment to the North so that its economic transformation creates jobs?

- how will insecurity and climate change impact on the Northern Ghana and what does this mean for our efforts to accelerate development?

We hope that this Development Summit will identify some concrete actions to address these challenges and to help set this country on the path to self-reliance for all Ghanaians, regardless of where they live and work.

Your international friends are with you every step of the way.

Thank you.