



**STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS
PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT BY HE JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

Thursday February 25, 2016

Right Honourable Speaker
Your Excellency, the Vice President
Your Ladyship, the Chief Justice
Honourable Members of Parliament
Honourable Members of the Judiciary
Distinguished Leaders of Our Security Forces
Excellences, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Our revered Niimeɛ, Naameɛ, Chiefs, Traditional Rulers and Religious Leaders
Fellow Ghanaians

Good Morning.

Mr. Speaker,

Over the years, I have often spoken about, and made reference to, the tremendous power that exists within every single Ghanaian - the power to create change and influence the course of events- the power to shape the future of this great nation of ours.

We are Ghana's greatest wealth. The individual skills, talents, passion, personality, ideas and ingenuity we bring can make a world of difference.

When we lose someone, especially someone who is in the prime of his or her life, we mourn much more than what that person was to us, or meant to us. We also mourn the possibility of what that person might have been or could have accomplished.

Mr. Speaker,

Every year since the good people of Ghana elected me to serve as President, I have come to this august House in fulfilment of Article 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana to address the state of our nation.

In many ways, because I began as a Member of Parliament, this House is my political home and its honourable members are my brothers and sisters. We stood on different sides and held our positions. We argued points, and we pointed out what we felt was the error of the other side's ways. But, as I recall, at the end of the day, we were more than worthy opponents. We recognised ourselves as family, as a microcosm of the larger Ghanaian family.

Mr. Speaker,

It pains me today to see the vacant seat of our brother, my friend, Honourable J.B. Danquah-Adu, MP for Abuakwa North. J.B., aged 50, when he was brutally murdered, was a gentleman who walked away from every conversation with a smile.



He genuinely loved Ghana and that devotion shone through in everything he did, especially in his constituency, where he was quite popular and well regarded. JB's absence in this House and in his constituency is both seen and felt. We have lost a member of our family. And Ghana has lost a true son, one who would no doubt have gone on to contribute greatly to the betterment of our nation.

I would like, on behalf of the good people of Ghana and of all those present today, to offer our deepest condolences to his wife and family; and to Mr. Frank Adu and Mr. George Twum-Barimah-Adu, brothers of Honourable JB Danquah-Adu, who are here in Parliament today.

I would also like to respectfully request that we take a full minute of silence to honour him. Let us also honour our compatriots who passed away during last week's Metro Mass Transit Bus accident.

May their souls rest in perfect peace.

Thank you.

* * *

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Mr. Speaker,

My Government is committed to putting people first. I have said that again and again over the last several years, but what does that really mean? How is that declaration affecting the lives of people in Bawku, Aflao, or Axim?

We politicians are known for talking a lot, yet the irony of such a stereotype is that in actual fact, words often fail us. They fail to convey the numerous ways in which what we are doing is directly impacting the lives of those we are serving. And that is because we speak in ways that sometimes take the very subjects of our concerns and turn them into objects, or place them in demographics, or speak of them as statistics.

We detail projects and proposals, we cite budgets and data, figures and bottom lines that can feel very far removed from the flesh and blood realities of the people whose lives we seek to improve.

Mr. Speaker,

In this address on the state of the nation, I would like to show the direct line between policy and people. I would like to show how the seeds we have been planting for the last three years have taken root and grown. Some have now become trees bearing fruits that are ripe for picking. And many more are fast approaching maturity, preparing to display their gifts.



EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to show how we are changing lives. And what a better place to start than with education, which has been proven to be the single most effective way not only to change a single life, but other lives that surround it.

Education can break cycles of poverty and abuse. Education is the key that can unlock, for children, worlds into which their parents could not enter; worlds they never even knew existed.

During this term, my first term as President, we have consciously developed strategies and made interventions to raise the quality of education by emphasising its relevance, improving access, and working to eliminate gender discrimination and inequality. We have also worked to better train and equip our teachers.

BASIC EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

Ghana has been commended by the United Nations for meeting the target of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on achieving universal primary education with gender parity. Despite that achievement, there are still a significant number of school-age children that are not enrolled.

These children are now being targeted under the Compulsory Basic Education (CBE) programme of the Ministry of Education. In the last year, a total of 54,800 out of school children in four regions have been enrolled into schools. These are 54,800 children who would not have received an education. These are 54,800 children whose lives will now have much different outcomes as a result of this programme.

Other important social interventions that are being implemented in the educational sector include the issuance of free supplies such as uniforms, sandals and textbooks.

In June 2015, I launched the free school sandals programme which saw the start of the distribution of 10,000 Kumasi Shoe Factory Made-in-Ghana leather sandals to school children in need across the nation.

A number of students would have struggled without the basic necessities with which to attend school - students like Mohammed Awabu of Moglaa JHS in the Savelugu District of the Northern Region who received free sandals; or David Aminayire of Nayagenia JHS, Kassena-Nankana Municipal in the Upper East Region who received free uniform, free exercise books and textbooks.

Last year, I insisted that the Ministry of Education must ensure that all textbooks are printed in Ghana. This is on course. In fact, I would like to acknowledge the statement of gratitude received from the Ghana Printers and Paper Converters Association, led by Mr. James Appiah-Berko.



I would especially like to take note of their indication that this intervention will help create 1,400 new direct jobs. Better still, that is 1,400 new direct jobs in Ghanaian businesses.

Mr. Speaker,

In our determination to improve quality education, we have also introduced two new programmes - the Teacher Professional Development Initiative and the Provision of Teaching and Learning Materials programme.

The Teacher Professional Development initiative aims to achieve a target of 95% trained teachers at the basic level by 2020 as set out in the Education Strategic Plan (ESP). The Provision of Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs) programme has seen to the distribution of teaching and learning materials to 10,924 basic schools.

In addition, 30,000 teachers were trained in ICT under the Basic School Computerisation Programme, bringing the total number of teachers trained under the programme to 50,000.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

Secondary education was plagued with a number of challenges, notably lack of access, leading to a poor transition rate from JHS to SHS. We are vigorously confronting these challenges. Under our programme to establish 200 Senior High Schools, I can report that 123 are currently being constructed. But permit me to place this project in a broader perspective.

The first secondary school was established in Ghana 140 years ago, in 1876. Between that date and 2012, the number of public secondary schools established was 526. The 123 schools that are being implemented right now will create more than 200,000 new places in the system, thus making the Community Day Schools Intervention the biggest ever expansion programme in the entire history of secondary education in Ghana.

It is because of this programme that 16-year-old Apim Shulamite is now the Assistant School Prefect of the Atta Mills Community Day School in Otuam. After completing JHS, Apim, who once dreamt of becoming a nurse, had to stay home for a year due to lack of access to a secondary school. Apim's parents are settlers from Somanya. Her father is a taxi driver and her mother sells second-hand clothing.

During the year that she stayed at home, Apim sold waakye and worked in a chop bar. Because of the Community Day Schools intervention, students like Apim are able to go from limited prospects to the fulfilment of personal dreams that ultimately benefit the entire nation.

Additionally, under the Secondary Education Improvement Programme (SEIP), 10,400 students benefitted from scholarships. 60% of the beneficiaries are young women, like Gertrude Ahya Yeboah, who is currently a student at St. Augustine's SHS in Bogoso in the Western Region.



TERTIARY EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

Enrolment in tertiary institutions increased by 6.3% for Universities and 8.9% for Polytechnics.

In November of last year, I inaugurated the main campus of the University for Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) at Ho, which, in just three years of its establishment, has achieved many remarkable success stories. So far more than 2,300 students have been enrolled. Associated with the enrolment is also the creation of 816 direct jobs for teaching and non-teaching staff of UHAS. But those are just numbers.

Let me tell you about one of those 2,300 students: Dzidzor Kwamuar from Fodome-Helu. She lost her mum when she was 10 years old. When she counted herself along with her 13 siblings, those being her father's children, there didn't seem to be any hope of standing out. Thankfully, an uncle took care of her through JHS and SHS. She was admitted to Aburi Girls and completed her studies there in 2014 only to find that despite being qualified, she could not attend medical school due to inadequate access.

Now, with the opening of the University for Health and Allied Sciences, Dzidzor is indeed standing out. This access has made a tremendous difference in her life, and it will also make a difference in the lives of Dzidzor's future patients.

Mr. Speaker,

Progress has been made at the University of Energy and Natural Resources, which has so far admitted 2,685 students and created 315 teaching and non-teaching jobs.

The bill for the establishment of the University of Environment and Sustainable Development has been passed and I have appointed an implementation team to assist the Ministry of Education in realising this vision. In fulfilment of our pledge to ensure that each region in Ghana has at least one public university, we are on course to begin construction this year at Donkokrom in the Afram Plains and Somanya, all in the Eastern Region.

Mr. Speaker,

In furtherance of our policy to convert polytechnics to technical universities, six (6) have met the 16-point criteria and have been recommended for immediate conversion. They are the Kumasi, Accra, Koforidua, Ho, Sunyani, and Takoradi Polytechnics.

The remaining four polytechnics will be assisted by a special arrangement to support them with infrastructure, equipment and the strengthening of their governance structure to enable them meet the conversion criteria in the shortest possible time.

Mr. Speaker,

The abolition of the quota system for enrolment in colleges of education has increased admissions by 63 per cent.



This has created access for many students who otherwise would not have had the opportunity. To assist teacher trainees and finance their education, following the cancellation of the teacher trainee allowances, I have asked the Ministry of Education to direct the Student Loan Trust to register trainees on their campuses and disburse student loans to them.

This new system allows us to reinvest in the education of the next generation of teachers and students.

To fulfil the policy of providing Colleges of Education in under-served areas and to expand access to teacher training, Government is absorbing into the public stream the following colleges -

- Saint Ambrose College of Education, Dormaa District
- Al-Farak College of Education, Wenchi District - this will become our first ever Islamic College of Education
- Gambaga College of Education, East Mamprusi District
- St. Vincent College of Education, Yendi Municipality
- Bia Lamplighter College of Education, Bia District.

Two other private colleges will be absorbed in the Brong Ahafo and Ashanti Regions to fulfil the initiative of providing a college of education in under-served areas. In addition, work will begin on three new Colleges in the Greater Accra, Central and Northern Regions.

Mr. Speaker,

Last year, we worked to improve the skills of in-service teachers. In 2016, we are going one step further by enhancing the education of pre-service teachers by giving them the skills and tools they need to excel in the classroom, and prepare our children for a bright and prosperous future.

We are doing this through the Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL) Programme, which aims to impact 35,000 teachers over four years. Central to achieving this are the 38 Colleges of Education.



HEALTH

Mr. Speaker,

At Independence, life expectancy was 47 years. Today, life expectancy has increased by 14 years. This increase is due to advances in medicine, improvements in health infrastructure and increased numbers of health personnel. Not only are we living longer in our adult years, more infants are living to see those years.

According to the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, there has been a drastic decrease in the rates of infant mortality and under-five mortality. Over the last decade, under-five mortality has decreased from 111 to 60 per 1,000 live births. Infant mortality dropped by almost 30% from 64 to 41 per 1,000 live births during the same period.

The mothers of these children are also surviving during pregnancy and after childbirth because antenatal and intra partum and postnatal care have improved.

EFFICIENT HEALTH FINANCING

Mr. Speaker,

We are poised to invest heavily in the coming years in education and preventive healthcare for the treatment of chronic diseases due to lifestyle choices- diseases such as Hypertension, Diabetes, High Blood Cholesterol, and Obesity. The investment in preventive health is even more prudent as our nutritional habits continue to change.

Mr. Speaker,

The double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases raises an even more fundamental question about sustainable healthcare financing. This is precisely why I constituted a Technical Committee to make proposals that will lead to a fundamental redesign of the National Health Insurance Scheme.

2015 saw an active NHIS membership of 11.2 million (41% of the population). Outpatient Utilisation of the National Health Insurance Scheme rose to 29.6million in 2014 from 597,000 in 2005. For us, this undeniable pattern of increased utilisation of healthcare insurance bears ample testimony to the confidence that our population continues to have both in the Scheme and in the health system.

It is also the reason why questions about the adequacy of the funding mechanisms cannot be ignored. To this end, Government expects the team of technical experts to propose for Government's consideration, fundamental reforms that will touch on areas such as equity, premiums, and expansion of the revenue base, fraud, benefit packages and procurement of medications.

Mr. Speaker,

I want to make medication affordable for all Ghanaians. That is why I want our local Pharmaceutical Companies to produce as much medication as possible right here in Ghana. To that end, we have disbursed more than GH¢50million cedis to assist them in doing so.



Through this, we hope to achieve an uninterrupted supply of anti-retroviral drugs for HIV and AIDS patients. There are also innumerable other associated benefits to this strategy, not least of which is the creation of more jobs in Ghanaian companies.

