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THE SDG 1 AND THE PATH DEPENDENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE PRODUCTIVE SAFETY NET PROJECT IN GHANA

BY

SAMUEL KWEKU ALIPOE

(11004684)

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NOVEMBER, 2025

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DECLARATION

I, SAMUEL KWEKU ALIPOE, hereby declare that this thesis is the original work of mine supervised by Dr. Nene-Lomotey Kuditchar and Dr. Charles Amo-Agyemang. This research has not been done anywhere nor has it copied any information from other sources, without appropriate acknowledgement. Therefore, this work is unique, as it provides fresh insights to the area of study, with sources duly acknowledged.

..... 3rd December, 2025

Samuel Kweku Alipoe Date

(11004684)

3rd December, 2025

.....

Dr. Nene-Lomotey Kuditchar. Date

(Principal Supervisor)

.....

4th December, 2025

Dr. Charles Amo-Agyemang. Date

(Co-supervisor)

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ABSTRACT

The SDGs we know today have its origin from the concept of Sustainable Development, which was first developed at the 1972 United Nations Conference. This set the pace for further discussion on the concept to expand it through a series of summits. Nevertheless, the global community was more focused on environmental issues, hence neglecting poverty reduction. However, the 1995 Copenhagen summit became the turning point for making poverty reduction a priority at the global stage, with the introduction of social protection. As a result, this set the foundation for the inclusion of social protection as a poverty reduction tool within the MDGs and SDGs. This is evident in the Ghanaian case, as Ghana has adopted social interventions such as GSOP, GPSNP to curb the issue of poverty in the country.

The study adopted a qualitative method, which used interviews and secondary sources to gather data to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that the GPNSP is path dependent, as it has travelled from the ancient days to LEAP to GSOP, and now to GPSNP. However, it was discovered that the 1992 constitution provided the basis upon which social protection was designed, influenced by the MDGs and SDGs. Based on the constitution, the National Social Protection Strategy and National Social Protection policy were designed to streamline and strengthen social protection interventions. As a result of these institutional frameworks, changes have been introduced into social protection such as the targeting and payment mode, evident from the GSOP time till date. Also, the study recorded a massive improvement in the lives of people through the project, hence reflecting increasing returns.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Almighty God for seeing me through my study. I would also like to dedicate this work to my parents (mother, Naomi Dansoaa [Deceased], father, Mr. Isaac Quarshie Alipoe) and my siblings.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CCMI	-	Climate Change Mitigation intervention
CLASS	-	Complementary Livelihood Asset Support Scheme
DAC	-	Development Assistance Committee
GGR	-	Greenhouse Gas Removal
GNHR	-	Ghana National Household Registry
GPRS I	-	Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy I
GPRS II	-	Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II
GPSNP	-	Ghana Productive Safety Net Project
GSOP	-	Ghana Social Opportunities Project
IDGs	-	International Development Goals
LEAP	-	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
LIPW	-	Labour Intensive Public Works
MDGs	-	Millennium Development Goals
NHIS	-	National Health Insurance Scheme
NSPS	-	National Social Protection Strategy
OECD	-	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAMSCAD	-	Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment
PI	-	Productive Inclusion
PRSPs	-	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
PSNP	-	Productive Safety Net Project
SAP	-	Structural Adjustment Programme
SD	-	Sustainable Development
SDGs	-	Sustainable Development Goals

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SFP	-	School Feeding Programme
SRM	-	Solar Radiation Management
UN	-	United Nations
UNICEF	-	United Nations International Children Emergency Fund

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A SYNOPSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF SDG 1 IN THE GHANAIAN CONTEXT

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could be traced to a series of events and processes that led to its outcome (Lachman, 2013). These processes or events followed a certain pattern in a sequential order, which themselves were contingent, causing changes in the society (Mahoney, 2000). The Agenda 2030, known as the SDGs, had a historical background, which dated back to the 1972 United Nations Conference in Stockholm. Before then, it became critical to protect natural resources as the population kept growing at an increasing rate, which had a damaging effect on the environment (Mensah, 2019). As a result, the conference was a global effort to address the concerns at the period through the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan for Human Environment. During this era, human welfare was given less attention. Notwithstanding, this laid the foundation for the adoption of rules and procedures to ensure sustainability of the environment.

After the first global summit, a number of events took place to expand the idea of Sustainable Development, and adopt strategies to realize its objectives. As a result, the World Commission on Environment and Development was held in 1987 to provide long term solutions to tackle the developmental challenges raised by its predecessor (Milic, 2024). This meeting, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway, culminated in the design of the Brundtland report (Mensah, 2019). The report redefined sustainable development, and placed more emphasis on the current

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and future socio-economic needs of the people, with a special focus on the poor generations. Based on the report, SD was seen in the light of development that enhances the wellbeing of the current generation, whose gains should transcend to the future generations without putting their lives at risk (Ordan, 2005). From this angle, the concept integrated the environment, economic and social aspect into the development discourse to give a broader perspective to the idea (Lele, 2013). This gave the concept a new direction, which shifted its focus from the environment to human wellbeing. As a result, it paved the way for the institution of series of Rio Earth Summits to move a step forward in the global development agenda. The summits were held in 1992, 2002 and 2012 respectively, with the development of principles and action plans to mitigate the global menace. (Mensah, 2019).

However, poverty became a major concern and priority on the global agenda. But the Rio Earth Summits set the stage for the adoption of the Millennium Declaration by world leaders in 2000, leading to the creation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This declaration captured the objective of the global community to address 21st century problems critical to development, with eradicating poverty as its core goal (United Nations Ghana, 2015). The Declaration was a practical manifestation of the reconceptualization of SD, which integrated the three pillars of development into a single agenda. This was welcomed by 189 members of the United Nations, which Ghana became a signatory in 2001. The MDGs comprised 8 goals, each with 21 targets and 60 indicators, which was to be achieved by 2015 (Caritas Ghana, 2016). The indicators were used as a tool to measure progress made by the global development plan. As a result, some gains were made globally in all the goals, with one billion people being lifted out of poverty (United Nations, 2015). However, Ghana focused on 17 targets, and 36 indicators to achieve growth and development in the country in line with the 2015 agenda (Ghana MDG Report, 2015).

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Within the Ghanaian context, several national efforts were taken to reach the target set by the MDGs, of which Ghana was not an exception. As a result, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper became the preliminary action towards the attainment of the MDG Goal 1, with international sponsorship from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. This was used as a strategic move to champion the idea of poverty reduction as a critical component of development (Gupta, 2011). However, this anti-poverty program could not stand the test of time due to poor monitoring and evaluation, and lack of coordination, which affected its goal of eradicating poverty. Therefore, this led to the introduction of another poverty reduction strategy, known as the Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II (GPRS II), which focused on macroeconomic stability as a mechanism to eradicate poverty. This was due to lapses in the GPRS I, and to continue the move toward enhancing the lives of the people. There were evident in inappropriate plan design and implementation challenges, poor monitoring and evaluation system, lack of coordination among others. Nevertheless, these strategies served as a precedent to the development of further anti-poverty programs.

Based on this, some progress was made with regards to the attainment of MDG 1, with evidence in the Ghanaian context which recorded a significant reduction from 32% in 2006 to 24% to 2013 in terms of the poverty threshold (GSS, 2014). However, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) could not achieve its overall target by 2015 because of the limitations inherent in the MDGs. Therefore, the PRSPs narrowed its objectives to income poverty reduction, without tackling it from a multidimensional approach (Gupta, 2011). These loopholes demonstrated the flaws in the Millennium Agenda, which led to most of the targets not being met by the set timeline (Vandemoortele, 2018). This prompted the need to convene another conference, the Rio+20 Earth Summit, in 2012 to discuss the progress made so far and the way forward. This paved the way for the discussion of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for

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Sustainable Development with the title "Transforming our world" to build on the successes and address the challenges of the previous global agenda (Fukuda-Parr, 2016).

Nevertheless, the post-2015 era ushered countries into a new pattern, characterized by lessons from the MDGs. The Agenda 2030 came into existence at a period where there were drastic changes in the International sphere (Arhin, 2016). As a result, the SDGs succeeded the MDGs at the UN General Assembly in September 2015 by bringing on board fresh ideas emanating from the pre-existing order (Halisçelik & Soytas, 2019). Therefore, it was a universal and comprehensive global plan that integrated poverty with other goals such as climate change, food security, good health and so on. The new development strategy consisted of 17 goals, 169 targets and 150 indicators, which was an extension of the MDGs (Arhin, 2016). They were crafted as a global action to end poverty, protect the environment, and ensure peace and prosperity for everyone in the world (United Nations Ghana, 2023). With poverty reduction being its major priority, 7 targets were set to achieve the goal.

The main objective of SDG Goal 1 was to eradicate all forms of poverty for all people everywhere with persons living on less than $1.25 per day (United Nations Ghana, 2023). Its targets included: ensuring the poor are covered by social protection systems; securing the rights of the poor to economic resources; access to basic services; building the resilience of the poor and vulnerable to withstand shocks, among others. This resulted in the drafting and implementation of social protection policies to lift the poor out of poverty from the MDG era through to the SDGs. These anti-poverty strategies were introduced and expanded progressively over time to capture those who fall within the extreme poor category. These policies included the LEAP cash transfer program, the Labour Intensive Public Works, the Ghana School Feeding Program, the National Health Insurance Scheme and the Education Capitation Grant (World Bank Group, 2021). In addition, the Ghana Youth Employment Program and National Labour

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Intensive Public works Policy offered a framework for the sustainable job opportunities and improved social protection intervention for the poor.

The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty program was one of such social protection schemes in Ghana, which was designed in line with MDG 1. The program started from 2008 as a pilot program, targeting about 1,824 beneficiaries, comprising the extremely poor households with an elderly person, person with disability, orphan, or a vulnerable child (Quinones et al, 2023). It provided cash transfers to the poor to enhance their wellbeing, hence reducing poverty (Alatinga et al, 2019). The LEAP program was also linked with the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and School Feeding Programme (SFP) to provide health and educational benefits to the beneficiaries. This program served as the gateway to the adoption of subsequent social protection policies in Ghana, which was based on its remarkable achievements. This was evident in massive improvements in income, food consumption, and so on, thereby transforming their lives (Centre for Social Policy Studies, 2024).

In order to standardize social protection, the Ghana Social Opportunity Project (GSOP) was introduced in 2010 as a social protection mechanism to provide job opportunities to the rural poor through the Labour Intensive Public Work programme (Eshun & Dichaba, 2019). The LEAP program was transitioned onto GSOP in addition to LIPW. This project was a collaboration between the Government of Ghana and the World Bank, with $56 aid support, to embark on a project to alleviate poverty. The selected beneficiaries were engaged in community projects such as the construction of dams, roads, and the planting of trees. At the end of the day, they received payment for working 6 hours, which were used to cater for their basic needs (Eshun & Dichaba, 2019).

Taking inspiration from these earlier social protection schemes, the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project was launched in 2018 as a successor to the Ghana Social Opportunity Project. The

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project underwent an evolutionary process, tracing its path from the LEAP program in 2008 through to the Ghana Social Opportunity Project, and finally to its present outcome, the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project. It was designed to achieve SDG 1 through cash transfers and labour intensive public works, with foreign aid support. Prior to the introduction of the project, the Government of Ghana approved the National Social Protection Policy, which established a vision and guidelines for addressing poverty (World Bank Group, 2021). The project through international financial assistance was meant to help the country solidify its social safety nets to improve the standard of living of the poor (World Bank Group, 2021). It comprised four main components which are the Productive Inclusion program, the Labour Intensive Public Works program, the LEAP Cash transfer program and the Social Protection System Strengthening.

The objective behind the project was to enable the poor to have access to social services such as jobs, education and entrepreneurial opportunities to limit the high level of poverty in the country (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2023). The project was mainly sponsored by the World Bank with $60 million aid to raise the productivity of the poor. The implementation agencies were the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development, and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, with the project expected to end in 2025 (World Bank Group, 2021). As a result, the programs under GPSNP were coordinated and harmonized across the ministries and agencies in charge of the implementation and supervision of the project. At the end of the project, an independent beneficiary assessment and performance evaluation was conducted to measure the progress and effectiveness of the project in tackling poverty in Ghana.

The project was in two phases: GPSNP 1 (2018-2022) and GPSNP II (2022-Date). The GPSNP I was made up of 80 Municipal and District Assemblies selected as beneficiaries. The GPSNP II was made up of 120 Municipal and District Assemblies as beneficiaries, and it was an

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expansion of the GPSNP I to include access to education to poor households. The total aid commitment for GPSNP II is estimated at $100 million from the World Bank (World Bank Group, 2021). Also, Environmental and Social Risk Assessment were also involved to ensure the reliability and validity of the project.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Studies on poverty reduction focused on strategies to curb the issue. This was because poverty became a major concern, as the poverty rate kept increasing. According to the World Bank (2019), 10% of the world's population lived below the $1.90 threshold as of 2015. Poverty had implications on education especially, as children had to forgo school to engage in hard labour (Arkorful et al, 2020). This was because parents lacked the money to send their wards to school. In addition, this social issue limited the poor from having access to proper medical care, resources and opportunities in society to enhance their wellbeing (Prince et al, 2023). The rural population were mostly affected by poverty due to inadequate employment opportunities to cater for their needs (Dagunga et al, 2021). This drew the attention of not only the international community but also scholars to carry out research on the issue. As a result, they adopted developmental strategies such as the Sustainable Development Goals to tackle poverty and other global issues (Fielmua & Mwingyine, 2018).

However, scholars paid less attention to the historical trajectory of the development of the SDGs, specifically Goal 1 (No Poverty). Many scholars such as Yu and Huang (2021), Bicaba et al (2015), Watkins & Quatri (2019), Prince et al (2023), Maoloni (2024), Priambodo & Djirimu (2024), Ruben (2025), Ahule et al (2023), Dii (2022), to mention but a few, pointed out how poverty is affecting lives, and the need to address the issue without delay. For instance, Prince et al (2023), Maoloni (2024) and Dii (2022) focused on challenges associated with social

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protection programs such as lack of political will, bad governance, financial constraints, with a narrow explanation of its benefits as well as a limited explanation about its genesis. Within the Ghanaian context, Sarfo-Adu (2021), Eshun & Dichaba (2019), Eshun (2020) also discussed how the safety nets programs are positively impacting the income, food consumption and health status of beneficiaries. Therefore, they argued that the programs have provided income earning opportunities to poor households, hence reducing poverty.

Despite these facts, there existed a lot of studies on the LEAP program, but only a handful of research works such as Amofa et al (2022), Fuseini et al (2021), Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) among others discussed the cash transfer program in tandem with other programs under the safety net projects. It was observed that research was conducted on the individual programs under the subprojects, which negated the adoption of a holistic approach towards studies on social protection, as evident in studies such as Eshun (2020), Eshun & Dichaba (2019), Debrah (2013), among others. Therefore, the integration of the programs under the safety net projects into a single research, with an elaborate historical background based on an analytical approach was lacking. As a result, these studies failed to trace the current situation to the past in order to better understand it. Furthermore, the studies showed clearly its greatest flaw by failing to carry out a historical analysis by using a historical institutionalism theory such as path dependence to unravel the mystery surrounding social protection. This limited the understanding of how these developmental strategies came into existence, and how it helped shape modern societies. In essence, this created a gap in the literature concerning the path dependencies of SDG 1 and social protection policies to help alleviate poverty which the study sought to fill.

The study would contribute to the field by placing the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project and its mandate of achieving SDG 1 within its historical context, using path dependence. This would unravel the path leading to the adoption of these mechanisms in order to explain its outcome in

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the present. This would help policymakers to figure out which aspect needs more attention. In doing so, this would help shape future social protection programs through the help of path dependence, which would enable lessons to be drawn from past programs. In essence, future implementation could benefit from an upgrade in terms of its targeting mechanisms, payment system and beneficiary outcomes through the path dependence study of social protection. The objective of the study was to explore the path dependence of the institutional development of SDG 1, using the Productive Safety Net Project as a case study.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the historical processes and events that led to the introduction of SDG 1 and social protection in Ghana.
2. To examine the role played by the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project in achieving the SDG 1.
3. To understand the institutional rules, procedures and standards put in place by the project through path dependence.
4. To explain the beneficiary outcomes emanating from the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project through the lens of path dependence.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is relevant to the field as it would enhance the understanding of why certain decisions were taken to help uplift people out of poverty. This would provide insights on what was being done to solve the issue and its implications for future generations. Hence, it would broaden the minds of the people on the project through the use of historical analytical tools to explain current

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situations. It would bring to light the structures, norms, values and mechanisms embedded in the project, and how these institutions helped shape decision-making and the behaviour of the people. Also, the study would highlight whether this evolutionary path brought positive changes in society. This would enable policymakers to track areas that need improvement to enhance the effectiveness of the project. The research would provide a solid foundation for further studies on Sustainable Development Goals using the variants of historical sociology since there were limited works that have used the model. In addition, it also would also contribute to the existing literature by adding new knowledge and fresh ideas to the field.

1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study is organized into six chapters. They are as follows;

Chapter One: Introduction – This chapter consisted of the Background of the Study, Statement of the Research Problem, Research Objectives, Significance of the study

Chapter Two: Literature Review – This chapter evaluated existing works in the field of Sustainable Development. This comprised appropriate works relevant to the study, The literature review was done thematically.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework - This aspect focused on adopting a particular theory as a framework to the study. The selected theory unleashed the strengths and weaknesses as well as its relevance to the study. This provided a foundation for the generation of research questions to guide the study.

Chapter Four: Methodology – This session focused on the selection of an appropriate methodology and methods to enhance data collection and analysis. This chapter included the

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Research approach, Research Design, Data collection tools and methods, Sampling size and technique, ethical considerations as well as limitations of the study.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis, Presentation and Discussion of Findings -The focus was on presenting an analysis of the data collected from the field. This chapter also discussed the findings of the results as well.

Chapter Six: Summary of findings, Conclusions and Recommendations – This consisted of summarizing the findings of the results and a conclusion to the study. Also, recommendations were proposed for the further studies and actions.

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter began by providing an introductory section, which served as the background of the study. It also discussed the research problem by explaining the actual issue in the literature that needed to be addressed. Following this, the objectives of the study were highlighted to direct the focus and path of the research. In addition, the chapter showed how relevant the study will be to the field, the populace and policy makers in the Significance of the study aspect. Lastly, an outline of the categorization of chapters was provided at the latter part of the chapter.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE GENESIS AND CONTEMPORARY NATURE OF SDG 1: A REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviewed existing works on the subject matter to identify gaps as well as contribute to the field of study. In this regard, literature review is relevant, as it helps the researcher become abreast with information related to his study; relate the study to the ongoing debate in the literature; identify and fill gaps; and expand previous studies (Copper, 1984). To achieve this purpose, the study critically assessed various literature on the historical evolution and current state of SDG 1 (No Poverty) to help trace its outcome from history. This section is categorized into four main themes with its subthemes, which included;

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. The Historical Evolution and Current state of the SDGs	a) The historical evolution of the SDGs b) Current and emerging trends of the SDGs
2. The historical roots and institutionalization of SDG 1	a) Historical roots of SDG 1 (No Poverty) b) The institutionalization of SDG 1

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3. The current state and trends of SDG 1: Current and Future Implications	a) Global Context
	b) African Context
	c) Ghanaian Context
4. Social Safety Nets	a) African Context
	b) Ghanaian Context

2.2 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE SDGs

The SDGs we know today have its historical roots, which dates back to the 1980s. According to Carruthers (2001), the idea of Sustainable Development (SD) came into the global development sphere in 1987. This period is agreed by scholars as the ushering of a new conceptualization of development. Hence, the definition by the Brundtland Commission has been widely accepted. This gave recognition of the environment and development as central issues of the global world (Ordan, 2005). The Brundtland Commission defined Sustainable Development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their future needs." However, this has attracted several critiques about the validity of the concept. In the view of Carruthers (2001), he argued that the concept is broad and ambiguous, which is also shared by Ross (2009). This assertion is valid as the concept lacked clarity on the subject matter due to its inability to properly define what "development" and "needs" represents. These two terms were broad in nature, and could have different meanings.

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However, Lafferty (1999) opined that the concept has become a central idea for integrating the problems of development and the environment. Despite praising the concepts, his work brought to light the gaps, as evident in the critique of Langhale and James Meadowcrooft. For instance, Langhale was much more concerned about the grammatical form of development while Meadowcroft was more focused on how such an understanding affects existing policy instruments and approaches. These critiques pointed to the ambiguity and vagueness surrounding the concept. Despite these criticisms, there is no doubt that the definition by the Brundtland Commission brought the idea to the centre of the development discourse, which paved the way for future conferences (Lele, 2013). Lele (2013) posited that the term's popularity grew through the convening of several conferences geared towards promoting the concept. The scholar went on further to state that the 1992 Earth Summit led to the official adoption of the term.

Though the 1992 Earth Summit transformed development thinking; its focus was centered on the protection and preservation of the environment. This was due to the increasing demands of the population on the earth's limited natural resources (Tanden, 2008). However, it failed to integrate the three pillars of Sustainable Development (SD), which is central to human wellbeing. Per the viewpoint of Ross (2009), the term focused more on economic development as a trigger of growth to the neglect of the environment, which created a barrier between economic growth and development. This showed that development was still viewed as economic prosperity. Nevertheless, Williams (2008) gave a concrete reason for the failure of the 1992 Earth Summit to successfully integrate the three pillars. The scholar opined that the concept was treated separately from mainstream development, and it is mostly confused with environmentalism.

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Meanwhile, the concept was a broad term that incorporated not only the environment nor economic development, but also included the social dimension of development. As a result, Sustainable Development included the environment, economic and human development as the central developmental pillars. These loopholes enhanced the redefinition of the concept to focus on the three pillars in subsequent United Nations conferences. It is evident that the Millennium Summit in 2000 was an improved institutional response to the attempt to integrate the pillars of SD. Clearly, the summit tapped into past experiences and gaps in previous conferences to formulate development goals. As stated by Ordan (2005), the Millennium Summit reflected a renewed thinking in development discourse that took keen interest in more pressing issues, taking into consideration human welfare. This signaled a modern interpretation and appropriate usage of the idea of SD in contemporary times. The Millennium Summit led to the introduction of the Millennium Declaration as a guiding principle to the outdooring of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

According to Gold & Connelly (2006), the Millennium Declaration attempted to build a consensus that prioritized poverty reduction as the major goal on the global agenda. This idea emanated from the OECD, which developed the International Development Goals. This shifted development from the narrow perspective of modernization theorists and environmentalists to a more comprehensive perspective. However, it was quite shocking to see the same problems during the 1980s and 1990s still unresolved. Poverty and environmental issues still persisted till today. These challenges were inspired by the lack of broader and comprehensive vision of development that sought to address global poverty and inequality (Gold & Connelly, 2006). Also, the MDGs failed to set targets on trade, development and debt cancellation. There were some misconceptions about the MDGs, which MCArthur (2014) brought to light. In this sense, the author tried to paint a good picture about the MDGs. As a result, the author ended up confirming the argument that the International Development Goals (IDGs) provided a

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guideline to the implementation of the MDGs. His work was based on unravelling the myths concerning the MDGs to avoid confusion rather than a critique of the effectiveness of the goals,

The quest to resolve global issues did not end at the Millennium Summit. This proceeded to the Johannesburg 2002 Summit which was bent on advancing the targets of the MDGs. The 2002 Summit sought to augment the fight against poverty with increased commitments. This served as a platform for renewed commitment to integrate the pillars of SD. The conference witnessed pledges made by governments to contribute to strengthen the interdependence of mutual pillars (Williams, 2008). This chorus seemed to be just a promise which could not be fulfilled. Challenges facing integration of SD still persisted. It should be noted that success to this integration required coordination and commitments at the global, sectorial and country level. This was a major challenge hindering the MDGs from adequately tackling global concerns. As a result, it failed to shift back the attention to poverty reduction (Lele, 2013). This meant a new conference was needed to address the weakness of the 2002 Johannesburg Summit. The 2005 World Summit was seen as a bold step towards assessing the progress made so far with the MDGs.

However, it must be pointed out that the concept of SD was expanded and reconceptualized. The concept took a new turn from its original definition stated in the Brundtland Commission to a modern version. The series of conferences leading to the MDGs and beyond tried to build on the modern interpretation of SD to address the gaps in it. This signaled that a more advanced description of SD could be introduced in the future. Notwithstanding, several attempts were made to advance the achievement of SD, with the most recent one, Rio de Janeiro Summit in 2012, to enhance a just and sustainable future. According to Griggs et al (2014), the Rio +20 Summit in 2012 was geared towards positioning states to psych their minds to introduce a new development strategy. Therefore, the summit served as a medium to track progress, identify

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gaps and develop a new strategy. This was a step in the right direction to build upon the MDGs into more comprehensive developmental goals. So, it could be noticed that the Rio+20 was needed to embrace a new vision that sought to continue the objectives of Sustainable Development.

Again, Griggs et al (2014) viewed the SDGs as a comprehensive and unified framework that sought to promote human development and prosperity in the era of climate change and other environmental issues. This fitted the ideal conceptualization of Sustainable Development, as this thought took into consideration the interaction between poverty reduction, economic growth and environmental sustainability. However, the author pointed out the possible challenge in defining, creating and agreeing on SDGs that incorporated the three pillars of SD (ibid). Bettelli (2021) explicitly outlined the processes that led to introduction of the SDGs, which followed a sequence of events and conferences, starting from the 1972 conference downwards to the Rio Earth summits. This article provided a solid foundation for the research, which dwelt on a path dependence of the SDG 1. Therefore, the study would benefit from information concerning the summits to establish how the past influenced the present. However, it is noticed that the article was focused on the SDGs in general, and not a specific SDG goal,

In addition, Correa (2012) followed a similar pattern but was more focused on the institutional frameworks that led to the introduction of the SDGs. In this light, the author argued that the Rio+20 Summit successfully laid the foundation for the promotion of SD in subsequent years. However, the author introduced the green economy as a vital tool in achieving SD in contemporary times. This green economy concept prompted a redefinition of the term to add technology. In this sense, Lele (2013) proposed a new definition which viewed SD as ecologically sustainable and social just pursuit of basic materials and non-material well being.

