

Mandate of the Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas

End of Mission Statement on the country visit to Ghana

Accra, 14 May 2026

Today we conclude our ten-day visit to Ghana, undertaken at the invitation of the Government. We sincerely thank the Government and the people of Ghana for their warm welcome and the spirit of openness with which they engaged us throughout the visit.

We held constructive exchanges with Government authorities across multiple ministries, including those responsible for foreign affairs, food and agriculture, fisheries, trade, labour, lands, environment, gender and social protection.

We also met with the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, UN agencies, farming and fishing communities, civil society organisations, academics, traditional authorities, and other stakeholders.

Ghana presents a compelling case for the rights of small-scale farmers, fishers and pastoralists in the context of the country's implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).

UNDROP's relevance to Ghana is both immediate and structural. The enshrined rights to land, productive resources and meaningful participation are the very conditions upon which the livelihoods of Ghana's subsistence farming, pastoralism and fishing depend.

The full implementation of UNDROP therefore represents a unique opportunity for the Government. To align its human rights obligations with its development objectives, recognising that protecting those rights is not a constraint on agricultural transformation but its most durable foundation.

Framing the Systemic Challenge: Transformation for Whom?

The country stands at the cusp of an agricultural transformation. The Government has taken concrete and commendable steps towards boosting food security, rural development, agricultural modernisation, climate resilience and export competitiveness.

Ghana has a robust, constitutionally grounded human rights framework. It is reinforced by ratification of major international and regional human rights instruments, including the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (No. 188). The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2025, the Social Protection Act 2025, and the Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act 2024. This signals that the Government is genuinely willing to engage with its human rights commitments and obligations. The development of a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights further

shows Ghana's commitment to ensuring that corporate actors operating in the agricultural and extractive sectors are held accountable to international human rights standards.

Yet the small-holder farmers, artisanal fishers and pastoralists who constitute the actual backbone of food production continue to suffer from poverty and exclusion from the formulation and implementation of that transformation.

These communities are treated as mere subjects of development policy, navigating compounding livelihood challenges and structural exclusions. The Government's drive towards mechanised, export-oriented agriculture is centred on such cash crops as cocoa, soybean and maize raises a fundamental question.

What is the intended role of the millions of smallholders, women farmers, artisanal fishers and nomadic pastoralists who currently sustain Ghana's food supply and rural social fabric?

The central challenge documented during this visit is not the absence of a legal framework. It is the persistent gap between the law and policy and their meaningful implementation on the ground. That gap is a product of two forces of which we have heard repeatedly. Firstly, it is insufficient political will to challenge entrenched interests. Secondly, social norms continue to normalise the exclusion of rural communities, women and pastoral peoples.

The Structural Squeeze: External Pressures and the Transformation Trap

Ghana's policy choices do not occur in a vacuum. Debt repayment obligations, volatile commodity markets, bilateral trade pressures, constraints by the multilateral trade regime, and ad hoc regulatory shifts in major export markets, all condition what the Government chooses to do for its people. It is important that the international community and African regional institutions provide support to the Government to overcome those structural challenges.

Yet these external forces distribute their costs unevenly. Invariably, family farmers, artisanal fishers and pastoral communities are exposed to residual risks generated by decisions made in the capital. The current transformation model risks entrenching a dual food system in which large-scale, input-intensive commercial agriculture serves an integrated export sector, while the family-based agrarian sector is left increasingly marginalised. Averting this outcome requires genuine political will and a commitment to rights-based support for smallholder producers. Without that commitment, Ghana's transformation agenda may become a trap for the very communities it claims to benefit.

The Land Question: Security of Tenure

Land lies at the centre of many of Ghana's contemporary governance and livelihood challenges. Ghana's plural land tenure system, in which statutory and customary regimes co-exist, vests most land in customary authorities such as stools/skins, clans and families, while also recognising state and private interests. This configuration exacerbates tenure

insecurity, particularly in rapidly urbanising and high-value rural areas, where customary and statutory institutions interact under conditions of weak regulation and land demarcation.

Customary governance enjoys deep cultural legitimacy, yet chiefs and other custodians have only recently been subjected to explicit fiduciary duties, record-keeping obligations and other accountability requirements under the Land Act, 2020. Enforcement remains uneven in practice. As customary and family land is leased or otherwise commodified, smallholder and subsistence farmers may see long-standing use rights diluted or extinguished. Although legal remedies and dispute-resolution mechanisms formally exist, practical barriers of cost, information and power relations can leave affected farmland users vulnerable to dispossession and livelihood loss.