We have here with us today, Samuel Amo Tobbin, the Executive Chairman of the Tobinco Group, which was one of the companies that benefitted from Government's support to the pharmaceutical industry.

The funds were disbursed through the Export Development and Agriculture Industrial Fund (EDAIF). With the support received, Tobinco has also increased its production portfolio by 150%. The company produces analgesics, antibiotics, antiretroviral and various syrups for the local market and also for export to Niger, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Mr. Speaker,

One cannot speak of health without speaking of physical exercise. There is a need to return Physical Education or Sports to the school curriculum. The current situation where PE and Sports has been de-emphasised in the academic curriculum is, in the long run, extremely costly. It directly impacts the health outcomes of students in the area of obesity and other such illnesses that arise from a sedentary lifestyle.

It is very easy to see that the benefits far outweigh the costs. I have asked the Ministers of Education, Health and Sports to initiate stakeholder discussions to ensure the adequate reintegration of Sports back into the school system.

Mr. Speaker,

In October of last year, 12 people in the West Gonja District in the Northern Region were affected by Yellow Fever. In December of last year, there was an outbreak of Pneumococcal meningitis that started in the Brong Ahafo region. These remind us that public health emergencies are not to be taken lightly. They are an ever-present possibility.

Ghana has been commended numerous times by the international community for being on the frontlines during the Ebola crisis. As others were standing still or, worse, stepping back because of fear, we stepped forward and took control of the situation, helping to mobilise efforts that ultimately helped contain the virus.

The World Health Organisation has declared the Zika virus a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. Numerous cases of the virus have been reported in Brazil, the United States and other countries in the Americas, as well as in parts of Europe and Africa. The Ministry of Health, acting through its agencies has started coordinating public education programmes on the prevention of the Zika virus.

The Ministry is also keeping health facilities on alert with timely messages on transmission patterns, associated signs and symptoms, methods of prevention and emergency preparedness planning.



I assure the people of Ghana that Government is fully prepared and equipped to deal with this and any other public health issue that might arise.

HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE FOR BETTER HEALTHCARE

Mr. Speaker,

Our healthcare system has improved tremendously. We continue to invest heavily in the sector to ensure an even better system because as a social democratic Government, we believe that a healthy people make a wealthy nation.

It is for this core reason that over the past few years we have invested over US\$2billion in health infrastructure, equipment and human resource. We project to add 6,000 more beds to Ghana's existing stock by the end of 2018 when the programme is completed.

Presently, there are two Teaching Hospitals, three Institutional Hospitals, four Regional Hospitals, fourteen District Hospitals, dozens of Polyclinics and Health Centres, as well as hundreds of CHPS compound projects all at various stages of completion.

Mr. Speaker,

Construction of the University Hospital at Legon, upgrading and rehabilitation of the Ridge Hospital, and the second phase of the Tamale Teaching Hospital expansion project are progressing steadily.

The Wa Regional Hospital which commenced in October 2012 is presently 70% complete. It is part of the US\$339million, 8-hospitals project.

Work on the following hospitals is also progressing:

- 250-bed Regional Hospital in Kumasi-Sewua
- 60-bed District Hospital in Salaga
- 60-bed District Hospital in Tepa
- 60-bed District Hospital in Nsawkaw
- 60-bed District Hospital in Konongo-Odumasi
- 100-bed Municipal Hospital in Atomic-Accra.

Rehabilitation of the 295-bed Bolgatanga Hospital is progressing satisfactorily. Work on a new modern Emergency Department for the Korle-bu Teaching Hospital is 90% completed. A 12-bed intensive care unit (ICU) for the department of surgery has been refurbished and equipped.

Six district hospitals with integrated IT systems are currently being designed, constructed and equipped at an estimated cost of US\$175 million. The beneficiary communities are Sekondi-Takoradi, Abetifi District, Garu District, Kumawu District, Fomena District and Dodowa District.

Mr. Speaker,



I have requested the Minister for Health to convert the Volta Regional Hospital into a modern Teaching Hospital befitting the status of a University hospital for use by the University of Health and Allied Sciences in the Volta Region.

The continuation of the US\$264million National Medical Equipment Replacement Programme which has, so far, provided diagnostic and treatment equipment for over 150 hospitals nationwide will ensure adequate provision for the much-needed retooling of the Regional Hospital in the Volta Region.

Mr. Speaker,

We are training more health care professionals. We are improving on the conditions of their service so that we may retain them to work in Ghana. Umar Mahmoud Mogtar worked as a farm hand, but he had always dreamt of becoming a health professional. His opportunity came when a health-training institute was opened in Lawra in the Upper West Region and now he is on course to realise his dream.

We are providing and building a better health infrastructure and providing more modern equipment to meet the current and future needs of our population and people, like Mercy Pomaa, who gave birth at the Nkrankwanta Polyclinic in January of this year, because Mercy's previous pregnancy went through Caesarean section.

Her condition with this pregnancy was delicate, one that could ordinarily only be undertaken by a higher-level healthcare facility. Having access to a capable and well-equipped polyclinic nearby decreased the travel time necessary for Mercy to access medical attention throughout the pregnancy and, also, when it came to time to deliver, the establishment of a new polyclinic in Nkrankwanta ensured that she delivered safely.

Today she is a proud mother of a safe and sound baby because a modern polyclinic was built in her community.

Stories like this should be ordinary and expected, not exemplary, and we are working hard to make it so. I firmly believe that Ghana's health system has been placed permanently on the right trajectory, and that it will be the healthcare system that other nations on the African continent will emulate and strive to duplicate.

Mr. Speaker,

The Ghana AIDS Commission has successfully coordinated implementation of the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2011-2015. Adult HIV prevalence has stabilised over the past 3 years. The current prevalence of 1.4% reflects declining new HIV infections and reduced morbidity and mortality among Persons Living with HIV.

Through targeted prevention strategies, new HIV infections have declined. We have seen a consistent reduction in new HIV infections from a baseline of 16,200 new infections to 11,356 in 2014. A 30% decline over the past 5 years.



We have been successful in reducing annual AIDS deaths by 43%. Through collaborative efforts to eliminate Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV with advocacy at the highest level, we have achieved over 50% reduction of transmission of HIV from mother-to-child. 81% of pregnant women receive PMTCT services. 66% of infected pregnant women receive treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

The prevalence of HIV among exposed babies has reduced drastically to 8% at birth and 21% after breastfeeding; down from 32%.

The Ghana AIDS Commission and its stakeholders have agreed on priorities for the new National Strategic Plan 2016-2020 towards achieving the 90-90-90 fast-track targets for Ghana (90% of PLHIV know their status, 90% of PLHIV on Antiretroviral treatment and 90% achieve immune suppression).

These priorities include strengthening of strategic information and health systems, as well as community empowerment to scale up HIV testing, treatment and targeted behaviour change. We will strive to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV by 2017 and meet the needs of adolescents and youth.



SOCIAL PROTECTION

Mr. Speaker,

We recognise that while carrying out structural reforms to achieve fiscal stability, many vulnerable families and households that are below the poverty line, could suffer further deterioration in their quality of life. For this reason, Government takes its social protection policies very seriously.

We have made remarkable gains in the Gender, Children and Social Protection sector by strengthening the legal and policy framework, effectively mainstreaming gender concerns, and increasing child rights protection.

Cabinet has approved five important policies to strengthen our Gender, Children and Social Protection programmes - the Child and Family Welfare Policy; the National Gender Policy; the Social Protection Policy; the Justice for Children Policy and the School Feeding Policy.

Other critical pieces of legislation designed to strengthen our social protection programmes, such as the Affirmative Action Bill, the Ageing Bill, the Domestic Violence Regulations, Adoption and Foster Care Regulations, have all been finalised and validated. These Bills and the Regulations will be presented to this House this year, to be enacted into law.

In addition, we are also implementing programmes to protect the elderly. The new EBAN card introduced by the Ministry has gained acceptance in many institutions, and the elderly who present the cards at bus stations, banks, hospitals and other public places are given priority in order of service. So far, over 14,000 cards have been issued in 7 regions, with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection set to issue an additional 9,000 to conclude the first phase.

Mr. Speaker,

We also continue to work to improve the opportunities available to persons with disability. It has been proven over and over again that “disability is not inability.” Our Minister for Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs, Dr. Seidu Danaa, is a living testimony of the veracity of this statement. He performs his duties just as effectively as the other members of my Cabinet.

Mr. Ivor Greenstreet, for many years General Secretary of the CPP, and now Presidential Candidate of the party, is also a testament to the fact that disability should not be allowed to be a bar to achievement.

It is estimated that persons with one form of disability or other constitute roughly 10% of our population, meaning that about 2.6 million of our compatriots fall into this category. I am of the opinion that marginalisation of such a huge segment of the population is not only unconscionable and impractical, but also unwise.

Many governmental and charity institutions are providing skills training for persons with disability to improve their opportunities in the world of work.



Under the Skills Development Fund (SDF), support has been provided to the Ghana Society for the Physically Disabled to procure a modern automated chalk moulding plant in order to enhance the production of chalk at their factory. This support will allow the organisation to meet the standard required by the Ghana Education Service.

Training was also provided for the Lakeside Cross Disability Self-Help Group by the Animal Research Division of CSIR in animal husbandry, with the aim of enhancing their livelihoods. To create further opportunities for persons with disability, I have requested that the Administrator of the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) increase the disability grant from 2% to 3%; a 50% increase for the current fiscal year. This formula is soon to be presented to the members of this House for your approval.

The moratorium for disabled access to public buildings pursuant to the Persons with Disability Act of 2006 expires this year. The National Council on Persons with Disability (NCPD) has developed the Ghana Standards on Accessibility Designs for implementation. This will enable owners of public buildings to provide accessibility to buildings for disabled persons.

Mr. Speaker,

Last year, on July 23, I became the first sitting president to pay a formal visit to a Ghanaian prison. Joining the Prison Council, officers and inmates of Nsawam for the launch of Project Efiase, opened my eyes to the deplorable conditions that exist in our prisons. As a follow-up to my visit, the Prisons Council is working on a new block at Nsawam specifically designed to decongest the prison, for which construction will begin this year.

Mr. Speaker,

In order to empower head porters – kayayei - and reduce their vulnerability, we have set up coordinated gender-based response centres at Mallam Atta and Agbogbloshie markets as a pilot to provide humanitarian support, counselling services, and psycho-social support to kayayei and market women. We have also registered a 1,000 of the kayayei free onto the NHIS in order to enable them access quality healthcare. In addition, a micro-finance credit programme for alternative livelihoods for market porters will also be launched.

Mr. Speaker,

Government progressively expanded the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme from 1,640 beneficiary households in 2008, to 71,000 in January 2013.

As at November 2015, LEAP had been expanded to 144,980 beneficiary households. The cash grants have also been increased this year. This has helped beneficiaries to not only address their critical needs, but also to invest in income-generating ventures that supplement family finances. I will share with you two such examples of this.

42-year old LEAP beneficiary Zenabu Sumaila, from Ninkogo in the Pusiga district of the Upper East region, has invested her grant into pig farming. Before that, she had no meaningful source of livelihood. Zenabu used to help her husband tend a small farm but when he died, it threw her and her two children into abject poverty.



She had to rely on the kindness of the people in her community for virtually everything. Even the Chief assisted her in feeding her household.

The lack of an income source also meant that her children could not attend school regularly and the family could not afford healthcare. After receiving her cash grants on a number of occasions, Zenabu started saving and she invested in animal rearing. She started with one piglet and she now has more than ten.

She has been able to supplement her cash grants with income generated from selling the piglets. She is now able to buy enough food for her household. Her children are attending school regularly and by virtue of being a LEAP beneficiary, Zenabu was also able to register on the National health Insurance Scheme free of charge.

Another LEAP beneficiary, Awenemi Apogyanga, from Sumbrungu Kulbia in the Bolgatanga Municipality, proved to be just as enterprising. A widow, Awenemi used to try to make ends meet by using the loom that she owned to weave kente. The money this brought in was not enough to sustain her household so her children would skip school to do part-time work to make enough money to buy material so she could sew and sell more kente.

With the assistance of the LEAP Programme, Awenemi procured a weaving machine and she is now able to afford the material in order to make kente, which she then sells to smock makers at Bolga. Her children no longer have to abandon school to help earn money for the household.

Mr. Speaker,

These are living testimonies of how people's lives are changed.



YOUTH

Mr. Speaker,

To ensure the smooth implementation of the National Youth Policy, in January 2015, I launched the National Youth Policy Implementation Plan. The Plan provides an accelerated framework with specific timelines for the adoption of programmes and activities in the policy document.

The country's Youth Leadership and Skills Training Institutes trained a total of 1,646 youth under a Vocational and Skills Training programme.

Mr. Speaker,

The Youth Employment Act 2015 has been passed to create a solid foundation upon which the Youth Employment Agency can be structured and run. Recruitment under the Youth Employment Agency (YEA) has also started, and it is targeted to recruit 100,000 young people over the next 12 months in 5 different modules.