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From this, it could be inferred that SD could include technology as essential to promote environmental sustainability, economic growth and poverty reduction

Many scholars stated optimism of the prospects of the SDGs to achieve a more just and peaceful environment. This new development agenda reflected the interconnectedness among the SDGs. In the work of Enevoldsen et al (2022), they showed how related they were, by pointing out that reduction in climate change could have a positive effect on the other SDGs. Hence, the SDGs reflected the integration of the targets which dwelt on the three pillars of SD. It seemed like the objectives were achieved on paper. However, the reality painted a different picture, with difficulties to reach the global objectives due to trade-offs between the goals. Nevertheless, the SDG reflected a more improved version of SD, picking lessons from past developmental strategies as well as building on the MDGs. The SDGs learnt lessons from the MDGs, which helped to include additional goals, and expanded the targets to suit modern trends of SD.

Notwithstanding, it is observed that most studies failed to link the historical roots of SD to the SDGs. Rather, SD was linked to the MDGs as a continuation. In essence, most works that traced the history of SD were written before the onset of the SDGs. Hence, one might have thought that the SDGs were detached from its historical roots. However, only a few studies traced SD from the 1980s to the SDGs. As a result, the study sought to fill this gap by tracing SD from its roots to understand how it helped shape current development thinking and lives of the people. Therefore, the study would provide up-to-date information by tracing the historical contexts to the SDGs. This would be evident in the work, as it would commence from the history of SDGs, with a focus on SDG 1 from the traditional social protection system through family support to the colonial social protection system to the Copenhagen summit to MDG 1 and finally to SDG 1.

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2.2.1 Current and Emerging Trends of SDGS

Sustainable Development underwent a new dynamic in this SDG era. The 2030 Agenda highlighted the interconnectedness among the various SDGs, linking the three pillars of SD. This was evident in current studies, which showed the synergies between the SDGs. For instance, Dermatas (2017) connected poverty, human wellbeing and the environment, by revealing the implications of air and water pollution on the attainment of SDG 6 (Clean water and Sanitation), SDG 3 (Good Health and wellbeing), SDG 12 (Responsible production and consumption), among others. This assertion is true, especially for areas that depended solely on groundwater for survival and home use. However, the choice of using groundwater in such areas depicted the high level of poverty and lack of access to pipe borne water, with health implications. Even though the treatment of groundwater did not guarantee its effect on health nor pollution, it was essential to consider this source as an affordable and flexible option (Dermatas, 2017).

Another study by Enevoldsen et al (2022) revealed the connection between SDG 13 (climate change action) and the other SDG Goals. With this being said, the study revealed that Greenhouse gas removal (GGR) had a positive impact on SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDG 13 (Climate change action) and SDG 14 (Life below water). Nevertheless, this did not signify the absence of trade-offs nor problems. The application of GGR without caution could cause more problems instead of resolving the issues, with impact on food security and biodiversity. This could have an effect on life below water, life above land and humans, affecting the attainment of the SDGs. Even with these negative effects, it was argued that GGR was a far better option than Solar Radiation management (SRM) and other climate change actions. This was because of the uncertainty surrounding the effective use of SRM. Despite

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this, SRM had the potential of lowering global temperatures by reducing the amount of solar imbalance reaching the Earth (Enevoldsen et al, 2022).

The above studies provided a link between environmental actions and its effects on the SDGs, without a focus on one particular SDG. But there was a missing link in the work of Enevoldsen et al (2022), which omitted the impact of GGR and SRM on SDG 1 (No Poverty). Though GGR and SRM reflected income generation opportunities which enhanced SDG 8, it only reflected the reduction of income poverty, and not multidimensional poverty. It could be inferred that poverty reduction was not the central focus of the above studies mentioned. Rather the focus was more on environmental actions, which its benefits would automatically reflect in the other SDGs. However, Reckien et al (2017) filled this gap by showing how climate change action affected poverty reduction as well as gender equality.

The authors opined that the poor and vulnerable were more exposed to the risks of climate change. As a result, the poor responded to climate change adaptation and mitigation differently. The study revealed a direct relationship between climate change and poverty reduction. However, it failed to identify which specific group of people are classified as poor. It is noted that the poor were referred to as low-income individuals and households. This did not reflect the multidimensional aspect of poverty, which provided a narrow view of poverty as income poverty. An individual might be a high-income individual but might be lacking in the other aspect of human wellbeing. Emphasis must be placed on the impact of climate change on multidimensional poverty, which would provide a broad scope in addressing the problem. Nevertheless, it should be noted that governance issues became a major problem hindering the effective application of climate change actions, safety nets, and other strategies. However, Giuliodori et al (2023) proposed smart governance or good governance as the solution to coordinate and help attain the SDGs. Per their viewpoint, this system was best for striking a

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balance between the state, civil society and the market, which would help foster a stable social, economic and environmental sustainability. Contrary to the scholars' opinion, smart governance might not be the most suitable pathway to ensure sustainable development. Though good governance system provided a solid foundation, sustainability involved many other factors to arrive at its destination. As a result, relevant stakeholders and non-state actors could play a critical role to enhance the success story of the SDGs, in addition to good governance.

In this regard, Annan-Aggrey et al (2022) were of the view that collaboration between government agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, the private sector, Civil Society Organizations, and local communities could position the state to address complex issues. Not to counter the latter argument, but good governance systems would serve as a means to coordinate and establish a solid bond among these partnerships. In this sense, this partnership signified a step towards achieving SDG 17, which would transcend to attaining the other SDGs. However, effective coordination became a major problem in many developing countries, as posited by the scholars. Another issue to note was the inability of local communities to fully participate in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Although, their full participation could make them feel part of the implementation process and enhance inclusive sustainable development, it was not always the case.

Though the local communities were relegated to the background, Bangami (2024) demonstrated the relevance of community engagement in achieving the SDGs. With this being said, the author made it clear how local communities contributed to the attainment of SDG 8 and 11 through partnership with libraries. As a result, the community was able to donate their collections and supply funds to promote lifelong learning, which led to the attainment of SDG 4. The limitation of the study lay within its limited scope of study, by focusing on South Africa and specific SDGs. This became a challenge as the national context varied, with increasing

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poverty and inequality rate. It could be inferred that less attention was paid to critical issues such as poverty and how community engagement could be of great help. Nevertheless, the study brought to light the importance of inclusive participation in promoting Sustainable Development.

However, it must be noted that most studies on the SDGs placed more emphasis on environmental and sanitation issues, with less attention given to poverty. This was evident in the work of Ferronato et al (2024) who focused on plastic waste management. This could be attributed to the implications on other SDGs such as SDG 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14 among others. Though this assertion is valid, a deeper look at poverty could enhance the attainment of the other SDGs. In essence, the study failed to draw a connection between poverty and waste management. One might say there is no link. But it must be noted that waste management created an avenue for income generation, which had a direct effect on poverty reduction. Nevertheless, Mahlatsi (2021) pointed out the reason why Africa is unable to make significant progress in development. The author put the blame on neo-liberalism as a barrier to the achievement of the SDGs, citing its focus on the market at the expense of social and environmental issues. This assertion is true to some extent, but the blame could not be put solely on neo-liberalism. The blame should be placed on the leadership of Africa, who are motivated by greed and corruption at the expense of welfare. If that is the case, then it implied that sustainability in Africa would be unachievable unless the leadership crisis is solved.

Aside from that, there was a global event, namely COVID'19, which transformed the idea of sustainability. This global pandemic worsened development issues facing the globe, specifically African countries. Pawar (2021) argued that the pandemic led to an increase in poverty rate, food security, climate change issues, among others. The same view was shared by Besiou et al (2021). They asserted that the pandemic affected the attainment of the SDGs, with increasing humanitarian support. This support played a critical role in saving lives during

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emergencies. However, this aid failed to take into account the context, as countries responded to the crises differently. Mostly, the issue was generalized due to lack of real world data, which affected its operation in the effective and efficient supply of aid to address critical issues.

Then again, its continuous supply could create a dependency chain, which would be difficult to break once it was established, especially if the focus was not on building resilience against shocks. This norm however provided a great opportunity, which has never occurred in history. This global crisis opened the door for many countries to adopt digital transformation, as shown in the work of Palos-Sanchez et al (2023). Though it was good, it opened an opportunity for cybercrime to adopt a new strategy. However, this period clearly reflected the integration of technology as part of the three pillars of Sustainable Development. This established the relevance of digital transformation in an ever changing global world.

It was observed that these studies offered the current situation of the SDGs, which included the challenges and efforts. However, less attention was paid to the issue of poverty in the SDG era, which became very critical, as it had ripple effects on other issues such as health, water and sanitation, education, among others. Most studies provided a link between the SDGs, with little or no focus on the linkage with poverty reduction. This made it relevant for the study to tackle poverty as a whole to uncover the hidden truths behind the institution of global poverty reduction strategies. Therefore, the research would address this lacuna by providing an in-depth analysis of SDG 1 using the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project to demonstrate how it achieved the poverty reduction goal under the 2030 agenda. In essence, this would add up to the existing literature to expand the scope of the research area by grounding it on a theoretical perspective, which is path dependence.

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2.3 HISTORICAL ROOTS OF SDG GOAL 1 (NO POVERTY)

The historical roots of poverty reduction had a different pattern from the evolution of Sustainable Development. However, this idea featured in a broad development agenda such as the SDGs under Goal 1. The history itself received contentions, with similar accounts. For instance, it was realized that Best (2013) set 1940 as the initial period when poverty began to gain ground through data collection, which helped to identify groups of people who fall under this category. This period however, was not captured in many historical works on poverty, though scholars gave a different period as the starting point. In the case of Ravallion (2020) which featured in a working paper, the author argued that the idea of poverty came into the picture in the 18th century, that is 1700s. But it was taken for granted until the 19th century, that is the 1800s. Though the period 1800s might be close to the 1940s, it signified the different but distinct account on the emergence of poverty reduction as a global project. Despite this, the period 1960 was agreed by many scholars as the turning point in the recognition of poverty reduction (Aksakal, 2024; Ravallion, 2020; Best, 2013).

This same period witnessed the inclusion of the idea into mainstream economics and development studies, with the emergence of theories. Modernization and Dependency theories became the dominant theories, with propositions on measures to address poverty. According to the modernization theorists, the solution to poverty required the adoption of industrialization which had an effect on economic growth. In effect, Roxas & Unyson (2011) asserted that poverty and underdevelopment could be attributed to inadequate investments required for rapid industrialization. It was argued that the modernization theory served as a neocolonial tool to advance the interests of the industrialized countries. The theory itself received several critiques, pinpointing the inadequate nature of the theory to propose a longlasting solution.

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It must be noted that the theory was more focused on development, which made it even vague. So one might not be able to tell whether the focus was on poverty reduction or development as a whole. Nevertheless, it was somehow used as a theory to explain poverty and poverty reduction. Though dependency theory was seen as the one that exposed poverty and explained its causes, it also had undeniable flaws. This made the two theories insufficient to tackle the issue of poverty. This idea was expressed by Roxas & Unyson (2011), who established that modernization and dependency theories were limited in delivering a poverty-free world, and was the problem rather than the solution. Nevertheless, economic growth as a poverty reduction strategy became the order of the day, as it was the dominant idea in neoclassical economics. According to Best (2013), it was believed that growth could reduce poverty, as its benefits would trickle down to the poorest. But that was not the case because countries achieved economic growth, yet struggled with issues of human development.

The economic growth model raised contentions among scholars about its viability in reducing poverty. In the viewpoint of Rowden (2010), economic reforms did not result in poverty reduction, as it was less concerned about the poor. However, economic growth played a role in poverty reduction, but it could not be the only factor in curbing this global issue. It could be said that it was a means to an end, and not the end itself.

The 1990s characterized the period where full attention was shifted to poverty alleviation, with numerous summits and strategies to reduce its effects. This same period witnessed the shift from economic growth to market-oriented policies as the solution to this social issue, as opined by Aksakal (2024). However, this free market approach had its limitations, as it was more focused on profit-maximizations rather than the welfare of the citizens. The approach in itself was not distinct from the classical economic growth model; it followed a similar pattern with a focus on the market. In this sense, the market became the determining factor in the demand

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and supply business, which controlled price. As a result, it neglected the role of the state by placing a limit on its role in managing the economy, thereby affecting human wellbeing and capacity building.

Though this idea was being criticized, it featured in poverty reduction strategies throughout history. This was evident in the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) adopted by many African states in the 1980s. However, Nurudeen & Adekola (2023) asserted that the SAP came to eliminate the social safety nets introduced by governments to support the poor. Clearly, the program was a problem to the development of Africa, as poverty and inequality kept increasing. With no doubt, the SAP was a thorn in the flesh in the development of Africa, as it brought social cost coupled with devastating economic decline. Noticing this trend, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) were introduced as a more viable option to curb poverty. From the viewpoint of Gupta (2011), the author posited that the PRSPs served as the mechanisms by which more emphasis was laid on poverty. However, this new strategy departed from the original SAPs to a more poverty-centered approach. Yet still elements of the SAPs could be traced in the PRSPs. It could be inferred that this poverty reduction strategy was a reframed SAP in a new form. That is, it was a subtle approach in promoting the interests of the advanced industrialized countries under the cloak of poverty reduction.

Despite its similarities with some of the principles with the SAP, it differed in its approach. In this direction, the program was more country-driven and result-oriented, a component that the SAP lacked. Nevertheless, it had some limitations though it opened the gateway to encourage poverty reduction. Gupta (2011) critiqued the PRSPs on its failure to include inequality in its agenda and its limited focus on poverty without a broad discussion of development as a whole. Looking at the progress of poverty eradication, it could not be ignored that the institutional structures and processes in the form of actors, activities, summits and conferences paved the

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way for this success story. With regards to actors, certain individuals such as Jeffery Sach, Amartya Sen, Paul Collier, among others played influential roles in advocating for focused attention on poverty as a critical developmental issue (ibid). However, their influence was limited to writings and not direct participation in the design and implementation of the Agendas. In essence, their works only provided theoretical and abstract perspectives, therefore lacking practicalism. Nevertheless, they were instrumental in drawing the attention of the International community about the significance of human needs, which led to adoption of the Human Development Index.

With regards to the summits, Koehler (2017) pointed out that the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development in 1995 was an important institutional measure to promote the agenda of poverty reduction. It was argued that the 1995 summit brought to the forefront issues of unemployment, exclusion and lack of participation to the table, with a discussion on the way forward (ibid). In this regard, attention was to be paid to the creation and adoption of employment as a central pillar of anti-poverty strategy. Then again, it could be understood that this phase served as a guideline to the inclusion of poverty in the MDGs. It should be noted that this historical pattern differed from that of the SDGs in general. Here, the focus was more on poverty as an individual goal and its evolutionary path. However, it could be pointed out that there was a shift from economic growth to human development. This reflected the social pillar of Sustainable Development, which interacted with the economic and environmental aspect to enhance the wellbeing.

In addition, critical approaches that set the pace for more emphasis on human development were the Basic needs and Capability Approach. During the 1990s, development thinking was influenced by human-centered theories, which conceptualized the idea of poverty, with its focus on its multidimensional nature (Fukuda-Parr, 2011). Per the arguments made by the

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scholar, Fukuda-Parr (2011), the capability approach came in as a critique of the SAP and Washington consensus to offer a new and fresh perspective on the appropriate ways to tackle this critical global issue. From this angle, development shifted more to the basic needs and human welfare of the individual, compared to earlier theoretical frameworks. However, the capability approach was more of an expanded version of the Basic Needs Approach. The scholar argued that the approach was very vital in redefining objectives as well as setting new priorities in the global development agenda (ibid).

In this sense, Alexander (2007) viewed this concept as a way of making people more capable by investing in expanding social and economic opportunities which in turn would have an effect on wellbeing. Also, in the opinion of Sen (2000), availability of opportunities could enhance the wellbeing of people, which in turn would uplift the people out of poverty. This idea reflected an individualistic approach, and not the community as a whole. This attracted critics who viewed the approach as limited in its capacity to achieve progress. This argument was shared by Gore (1997), who believed that development was communitarian in nature, hence integrating the community as a central pillar became critical. This was supported by the fact that the individual was part of the larger community, and this had the tendency to shape the individual within it. Nevertheless, the Human Development (HD) Report and the HD Index took inspiration from the capability approach, which set the foundation for the measurement of poverty and wellbeing in countries.

The MDG 1 and SDG 1 were a reflection of the influence of the approach in framing poverty-related goals in this contemporary world. In this light, the Brundtland Commission and the Rio Earth summits played a critical role in institutionalizing poverty goals as part of the broad global development agenda. However, it must be noted that poverty reduction was consistent in featuring in the IDGs through to the MDGs to SDGs, and it continued to be an overarching

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goal in the global world. It was observed that this reflected a path dependence, which traced its outcome to previous chains, starting with the conceptualization of Sustainable Development which included the social dimension of development. The historical path of the concept followed different patterns in the works of scholars.

However, most studies were limited in their use of historical analysis in tracing the evolution of the concept. In this sense, it was realized that limited studies exist on the usage of an analytical tool such as Historical Institutionalism to explain how historical factors helped shape present situations. Therefore, the study would fill this gap by specifically using the Path Dependent Theory to establish how critical juncture periods within Ghana:s social protection landscape such as the LEAP program influenced the GPSNP through locked-in institutional structures. However, one could not ignore the detailed description of the evolution of poverty alleviation. This in-depth information nevertheless provided rich insights into understanding the current outcome, which is SDG 1. This provided a deep support system in the analysis of the root remedy in handling the situation in order to track loopholes in past and present anti-poverty strategies, which the study would unravel.

2.3.1 The Institutionalization of SDG 1

Institutional norms and structures became the main mechanism through which political actions emanated from. From the constructivist perspective shared by Burchill (2005), the author believed that institutions were borne out of norms and values which shaped actors' interests and behaviour. With regard to this, it showed that they were the creation of man, which came from shared interests. In this light, Hodgson (2006: 2) defined "institutions as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions". However, it must be noted that institutions either remained the same for a long period of time or changed over time. In this sense, the unchanging nature of rules and regulations reflected the conservatives

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ideology, who believed in the preservation of already existing norms. Nevertheless, the challenge with conservatism was its inability to adapt to changing trends. As a result, the institutions required a more dynamic perspective to shape norms and values to reflect modern trends.

It must be noted that if a certain norm continued for a long time without changes, it reflected a critical juncture, which was path dependent (Mahoney, 2000). However, a change in a different direction reflected a path departure. In this direction, it was argued that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1 was institutionalized through an interactive process, which shaped actors' decisions in an interdependent world. Actors, processes, events, rules and regulations formed part of the institutionalization of the SDG 1. This was evident in the work of Fukuda-Parr & Hume (2011), who highlighted the institutional processes leading to the emergence of the SDG 1. In effect, poverty reduction was first institutionalized in the DAC-OECD policy document "Shaping the 21st Century" through a policy medium known as the International Development Goals (IDGs). This same argument was also shared by Fukuda-Parr (2011). However, the IDGs was limited in its capacity in providing a comprehensive approach towards tackling the issue. The IDGs, compared to the SDGs, lacked a gender-related poverty reduction approach and a social protection component. In this sense, it was argued that the IDGs did not properly align with the three pillars of Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, it served as the foundation for the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With respect to this, institutional norms, conferences and summits were very instrumental in crafting these policy documents targeted at poverty reduction. In this sense, Fukuda-Parr & Hume (2011) established the fact that the 1990 World Summit for Children set the pace for the institutionalization of poverty reduction through the Copenhagen Declaration. From the

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viewpoint of Koehler (2017), the scholar posited that the UN Development Decade led to the establishment of the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development in 1995. The framing of the summit in Copenhagen by two different names created confusion among people, as it seemed like two different summits. The confusion was due to the absence of the exact date for the conference in the work of Fukuda-Parr & Hume (2011). In essence, it reflected the same summit; which meant the Copenhagen summit on Social Development served as a substitute for the World Summit for Children.

It must be noted that the 1995 UN social Summit brought to the forefront issues of unemployment, social exclusion and lack of participation (Koehler, 2017). This signaled that the 1990s was a period that gave prominence to the idea of poverty reduction through summits, norms and values. With regards to this period, two contrasting views emerged about the institutional mechanism of poverty alleviation. From the perspective of Fukuda-Parr (2011), the author asserted that the concept was institutionalized in the DAC Policy and Millennium Declaration. In contrast, Gupta (2011) posited that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) served as the main institutional mechanism for championing poverty eradication. From this angle, it must be noted that the DAC policy and Millennium Declaration provided a global institutional framework for the adoption of PRSPs at the country-level. Therefore, this international norm served as a guideline for the introduction of country-driven programs.

In effect, the PRSPs reflected a neoliberal perspective, which signaled an implicit inclusion of the principle of Washington Consensus. Notwithstanding, the World Development Report served as a mechanism for addressing poverty, influenced by the Capability Approach (Best, 2013). It was, however, observed that this institutional process was global in nature, and it reflected a generic norm governing global governance. It did not reflect country-specific contexts, but it served as a general guideline to the creation of national structures and

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mechanisms to achieve the broad global development agenda. Also, actors played a critical role in shaping political actions, norms and values (Sarfo-Adu, 2021). This was evident in the work of Gupta (2011) and Best (2013) who highlighted how influential actors had shaped the outcome of human development and poverty reduction strategies. It could be inferred that the modern interpretation of poverty reduction was influenced by these scholars, who played critical roles in reshaping international norms.

Though most works related the idea of poverty reduction to Amartya Sen, there were other scholars such as Jeffery Sach, Paul Collier, Jim Grant, among others, who also contributed to the debate. However, the Capability Approach by Amartya Sen was the main work, which influenced development discourse on human development. In essence, the institutionalization of SDG 1 reflected the constructivist perspective, which brought actors form collective interests together, hence leading to a coherent set of rules, regulations as well as shaping behaviour (Jackson & Serensen, 2007). However, it was observed that many works focused on non-state actors such as Civil Society Organization, Non-Governmental Organizations, academics, scholars among others. They paid little attention to state actors who were the main negotiators of the global development agenda. These non-state actors only influenced the development discourse through writings and advocacy, with little input at the negotiating table. Nevertheless, the final decision lay with the state actors who convened at international summits and conferences to agree on a common international development policy. It was also argued that these studies did not focus on the institutionalization of SDG 1 at the country-level.

Nevertheless, the Millennium Declaration and the 2030 Agenda served as the main institutional framework that aligned country priorities and programs with the broad international development goals and targets. This was evident in the work of Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022) who argued that the National Development Plan was the main

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institutional mechanism that incorporated strategies to reduce poverty at the national level. At the local level, the National Social Protection Policy provided a broad policy framework which encompassed various social safety nets in alignment with its objectives (Owusu & Baidoo, 2020; Sarfo-Adu, 2021). With respect to that, several actors such as policymakers, bureaucrats played a crucial role in framing programs and policies, which intended to achieve the SDG 1 (Sarfo-Adu, 2021).

These actors fell under the umbrella of the implementation agencies such as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, charged with the design of social protection policies (Sarfo-Adu, 2021). They were seen as a coordinating institution that managed social protection across the country. However, it was argued that their role was highly influenced by political elites, which hindered their effectiveness. This confirmed the viewpoint Hickey et al (2018) of the ineffectiveness of the program as a result of clientaristic interests. Therefore, in reality, it was argued that bureaucrats were mostly party members who were selected by virtue of their association, hence lacking the competence to design appropriate policies. Therefore, they became puppets of politicians who ordered them around to do their bidding by enrolling their people onto the program, which affirmed the arguments of Abane (2017). Nevertheless, there still existed social protection experts who were specialized in social policy, who guided and led the design and implementation process, which negated the idea that employees working in the social protection sector did not have the requisite knowledge and skills

However, when it came to actors, less attention was paid to international actors who also had an influence in shaping policy making. Nevertheless, their influence was seen as minimal, but implicitly, they had great influence on final policy drafts due to their funding activities. Hence, it reflected a neo-colonial approach, which was mostly ignored by most studies. It was observed that studies on poverty were more biased towards poverty reduction strategies and

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its impact, with less focus on institutional mechanisms and structures of the programs. As part of the objectives of the study, it would delve into the institutional mechanisms that paved the way for the creation of the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project, which was missing in studies on social protection policies. Therefore, the study sought to fill the gap by discussing the rules and procedures put in place, starting from LEAP through to GSOP to examine how it helped shape the GPSNP program. Therefore, these institutions would be analyzed through a theoretical lens, Path Dependence, to establish a self- reinforcing mechanism.

2.4 THE SDG 1: CURRENT AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The global development agenda took a new shape, evident in existing literature. This shaped the form of Sustainable Development Goals, with the goal of poverty reduction included as Goal 1. This objective was the number one priority of the international community, with its interrelation with other SDGs. As a result, this section provided an overview of the literature on the current state of the SDG 1, with subthemes. The sub themes included; looking at it from the Global perspective, African perspective and Ghanaian perspective.

2.4.1 Global Context

Poverty became a major global challenge affecting countries, which needed immediate response and action to curb the situation. This argument was supported by Sherratt (2023) who stated that more than 700 million people worldwide still lived in poverty. This suggested that people still struggled to secure basic necessities of life needed for survival. In this sense, the poverty level in the world was measured by the global standard, which was set at $1.25 per day. However, there was a challenge with this measure. In the viewpoint of Rassanjani et al (2019), the measurement of extreme poverty was insufficient in representing all emerging

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countries. This was because some countries had different thresholds set for poverty, with some setting theirs above the $1.25 threshold. For instance, Poland used the Minimum Subsistence level, which was the low satisfaction of needs as a determinant of the limit of poverty (Palimaka & Karas, 2022). This measure depicted income as a means of determining the poor.

Nevertheless, this reflected relative poverty, which focused on income and consumption. The definition of poverty as $1.25, a threshold set by the Bretton Woods institutions, signified a limitation on its conceptualization of the extreme poor. It should be noted that poverty reflected a multidimensional perspective, which went beyond income poverty to include other aspects such as health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, among others. Taking inspiration from this argument, the study would focus on the multidimensional nature of poverty, which was evident in the project, Ghana Productive Safety Net Project. Therefore, the study would unravel the link between poverty reduction and health, food security, climate change, thereby integrating the economic, environmental and social pillars of development. This would be evident in the findings of the study, where the LEAP program link with NHIS would help unravel how poverty reduction affects the health of the poor households. The LIPW would demonstrate how it enhances climate change mitigation. In addition, all the three programs under GPSNP would establish how poverty reduction impacts food consumption.