Women and youth face compounded disadvantages within both tenure systems. Despite their critical roles throughout agricultural and fisheries value chains, women remain excluded from land ownership and decision-making, a condition sustained by both statutory gaps and deeply entrenched social norms.

Of particular concern is the heightened vulnerability of older farmers, who face compounding poverty and are among those most consistently excluded from social protection. Older women farmers are further exposed to the grave abuse of witchcraft accusations. It is a pernicious practice that serves to stigmatise, displace and dispossess them of land and livelihood. It requires explicit condemnation and legal remedy from the State. We note with support the ongoing deliberations at the Parliament of a bill that would address this serious concern.

Young farmers face a particular bind. Without secure land access or credible economic prospects, the irresistible pull of quick revenue from illegal gold mining (galamsey) grows ever stronger. The land question and the galamsey crisis are therefore the same predicament, viewed from different angles.

The Twin Environmental Threats: Climate Change and Galamsey

Climate change manifests in Ghana through unstable and shifting rainfall patterns, failed crop seasons, shrinking grazing corridors, diminished fish stocks and an increasingly erratic rhythm of abundance and scarcity. Post-harvest losses during glut periods have become catastrophic when climate shocks compound market failure. They are exacerbated by absent cold-chain infrastructure, inadequate road networks and the lack of guaranteed price mechanism. The farming communities require adaptive financial and knowledge-based resources: credit, timely meteorological information, crop insurance, efficient irrigation and climate-resilient systems. Yet those resources remain largely inaccessible to the communities that need them most.

Ghana is simultaneously confronting a human-made disaster of the first order. Galamsey mining represents the most acute, rapidly expanding and politically charged environmental

emergency facing the country. The contamination of rivers, destruction of farmland and the spread of cyanide, mercury and heavy-metal hazards reach far beyond mining sites. It devastates communities, diminishes agricultural labour capacity and forecloses the long-term prospects of rural youth.

Galamsey must be understood as both a cause and a symptom. It is a cause of environmental destruction and socio-economic collapse in affected communities, and a symptom of the failure to offer rural youth a dignified and viable economic future. Sustained by powerful domestic and foreign interests with massive financing and heavy excavation equipment, it has become a national security, as well as food security and public health emergency.

Enforcement responses alone cannot resolve what is fundamentally a development failure intertwined with elite capture. Addressing the galamsey crisis demands political courage and a willingness to challenge those who benefit from the status quo.

The role of traditional leadership in Ghana is both indispensable and underutilised. Paramount chiefs occupy a unique position of moral authority and social mobilisation, which formal governance cannot replicate. The example set by Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II is instructive and commendable. His public condemnations of galamsey and sustained calls for political leaders and fellow traditional chiefs to unite in urgent action demonstrate the transformative potential of engaged traditional leadership. Such moral authority should be scaled and matched by political action and legal enforcement at every level of the State. Traditional authorities represent a critical and largely untapped partner in the governance response to galamsey.

The seeds question

The government has stated its legal commitment to support traditional seed systems through legislation and policy measures aimed at recognising and strengthening farmer-managed seed networks. Yet the smallholder farmers' customary right to save, share and use traditional seeds is increasingly constrained by recent seed- and biotechnology-focused reforms and market shifts. Reportedly, they privilege certified, commercial and breeder-controlled varieties over farmer-managed seed systems and risk criminalising informal seed exchange.

Farmers and civil society have raised specific concerns about the pending or implemented provisions that may limit access to non-certified local varieties, while debates over GM crops including contested trials and approval processes for GM cowpea seeds have sharpened fears that regulatory gaps and corporate interests will further marginalise traditional seed use.

At the same time, positive measures such as national seed policy commitments to strengthen the informal sector and investments in gene banks and local seed improvement show promise, provided researchers receive sustained funding and integrate farmers' traditional knowledge through participatory breeding approaches. The net effect, many argue, is a growing policy tilt toward large agribusiness engagement at the expense of concrete support

for small-scale farming. Such a shift would bear implications for food sovereignty and rural poverty reduction unless safeguards for farmers' rights and equitable seed governance are strengthened.

Markets and Credit: Exclusion from Economic Participation

Even where farming communities achieve successful harvests, they confront structural barriers to converting output into sustainable livelihoods. Among the most acute challenges facing smallholder farmers in Ghana is the growing irregularity of rainfall and water shortage, driven by climate variability and the absence of reliable irrigation and timely technical support. When yields do materialise, farmers frequently lack access to consumer markets.