The new Youth Employment Agency is implementing a purely cashless organisation where all financial transactions will be electronic or by cheque.

Mr. Speaker,

The Youth Enterprise Support (YES) initiative made significant progress in the year under review. A total of 2,048 applications were received in response to its first call, and 107 individuals were selected for financial and technical support. Out of the 107 beneficiaries, 81 were earmarked to receive financial support and 26 to receive technical support.

The progress of all beneficiaries is closely monitored by the YES business support team and the YES monitoring and evaluation desk through mandatory reporting and regular business site visits and audits.

That first call under YES has created over 800 direct and indirect jobs for Ghanaian youths. The second call for applications was made in January this year and so far about 4,000 applications have been received. I urge our youth to take advantage of this initiative.

Mr. Speaker,

One growing area of opportunity for our youth is in ICT services and applications. In the last few years we have made significant progress in entrepreneurship support and the incubation of programmes. These serve as foundations for a strong digital ICT market.

A number of interventions are being implemented, including mLabs, iHubs, Accra BPO Center, Kumasi Business Incubator, Regional Innovation Centers and the ICT Park in Tema to boost the innovation ecosystem and enhance digital opportunities and entrepreneurship.



SPORTS

Mr. Speaker,

In addition to the construction of the Cape Coast Sports Stadium, which has been completed and which I shall have the privilege of commissioning soon, we have also completed the drawings and bills of quantities for the construction of the New Edubiase Sports Stadium.

Last September, Ghana participated in the 2015 All Africa Games held in Congo Brazzaville and won a total of 19 medals. Our women's football team must be particularly commended for winning the football trophy.

The Senior National Football Team, the Black Stars placed second in the African Nations Cup tournament held in Equatorial Guinea in January 2015, and the Black Satellites placed third in the Orange African U-20 Cup of Nations Tournament that was held in Senegal this year.

Mr. Speaker,

Government commits to the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the World Cup Commission even as we confront the legal hurdles ahead.

A new boxing gym and sports complex being built by SSNIT near the Korle Lagoon, will be commissioned this year. This will give opportunity to the young people in Bukom and other surrounding areas who have a talent for boxing to realise their dreams.

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BUILDING A STRONG AND RESILIENT ECONOMY

Mr. Speaker,

When I took office as President our economy was faced with severe challenges from both domestic policy misalignment and external shocks. The resulting effect was a budget deficit of 11.5 % of GDP and a current account deficit of 11.7% of GDP. Expenditure pressures emanating largely from the compensation of public sector employees, budgetary overruns, shortfalls in corporate income tax and low Development Partners' inflow accounted for the high fiscal deficit.

On the other hand, developments in commodity prices and a tightening of financing for middle income countries jointly contributed to the high current account deficit.

At the time of our Independence, the Agriculture sector accounted for about 50% of GDP. It currently accounts for about 21.5% of GDP. The Services sector is, right now, the largest sector with slightly over 50% share of GDP. Following it is the industrial sector, which accounts for about 26.6% of GDP.

Despite, this significant shift in the structure of the economy, the nature of our exports has virtually remained the same. We have a narrow base of export commodities and a high dependence on imports. This situation has subjected our economy to shocks in the face of global price volatilities.

In fact, we have witnessed a simultaneous fall in crude oil, cocoa and gold prices. The price of a barrel of crude oil has fallen by more than 70% since June 2014, and as it stands today, Brent crude oil is selling at around US\$33 per barrel from a high of US\$ 100 per barrel. This is the lowest since 2004. Even though cocoa and gold prices have had a significant effect on the balance of payments and tax revenue, the oil decline is a mixed bag that favourably supports crude oil import bill but affects negatively the Annual Budget Funding Amount (ABFA) of the budget.

This explains the revision of the 2015 original budget by the supplementary budget that was presented to this august House on 21st July 2015.

Over the last few years, we have taken significant measures to address the real sector of the economy. As a first step, we started to diversify our economy by intensifying value-addition to our exports. For example, in August 2015, the Minister for Lands and Natural Resources inaugurated a US\$7 million gold refinery at Adjiriganor in Accra, the second of its kind in Ghana.

Sahara Royal Gold Refinery Limited has the capacity to refine between 200-300 kilos of gold daily, and the expectation is that the growing number of licensed gold buyers who have traditionally purchased raw minerals from Ghana and have exported them to other countries will seek to refine the gold right here in Ghana, creating jobs and therefore aiding inclusive growth. Assistance to the KNUST Jewellery School is also aimed at training a core of craftsmen to kick-start the jewellery industry in Ghana.



Additionally as part of our agenda to achieve a value-added and export-led economy, the Ghana Export and Import Bank (EXIM) Bill has been laid before Parliament. The primary purpose is to finance exports (notably light industrial and agricultural products); guarantee loans; provide export insurance; support SMEs and other businesses; and, strengthen our access to markets under economic cooperation programmes such as the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

The operations of the Bank will support the nurturing and growth of the private sector in Ghana and address the longstanding problem of access to credit for expanding value-added exports. I intend to sign this bill into law as soon as this House passes it because I believe it will underscore Ghana's story of transformation.

Our second strategy has been to invest heavily in building a transformative infrastructure. As an emerging middle-income country, with a growing middle-class, this will form the basis of a new growth trajectory in the economy, generating jobs and increasing incomes. In furtherance to this, it was decided to create strong institutions that would help us achieve our goal.

As with the Exim Bank, the Ghana Infrastructure Investment Fund (GIIF) was established for similar purpose. These institutions will serve as buffers for managing the economy, whilst providing the space for spending on socio-economic infrastructure. The Ghana Exim Bank and the Ghana Infrastructure Fund are some of the more enduring and independent mechanisms for addressing the root causes of our particular macro-economic challenges.

Government has additionally deployed a new debt management strategy that includes making commercial projects pay for the loans that are procured to complete such projects.

Government benefited tremendously from the outcome of the 'Senchi Consensus'; suggestions from enthusiastic stakeholders led to the validation of a Home Grown Fiscal Consolidation Plan which was eventually presented to this august House for consideration. Specific interventions included major public financial management reforms in the areas of budgeting, accounting, revenue administration, wage management, debt management and other structural reforms.

The primary goals of this coordinated policy were to stabilise the economy, facilitate inclusive growth, protect social spending and create decent jobs. On the basis of this plan, I took the decision to enter into the IMF Extended Credit Facility (ECF) Programme to give credibility to our policies. Our commitment to the implementation of the programme has led to two successful reviews under the IMF Programme in 2015, and a third review due in April of this year.

This year, Ghana is expected to achieve a budget deficit of 5.3% of GDP under the IMF Extended Credit Facility (ECF) programme, which provides a tighter fiscal space than anticipated in the original programme. It is within this context that we must practice an even greater degree of fiscal prudence in 2016.



The bane of our economic management has been the cyclical huge election year budget deficits. It is an unfavourable narrative for which Ghana has become famous. I have assured the nation and our partners that my administration will exercise strict fiscal discipline even in this election year in order that we can also transform this negative narrative of our country.

This has not been an easy road to travel. As President, I swore an oath to act in the best interest of our nation. Acting in a nation's best interest is not synonymous with taking only decisions that make one popular. I thank the good people of Ghana for your understanding and patience during these challenging times that we have endured. The sacrifices we have made, place our economy back on a path of growth, and make it more resilient even in a volatile global financial environment.

Working together we have chalked major achievements in our economic management journey so far.

We have contained the unsustainable utility and fuel subsidy overruns by implementing the automatic price adjustments of petroleum and utility prices that took effect in July and December 2015, respectively. The implication has been a minimal budgeted amount of about GH¢50 million for the 2015 budget and provisional outturn relatively lower than provided for.

Considering that in the past, Government has had cause to spend over GH¢1.0 billion for overruns in subsidies, it makes this an uneasy feat for any Government to achieve at this time.

For the first time in many years, negotiation with our Trade Unions within budget constraint before the 2016 budget has been achieved. We acknowledge the enormous support from Organized Labour and our Trade Union Partners who have shown understanding on the need to achieve fiscal consolidation.

In the same vein, we have had human resource and payroll system upgrades and audits with a major policy of a net freeze on employment in some public sectors excluding health and education. The effect has been a reduction in the wage to GDP ratio from 8.9 % in 2012 to 7.9% in 2015; and as a percentage of tax revenue, a reduction from 53.3% in 2012 to 43.6 % in 2015 as well as success in migrating staff onto the Single Spine Salary Structure. It is expected that with the stability achieved negotiations for base pay for next year will commence in April this year.

Our investment in the energy sector has started bearing fruit. With the support of Honourable Members of Parliament, we have amended the Petroleum Revenue Management Act to reflect our current policy stance. We are witnessing increased inward investment into Ghana's oil and gas sector despite the current low price on global markets. We intend to clean up the financial challenges that have affected the viability of the SOEs in the energy sector.



MICRO FINANCE COMPANIES

Mr. Speaker,

Over the past 5 years there has been a proliferation of microfinance companies. These companies come under the direct supervision of the Bank of Ghana. Unfortunately, lack of effective supervision has resulted in many cases in which micro finance companies licensed by Bank of Ghana have breached the rules and created supposed pyramid schemes that have eventually come crashing down.

One such case is DKM. DKM, with the super high interest rates of between 50 and 55% promised, is believed to have caused a loss to its clients in excess of GH¢77 million. Many depositors have lost their livelihood. While our laws place this matter squarely in Bank of Ghana's ambit, Government has a concern for the poor unsuspecting Ghanaian clients who deserve to have been protected by a more robust inspection and supervisory regime by the Central Bank.

I am aware that the Bank of Ghana has commenced liquidation proceedings in respect of DKM. I believe that this process should be part of a comprehensive package that looks at protection of the livelihoods of especially small depositors without rewarding the reckless conduct of the microfinance institution, in this case DKM. The object of this would be to look at reimbursing legitimate customers their original deposit amounts, and not the Alice-in-Wonderland prospects they were expecting.

This initiative should be conceived in the context of a broader solution that will permanently sanitise and restore credibility to the microfinance industry and strengthen Bank of Ghana's supervision.

Mr. Speaker,

This august House has a role to play. We must fast track the Ghana Deposit Protection Bill, which will protect small depositors funds in similar situations like this in future.

Mr. Speaker,

In the Energy Sector, Government in 2013 formulated the Local Content and Local Participation Policy. Approximately 7,000 people have been employed in the upstream sector of the Oil and Gas Industry - 5,590 Ghanaians and 1,350 expatriates. Out of the 474 companies registered with the Petroleum Commission, 321 are indigenous companies and 46 are joint ventures.

Out of the total value of US\$6.3 billion contracts awarded from 2010 to 2015, over US\$1 billion went to indigenous companies. Specifically, as at the third quarter of 2015, \$201,072,785.62 representing 41% of the total of \$792,623,122.73 worth of investment for the year was awarded to indigenous companies.

On the downstream, our vision is to create Ghana as a hub for petroleum distribution in the sub-region. Already BOST has begun supplying petroleum products to the land-locked countries of Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali from their Bolgatanga Depot.



TOR, I am pleased to announce, is operational and is poised to resume its strategic role in petroleum production in Ghana.

Mr. Speaker,

I salute the Acting. MD and the staff of the refinery for the hard work and sacrifice they have made to bring the refinery back on stream. The staff voluntarily took an unprecedented 20% pay cut as their contribution to putting TOR back on its feet. The Chairman of the workers' union and some of his staff are here with us today. I salute you.

ENDING 'DUMSOR'

Mr. Speaker,

A year ago, I stood before this august House and promised to fix the power sector deficit that, at the time, had become a significant constraint to economic growth and was a major disruption in the lives of Ghanaians, both at home and at work. This was a time of considerable national anxiety.

A huge deficit in power generation had resulted in prolonged rationing. I was painfully aware of the difficulties this situation was posing. Ghanaians had to put up with long hours of darkness or spend money on expensive fuel to run their generators. Businesses faced serious disruption or saw their cost go up if they had to operate on generators. I expressed my deep regret to the nation over the situation and took responsibility as President, leader of this nation and Commander in Chief.

It has been a year of hard work and negotiations. We have achieved the fastest mobilisation of power in the history of Ghana. About 800MW of power has been added to our generation within the shortest period of time. Finalising and commissioning KTPP 220MW, Commissioning TICO combined cycle 110MW, mobilising Karpower 220MW and Ameri 250MW have added extra power to our transmission grid.

180 MW of Asogli phase II is also available as soon as we can get extra gas for it.

Much work still needs to be done to give us the comfort of sustainable generation.

