



AL-AYN



Exploring Multidimensional Poverty in Ghana

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Summary

Executive Summary

This comprehensive report delves into the multifaceted issue of poverty in Ghana, with a specific emphasis on multidimensional poverty and its significant impact on children, particularly orphaned children. Poverty in Ghana transcends mere income inadequacy, extending into various dimensions, including health, education, and living conditions, impacting vulnerable populations disproportionately.

Ghana, a West African nation, has a population nearing 30 million, and while it has shown positive strides in establishing a multi-party democracy, historical financial and economic mismanagement have hindered substantial per capita GDP growth. Though ethnically diverse, Ghana has exhibited relatively low internal tensions, maintaining a stable environment. The country's economy, despite significant natural resources, faced challenges due to governmental control, mismanagement, and political instability, necessitating economic restructuring in the 1990s.

The dire impact of poverty is evident in housing and sanitation, where rapid population growth and internal migration have led to overcrowded urban areas with substandard living conditions. Children, especially orphaned children, endure unsanitary environments devoid of basic amenities, further amplifying the risk of waterborne diseases and overall compromising their health and well-being. Inadequate nutrition compounds the challenges faced by orphaned children, with a lack of dietary diversity resulting in compromised health, hindered growth, and impaired cognitive development. This issue intertwines with deficient water-supply facilities and sanitation, perpetuating a cycle of health challenges among vulnerable populations.

The ramifications extend to public health, with communicable diseases posing threats, especially in rural areas due to inadequate infrastructure and unsanitary conditions. The healthcare system in Ghana faces strains due to rapid population growth and external support dependence, posing additional challenges to addressing public health concerns. The educational landscape, while offering compulsory education, faces inequalities in quality and accessibility. Overcrowded classrooms and resource inadequacies hinder the learning experience, further impeding these children's chances to break free from the cycle of poverty.

The report concludes with an exploration of the extensive impact of poverty on children in Ghana. With a significant portion of children living in poverty, particularly in rural areas, the effects are alarming, contributing to child mortality, malnutrition, and insufficient sanitation, impeding the physical, mental, and emotional development of vulnerable populations.

In summary, the report highlights the interwoven complexities of poverty in Ghana, significantly impacting orphaned children and vulnerable communities across various dimensions. It stresses the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to break this detrimental cycle and secure a healthier, more dignified future for Ghana's youth.

Al-Ayn Social Care Foundation commenced its operations in Ghana in 2021, focusing on aiding orphaned children and their families by establishing dignified and sustainable services tailored to meet their fundamental needs. Our objective in Ghana mirrors our successful operations in other regions, ensuring orphaned children have access to secure housing, essential healthcare, educational support, and a spectrum of vital services to nurture their well-being and potential.



Salma, 15



Orphaned children, bereft of parental support and often living in destitution, face an uphill battle marred by the absence of basic necessities.

Introduction

In the context of poverty analysis, multidimensional poverty refers to a comprehensive understanding of poverty that extends beyond mere income inadequacy or consumption levels. It recognises that poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by various interrelated factors such as health, education, living standards, access to essential services, social exclusion, and susceptibility to unforeseen disturbances .

In Ghana, a West African country striving for sustainable development, it is children that disproportionately bear the brunt of multidimensional poverty. The ramifications of poverty extend even further, significantly impacting orphaned children and widowed mothers in Ghana. Orphaned children, bereft of parental support and often living in destitution, face an uphill battle marred by the absence of basic necessities.

This report aims at critically analysing the extent of multidimensional poverty in Ghana and its profound impact upon children, especially those at the intersection of multiple disadvantages or vulnerabilities. Furthermore, the unique circumstances faced by widowed mothers have a direct impact on their children. The lack of resources, both financial and emotional, can hinder a child's development and undermine their chances of breaking free from poverty. These children often miss out on critical aspects of their upbringing, such as education, healthcare, and emotional support, which can have long-lasting ramifications on their future prospects.