In this light, a growing interest shifted the debate from economic growth to social protection as a tool to eradicate multidimensional poverty. Evidence proved that countries experiencing economic growth still had issues of poverty, hence drawing the conclusion that economic growth was not enough to achieve SDG 1. This was seen in the work of Vyas-Doorgapersad (2021) who drew on an illustration of BRICS countries to demonstrate that economic growth did not necessarily reflect poverty reduction. In this sense, the author indicated that China's massive growth did not transcend into poverty reduction, as there are 55 million poor people

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in the rural areas as of 2015 (Vyas-Doorgapersad. 2021). However, in the view of Alvi & Senbeta (2014) and Mahembe & Odhiambo (2018), economic growth was a necessary driver of poverty reduction, as its benefits trickled down to the poor. As a result, they believed that foreign aid should be focused on economic growth, which would translate automatically into poverty reduction.

In addition, the context of Poland, which showed a stable increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 2010 and 2020 confirmed the argument that economic growth led to a reduction in poverty (Palimaka & Karas, 2022). Even with this, social protection played a significant role in curbing this social issue, which could not be underestimated. However, it is noticed that there was an overestimation of the role played by economic growth. In contrast, the study by Vyas-Doorgapersad (2021) showed otherwise, as it supported social protection as a support system to the poor rather than economic growth. It should be noted that economic growth could create employment opportunities, which would lead to income generation. There was no doubt that economic growth could help reduce poverty to some extent but not in its entirety. However, this only reflected the reduction of income poverty, and not multidimensional poverty.

In this sense, the social protection system became a viable option, which captured SDG 1 target 3 under it, though it had its shortfall. This reflected the arguments of Maoloni (2024) who brought to light the positive impact of social protection on education, health and income generation. Per the arguments which were in line with Vyas-Doorgapersad (2021), the author asserted that social protection helps reduce poverty by providing financial support to the poor to engage in business ventures to enable them to cater for their families. Nevertheless, the study only limited safety nets to cash transfers, which provided a narrow perspective of social protection. Therefore, a broad perspective would encompass Labour Intensive public works,

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social insurance, traditional and informal Social protection to provide. a comprehensive overview of the subject matter. In essence, the study would provide a comprehensive understanding of social protection which would focus on informal social protection systems, business support capital, grants from manual labour and how it transformed the lives of the beneficiaries.

In addition, the study overemphasized the benefit, omitting the fact that most social protection programs in the developing world were ineffective, as opined by Hickey et al (2018). Therefore, Priambodo & Djirimu (2024) resolved this issue by providing both the positive and negative aspects of social interventions in Indonesia. In the scholars' opinion, the areas with high poverty rates struggled to enhance their livelihoods through safety nets, while social protection functioned effectively in the areas with areas with low poverty rates. Though this presented a fair analysis of the social programs, it showcased the weaknesses inherent in the political system of Indonesia. As a result, the disparities in socio-economic development in some few areas demonstrated its high rate of poverty.

Nevertheless, the findings served as a reference point in substantiating the results provided by the research on path dependence of SDG 1. This would help in supporting responses to Research Question on the role of GPSNPI and beneficiary outcomes of social protection in Ghana. In this regard, countries worldwide adopted this social safety net to lift its people out of poverty. Poland introduced a support mechanism for the poor in the form of 500+, a state funded program, to aid families to cater for their needs. According to Palimaka & Karas (2022), this program reflected a decrease in the poverty rate between 2016-2017. This signaled a positive impact of social protection on the elimination of poverty. However, the focus of Poland's poverty reduction strategy on increasing the real income of households limited the scope of improving lives. Though it was believed that increased income could help the poor

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cater for their needs, it was not the ultimate. Poverty reduction goes beyond employment opportunities to include access to social services such as education, health and so on, hence its broad nature.

In this sense, Leal-Filho (2021) demonstrated how SDG 1(No Poverty) had a strong impact on the other SDGs on health, education, climate change, among others. This underscored the fact that those who were poor struggled to obtain better health services and quality education. This assertion is on point, as the rich had access to better and quality services and opportunities by nature of their status, creating inequality. Nevertheless, social assistance targeted at the poor was the sure way for them to level up, which enabled them to gain opportunities to improve their lives. This brought them up to the level of the rich where they were able to also compete for resources, which bridged the inequality gap. In this way, the social assistance program became an effective approach in tackling the issue of poverty, which enhanced the wellbeing of the citizens (Rassanjani et al, 2019). This was evident in the study conducted by Vyas-Doorgapersad (2021), who argued that Social Cash Transfer introduced in 2003 in South Africa was the most efficient due to its massive achievements in securing a better life for the poor.

In the same vein, Rassanjani et al (2019) also asserted that social protection policies brought significant benefits to the poor, which increased school enrolment, among others. The scholar was specific with the categorization of the mechanism, which he stated, comprised two components namely National Social Security System and Social Assistance. But the good thing was that the author provided the historical trajectory of social protection policies in Indonesia, starting with the year 2007. However, that programme was focused on improving health and education. Then again, it was expanded to include the disabled and other groups in 2016. This aid was in the form of cash transfers to support the poor and vulnerable, which went beyond

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2016 till date. However, the challenge with the programme was its inability to provide sufficient assistance to the elderly, who are in dire need of financial aid to survive and cater for their health needs. The most important challenge hampering the effectiveness of the programs worldwide was biasness.

In this sense, it was mostly not targeted at the right beneficiaries, who genuinely needed help to come out of poverty. As a result, this support was used as means of political patronage, which provided cash transfers to party faithfuls. Despite these shortcomings, it was the best option so far in empowering the poor to become self-sufficient, which was in line with Sen's Capability Approach. This study served as a guideline to the research, as it focuses on social assistance programs by tracing it from past programs to the present. This provides the study with the opportunity to tap into the knowledge base of the author, serving as a vital backing. It should be noted that safety nets were not the only mechanism to curb this situation, though it proved to be the most effective and efficient. Employment schemes were also a great tool of providing job opportunities and skills training to individuals to gain income. However, the limitation associated with the scheme was its focus on income earning opportunities, with less attention to the wellbeing and happiness of the people.

Despite the introduction of these institutional mechanisms, the sustainability of these programs largely depended on effective governance systems put in place to coordinate and assess its progress. The social protection system was the order of the day in achieving SDG 1, of which Ghana is not an exception. The Indonesia and Poland case provided an idea of the role social protection systems played in attaining the SDG 1. This could be vital in understanding the Ghanaian case, with a focus on the safety net project. However, the study would unravel the mystery surrounding the attainment of SDG 1 through GPSNP from a historical institutionalist perspective.

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2.4.2 The African Context

The existence of poverty reduction strategies in Africa and the world at large dated back to the 1990s. Since then, several anti-poverty policies were introduced to curb the issue. Despite this, poverty still remained high in low-income countries and fragile states like those in Africa (World Bank, 2019). Some scholars painted a gloomy picture of the state of poverty in Africa. This was evident in the work of Udofia (2024), who argued that poverty still remained high in Nigeria despite global and local efforts. Though this case represented one particular country, it provided an idea of the situation in Africa. This did not mean that poverty was high in the entire African continent. In this sense, this might as well be misleading, as some parts of Africa were able to reduce poverty. The selection of a case or few cases in Africa could create the impression that Africa is a rotten country. However, in general, the World Bank (2019) asserted that 80% of the world population who lived in extreme poverty were in SubSaharan Africa. The challenge with this conclusion stemmed from the validity of the measurement tool used to arrive at these findings.

It could be realized that this estimation was based on a fixed standard, measured against certain quantifiable means. This reflected the usage of income poverty threshold as a baseline to determine the poor, which was limited in scope. In this regard, it did not reflect the actual proportion of the people living in abject poverty in Africa. It should be noted that the poverty rate in Africa was not stable; it fluctuated overtime. This made it difficult to determine the exact proportion of people living in poverty. Despite this gloomy assumption of the continent, some parts showcased a remarkable decline in poverty. Nevertheless, Bicaba et al (2015) painted a positive and optimistic picture about the poverty issue in the continent. From their viewpoint, Africa exhibited some level of progress in the attainment of poverty reduction

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goals. In that sense, Cape Verde, Seychelles, Rwanda exemplified the optimistic view of the continent achieving the global goals, which set a precedent for others to follow.

Hudson et al (2018) added to the discussion by examining a single case study on the progress made so far with poverty reduction. Nevertheless, the project produced combined benefits of environmental conservation and poverty reduction, whereby farmers got the opportunity to generate income. The study showed that significant strides were made in attaining the SDG 1, but not entirely. This gave hope of the continent transitioning from its underdeveloped status to a rich-resource continent. Nevertheless, the Royal Botanical Gardens could be used for tourist attraction through beautification, which would help Mozambique generate revenue to expand social safety nets in the country. However, these achievements in terms of poverty eradication countered the argument made by Devereux (2002) who gave a pessimistic opinion about the possibility of social safety nets producing efficient results in addressing poverty.

However, evidence showed that the majority of the states such as DR Congo, Liberia, among others, faced high levels of poverty due to political instability and conflicts. With that being said, it should be noted that when it came to this social canker, child poverty was mostly removed out of the equation, with more attention being paid to income poverty. But child poverty was of equal importance, and the high rate of child poverty necessitated an immediate response to salvage the issue before it got out of hand. Even the statistics provided by Watkins & Quattri (2019), which estimated 305 African children to live in poverty by 2030 and 87 million children being born into poverty each year illustrated how serious the issue is. Though there were few studies on poverty, it did not mean it was not being taken seriously. The multidimensional nature of poverty captured child poverty, and the SDG 1 revealed this, though it was not stated explicitly under Goal 1. However, SDG 2 (No hunger) and SDG 3

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(Good Health and wellbeing illustrated measures to tackle issues of malnutrition and child mortality, which were vital aspects of child poverty reduction.

Notwithstanding, there was still prospect for Africa to lift many out of poverty geared towards attaining SDG 1. This success story had the tendency to reflect in the other SDGs, hence reducing child poverty in Africa. To realize this goal, several anti-poverty strategies were adopted in both previous and current years. In effect, according to Anuoluwapo & Dominique (2021), Nigeria took several steps by introducing social protection programmes such as Conditional Grant Scheme, Conditional Cash, National Social Security Policy, Home Grown school feeding program as a mechanism to help achieve SDG 1. However, these programmes did not necessarily signify an automatic success story. Definitely, there would be barriers that would affect its effective implementation, as observed in the MDG era. Issues of corruption, policy inconsistency, bad governance, non-poor targeted, among others were challenges that existed since the introduction of the poverty reduction strategy to the SDG era in Nigeria.

In this sense, the authors expressed their doubts about the country's ability to meet the set target by 2030. These challenges were not only evident in the Nigerian case, as it reflected the same thing happening in other African countries and other parts of the world. These same reasons accounted for implementation challenges even in the Ghanaian context, hindering its outcome. Nevertheless, these policies had the tendency to transform the lives of people and the economy, and its potential benefits could not be overlooked. In the same vein, the South African case also exemplified a scenario, demonstrating measures adopted to attain SDG 1, similar to Nigeria. As a result, the National Development Plan became the main institutional framework set to alleviate people out of poverty (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). Under this broad policy framework, subprograms were designed which include Land Reform and Agriculture, Free Higher Education, and growing Entrepreneurship (ibid).

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Basically, these subprograms were social protection schemes targeted at improving the livelihood of the people. However, just like the Nigeria scenario, the author also made inferences from the MDGs to draw a conclusion of South Africa's likelihood of not meeting the target by the set date due to implementation challenges. This assertion was not based on mere thought but on empirical facts that showed the struggles associated with the implementation of SDG 1 programmes. It was observed that the same challenges facing Nigeria appear in the South African Context. These two case studies signaled that Africa would not be able to meet the targets set by SDG 1 by 2030. It seemed that the South African government was poised on reaching the goal by all means, with social protection policies. However, those policies were inefficient due to poor identification of the poor, corruption among others, which hampered the eradication of poverty in the country. In relation to the challenges, VyasDoorgapersad (2022) opined that the country lacked the appropriate infrastructure to enhance effective implementation and coordination.

Despite these drawbacks, Udofia (2024) argued that the SDG programmes were of great help to the people by uplifting them out of abject poverty to a secure livelihood. It should be noted that every policy or program had its pros and cons, but it became a challenge when the cons superseded the pros. In this sense, social protection could not be seen as a curse rather than a blessing to save millions of people. The failure of these programs to reach its full potential was dependent on attitudinal factors, and not necessarily the program itself. Notwithstanding, the above cases reflected non-Ghanaian anti-poverty programs, but it had semblance with the scenarios mentioned.

It was however observed that gender-related issues were not mostly captured in social protection policies, reflecting a bias. In this sense, Vyas-Doorgapersad (2019) opined that women were the most vulnerable to poverty, and anti-poverty strategies should capture them.

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It was believed that it had the potential of raising the standard of women through access to employment, basic services and other resources. This bridged the inequality gap between men and women, hence fostering an inclusive society. In as much as it was a good initiative, the perception about the female gender wound still remains unless there was a mind-set shift, which would lead to changing perspectives. But the SDGs was made up of a component that incorporated gender-sensitive issues into poverty alleviation strategies. In this regard, according to Vyas-Doorgapersad (2019), gender equality in poverty reduction strategies could have a positive impact on the realization of SDG 1. This showed the relationship between poverty and gender equality. Implicitly, it was noticed that this relationship could birth out gains in other SDGs pertaining to female health, sanitation, among others. This did not only reflect a synergy between SDG 1 and SDG 5, but also SDG 1 and other poverty-related goals.

2.4.3 The Ghanaian Context

The SDG 1 (No Poverty) in the Ghanaian context had its own story, which was similar to the African experience in general. In this light, the issue of poverty was at the centre of not only the global development agenda, but also the national development plan. As a result, the country witnessed a series of poverty reduction strategies such as the Livelihood Empowerment Program Against Poverty (LEAP), School Feeding Programme, among others. Despite these efforts, poverty still remained unresolved, as the rate kept increasing instead of declining (Daganga et al, 2021). It was also observed that the incidence of poverty was more rampant in the rural areas than the urban, with the Northern part of the country being the region with the highest poverty rate.

In this sense, the author's definition was based on the multidimensional nature of poverty which encompassed food security. health, education, sanitation, among others. This meant that those in the rural areas lacked quality education, good health systems, poor transportation systems

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among others, which directly affected poverty levels. This explained why child mortality, malnutrition, among others were high in the rural areas of Ghana. It could be inferred that there existed inequality in terms of development of both rural and urban areas, signifying high poverty levels in rural Ghana. Despite these disparities, the limited opportunities in the rural areas could be used effectively to reduce poverty. However, it was observed that most studies related poverty to the rural folks, with less attention being paid to urban poverty. Urban poverty became a critical issue due to urbanization, hence putting pressure on the limited resources and opportunities. As a result, the study would not be limited to only rural folks, but also include urban folks.

Nevertheless, the issue of poverty was not novel nor irreversible. In this sense, a sure way to lift people out of poverty was through education and training. According to Abaidoo (2021), education was the most important driver which improved productivity and offered better economic opportunities. This suggested that individuals or households with higher education were open to well paid jobs, which reduced the likelihood of poverty in this category of people (Abaidoo, 2021). But it should be noted that education alone was not the only contributor to poverty alleviation. Poverty reduction was also dependent on the government's policies and the economic status of the country. In this sense, the author was limited in its work by focusing on one aspect, which was education. In addition, the study neglected informal education and training, which underestimated its influence on income generation and poverty reduction.

In this regard, the work of Baah-Mintah et al (2018) illustrated the positive impact of informal education on poverty alleviation. From their perspective, this type of education was key in the expansion and sustainability of small scale businesses, which reduced poverty. However, it should be noted that these small scale entrepreneurs were mostly illiterate. As a result, an informal style of education and training was the best way to enhance their knowledge and skills.

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The benefits came with the adoption of best management practices by these entrepreneurs, who were mostly self-employed. However, small scale businesses had implications on income levels, as the type of self-employment mattered.

From the viewpoint of Adjei-Mantey & Kumawotor (2024), entrepreneurs who engaged in nonagricultural works were in a better position to escape poverty compared to those involved in agriculture. The reasons were based on the limitations of traditional farming practices, which were devoid of irrigation and extension services to secure employment during the dry season. Though this assertion was true, engaging in non-agricultural services did not exempt people from being poor because poverty went beyond income. In this sense, the author limited the reduction of poverty to employment, without the inclusion of social protection measures.

The argument above was substantiated by Ruben (2025) who argued that having multiple sources of income provided individuals with means to come out of poverty, and not one formal job as argued by Adjei-Mantey & Kumawotor (2024), Therefore, this was evident in the world of Ruben (2025) who argued that farmers engaged in non-agricultural activities to make additional income. Nevertheless, escaping poverty was dependent on financial management, and not necessarily the availability of financial resources. But Sen (2000) negated this statement by asserting that availability of resources enhanced the well-being of citizens. Though substantiated by Eshun (2020), this did not mean that there would be equal and fair distribution of resources to reach everyone, which might be constrained by political and institutional barriers. However, it must be noted that employment led to income generation, which offered people the opportunity to afford their basic needs. But it was argued that social protection schemes were the most effective way of curbing the issue of poverty. In essence, social intervention offered entrepreneurs with grants, cash transfers subsidies to expand their business, which boosted productivity.

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In contrast to the arguments raised by Adjei-Mantey & Kumawotor (2024), it was argued that agriculture had the potential of helping the country meet the SDG 1, provided productivity was enhanced (Wonganga & Awunyo-Vitor, 2018). This implied that the type of job did not matter; what was most important was its output. In this sense, productivity was enhanced by available access to resources and credit, which had an effect on sales and income levels. In relation to agriculture, Wonganga & Awunyo-Vitor (2018) asserted that this factor was based on the use of fertilizer, extension services, improved seeds which led to technical efficiency, hence contributing to poverty reduction. As mentioned above, it was realized that the authors focused on income poverty. In this sense, the study lacked a multidimensional approach at looking at the issue of poverty. In addition, the study was silent on social safety nets to provide security to farmers, with access to agricultural aid.

Ruben (2025) highlighted that the challenges farmers faced in assessing credit, and social protection had the tendency to make available financial aid to this group of people. Therefore, this explained the reason behind farmers engaging in additional income generating activities to complement the shortfalls of the agricultural system (ibid). In essence, this could also be attributed to the lack of government support in the agricultural sector through social assistance. This necessitated the importance of social safety nets as a mechanism to eliminate poverty, which featured as one of my objectives. Notwithstanding, it was evident from the perspective of Wonganga & Awunyo-Vitor (2018), that education and skills training was a necessary factor that enhanced efficiency and productivity of farmers. Coming from this angle, the authors opined that farmers with formal education were able to produce maize more efficiently than those without education. This was not only limited to farmers, but applied to other jobs. However, education coupled with available resources in the form of social assistance went a long way to contribute to high productivity, which translated into poverty reduction.

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Nevertheless, these employment opportunities excluded persons with disabilities from engaging in either agricultural or non-agricultural activities. Opoku et al (2021) asserted that this category of person lacked access to education and employment opportunities, hence widening inequality and poverty among them. It was observed that the disabled were mostly reliant on other family members or begging on the streets. The situation became worse if the individual came from a poor household, affecting their capabilities. Looking at how critical the situation was, persons with disability could not be exempted from the discussion of poverty reduction, as evident in most literature. The literature on poverty reduction was limited in its discussion of persons with disabilities, who were not covered by social protection. However, recent social assistance programs or safety nets included this group of people as beneficiaries of the programs to assist them in catering for their basic necessities of life. In this sense, this program became a viable option in lifting all manner of persons which included; the poor, persons with disabilities and vulnerable living everywhere out of poverty.

2.5 SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

Social Safety nets became the new norm in the fight against poverty. This was evident in its objectives and vision towards creating a poverty-free world and leaving no one behind through state-led intervention. The available literature on this subject matter provided an interesting insight on the benefits of this anti-poverty program, not overlooking its challenges as well. The discussion above did justice to the issue by categorizing it into two subthemes. This included: taking it from the African and Ghanaian context. Hence, a critical review of various studies is provided below.

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2.5.1 African Context

The Social Safety net had a long history, which could be traced to colonial times. From the viewpoint of Patel (2018), the scholar opined that the British and other colonial powers established social welfare provision targeted at the public in most African countries. However, it should be noted that this form of social protection could not be compared to today's own. Obviously, it was evident that these social protection schemes introduced by the colonial powers were neoliberal in nature, and could be seen as a medium to further subjugate the people. In this sense, it was argued that social policies needed to work in line with economic policies to ensure equitable and sustainable development. This supported the neoliberal viewpoint of social protection. In this regard, neoliberals saw social protection as a viable option compared to social safety nets, as it was criticized as a mechanism that does not contribute to alleviating poverty in developing countries (Devereux, 2002). To add to the argument by Patel (2018), Lambin & Muangi (2025) asserted that the colonial powers introduced a limited social protection system which was only targeted at workers in their administration. Therefore, contrary to above scholars, the social welfare support system was discriminatory in nature, and was not open to the public per say (ibid).

Therefore, it depicted the placement of Africans as low-class citizens, who did not deserve to enjoy good life (Mills, 2014). This argument was clearly articulated by Mills (2014) who raises displeasure about the subjugation of the Black race in contemporary times through neo-colonial. As a result, the Black race was relegated to the background because of negative perceptions about the continent, which placed Africa at the periphery and the whites at the core with great powers and control over the global world. Nevertheless, breaking the dependency chain of Western powers' control was possible, as posited by Frank (2013), which Burkina Faso took the lead in its liberation process. In essence, the creation of formal safety nets clearly

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demonstrated the imposition of Western ideas on Africa under the pretense of aiding in its development, but with a neo-colonial agenda. Therefore, elements of Ubuntu philosophy were missing in the social protection systems, hence further engendering conflicts and division among the people (Lambin & Muagin, 2025).

It was argued that the social safety net created a dependent poor, who relied too much on cash transfers, which often led to laziness. However, Devereux (2002) countered this assertion by pinpointing the benefits associated with safety nets. The scholar made it clear that the social intervention programs had the working poor as its target group, with its positive impact on labour productivity, which social welfare lacked. This came in contrast with the social welfare system introduced by the Western powers. This showed the significant contribution of safety nets programs in tackling poverty, with its trickle down effect on hunger, and other social issues. It was with no doubt that the social welfare system served as a starting point for the introduction of safety nets. However, Patel (2018) asserted that the Western style of welfarism was inadequate in terms of its limits in understanding that developing nations took a different turn. Nevertheless, social welfare institutions served as an institutional mechanism in championing social protection policies.

Ordinarily. scholars referred to the 1990s as the period when social protection came onto the development agenda, established by the 1990 World Development Report on Poverty (Devereux, 2002). However, it should be noted that this idea attracted critics who did not believe the relevance of social protection policies in alleviating poverty. In this sense, the program was criticized as being unable to sustain living standards of beneficiaries for a long term, as it only elevated the poor to a minimum living standard in the interim (Devereux, 2002). The assertion of a long-term benefit only created a dependent poor, who could not do without cash transfers. This created a sense of lack of initiative and creativity. However, the social

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safety net was supposed to be short term by building the resilience of the poor against shocks to come out of poverty. Once the beneficiaries were lifted above the poverty line, it created space for other poor individuals. However, the vulnerable such as the disabled, old age and so on would need long term social protection policies due to their incapacity to work productively.

Though the social safety net emerged in the 1990s, it took a different pattern in its expansion in African countries. From this angle, Patel (2018) posited that these social protection mechanisms emerged on the African scene through a communitarian support system. This system was based on mutual aid and subsistence agriculture taken upon by the extended family. In this scenario, it took the form of an informal cash transfer to the poor. Then again, Devereux (2002) made a striking point, which brought to light poor-to-poor transfer. Clearly, it showed the profit maximizing ability of the rich, who were less interested in social welfare or donations to the poor. With reference to this, it depicted the gross inequality among the rich and poor, as the poor lost money to support their fellow poor while the rich kept being rich.

But then again, this communitarian system fostered a sense of love and belonging among individuals. Nevertheless, Adasi-Bekoe (2025) made a good point that brought to light the dormant nature of the traditional social protection system. Per his viewpoint, modernization and urbanization was the casual factor that had disrupted the relevance of the traditional system. But in actual sense, this could be attributed to the influx of Western ideas into Africa, which introduced the nuclear system, leading to separation from the extension family system (ibid). This was acknowledged by Owusu & Baidoo (2020) who was worried about the fading nature of the traditional system, with fears that it would be scrapped totally. The authors emphasized the never-ending role the system played in this contemporary time, thereby advocating for its revival and preservation (ibid). From a critical point of view, this could be an alternative safety net to cover the poor who were not enrolled onto the state-led social

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interventions, hence saving the cost of the government undertaking a reassessment to exit some of the beneficiaries. Nevertheless, the modern system made it difficult to incorporate the traditional model into the formal system, therefore brainwashing the minds of Africans that customs and traditions were archaic and demonic.

As a result, formal social safety nets were introduced into the picture to replace the informal one. This signified the historical trajectory behind the introduction of social safety nets, which could be of great significance to the research. Abane (2017) opined that the problem with the argument above was that it provided limited explanations of social safety nets within the local context. However, this formal social intervention received mixed results, with some scholars arguing in favour of a social safety net while others were skeptical about the program. Abane (2017) argued that this program did not reflect its intended purpose, as it was used to promote clientelistic interests, which was used as a means to gain political support and retain their seat. In this sense, it could be inferred that support from the safety nets was given to party faithfuls at the expense of those who really needed it (ibib). This could be attributed to the power vested in the hands of the political elites to determine the target and size of the program without stakeholder consultations. In contrast, the author acknowledged the fact that it could help promote good governance and democracy if managed well, with effective administrative structures put in place. In this sense, it would automatically enhance socioeconomic growth.

In support of the earlier critics, Hickey et al (2018) added by stating that social intervention was based on the survival tactics of the political elites, who used it as a means to gain voters' support and legitimacy. However, the author argued that the citizens had an upper hand in influencing and negotiating for social protection in exchange for support. This placed the politicians in a tight corner to respond to the demands of the population, otherwise risked losing their seat. It must be noted that a diabolic tactic could be used to win the heart of the

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electorates by making promises. Nevertheless, these schemes were often influenced by domestic political issues, with little external interferences (Hickey et al, 2018). Then again, Prince et al (2023) in agreement with the above scholars gave concrete reasons for the attitude of political elites, stating that the African system promoted a lack of political will, which made them reluctant to address the needs of the poor people. However, dependency theorists blamed the deplorable and corrupt atmosphere of Africa on colonialism, hence providing the fertile grounds for African leaders to neglect taking responsibility to address the issues. Nevertheless, this assertion was generic, which did not apply to everywhere in the continent.