I salute the former Minister of Power Dr. Kwabena Donkor, Deputy Minister John Jinapor and their team of technical people. Minister Emmanuel Armah Buah and his team at the Ministry of Petroleum, and I acknowledge the Chief Executive and Staff of the PURC, Energy Commission, VRA, GRIDCO, ECG, GNPC, Ghana Gas Co. Ltd, Ministry of Finance, and the Attorney General's Department. It has taken teamwork and cooperation of many people to achieve this.

Much of our power is based on thermal generation now. Akosombo is currently producing at about 40% capacity. All our hydro resources are strained because of the low level of the Volta Lake caused by a changing climate. More thermal generation means we have had to pay more in tariffs to maintain sustainable power. I wish to thank Ghanaians for your patience and understanding. I pledge to Ghanaians that I will continue to work to ensure that we never find ourselves in such a dreadful situation ever again.



Mr. Speaker,

To ensure we never end up there again, we must add even more generation to keep ahead of a robust growth of almost 12% increase in demand per annum. Planned power based on MOUs and Power Purchase Agreements signed, project an addition to generation of about 3,500MW by 2010. This will ensure Ghana's power security and position Ghana as the power hub of West Africa.

Mr. Speaker,

In this term, and my next term, I intend to work hard to achieve this objective. Additional power into the grid will aim at diversifying fuel sources, from gas to crude oil, LPG and LNG. Additionally, there will be an injection of renewable energy. Currently Ghana has about 25MW of solar power being transmitted into the national grid. This is set to increase to about 200MW over the next 4 years.

Already several small and medium enterprises have been provided with rooftop solar following my announcement of a target of 200,000 rooftop solar projects for small businesses and residential users. Some of the micro enterprises connected include:

- Young Dollar Barbering shop (Maamobi),
- Alice Skills Training Center for Hairdressers (Trade Fair),
- Dara Beauty Parlor (South Labadi),
- Renee Designs (Nima),
- Emmacansey Tailoring (Alajo), and
- Mercy Fashion (Lashibi).

The Ministry of Power, working with the PURC and Energy Commission, will intensify implementation nationwide in order to achieve the target of 200,000.

African Plantations for Sustainable Development (APSD) is also poised to pump 60MW of biomass energy into the transmission, following the signing of a PPA with ECG. Government is also initiating this year, a programme to substitute incandescent and CFL bulbs with LED bulbs.

The Ministries of Finance and Power are finalising processes for the implementation of the Private Sector Participation (PSP) programme for the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) Limited.

Mr. Speaker,

In anticipation of tariffs being paid by all, the Electricity Company of Ghana, is undergoing corporate re-organisation to make its operations more responsive to customers' desires. The strategic focus is to improve general customer service delivery, response time when attending to faults and customer complaints, staff attitudes and professional competence.

ECG is on course to increase pre-payment metering coverage by which time a total of 400,000 prepayment meters should be installed.



Cabinet has approved the Millennium Challenge Compact II's US\$498m grant, which will provide a major boost in addressing energy efficiency problems as well as improving access to energy.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2015, several major power distribution network projects were completed while others reached an advanced stage of work. Even as we worked round the clock to bring load shedding to an end, we were also vigorously working to bring electricity to as many of our people as possible. When I appeared before you last year, 76% of our people had access to electricity. As I speak, 80.5% of our people now enjoy access to electricity. This compares significantly with the 58% of coverage in 2009. And the difference this has made in the lives of the people in these communities is monumental.

Shirazu Issaku is a vulcaniser. He operates at the Fufulso-Junction, located in the Central Gonja District of the Northern Region. It is on the main Kintampo-Tamale road. Shirazu, realising the strategic location of the Fufulso-Junction, as an intersection between the Northern, Upper West and Brong Ahafo Regions, as well as the heavy vehicular traffic on the route from landlocked countries like Burkina Faso and Niger, established a small vulcanising shop there in the early 90s.

Until the extension of electricity to Fufulso-Junction in 2015, Shirazu had to depend on diesel to run his generator enduring the hazardous effects of the smoke. The extension of electricity to the town has changed his life drastically. Today, not only does he have dependable, reliable and sustainable energy for his business, he is also able to work in the night.

Other traders in the village are also benefiting from his enterprise. Kenkey seller, Afishata, also takes advantage of the presence of drivers there to sell the now-popular Fufulso kenkey and fish to drivers and passengers who stop to make use of the vulcanising services. Today, trading is booming in the town, both day and night, as a result of the installation of streetlights.

With this massive expansion in coverage, I wish to urge the Energy Commission and the general public to work together to implement energy conservation programmes with the view to reducing our tariffs and also ensuring judicious use of power.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY OF POWER COMPANIES FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE

Mr. Speaker,

All these gains will be undermined if the issue of financial viability of our utility companies is not addressed. For nearly two decades, our power sector companies have piled on astronomical debts that have severely impeded their ability to perform at optimum level. It is a mark of their resilience and commitment to the national cause that they have survived till date.



Together, Volta River Authority (VRA), Ghana Grid Company (GRIDCO) and the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) owe colossal amounts of billions of cedis. These debts are referred to as “legacy debts” because they have not recently been accumulated; they have been building up for close to two decades.

While it is true that there have been periodic upward adjustments in tariffs over the years, the amount of tariffs paid have not been adequate to meet the operational expenditures of these utilities. For example, the VRA produces electricity at an average rate of 32cents per kilowatt-hour and sells same to ECG at 21cents per kilowatt-hour. The shortfall in revenue has traditionally been paid through the payment of subsidies by Government.

Mr. Speaker,

The reality is that while some subsidies have been paid over the years, perennial budgetary constraints and numerous competing demands have made it virtually impossible for successive Governments to meet this obligation. It is therefore obvious that the operations of these power utilities cannot be sustained if nothing is done to arrest the situation.

The situation that we are faced with requires very difficult but necessary measures to sustain these vital utility companies. The alternative to not acting would be a total collapse of the power sector, and the consequences would be too catastrophic to imagine.

It is on the basis of this that we placed the Energy Sector Levy Bill before this august House in December 2015, and for which we received your gracious approval. If we were to free the credit lines of the utility companies by ring-fencing and paying-off the legacy debt, we would be putting them back in a better position to provide us with reliable sustainable power.

As President, I did not take this decision lightly, knowing the implications for the budgets of many households. It was, however, the only option available after all others had been evaluated. Leaders sometimes are called upon to make tough decisions, decisions whose overall benefits outweigh their initial difficulties, and the Energy Sector Levy is one of those types of decisions I had to take.

It is a measure whose benefit will become apparent sooner rather than later. I deeply regret any hardship this may have caused but if we are to fix our energy challenges permanently then this decision was absolutely imperative.

DIVERSIFYING THE ECONOMY (COFFEE)

Mr. Speaker,

As part of efforts to diversify sources of national revenue as well as provide additional income to farmers, the Government, through the Ghana Cocoa Board, intends to increase Ghana’s annual coffee production from the current level of about 6,000 metric tonnes to 100,000 metric tonnes in the short to medium term.

Production of coffee in Ghana has been low, ranging from a peak of 6,700 metric tonnes in the mid-1960s to a low of 1,140 metric tonnes in 2009.



Government support for COCOBOD's Pilot Coffee Rehabilitation Project instituted in 2010 resulted in a gradual increase in production to 6,000 metric tonnes by 2015.

Government is promoting coffee cultivation in areas considered as marginal for cocoa production. Coffee thrives very well in areas with rainfall ranging between 1200-2000mm per annum but can also grow in areas with a minimum of 1000mm rainfall per annum with irrigation.

Parts of the Volta, Eastern, Central and the transitional areas of Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions such as Techiman, Wenchi, Bechem, Nkoranza, Atebubu, Kwame Danso, Drobo, Akomadan, Offinso, Jamasi, Mampong-Ashanti, Kete Krachi, Dambai are being targeted for aggressive promotion of the cultivation of coffee.

The Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana has developed high-yield varieties of coffee that, under good management, start bearing in 2-3 years after planting, with average yields of 2-3 metric tons per hectare. With a projected planted area of 100,000 hectares over the next six years, it is estimated that from 2021, about 100,000 metric tonnes of coffee can be produced annually which will subsequently increase to about 200,000 metric tonnes over the next decade.

Mr. Speaker,

This year, five million improved, early maturing and high yielding coffee seedlings are being raised and supplied to farmers. This number will be substantially increased annually to ensure that we achieve the 100,000 hectares of coffee farms in the targeted locations by 2021. The efforts being made to increase coffee production will be backed with readily available marketing channels for farmers.

COCOA

Mr. Speaker,

Let me state for the avoidance of doubt that this initiative will co-exist with the cocoa industry without sacrificing the interest of cocoa farmers. To ensure long-term sustainability of cocoa cultivation in the country, Government through Ghana Cocoa Board has initiated a programme to motivate the youth to engage in cocoa farming. This will reduce rural-urban migration, enhance incomes and livelihoods, and boost the rural economy.

The motivation package includes provision of effective extension support, free cocoa seedlings, free sulphate of ammonia fertilizers to boost early growth and establishment of cocoa, and enhanced access to the mass spraying inputs and fertilisers. Since the programme was launched in 2014, over 30,000 youth have signed up in Ashanti, Central, Eastern, and Western regions.

Mr. Speaker,

Government has rolled out programmes that will increase productivity of cocoa farms from an average yield of 0.5 tonnes per hectare to over 1.5 tonnes per hectare.



To renew the cocoa tree stock and increase productivity, Government has directed Ghana Cocoa Board to raise and distribute freely to cocoa farmers, improved hybrid cocoa seedlings.

During the 2014/15 season, 50 million cocoa seedlings were raised at 87 nursery sites and distributed free of charge to farmers. For the 2015/16 season, the nursery sites have been increased to 331 to produce 60 million seedlings across the cocoa growing regions for free distribution to cocoa farmers. The increase in the nursery sites is aimed at bringing the seedlings closer to the farming communities.

The seedlings production involved the engagement of 4,800 youth as casual labourers in the cocoa growing communities. The 60 million seedlings, which is equivalent to 50,000 hectares of cocoa farms, will increase the existing cocoa plantations annually. At the average output of 1.5 tonnes per hectare, an additional 750,000 metric tonnes will be added to Ghana's cocoa output in the next 10 years.

To motivate cocoa farmers to boost output and encourage the youth to take up cocoa farming as a lucrative business, Government will continue to pay remunerative prices to farmers. For the 2014/15 cocoa season farmers were paid GH¢5,600 per tonne including a bonus. This price was increased by 21.4 percent to GH¢6,800 per tonne for the 2015/16 cocoa season, including a bonus.

During the 2013/14 season Government made it a policy to distribute fertilisers free of charge to cocoa farmers and also enhance the mass spraying programme to boost production. As a result, for the 2015/16 cocoa season, 2.4 million bags of granular fertilizer and 1.6 million litres of foliar fertiliser have been procured for free distribution to farmers. For the mass spraying exercise 1,500 tonnes of fungicides and 1.7 million litres of insecticides will be supplied to farmers. Over 58,000 young persons in the cocoa farming communities have been engaged as sprayers for the programme.

Government appreciates the efforts made by Traditional Authorities and landowners by generously offering land to farmers who intend to engage in cocoa farming, especially the youth.

I would like to thank Nana Baffour Kwame Anim II, the Chief of Krodua, a town in the Eastern Region, for generously offering 500 acres of fertile land to 80 young men and women in Krodua to cultivate cocoa. I wish to make a passionate appeal to Traditional Authorities and landowners to continue to offer land to persons interested in cocoa farming and other aspects of agriculture.

PALM

Mr. Speaker,

Government intends to commence a new initiative in Palm Plantation. Ghana is currently a net exporter of palm oil. And yet we have the comparative advantage to produce vegetable cooking oils of all kinds for our own consumption. We must reverse this situation. It will



create countless number of jobs and provide raw material for countless number of uses. We will consider the setting up of a Palm Development Board to supervise this project.

SHEA NUT

Mr. Speaker,

The first shea nut processing plant with an initial capacity of 100 metric tonnes per day was established and commissioned in May 2012 at Buipe in the Central Gonja District of the Northern Region. Arrangements are far advanced for the expansion of its capacity to 200 metric tonnes per day. Government also plans to establish similar plants in the Upper East and Upper West Regions.

Since the inception of the Shea Board in regulating shea nut purchases, similar to what pertains in cocoa purchases, the price per bag of shea nut has increased from GHC28.00 in 2009 to the current price of GHC130.00 per bag, an increase of over 264%.

POULTRY

Mr. Speaker,

Under the pilot phase of the Ghana Broiler Re-vitalisation Project, which was launched in July 2014, a total of 650,000 birds were raised, processed and sold by 2015. This created 350 direct jobs and 7,800 indirect jobs for poultry farmers and the youth along the poultry value chain.