Overview of Ghana

History and Politics

Ghana is a country situated on the Gold Coast of West Africa with a population approaching 30 million.¹ Its history of early independence from colonial rule saw development scuppered by decades of mismanagement, accompanied by failures in making substantial increases in per capita GDP across this time.²

However, more recently, significant steps towards establishing a multi-party democracy have had positive effects on public confidence in the country's institutions.³ Furthermore, though Ghana is an ethnically and religiously diverse state, it has few of the tensions that have impacted other sub-Saharan African states, making it a relatively stable country over the course of its modern history. Additionally, Ghana has a young population and a robust indigenous social system, which has been able to successfully cope with migration shocks in the past.⁴

Natural Resources and Economy

Ghana is a country with significant natural resources and a favourable climate, providing it with significant natural wealth as compared with some other states in the region.⁵

Ghana's early history as an independent state saw significant government control of the economy, with mismanagement discouraging foreign investment in its burgeoning industries. Political upheaval in the late-1960s saw significant overseas borrowing occur and economic depression across the 1970s and 1980s.⁶ Under the guidance of the World Bank, the economy became more decentralised across the 1990s and joint public and private ventures were encouraged to shift towards privatisation of the economy.

The Quest for Debt Relief

Over the course of the twenty-first century, Ghana has qualified for significant debt relief measures, with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund attempting to negotiate forgiveness of Ghana's national debt. However, risks to economic stability including liabilities in the energy sector and cocoa industry, delays in debt restructuring, and market shocks to commodity prices mean that Ghana's economy remains vulnerable.⁷ A macroeconomic crisis in 2022, which saw existing debt levels aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, has again plunged the state into economic crisis, with significant effects on outcomes for the Ghanaian population.

Dimensions of Poverty in Ghana

Poverty in Ghana has proven a longstanding and intractable problem, strongly related to the aforementioned economic problems. However, even during periods of economic growth, the rate of inequality has increased across the rich and the poor. Although there were significant drops in poverty across the early twenty-first century, these rates have again increased, with distinctions especially between rural and urban areas.⁸

Almost one in ten people live in extreme poverty, with the poorest social group being small-scale farmers that produce barely enough for subsistence, concentrating poverty disproportionately in rural areas (fig.1).⁹ These measures reflect monetary measures of poverty, meaning that the true scale of poverty when taking into account the various domains in which deprivation might occur could be considerably higher.

The dimensions of poverty in Ghana extend beyond monetary indicators. Deprivation spans across various facets of life, encompassing inadequate access to education, healthcare, housing, and sanitation among the most vulnerable populations. The impact is acutely felt in rural regions, where small-scale farmers, the backbone of the agrarian economy, struggle to produce enough for basic sustenance, perpetuating a cycle of extreme poverty.¹⁰ Moreover, the disparity between rural and urban areas amplifies the challenges faced by those residing in remote or underserved communities, where access to crucial resources remains limited. This multidimensional deprivation, beyond mere income inadequacy, underscores the necessity for a holistic approach in addressing poverty, considering the varied needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