As Tsaro (2022) opined, countries such as Uganda were able to reduce poverty through support from Western donors. This signified that dependency did not necessarily lead to underdevelopment, but it was internal factors that contributed to the problem, which was in line with the argument of Hickey et al (2018). This supported the stance of Iwegbu & Dauda (2022) who were of the view that the ineffectiveness of foreign aid support was as a result of the political and economic structure of the state, and not the aid itself. This came to discredit Frank (2013) idea of detachment from foreign aid, and to encourage laziness and corruption in Africa. Therefore, this created the avenue for foreign powers to dictate policies and exploit the continent based on their interest. Though there were few success stories with foreign aid, the cons or negative effects exceeded the positive, thereby being a curse for African nations.

To complement its weakness, Adasi-Bekoe (2025) brought to light the relevance the Church plays in supporting poor members, which was given less attention. It must be noted that the Church social welfare system did away with behaviours in its selection process evident in the Baptist Churches. But rather, its system functioned based on Biblical principles, which selected members on a fair and equal basis. Though there were challenges, it was more efficient, as it targeted only poor individuals and supported them with payment of fees, provision of food

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items and humanitarian services (ibid). However, Devereux (2002) highlighted the role social safety nets played in reducing chronic poverty. In this regard, the author illustrated how beneficial the program had been through investments in income generating activities, education, social networks, and productive assets. In the author's viewpoint, impact assessments ignored the positive aspects of the program, by focusing more on the negatives.

It could be said that the impact of social safety nets was often underestimated, with pessimists offering doubts and negative remarks about the potential of the intervention. Nevertheless, Gilligan et al (2008) stated that those who received cash transfers experienced a massive improvement in food security, as in the case of Ethiopia's PSNP. It could be argued that most safety nets were focused on food security rather than poverty. It was believed that improving food security of poor households had the potential of reducing child poverty and poverty in general. As a result, cash transfers were spent on securing food supplements to provide dietary food for the household. The Ethiopian case had a restriction, as it was less focused on the educational needs and income generation activities such as entrepreneurship of the households.

This led Gilligan et al (2008) to make the assertion that the program did not contribute to the asset growth of the beneficiaries. This safety net differed from the Ghanaian one, as it was broad base and it included both educational, food security and asset-based benefits. However, Oduro (2010) pinpointed the challenges affecting the effectiveness of safety net programs, stating that progress reports on the programs were scarce. This made it difficult to determine the real impact of the social interventions, causing people to draw inaccurate conclusions not based on empirical data, which did not correlate with the reality on the ground. Nevertheless, the Ethiopian case of safety net provided the study with a foundational understanding of social intervention, but its system could not be generalized to the Ghanaian system, as they operated under different institutional models. In addition, the study failed to trace the Ethiopian Safety

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Net from a historical perspective to provide a comprehensive understanding, hence creating a gap for the Therefore, the study sought to resolve this lacuna by embedding the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project within an analytical framework, which is path dependence, to better understand the influence of historical factors on current phenomenon. This would be evident in establishing critical junctures, self- reinforcing mechanisms, reactive sequencing and increasing returns of social protection systems from LEAP through to current safety net, hence helping in concluding that GPSNP is path dependent.

However, the project had shortcomings which cannot be overlooked. There was an important omission in most social protection policies in Africa. This omission was reflected in the neglect of pastoral communities. Most literature paid less attention to this group, however, they formed part of the poor and vulnerable category. This neglect, according to Tsegay (2017) was attributed to the focus on employees with formal sector jobs, due to their influence in electoral outcomes. In this sense, pastoral communities were ignored intentionally, caused by the selfish interests of political elites. This did not reflect an inclusive coverage of social protection, which confirmed the argument made by Abane (2017) and Hickey et al (2018). This created the impression that this social intervention was biased and ineffective. Tsegay (2017) nevertheless noted that most safety nets in Africa were generic in nature, which focused on nationwide policies to the neglect of the specific needs of groups such as pastoral livelihoods. However, it was observed that safety net projects could not cover the needs of specific groups or communities, as this would require financial capital to expand its coverage. So a nation-wide approach was needed with objectives including the needs of pastoral groups.

Another issue worth noting, which Devereux (2002) brought to the forefront dealt with gender bias influenced by patriarchal thought, giving men an advantage over women. It was worth noting that women who obtained cash transfers gave them to their husbands due to the

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perception that the man was the head of the family. Also, women were prevented from participating in public works by their husbands or families, hence limiting the role of the women to catering for the household (Devereux, 2002). This depicted that gender inequality was implicitly embedded in the social safety net, for which scholars paid less attention. This imbalance reflected a biased form of the program, implicitly targeted at favouring men more than women. In essence, it was noted that this safety net was biased by excluding pastoral communities and limiting the participation of women in the projects.

Despite these shortcomings, the social safety net project was the most viable solution to the reduction of poverty in developing countries. This could be essential in the attainment of SDG 1, which comprised a social protection component targeted at the poor. The African experience in terms of social protection policies served as an exemplary case, which could provide lessons to the Ghanaian context. Nevertheless, it was observed that most studies which adopted case studies were biased in their selection by focusing on South Africa, Zambia, Ethiopia, Lesotho. Little attention was paid to countries in the West Africa sub-region, which adopted similar policies. The selected case studies did not reflect the region as a whole, which meant that the results could not be generalized to other parts of the continent. In addition, the experiences of the selected countries were not detailed, hence limiting its understanding and relation to the Ghanaian experience. Even with that, the studies did not look at the issue from a theoretical lens to explain changes in social protection through an analysis of historical context. Therefore, the Ghanaian case sought to fill this gap by providing a unique insight by embedding it in a path dependence to explain the influence of the past on present circumstances, thereby providing an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. However, these studies served as a foundation, which would complement my work, as similar patterns could be traced despite the differences. Overall, the study would focus on the West Africa sub-region, with particular focus on Ghana's social safety net to provide a detailed understanding of the program by

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tracing it from its historical trajectory. This would complement studies which focused on North, South and East African countries.

2.5.2 The Ghanaian Context

The Safety net in Ghana was not that different from other ones in other countries, as they evolved around the same goal of reducing poverty. In this sense, Laar (2017) opined that this social intervention was the most effective tool for achieving the double goal of SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 2 (No Hunger). There was no doubt about its potential. However, it must be noted that its effectiveness depended on country-specific context, supported by many variables such as administrative capacity, good governance, among others. The description of the program as effective was a generalization based on the success stories of some countries. Overall, it had the potential of alleviating poverty when properly administered, with its focus on the deserving poor. Nevertheless, the Ghanaian case had recorded some success and challenges since its inception. From a historical context, Laar (2017) asserted that social intervention began in 1965 as national social security. Contrary to this, there was a contrasting view about the genesis of the programs. In the opinion of Abane (2017), the idea of social protection came into existence to mitigate the cost of the Economic Recovery Programme in the mid-1990s. It could be inferred that this referred to the introduction of formal social protection by the state, and not the informal one.

The interesting fact was that Sarpong & Asuming-Brempong (2004) sided with the argument raised by Abane (2017), by stating that the Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) was a buffer to secure the livelihoods of the poor and unemployed. These contrasting views about the origin of social protection in Ghana created uncertainty concerning the original date. Though in history, 1965 was counted as the genesis of social protection, the 1990s was characterized as the period of popularity of the programs,

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prompted by the economic situation of the country. Nevertheless, these policies served as an antecedent to latter social protection mechanisms. In this regard, the PAMSCAD introduced public works and labour intensive works onto the scene, which was now featured in contemporary social safety nets (ibid). This was evident in the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (L.E.A.P), the Ghana Social Opportunity Project (GSOP), which was an expansion of earlier social protection schemes. The LEAP Program became the most popular safety net project, with research focusing on its impact on poverty reduction. Mostly, the program was criticized as a failure.

On the part of Sarfo-Adu (2021), the author opined that the ineffectiveness of the program was rooted in the low coverage of the entire households. In this sense, it left out individuals and households that were extremely poor, and needed urgent help to save them. This was attributed to financial problems, but in actual sense, it led to selective bias. From the standpoint of Abane (2017), it was observed that the program's limited coverage gave the political elites the room to manoeuvre their way through the selection of their favourites as beneficiaries. This defeated the actual purpose of the intervention, as it was used to promote political interests at the expense of the poor. Critics were wrong by focusing more on the flaws of the project, without considering its benefits. A critical look at the project revealed that it was not bad after all, as it chalked some gains. So it could not be underestimated. However, a cost-benefit analysis had the potential of erasing doubts about the efficacy of the project. This analysis unveiled the real impact of the program through a comparison of the pros and cons. It must also be noted that no program or project was perfect, as there would definitely be challenges.

As a result, Akurugu et al (2022) highlighted how beneficial the project contributed to the health, education and consumption levels of the poor. In this regard, this cash transfer resulted in enhancing the food security of recipients. In support of the arguments, Laar (2017) opined

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that the program made the poor households have access to basic services and consumption of food items, which under normal circumstances would not have had. This program was in alignment with the capability approach, which sought to empower the poor. In comparing the pros to the cons, it could be stated that it was effective to an extent, but not entirely as it needed improvements in certain areas. However, it must be noted that the Ghana Productive Safety Net (GPSNP) had a component focused on LEAP, hence it became an expansion, with lessons drawn from the previous anti-poverty program. It was also noted that studies on social protection in Ghana centered on LEAP, with little attention paid to post-2015 poverty reduction strategies. In effect, there were limited studies on subsequent programs such as the Ghana Skills and Technology Development Project, the Ghana Social Opportunity Project, with only impact assessments. With regards to the LEAP program, focus was on the impact rather than the historical context that led to the emergence of the intervention. Therefore, the study would examine the transitionary process from GSOP to GPSNP to uncover the continuity of programs and institutions, thereby establishing reactive sequencing. In addition, the LEAP program would take a new turn under a broader project by analyzing it together with other programs such LIPW, PI through an analytical approach using path dependence.

Despite these loopholes, various works provided a solid foundation for the study, as it looked at past social protection policies in Ghana. This would aid me to trace the historical trajectory of the current social safety net project to gain a deeper understanding. In this light, Eshun & Dichaba (2019) provided an assessment of the impact of the Ghana Social Opportunity Project (GSOP) on poverty reduction. The study raised concerns about the feasibility and effectiveness of the project through interaction with the beneficiaries. It was vital to engage them since they were the direct participants of the project, and their experiences would go a long way to bring on the forefront their plights. This could be a great way of drawing the attention of

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policymakers to listen to the concerns of the beneficiaries. Though the program chalked some achievements, the study revealed its ineffectiveness.

In this sense, Eshun & Dichaba(2019) highlighted the fact that the participants were unsatisfied with the meagre amount given them and the delay in payments. It could be inferred that the amount was insufficient for the poor households to cater for their basic needs. So, it could be argued that the project had little impact on poverty reduction. This assessment was in line with the doubts and skepticism poured out by Abane (2017) and Hickey et al (2018). However, it was observed that this assessment paid less attention to the positive aspects of the project, as it had some benefits which were not covered. In this sense, this study was biased in its analysis, creating the impression that the project was an ineffective one. Though some respondents shared some positives such as good targeting and quality assets, these were not enough to demonstrate the good aspect of the project (Eshun & Dichaba, 2019).

To extend the scholars' research, Eshun (2020) provided a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the LIPW program by using a mixed method, which provided a detailed understanding of the issue. Per the findings of the study, it was revealed that the LIPW had increased the income status and food consumption level of beneficiaries, with the money being invested in livestock rearing (Eshun, 2020). This was also substantiated by Namara et al (2018) who stated that the LIPW provided an additional positive outcome. Per their perspectives, the project reduced unemployment by providing job opportunities to the youth to generate income, which also reduced youth migration. Hence, it demonstrated a massive improvement in the lives of the poor people.

However, the focus of the studies was only limited to first, LIPW, and second, its benefits, which narrowed the scope of the study. Furthermore, the study by Namara, Essilfie & Dadzie (2018) was inconsistent with current trends, which highlighted the increasing rate of

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unemployment and high migration to cities, leading to overcrowding and pressure on limited facilities. In essence, the findings could only be limited to poor households covered by social protection, and could not be generalized to the entire population. Nevertheless, it was observed that when it came to assessing the GSOP program, most studies focused on LIPW, thereby failing to integrate the LEAP program into it. Therefore, this created a gap for the research on path dependence of SDG 1 to analyze all the subprojects under GPSNP, without leaving any of them out. Therefore, LIPW, LEAP and PI would be examined critically from a theoretical perspective to determine its contribution to the attainment of SDG 1. This would help integrate the three subprojects to establish the link between them, thereby unraveling their convergence and divergence.

To counter the argument by Eshun & Dichaba (2019), Amofa et al (2023) filled in the gap by elaborating on benefits of the program, which yielded massive improvements in the lives of the beneficiaries. Per their viewpoint, the LEAP program was integrated into the Productive Inclusion program, which enabled beneficiaries to start and expand businesses, hence increasing their income and standard of living. However, this study failed to touch on the impact of the program on the psychological wellbeing of poor households, which was a very vital element in human development. But this was complemented by a balanced assessment of the GSOP, unlike that of Eshun & Dichaba (2019) who focused more on the positive impact.

This balanced assessment was also evident in the world of Agbenyo et al (2017) who argued that the LEAP transformed the lives of the people, with challenges such as meagre payments and so on inherent in the system. This countered the assertions of Hickey et al (2018), Devereux (2002), Debrah (2013) who argued that social protection was ineffective, and did not yield results. Nevertheless, the historical evolution of the program was very limited, as it was not explored through path dependence, which provided a unique gap for the research to

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embark on a path dependent analysis of social protection, particularly GPSNP. This was evident in its objectives, as it was focused on assessing the impact of the program, and not a comprehensive understanding of how the past influenced the current system.

However, Cuesta et al (2021) pinpointed the fact that these social interventions were mostly rural-based, neglecting the urban poor who needed equal attention. This depicted the discriminatory nature of social protection, which deviated from Article 36 of the 1992 constitution which stipulated the creation of social protection for all. However, what was needed was equity in provision of safety nets for the urban and rural poor, as poverty was more rampant in the rural areas. But the equity element was lacking in the social protection implementation process (ibid). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the GPSNP took inspiration from the GSOP to create a social intervention that expanded the earlier one. This showed that the program was of great benefit to the people despite its challenges, if not, it would have been scrapped off. The challenge facing the effectiveness of the program dealt with governance and administrative capacity issues (Laar, 2017). However, addressing these issues would position Ghana to achieve SDG 1.

Nevertheless, it was observed that when it came to social intervention, less attention was paid to the informal sector. Evidence showed that the informal sector played a critical role in offering safety nets to poor households. With reference to the earlier statement, Owusu & Baidoo (2020) argued that the extended family, an informal sector, continued to provide a safety net to the vulnerable in the society; therefore it could not be underestimated. The authors further asserted that informal social intervention could complement the existing formal ones to help reduce abject poverty. However, it must be noted that challenges which existed within the extended family could not be overlooked. For instance, the large population could place a burden on a wealthy member to take care and offer support to other members. This created a

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form of dependency, as some members refused to work since they received support. Though safety nets from the family helped, it was argued that the vulnerable and poor lived with the extended family because they had no choice (Owusu & Baidoo, 2020). Once they were able to find their feet, they left. It should be noted that naturally, individuals sought privacy and peace of mind, which sometimes the extended family did not offer. This would provide a solid background to unraveling the genesis of social protection, which would serve as a foundation to understand the factors leading to the GPSNP.

However, from the viewpoint of Sarpong and Asuming-Brempong (2004), they argued that the extended family, who mostly resided in the rural areas, could offer a safety net to their members who lost their jobs in the urban centres. In this sense, agriculture became the best option for the unemployed, as it absorbed the majority of them by offering them income earning opportunities. Aside from that, the extended family offered cash transfers to support their unemployed members through profits from their agricultural services and remittances received (ibid). Notwithstanding, the sector did not offer a solid safety net to the poor and vulnerable due to its instability. It was noted that the sector created seasonal unemployment during the dry season. This drew attention to the relevance of formal safety nets in keeping the farmers engaged during the dry season through labour intensive public works (Eshun & Dichaba, 2019). Looking at this, it could be seen that both the formal and informal social interventions complemented each other by filling in the gaps. With respect to that, support from family members and social security could help build the resilience of the aged, sick, disabled to withstand shocks.

Inferring from the above arguments, it was realized that social intervention in Ghana needed a broad base consultation of the target group to incorporate their needs into the design of the programs, which was lacking in subsequent ones (Sarfo-Adu, 2021). However, it could be

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argued that poverty reduction strategies in Ghana underwent a path dependent. This could be traced from the national social security in 1965 through to the PAMSCAD in the 1990s where poverty reduction gained prominence, laying the foundation for modern social protection policies. It could also be inferred that during the MDG era, the LEAP Program was introduced in 2008, which was continued by the GSOP. In this SDG era, social safety nets continued, which was seen in GPSNP. Nevertheless, it was realized that no study was conducted to understand the path dependence of anti-poverty strategies in Ghana up to the present time.

Therefore, the study sought to provide new insights in International Development by tracing social protection policies from its historical trajectory to its current state, that is GPSNP, which previous studies failed to integrate. In essence, the study would provide a theoretical perspective of social protection in Ghana by tracing it from the evolution of social Protection to LEAP in 2008 to GSOP and finally to GPNSP. The study would unravel the institutional structures of the current safety net program through path dependence to explain how rules and procedures solidified social interventions to establish a self-reinforcing mechanism. In addition, the LEAP program would be assessed to establish whether it reflected a critical juncture period or not, and increasing returns of the programs would also be looked at critically. At the end, a path dependence would be established, which would fill the loopholes in the existing literature which only focused on its present state. Therefore, the study would provide a unique and comprehensive approach to social policy studies from a historical sociology, which was lacking in most studies. Regardless, the studies on the individual poverty reduction strategies would be used as a secondary source in the tracing process, leading to a better understanding of the current program.

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2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a review of the existing literature on Sustainable Development, with particular emphasis on Goal 1. This section was categorized into four main themes. These themes mentioned above provided in-depth information on the subject matter, which helped in identifying gaps in the literature. However, it was observed that studies were conducted on Sustainable Development Goals and Poverty Reduction, but no study was conducted on the path dependence of SDG 1 using Ghana Productive Safety Net Project. This formed a gap which the research sought to fill.

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CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

EMBEDDING THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF SDG 1 IN PATH DEPENDENCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter offered the theoretical explanation of my study, providing a lens through which explanations and predictions are derived. This theoretical underpinning was in the form of a model of historical institutionalism that sought to trace the outcome of a given situation to its historical roots. Therefore, in this light, a path dependent theory became the appropriate model; an analytical tool used in studying institutions from the perspective of past occurrences. This theoretical lens became the basis upon which the findings of my study was situated on. As a result, this section is categorized into four aspects which are; the Concept of Path Dependent theory, the assumptions, critiques, applicability of the theory to the study, and finally Research questions.

3.2 THE CONCEPT OF PATH DEPENDENT THEORY

The New Institutionalism theories focused on how institutions such as norms, values, principles, standards, procedures affected the political behaviour of both state and non-state actors (Immergut, 1998). Under this theory, there existed three theories namely; Rational Choice institutionalism, Sociological Institutionalism and Historical Institutionalism. Rational Choice institutionalism stated that the selection of choices particularly institutions were premised on

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their preferences with the ultimate goal of maximizing their personal interests. In contrast, Sociological Institutionalism did not focus on the self-maximizing behaviour of political actors, but dealt with how cultural elements such as norms, values and standards in the society shaped the actions and inactions of state actors and influenced their decision+making. In comparing Historical Institutionalism which consisted of the Path Dependent Theory to the two analytical tools mentioned above, historical institutionalism was a much broader aspect of sociological Institutionalism which encompassed norms, values, etc but focused on their dynamic nature, that is how they changed over time to produce static institutions. In this sense, political actors could not be rational due to the critical juncture period where suboptimal choices were made.

Therefore, the Path Dependent Theory became the suitable theory for analyzing the Ghana Productive Net Project to unravel the historical and social factors that led to the institutional development of the project. The Path Dependent model originated from the idea of the economic historian, Paul A. David and systems theorist, Brian W. Arthur, who coined the concept of Path Dependence during the early 1980s in the United States (Bernhard, 2005). In essence, these scholars became the proponents of the theory, which expanded over time. This term was widely associated with increasing returns, which was an economic terminology. With respect to increasing returns, Page (2006) described it as "the more an outcome occurs, the higher the relative return to that outcome, and therefore, the more likely an outcome would occur in the future." Therefore, path dependence reflected the notion of persistence which resulted in changes, which had implications in the future. In essence, if an initial outcome persisted for a long time, it was more likely that it would result in a return that was beneficial, and could be replicated in the future. This concept dwelt on increasing return as the cause of path dependence (Arthur, 1994; Pierson, 2000). From this angle, according to Mahoney (2000), path dependence refers to "tracing a given outcome back to a particular set of historical events, and showing how

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these events are themselves contingent occurrences that cannot be explained on the basis of prior historical conditions.".

History mattered, and outcomes were based on contingent events (Rixen et al, 2016). Contingent events became an important characteristic through which a final outcome was linked to establish a causal mechanism. These causal mechanisms related an initial outcome to its final product, which was determined by the linkage among them. Nevertheless, contingent events were unpredictable; something which was not expected to happen, and deviated from the norm (Mahoney, 2000). In principle, the concept connoted sequences of events that led to an outcome which was less optimal. In essence, history had a bearing on current situations, as it shaped behaviours and actions at the moment. Hence, decisions taken were based on historical context. However, not every situation was referred to as path dependent, even if it dwelt on history. This was because the concept relied on the sequential order of previous events, and any outcome that did not follow the order did not reflect path dependent.(Page, 2006) .

In this regard, the order must be in a chronological manner, such that it was made easy to trace its steps. A series of steps followed one path, leading to an unexpected result. In the selection of one pathway, multiple paths existed, creating different alternatives (Mahoney, 2000). Nevertheless, the path reached a critical juncture where one suboptimal option was selected at the expense of the others, which was more efficient. This critical juncture period led to the adoption of a particular institutional arrangement, which could not be reversed to the initial point where alternative options were available (Mahoney, 2000). As a result, institutions were locked into one particular option, hence leading to path stabilization. However, a counterfactual analysis became relevant at the critical juncture period, as it demonstrated that the selection of alternatives could lead to a different final outcome. But once a particular option was selected, the remaining options became useless. However, this did not mean the chosen path could not

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deviate from its initial outcome. A path departure could sway away the institutional arrangement to a different direction. In this, a long-term gradual change began through partial renewal of institutional arrangements over time, which transformed the final product (Pierson, 2000; Bernhard, 2005).

In the case of path departure, the same institution was retained with changes in its purpose; this meant that the entire structure was not changed (Bernhard, 2005). Rather aspects of the arrangements were either modified or a new one was added which brought on broad different orientations (Thelen, 2003). In essence, the path departure still remained a path dependent since the original steps remained with slight changes, which deviated from the intended outcome. However, in extreme cases, path cessation or switching occurred, which broke the cycle of entrenched processes (Pierson, 2000). Hence, an intervention ended the self-reinforcing of an established institution, opening the door to new ones to be created in place of the old one.

3.3 TYPES OF PATH DEPENDENT THEORY

The theory is categorized into two main types which are; self-reinforcing sequences and reactive sequences. With self-reinforcing sequences, the initial steps towards a particular path influenced other steps in the same direction until it became entrenched (Mahoney, 2000). Once it became entrenched, it was locked-in, such that it became difficult to reverse it. The critical juncture period became the medium through which an option was selected and was locked-in for a long time. As a result, a particular pattern was followed strictly without deviation, into the present and future. In essence, an institutional arrangement became the norm, which influenced later outcomes in the same direction.

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This type of path dependent was resistant to change, as a particular institution persisted without a breakpoint. It became difficult to change a particular norm once it was firmly established, preventing other alternatives from taking over. The established norm became part and parcel of the institution, as it offered increasing returns in the long-run. This reflected path dependence, as the events were contingent situations which were highly unpredictable, but it was stabilized over time through reinforcing mechanisms. These reinforcing mechanisms placed events in a situation where it became acceptable such that a change would be costly. As a result, an existing institutional arrangement became the preferred mode compared to other alternatives, even if it led to suboptimal results.

However, the second type of path dependent followed a different route from the self-reinforcing sequence. The Reactive sequence, according to Mahoney (2006:144) refers to "chains of temporally ordered and causally connected events." In this sense, the steps were interconnected such that the initial one influenced the latter. No step was independent, as a conjuncture was required to converge multiple paths across the same direction. The multiple paths in the sequence led to the final outcome, therefore it was dependent on the initial one (Mahoney, 2000). Each event had a role to play, as it reflected a reaction to the earlier one or a cause to subsequent events. In effect, current results were a reflection of a series of interdependent outcomes that influenced the final product.

Nevertheless, a change in the outcome of initial or subsequent steps affected the final outcome, as it was dependent on previous actions taken in the chain. Hence, a small change in the chain built up on the other ones, which made a difference at the end of the sequence. The changes in the chain could generate positive feedback, which led to an improvement in subsequent actions (Mahoney, 2000). This type of sequencing was different from the self-reinforcing sequence, as actors referred back to the initial outcome, which could be reversed.

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The reversal could occur due to the response given, which could be a positive or negative feedback. This fed into the next event, which led to a much more optimal result. However, the final outcome could be traced to the series of events which took place in a sequential order. A break in the chain led to a path departure, which diverted it from the initial purpose.

3.4 FEATURES OF PATH DEPENDENT THEORY

Mahoney (2000) presented three underlying features characterizing the concept of path dependent. First of all, path dependent analysis involved the study of causal processes that were highly sensitive to events that took place in the early stages of an overall historical sequence; secondly, early historical events were contingent occurrences that could not be explained on the basis of prior events; lastly, once contingent historical events took place, path-dependent sequences were marked by relatively deterministic causal patterns (Mahoney, 2000).

3.5 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE THEORY

The following assumptions underlie the theory.

1. History mattered, and outcomes were based on contingent events..
2. Contingent events had deterministic properties which established causal mechanisms.
3. Contingent events were mostly unexpected, and deviated from an established theoretical norm.
4. Causal mechanisms were established through linking a final outcome to an initial institutional arrangement.