In response to my call for an increase in the local production of poultry and the reduction of high import dependency, a Project Technical Committee was set up to work closely with EDAIF to support poultry production and processing. From 2014 to date, EDAIF has approved a total of GH¢14,972,802.92 for fourteen (14) farming companies/associations including the Greater Accra Poultry Farmers Association, Dormaa Poultry Farmers Association and Bole District Poultry Farmers Association.

Under the Ghana Commercial Agriculture Programme (GCAP), we are working to support large-scale production of maize and soya to feed the poultry industry. When the programme is fully operational, maize and soya bean for livestock feed can be supplied at a cheaper rate to the benefit of Ghanaian poultry farmers.

40% REDUCTION IN POULTRY IMPORT

Mr. Speaker,

Government's policy of 40% poultry import reduction, which is currently underway, is creating thousands of jobs in the Greater Accra, Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions in the short term. EDAIF is also enjoined to speed up disbursements to the poultry sector in order to boost production.

I have tasked the new Minister for Food and Agriculture to take stringent measures to ensure that the policy is strictly implemented.



I am once again calling upon the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) to join hands with GHAPOHA and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to ensure strict compliance with rules and directives on this matter.

SHRIMP FARMING

Mr. Speaker,

Government is supporting the establishment of a Shrimp Project to promote processing and production for export. The project will start in June this year. Production of fingerlings, laboratories, fish feed factories, production ponds, processing and marketing facilities will be located in parts of Greater Accra, Volta and Eastern Regions. The project will create 76,000 direct and indirect jobs. Production is projected at 30,000 metric tonnes and projected export revenue is between US\$60million to US\$200million.



EXPANDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GRWOTH

Mr. Speaker,

This Government is implementing the biggest infrastructure development programme in our country's recent history. So much has been committed to delivering social and economic infrastructure in a relatively short span of time.

For decades, our people have had to cope with an unacceptably huge gap between what is required and what exists in terms of infrastructure. Ageing, dilapidated and non-existent infrastructure has slowed down our economic progress. The World Bank estimates that Ghana suffers an infrastructural financing gap of about US\$1.5 billion per year.

Modern and expansive infrastructure lays down the building blocks for a more efficient and robust economy, spurring growth, enhancing the quality of life and living conditions of our people, optimising critical human development indicators, removing protracted sources of suffering for our people and creating jobs for the multitude of artisans and professionals whose livelihoods are guaranteed by working on such transformational projects.

The masons, carpenters, welders, steel benders, painters, plumbers, tillers, architects, draughtsmen, quantity surveyors, civil engineers, electricians, glazers, operators, drivers, labourers and others who are engaged by contractors to work on these projects, as well as, food vendors earn incomes through the work they do. These incomes represent money that we put in their pockets to enhance their lives and those of their dependents.

The manufacturers and suppliers of building and construction materials, from whom purchases are made, earn money to sustain and expand their businesses and pay their employees. The policy of an aggressive expansion of our infrastructure as captured in our Manifesto of 2012 cannot therefore be viewed through the narrow prism of brick and mortar provision. It must be viewed within the wider context of the socio-economic benefits that come with it.

WATER

Mr. Speaker,

In the water sector, the total water production and distribution system available in all the 52 years of our nationhood prior to 2009 was only adequate to meet the needs of approximately 52% of our people or approximately 14 million out of our current population of about 27 million. This meant that a staggering 13 million suffered the deprivation of not having access to clean drinking water.

In the more remote parts of our country, the total lack of potable water meant that our citizens had to risk drinking water that likely carried water-borne diseases. Some of the water sources were shared with their cattle and other livestock. This situation had far-reaching ramifications for the general health and wellbeing of a large section of our people.

Mr. Speaker,



Since my last appearance before this august House, a total of 77.5 million gallons of water per day has been added to the national water production stock following the coming on stream of such water projects as the:

- Kpong Water Expansion Project Phase 1,
- Kpong Water Intake Rehabilitation Project,
- Accra-Tema Metropolitan Water Supply Project,
- Teshie Nungua Water Desalination Project,
- Nsawam,
- Essakyir Five Towns,
- Mampong,
- Barekese, and
- Other Small Town Water Projects.

The effect of this intervention is that out of the 10 million or so Ghanaians who were deprived of water, 4 million of them living in hundreds of communities currently have been given access to safe drinking water.

There are many more water projects dotted around the country, which are nearing completion. These include the:

- Akim Oda- Akwatia- Winneba,
- Konongo-Kumawu-Kwahu,
- Wa,
- North Tongu,
- Adaklu Anyigbe, and
- Scores of urban and peri-urban Small Water Projects.

The completion of these projects will increase water coverage for our people to about 85%, which translates into 7 million out of the 10 million that were left behind as at 2009. These are not just statistics. These are real people. They are siblings, friends, and future leaders. 7 million Ghanaians including an entire generation that had never seen water flow through their taps at home since they were born.

And, if you can believe it, there was a time when to many people like Madam Naomi Appiah Korang, a schoolteacher at the Kyebi Islamic Primary School, it didn't matter as much as it does today.

Naomi, who is present in Parliament today, and many others are living testimonies to the benefits being derived from the 1.5 million gallons per day Five-Towns Water Project in Kyebi, Osenase, Anyinam, Apedwa and Kwabeng.

I had the honour of joining the Okyehene Osagyefo Amoatia to commission this particular project, so I know what I am talking about. This is a story that I am very sure the Honourable Samuel Atta Akyea will corroborate because water was a daily challenge for the people in this area.



Naomi lives in Kyebi with her three children and she recounts her difficulties in accessing clean drinking water prior to the inauguration of the new Water Treatment Plant.

The old treatment plant was designed to treat much less turbid water in those days when a pin dropped in the famous River Birim, could be viewed from the riverbed. Over the years, the activities of illegal miners - a problem that is not limited to Kyebi alone - have changed the physical properties of the freshwater from the River Birim, rendering the old water treatment plant essentially useless because it was not designed to sieve the increasing quantities of mud that it has had to process with every passing year.

Fortunately, this situation has been resolved to provide the people of Kyebi, Osenase, Anyinam, Apedwa and Kwabeng potable water through the implementation of the Five-Towns Water Project, which has a superior and efficient mechanism to effectively process turbid water.

HOUSING

Mr. Speaker,

For years, the national housing deficit has continued to widen without commensurate investment to bridge it. The lack of adequate public housing has had serious effects on many families and households who have to pay exorbitant amounts in rent just to secure a place to lay their heads. Urgent interventions were therefore required to make affordable housing available.

Through both direct investments and collaboration with the private sector, we are currently on course to deliver over 12,500 housing units, which represents the biggest investment in this sector by any government in decades.

They include the following:

- Saglemi Housing Project at Prampram in the Greater Accra Region - 5,000 housing units. The first 1,500 units will be ready in a few months.
- Nyame Dua Estates at Kpone - This project is being executed in collaboration with Sethi Realty and is designed to provide 5,000 units. The first phase of this project is almost ready.
- Keta Sea Defence Resettlement Housing Project - 618 out of 836 houses have been completed for families affected by the Keta Sea Defense Project.
- SSNIT Housing Projects - Construction is currently ongoing on 608 flats at Dunkonnah near Weija in the Ga South Municipality and 240 flats at Sakumono in the Tema metropolis.
- Security Services Housing Project in Tema - The first phase comprising 168 housing units under this project has been completed. These are currently occupied by security personnel. The second phase of 368 housing units is due for completion in a few months for occupancy by personnel of the Navy.
- New Labadi Villas Housing Project - Under this scheme, decent housing units have been completed and are currently occupied by military personnel in Accra.
- Adenta Regeneration Project (SHC Gardens) - 72 housing units are nearing completion for middle-income households at Adenta. Similar projects will soon be



started at Laterbiakorshie, Kaneshie and Kanda in Accra, and North Effiakuma in Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis.

- Tema Development Corporation (TDC) Housing Projects - The TDC is constructing a total of 148 housing units in Communities 1, 22 and 23. Sixty-Eight units have already been completed for occupancy.
- Police Housing Units at Tema Community 3 - Under a PPP arrangement, decent housing has been provided to police personnel.

Additionally, Government has handed over the 4000+ affordable housing units commenced by President John Agyekum Kufour's Government to SSNIT and State Housing Corporation for completion. This includes the Asokore-Mampong Housing Project.

Mr. Speaker,

I have had cause to caution state institutions that look on while their land is being encroached upon only to carry out painful demolitions later on. This is not acceptable. Ghanaians invest a lot of money to construct those houses. It doesn't help to watch encroachment take place over a period of 10 years and then turn around and demolish the properties.

One such demolition took place in Adjei Kojo. Following a petition received from the MP for Tema West, Irene Naa Torshie Addo, I had a meeting convened with the Chief of Staff and the Chief Executive of TDC to address the issue of the plight of the people affected by the demolition.

ROADS

Mr. Speaker,

Since 2009, we have added 3,772 kilometers to Ghana's motorable network. The GH¢3 billion Cocoa Roads Improvement Programme, which is being rolled out around the country, has added additional resources and impetus to the Roads Improvement Programme.

Permit me to enumerate the most significant road projects on a region-by-region basis.

GREATER ACCRA

Road works in the Greater Accra Region include:

- Kwame Nkrumah Interchange,
- Awoshie- Pokuase Road,
- Giffard Road,
- Burma Camp Road,
- Spintex Road by-pass,
- Boundary Gulf House Road,
- Teshie-Nungua-Sakumono Beach Road, and
- Ashaiman Road.

Additional resurfacing works are being executed in:

- Ningo–Prampam,



- Tema,
- Ashaiman,
- Nungua,
- Teshie,
- La, and
- Accra Central.

There is also ongoing, an overnight asphaltic overlay works on principal streets in Accra.

Preparatory works for the redevelopment of the Accra-Tema Motorway into a six-lane road with 4 interchanges at Adjei Kojo, Abattoir, Teshie Link, and Tema Roundabout will commence soon.

EASTERN REGION

In the Eastern Region, roads completed or being worked on include:

- Suhum town roads,
- Asamankese town roads,
- Somanya town roads,
- Kyebi town roads,
- Kwafokrom-Apedwa Road,
- Nsawam-Aburi,
- Nkawkaw by-pass,
- Nkawkaw-Atibie,
- Adeiso-Asamankese,
- Nsawam-Asamankese,
- Osenase-Akwatia-Kade,
- Apedwa-Kyebi-Bunso,
- Koforidua-Bunso,
- Suhum-Asamankese,
- Anyinabrem-Amagyei,
- Railway Station-Subreso,
- Abuabo-Kofi Agyei,
- Akoase-Subriso-Ntronang,
- Larbikrom-Badukrom,
- Tweapease-Behenese Junction,
- Antaso-K. Anumah,
- Noyem-Winso-Amuana-Praso,
- Akim Sekyere-Abekoase,
- Mangoase-Kukua, and
- Chia-Brenase-Ofoase.

The Adomi Bridge rehabilitation project has been completed and has been opened for use by motorists and the general public.

VOLTA REGION



In the Volta Region, the Eastern Corridor Project is progressing steadily. The Asikuma Junction to Have, Dodi-Pepesu to Nkwanta, Nkwanta-Oti Damanko sections are under construction.

Other road projects in the Region include the following:

- Kete Krachi to Buya,
- Ho – Fume,
- Kpando town roads,
- Worawora – Dambai,
- Bame – Dzolokpuita – Kpedze,
- Ho – Adidome,
- Metrikasa – Havedzi,
- Gwolokwati – Wli – Hohoe,
- Kpando - Alavanyo,
- Kpeme – Nkonya - Gbi Wegbe,
- Aveti – Logaba,
- Alakpeti – Anfoega – Akukome – Aveti,
- Dalive – Agortage,
- Dove (Atitekpo Junction) – Mepe,
- Dove Junction – Dove – Aveyime,
- Dodi Papaase – Mensahkrom – Asuboi,
- Dapaa Jn-Pampawie – Ahamansu,
- Tadzevu – Devego - Agorve Junction,
- Shia Honuta Kpedze & Kpedze town roads,
- Have – Kpando,
- Hohoe – Jasikan, and
- Have – Hohoe.

Rehabilitation of selected roads in the Ho Municipality, including the access into the University of Health and Allied Sciences, are ongoing.

The Juapong-Fodzoku-Akuse Dam road and the Sogakofe-Battor road have been completed, while the Juapong- Abutia-Sokode road is ongoing.

WESTERN REGION

In the Western Region, work is being done on the following roads:

- Kansaworodo By-Pass,
- 20 km asphalt overlay of selected roads in Sekondi-Takoradi,
- Asphalt overlay of Tarkwa, Axim and Elubo town roads,
- Daboase and Sefwi Wiawso town roads,
- Prestea, Asankragua and Enchi town roads,
- 110 km Agona Junction-Elubo,
- 94km Tarkwa-Bogoso Ayamfuri, and
- 52 km Ayamfuri-Asawinso roads.