The dominance of intermediary traders, who control distribution networks and retail channels, systematically suppresses farmgate prices and appropriates a disproportionate share of value that should accrue to the primary family producer. This structural asymmetry, compounded by poor rural road infrastructure that inflates transportation costs and the absence of storage and cold-chain facilities that transforms harvest abundance into post-harvest loss, renders small-scale food production chronically precarious and economically unviable for many.

The credit gap is equally structural. Smallholder farmers and artisanal fishers are excluded from formal finance by their inability to provide conventional collateral. Without investment, the sustainability of Ghana's smallholder food system will remain elusive. Functioning cooperatives observed during this visit demonstrate what is achievable with appropriate support; these good practices deserve systematic institutional backing rather than incidental survival.

Artisanal fishers face mounting pressure from overfishing and rapidly declining fish stocks. There is also a serious concern of illegal fishing that deploys destructive practices, including the use of light fishing, harmful chemicals and fine-mesh nets, which devastate marine ecosystems and undermine the long-term viability of coastal livelihoods. Encouragingly, coordinated outreach between Government extension officers and fishing communities has demonstrated that when fishers are engaged as genuine partners in fisheries management, compliance improves and conservation outcomes strengthen.

In the fisheries sector, women dominate processing, marketing and distribution, yet they remain absent from governance and have limited access to credit or organisational support. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2025 and the ratification of ILO Convention No. 188 represent meaningful recognition of this sector's rights dimensions. What is now required is implementation: enforcement mechanisms, sustained resource allocation and the social norm change needed to include women fishers as rights-holders, not merely as labourers within a value chain.

Pastoralists and Fulbe Communities: Deep Exclusion

Among all the communities encountered during this visit, pastoralists and cattle breeders face the most acute and multi-dimensional exclusion. Their nomadic way of life renders them structurally invisible to governance systems designed around settled tenure, and many in Fulbe communities face barriers to citizenship documentation that effectively place them outside the reach of any legal protection framework. The erosion of grazing pastures, through agricultural expansion, climate pressure and the absence of land-use planning that recognises multiple co-existing uses, is generating an escalating cycle of conflict between pastoralists and settled farmers. The Government should actively engage with traditional chiefs and take measures to ensure viable grazing for herder, to mediate effectively relations between affected farming and herding communities, and to include more pastoral peoples in decisions that determine their survival.

Governance and the Political Will to Change

Cutting across all the challenges documented above is a governance deficit: the systematic exclusion of rural communities from meaningful participation in decisions that shape their lives. Top-down decision-making, by government structures and chiefly authorities alike, renders smallholders, fishers and pastoralists objects of policy rather than rights-holders with agency. They are not sufficiently empowered to participate in policy consultations and lack access to accurate meteorological data.

Despite loadable progress, education remains an elusive challenge. Ghana's success in curbing child labour in agriculture is commendable. Yet formal schooling has become disconnected from agricultural practice and rural livelihoods. Young people are often educated away from farming, without offering a viable alternative.

Commendably, Ghana is implementing models of inclusive and participatory governance that deserve recognition. When the government combines genuine political will with authentic community empowerment, the results can be transformative. For example, the Community Resource Management Area model shows that decentralising authority and granting forest-adjacent communities the legal right to manage their natural resources fosters both ecological resilience and sustainable local economies. The National Alternative Employment and Livelihood Programme pairs environmental enforcement with alternative livelihoods for displaced rural youth. These models offer proof of concept, and the challenge is to scale these decentralised frameworks from isolated successes into coherent, adequately resourced policy across all sectors. The Social Protection Act and the Feed Ghana Programme hold genuine potential to anchor a more integrated and rights-consistent approach.

We urge the Government to take concrete and measurable actions to ensure that farmers, fishers and pastoralists are meaningfully heard in decision-making that affects them. This requires more than consultation formalities: it demands institutionalised mechanisms

through which these communities can participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of agricultural and environmental policies. Formal right-holders consultation platforms, inclusive of women, youth and pastoral communities, should be established at both district and national levels with adequate resources and genuine decision-making authority.

Conclusion

The policy and legislative framework that Ghana has assembled constitutes a foundation that commands respect and serves as a commendable example for the region.

To realize the full potential of progressive policies in Ghana, their implementation should be built around communities, rather than delivered to them as passive recipients. The voices of those who produce Ghana's food must be heard where decisions about Ghana's food systems are made.

The open question before us is not whether Ghana possesses the tools. It is whether it commands the political will to apply them. To enforce rights against powerful interests. To commit to the deeper social changes without which legal frameworks remain aspirational. Human rights commitments of Ghana under UNDROP demand both. The communities encountered during this visit are resilient, knowledgeable and determined. They deserve nothing less.