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5. Events flowed through a sequence, embedded in a chain, which determined the final outcome.
6. Certain institutional arrangements were locked-in a self-reinforcing mechanism, making it irreversible.
7. Critical juncture was an important period, which led to an entrenched institutional arrangement.
8. Counterfactual analysis was relevant in the critical juncture.
9. Conjecture brought together multiple pathways towards one direction.

3.6 CRITIQUES OF THE THEORY

1. With reactive sequence, there was no criteria for selecting an event. This made the researcher select any particular event without certainty. As a result, it became difficult to identify the actual starting point of an event. Hence, researchers kept referring back to the chain to figure out the causal processes that led to the outcome. So instead of a progression, there was a regression, which drew them back to the initial outcome. In this sense, it became difficult to trace the outcome to its historical antecedent. In relating it to the limitations, the study selected SDG 1 without looking at the synergy between Goal 1 and other goals such as SDG 3, SDG 4, or SDG 13, which was not exhaustive due to the absence of criteria of selection.
2. Self-enforcing sequence was resistant to change, hence institutions found it difficult to adapt to changing situations. This was one of the problems associated with this type of path dependence, as actors became too used to a particular institutional arrangement for a long

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time. And since these arrangements were locked-in, it became very difficult to make certain adjustments during emergency situations, which changed the whole institutional structure. In relation to the limitations of the study, income threshold was established as a self-reinforcing mechanism, making it the determinant of poverty, hence neglecting multidimensional poverty in reality. It became resistant to change such that the world was finding it difficult adapting to the idea of poverty as multidimensional poverty.

3. Increasing returns were neither necessary nor sufficient for path dependence. The application of increasing returns to the concept of path dependent depicted its limit in explaining social events. This was because the phenomenon selected would not necessarily lead to increasing returns, but it would be termed as a path dependent. Therefore, there was no connection between the two concepts, as they referred to two different situations. In relating it to the study's limitations, the research objectives, specifically the last objective which sought to establish increasing returns of social protection over the years were not sufficient nor necessary for path dependence due to the lack of the use of mixed methods.

4. Analysts found it difficult predicting or explaining an outcome. This was a challenge, which disqualified path dependent as a theory. Theory in essence should have the feature of predictability and explanatory power, which the concept lacked. This was because of the selection of contingent events which were unexpected to happen, with low prediction rate. In relating the critiques to the limitations of the study, the problem of generalizability made it difficult to predict the outcome of Path Dependence of social protection in other jurisdictions, hence limiting the scope of the study to only Ghana. The limited scope

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prevented the study from providing a more comprehensive explanation of path dependence of social safety nets.

3.7 RELEVANCE OF THE THEORY TO THE STUDY

The Path Dependent Theory was the most suitable theory for the study because it helped explore and understand the SDG 1, with a focus on social protection as a poverty reduction tool. The SDG 1 in itself could not be properly understood without reference to its historical context because of the persistence of poverty in the globe. As a result, to address the issue, reference needed to be made to the past to trace its pattern. This helped in understanding the root cause of poverty, past poverty reduction strategies and lessons drawn from it. This was relevant to the formulation and implementation of policies and programs targeted at eliminating poverty in the present, which had implications in the future. In essence, the path dependent theory became the tool for understanding the institutional development of current social protection programs.

Social protection was a constant tool used by many governments to solve the issue of poverty. It has been in existence for so many years, and each program was a build up of the previous one. As a result, the lessons from the past safety nets served as a foundation for the development of an improved and upgraded version. In order to understand the current system, it was important to study it from the past to know what changed, whether the objectives and vision still remained the same, and so on. Nevertheless, every program had an entrenched institutional mechanism that guided its implementation, which took inspiration from the past. This was evident in the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project, as it was a build up of the Ghana Social Opportunity Project. As a result, the GPSNP was a continuation and not a deviation from the previous one.

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Looking at that, the objectives and vision still remained the same with little adjustments to suit modern trends. To add up, the introduction of GSOP was inspired by feedback from the LEAP program introduced in 2008, hence reflecting reactive sequencing. However, when studied closely, the SDG 1 followed an evolutionary path, which required a historical tool to unravel the mystery behind its existence. Also, the GSOP followed a similar pattern from past social protection with slight modifications, which also needed a historical tool to understand the complexities behind its inception. This analytical tool brought to light the hidden truth behind the successes and changes of institutional arrangements.

The theory helped establish the LEAP program as a critical juncture, which served as a turning point for social protection. This analytical tool helped unravel how the LEAP was established as one of the major social protection programs, which persisted till today. In addition, the theory helped bring to light the increasing returns of the programs, which constituted the long term benefits or outcomes of the social protection programs such as the LEAP, LIPW and PI over a long period of time. Furthermore, the theory helped explain the institutions such as the National Social Protection Strategy 2007, Ghana National Household Registry, among others which have entrenched and persisted till date to produce self-reinforcing mechanisms. As a result, it helped trace GPSNP from how social protection started from the traditional social protection system to LEAP in 2008 to GSOP to its current state, GPSNP to establish a path dependence. In essence, the path dependent theory became an analytical tool that helped answer the research problem by tracing the outcome of the current project to its history to explore the subject into details. This helped trace the processes and institutional mechanisms that led to the introduction of SDG 1 and Social Protection in Ghana. In addition, this analytical tool helped understand the changes the project brought in the lives of the poor as a result of persistence of the project to establish increasing returns.

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3.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. **What were the historical processes and events that led to the introduction of SDG l 1 and Social Protection in Ghana?**

2. How did the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project contribute to achieving SDG Goal
3. How did the institutional rules, procedures and standards put in place by the project reflect path dependence?
4. To what extent did the project produce beneficiary outcomes in the society through path dependence?

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided the theoretical lens underpinning this study. A Path Dependent Theory was selected out of the different theories of Historical institutionalism to explain changes in the society with reference to its historical context. In this section, an overview of the theory was provided, with its assumptions and critiques. In addition, the theory was linked to the study to demonstrate its applicability. Based on the theory, research questions were generated to guide the research, which helped seek answers to meet the objectives of the study. Overall, path dependent was most suitable for my study due to its ability to trace the SDGs from its initial outcome to explain changes in the society.

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CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERY BEHIND THE SDG 1 IN GHANA:

THE QUALITATIVE STYLE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discussed the strategies and methods that were adopted to gather data for the purpose of data analysis. The selection of an appropriate methodology and method was based on a philosophical paradigm. The major issues covered under this section included; philosophical paradigm, research design, sampling technique, Data collection methods, ethical considerations, data analysis technique, justification, and limitations of the study.

4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL PARADIGM

Philosophical paradigms were necessary ingredients that guided the selection of an appropriate methodology and methods. According to Creswell (2009), these paradigms had great influence in research, and should be taken into consideration. The research work of individuals showcased their philosophical worldviews, and it helped understand why a researcher chose a particular research design as compared to the others (Creswell, 2009). With regards to the name, Creswell (2009) called it Philosophical worldview meaning "a set of beliefs that guides an action". Crotty(1998) defined the term as Ontology and Epistemology while others called it paradigm. The study would go with the term "Paradigm". Paradigms were often shaped either by the individual's perceptions, or an external influence.

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There existed four main research paradigms: postpositivism, constructivism, participatory and pragmatism. Each of them had its suited research design. The Postpositivist school of thought was in alignment with the use of quantitative methods, which was most suited for the natural sciences. Pragmatism was mostly associated with mixed methods. However, Participatory and Social Constructivism/Interpretivism aligned with the use of Qualitative research design.

However, the study adopted the Interpretivist/Social Constructivist paradigm as the basis for guiding the selection of an appropriate method. This was because this paradigm allowed for subjective opinions of participants on a particular subject matter. As a result, the researcher was able to engage the world, and constructed meanings out of the perspective of others. Its flexible nature aligned with the social science field, and guided the selection of the research topic. This underpinned the selection of qualitative methods and the use of interviews as a data collection tool. This research relied on information provided by the participants on the issue under study (Creswell, 2009). Open-ended questions were posed to enable participants the opportunity to express their opinions on the subject matter while the researcher listened with rapt attention. The historical and cultural context of individuals were taken into consideration since it helped shape their perspectives on matters. Compared with Postpositivism which started with a theory, Constructivism developed a theory inductively from the study (Creswell, 2009).

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Creswell (2009; 3) defined Research Design as "plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis". The philosophical worldview informed the researchers as to which research design to select. There existed three main research designs; qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Quantitative research design sought to establish the relationship between two or more variables, and dealt

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with the use of statistical means for analysis. This was not suited for social science,as social issues could not be quantified. Mixed Methods dealt with the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

However, the nature of the study and adoption of the Interpretivist paradigm underpinned the selection of the qualitative method. According to Creswell (2009; 3), the qualitative method is a "means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". Qualitative research adopted different strategies and methods of data collection, and relied on text and images. It had a unique data analysis method which distinguished it from other research designs. The study adopted the qualitative method because of its unique features which were: researcher as key instrument; data collected in natural settings; meanings derived from interacting with participants; multiple sources of data; interpretative nature, among others. The interpretivist paradigm guided the selection of qualitative research design which was appropriate for the study.

Under the qualitative method, the study adopted a case study research design. This was preferred to the other types of qualitative design – ethnography, phenomenology, narrative research – because it provided an in-depth understanding of a social issue through the examination of a single case or few cases. Gerring (2007; 20) defines case study as the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)". Case study research sought to explore new issues or issues of interest to provide detailed information. However, its problem lay in its representativeness; it lacked the ability to generalize issues to a larger population.

Case study was meant to focus on smaller samples to examine real life issues, and not make generalisations to a wider population (Yin, 2003). Despite this setback, case study research was appropriate since it allowed for the use of multiple sources of data collection to arrive at

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findings, hence enhancing flexibility. Based on this, the study focused on an in-depth understanding of the path dependence of SDG Goal 1 by using Ghana Productive Safety Net Project as a case study.

4.4 RESEARCH POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A Research Population was an entire set of cases from which a sample was drawn (Taherdoost, 2016). The research population of the study consisted of academics, experts, ministries, Civil Society Organizations, Development partners, government agencies and beneficiaries. From this research population, a sample was drawn out of it. A sample size of 15 was reached to provide information about the issue. This was because its saturation point was reached with no additional information. In addition, this number was selected to provide varied and in-depth perspectives on the subject matter, thereby enhancing the collection of rich and quality data. This included social protection expert from the Centre for Social Policy Studies, ISSER and LECIAD in the University of Ghana, the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, experts from World Bank and United Nations in Ghana, Civil Society Organizations and beneficiaries.

Sampling technique provided the means by which an inference was made from the population (Taherdoost, 2016). As a result, the study adopted a non-probability sampling method. This was because it was in alignment with the qualitative method and case study research. Under this sampling technique, both Purposive sampling and Snowball sampling technique were adopted for the study. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to deliberately select individuals who can provide important information on the issue that could not be obtained using other techniques (Maxwell, 1996). Based on this, participants provided knowledge on an issue based on their expertise and experience. This explained why academics, experts, and beneficiaries were

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included in the sample to provide relevant information. To complement the Purposive sampling, Snowball sampling technique was also added to help locate beneficiaries and experts. This was due to the difficulty in identifying such respondents for the study.

4.5 SOURCES AND TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was an essential part of the research process which enabled the researcher to derive findings to ascertain validity and reliability (Alshenqeeti1, 2014). As a result, the kind of method selected could either bring success or errors. However, to minimize errors, it was very necessary to choose an appropriate method that fitted the research objectives. Researchers adopted various methods to gather data. These were categorized into two sources of information; primary and secondary sources of data.

The secondary sources of data were collected from journal articles, reports, publications, books, review articles, official documents, working papers. These materials were gathered from Balme library database (Sage Journals, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Academic Journal & Search All Database), JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development official website, and World Bank official website.

For primary data collection, the study adopted interviews to collect data. Interviews were most suited for qualitative studies. This chosen method was in line with the constructivist paradigm which gave room for the researcher to engage the world, and make meanings out of interactions. It allowed researchers to gather in-depth information on the beliefs, views and opinions of the respondents without imposing any predetermined set of answers as evident in questionnaires

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(Alshenqeeti1, 2014). This allowed respondents to freely express their thoughts and feelings ((Berg, 2007). Also, it enabled the researcher to seek for complete and clear answers, and probe more for better understanding. Participants could ask for more clarity of questions if they lacked understanding. This was lacking in questionnaires as participants were not able to ask for clarity, hence leaving some questions unanswered. The researcher was able to read the emotions and body language of the participants. Meanings and interpretations were derived from the conversation during the interview session.

There existed different types of interviews. However, the research adopted a semi-structured interview to collect data on the topic. This was because it provided direction to the interview, which prevented deviation from the topic. Interview questions were designed based on the research questions which gave focus to the study. As a result, an interview guide containing themes and questions was used to enhance the flow of the interaction (Harell & Bradley, 2009). Spaces were provided between the questions in the interview guide to record responses. The researcher had control over the interaction, compared to unstructured interviews. Moreover, the researcher had the opportunity to use his discretion to determine the manner in which the questions would be asked (Harell & Bradley, 2009). However, he or she followed a standard set of questions but probes were introduced for more clarity (Harell & Bradley, 2009). Based on the use of case study research, this type of interview allowed for the collection of detailed information on the subject matter. This ensured that complete, clear and concise answers were provided. The answers provided were cross-checked to ensure all areas in the guide were covered (ibid).

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However, the semi-structured interview faced issues with validity and reliability. The reliability of findings was questionable as researchers' bias had great influence over the study. Aside from this, this method was time consuming and difficult to generalize. Nevertheless, the issue of

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validity and reliability was resolved by reducing bias, checking accuracy and credibility of findings (Creswell, 2009). This was achieved by cross checking transcripts to avoid mistakes, cross checking codes, using peer debriefing, using an auditor, triangulation, among others (ibid).

4.6 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involved making sense out of textual and image data in order to make interpretations (Creswell, 2009). This process involved summarizing and organizing the data collected into simple, clear and understandable information for the consumption of readers. As a result, large sets of data were reduced to smaller sets so that meaning could be derived out of it. Researchers adopted different kinds of qualitative data analysis to help analyze the data.

The study adopted thematic analysis as a method of analyzing the interview data gathered from the field. This method was also known as interpretative thematic analysis. Liamputtong (2009; 79) defined thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes within the data". This mode of analysis allowed the researcher to search across the data to identify similar and contrasting patterns relevant to the study. Also, It enabled researchers to move back and forth the interview data to ascertain the categories and themes generated (ibid). Before the data was analyzed, the recorded information was transcribed verbatim into text. This was to enable the generation of themes from the text.

The text was read carefully and repeatedly to identify codes and themes for the study. This process helped the researcher to familiarize himself with the text to understand and make sense out of the data. In doing so, significant segments of the texts were highlighted on word documents and phrases, and sentences were assigned to them. Open coding was adopted to establish codes and themes which were not pre-determined but came directly from the

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transcripts. Initial codes were generated from reading the text. The codes were scrutinized to identify whether there were similar codes or not. The similar codes were categorized into one code to avoid repetitions. Then, themes were crafted for each code; words and phrases were placed under them. Based on the themes derived, the findings of the study were recorded under its appropriate theme, supported by quotes from interview data and empirical literature review. Discussions were made based on the findings of the study to situate the study within the existing literature. Based on that, conclusions and recommendations were made.This process allowed room for the researcher to crosscheck if the themes were not consistent with the codes generated from the data set (Liamputtong, 2009). This process made it easier for interpretation of the data. However, the data was scrutinized to avoid misinterpretation as well as reduce bias. The data analysis process was done manually to help immerse the researcher in the data to better derive meanings out of the texts compared to computer software which lacks the functionality.

4.7 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

The study is justified under the following scenarios. First of all, it was easier to obtain access to a wide range of information on Sustainable Development. This made it simple to identify gaps in the research area as well as formulate a good research problem. Secondly, poverty reduction remained the number one priority of the international community. This was because SDG 1 (Poverty reduction) had a great effect on the other SDGs. Thirdly, poverty reflected the inability of people to meet the $1.25 poverty threshold daily, hence struggling to cater for their basic needs. The third scenario was that the chosen case study (Ghana Productive Safety Net Project), a World Bank sponsored project, best fitted the attainment of SDG 1. Lastly, the SDGs, particularly Goal 1 and the project followed a path dependence, which was traced from its history to understand present situations.

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4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethics in research were very important, and should not be taken for granted. The institutions, agencies, and ministries were sent letters weeks before the start of the data collection process to seek their consent and approval to participate in the interview. Also, academics and experts were also contacted to seek their consent for partaking in the study. The interview guide was made available to the participants for their perusal. In addition, the aims and objectives of the study were clearly explained to the participants. The research assured them of the confidentiality of their responses, and that sensitive information would be treated with much caution. However, the targeted respondents were at liberty to decide not to give out some sensitive information, and their decision would duly be respected. In addition, they had the right to opt out of the study at any time if they so wished.

4.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations were bound to happen, so preparations were made to cater for the challenges that occurred during the research. The major challenge associated with the study was its inability to generalize the findings to similar issues and other geographical locations. Secondly, the poverty threshold of $1.25 or $1.90 placed a limitation on broadening the scope of the research to include individuals facing multidimensional poverty. As a result, the study was limited to income poverty, that was those who fell below the threshold. Thirdly, time constraints placed a limit on the scope of the research to study the synergies and trade-offs between the SDG Goal 1 and other SDGs such as Climate change, Food Security, Education and so on. Lastly, the research problem statement and research objectives prevented the study from adopting a mixed method, which had the benefit of providing a much more deep understanding of the situation.

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In mitigating the challenge of generalization, the findings of the study were rooted deeply in the theoretical foundation of path dependence which enabled the study to be related to other jurisdictions pursuing social protection. Despite the fact that the income threshold of $1.90 was used as a determinant of poverty, the study went beyond that to link how availability of jobs affect quality healthcare, education, and hunger, as evident in the linkage of the LEAP program to the NHIS. Therefore, the study ended up revealing poverty and poverty reduction as multidimensional. In addition, with reference to the synergy between the SDG 1 and other SDGs, these limitations were handled by tracing the GPSNP from its historical roots, starting from the traditional social protection system to its current state, which provided much more comprehensive findings. This broadened the scope of the study, which mitigated the problem. Also, the synergy and tradeoffs between SDG 1 and other SDGs were discussed in the literature review section. To solve the issue of the absence of the use of mixed methods, the study adopted triangulation, which used multiple sources of data such as reports, publications, journal articles, policy documents, 1992 constitution and interviews to provide a deeper insight on the issue. This was made possible due to the research problem and research objectives.

4.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology and methods adopted in the study. This enabled smooth and easy collection and analysis of data though some challenges were encountered. Relevant issues that were covered were Philosophical paradigms which set the foundation for the selection of an appropriate method; Research Population, Sample and Sampling Technique; Research Design. In addition, other areas such as method of data

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collection, framework for data analysis, justification for the study, ethical consideration and limitations of the study were discussed.

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CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

THE SUSTAINABLE NATURE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION AS AN INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN GHANA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter unravelled the mystery behind social protection in Ghana. Qualitative data analysis involved making meanings and inferences from data gathered through interview transcripts and secondary sources (Creswell, 2009). As a result, data gathered from the field were presented and discussed within the existing literature to draw inferences for the study. In this regard, the results of the study were organized into five main themes to understand the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project and its relation with SDG 1 through path dependence. The findings of the study are categorized into the following themes discussed below:

1. Historical Trajectory of SDG 1 and Social Protection
2. The Role GPSNP Plays in Poverty Reduction
3. Analysis of GPSNP Through Path Dependence
4. Increasing Returns of Social Protection Over the Years
5. Future implications of social protection in Ghana

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5.2 HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF SDG 1 AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The study investigated the historical processes and events that led to the introduction of the SDG 1 and social protection in Ghana. In its findings, the study discovered that the SDG 1 was a build up of the MDG 1, reflecting a reactive sequential analysis. However, the Copenhagen summit paved the way for the MDG 1 to be actualized, which was reflected in national development plans and policies towards the attainment of the poverty reduction goal. This revealed the historical trajectory of poverty reduction within the global community and local context, showcasing the commitment of the International community to help developing countries attain the SDG 1.

5.2.1 From MDG 1 to SDG 1: A Reactive Sequential Analysis

The transition from MDG 1 to SDG 1 served as a continuation of the poverty reduction, with the objective of reducing the proportion of people who lived on less than $1.90 per day (United Nations, 2023). However, this remarkable transformation did not just occur in isolation, but it was orchestrated by several factors, which prompted the decision to introduce the SDG 1. This was due to gross lapses in the implementation of the MDGs, which led to convening of the Rio+20 summit to discuss the way forward with regard to the reduction of poverty and other goals (Fukuda-Parr, 2016; Anuoluwapo & Dominique, 2021). In an interview with a Social Protection expert, he revealed a fascinating insight about the movement from MDG 1 to SDG 1. This was evident in the quote below which stated that:

> "*The SDG 1 came in 2016 after the MDGs. And the MDG 1 was supposed to end extreme po*verty and also halve poverty in all its forms by 2015. Apparently, a lot of countries were not able to attain some of the targets of the Goal" (Field Notes, 2025).

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This clearly showed that the inability to attain MDG 1 was heavily hinged on flaws in the implementation of the global development agenda and lack of political will, contributing to its failure. This opinion was substantiated by an argument made by a renowned scholar, Fukuda-Parr (2016), to support the statement made above on the challenges. According to the scholar, the MDG 1 provided a narrow version of the targets under the Goal, hence limiting the scope of MDG 1 to just two targets due to the addition of hunger goals (Fukuda-Parr, 2016)). In the same vein, the same scholar opined that the MDG 1 failed to trace the root cause of poverty in order to understand the issue to propose appropriate measures and strategies to curb this global issue (ibid). To further support the quotation made above, Anuoluwapo & Dominique (2021) stated that lack of political will contributed to failure to achieve the poverty reduction goal by 2015. In addition to the above argument, another social protection expert re-echoed the perspective shared above. From his perspective:

> *"If the MDGs had reduced poverty drastically, the SDGs would not have had it as Goal 1 again. But because we couldn't achieve it in the first place in the first global agenda, that is why they were still including ii" jField Notes, 2025).*

This revealed that the SDG 1 was introduced due to loopholes evident in the MDGs, which served as a feedback mechanism for the poverty reduction goal under the Agenda 2030. This clearly reflected reactive sequencing, as explained by Mahoney (2006), that the previous step led to the current step to produce an institutional arrangement. As a result, the previous goal informed the current goal to produce the target under SDG 1. With that being said, the narrow targets under MDG 1 which influenced the failure of Goal 1 motivated the international community to separate food security from poverty reduction to create space for more comprehensive targets (Fukuda-Parr, 2016; United Nations, 2023). In essence, the two targets, which is reducing income poverty and achieving full employment and decent work were transitioned to 7 targets, with social protection for the poor and building resilience of the poor

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and other ones being added (United Nations, 2023). The SDG 1 explicitly stated appropriate strategies to curb the issue through social protection systems, which was not included in the MDG 1. In addition, Gold & Connelly (2006) contributed to the argument by asserting that the SDG 1 was introduced to fill the gap created in the MDG 1. This reflected path dependence, as the current global agenda was dependent on the outcome of the previous agenda, which constituted a reactive sequential analysis (Mahoney, 2000).

Contrary to the above argument, a social protection expert stated that the complex nature of human welfare problems is the reason behind the inclusion of poverty reduction in the SDGs (Field Interview, 2025). This was also substantiated by a social assistance specialist who argued that:

> *"And so the main goal was Goal 1, which is about poverty. But they also had other Goals that eventually if you meet all those goals, it will reflect in poverty reduction' (Field Notes, 2025).*

This implied that poverty reduction became one of the most important goals and a priority in the development agenda due to its connection with other goals such as food security, proper healthcare, climate change and so on (Maoloni, 2024; World Bank, 2020; Prince et al, 2023). In support of the argument made by the Social Protection expert, Prince et al (2023) argued that poverty became a persistent issue facing the world, which influenced the continuation of the global development agenda. Its persistent nature and continuation in the development discourse showcased a self-reinforcing mechanism, where poverty reduction was established as an entrenched strategy, reflecting path dependence (Mahoney, 2000).

Furthermore, another strand of argument gave unique reasons for the transition from MDG 1 to SDG 1. A motivating factor for the continuation of poverty reduction was deeply rooted in the

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success stories chalked by some countries which gave hope for a better future. The Ghanaian case was an exemplary case which depicted the achievement made. This was evident in the argument of a social protection expert who stated that:

> *"By the year 2015, our poverty incidence had reduced all the way from 51.7 percent to 24.2 percent" Field Notes, 2025).*

The argument of Haliscelik & Soyras (2019) was consistent with the opinion above, as they clearly articulated that some countries were successful in achieving the MDG 1. In further solidifying their arguments, empirical evidence was included to substantiate the information provided. For instance, the scholars postulated that Sweden was able to achieve 89.27 percent of the MDGs, which clearly showed the Goal on Poverty was achieved in relation with Goals, which were in line with the works of Maoloni (2024) & Prince et al (2023). Larionova (2020) added that poverty declined by more than 50 percent. This suggested that the MDG 1 was achieved, with some countries lagging behind. It even showcased that the goal on poverty reduction was attainable, with commitments from National governments. The progress made served as a feedback loop, which informed the decision of the SDG 1.

Inferring from above, the SDG 1 was a focused and comprehensive vision, compared to the MDG 1, with much broader targets (Field Interview, 2025). This implied that poverty reduction was transformed from income poverty reduction to multidimensional poverty reduction, hence reflecting the massive improvements in the global development agenda. Lessons were drawn from the MDGs, which helped reshape the SDG 1. As a result, the SDG 1 was a build-up of the previous goal to establish a much more improved version. This was substantiated by Griggs et al (2014) who affirmed that the current poverty reduction goal is a revised and expanded version of MDG 1. The SDGs prioritized social protection as the main institutional mechanism to achieve the target of Goal 1. In essence, the current agenda was revised based on feedback from

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the previous agenda. This shows how a particular development program was reliant on past programmes to achieve its objectives.

5.2.2 Evolution of Social Protection

The study revealed that social protection was a novel poverty reduction, but had its roots from historical antecedents. Therefore, the current social safety net was introduced to properly streamline the inclusion of the poor onto a well coordinated program. However, the traditional cash transfer system still existed, but it was ineffective. Nevertheless, the formal social protection was engineered by the Copenhagen summit. This provided an understatement of the genesis of social protection to decode its mystery.