Other roads under construction are the following:



- Sefwi-Bekwai-Eshiem,
- Sewfi-Wiawso-Akontombra,
- Benchema-Oseikojokrom,
- Juabeso-Bodi-Akontombra,
- Daboase-Atieku,
- Anyinabrim-Sui-Bodi Junction,
- Prestea-Samreboi,
- Enchi-Dadieso,
- Adwofua-Oseikojokrom,
- Buako-Sankore,
- Suhyenso-Subriso-Djoboakrom,
- Kwasuo-Gyankufa, and
- Johnkrom-Attahkrom.

Work has also commenced on the 51.2 kilometre Edwenase-Atobiase, Juaboso-Dadieso, and Anto Dampen-Daboase rural roads. The construction of the 10-kilometre Oil and Gas Enclave roads along the pipe-line including the Amazure Bridge is on-going.

CENTRAL REGION

Mr. Speaker

In the Central Region, work is progressing impressively on the Kasoa Interchange. Completion of work on this interchange will bring great relief to travelers on this road, which has been the source of severe frustration and irritation for the travelling public as a result of vehicular traffic.

Also in the Central Region, the following are underway:

- Upgrading works on roads in Cape Coast, Dunkwa-on Offin, Winneba and Agona Swedru townships.
- Asphalt overlay in Cape Coast, Dunkwa, Saltpond and Mankessim.
- Construction of the Kasoa by-pass, Mankessim-Abora Dunkwa, Dunkwa-Twifo Praso- Assin Foso, Amanful-Nyarkrom-Nkum and Assin Nyakomase-Senchiem Roads.
- Construction of Assin-Twifo Praso , Essiam Town roads and the Brehman Asikuma-Amanfopon Road.

Work is also progressing steadily on the:

- Ekwamoase-Ofabil,
- Sankor-Kweikrom-Ojobi-Akoti,
- Abowin-Nkodwo-Asempanyim,
- Duakwa-Akwakwa (Phase 1), and
- Dominase-Subinso roads.

Work has also been completed on the following feeder roads in the Central Region:

- Bawjiase – Aponkyekura,
- Bawjiase – Ayensuako,
- Adawukwa - Adjator – Honi,



- Bewuanum – Adawukwa,
- Bawjiase - Amonkrom (Congo) – Tetteykura,
- Ahentia - Busumabra Junction – Kweikrom,
- Papaase No. 1 – Odotom,
- Kwa Bondze - Larbie – Jeikrodua, and
- Bontrase – Dasum.

ASHANTI REGION

Mr. Speaker,

In the Ashanti Region

- The Sofoline Interchange is almost complete.
- Works are ongoing on the Bekwai and New Edubiase town roads.
- The Assin Praso- Bekwai road is currently in use following its completion last year.
- Major road projects such as the Bomfa Junction-Asiwa-Bekwai, Bekwai-Ampaha-Asiwa, Kumawu-Timaate-Drobonso and Agyenkwaso-Anomabu-Gyadem roads are progressing steadily.
- The New Edubiase- Anomabo, Amantia- Obuasewa, Obuasi Junction- Dunkwa-Ayamfuri, Ahwiankwanta- Adumasa and Trabuom- Toase Road sections are also being worked on and are on schedule.

BRONG AHAFO

Mr. Speaker,

In the Brong Ahafo Region the following roads are under construction:

- Nsawkaw - Namase section of the Wenchi - Sampa road,
- Berekum - Sampa,
- Atebubu - Kwame Danso - Kwadwokrom,
- Gaoso - Kukuom Junction,
- Prang - Kintampo,
- Dormaa Ahenkro - Nkrankwanta, and
- Tuobodom - Offuman - Wenchi.

Work is also ongoing on the:

- Gambia No. 2 - Kyeremasu,
- Tepa Junction - Goaso,
- Kofibadukrom Junction - Kofibadukrom,
- Dormaa Ahenkro - Nkrankwanta,
- Dormaa - Nkrankwanta,
- Atebubu Kwame Danso - Kojokrom,
- Bechem - Techimentia - Akomadan,
- Nkroanza - Jema,
- Yamfo - Asuadei - Ansin,
- Asumura – Tipokrom, and
- Akrodie – Kanchiamoa.

The following are also on course:

- Dadiesoaba - Twabidi,



- Dormaa - Ahenkro - Baabianiha,
- Asuadei Junction - Asuadei,
- Antwirifo - Danyame Feeder Roads,
- Sunyani town roads,
- Techiman town roads,
- Nkoranza Goaso town roads,
- Dorma Ahenkro town roads, and
- Kade town roads.

NORTHERN REGION

Mr. Speaker,

In the Northern Region, I inaugurated the 147-kilometre Fufulso-Sawla Road last year following its successful completion. Significant progress has been made on the Buipe-Tamale road and work has started on the Busunu-Daboya road.

The following roads are at various stages of completion:

- Daboya-Mankarigu - Wiase including the Oti Damanko-Bimbila-Yendi road,
- Yendi - Nakpanduri on the Eastern Corridor,
- Nyankpala - Tolon,
- Tamale – Salaga - Makango (Awarded),
- Chereponi - Yendi,
- Busunu - Daboya,
- Yendi - Tamale,
- Tamale - Kumbungu, and
- Tamale - Karaga - Gushegu (Awarded).

Over the last two years, 30km of roads have been rehabilitated in the Tamale Municipality with work on another 25km underway.

Roads in Yendi, Savelugu, Damongo and Bole have also been worked on. We are also in negotiation for funding for the construction of a bridge over the White Volta between Daboya and Tolon.

UPPER EAST

Mr. Speaker,

In the Upper East Region, the following have either been completed or are on going:

- 10 km of roads in the Bolgatanga municipality,
- Navrongo and Bawku town,
- Navrongo - Tumu,
- Bolgatanga - Bongo,
- Wikongo - Tongo,
- Navrongo - Tono,
- Bolgatanga- Bawku, Queiroz Galvao who are working on the Tamale Airport, have substantially finished their work. We have asked them to demobilize their equipment on to the Bolgatanga- Bawku road.
- Misiga - Kulungugu, and



- Sandema - Wiesi.

UPPER WEST REGION

Mr. Speaker,

Seven kilometres of town roads have been completed in the Wa Municipality. The Wa campus of the University for Development Studies has also seen improvements in the road network.

Other road works in the region include:

- Tumu roads,
- Nadowli - Lawra – Hamile,
- Wa - Bulenga, and
- Wa-Dorimon.

Construction of steel bridges on the

- Yala - Sombisi,
- Tantale - Tuvuu,
- Tuvuu - Lzabisi,
- Wa - Walewale,
- Jeffisi - Gwolu, and
- Guono-Kperisi.

Mr. Speaker,

Many of these roads have been in a bad state for many years. There are a good number more crying for attention. It is not practically possible for us to commence work on all roads in Ghana at once. I urge Ghanaians to exercise patience. As we finish with these roads, we will commence work on other equally important roads.

As a result of directives to the Roads and Highways Ministry to ensure that projects financed by Government of Ghana budget are awarded to local contractors, I am proud to announce that roughly 95% of contractors working on GOG awarded roads and the Cocoa Roads Improvement Programme are Ghanaians - like Emmanuel Aboagye, who represents a new crop of young and dynamic road contractors. His firm MMNAB Company Limited employs 73 people and is working on the Bekwai Town Roads under the COCOBOD Roads Programme.

Mr. Speaker,

He started his construction company in 2009 and he is only 32 years old. He graduated from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Engineering and another BSc in Petroleum Engineering.

The interesting thing is that he is a youth member of the NPP and was a Polling Station Chairman. This is a Government that opens up the opportunities of this country to everybody without political prejudice. I cut the sod for the Ashanti segment of the Cocoa Town Roads in new Edubiase and in Bekwai. The site where we cut the sod for the cocoa



roads project in Ashanti at Bekwai was on the site of Emmanuel Aboagye. And I must say, as young as he is, he does a very fantastic job.

Mr. Speaker,

Ghanaian contractors can do as well as foreign contractors and I want to ensure that we raise indigenous Ghanaian construction firms that will not only construct roads in Ghana but, in future, will construct roads in other countries.

Through this massive road construction effort, we are creating thousands of jobs for our youth who have been engaged by the local contractors working on these roads. It also means the profit earned from these public works is retained and invested in this country.

As of 2012, there were only 6 asphalt plants in Ghana mostly owned by Foreign Construction Companies. Today, there are 22 of such plants, majority of which are owned by Ghanaians.

In order to address the perennial problem of debts owed to contractors, a portion of the Energy Sector Levy will be used to defray about GH¢323 million owed them by the Road Fund. This will also enable the Road Fund amortise another GH¢300 million, borrowed from SSNIT in 2008 and 2010, to support its activities. Additionally, it will enable the Road Fund to scale up road maintenance and repair to ensure longer life spans for our roads.

Mr. Speaker,

The massive investment we are making in road construction is making life easier for our people. It is facilitating movement of people as well as goods and services. It is boosting economic activity and giving motorists greater options while cutting down travel time significantly.

Today, it is not unusual to go to bed having driven on a bad road only to wake up to find that the road has been re-asphalted and covered with beautiful road markings. Many have also left for work in the morning driving on poor roads only to return in the evening to find their roads re-done.

The savings for motorists in terms of money that would have been used to fix broken-down vehicles due to bad roads cannot be underestimated. The savings for commercial drivers who can now ply certain roads multiple times because they can move quicker and more easily on the smooth roads can also not be underestimated.

Ask Mohammed Hissan, who has been driving since 2004 and plies the route to Tamale. Before the completion of the Sawla-Fufulso Road, Mohammed says he and other drivers spent between 8 and 9 hours traveling from Wa to Tamale. With the road completed now, an excited Mohammed says they now spend a maximum of 4-and-a-half hours doing the same journey and that now, travelling across the two regional capitals is much safer.

Ghana has the most extensive engineered roads in West Africa. I intend by the time I leave office in 2021 for Ghana to be among countries with the best road network in Africa.



Let me appeal to drivers to strictly observe road safety regulations to save lives and halt the carnage on our roads. It was heart wrenching to see the severe injuries sustained by the survivors of the bus accident, many of them children. I wish to salute the doctors and staff especially of the Kintampo hospital and the other health facilities who helped to save the lives of the survivors.

Mr. Speaker,

Pedestrian and passenger-related fatalities account for nearly 63% of all road traffic related deaths. The National Road Safety Commission (NRSC) is strengthening the 'Speak Up' passenger campaign launched in 2015 and putting in place a new campaign on pedestrian safety. It is implementing a plan to construct and install 968-lollipop crossing stands at strategic locations to aid the use of the roads by children and vulnerable adults.

We will continue to support the Police MTTD with logistics such as speed radar guns and alcometers.

Mr. Speaker,

As part of its mandate of promoting good driving standards and the use of roadworthy vehicles on our roads, the Driver Vehicles License Authority (DVLA) automated 15 of its offices to improve the delivery of service to the public. The Authority is in the process of digitizing vehicle records to pave way for other stakeholders, such as the MTTD and insurance companies, to have real time access to vehicle records.

TRANSPORT

Mr. Speaker,

We have chalked major successes in our drive to aggressively modernise and expand our transportation system. Today Ghanaians and foreigners alike travelling through Kotoka International Airport's Terminal II transit through a refurbished arrival hall that meets all international standards. The new arrival hall gives travelers a most favourable impression of our country.

Work is currently ongoing on an ultra-modern International Terminal building to be known as Terminal 3. It is designed to accommodate 5 million passengers a year and process 1,250 passengers an hour. It will have six boarding bridges, a large retail area and three main business lounges, among others.

The Turkish construction company has taken possession of the site and has already started working feverishly. I will have the honour to be joined on the 1st of March 2016 by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to break ground for official commencement of work on this monumental project. This project will surely make Ghana the preferred hub for transit passengers in West Africa.

I am pleased to note that this project is being financed by credit raised by the Ghana Airport Company Limited on its own balance sheet with no sovereign guarantee or charge



to the public debt stock. This is in line with our new public debt management strategy that compels public companies to borrow using their own financial muscle.

To further enhance the operations of the airport and cater for the needs of importers and exporters, construction of a new state-of-the-art Import, Export and Transit Cargo Centre, Office Complex & Aircraft Ramp Handling Operation is almost complete.

The Centre will be equipped with the latest cargo handling equipment, including automated storage and retrieval systems accommodating 2,800 pallet positions, mini-shipment tower, cold stores, bullion stores, x-ray scanners and the highest level of security controls and CCTV monitoring for safety and security of goods and counter-narcotics purposes.

Mr. Speaker,

Work is progressing steadily on converting the Kumasi and Tamale Airports into international airports. Last year, work was completed on the first phase of the Kumasi International Airport. Work on the Tamale International Airport will also be completed soon. These will inject greater flexibility into air travel and become growth poles around which the economy of the middle and northern parts of our country will revolve.