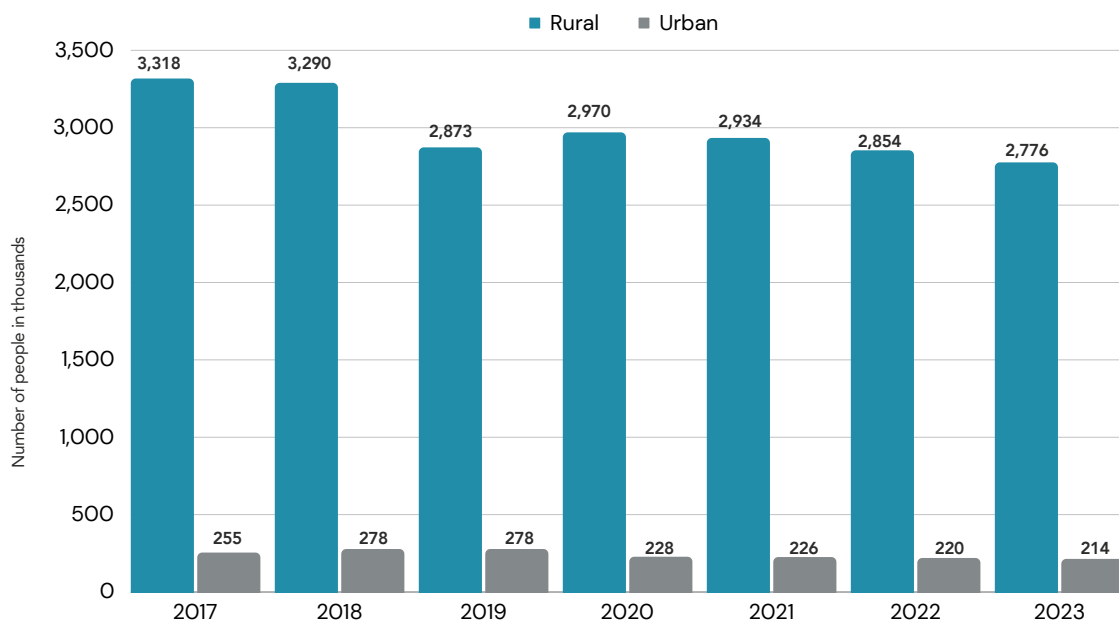


Figure 1. Number of people living in extreme poverty in Ghana in 1000s by area, 2017-23.¹¹

Housing and Sanitation

Vulnerability to Eviction and Displacement

Housing has been an area affected by Ghana's rapid population growth as well as waves of internal movement from rural to urban areas following economic shocks within the agricultural sector.¹²

For one, overcrowding in urban areas is a longstanding problem, with the economic problems facing the Ghanaian state minimising the proportion of public housing built.¹³

These areas are marked by makeshift structures, improper settlements, and minimal access to basic amenities such as electricity and clean water. Families often lack secure tenure or property rights, making them vulnerable to eviction and displacement.

Compromised Health and Stunted Development

The dire living circumstances of impoverished children in Ghana present a harrowing threat to their overall well-being. These children and their families are often confined to cramped, unsanitary slums where clean water,

proper sanitation, and adequate hygiene facilities are glaringly absent. This absence not only amplifies the likelihood of waterborne diseases and widespread infections but also directly imperils the health and safety of these vulnerable children, plunging them into an ongoing cycle of compromised health and well-being.

In these impoverished settings, the lack of proper sanitation facilities becomes a breeding ground for various illnesses, including diarrhea, cholera, and parasitic infections. Children, especially those from widowed households, bear the brunt of these unsanitary conditions.

The absence of clean water sources and hygienic practices perpetuates a constant health crisis among the most vulnerable, stunting their growth, compromising their immune systems, and impeding their overall development.



Beyond Physical Health: Long-term Consequences

The insidious impact of inadequate sanitation extends beyond physical health. The mental and emotional toll on these children is severe, enduring the stress and anxiety of living in unhygienic environments.

The absence of basic sanitation facilities not only jeopardizes their immediate health but also robs them of their sense of dignity and security, further entrenching the cycle of poverty by hindering their ability to break free from these circumstances.



Nima is a densely populated town in Accra, characterised by inadequate housing infrastructure and limited access to basic sanitation facilities. The town faces severe overcrowding and lacks adequate housing arrangements, leading to several households sharing limited living spaces, lacking privacy, and being more susceptible to health issues. This dire situation combined with insufficient sanitation facilities contributes to unsanitary living conditions and increased health risks for the residents.

Photo: House belonging to a widowed mother and three children registered under Al-Ayn located in Kotobabi. The house does not have a bathroom, and family must pay to use facilities in the compound.

Nutrition, health and development

Repercussions of Inadequate Nutrition

The impact of insufficient nutrition on children in Ghana, especially orphaned children, cannot be overstated. Insufficient nourishment not only renders them more vulnerable to infectious diseases, leading to heightened rates of illness and death, but it also significantly hampers their growth, immunity, and cognitive development, impeding their overall potential for a healthy and prosperous future.