5.2.2.1 Global Context

The shift from economic growth and environmental to poverty reduction was based on the urgent need to prioritize this social pillar (Atapattu, 2018). This was due to persistence of the issue of poverty, which became relevant to address. The Copenhagen Summit served as an institutional arrangement by birthing out the Copenhagen Declaration to solidify the move towards placing this global problem first on the global development agenda (Field Interview, 2025; Atapattu, 2018). This argument is supported by Koehler (2017) who agreed that the 1995 summit was a turning point in the history of development, which enabled human development to be prioritized. This bold move placed human welfare at the centre of development to promote and enhance the wellbeing of individuals. This was seen in the viewpoint of a social protection expert who stated that:

> *"They made commitments to ensure that human beings are at the centre of growth and development because to look for every country, for country, every state, for every society to grow, it required humans" (Field Notes, 2025)*

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This quote further substantiated and proved that the 1995 summit was a relevant conference that brought drastic changes to the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This was evident in the opinion of a social protection expert who affirmed that:

> *"It brought about a lot of changes with the global stage as far as poverty reduction is concerned" (Field Notes, 2025)*

This was substantiated by Langmore (2000) who argued that the 1995 social summit made commitments to eradicate poverty through international and national governments. The goal was to enhance the capability of the poor to contribute to development through employment and entrepreneurial ventures. This was consistent with Sen (2000) who stated that the provision of social opportunities went a long way to enhance the wellbeing of people, therefore lifting them out of poverty. This therefore formed the basis for the introduction of social protection among states to achieve these objectives. As a social protection specialist opined:

> *"The 1995 Copenhagen Declaration really helped streamline or strengthen social protection efforts or social development agenda to be able to ensure that your religious affiliation, your tribe, your race, your disability, whoever, should not be the basis for you to be excluded in the national growth" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This showed that the conference inspired the adoption of social safety nets in different countries to cover the poor and uplift them out of poverty. This was evident in the works of Corell (2908) and Langmore (2000) who stated that commitments were made for national policies to be designed to reduce poverty within the shortest possible time. In essence, the introduction of the LEAP programme, for instance, was highly influenced by the global development agenda. This argument was supported by Agbenyo et al (2017) who asserted that providing social protection programs sought to achieve the objectives of the Copenhagen Declaration, which asserted that providing cash transfers to beneficiaries supported them to cater for their basic needs such as food, clothing, and so on. Also, this implied that the selection of beneficiaries should be fair and

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equal irrespective of gender, race, religion and so on. This same summit was what led to the inclusion of social protection systems in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The social protection target under SDG 1 stated that "states should implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable" (United Nations, 2023; Küfeoğlu, 2022).

In essence, national development plans and national social protection policy were designed in alignment with target 1.3 which served as guiding principle in ensuring a robust system that covered the poor and built their resilience against shocks (National Social Protection Policy, 2015). This meant that national development plans were dependent on the changes in the international system, which shaped policies. If there was a shift from the targets to different ones with changes, definitely the policies would change, reflecting reactive sequencing.

Inferring from above, the Copenhagen summit did not make any drastic changes to international development, but made a feasible contribution that changed the focus of global policies, which was supported by Koehler (2017). In doing so, poverty reduction which was neglected in previous agendas was brought to the table for negotiations, which led to the conclusion of placing poverty reduction ahead of economic and environmental sustainability (Atapaatu, 2018). In essence, the conference, per their discussions, designed a Copenhagen Declaration to serve as a guiding principle towards eradicating poverty, which the interview revealed and supported by Atapattu (2018). This was contained in the commitments in the Declaration such as designing internal and national policies to eradicate poverty, among others, which were the basis for targets under MDG 1 and SDG 1. In essence, it was what made Poverty reduction the number goal under the MDGs and SGs, which reflected its prioritization. However, the MDG did not state explicitly how to reduce poverty. But SDG 1 was representative of the commitments contained in the Declaration. In addition, it brought social protection to the

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forefront of development discourse by making it the most preferred poverty reduction strategy. This was supported by Rassanjani et al (2019) who argued that social protection was the best and feasible solution to addressing poverty as compared to economic growth. The study showed that the institutional processes through the Copenhagen summit at the global stage that led to the evolution of social protection.

5.2.2.2 Local Context

The Traditional social protection system had been in existence for a long time, which was evident in the colonial system, who provided assistance to the people (Field Interview, 2025 Lubinga et al, 2025). In contrast, from the viewpoint of Parel (2018), the colonial powers established a social welfare system to support the public. This demonstrated the historical support mechanism that helped people to get access to the basic necessities of life, which preceded post-independence formal social protection. This was backed by Lambin & Muangi (2025) who opined that the British colonial rule provided social assistance to those employed under their administration. It must be noted that the post-independence system introduced a more robust social protection that covered the poor, which was distinct from the colonial era (Maoloni, 2024). However, this form of social protection was discriminatory, as it only focused on workers, thereby neglecting the poor.

As a result, the traditional social protection system was a significant support mechanism that helped the poor, old age, needy, orphan to have access to some form of assistance. This argument was affirmed by Ruparanganda et al (2018) who argued that the chief gathered support in cash or kind such as food, which is reserved and given to those in distress such as the orphan, needy, disabled and elderly. This depicted that the traditional social protection system was in existence long before the colonial powers invaded Africa. This institutional approach was based on the communitarian system and the Ubuntu Philosophy which was hinged on core values and

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principles that bring about togetherness, cooperation, empathy, understanding and so on, which united society (Ruparanganda et al, 2018). According to an interview with a social worker, he stated that "*family members and the traditional society were supportive of each other, providing support where necessary to those in need and facing difficulties in life" (Field Interview, 2025).* Children who lost their parents were highly provided with assistance to continue their education, as evident in an interview with a well known Civil Society Organization that engaged Government on the SDGs, who opined that:

> *"We had an issue of when your father dies, somebody will take care, even when you are hungry, family members are there. People will support you. Even people contributed to taking others to school. So it has been with us for a very long time" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This signified that family members were obliged to take on the responsibility of a parent in the lives of the children when their father or mother died, especially when they were young. The argument made above was supported by Ruparanganda et al (2018) who agreed with the above option, stating that the death of a parent required someone to be selected to take over to provide social, economic and emotional needs of the children left over. A senior protection specialist stated that "*they are not to be left alone to fend for themselves, but to be catered for, by providing them with food, shelter, clothing, education among others" (Field Interview, 2025)*. In essence, Atwine & Raniga (2022) agreed with the statement by stating that this support mechanism served as solid grounds for providing emotional, psychological, physical and financial support to children. However, If not done, they tended to sell on the streets which led to accidents; they engaged in prostitution which led to either pregnancy or HIV)AIDs. This was affirmed by Oduro (2010) who argued that providing social assistance to children by either paying their fees or allowing them stay with another family member was a promotive measure. This signified this strategy to prevent children from going wayward such as engaging in prostitution; giving them

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proper training; imparting the values of courtesy in them; and promoting their wellbeing such as taking them to school, catering for them (Oduro, 2010).

From another angle, a senior social protection expert provided a similar opinion on the support given to children who lose their parents. This was seen in his arguments stated below. According to him:

> *"Children were the responsibility of the whole community, to the extent that when a child was going to school and the parents could not afford the fees, the whole community could contribute and support". (Field Notes,*

This argument was substantiated by Ruparanganda et al (2018) who argued that the community was obliged to support members who were facing financial challenges or distress, in which traditional and religious beliefs played a critical role. This implied that there were certain customs and traditions in the society that normalized helping people, with the notion of guilty conscience and sanctions if one did otherwise (ibid). In essence, communication support systems played a critical role by providing a social welfare system to enhance the wellbeing of the society (Field Interview, 2025). In support of this argument, Oduro (2010) opined that the societal system served as a platform for preventing risks associated with distress and poverty, hence promoting the wellbeing of individuals and sustaining their livelihoods.

However, the study revealed that most people relied on community support groups from friends, neighbours for support, of which children were beneficiaries (Ayadi et al, 2023). In essence, children benefited from a wide range of basic needs such as paying their fees through contributions from members of the community. This argument was substantiated by Patel (2018) who asserted that the traditional social protection system provided cash transfers to the poor comprising children to enable them to have access to certain necessities of life such as education.

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They also contributed to buy textbooks, computers in the case of University students, stationary needed for academics and so on. This support scheme provided an avenue for the children to be literate, gain relevant knowledge and skills to contribute their quota to society.

Though the traditional welfare support system existed, it had a flaw, pertaining to its unsustainable nature. This was due to lack of a streamlined social protection strategy to guide its operation, thereby prompting the need to introduce a formal social protection (Field Interview, 2025). This was affirmed by Suubi et al (2022) who argued that there were no institutional arrangements for informal social protection such as social protection strategy and policies to streamline this support system. Lubinga et al (2025) added to the argument by stating that the impact of the informal support system was undocumented with issues of lack of planning and monitoring mechanism to track progress and identify gaps to address them. In essence, the formal social protection system came to fill in the gap by streamlining these social interventions in order to properly regulate and coordinate them to enhance wellbeing (Field Interview, 2025). Institutional structures such as the 1992 constitution served as a solid foundation for strengthening social protection systems (Centre for Social Policy Studies, 2024).

In an interview with a Civil Society Organization that engaged the government on the SDGs, he revealed that *"social protection took inspiration from the State Directive Principle of the constitution" (Field Interview, 2025).* In the same vein, another senior protection expert added that:

> *"The constitution has enshrined that every government put in place measures to protect the vulnerable and promote their wellbeing through safety nets" (Field Interview, 2025).*

The argument was supported by Kaltenbron et al (2017) who argued that the constitution provided a right based approach which formalized the rights of the poor to access social services

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as well as served as legal guideline for the design and execution of social protection programs. This was further substantiated by Article 36 section 1 of the 1992 constitution which stated that;

> *"The State shall take all necessary action to ensure that the national economy is managed in such a manner as to maximize the rate of economic development and to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every person in Ghana and to provide adequate means of livelihood and suitable employment and public assistance to the needy" (Article 36, 1992 Constitution).*

The 1992 constitution institutionalized the National Social Protection Strategy 2007 which brought about the LEAP program (National Social Protection Strategy, 2007). Based on this, every design of social intervention was in alignment with Article 36 of the 1992 constitution. This therefore bonded every government, whether NPP or NDC, to adopt social protection programs to uplift them out of poverty to become independent and live on more than $1.90 a day (United Nations, 2023).

5.3 THE ROLE GPSNP PLAYS IN POVERTY REDUCTION

The study revealed that the GPSNP played a great role in attaining the SDG 1 through its social intervention programs such as the LEAP program, LIPW and Productive Inclusion. This helped promote sustainable livelihoods. Individuals became self-sufficient and were able to cater for their basic needs, which they could not previously. The complementary services such as the alignment of LEAP to the NHIS and Capitation helped promote educational and healthcare needs, demonstrating the multidimensional nature of poverty reduction strategies. In addition, the connecting LEAP with Productive Inclusion sought to provide beneficiaries with sufficient finances, hence helping them come out of poverty by living on more than $1.90 a day. The study

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provided an interesting insight on the subject of GPSNP playing a critical role in poverty reduction.

5.3.1 Alignment of GPSNP To SDG 1

The study revealed that the GPSNP provided the platform to promote the wellbeing of the individual through various social interventions. Each of them played a role in achieving the SDG 1. This was achieved through cash transfers, manual labour and skills trading to enhance the productivity of the poor. This stimulated their confidence to contribute their quota to development. Nevertheless, each of the objectives of the individual components were derived from a general objective, which was based on enhancing the productivity of the poor through a robust social protection system.

5.3.1.1 General Objectives

The study revealed that the GPSNP had a broader objective under which each of the individual projects fell under. The General Objective was stated clearly in the policy document, which explicitly outlined the direction of the project, which was in alignment with SDG 1 (Field Interview, 2025). Kaltenbron et al (2017) and Khan (2022) justified this argument, with the reason that policy frameworks served the purpose of crafting overarching objectives that guided the operationalization of the project and program. Therefore, evident in the policy document of the GPSNP, the main objective was:

> *"To support the Government to expand and enhance social safety nets that improve the incomes and productivity of the poor" (World Bank, 2020: 8).*

In essence, the idea was to solidify social interventions by introducing massive improvements in the targeting process, payment systems, monitoring and evaluation, among others, with the

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goal of coordinating the program effectively to achieve its objectives. In an interview with a social protection expert from the World Bank, she added that:

> *"The objective was to support the Government of Ghana to strengthen the safety net System that improves the productivity of the extreme poor in Ghana" (Field Notes, 2025).*

With this, the end goal was to eradicate poverty reduction through cash transfers. This was substantiated by Agbenyo et al (2017) who affirmed that the implementation of safety nets were a strategic move to help achieve the global goal on reducing poverty through state interventions. This was also substantiated by the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (2022) who elaborated that the project sought to enhance social protection systems to build the capacity of the poor as well as expand access to safety nets to help reduce the proportion of people living under $1.90. This was consistent with the argument made by Ayadi et al (2023) who opined that social protection provided a critical avenue that opened access to everyone to enhance their wellbeing. Another social protection further elaborated on the issue by articulating that:

> *"Now when you look at the objectives for the project, it is highlighting systems for improving productivity. So if you are improving their productivity, then you are moving towards eliminating poverty because then they become more resourceful. They become self-dependent because you are enhancing their productivity, they get more income And eventually they don't live on $1.25 a day; they can do more than that so that they are no longer poor" (Field Notes, 2025).*

The above was complemented by the study carried by Centre for Social Policy Studies (2924) which revealed that:

> *"GPSNP aims to reduce poverty by 50 percent through increased and improved social assistance for poor and vulnerable Ghanaians; enhance employment opportunities Through the promotion of productive inclusion and decent work to sustain families and communities; and increase access to social security and social insurance for all Ghanaians" (Centre for Social Policy Studies, 2024: 1).*

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This implied that the social protection was an institutional arrangement to support them in the short-term till they became self-reliant and confident. The idea was to create space for other vulnerable groups to join the program to benefit from the packages such as cash transfers (Field Interview; Adato et al, 2004). Enhancing their productivity through Labour Intensive Public Works would enable them gain relevant skills and employment opportunities to generate income for their upkeep (Eshun & Dichaba, 2019; Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development, 2022).

This signified that poverty was measured based on the income poverty index, which classified a poor person as someone who lived below $1.90 per day (United Nations, 2023). This depicted a narrow version of poverty, only focusing on the extreme poor leaving behind the poor and non-poor (Field Interview, 2025). Nevertheless, the introduction of social protection served the purpose of the seven (7) targets of SDG 1. For instance, the GPSNP was designed to meet main target 1.1, which was to reduce poverty, by providing them with employment opportunities to enhance their productivity (Eshun & Dichaba 2019; United Nations, 2923). Also, GPSNP through its components implemented various programs to eradicate poverty, hence aligning with Target 1.3. In essence, the GPSNP aligned with the SDG Goal of No Poverty. The social safety nets would not only eradicate poverty but also build their resilience to withstand shocks, which was very vital. In essence, social protection became an effective mechanism to attain poverty through its interventions targeted at the extreme poor (Field Interview, 2025; Ayadi et al, 2023).

Inferring from above, the study revealed that the best way to enhance the wellbeing of the poor was to enable them to have access to social services such as jobs, entrepreneurship so that they could generate income for food and household consumption. In essence, it went a long way to reduce poverty by half, as stated in the SDG 1. This was consistent with the argument of Devereux (2002) who argued that social safety net programs played a critical role in reducing

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extreme poverty overtime through investment in income generating activities, productive assets, social networks and education. Nevertheless, this remained the overarching objective of every social intervention targeted at the poor from government to government without any changes. In essence, it became static, which was binding on all governments to comply by making available safety nets for the poor, as enshrined in the 1992 constitution.

5.3.1.2 The LEAP Program

The LEAP program was one of the well known social protection programs in Ghana because it existed for a long time. Successive governments continued with the implementation of the program because of its statutory order, that was the 1992 constitution and the NSPS 2007 (Debrah, 2013). In essence, it persisted for a long time, reflecting path dependence. Nevertheless, the LEAP program contributed to poverty reduction and played a critical role in enhancing social development. This was seen in the viewpoint of a Senior Staff at the LEAP program, he opined that:

> *"We give them cash, transfer money, supply money to them to be able to smoothen their consumption and also help them to put their children in school" (Field Notes, 2025).*

Cash transfers was a medium to support the poor, mostly given to the aged, orphans, disabled, lactating mother's, pregnant women to enhance their wellbeing (Field Interview, 2025; Niyuni, 2016). This category of people were specifically selected due to their inability to work to fend for themselves, so this was a form of support to enable them to have the means to purchase certain basic necessities. This quote above and arguments were supported by Fuseini et al (2019) who agreed that the LEAP was a social intervention that made available in-kind transfers to the poor and vulnerable to sustain their livelihoods. In essence, this aligned with the SDG Target 1.3 which stated that governments should provide social protection for the poor (United Nations, 2023). In addition, a social protection expert from UNICEF added her voice to the discussion. She articulated that:

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> *"One way of reducing poverty or the simplest way of reducing poverty is to give money to the poor and vulnerable who have no means of productivity" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This argument was substantiated by Sulenana et al (2019) who affirmed that cash transfers played the role of reducing poverty through making available non-contributory money to the poor and vulnerable, which went a long way to enhance their wellbeing as well as build their resilience. In this sense, it aligned with both the targets of MDG 1 and SDG 1, which served as a mechanism to promote economic inclusion and social development.

5.3.1.3 Labour Intensive Public Works

The study revealed an interesting dynamic, which dealt with the provision of employment opportunities to the poor to generate a reasonable amount of money to cater for their needs (Eshun & Dichaba, 2019). This was evident in an interview a staff at the Safety Net Office who argued that:

> *"The aim is for them to gain daily wages through the work they do. So, instead of using machines and equipment to do road construction, to do small hedge dams, to do plantations, we have a labour component where people who have no jobs are employed. This is aimed at alleviating poverty so that nobody will live without a source of income to feed" (Field Note, 2025).*

In essence, this signified that poor households were enrolled onto the LIPW program to engage in manual labour to gain daily wages. This argument was in line with the argument with Namara et al (2018) who asserted that the LIPW provided income earning opportunities to the extreme poor households to work during the agric-off season, with the aim of alleviating poverty. The reason for implementing this program during the agric-off season was explained by a staff at the Safety Net Office who stated that:

> "*Most farmers are unemployed during the dry season, hence not having any means to generate income. This will keep them busy while providing them with an opportunity to make some decent amount of money so that the gains from their farm proceeds will not finish"* (*Field Interview, 2025).*

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This meant that relying on the money obtained from the farm proceeds would diminish it, and bring them back to zero, where they would not have any money. However, it was not only farmers who were enrolled; able-bodied men from the LEAP household were also selected to participate in the project (Eshun, 2020). From this angle, the LIPW in the agric-off season was heavily backed by Eshun (2020) who argued that the beneficiaries were engaged in construction of feeder roads, dams, dugouts and planting during the seasonal labour demand shortfalls, the period where without rainfall. This provided benefits to the beneficiaries while rehabilitating and maintaining public assets for effective use by community members. In addition, the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (2022) substantiated the argument by Eshun (2020) who asserted that the LIPW served as a platform that provided the avenue for the poor to engage in construction works and tree planting to gain monetary benefits with the ultimate aim of reducing poverty.

Furthermore, another representative from Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development added to the discussion by stating that:

> *"We are doing roads, dams, CCMI and plantations. So what we do is that these opportunities are given to extremely poor persons in communities where the Ghana Living Standards Survey has classified those districts and communities as extremely poor" (Field Notes, 2025).*

In essence, this was a special intervention designed for the extreme poor to come out of poverty. As a result, they were given the social opportunity to generate income to close the inequality gap between the rich and the poor. This assertion was in tandem with that of Devereux (2002) who stated that social protection was intended to enhance the labour productivity of the extreme poor through employment opportunities. In essence, Eshun & Dichaba (2019) substantiated the above arguments by stating that the LIPW provided the poor with job opportunities with the intention of eradicating extreme poverty in the rural areas. This was in line with the targets of SDG 1 aimed at eliminating extreme poverty through Labour Intensive Public Works. Aside

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from this, the Productive Inclusion was another mechanism under the GPSNP, with its specific goals aligned to the SDG 1.

5.3.1.4 PRODUaCTIVE INCLUSION

The Productive Inclusion program was a support scheme that provided additional income to beneficiaries of both LEAP and LIPW to smoothen their consumption (Field Interview, 2025). This argument was backed by Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) who argued that PI was designed to create employment through skills training to sustain the livelihoods of families. In essence, beneficiaries gained entrepreneurial skills, which boosted their creativity and innovation. This was further expanded by a social protection expert from the Ministry of Gender, Children and rRural Development who articulated that:

> *"If within your local community, there are certain resources that you think you can fall on it to make income like weaving, like basketry, like rabbitry, livestock rearing, farming, vegetable production, anything that you think will bring income, which is lucrative, the project will support you with training, skills, and mentorship, and the seed money to start that business. So, when you are able to grow that business, then it becomes your source of livelihood so that you wouldn't live without any source of income. And these are aimed towards reducing poverty in rural communities, where they fall below the poverty line" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This was consistent with the statement made by World Bank Group ((2020) which clearly stated that the Productive Inclusion had the aim of unleashing the skills of poor individuals who carried great potentials through skills training and development, mentorship and coaching. They were also taught how to start and expand a business, business management, digital marketing, etc specifically to groom them to effectively operate a business to gain profit. This was an income generating opportunity which emanated from a person's ability to monetize his or her skills. After completion of the training program, an amount of money, $200 was invested into your program as a start-up capital (Field Interview, 2025; World Bank Group, 2020). In essence, these business ventures provided them with the platform to obtain income to cater for their needs

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and that of their families, hence reducing poverty and promoting food security. This initiative aligned with the SDG 1, which was meant to reduce by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty. The argument raised was consistent with that of Devereux (2002) who attested to the fact that investment in income generating activities and productive assets helped lift people out of extreme poverty.

5.3.2 Complementarity of Social Interventions

The study revealed that different social interventions were linked together, hence providing complementary services to the poor (Field Interview, 2025). This was evident in the linkage between the LEAP, NHIS, Capitation Grant, School Feeding Program, LIPW and PI. To substantiate this argument, the study revealed that beneficiaries were enrolled onto the NHIS, which was supported by Domapielle et al (2023). This was augmented by the opinion of a respondent who stated that:

> *"LEAP beneficiaries are on the National Health Insurance Scheme so that they are able to access healthcare and things like that" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This implied that LEAP households enjoyed free medical care by virtue of their privilege of enrolling on the NHIS. This was supported by Alatinga et al (2018) who argued that the LEAP and the NHIS was linked together such that while they were getting cash transfers, their health was also given attention. This allowed them to have access to quality medical care, just like the rich have access, to close the gap between the rich and the poor. To add up to the discussion, a representative from Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection articulated that:

> *"So if you are a LEAP household or you are benefiting from the LEAP, your household will be freely be registered onto the National Health Insurance Scheme so that you can assess healthcare, for the money that we give them or the grants is just for you to at least make earns meet or buy food" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This implied that this linkage did not require LEAP households to spend their LEAP grants on hospital bills, but use it for their personal needs. Nevertheless, this package reflected the

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combined benefits of good health and poverty reduction, which were in alignment with SDG 1 and SEG 3. Hence, this reflected the multidimensional nature of poverty reduction. This was backed by Akurugu et al (2022) who agreed that the integration of the two social interventions served double purpose, that was ensuring that LEAP households gained access to grants for household consumption as well as promote good health through free medical care. In addition, the LEAP was also linked with the Ghana School Feeding Program (SFP) and the Education Capitation Grant to enhance school enrolment among poor (Akurugu et al, 2023). In essence, this linkage was to ensure that parents send their wards to school, enjoying benefits such as total waiver on school fees and free food (Field Interview, 2025). This helped ensure that children enjoyed their right to education, which led to the fulfilment of the provisions stated in the 1992 constitution. Nevertheless, linking LEAP to both NHIS to SFP and Capitation Grants presented the multidimensional aspect of poverty reduction, demonstrating how poverty reduction reflected in the other SDGs such good health and education (Sulenana et al, 2019).

In addition, the LEAP was linked with the LIPW and Productive Inclusion to provide them with additional sources of income to smoothen their consumption. This was is in line with the with the project's objectives, stated in the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (2022), which clearly articulated that the safety net was meant to enhance the assets of the poor to enable them have the capacity to supply their basic needs as well as cater for their families. In this regard, social protection specialist opined that:

> *"We now layered LIPW on LEAP so that while the beneficiaries are getting cash transfers, we acknowledge the fact that they may need additional income. So when LIPW is targeting for the selection of its beneficiaries, it gives room for some LEAP households members to be selected onto the programme so that households can have additional money" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This was another benefit associated with the LEAP package, which was geared towards enhancing the wellbeing of the poor. This was consistent with the argument of Sen (2000) who

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argued that the wellbeing of the people should be enhanced through their capabilities and functioning. This additional income served the purpose of enhancing food security, as food consumption increased; promoted maternal health since pregnant women would go on regular checkups as well as reduced income poverty (UNICEF, 2016).

In connection with Productive Inclusion, a social protection expert from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection asserted that:

> *"They benefit from Complementary services like the Complementary Livelihood Asset Support Scheme, which is a Productive Inclusion, whereby they are into income generating activities. In terms of the selection of beneficiaries, they consider LEAP household first" (Field Notes, 2025).*

With regard to the linkage, the LEAP beneficiaries were selected as part of the Productive Inclusion program or CLASS to engage in skills training and mentorship to operate a business venture. This was meant to help poor households generate an additional source of income to complement the LEAP cash transfers to help become financially independent as well as exit poverty.

Inferring from above, the three projects coupled with SFP and Capitation provided complementary services to LEAP households to improve their economic status and build their resilience. This boosted the morale of the household to be in a position to purchase vital products without fear. This interlinked service provided the beneficiaries with different avenues to generate income coupled with health and education. This helped reduce multidimensional poverty as well as providing them with health benefits through the NHIS and educational benefits to improve literacy rate in the country.