Work will also be completed on the Aerodrome at Ho to give Ghanaians more air travel options. The procurement process for the temporary terminal to allow commercial flights to commence operations into Wa is underway.

Mr. Speaker,

In the Maritime sector, the expansion works on both Tema and Takoradi Harbours are moving steadily. The Phase I expansion works in Takoradi are expected to be completed in May this year. The expansion of these two ports will create approximately 10,000 new jobs for our people.

The following projects are also ongoing at the Tema Port:

- Bulk Cargo Handling Jetty project which will provide a jetty for the off-loading of bulk cargo- clinker, cement and related products to free the other berths for other commercial cargo vessel to reduce waiting time of vessels.
- The development of four (4) container terminals at the port including an access road from the port to the motor way and expansion of the motor way from four (4) to six (6) lanes.
- The reconstruction of the Net-Mending Wharf at the Tema Fishing Harbour to support the artisanal fishing industry and to enhance environmentally safe fish handling.

An even bigger expansion project aimed at increasing the size of the Tema Harbour to four times its current size, to respond to increasing container volumes will begin shortly. The US\$1.5 billion project will be the largest private sector investment in the transport sector in recent years and will result in the provision of a modern harbour with state of the art



equipment that is able to take on increasing trade, vital for economic development. This project is being undertaken by Meridian Port Services (MPS).

Mr. Speaker,

The Ghana Urban Transport Project, which is being implemented by the Ministry of Transport in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, is expected to provide scheduled passenger services along some designated routes within the Accra metropolis. Private sector transport operators will own and manage the buses for these routes. Government is assisting them to procure buses for the Bus Rapid Transit System to improve on its service delivery.

Dedicated bus lanes are being constructed. The first one from Amasaman to the Central Business District has been completed. This is a lane that will be used only by buses to ensure the provision of regular and efficient mass transit services for passengers and also to reduce congestion.

ICT AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Speaker,

From the mid 1990's when we began the ICT revolution, Ghana has attained an enviable mobile and fixed telephony subscription record of 33,099,514 as at August 2015 as compared to 11million in 2008. Mobile and fixed Internet subscribers have also reached 17,159,383.

Last year, we established the National Emergency Response Number - 112 - which allows callers in distress to access any of the emergency services. It proved extremely useful during the period of the June 3rd Fire and Flood Disaster. We have also established the Government Online Portal - the eServices portal to provide Government services online.

This means we are almost at the point of conducting paperless Cabinet sessions. Indeed, at our last Cabinet sitting, I indicated that I would soon give a deadline when hard copy Cabinet files would no longer be tolerated. Very soon, distinguished members of the House will also be conducting paperless Parliamentary sessions.

Mr. Speaker,

With expansion in mobile and fixed broadband including 4G LTE, the recently auctioned 800MHZ spectrum, the establishment of the National Data Centre among others, Ghana's digital economy has been strategically positioned to blossom. We are witnessing more software being developed locally by the youth.

Cash is finding its way gradually into the electronic realm through mobile money and other initiatives. More and more digital jobs are being created with every click of the button. This is why we continue to train more girls in ICT to ensure digital inclusion. Last year, for the pilot programme we trained about 900 girls in the Volta Region in ICT. This year 1,000 more will be trained in other parts of the nation.

Mr. Speaker,



A growing telecommunications industry requires a dynamic regulatory framework, which ensures customer satisfaction, good return on investment and adequate participation of the private sector.

To this end, in August 2014, Cabinet approved four policies to establish:

- The Mobile Virtual Network Operating License
- The Interconnect Clearing House License
- The International Wholesale Carrier License and
- The Unified Telecom License



TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE

Mr. Speaker,

The canker of corruption and its negative impact on development is well known. It continues to pose a big threat to every society, in both developed and developing nations. While the canker spares no country, its effects are felt more in developing and poor countries as it exacerbates poverty and hinder development. It eats into the moral fabric of society and undermines the foundations of democracy and good governance.

Corruption is a disease, which left unchecked can choke and kill a nation. It is an enemy of progress and development and a threat to peace and security. It is therefore an obligation on all of us to mobilise our efforts in the fight to eradicate corruption.

Mr. Speaker,

We have tackled corruption with determination and fortitude in an effort to stamp out systemic indiscipline in the fabric of public and social service. We have refused to bury our heads in the sand like the ostrich or to adopt a defensive posture. The indifference of the past has given way to a refreshing blast of sunlight, a proven potent and enduring disinfectant for the canker. This firm position and commitment has heightened public hope and confidence that the fight against corruption is winnable.

Mr. Speaker,

We decided in 2009 that a ten-year action plan that addresses corruption in a more strategic, scientific and sustainable manner is the right way to go and that the plan should be integrated into national development planning.

The nation was unanimous in support of the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (NACAP). That is partly why the nation was united, through our representatives in Parliament, in adopting the NACAP. Following its adoption, I have inaugurated the High Level Implementation Committee, as one of the structures to facilitate implementation of the plan.

The Committee is responsible for providing strategic policy direction and advice to implementing bodies, and assisting CHRAJ and the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) in monitoring and coordinating the implementation of NACAP.

The Committee consists of representatives from key state institutions, the private Sector and Civil Society Organisations.

Mr. Speaker,

The 'progress report' presented by the Acting Commissioner of CHRAJ reveals that significant progress has been made in the first year of the implementation of NACAP



despite some challenges. Government is determined to play its role under NACAP and will sanction heads of institutions that do not comply with the directives on the implementation of NACAP.

Mr. Speaker,

The country is doing its best to combat money laundering and Terrorist financing after establishing the required legislative framework. Three (3) successful convictions involving money laundering have been secured following continuous analysis of intelligence of over 200 Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs).

In the case involving ghost names on the payroll of the National Service Scheme (NSS), the Attorney General has commenced the prosecution of a number of persons. Thirty-five (35) officials including a former Executive Director and his Deputy have been arraigned before court and four have already been convicted. 130 others are being processed for court. 163 officers, some of whose careers in the Scheme span several Governments, and were neck deep in the fraudulent enterprise have been dismissed.

Following the passage of the Youth Employment Agency Act, Act 887 of 2015, we have taken measures to install strong systems to ensure probity, transparency and accountability. Steps are being taken to ensure that transactions take place on electronic payment platforms. I have no doubt that these measures will strengthen the systems and procedures in the Agency to avoid a recurrence of the challenges its predecessor encountered. In the meantime, over fifty million Ghana Cedis has been recovered from the Agency's debtors.

Mr. Speaker,

I share the sentiments and, sometimes, the impatience of the public concerning the pace at which some of the investigations are proceeding, but our commitment to constitutional governance and the rights of persons, enjoin us to be patient with the judicial processes.

As I said last month, "we cannot be adherents of constitutional democracy, and be admirers of arbitrary justice". I wish to emphasise the commitment of my administration to expose and take action on allegations of corruption that are brought to our attention.

Mr. Speaker,

The new Board and Management of the Savanna Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) have comprehensively addressed the concerns raised in the 2013 audit report regarding the use of resources. The financial accounts of SADA from 2012 to date have been audited, and the 2014 accounts will be published as part of SADA's annual report.

A comprehensive report on the audit, including recommendations to address financial malpractices, is ready and will be published in due course. In addition, an external independent body has conducted a comprehensive institutional assessment of SADA and steps outlined to strengthen the institution's performance and accountability.



Last year, following concerns about the re-spraying and branding of 116 Metro Mass Transit buses, the Chief of Staff promptly asked the Attorney General to look into the matter. The Attorney-General concluded that if proper procedures had been followed the State would have saved about GH¢1.5 million.

The Chief of Staff subsequently directed the A-G to pursue the recovery of the excess amount. The contractor, following meetings with the A-G and without prejudice to their legal rights, agreed to refund the amount in three installments by the end of next month. The first installment of GH¢300,000 has been paid to the A-G's Department.

Mr. Speaker,

As you would recall, ace investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, conducted some underground investigations and presented my office with a petition accusing some judges and other judicial officers of corruption. As required by the constitution, I referred the petition to the Chief Justice for investigation. On the recommendation of the inquiring panel, I approved the dismissal of 23 judges from the bench.

Mr. Speaker,

In this fight against corruption, there is a need for us to combine law enforcement with an approach that also emphasises national integrity as an important component of NACAP. In connection with this, I take note of the role assigned to the Office of President to institute a National Integrity Awards Programme to motivate honest people in the country.

I am determined to have the awards programme established within the time frame prescribed by the NACAP. The criteria to be developed for this important programme will be transparent and participatory. I urge you all to take interest in it and at the appropriate time, submit proposals to assist us institute the scheme.

Mr. Speaker,

We are working tirelessly to encourage citizens to report corruption without fear of victimisation. Here again, the Anas' expose, and the debate surrounding it, suggests that though there is a favourable and enabling environment for investigative journalism to thrive, robust measures to further strengthen mechanisms for safe reporting of corruption and crime are needed.

Let me take this opportunity to inform you that 10 persons have been convicted in relation to Anas' expose on smuggling of cocoa, while two were acquitted by the court. The Attorney General and other relevant stakeholders are working together to bring the Witness Protection Bill to Parliament soon, for consideration. I also urge Parliament to expedite work on the Conduct of Public Officers Bill, which is currently in Parliament and also the Right to Information Bill, which is also still in Parliament.

Indeed, I think the Right to Information Bill by the time it is passed, will go down in the history of this country as the longest bill ever under Parliamentary consideration..

The Whistleblower (Amendment) Bill, which is already before Parliament, I am told, will be passed soon.



The anti-corruption and law enforcement agencies have meanwhile begun discussions on how to coordinate their activities in a manner that facilitates effective investigations and prosecution of corruption and crime.

I am happy to announce that the first in a series of Citizens Complain Centres has been set up here in the national capital. The Centre is located in Room 209 on the 2nd floor of the Public Services Commission Building in the Ministries Area. In addition to walk-ins, the Centre receives and processes voice complaints using hotlines and via its website, www.ghanacitizen.org.

The Citizens Complain Unit will collate data and will produce quarterly reports based on the type, nature and sources of complaints received. The report will also include recommended action, resolution of complaints as well as trend analysis. It is expected that reports by the Unit will help promote the fight against corruption as well as improve service delivery in the public sector.

If it proves successful, the Citizens Complain Unit will be replicated in all the regional capitals.

District Assemblies are also encouraged to establish their own Units in their district capitals.

Mr. Speaker,

The Sole Commissioner on Judgment Debts concluded his work and presented his report. Since then a White Paper has been published for implementation. The Sole Commissioner's report reveals the weaknesses in our systems and also shows how some persons in collusion with public officers deliberately fleeced Government of hundreds of billions of Ghana Cedis and in some cases US Dollars.

Even before the presentation of the report, the Attorney-General upon my directive commenced a robust defence of several cases of judgment debts. This action has paid off with massive savings recorded. In 2015 alone, as much as US\$900 million in claims against the state were successfully and effectively defended internationally. In domestic cases, last year alone, the Attorney General's Department successfully resisted claims of over US\$100 million.

Our greatest success in the fight against corruption must be based on preventing it. We must speed up the use of technology to remove much of human discretion in our public service transactions. We must move from a cash-based society into a cashless one where transactions are handled using electronic settlement platforms rather than lugging huge amounts of cash about. I have discussed with the Governor of the Bank of Ghana and asked for a road map to achieve this target by the year 2020.

There is a political risk any Government runs in facing up to corruption and fighting it - the paradox of exposure - where an open, transparent approach to fighting corruption leads to an erroneous impression that corruption is more pervasive and prevalent at a certain point



than another. This is a risk my Government has accepted to take and a challenge we are willing to confront.

In this fight, concocted allegations and other salacious fabrications anonymously circulated on social media under the masthead of fake newspapers do not help. They rather hinder the fight, making it difficult to differentiate what is truth, and what is political propaganda.

Similarly, sweeping and generalised conclusions drawn on the basis of scanty and often misleading information ought to be guarded against. Corruption has serious implications for any society's advancement. For that reason the push against it cannot, and must not, be ceded to those whose only motivation is electoral advantage. I wish to strongly restate the political will of my Government, working with our internal and external partners, in the fight against corruption.

LEGISLATURE AND JUDICIARY

Mr. Speaker,

Good governance and the fight against corruption rest not only on the Executive and the general public, but also the Legislature and the Judiciary. In the course of their duties, the second and third arms of Government are called upon to perform tasks that will advance the frontiers of democratic practice in our nation.

However, as I observed earlier, the image of the Judiciary was brought to a near all-time low with the Anas exposures. As nerve-racking as this incident was, it also presented a story of hope. Hope, in the fact that there were a significant number of judges who not only threw Anas out, but also threatened to call the Police on him. It shows that we have many judges on the bench who are upright and have great integrity.

We commend Her Ladyship the Chief Justice for her courage and determination in dealing with the matter as required by law. The Chief Justice and her team have worked hard to try to restore the image of the institution. We will work with her to ensure that we implement any other structural, institutional or human reforms required to make the Judiciary an institution Ghanaians can be proud of.

Mr. Speaker,

The provision of adequate security to Parliament and Honourable Members is of utmost priority to Government. The recent murder of our Honourable colleague raises again the discussion in respect of what the suitable accommodation for an MP should be - concentrated or scattered? Concentrated accommodation in, say, a Parliamentary village ensures better security. Scattered is more difficult to secure.

With respect to the security of the precincts of Parliament, I have authorised the release of the Western Gate Security Post of the State House to Parliament for use as a Police Station. The facility has been refurbished with modern policing equipment and is ready for use.



We have also installed a Digital Surveillance System with over 400 CCTV cameras and it is currently being manned by a detachment from the Criminal Investigations Department of the Ghana Police Service.

I encourage the Leadership of Parliament to liaise with the Security Agencies to fashion out appropriate arrangements to ensure the safety of members of this august House.

ENHANCING RULE OF LAW & JUSTICE

Mr. Speaker,

With the challenge to the constitutionality of the constitutional review procedure dismissed by the Supreme Court, we will work to ensure that the constitutional review process is brought to closure and that the Constitution Review Implementation Committee is able to proceed with its mandate.

With the commissioning of both Job 600 and the Courts Complex, we can all rest assured that all the three arms of Government have now been properly accommodated to carry out our work. But let us always remember that it is said that, “to whom much is given, much is expected”. Our people expect much from us.

My understanding also is that, this year we will design and start construction of a new block to cater for the extra 23 members of Parliament who cannot be accommodated in the tower block complex.

Mr. Speaker,

The late President John Evans Atta Mills is our first and only President to have died in office. It is important that fitting memorials are established in his honour. The Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) has established the John Evans Atta Mills Centre for Law and Governance. This year, the John Evans Atta Mills Memorial Library of the University of Cape Coast will also become operational. Government will support these two institutions to ensure that the vision and the ideals of this great academic and political leader are not lost.

Mr. Speaker,

This year is an election year and all of us must give the utmost support to the Electoral Commission to carry out its work. Our Electoral Commission has gained commendation all over the world for the good work that it has done over the years since the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution. We have held 6 successful elections and I have absolutely no doubt that our electoral commission will rise to the occasion to deliver a 7th successful election come November this year.

It is important for all of us to support the Commission to be able to put in place the processes that will make this election successful. I call on all political parties to do exactly that.

Mr. Speaker,



I pledge as President to do everything in my power to work for a free, fair and transparent election. Every support that can be given to the Electoral Commission by Government, we will give to ensure that they are able to carry out their mandate. Let the election be clean and devoid of insults.

Mr. Speaker,

I want, on behalf of all Ghanaians, to salute the media for the good work they have been doing in communicating our voices to the electorate. I believe that as they have done in the last 6 elections, this year, again, they will be a useful conduit for sending the messages of political parties to the electorate.

I wish to ask the media to be circumspect in the use of language, and to avoid insults. Let us tell the Ghanaian people what we intend to do for them and let them make their choice.

DECENTRALISATION

Mr. Speaker,

Having decentralised our governance system to this point where functions, functionaries and funds have been deployed to the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs), Government and the citizenry expect the local authorities to reciprocate by being more responsive to the needs of their communities.

We expect the MMDAs to work towards financial independence through innovation and application of efficiency measures. We expect them to go beyond the naming of the streets, which they have done creditably well, to numbering the houses and developing a comprehensive database for policy planning and emergency response.

The street naming policy has largely been implemented; we need to speed up the next phase of numbering all houses and creating GIS maps of all our communities. District assemblies should be able to create a database of all this information for the purposes of effective revenue mobilisation and provision of social services.

Mr. Speaker,

This year will be the second year of implementation of a Five-Year Phase Two of the Decentralization Policy Framework and National Decentralization Action Plan (2015-2019). We remain committed to implementing the activities agreed upon.

Mr. Speaker,

Bills to decentralise the following Departments by devolution and converting them into Departments of District Assemblies have been finalised and will be placed before Parliament in the first quarter of 2016.

1. Registry of Births and Deaths
2. Ghana Library Board
3. National Youth Authority
4. National Sports Authority
5. Department of Cooperatives



6. Department of Town and Country Planning
7. Ghana Education Service
8. Ghana Health Service

The Consolidated Decentralised Local Governance Bill will also be laid before Parliament in the course of the year. A Local Government (Borrowing) Bill will also be laid before Parliament that will enable MMDAs to borrow for infrastructure projects and municipal services delivery without incurring liability for the Government.

SECURITY AGENCIES

Mr. Speaker,

Over the past few years we have embarked upon a progressive retooling of our security agencies. We have provided them with vehicles, accommodation, logistics and resources that enable them to fulfill their constitutional mandate.

We will continue to place priority on their needs in order to place them in a favourable position to carry out their duty of confronting and defeating crime, including cross border crime, narcotics, arms trafficking and terrorism.

Lately the Police Service has earned the admiration of the nation for the dexterity with which they tracked down and arrested Arthur Simpson Kent who fled from Britain to Ghana after allegedly committing murder. The speed with which the suspect in the J.B. Danquah Adu murder was nabbed has also earned the Service plaudits. We hope the Police will deepen this investigation to unravel all the unanswered questions surrounding this case. In the mean time I will urge the public to desist from making wild, unsubstantiated allegations.

Mr. Speaker,

Ghana continues to participate in peacekeeping efforts in the West Africa sub-region and on the African continent as well as other parts of the world, as her contribution to ensuring peaceful resolution of disputes and elimination of threats to international peace and security posed by conflict zones around the world.

We have deployed infantry battalions to Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire and aviation units in Mali and Cote d'Ivoire. An engineering company has been deployed in Mali, and we are participating in UN peacekeeping missions in DR Congo, South Sudan and Lebanon. The Police deployed 170 personnel from the Formed Police Unit to South Sudan in August 2015. Due to the high performance of the contingent, the UN has requested for an additional 100 personnel from the Unit who are to be deployed in the first week of March 2016.

Mr. speaker,

As I said, 2016 is an election year and we are confident that all our security agencies will join hands once again to secure the peace and stability of our nation before, during and after the November 7 general election.



FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. Speaker,

My understanding is that the Minister for Foreign Affairs presented a comprehensive statement on GITMO to this House. And you exhausted yourselves questioning her on all aspects of the matter. I will therefore not repeat what she said.

Mr. Speaker,

The world we live in today is a world that has become a more integrated and connected place, that creates both challenges and opportunities for our dear nation. It is important as we seek to build stronger relations with our friends and allies that we take this into consideration.

We must also, as a leading nation on the West Coast of our continent, live up to our principles and our ideals that have informed our Foreign Policy since our independence and continue to do so, because those ideals are as relevant today as they were at our independence. Our First President charged that Africa should unite because in unity lies strength, we are far from that but there are steps we can take as a country that can bring Africa closer to us, and create economic opportunities as we do so for our citizens.

Earlier this year at the Executive Council Meeting of the African Union it was decided that AU Member States should review their internal and external security situations with a view to putting in place the mechanisms that would allow for the issuance of visa's on arrival for citizens of AU member states, with the option to stay in the country for up to 30 days.

Mr. Speaker,

We believe creating opportunity for the mobility of people on our continent is key to unlocking our economic potential. Today within some of our regional organisations, in our case the ECOWAS, and in a number of countries such as Kenya, Seychelles, Mauritius, Rwanda it is possible to travel without having to obtain a visa before visiting another member state.

But by and large, traveling across our continent is a hassle. Indeed for those African businessmen and women trying to do business on our continent, it's actually easier for them to operate within the Schengen Area of the European Union than it is to travel around our continent. Africa has a growing and dynamic middle class that is both entrepreneurial, forward looking and has purchasing power and we intend to make it easier for them to enter our country.

Mr. Speaker,

With effect from July this year, we will be allowing citizens of AU member states to enter into our country and obtain visas on arrival with the option to stay for up to thirty days and experience what our country has to offer. This measure, with time should stimulate air travel, trade, investment and tourism.

We have managed movement within and out of our country with citizens of the ECOWAS member states so we have the capacity to manage this new regime. We also know that



there may be persons from our continent who we may not want to admit into our country, and hence the provision for obtaining visas on arrival and not visa-free entry.

This will enable the Ghana Immigration Service to make a determination as to whether to allow them entry or not into our country.

Mr. Speaker,

In doing this, we are taking up the needed leadership of our Founder's dream of bringing the citizens of the African continent closer together.

Mr. Speaker,

This year, we will also commence negotiations for the creation of a Continental Free Trade Area by 2017, and we will be actively participating in the negotiations with a view to creating the economic basis for a more united and integrated continent.

The target we set ourselves as a continent here in Accra in November 2011, during the African Trade Ministers meeting, is an ambitious one, but is certainly not beyond our capability and we will continue to play a leading role towards realising our goal of promoting an integration of the states and people of this great continent.

Last year, just before the UN General Assembly, the world saw the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals. The goals set an ambitious agenda for the development of all the countries of the world so that for the next fifteen years we will collectively work together to create the world that we want to see. We also, at the COP 21 summit in Paris, came to a historic agreement on reducing carbon emissions and fighting Climate Change.

Mr. Speaker,

The two are not mutually exclusive and we look forward to incorporating the elements of these two important multilateral and global policy initiatives into our national planning and programme implementation.

Mr. Speaker,

I was honoured to be appointed the Co-Chair of the UN Secretary General's SDG Advocates Group. This is not just an honour for me; it is an honour to our country in recognition of our leadership in peacekeeping, in managing crisis such as the Ebola outbreak that hit our region two years ago, our leadership on our continent in promoting democracy and good governance, and our leadership in positively transforming the lives of our people over the period of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

It is important that we draw our continent's attention to the need to incorporate the SDG's into our National Development Plans as we think and plan for the future we want to create for the next generation.

I will be working with other members of the advocacy group and roping in other advocates from our continent with an emphasis on bringing on board young people and women so



that the SDG's become part of our discourse and engage our collective attention as we plan towards the development of the continent.

Mr. Speaker,

We will begin the implementation of our linguistic pact with La Francophonie, and through this process encourage our citizens at all levels to become bi-lingual in French and English.

When we consider that with our immediate neighbours our combined populations create a market of 74 million people, and we already engage in trade and social interactions with each other both formally and informally, it is time for us to make an extra effort to be able to engage them and the other francophone states within our ECOWAS region more effectively to promote trade in goods and services, tourism and investments within our region.

Mr. Speaker,

This year, we will continue to play an active role within our ECOWAS region, on the continent, within the Commonwealth under the leadership of our new Secretary General - Patricia Scotland - and within the United Nations and its various agencies, especially the Human Rights Council and UNESCO, where we are members of the Executive Board. We will play an active leadership role in creating the world we want.



CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker,

I began this address with an admission that politicians talk a lot - as I have, no doubt, proven here today - but that our words sometimes fail us because they do not always accurately reveal the human faces that inform our ideas and benefit from the programmes and policies we enact.

When I was elected President, I stated that my mission during my term in office would be to transform Ghana. It is certainly an admirable goal, but even to my own ears it sounded like a huge and lofty undertaking. I suppose if one looks at it as a single undertaking, it does seem intimidating, perhaps even impossible.

But transformation is, by its very nature, an elusive process. It's a process by which change takes place in gradation, in small and almost imperceptible movements and occurrences. Sometimes all that is noticeable is the before and the after, but not the process in between.

Mr. Speaker,

We are always in motion, even when we believe ourselves to be standing still. The Earth is always spinning on its axis. I like to think of our Transformation Agenda in that same way. Change is happening. It is taking place. Ghana is being transformed.

I realise that saying so does not make it so. But I know, too, that seeing is always believing. So look around in this gallery. I would like to ask my invited guests to please stand: Mercy Pomaa; Regina Haku; Umar Mahmud Mogtar; Naomi Appiah Korang; Mohammed Hissan; Gertrude Ahyia Yeboah; David Aminayire; Mohammed Awabu; Dzidzor Kwamuar; Apim Shulamite; Samuel Amo Tobbin; Zenabu Sumaila; James Appiah-Berko; Emmanuel Aboagye; Shiraz Issaku; Awenini Apogyanga.

Mr. Speaker,

This is Ghana. This is every tribe and ethnicity. It is every religious affiliation. It is every political persuasion. It is the young and old. It is various income levels. This is the process of transformation. We are changing lives, one individual at a time. We are heeding the words of our founding father, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, and looking neither East nor West but forward into the future that we want for our beloved country.

I thank you for your kind attention.

May God bless this august House.

And may God continue to bless our homeland Ghana.