Particularly in rural areas, the available diet predominantly comprises tubers and cereals, with limited access to protein sources such as livestock and fish.¹⁴ This lack of dietary diversity results in inadequate nutrient intake, further compromising the health of these children.

The Impact of Limited Water Supply and Poor Sanitation

The scarcity of water-supply facilities, coupled with deficient sanitation in both rural and select urban areas, perpetuates a cycle of health issues, amplifying the prevalence of diseases among the population, further exacerbating the already dire situation faced by orphaned children and vulnerable communities.

This interconnected web of nutritional deficiencies, inadequate water supply, and poor sanitation continues to impede the health and well-being of these children, obstructing their path to a healthier and more promising future.

Health Effects and Economic Implications of Deficient Infrastructure

The effect of the above on health must be acknowledged. Whilst the education and health sectors have helped reduce mortality from endemic diseases such as malaria and pneumonia, it is clear that poor infrastructure means that many communities still lack adequate sanitation and clean water.¹⁵

Communicable diseases, especially those of the gastroenteritis group (stomach/bowels), still pose a threat to public health, especially within rural communities. The risk to the health of the population has a corollary risk of worsening the economic conditions of the poor, with poor safety nets for times of unemployment in place.¹⁶

The healthcare system in Ghana has been stretched by rapid population growth and still relies, to no small degree, on support provided by external organisations.

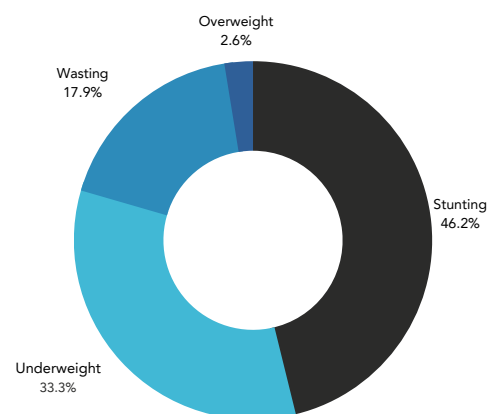


Figure 2. Share of children under five with indicators of malnutrition in Ghana in 2018¹⁷



Photo: Sirillah aged 5, lives in Zabarma line (Shukura)

Access to Quality Education

Achievements and Challenges in the Educational Landscape

The educational landscape in Ghana presents a mix of achievements and challenges, impacting orphaned children in varied ways. While education is compulsory and, to a certain extent, free—especially since high school became tuition-free in 2017—it has brought Ghana a relatively higher literacy rate compared to many African nations, hovering around 80 percent.¹⁸ However, within this seemingly positive framework, stark disparities and hurdles persist, affecting orphaned children profoundly.

Disparities and Hurdles in the Education System

The education system grapples with inequalities. Overcrowded classrooms, coupled with inadequately trained educators and a shortage of crucial resources like textbooks, severely compromise the quality of education, disproportionately impacting orphaned children who already face numerous disadvantages.¹⁹ This compromised educational environment not only affects the learning experience but also intensifies the challenges these children face in breaking the cycle of poverty.

The Cycle of Poverty

While primary education is compulsory, high school attendance isn't mandatory. This situation leads to economic realities discouraging many students, especially orphaned children from low-income backgrounds, from pursuing higher education. The lack of economic prospects requiring an education contributes to a cycle of underachievement and restricted opportunities, further impacting orphaned children and impeding their chances for a better future.

The asymmetrical access to quality education perpetuates the plight of orphaned children, hindering their ability to escape the constraints of poverty and secure a brighter future.

Only 47% of children complete lower secondary school in Ghana²⁰

Impact on Children and Adults

Inequities in Child Poverty

Rates of child poverty in Ghana are significant given that it is a very young population. Some 3.65 million children live in poverty, with a third of those in extreme poverty, characterised by an inability to meet basic food needs.²¹ Children are 40 per cent more likely to be in poverty than adults, being the most vulnerable in society, with poverty worst among the young children, eight of ten of whom are in poverty.²² As of 2020, this accounts for some 73.4 per cent of children, who face multidimensional poverty across at least three dimensions of deprivation.²³ Rates are worse in rural areas, with 75.9 per cent of children in rural areas being in poverty, more than double the rate of poverty in urban areas.²⁴

The Interplay between Poverty, Malnutrition, and Child Mortality

The extreme rates of poverty mentioned above contribute to a significant child mortality rate, with nearly 1 in 17 failing to make it to adulthood.²⁵ Malnutrition is an issue for those children that survive into later childhood. The malnutrition rate in Ghana is 38.7 per cent for children under 5 (fig. 2) with around 57 per cent of children under 6 months not being breastfed, whilst 87.6 per cent of under-twos do not meet World Health Organisation standards for food frequency and diversity.²⁶ Effects remain with children throughout later childhood, with half of girls aged 15 to 19 being anaemic, for example.²⁷ Sanitation is a related problem also, with 81.6 per cent of children being affected by insufficient sanitation.²⁸

One child in five will experience stunted growth in their first three years as a result of malnourishment, illness, or an unhealthy environment.²⁹ This can affect children's cognitive, social and physical development, paving the way for poorer later-life outcomes.

Barriers Created by Poverty

Poverty also has an impact upon children insofar as it pushes them out the education system. Although education is compulsory and free, poor quality of education and the perceived need for children to work in poorer families means that not every child receives an adequate education. Around 21 per cent of children aged 5 to 17 are involved in child labour, with almost 80 per cent of those working in agriculture, largely in cocoa production.³⁰

This in itself produces risks to children, especially to their health, where musculoskeletal disorders, head injuries and fractures are not uncommon.³¹ Additionally, human rights organisations have called attention to children being exposed to dangerous substances such as mercury in the workforce.³²

Efforts to breaking this cycle require holistic interventions that address not only economic needs but also educational support, healthcare, and community development initiatives. Providing access to quality education, nutritional support, healthcare facilities, and creating supportive environments for families are crucial steps toward mitigating the adverse effects of poverty among children and families in Ghana.

Widowhood and Single Motherhood: The Intersection of Poverty and Limited Legal Rights in Ghana

High rates of adult mortality also present a problem for children’s welfare. As figure 3 demonstrates, an increasing proportion of single mothers are widows, making widowhood an important factor in understanding why many children are from one-parent households. The rising rate of single motherhood and widowhood in Ghana appears to be linked to poverty, with richer women being less likely to become single mothers by any route.³³

An important factor here is inequitable laws regarding the rights of single mothers, with factors such as property ownership and inheritance rights being dependent on marital status.³⁴

High rates of spousal mortality coupled with limited legal rights for unmarried women contribute to outcomes for widows in Ghana being comparatively worse compared with those of other countries, including across physical health, mental health, and well-being, with high levels of poverty and food scarcity reported – findings that were even more pronounced in the rural north where prejudice against single mothers is more prevalent.³⁵

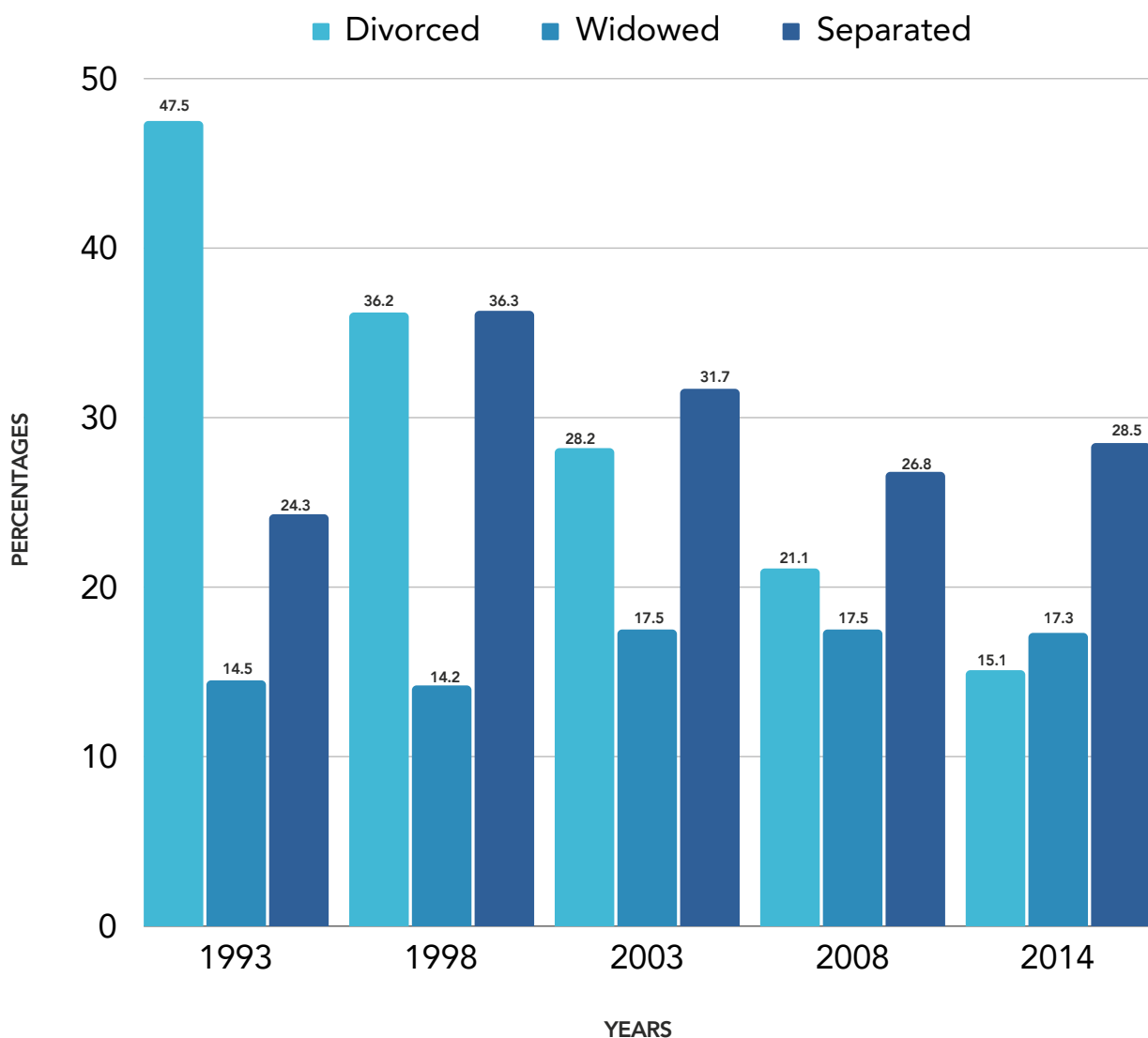


Figure 3. Percentage contributions to single motherhood, 1993-2014³⁶



Sirillah, aged 5, lives with his mother in perilous conditions. To reach the communal toilet facilities, they have to navigate through a narrow alleyway. In September 2023, Al-Ayn International facilitated the reconstruction of their home, providing Sirillah and his mother with a safe and respectful living environment.



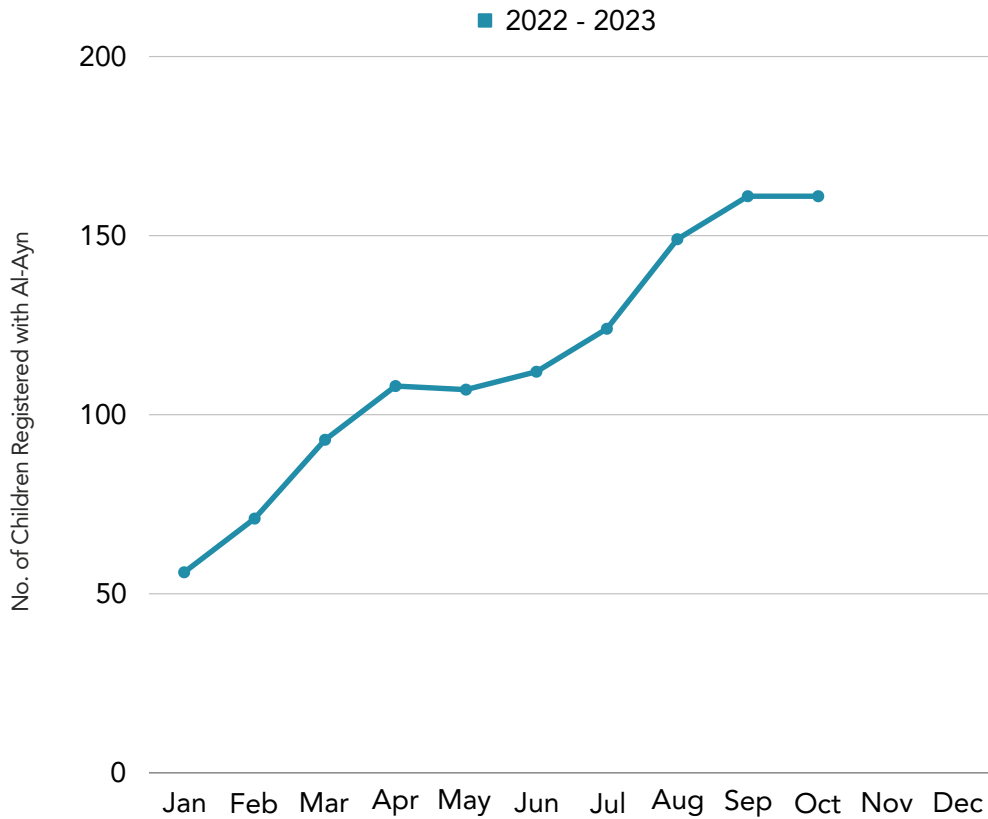
Al-Ayn Response

Poverty deeply affects orphaned children, exacerbating their vulnerabilities to a great extent. Orphaned children and youth, already coping with the trauma of losing their primary caregivers, often lack the necessary resources to break free from the cycle of poverty. Without familial support, children face even greater challenges in accessing basic needs like food, shelter, and education. They are at a heightened risk of being drawn into child labour, facing exploitation, and are more susceptible to malnutrition and health issues due to limited access to proper healthcare and nutrition.

Orphaned children and widowed mothers living in poverty encounter not just economic hurdles but are also at a greater risk of psychological distress and limited opportunities for growth and development, significantly affecting their future prospects.

With an extensive history spanning over 18 years, Al-Ayn has been a beacon of support, touching the lives of more than 170,000 orphaned children in Iraq. Expanding our compassionate initiatives to Ghana, our mission is to kindle the flame of hope and foster the thriving potential of orphaned children. We are dedicated to establishing sustainable and dignified services, ensuring a bright future for orphaned children and families under our care.

Empowering Orphaned Children



In 2021, Al-Ayn established its operations in Ghana, and in 2022 initiated its projects dedicated to providing assistance to orphaned children and their families. We strive to establish sustainable and dignified services that cater to their needs. Our mission in Ghana mirrors the triumph we have achieved in other areas, guaranteeing that orphaned children have access to secure homes, necessary healthcare, educational aid, and a range of crucial services that foster their overall well-being and potential.

As of October 2023, Al-Ayn has extended support to more than 161 orphaned children in need.



Providing Comprehensive Care

Beyond the provision of financial assistance, our comprehensive approach aims to grant orphaned children and their families access to fundamental necessities, including:

Housing Support

Al-Ayn recognises that stable housing is fundamental for orphaned children and their families' well-being. By providing housing support, we ensure a secure and nurturing environment for these vulnerable individuals, offering a sense of stability, safety, and comfort that enables them to focus on their emotional and educational growth without the worry of shelter insecurity.

Access to Healthcare

Healthcare is a basic human right, and orphaned children, as well as widowed mothers, often face barriers to accessing necessary medical services. Al-Ayn provides guardians of orphaned children with financial aid when required so that the family can receive essential medical attention, medication, and treatments, promoting their physical well-being and enabling them to lead healthier lives.

Educational Aid

Education is a vital tool for empowering orphaned children, offering them the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and build a better future. Registered children receive financial support on a monthly basis, which covers their educational needs. Al-Ayn ensures that these children have access to learning opportunities, enabling them to gain knowledge and skills that will equip them for a brighter tomorrow.

Sanitation Services

Sanitation is crucial for maintaining health and preventing diseases, especially in underserved communities. Al-Ayn is dedicated to expanding its services to prioritise the well-being of the children and families. We aim to ensure that they have a comprehensive understanding of hygiene practices, empowering them to safeguard themselves and their communities from potential health concerns.

Legal documentation for orphaned families in need

Al-Ayn facilitates the acquisition of legal documentation and biometric certification for orphaned families in need. The absence of these documents poses numerous obstacles in their daily lives, making it imperative to address this issue. Specifically, in Ghana, obtaining these documents is essential for accessing education, healthcare services, securing formal employment, and ensuring eligibility for government programmes.

This support from Al-Ayn profoundly impacts widowed mothers, enabling them to break free from the constraints that hinder their progress, granting them opportunities for self-sustainability and growth.



Mariama, a widowed mother of 4 residing in Kotobabi, faces challenges in obtaining legal and biometric certificates for her deceased husband. Our social care staff have provided guidance, assisting her in navigating bureaucratic processes required for obtaining the legal documentation, and filling out applications.

As her family obtains the necessary documents, doors that were previously closed to them will start to open. Mariama's story reveals the immense challenges faced by widowed mothers across Ghana. Al-Ayn is committed to ensuring any obstacles can be overcome, providing opportunities for education, employment, and a better future for all.

Summary

This report demonstrates that poverty is a problem that affects a majority of children in Ghana across a number of dimensions. These problems are often economic in their origin though they also reflect inadequate provision on behalf of the government and the lack of a trickle-down of economic growth to the poorest communities, especially rural communities.

For children, sanitation and food poverty are among the worst problems, though low levels of family income affect also their access to education. Poor availability of public healthcare is also a factor, as is the rate of disease, which is in part attributable to poor sanitation and clean water supply. This demonstrates the interrelatedness of these problems associated with poverty and the impact on children and families.

Without familial guidance or financial stability, orphaned children confront a heightened risk of malnutrition, limited access to education, and increased susceptibility to exploitation, further entrenching them in the cycle of poverty. Widowed mothers, left as sole providers, face immense challenges in meeting the needs of their families. With limited resources and often lacking adequate support structures, these women are thrust into the role of primary breadwinners.

The economic strains they face not only jeopardize their own well-being but also exacerbate the vulnerability of their children. They encounter hurdles in accessing education, healthcare, and securing a stable livelihood, amplifying the hardships faced by their families.

The compounding effects of poverty on both orphaned children and widowed mothers underscore a systemic failure to provide essential social safety nets and comprehensive support mechanisms, leading to a generational entrapment in dire economic circumstances. This exacerbates the struggle for these marginalized groups to break free from the cyclical nature of poverty, hindering their prospects for a brighter and more secure future.

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Al-Ayn Social Care Foundation International
Unit 5 Watling Gate,
297-303 Edgware Road,
Colindale
NW9 6NB
United Kingdom

Phone: 0203 034 2121
Email: info@alayninternational.org

Registered Charity No. 1196583



Empowering Orphaned Children