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5.4 ANALYSIS OF GPSNP THROUGH PATH DEPENDENCE

The findings revealed that the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP) emanated from the Ghana Social Opportunity Project, with some modifications. Productive Inclusion was added as a complementary livelihood support scheme to LIPW and LEAP. The targeting and payment system were modified to a much better and efficient system to enhance a seamless mechanism. However, the LEAP served as a gateway for the adoption of GSOP which evolved into GPSNP.

5.4.1 LEAP In 2008 As A Critical Juncture

The LEAP in 2008 was a successor of previous social interventions targeted at poverty reduction, but reflected a complete path departure. Nevertheless, the Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Structural Adjustment Programme (PAMSCAD) was set up as a resolution mechanism to address the issues inherent in the Structural Adjustment program. This argument was backed by Abane (2017) who argued that PAMSCAD was introduced as a social intervention to support and enhance the livelihoods of the poor and unemployed in the society. This was seen in the statement of the senior staff at the LEAP secretariat who asserted that:

> *"They introduced some interventions, including some measures to address the social cost of structural adjustment, in which PAMSCAD was used as a mechanism to mitigate the stress that people were in" (Field Notes, 2025).*

However, it should be noted that PAMSCAD was designed because of the devastating effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme, which had dire negative effects on the livelihoods of people. This was substantiated by Odutayo (2015) who asserted that the SAP crippled the economy, as poverty rates rose up to a higher level, coupled by layoff of workers which exacerbated the unemployment rate in the country. Therefore, the PAMSCAD was a policy response to tackle the issue of gross poverty, which had affected livelihoods, as asserted by

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Abane (2017). In essence, the introduction of PAMSCAD was based on a feedback mechanism from SAP, which informed the Government about the way forward, which reflected reactive sequencing. Nevertheless, the PAMSCAD could not live up to its expectation, just like the SAP. Its failure was evident in the work of Sarfo-Adu (2021) who argued that the program could not stand the test of time because of its ineffectiveness evident in its low coverage and poor targeting of beneficiaries.

As a result, this prompted the design of a new policy action which was Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper I and Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II. This was backed by the viewpoint of a social protection specialist who stated that:

> *"Between 2001 to 2005, the government introduced a lot of interventions. One was the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy 1, then another one was the Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II. All of these interventions brought about so many Programs" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This was to address the combined variable of economic growth and poverty reduction. This was because it was believed economic stabilization could have a great positive effect on poverty reduction, as its benefits would trickle down to poverty eradication (Best, 2013). This was supported by Mahembe & Odhiambo (2021) who affirmed that economic growth was an effective tool for the reduction of poverty. Nevertheless, poverty reduction was a major priority of the government to address the issue, economic growth was just used as a means to an end. This was supported by Gupta (2011)who opined that GPRS I and II was introduced as the viable option to address poverty reduction in the country. However, the challenges inherent in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers defeated its championship as the most feasible alternative. This was seen in the work of Gupta (2011) who pointed out its lapses after praising it, stating that the intervention lacked a robust institutional mechanism to streamline and strengthen its elements.

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Inferring from above, It should be noted that all these social interventions could not stand the test of time, but each of them was based on feedback from previous programs. This reflected the idea of Mahoney (2000) on reactive sequencing, which stated that each step was based on feedback from the previous step. Though they came with different and unique structures, the objective remained the same. This implied that poverty reduction strategies were entrenched as a strategic plan to address poverty, therefore reflecting self-reinforcing mechanisms.

Nevertheless, the introduction of the MDG 1 paved the way for the adoption of the LEAP program in 2008, which was a suboptimal option within the social protection sector to improve the living conditions of the poor (Asante et al, 2025). This was a critical moment in the history of Ghana, as it was the starting point of social protection in Ghana, which reflected a critical juncture period. This was evident in an interview with a social worker who articulated that:

> *"Now for LEAP, LEAP in the past was a program. It wasn't LEAP before, it was a Program that was being piloted to support the extremely poor in the country" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This argument was substantiated by Asante, et al (20025) who affirmed that the LEAP program was introduced in 2008 as a flagship social protection initiative to reduce poverty through cash transfers to selected beneficiaries. These beneficiaries were selected from poor households according to the Ghana Living Standard Surveys, and included orphans, the disabled, the aged above 65, pregnant lactating mothers. This was further supported by Tweneboah-Koduah (2020) who argued that LEAP was introduced as a pilot program in 2008, targeting extreme poor households with the aim of enhancing their wellbeing. This was a pilot program to test its effectiveness in achieving the MDG goal of No poverty reduction. To expand this argument, a social protection specialist opined that:

> *"LEAP started in 2008 with just 1,654 beneficiary households, which were actually orphans taken due to many circumstances, but basically because their parents died of AIDS and so they were left alone. That is, the Catholic Relief Service, UNICEF and*

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> *others started it, then the government took over and then expanded it" (Field Notes, 2025),*

This clearly showed that the program was novel, targeted at a specific group of people, that is orphans. This meant that the program was not a government intervention at first, but rather a community-based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) project to cater for the needy and destitute. This was evident in an interview with a social protection specialist who stated that:

> *"LEAP program itself, it metamorphosed from what it used to be to become LEAP in March 2008 which was outdoored" (Field Notes, 2025).*

In essence, the Government formalized the LEAP in 2008 with the crafting of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) in 2007 to solidify and strengthen this social intervention (De-Graft et al, 2016; Ghana National Social Protection Strategy, 2007). This was evident in an interview with a social protection specialist who asserted that:

> *"Now it became very useful that the government streamlined the LEAP program, but in 2007, the government introduced what we call a National Social Protection Strategy" (Field Notes, 2025)*

This institutional rule entrenched the LEAP program as a standard social protection program, taking into consideration its robust targeting system (Ghana National Social Protection Strategy, 2007). Hence, it reflected path dependence, as the LEAP program was locked-in through the NSPS 2007, making it difficult to return back to its initial outcomes. In essence, a self-reinforcing mechanism was established, which was consistent with the idea of Mahoney (2006). Therefore, the program reflected a critical juncture period, where LEAP was selected as a suboptimal alternative regardless of numerous proposals to eradicate poverty, but it produced significant results leading to path stabilization. Path stabilization was evident in the interview with social protection expert from UNICEF who articulated that *"the LEAP program has been in existence for the past 17 years with improvements over the years"* (Field Interview, 2025).

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This also revealed its critical juncture nature, as it persisted for a very long time. Nevertheless, this whole social intervention turned around the social protection sector by standing the test of time, which the previous social interventions failed to do. There was also a path departure from the utilization of economic growth as a tool of poverty reduction to social protection through the LEAP program as a viable poverty reduction strategy. This was consistent with the assertions of Vyas-Doorgapersad (2021) who agreed that social protection was most effective in poverty reduction, and stated that economic growth did not necessarily reduce poverty. This set a precedent for other social interventions to follow suit, which provided evidence for the expansion of the entire social protection system in Ghana (Field Interview, 2025).

5.4.2 Transition from GSOP to GPSNP

The study revealed that the GPSNP emanated from GSOP, with lessons for a better and improved safety net system (Field Interview, 2025). This was supported by the World Bank (2020) who articulated that GPSNP was a build up of the GSOP. This represented reactive sequencing, as the current safety net was designed based on the feedback from the previous system. In addition, the GPSNP was more or less a continuation of the LEAP program and LIPW, also reflecting a path dependence. This was attributed to the persistence of the programs for a long time, therefore leading to the production of increasing returns, which was consistent with Mahoney (2000). The consistent inclusion of the LEAP program was evident in the viewpoint of a social worker who articulated that:

> *"When they saw that LEAP was also gaining some ground, the impact LEAP was making was good, they started putting LEAP together, and now a whole project called GSOP was introduced. So GSOP came, and LEAP was part of GSOP. They further continued LEAP under GPSNP because it was producing great results, and was one of the best social intervention programs. LEAP forms part of the components of GPSNP, it is the first component." (Field Notes, 2025).*

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This was clearly evident in World Bank (2020) who affirmed that the LEAP in 2008 was streamlined and solidified under GSOP, and then included in GPSNP. Therefore, LEAP transitioned from a pilot program in 2008 to a formal social protection program under GSOP, and then to GPSNP, which clearly reflected reactive sequencing. This was because the program followed a linear evolutionary path, which could be traced from its historical processes, hence leading to its current state. This was consistent with the notion of Mahoney (2000), as reactive sequencing followed a certain pattern in a straight line from its initial outcomes through to its final outcome. In addition, the inclusion of LEAP in GSOP was based on its substantial achievements, which positioned it in a better state to be sustained (World Bank, 2020).

Nevertheless, the transition from GSOP to GPSNP, though a continuation of the previous order, witnessed additional features to upgrade it to a more efficient and robust social safety net. As the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (2022) and World Bank (2020) opined, systems strengthening and project management and coordination were added to properly streamline and coordinate the social interventions in a coherent and consistent manner to produce efficient results. This was substantiated by Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) who added that GPSNP sought to solidify its safety net systems through its additional components to improve the productive capacity of the poor.

Furthermore, LIPW was one of the programs which effected a small change in its operations. This was manifested in the opinion of a representative from the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development who articulated that:

> *"So at GSOP, they were doing more projects. They were doing roads, dams, CCMI, markets, and other things. But when it came to GPSNP, we have now narrowed it to three main sub-projects. We are doing road, dam, and CCMI and plantation" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This was consistent with the arguments of Namara et al (2018) who confirmed that there were numerous subprojects under GSOP such soil conservation, waste disposal, dugouts. These

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affected the effectiveness of the LIPW resulting in land allocation problems, financial constraints in utilizing the dugouts, among others, hence failed to achieve its intended purpose (Eshun & Dichaba, 2019). However, Eshun (2020) affirmed that LIPW limited its scope to just a few ones such as roads, dams and tree planting. This was to enhance the direction of the project to enhance efficiency and productivity. This also showed a clear path dependence, as most of the projects such as roads, dams, and CCMI were sustained under GPSNP, with the aim being the same.

The transition process saw a transformation of its payment system, as it moved from manual payment to electronic payment. The impact evaluation report by Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) confirmed the above argument, showing that the e-zwich, which was an e-payment system, was now being used for paying beneficiaries. This was further elaborated by a social protection specialist from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection who explained that:

> *"In GSOP, we were paying people through Ghana Post, through Table top. And you know, when people are paid through Table top, you know what happens. A lot of money goes under the drain, you don't know where it is and all that so accountability was not too robust. But coming into GPSNP, we started at the late part of GSOP by piloting electronic payment" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This statement was seconded by another social protection expert who argued that:

> *"With Ghana Post, they will put their sheets with their names and everybody has an ID number, then they will be thumb printing. But we realized that those times they were even short-changing them because there wasn't any forensic audit. Currently, we pay them through Ghana Interbank Payment and Settlement system (GhIPSS), a subsidiary under Bank of Ghana and every beneficiary has an e-zwich account or card. So when we transfer the money through the controller, then GhIPSS would also credit the individual beneficiaries' e-zwich account" (Field Notes, 2025).*

In essence, the payment system was improved and upgraded to a more efficient mode. This was affirmed by Namara et al (2018) who argued that it was a manual system which was later computerized, and assigned unique codes to beneficiaries for payment to be made by GhIPSS

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through the e-zwich card. Nevertheless, the transition process to e-payment was based on a feedback on the loopholes of the manual system, which prompted an adoption of an electronic system to do away with the lapses in the previous mode of payment. In essence, this medium of payment, according to the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (2022) was the most efficient system of payment, which explained the reason for the adoption of an e-payment mode to replace the manual mode of payment. There was an element of path dependence in the payment system, as the current system was dependent on the outcomes of manual mode, which demonstrated reactive sequencing (Mahoney, 2006). In addition, the current system was also highly influenced by the technological transformation occurring in the world, serving as a causal mechanism, leading to a path stabilization of computerized systems.

Furthermore, the targeting approach also went through massive transformation in its selection process to enhance the coverage of appropriate beneficiaries (Abane, 2017). Therefore, this modification signified a more robust targeting process which was transparent and efficient. This was shared by a senior social protection specialist who asserted that:

> *"And of course, the targeting of LEAP has really improved since GSOP time to date because it is now very scientific, and it takes away most of the human interactions" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This was supported by Abane (2017) who opined that the targeting process shifted from using the availability of social amenities such as water, electricity, roads and so on as a means of beneficiary selection to the use of geographical targeting based on a poverty map designed by Ghana Statistical Service. This depicted the scientific nature of the targeting approach, as the selection process was based on analytical data which categorized households into extreme poor, poor and non poor based on certain metrics such as income, employment, education and so on (Ghana Statistical Service, 2019). Nevertheless, the transition process was based on certain causal mechanisms, leading to entrenchment of the Proxy Means Testing (PMT), which

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persisted for some time. As a social protection expert from World Bank articulated the reason, she emphasized that:

> *"They used to do the targeting and filling of forms manually, with a lot of papers being carried to the national office for processing. However, the printing of paper form questionnaires was not sustainable, as data lost could not be retrieved compared to the database system. As a result, anytime there is rain, the data collection process is interrupted, with the papers getting wet" (Field Interview, March 2025).*

This causal factor served as a feedback mechanism that led to the introduction of a more robust and sustainable selection system, which was in alignment with the idea of Mahoney (2000) on reactive sequencing. This standardized targeting approach was further elaborated by a social protection specialist from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection who explained that:

> *"Now there are enumerators who are on the field gathering the data, they are using PMT, using the census approach. They go to the households, they engage the household heads or household members who can respond to the issues. After that, we do data cleaning and see those who qualify in terms of enrolling them onto the Programme" (Field Notes, 2025).*

Inferring from above, the targeting approach transitioned from community-based targeting to Proxy Means Testing (UNICEF, 2016). This move signified an upgraded system to strengthen institutional mechanisms through a fair and seamless targeting approach. Nevertheless, the link between the initial outcomes was the manual approach which led to a casual mechanism, that is the unsustainable nature of the paperbase approach, therefore creating a final outcome, the PMT, reflected a clear path dependence. Therefore, reactive sequencing was established through its reactionary process, where the current step depended on the outcome of the previous step (Mahoney, 2000).

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5.4.3 Self-Reinforcing Institutions of Social Protection in Ghana

The study revealed that the social protection system in Ghana was institutionalized through protocols, rules and procedures that guided the design and implementation of social protection. This was in sync with Hodgson (2006) who argued that institutions were entrenched social rules that guided the execution of social interventions. Therefore, the 1992 constitution played a critical role in institutionalization by serving as a guiding principle in creating social safety nets for the poor based on a right-based approach, thereby ensuring the dignity of all persons (Field Interview, 2025; Abdulai et al, 2019). This is clearly stipulated in Article 36 of the 1992 constitution, which is stated:

> *"The State shall take all necessary action to ensure that the national economy is managed in such a manner as to maximize the rate of economic development and to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every person in Ghana and to provide adequate means of livelihood and suitable employment and public assistance to the needy" (Article 36, 1992 Constitution).*

Therefore, every citizen had the right to access and benefit from social protection because it was enshrined in the constitution (Kaltenborn et al, 2017). According to a social worker, he stated that "*this has been entrenched as an institutional structure under which every social intervention should be designed in alignment with the provision"* (Field Interview, 2025). This argument was substantiated by Abdulai et al (2019) who asserted that social protection was designed in accordance with provisions in the 1992 constitution, hence having influence on safety nets. In essence, the constitution served as a robust legal framework that provided effective guidelines for the implementation of social protection (Kalternborn et al, 2017).

Nevertheless, the constitution bound all governments to adopt safety nets to secure the livelihoods of the poor, irrespective of its ideological standpoint (Field Interview, 2025). This was because poverty reduction through social protection became critical to the development of the country, therefore the need for a legal framework that locked-in social protection (Maoloni,

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2024). This reflected a self-reinforcing mechanism because the 1992 constitution persisted for a very long time without any changes to its provisions. It became a statutory order that ensured that the poor were provided with economic opportunities to enhance their wellbeing in the society.

Based on inspiration from the 1992 constitution, the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) was designed to streamline and strengthen the LEAP program and other social interventions. This was based on the principle of ensuring the dignity of all persons irrespective of race, colour, gender, ethnicity (Abdulai et al, 2019). This was stated by a representative from UNICEF who argued that:

> *"The idea was to promote the well-being of Ghanaians, reduce poverty, and make sure that Ghanaians also are able to contribute to national development, so that was like going without leaving anyone behind" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This argument was consistent with the argument of De-Graft Aikins et al (2016) who argued that the NSPS 2007 served as a development plan that sought to provide poor households with safety nets to eradicate poverty and build their resilience against shocks. To add up, Abdulai et al (2019) asserted that the 2007 strategy was the initiator of formal social protection, which brought into existence the LEAP program. Therefore, NSPS 2007 was the statutory institutional structure that entrenched the LEAP program, hence its sustenance for a very long time. (Field Interview, 2025). The argument above was further substantiated by evidence from the National Social Protection Strategy 2007 policy document which clearly articulated that **NSPS 2007 seeks to capitalize on the LEAP program as a mechanism to empower the poor to improve their socio-economic conditions" (NSPS, 2007).*

Inferring from above, the NSPS was in existence for a long period of time, which was locked-in as an institutional norm guiding social protection in Ghana. In essence, a self-reinforcing mechanism was established through the strategy, therefore making it difficult to go back to its

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initial outcomes to effect changes (Mahoney, 2000). Therefore, this showed a path dependence, as the failure of past poverty reduction strategies such as GPRS I and II diverted the course of action to a more standardized safety net system based on robust and entrenched institutional policies and structures. Hence, this culminated in the stabilization of the LEAP program, the NHIS, School Feeding Programme, among others.

Nevertheless, the NSPS was situated within a policy framework, which was the National Social Protection Policy 2015 to establish rules and regulations to govern the social protection sector. This was evident in an interview with a senior social protection specialist who opined that:

> "*The National Policy for Social Protection which was launched in 2016, gives directives as to how social protection programs should be implemented. So it is more like a framework for delivering these interventions" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This was consistent with the arguments of Abdulai et al (2019) who posited that the Social Protection Policy 2015 was introduced to serve as a legal framework, shaping social interventions. Therefore, this policy framework provided guidelines for the execution of the LEAP program, the Labour Intensive program, Productive Inclusion, which were brought under GSOP and GPSNP (Field Interview, 2025). This was backed by the National Social Protection Policy (2015) which attested to the fact that the policy helped streamline and strengthen social interventions such as the LEAP, LIPW, NHIS, PI, Capitation Grant and NHIS, leading to its stability. In essence, this was evident in the purpose of Social Protection Policy 2015 stated in its policy documents, which articulated that:

> *"The social protection policy aims to deliver a well-coordinated, inter-sectoral social protection system enabling people to live in dignity through income support, livelihoods empowerment and improved access to systems of basic service" (National Social Protection Policy, 2015).*

In essence, rules, norms and principles were established as entrenched institutions, which enhanced the efficiency of the programs. Nevertheless, these institutional standards persisted

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for a long time, reflecting a self-reinforcing mechanism, which provided a legal framework for both current and future social interventions.

However, the strengthening and streamlining of these social programs was not done in isolation. Institutional structures were established, with protocols guiding their operations to coordinate and manage social assistance programs. This was seen in the opinion of a social protection expert from the World Bank who stated that:

> *"But in all of these, there is the need for proper coordination. So we learnt this over the years that when it all scatters like that, it doesn't help to achieve the intended objective. So in 2013, the government now set up the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to properly coordinate the various social interventions" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This was affirmed by De-Graft et al (2016) and Sarfo-Adu (2021) who argued that the Social Protection Directorate under the Ministry was created as a bureaucratic institution to monitor the progress of the social protection programs through effective coordination and management approach. In essence, the Ministry was established as a self-reinforcing mechanism, which was sustained till date without any changes to its organizational structure, and procedural rules and norms. This reflected path dependence, as espoused by Mahoney (2006), where the Ministry produced a critical juncture for enhancing the implementation of social protection across the various sectors.

With regards to the targeting approach, a unique and robust institutional structure, which is the Ghana Household Registry, was erected with the aim of streamlining the targeting system to an efficient and effective system. This was reflected in the viewpoint of a social protection expert from the Military of Gender, Children and Social Protection who asserted that:

> *"So the Ghana National Household Registry is a social register that does what we call a poverty profile of all Ghanaian households. So that register or that system helps us to be able to identify people who are poor, people who are not poor, and people who are extremely poor" (Field Notes, 2025).*

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In the same vein, this assertion was also reiterated by a social protection specialist at the World Bank who attested to the above argument by stating that:

> *"So now through that, we have set up a registry, the Ghana National Household Registry, that is supposed to have a database of all the people in Ghana. And in that categorization, the registry has categories of people in terms of poverty in the registry database" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This registry provided the various sectors with credible information about the status of poor households to help them with the selection of beneficiaries for their respective social intervention (Field Interview, 2025). This was supported by evidence from the National Social Protection Policy (2015) which argued that the GNHR was set up as an entrenched institution, providing directions to social sectors on their targeting process. Therefore, the institutional structures and mechanisms mentioned above demonstrated a path dependence, clearly showing how certain norms, rules, practices established shape policy actions, and directs its operations (Hudgson, 2006).

5.5 INCREASING RETURNS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION OVER THE YEARS

The study revealed that the LEAP, LIPW and PI improved the lives of the people, as compared to their non-enrolment onto the program (Centre for Social Policy Studies, 2024). This was due to the persistence of the programs for a long time, with beneficiaries being on the social intervention for a certain period of time. Therefore, they exited from the extreme poverty bracket through sustainable programs complemented by the Productive Inclusion. The study showed that there was an increase in food consumption, income status and confidence level (Field Interview, 2025).

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5.5.1 The LEAP Program

The LEAP program brought great improvements in the livelihoods of beneficiaries, with so many success stories (Centre for Social Policy Studies, 2024). The extreme poor reaped the benefits of the program, which transformed their lives and enhanced their wellbeing. This was evident in the argument shared by a beneficiary who stated that:

> *"Our lives have transformed. Previously, our children had to engage in petty trading, farming to support us. And even buying textbooks, school bags was a problem. Most of the time, they stayed at home to help us with our business because there was no money to give to them to take to school. But now, because of these interventions, I for instance, sell roasted plantain and groundnut with the LEAP cash transfer, and I am able to get some money at the end of the day. Now, I don't worry about buying textbooks, giving them chop money for school. I can now buy little little things for myself and children" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This argument was supported by Agbenyo et al (2017) who argued that the LEAP cash grants were used to pay their children's school fees, purchase school items and stationeries such as pencils, school bags, textbooks, exercise books, and so on. This was also substantiated by evidence from UNICEF (2024) who affirmed that the LEAP program helped parents to provide for the educational needs of their wards by paying their fees and buying school items using the cash transfer. This contributed to increase in enrolment in schools, which led to improvement in literacy rates that is reading and writing, among LEAP households (UNICEF, 2024). To further substantiate the argument, Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) provided empirical evidence by stating that 12.3% of the cash grants was spent on education, 9.7% was spent on school books and 6.0% was spent on school uniforms, totaling 28% spent on education. The remaining 72% was spent on other household expenditures. These above arguments showed that part of the LEAP cash transfers was invested into the education of their wards to secure their future in becoming better people.

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In addition, the LEAP cash transfer increased food consumption of households, which helped reduce malnutrition, hence leading to an improved health of beneficiaries. In an interview with another beneficiary, she asserted that:

> *When they pay the LEAP money, I use it to buy food items such as pepper, onions, bags of rice, tomatoes and so on in bulk to prepare delicious meals for the family. Because of this money, there is always food in the house, and children do not go hungry like before. They have enough to eat, and they are much more healthy and stronger due to the nutritious food I give them. Now, we eat three square meals a day compared to before when we used to starve or eat once a day. The whole family is happy, and gets the strength and motivation to work.*

This was supported by Alatinga et al (2019) who argued that the LEAP cash transfer helped improve food security and nutrition among beneficiaries, which boosted their health. They were able to produce quality farm produce coupled with improved crop yield, which was also used to feed their families due to investment of LEAP cash transfers into their farm (Field Interview, 2025). This was affirmed by UNICEF (2024) who argued that some of the beneficiaries used the money to engage in household economic activities such as farming to enhance food consumption and increased income. This was further substantiated by the Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) who asserted that food was the top most priority of LEAP households, and the majority of the cash transfers, which was about 65.9% of the grants, was spent on meals. This implied that food was the most important need to reduce the high mortality rate caused by malnutrition and stunted growth.

In addition, the quality and quantity of food improved, as they ate healthy foods, which contributed to their human growth and development (Centre for Social Policy Studies, 2024). In essence, this helped to achieve the SDG 2 on food security, which reduced hunger, and SDG 3 on improved health which boosted the immune system. This was supported by Atuoye and Luginaah (2017) who agreed to the statement by stating that food security and improved nutrition contributed greatly to good health, hence demonstrating its relevance. Therefore the

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LEAP program did not only contribute to SDG 1 (No Poverty, but also helped achieve SDG 2 (Food Security), SDG 3 (Good health), SDG 5 (Women empowerment), and SDG 16 (Peaceful co-existence) (Alatinga et al, 2019). This depicted the multidimensional nature of poverty reduction, as it had a direct effect on the other global goals, thereby negating income poverty reduction as eradicating poverty.

Furthermore, the LEAP program contributed to improved health due to access to quality medical care (Field Interview, 2025). This was attributed to their enrolment on the NHIS, which enabled them to benefit from its health package, hence reducing mortality and morbidly rate (Alatinga et al, 2019). From the perspective of a social worker at UNICEF, she asserted that "*enrollment onto NHIS has enabled pregnant women to receive proper maternal health care such as antenatal and postnatal care to ensure the mother and baby are in good shape" (Field Interview, 2025).* This was consistent with Owusu-Addo et al (2018) who opined that the cash transfer program brought a positive transformation in the health status of poor households, especially pregnant women, women in general, and children. In essence, issues such as breast cancer, kidney failure, prostate cancer were diagnosed and treated, which continued to be given medical care (Field Interview, 2025). This was in alignment with the SDG 3 of ensuring universal health coverage to all; reducing maternal mortality rate to less than 70 per 100,000 live births and improving sexual and reproductive health (United Nations, 2023).

Inferring from above, the above success stories demonstrated an increasing return of the LEAP program, which brought great benefits to the poor households in the long run. The results showed that their lives were transformed, and they were living a better life, as compared to not being part of the LEAP program. This was in line with the notion of Arthur (1994) who argued that the persistence of an institutional arrangement led to a beneficial return in the long run. The results depicted that there were massive improvements in the livelihoods of the beneficiaries in terms of food security, household consumption, education, income and so on.

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5.5.2 The Labour Intensive Public Works

The LIPW program, just like the LEAP program, also produced great results in terms of beneficiary outcomes with regards to social intervention. The wellbeing of the poor households were improved through benefits derived from engaging in the subprojects under the LIPW (Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development, 2022). This aligned with Sen (2000) who argued that the availability of economic opportunities enhanced the wellbeing of people, which in turn uplifted the people out of poverty. This was evident in an interview with a staff at the Safety Net Office in Accra who articulated that:

> *"We have over 120,000 beneficiaries enjoying these opportunities over a period of three years, and 500 plantations have been established. For instance, one of the communities has harvested a coconut farm of 10 hectares, which is about 25 acres. They have grown it, and now they are using the money obtained from the plantation to support their children in school. In addition, we have over 4,000 hectares of plantations, which is contributing so much to the climate change interventions of the nation while providing sustainable income for these communities" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This was supported by the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (2022) who articulated that the plantation of oil palm trees using 30,000 seedlings enabled them to pay their children's school fees, paid off their debts and other household expenses. This improved their economic livelihood, as they were in a better position to purchase whatever they wanted without worrying (Field Interview, 2025). This was consistent with Eshun & Dichaba (2019) who asserted that providing the poor with job opportunities contributed to uplifting them out of poverty, as they derived income from LIPW to cater for the needs of their families. In essence, the program contributed to the attainment of SDG 1 and SDG 13 (Climate change adaption). This helped reduce the proportion of individuals living on less than $1.90 a day as well as built their resilience against external shocks such as climate change, famine, and so on (United Nations, 2023). The plantation projects increased their income status such that

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some of them built their own houses and businesses. This was evident in the testimony shared by a beneficiary who stated that:

> *Through this program, I have been able to buy my own properties, in which I have built two houses. I have rented one of them, and I am making additional income on the side. Aside from that, I have invested the money into starting a retail business, which is yielding profits. I must say, this project has really improved my life, as I am in a better position to cater for my family's expenses including education, food, clothing and so on.*

The findings were consistent with the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (2022) who stated that the lives of beneficiaries improved, such that they could afford luxury goods such as property as well as cater for their household expenses. This showed massive improvements in their lives in terms of their wellbeing and functioning (Sen, 2000). The study revealed that some of them invested the gains from the LIPW program into expanding their existing businesses such as farming, petty trading and so on, which helped them to generate income (Field Interview, 2025). This was further substantiated by the Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) who stated that the majority of the respondents, 88.1%, witnessed a major transformation in their livelihoods. This confirmed the findings of the study that the LIPW brought positive changes in the socio-economic well-being of beneficiary poor households.

In addition, some beneficiaries secured great employment opportunities in companies through their skilful abilities. This was explained in an interview with one of the beneficiaries who shared her experience with the project. The respondent stated that:

> *"If not for this program, I doubt if I would be where I am today. Today I can also boast of being an asset as I have gained some engineering skills. In fact, I learnt how to dig dams, fix roads which has helped me to secure a job. And interestingly, I have received contracts from companies to serve as a contractor for construction of roads and dams. My life has really changed, and now I can buy anything I want" (Field Notes, 2025).*

In essence, this confirmed the argument of Namara et al (2018) who opined that the LIPW program provided job opportunities for the people who participated in the construction of the

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feeder roads and small earth dams. This was substantiated by evidence from the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (2022) who argued that the majority of the respondents, which is about 90.9%, witnessed a drastic change in their employment status, as it opened the door for better opportunities to earn a higher income. This could be attributed to the relevant hard skills gained through their work experience obtained through their engagement in small earth dams and feeder roads, designed by the LIPW program. This showed that the objectives for the LIPW project were achieved through the creation of economic opportunities in the form of construction works and plantation activities for the poor households to generate income to cater for their needs (Eshun & Dichaba, 2019). In essence, a social worker opined that *"it is not only the beneficiaries who benefit from the program, but the community as a whole enjoy its positive impact, which is evident in better roads to transport goods, irrigation facilities to enhance good farming practices, and the availability of food crops to the community'* (Field Interview, 2025).

Inferring from above, the results above demonstrated that the LIPW produced increasing returns, which was a reflection of the path dependence of GPSNP and its self-reinforcing institutions (Mahoney, 2000). Therefore, the findings explained Pierson (2000) notion on increasing returns as an institution producing maximum benefits based on the continuous existence of a particular social norm for a long period of time. The study revealed that the prolonged implementation of the LIPW produced a transformative effect on the lives of the beneficiaries. This was supported by the Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) who provided empirical evidence, stating that the majority of the respondents, which is 91.5%, benefited greatly from the program, which helped improve their overall wellbeing. This contributed to the fight against poverty towards the attainment of SDG 1 through safety nets, with income levels rising beyond $1.90 per day.

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5.5.3 Productive Inclusion

The Productive Inclusion program served as an extra means of livelihood to LEAP and LIPW beneficiaries, which helped them gain relevant skills for entrepreneurial activities (Field Interview, 2025). In essence, beneficiaries engaged in different economic ventures based on their capabilities. Nevertheless, the study revealed that the PI program also improved the living conditions of beneficiaries who joined skills and mentorship training programs. This was evident in the success story shared by a senior social protection specialist at the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection who asserted that:

> *"Through this intervention, we have this woman, she is in the Upper East, Kassena Nankana. She was a LEAP beneficiary. Then when the GPSNP was introduced, she was selected for Productive Inclusion so she was into shea butter processing, and through that she has gone to the extent of even exporting it. Because of that program, they will introduce you to how to market your product such as using social media handles, how to brand your product and all that. And out of that, she has been able to cater for her kids, two of her kids to the tertiary level. For now, she is doing very well; the business has really expanded. And not only one, we have a lot of living testimonies" (Field Notes, 2025).*

The above quote was supported by Rassanjani et al (2019) who argued that social protection brought significant benefits to the poor, which enhanced school enrolment, among others. Nevertheless, the case depicted a typical example of LEAP beneficiaries benefiting from the PI, enabling them to provide the needs of the family. This showed that the PI program had a positive impact on the wellbeing of beneficiaries through income earning opportunities such as bee keeping, rabbitry, basket weaving, oil palm processing, soap making, and so on (Field Interview, 2025). This argument was supported by evidence from the Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) who stated that the majority of its respondents, about 71%, witnessed a difference in their lives in terms of improved standard of living. Therefore, the study by the Centre confirmed the findings of the study that the PI produced maximum output, which reflected in the improvement in human and economic development.

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The above empirical findings were substantiated by Baah-Mintah et al (2018) who argued that informal education and training had a positive impact on poverty reduction, as skills obtained were used to expand and sustain small-scale businesses. This enabled the individuals to generate income, which led to a better living condition. This affirmed the argument of Sen (2000) that the availability of resources led to the betterment of the poor, which boosted their morale and confidence. This was evident in an interview with a beneficiary of the PI program who shared that:

> *"At first, I could not attend funerals nor make donations to the community because I didn't have money. But now, I feel more relevant ever since I was enrolled on the Program, as I can now attend any social gathering such as funerals and make contributions without feeling neglected. People do not look down on me again, as my social status has upgraded" (Field Notes, 2025).*

Therefore, this implied that the increase in income of beneficiaries improved their self-esteem, as they felt valued in the society. The findings were supported by Molyneux, et al (2016) who agreed that the program increased their self-worth in society, as they were respected, which enhanced their dignity. This enhanced their self-confidence because of the fact that they could now attend and make monetary contributions to social gatherings. This helped reduce the feelings of worthlessness, shame and hopelessness, which improved their mental wellbeing (Alatinga et al, 2019). The above argument was reiterated by a social protection expert who opined that:

> *"One of the compelling stories from the PI program is that it has given people dignity. You know how poverty can make you lose your dignity. And we have stories of women saying that because of the PI training program, they feel respected like a human being. The skills acquired have been used to start and expand businesses. We have beneficiaries engaging in shea butter processing, basket weaving, oil palm processing and so on, and they are making a lot of money. Some have gone further to invest the profits into other economic activities such as farming, trading, livestock rearing to make additional cash. They are able to cater for their families and support members of the community. Because of this, they are valued in the society, making them feel like part of the society, hence boosting their confidence and self-esteem. Some of the stories when you hear, it gives people hope" (Field Notes, 2025).*

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This implied that the PI program had psychological benefits, which gave poor households hope and peace of mind to carry out their daily activities. This was consistent with the argument of Pavanello et al (2016) who argued that increase in income levels had a positive impact on mental wellbeing, as it eliminated depression and frustration while promoting self-esteem. Therefore, this reflected in their peaceful and cordial relations with members of the society, as they participated in community activities with boldness (Alatinga et al, 2019). This enhanced their dignity due to unlimited access to the utilization of community assets. This was in tandem with Article 15 of the 1992 constitution which stipulated that *"The dignity of all persons shall be inviolable. No person shall, whether or not he is arrested, restricted or detained, be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; any other condition that detracts or is likely to detract from his dignity and worth as a human being……." (Article 15, 1992 Constitution).* This demonstrated how psychological wellbeing was relevant in promoting the welfare of the citizens (Sen, 2000). In essence, the 1992 constitution served as a foundation to establish social protection as a poverty reduction strategy to enable poor households live a dignified life (Field Interview, 2025).

Inferring from above, the PI program also demonstrated increasing returns with significant changes in the socio+economic conditions of beneficiary households. The findings supported by evidence and facts from empirical literature, elaborated with practical cases, the positive impact of Social Protection programs such the PI on poverty reduction. As a result, the sustenance of the PI which reflected a path dependence, produced efficient results, with beneficiaries reaping the benefits in the long run through their participation in the social intervention. Therefore, it goes a way to help eradicate poverty to its bare minimum

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5.6 FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN GHANA

The study revealed that there was an ongoing exercise to shape social protection in Ghana. This became necessary to assess the impact of the program on the beneficiaries to determine the way forward. This was in alignment with Raffaelli & Gitan (2015) who argued that social institutions changed from time to time due to certain circumstances irrespective of its stable nature. This suggested that reforms were necessary to reshape policy directions to meet the objectives of the social interventions. Therefore, the exit plan was a strategic move to enhance the transition process of moving the LEAP beneficiaries who were above the poverty threshold to another social intervention (Fuseini et al, 2022). This was evident in the assertion of a senior social protection specialist at the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection who articulated that:

> *"Now, what we began doing under GPSNP is what we call the reassessment. So the reassessment is actually helping us to determine the continuous eligibility of the LEAP program. We want to tell if the poorest still qualifies to be on the program. And that, we are able to exit some of them. We are able to graduate some and put them onto any of the CLASS interventions, the Complementary Livelihood Asset Support Scheme" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This argument was supported by Fuseini et al (2022) who posited that some of the beneficiaries' income level went beyond the $1.90 threshold, prompting the urgent need to remove them from the program to create space for other poor households. In essence, the government's inability to expand the number of beneficiaries was based on the limited financial capacity of the state (Field Interview). This was supported by Kidd (2013) who attested to the fact that financial constraints were a great impediment hindering the expansion of the LEAP program to cover all extreme poor and poor households. Nevertheless, the good news was that the scarce funds of the state to sustain those who are above the threshold was redirected to other important developmental matters that needed equal attention (Fuseini et al, 2022).

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However, graduating them to CLASS had the potential of providing them with sustainable livelihoods, which would enable them to generate better income to exit the poverty bracket completely. This was supported by Centre for Social Policy Studies (2024) who opined that the CLASS was meant to provide skills training to the beneficiaries to help them establish their own businesses to become financially independent. Hence the future implication was that this strategic plan would quicken the process of uplifting the poor out of poverty, which was in alignment with the attainment of SDG 1 (United Nations, 2023). The reassessment would help restructure the LEAP program to suit modern trends, especially the cash grants.

Nevertheless, the changing nature of the cash grants for the LEAP and LIPW was a major policy reform that had direct benefits on the lives of the beneficiaries. In essence, a social protection expert explained that *"the grants have been adjusted to meet the inflationary rate to enhance the purchasing power of beneficiaries to cater for their needs"* (Field Interview, 2025). The adjustment was evident in the work of Agbenyo et al (2017) who stated that LEAP cash grants increased from 4 cedis in 2008 to 64 cedis per one household, 76 cedis to two households and so on. This argument was consistent with the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (2022) who asserted that increase in income levels enabled them to afford basic necessities of life, irrespective of the price. As a result, the adjustment of cash grants were done in line with the costs of living in the country, to enhance affordability of goods and services (Cuesta et al, 2021). The implication was that future beneficiaries would enjoy a better cash transfer amount to properly promote their wellbeing, thereby uplifting them out of poverty within the shortest possible time.

Furthermore, a Social Protection Bill was introduced to further strengthen social protection programs to give it a policy focus, waiting for approval by Parliament. From the perspective of a social protection specialist, he opined that:

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> *"As we speak, we have even developed a bill that we are seeking to have a law that will provide that kind of legislative authority for social protection" (Field Notes, 2025).*

This was consistent with Abdulai et al (2019) who argued that legal frameworks provided social interventions with a solid foundation that directed policymaking and implementation processes. Therefore, it was a legislative act intended to shape policy actions and influence state actors to design social protection in accordance with the provisions in the legislative instrument. This was consistent with Hodgson (2006) who argued that institutions prescribed rules, norms, and values which influenced the actions of political elites to take certain decisions based on laid-down procedures and principles which could be altered easily.

Inferring from above, these reforms had future impacts on potential beneficiaries, who could reap better benefits. This was evident in the reassessment process of the LEAP, which depicted ongoing research to upgrade the system to suit modern trends. Also, the social protection bill would provide the legal guideline for an efficient and proper targeting system and major adjustments in payments level, hence benefiting future generations born into poor households. Therefore, these reforms gave hope for a brighter and better future for social protection in Ghana.

5.7 CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that GPSNP was path dependent, as it followed through historical processes to its current state, with causal mechanisms serving as a feedback loop. In essence, the findings demonstrated that the evolutionary path of social protection could be traced from the traditional social protection system, which involved informal support mechanisms, to the formalization of LEAP through a self-reinforcing institution, which was NSPS 2007, to GSOP, and then to its current state, GPSNP. Nevertheless, social protection was locked-in with institutional structures

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such as the 1992 constitution, NSPS 2007, SP policy 2015 among others, making it difficult to change. As a result, social intervention programs persisted for a long time, leading to increasing returns. As the findings revealed, the various programs brought a massive improvement in the lives of the beneficiaries.

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CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A SHORT STORY BEHIND THE SURVIVAL OF THE EXTREME POOR, ITS IMPACT AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provided an overview of the findings generated from the data collection process and discussed in the previous chapter. The summary of the findings was discussed in line with the research questions of the study, with the objective of answering those questions. This served as a basis for drawing conclusions and making recommendations that would be relevant to the field of study and the implementation of social protection in Ghana. In essence, this provided a general knowledge on the subject matter by giving a brief insight.

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The core objective of the study was to understand the SDG 1 within the Ghanaian context through a path dependent analysis. In essence, the research sought to trace the current institutional arrangements from its previous one to gain a deep insight on how past outcomes influenced present choices or decisions. In a bid to answer the research questions, data gathered was analyzed to unravel the mystery behind the subject matter. The results of the findings were discussed in line with the research objectives. In essence, the summary of findings were discussed based on the research questions which are:

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- What were the historical processes and events that led to the introduction of SDG Goal 1 and social protection in Ghana?
- How did the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP) contribute to achieving SDG 1?
- How did the institutional structures and mechanisms put in place reflect path dependence?
- To what extent did the project bring about beneficiary in the society through path dependence?

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

What were the historical processes and events that led to the introduction of SDG Goal 1 and social protection in Ghana?

The study revealed that the 1995 Copenhagen Summit was a turning point in placing poverty at the centre of human development. This served as a critical step towards prioritizing poverty reduction over environmental and economic issues. However, this provided the foundation for the introduction of social protection as an institutional mechanism to curb the issue of poverty as compared to economic growth. As a result, social protection featured on the global development agenda, which is from the MDG to the SDG era. Nevertheless, it is observed from the study that social protection in itself had a long history, which dated back to the preindependence period. The study identified that social protection started within the traditional society through the family support system. However, it was formalized into a state-led social protection, with LEAP setting the pace for the sector within the Ghanaian context. Nevertheless, social protection in Ghana was inspired by the SDG 1, which transitioned from MDG 1 to the

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current goal. In essence, the Millennium Summit in 2000 helped streamline social protection, with the Rio +20 summit in 2012 serving as a feedback mechanism to continue the poverty reduction goal in the SDGs.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

How did the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project contribute to achieving SDG 1?

The main objective of the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP) was to help strengthen social protection systems to improve the productivity of the poor, as evident in the findings of the study. In essence, the project was designed to achieve the targets of the SDG 1 by providing income earning opportunities to uplift the poor from the poverty bracket, hence leaving no one behind. Due to this, the project was categorized into three main sub projects which were the LIPW, the LEAP program and the Productive Inclusion, which were all aligned to the attainment of the SDG 1. In essence, the LEAP program sought to provide beneficiaries with cash transfers to be able to cater for their needs coupled with free medical health through the NHIS. With regard to the LIPW, the idea was to provide beneficiaries with the opportunity to engage in manual labour such as the construction of small earth dams, feeder roads, and plantations in exchange for wages, which helped them to satisfy their basic needs. Lastly, for Productive Inclusion, beneficiaries were provided with skills training and mentorship with start-up capital to engage in income generating activities. All these contributed to the reduction of poverty in the country.

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RESEARCH QUESTION 3

How did the institutional structures and mechanisms put in place reflect path dependence?

Certain institutional arrangements were established to strengthen and streamline social protection in the country, hence serving as a lock-in mechanism. According to the findings of the study, the general institutional mechanism was the 1992 constitution, which outlined guidelines for the provision of safety nets to enhance the economic stability of the poor. As a result, the constitution became an entrenched legal framework binding on all governments, from which the National Social Protection Strategy 2007 took inspiration from. Due to this, the National Social Protection Strategy also became a self-reinforcing mechanism, persisting for a long time with minor changes effected in 2012. Nevertheless, this laid the foundation for the adoption of the National Social Protection Policy in 2015, serving as a framework guiding the implementation of social protection. Based on that, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection was given the mandate to play a coordinating role in all social protection initiatives in the country, hence its stability. In addition, the Ghana National Household Registry was established as a robust institutional structure to strengthen targeting of beneficiaries, which helped in the transition from community-based targeting to the use of Proxy Means Testing. In essence, the study revealed that the institutional structures mentioned above were established as a self-reinforcing mechanism to strengthen safety net systems, hence reflecting path dependence.

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RESEARCH QUESTION 4

To what extent did the project produced beneficiary outcome in the society through path dependence?

The study revealed that social protection produced increasing returns, which were beneficial to the livelihoods of the poor and society at large in the long run. This was evident in the success stories, which were compelling, showcasing the impact of the project. The findings of the study showed that the project through the LIPW, PI and LEAP led to a massive improvement in the lives of the people, with living testimonies as proof. Per the findings of the study, the beneficiaries expanded their existing business with the grants and livelihood support scheme. As a result, some of them engaged in petty trading, basketry, cashew plantations, hairdressing through the Productive Inclusion program. Others too gained engineering skills through the LIPW, which enabled them secure jobs. In essence, beneficiaries were in a much better position to send their children to school and take good care of the family. It was also identified that the project enhanced the dignity of beneficiaries, who now felt respected and recognized in the society. Overall, the project was very instrumental in raising the standard of living of the poor, hence enhancing their wellbeing.

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6.3 CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project was path dependent, which meant that its design was based on the outcomes of previous social protection programs and existing institutional arrangement. In essence, the study identified that the LEAP program in 2008 served as a critical juncture for the formalization of social protection in the country. Hence, the LEAP reflected a path dependent, as it persisted for a long time with the objectives remaining the same. However, the institutionalization of the LEAP program was premised on robust institutional arrangements such as the 1992 constitution, the National Social Protection Strategy 2007, National Social Protection Policy 2015, and featured currently in the National Social Protection Bill in 2023. These institutional arrangements were the same mechanisms used in establishing other social interventions such as the Capitation Grant, School Feeding program, LIPW and Productive Inclusion.

As evident in the findings of the study, the LIPW and LEAP travelled from GSOP to GPSNP I, and featured in the GPSNP II. However, the Productive Inclusion was added to the LIPW and LEAP to complement its gain, and serve as an additional and sustainable source of income. As a result, the current impact of the intervention was premised on the persistence of the program for sometime, producing increasing returns beneficial to the beneficiaries. In this light, it could be concluded that social protection was a more efficient way of reducing poverty compared to economic growth and other tools. However, to achieve the needed impact, the programs ought to persist for a long time, as evident in the success stories recorded so far. In essence, social protection reflected a path dependence, as it was traced from its history, which started with informal cash transfers in the traditional societies and transitioned into our modern societies, with inspiration from the 1995 Copenhagen Summit, the MDGs and SDGs at the global level.

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However, within the Ghanaian context, social protection travelled from informal cash transfers to the LEAP in 2008 to GSOP and now to GPSNP.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Based on the results of the study, some recommendations emerged from it, which are discussed below;

First of all, it was discovered that only LEAP beneficiaries enjoyed free medical care through enrollment into the NHIS. This meant that those on other interventions such as Productive Inclusion or LIPW did not benefit from that since they were not enrolled onto NHIS, leading to bias. It was highly recommended that the NHIS coverage should be universal to include all poor people including those on LIPW and PI. As a result, NHIS should also be linked to other social services to enhance healthcare. However, financial constraints could be a hindrance to the achievement of this goal. Therefore, the limited costs involved could negatively affect coverage of all manner of disease and total waiving of medical costs. Therefore, NHIS should not be only linked to other social services, but the health of the poor households should be highly prioritized by investing funds to expand this health benefit.

Secondly, it was also observed that most social interventions were mostly targeted at the extreme poor, leaving out the poor. It was realized that there were no streamline interventions for those who fell into poverty as a result of misfortunes. As a result, this was compounding the poverty issue in the country. Hence, it was recommended that social interventions should be widespread, covering the extreme poor, poor and non-poor to build their resilience against shocks. Nevertheless, this social protection from the poor and non-poor could face targeting problems

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where some people would be left out. In addition, there was the tendency of politicians to use these mechanisms for clientistic gains. Therefore, to complement the wide coverage of Ghanaian citizens, more attention should be given to adopting a fair system of targeting approach where those who needed social protection urgently were prioritized. Also, checks should be in place to prevent political elites from selecting party members onto the program while neglecting the rightful beneficiaries.

Thirdly, it was observed that the timing for targeting of the beneficiaries for the poor communities was not constant, as each selection period targeted a few selected communities per window. In addition, it was realized that the interval between the selection window was wide. Once the window closed, you could not not be enrolled onto the program until the next window was opened. It was highly recommended that there should be a timeless and open selection process, where at any point, one could walk into the office to be selected onto the program when the need arises. However, limited staff could pose a challenge to the implementation of this recommendation due to a small workspace to accommodate a huge number of employees. Furthermore, moving from home to the office from selection could pose financial burden and stress on individuals who are already facing monetary difficulties coupled with overcrowding. Therefore, in addition to the above recommendations, a digital system should be designed to reduce the burden and overcrowding where individuals could just log onto the website and apply without going to the office.

Fourthly, since the GPSNP was the innovation of the previous government and would end this year, it was most likely that the new government would introduce a new set of social interventions, which would phase out some of the programs under the GPNSP. Nevertheless, it was highly recommended that the programs such as the LIPW, PI should be continued under another safety net project in order to witness increasing returns in terms of reducing poverty.

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Also, it was highly recommended that the new safety net be broadened to include more programs to target the majority of the poor. Nevertheless, challenges inherent in the LIPW, PI such as meagre salary and delayed payment could appear in the current programs, hence affecting efficiency of the project. Therefore, a more robust and well-designed system by excellent professionals should be put in place to track flaws in the system, with an efficient response mechanism to address those challenges. In addition, the programs should be redesigned by appropriate experts to phase out old problems, and establish an efficient safety net system.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACADEMIA

First of all, it was observed that most studies on social protection were not grounded on an analytical approach. Therefore, it was highly recommended that research on social insurance such as pension schemes could benefit from the use of path dependence to establish the link between the past and present social security services. This could have the tendency of providing a comprehensive understanding of the issue from a historical perspective, therefore enhancing the proposition of feasible recommendations to policymakers to enhance this social intervention.

Secondly, it was highly observed that there were plenty of studies on LEAP, with less focus on LIPW and PI. It was highly recommended that future studies focused on carrying out in-depth research into the Productive Inclusion and LIPW program to bring out its significance. Therefore, research on this scanty area could be grounded in a theoretical perspective by using other analytical approaches such as rational choice Institutionalism, structuration theory to help provide in-depth findings.

Lastly, further research could look at the synergies and trade-offs between SDG 1 and other SDGs, as studies on this area were scarce. For instance, research could be carried on to establish

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the link between poverty reduction and food security through a comprehensive approach. Therefore, these studies could apply mixed methods to provide a solid and in-depth understanding of the correlation between these development goals. This would have the tendency of shifting the focus from income poverty reduction to an explicit demonstration of multidimensional poverty reduction.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE (SEMI-STRUCTURED)

INTRODUCTION

This interview guide is designed to obtain different perspectives on the subject matter, "THE SDG 1 AND ITS PATH DEPENDENT OF INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE PRODUCTIVE SAFETY NET PROJECT IN GHANA." The responses derived will be instrumental to unravelling the mystery behind the SDG 1. However, feedback provided to the questions will remain anonymous and highly confidential. It will be used for its intended purpose, which is to obtain a Master of Philosophy in Political Science Degree. You are at liberty to give your approval to participating in the study, or decline the offer which will be duly respected. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

How did the idea of poverty reduction emerge and gain attention in the global development agenda?

How did social protection as a poverty reduction strategy appear in the SDG under Goal 1?

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RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What are the set objectives and vision of the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project?

How does these set objectives and vision align with the attainment of the SDG 1?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 3

How do mechanisms put in place for the selection of beneficiaries differ from past social safety net project?

Do the rules, regulations and structures take inspiration from past social safety net projects?

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

Has the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project brought an improvement in the lives of the people compared to past social safety net projects? And why?

Does past social safety net projects have an effect on the changes brought by the Ghana Productive Safety Net in the lives of the people? And why?

INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS