

Assessing the Sustainability of Social Protection Interventions in Reducing Rural Poverty

Asana Ayamga

Department of Community Development
Faculty of Planning and Land Management
University of Business and Integrated Development Studies

*Correspondence: Ackah David, email: drdavidackah@gmail.com

Abstract

The Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP) is one of Ghana's major social protection initiatives aimed at reducing rural poverty through cash transfers, labour-intensive public works (LIPW), and productive inclusion support. This study assessed the sustainability of GPSNP interventions in the Upper West Region using secondary data from project reports, monitoring and evaluation documents, poverty profiles, and relevant academic literature. Findings revealed that while GPSNP interventions contribute significantly to short-term poverty reduction—especially through improved household consumption, seasonal income stability, and enhanced livelihood opportunities—the sustainability of these benefits remains mixed. Long-term sustainability is constrained by funding inconsistencies, weak institutional capacity, limited market access, and climate-related risks.

Comparisons between GPSNP Phase 1 and Phase 2 show improvements in training, youth support, and institutional strengthening, yet challenges persist. The study concludes that for GPSNP interventions to remain sustainable, there must be stronger institutional systems, increased domestic financing, improved community ownership of assets, and climate-resilient livelihood support. Key recommendations include integrating robust exit strategies, strengthening district-level capacity, enhancing market linkages, and adopting climate-smart approaches.

Keywords: Sustainability of Social Protection, Interventions in Reducing Rural Poverty, Non-Governmental Organisations, Human Rights, Advocacy, Effectiveness, Challenges, Legal Framework, Policy Reform.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Poverty continues to be one of the most enduring development challenges globally, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where structural inequalities, weak economic systems, and limited access to social services disproportionately affect rural populations. In sub-Saharan Africa, rural poverty is often driven by a combination of climatic shocks, seasonal food insecurity, low agricultural productivity, and inadequate infrastructure (UNDP, 2016). Within this context, governments and development partners increasingly rely on social protection systems as a key mechanism for addressing poverty and vulnerability. Social protection interventions—including cash transfers, labour-intensive public works, and livelihood empowerment initiatives—play an essential role in cushioning vulnerable households from shocks while providing opportunities for productive inclusion and long-term resilience.

Ghana provides a notable example of a country that has adopted a comprehensive social protection framework as part of its national development strategy. Despite achieving considerable progress in poverty reduction between the 1990s and early 2010s, the country continues to experience significant regional disparities, with rural areas sustaining the highest poverty rates (World Bank, 2020). National statistics demonstrate that poverty has become increasingly ruralised, with the rural poverty rate reaching 39.5% in 2016/17 compared to just 7.8% in urban areas (GSS, 2018). The Upper West Region, in particular, remains one of the most deprived

regions, with limited access to economic opportunities, persistent food insecurity, and high dependency on rain-fed agriculture. These structural challenges have entrenched chronic poverty and made households more susceptible to socioeconomic shocks.

Recognising these challenges, the Government of Ghana, in partnership with the World Bank and other development agencies, introduced a range of social protection initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and improving household resilience. Among these is the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP), which was launched to strengthen existing interventions such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme and the Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) initiative. GPSNP seeks not only to support the immediate consumption needs of poor households but also to enhance their productive capacity, build community assets, and promote long-term income security.

GPSNP Phase 1 (2019–2022) focused on productive inclusion measures, cash transfers, and public works, while Phase 2 (2022–present) expanded these interventions and introduced components aimed at institutional strengthening and youth entrepreneurship (World Bank, 2019; MLGDRD, 2022). These interventions aim to reduce rural poverty not only in the short term but also in a manner that is sustainable, ensuring that beneficiaries can maintain improvements in their livelihoods beyond the project lifecycle.

However, despite the strategic importance of social protection programs, concerns remain regarding their long-term impact. Sustainability—defined as the continuation of benefits after the withdrawal of external support—has become a central focus in evaluating social protection outcomes. While several reports highlight positive short-term gains associated with GPSNP, such as increased household consumption, improved community assets, and enhanced income-generating activities, there is limited evidence demonstrating whether these benefits endure once programme support ends (World Bank, 2022). This is especially relevant in regions such as the Upper West, where chronic poverty and environmental vulnerability may undermine sustained progress.

Given this context, assessing the sustainability of GPSNP interventions is critical for understanding whether social protection programs can lead to meaningful and lasting poverty reduction in rural Ghana. This study therefore investigates the extent to which the outcomes of GPSNP Phase 1 and Phase 2 have been sustained in the Upper West Region, and the factors that enable or hinder long-term impact. By exploring these dimensions, the study contributes to the broader discourse on designing resilient social protection systems that can effectively address persistent rural poverty.

1.1 Background to the Study

The concept of social protection has evolved significantly over the past two decades, emerging as a central pillar of global development strategies aimed at reducing poverty, promoting equity, and enhancing resilience among vulnerable populations. According to UNDP (2016), social protection encompasses a range of policies and programmes intended to help individuals and households manage risks, smooth consumption, and build productive capacities. In many low-income and lower-middle-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, social protection interventions have therefore become vital tools for addressing chronic poverty, mitigating shocks such as droughts or economic instability, and enhancing long-term human development outcomes.

Ghana's social protection landscape reflects this global shift, having undergone substantial expansion and institutional strengthening since the early 2000s. The country's early social protection interventions, including school feeding programmes and basic health insurance schemes, were later complemented by more targeted initiatives such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme and the Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) programme. These interventions were introduced against a backdrop of persistent regional disparities and structural inequalities that limited the capacity of the poorest households to benefit from national economic growth (World Bank, 2020). Although Ghana successfully reduced national poverty rates from approximately 52% in 1991 to 24% in 2013—and consequently met the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty—subsequent assessments revealed that the gains were unevenly distributed across regions and population groups.

In particular, the northern regions—Northern, Upper East, and Upper West—have consistently lagged behind the rest of the country in terms of human development indicators, poverty levels, and access to livelihood opportunities. The Upper West Region has been repeatedly identified as the poorest region in Ghana, with extreme poverty affecting 45.2% of the population as of 2016 (GSS, 2018). This persistent deprivation has been linked to factors such as low agricultural productivity, limited industrial activity, inadequate infrastructure, poor market access, high dependency on rain-fed farming, and cyclical food insecurity. These structural constraints not only entrench poverty but also heighten vulnerability to environmental and economic shocks.

Given these regional inequalities, social protection has become a critical component of Ghana's development policy. The Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP) was launched as a comprehensive initiative designed to address both immediate and structural dimensions of poverty. By integrating cash transfers, labour-intensive public works, and productive inclusion measures, GPSNP seeks to improve household consumption, build community assets, and enhance the long-term livelihoods of poor households (World Bank, 2019). The introduction of the Ghana National Household Registry (GNHR) further strengthened the targeting capacity of social protection systems, ensuring that limited resources are directed toward the most vulnerable populations.

GPSNP Phase 1 (2019–2022) represented a significant milestone in Ghana's social protection agenda by consolidating existing programmes and piloting new approaches to productive inclusion. Activities under this phase included providing grants and capacity-building support to poor households, improving community infrastructure through LIPW, and strengthening institutional systems for social protection delivery. The project's achievements led to the design and launch of GPSNP Phase 2 in 2022, which expanded project components to include youth entrepreneurship support, improved livelihood interventions, and enhanced coordination between local government structures (MLGDRD, 2022).

Despite this progress, questions remain about the sustainability of the gains achieved. Many social protection programmes globally struggle to ensure that improvements in income, consumption, or asset ownership are sustained after projects end. In Ghana, evaluations have shown that while beneficiaries often experience short-term improvements, long-term effects depend heavily on factors such as community ownership of assets, continued access to markets, environmental resilience, and the ability of households to diversify their income sources (World Bank, 2022). The Upper West Region's exposure to climate variability and limited economic diversification further complicate the sustainability landscape.

These dynamics highlight the need for a comprehensive assessment of GPSNP's long-term effectiveness, particularly in regions most affected by chronic poverty. Given that sustainable poverty reduction hinges not only on temporary relief but also on lasting improvements in household resilience, this study seeks to examine whether GPSNP interventions have produced enduring benefits. By assessing Phases 1 and 2 within the Upper West Region, the study contributes to broader efforts to identify best practices for designing social protection programmes that are both impactful and sustainable.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite decades of policy reforms and government-led initiatives aimed at reducing poverty in Ghana, rural areas—particularly those in the Upper West Region—continue to record disproportionately high levels of deprivation. National poverty figures show some improvements over the years, yet these aggregated statistics often mask persistent regional inequalities. The Upper West Region remains among the poorest in the country, with rural communities experiencing chronic food insecurity, limited livelihood opportunities, weak market access, and heightened vulnerability to climate variability (GSS, 2021). These realities underscore the urgent need for effective and sustainable poverty reduction mechanisms.

In response, various social protection interventions have been implemented across the region, including the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme, the Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW), school feeding programmes, and emergency social assistance schemes. While these interventions are designed to cushion vulnerable households and enhance their long-term welfare, there are growing concerns about their sustainability and overall impact on reducing entrenched rural poverty. For instance, beneficiaries often rely heavily on irregular

cash transfers or short-term employment opportunities, raising questions about whether these interventions sufficiently build resilience or merely provide temporary relief.

Furthermore, reported challenges such as inconsistent funding flows, inadequate monitoring systems, political influences, weak institutional coordination, and limited community participation have the potential to undermine programme effectiveness. Many households continue to fall back into poverty after exiting social protection schemes, suggesting that current interventions may not be robust enough to create lasting socio-economic transformation. The disconnect between policy design and the everyday realities of rural households further complicates the sustainability of these programmes.

Additionally, although numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of social protection in Ghana, few have specifically assessed the sustainability dimensions—particularly in the Upper West Region, where poverty dynamics differ significantly from urban contexts. There is limited empirical evidence on whether these interventions genuinely equip rural households with the necessary capabilities to achieve self-reliance, or whether they foster dependency due to structural weaknesses. Little is also known about how beneficiaries perceive the long-term value of these interventions or how programme outcomes evolve over time.

This knowledge gap presents a critical concern for policymakers, programme implementers, and development partners seeking to redesign social protection systems for greater impact. Without a clear understanding of what makes these interventions sustainable—or unsustainable—efforts to reduce rural poverty may continue to yield suboptimal results. Therefore, a comprehensive assessment of the sustainability of social protection interventions in reducing rural poverty in the Upper West Region is both timely and necessary. Such an assessment is crucial for informing future policy directions, improving programme delivery, and ensuring that social protection contributes not only to short-term welfare gains but also to long-term poverty reduction.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to the sustainability of social protection interventions and their role in reducing rural poverty. As social protection becomes increasingly recognised as a critical policy tool for addressing chronic deprivation and vulnerability, understanding its long-term impact has become essential—especially in rural contexts where poverty is multidimensional and persistent. Rural communities, such as those in the Upper West Region of Ghana, continue to experience high levels of socio-economic vulnerability due to limited livelihood opportunities, climatic variability, infrastructural constraints, and structural inequalities. As a result, social protection interventions have emerged as vital mechanisms for mitigating risks, supporting basic consumption, and enhancing household resilience.

The literature reviewed in this chapter spans conceptual, theoretical, and empirical domains to provide an in-depth understanding of the subject matter. The conceptual review clarifies key terms such as social protection, rural poverty, and sustainability to ensure a shared understanding of how these concepts are used within academic and policy discourse. The theoretical review examines major frameworks that underpin social protection systems, including the Social Risk Management Theory, the Human Capital Theory, the Capability Approach, and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. These theories help explain how social protection interventions influence welfare outcomes and the pathways through which sustainable poverty reduction can be achieved.

The chapter also reviews global and African perspectives on social protection, highlighting emerging trends, best practices, and the challenges that shape programme implementation across various contexts. Particular attention is given to Ghana's social protection landscape, where programmes such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW), the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP), and the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) play significant roles in supporting vulnerable groups. Existing empirical studies in Ghana and other African countries are examined to assess what is already known about the effectiveness and sustainability of these interventions.

Furthermore, the chapter critically analyses sustainability issues—financial, institutional, social, political, and economic—that influence long-term programme performance. By evaluating previous research, the chapter identifies key knowledge gaps, including limited

attention to regional differences, inadequate exploration of long-term impacts, and insufficient understanding of beneficiary perspectives. These gaps provide the rationale for the present study and highlight the need for a more comprehensive assessment of the sustainability of social protection interventions in the Upper West Region.

In summary, the literature review offers a structured foundation for the study by synthesizing current knowledge, establishing theoretical grounding, and identifying gaps that the research seeks to address. The discussions that follow help situate the study within existing academic debates and guide the development of the conceptual framework.

2.1 Conceptual Review

The conceptual review provides clarity on the key terms, constructs, and ideas that underpin this study. Understanding these concepts is essential because they form the foundation for analysing how social protection interventions contribute to the sustainability of poverty reduction outcomes in rural areas, specifically within the Upper West Region of Ghana. This section elaborates on the core concepts of social protection, rural poverty, sustainability, and the specific interventions implemented under the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP).

2.1.1 Concept of Social Protection

Social protection is broadly defined as a set of policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing exposure to risks, and enhancing the capacity of individuals and households to protect themselves against income shocks (World Bank, 2018). In developing countries, social protection is often targeted toward poor and vulnerable populations who face structural and cyclical barriers to economic stability.

Social protection typically encompasses four key components:

- *Social Assistance:* These are non-contributory transfers provided to the poorest and most vulnerable. Examples include cash transfers (regular or emergency), in-kind transfers, public works programmes, and school feeding initiatives. Social assistance aims to stabilize consumption, prevent destitution, and promote human capital development.
- *Social Insurance:* Contributory schemes designed to protect individuals against lifecycle and covariate shocks, such as illness, unemployment, disability, or old age. While common in higher-income settings, social insurance coverage in low-income contexts tends to be limited due to informality in labour markets.
- *Labour Market Interventions:* These include job placement services, wage subsidies, skills training, and labour-intensive public works aimed at improving employability and generating temporary income.
- *Social Services:* Services that support vulnerable groups, such as child protection, services for people with disabilities, and community-based rehabilitation.

In the context of Ghana, social protection is guided by the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP, 2015), which emphasizes inclusiveness, equity, and resilience-building. Programs like LEAP, LIPW, and GPSNP represent the operationalization of this policy. They play a crucial role in addressing multidimensional poverty, especially in regions with chronic vulnerability.

2.1.2 Concept of Rural Poverty

Rural poverty refers to deprivation experienced by individuals and households living in rural areas, manifesting in constraints related to income, education, health, infrastructure, and livelihood opportunities. Rural poverty is typically more widespread and severe than urban poverty due to multiple interlinked factors:

- Dependence on rain-fed agriculture, making households vulnerable to climate shocks such as droughts and floods.
- Poor infrastructure including roads, irrigation, markets, and health facilities.

- Low levels of education and limited access to information, which restrict skill development and diversification.
- Seasonal unemployment, common in agrarian economies
- Weak access to formal financial services, limiting investment and savings.

In Ghana, rural poverty is particularly severe in the northern savannah belt, including the Upper West Region, where households face a combination of structural constraints, environmental stressors, and historical marginalization. Understanding rural poverty in this context is essential because it shapes both the need for and the outcomes of social protection interventions.

2.1.3 Concept of Sustainability in Social Protection

Sustainability, within the context of social protection, refers to the ability of programme outcomes—such as improved welfare, resilience, and livelihood diversification—to continue beyond the period of external support or donor funding. It extends beyond financial continuity to include institutional, economic, social, and environmental components.

Dimensions of Sustainability

- *Financial Sustainability:* This relates to the reliability of funding sources and the government's commitment to consistently financing social protection programs over time.
- *Institutional Sustainability:* Refers to the strength of systems, structures, and capacities that enable effective programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Sustainable interventions require functional institutions capable of maintaining quality delivery.
- *Social Sustainability:* Concerns the acceptance, participation, and ownership of interventions by communities and beneficiaries. Programmes that reflect community needs and promote participation are more likely to endure.
- *Economic Sustainability:* Refers to whether beneficiaries can transition from dependence on assistance to self-reliance through income-generating activities, skill development, and livelihood diversification.
- *Environmental Sustainability:* Especially relevant for public works programmes, this concerns the ability of community assets (e.g., dams, feeder roads) to withstand environmental pressures and continue to generate local economic value.

In evaluating the GPSNP, the concept of sustainability helps determine whether interventions such as public works assets, grants for productive inclusion, and capacity-building initiatives produce enduring benefits for households and communities.

2.1.4 Social Protection Interventions in Ghana

Ghana's social protection landscape includes several key programmes aimed at addressing poverty and enhancing human development outcomes. The main interventions relevant to this study include:

- **Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP):** A flagship cash transfer programme providing bi-monthly cash support and health insurance subsidies to extremely poor households, with a focus on orphans, vulnerable children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. LEAP aims to improve consumption, promote human capital, and reduce intergenerational transmission of poverty.
- **Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW):** This programme provides temporary employment to poor households during the agricultural off-season, focusing on creating community assets such as feeder roads, small dams, dugouts, and climate-resilient infrastructure. It aims to stabilize seasonal income fluctuations and enhance community-level productivity.

- Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP): Provides daily meals to pupils in public basic schools, promoting enrolment, attendance, and improved nutrition—especially in poorer regions.
- National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS): Enhances access to healthcare by reducing out-of-pocket payments, improving household welfare through reduced health-related vulnerabilities.
- Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP): A combination of components including the expansion of LIPW, productive inclusion (grants + training), shock-responsive assistance, and institutional strengthening for improved social protection delivery.

GPSNP integrates both consumption support and productive support, making it pivotal in assessing long-term sustainability.

2.1.5 Interconnection Between Social Protection, Rural Poverty, and Sustainability

Social protection interventions are increasingly viewed as transformative rather than merely protective. Their effectiveness in rural Ghana depends on how well programme components address the root causes of poverty and whether they create lasting improvements in household capabilities.

For example:

- Cash transfers can enhance consumption in the short-term, but long-term sustainability depends on whether beneficiaries can invest in productive activities.
- Public works assets may reduce vulnerability to climate shocks when well-maintained, contributing to sustainable community development.
- Skills training and grants enable livelihood diversification, which is critical for lifting households out of chronic poverty.
- Institutional strengthening ensures that targeting, disbursement, and monitoring systems remain functional.

By conceptualizing these connections, this study positions sustainability as a central lens through which the long-term effectiveness of GPSNP interventions can be evaluated.

2.2 Theoretical Review

A theoretical review provides the conceptual lenses through which a study is interpreted, guiding the understanding of how and why social protection interventions influence poverty outcomes. This study draws on four core theoretical frameworks—Social Risk Management Theory, Human Capital Theory, the Capability Approach, and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. Together, these theories offer complementary insights into the mechanisms through which social protection initiatives, such as the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP), can contribute to both immediate welfare improvements and long-term sustainability in rural settings.

2.2.1 Social Risk Management Theory

Origin and Key Assumptions: Proposed by the World Bank (Holzmann & Jørgensen, 2000), SRM posits that households—especially poor and rural ones—are constantly exposed to a wide range of risks, including economic shocks, environmental hazards, health crises, and social vulnerabilities. These risks can lead to negative welfare outcomes if households lack adequate mechanisms to manage them.

SRM categorizes risk management strategies into:

- Risk reduction (prevention): interventions like livelihood training or agricultural diversification.
- Risk mitigation: mechanisms like insurance or savings schemes.
- Risk coping: measures taken after a shock occurs, such as cash transfers or public works.

Relevance to Social Protection: Social protection programmes are seen as institutionalized mechanisms that help households manage risks more effectively. GPSNP components such as:

- Cash-for-work under LIPW (mitigating short-term consumption shocks),
- Productive inclusion packages (reducing exposure to livelihood risks), and
- Community infrastructure development (reducing environmental risks)

clearly align with the SRM approach.

Relevance to Sustainability: The theory highlights that sustainability is achieved when interventions extend beyond temporary coping instruments to strengthen households' ability to mitigate and reduce future risks. Thus, SRM provides a useful framework for examining whether GPSNP interventions lead to lasting resilience rather than dependence.

2.2.2 Human Capital Theory

Foundation and Assumptions: Developed by Becker (1964) and Schultz (1961), Human Capital Theory argues that investment in health, education, nutrition, and skills enhances an individual's productivity and earning capacity. Poverty is often perpetuated because the poor cannot afford to invest in themselves or their dependents.

Application to Social Protection: Social protection interventions can act as indirect or direct mechanisms of human capital investment by:

- enabling households to spend more on health and education,
- providing training and capacity-building for productive activities,
- supporting improved nutrition through predictable cash flows.

GPSNP interventions, especially training for microenterprise development, financial literacy sessions, and productive inclusion activities, directly promote human capital enhancement.

Connection to Sustainability: Long-term poverty reduction depends on continuous improvements in household productivity. If GPSNP interventions build durable skills and capacities, households are more likely to sustain gains even after the project ends. Lack of adequate training or market linkages, however, may undermine sustainability.

2.2.3 Capability Approach (Amartya Sen)

Theoretical Basis: Sen's Capability Approach (1999) emphasizes that poverty should not be understood solely as income deprivation, but rather as a lack of capabilities—the freedoms and opportunities individuals need to live lives they value. These capabilities include access to education, health, security, participation, and livelihoods.

Implications for Social Protection: Under this approach, social protection is not merely a charity or relief mechanism, but a system that expands people's capabilities by:

- reducing social exclusion,
- enhancing agency, and
- enabling participation in economic and social life.

GPSNP's efforts to provide livelihood inputs, strengthen community assets, and empower rural beneficiaries align with the capability approach's emphasis on expanding choices and freedoms.

Sustainability Perspective: Sustainability involves not only maintaining economic gains but also ensuring that beneficiaries retain the capability to function beyond programme support. This theory thus guides the evaluation of whether GPSNP interventions genuinely expand long-term opportunities or only meet temporary needs.

2.2.4 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

Foundational Concepts: Developed by DFID (1999), the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework views poverty as a function of limited access to five core assets:

- Human capital (skills, knowledge, health)
- Social capital (networks, relationships)
- Natural capital (land, water, environment)
- Physical capital (infrastructure, tools)
- Financial capital (savings, credit, income)

This framework also considers the vulnerability context (shocks, trends, seasonality), transforming structures (institutions, policies), and livelihood strategies.

Link to Social Protection: Social protection interventions help strengthen livelihood assets in different ways:

- LIPW improves physical capital (roads, dams).
- Cash transfers contribute to financial capital.
- Productive inclusion supports human and financial capital.
- Community engagement builds social capital.
- Environmental works under LIPW enhance natural capital.

Sustainability Insight: The framework emphasizes that sustainable poverty reduction occurs when livelihood assets are strengthened in a transformative manner. If GPSNP interventions improve these assets but households still lack market access, climate resilience, or institutional support, sustainability weakens.

2.2.5 Integrative Relevance of the Four Theories to the Study

Each of the four theoretical perspectives contributes uniquely to understanding the sustainability of GPSNP:

Table 2.1 Theoretical Perspective and contribution to study

Theory	Contribution to Study
Social Risk Management	Explains how GPSNP helps households manage risks, especially environmental and economic shocks.
Human Capital Theory	Highlights the productivity gains from training, capacity-building, and improved welfare.
Capability Approach	Shifts focus from income to enhanced freedoms, choices, and long-term empowerment.
Sustainable Livelihoods Framework	Examines how interventions build assets necessary for lasting poverty reduction.

Together, these theories allow for a holistic assessment of whether GPSNP interventions generate short-term relief only or support lasting socio-economic transformation.

2.3 Overview of Social Protection Interventions in Africa

Social protection interventions have increasingly become central to development policy across Africa, reflecting a fundamental shift from emergency relief approaches toward long-term poverty reduction, resilience building, and inclusive growth. Beginning in the early 2000s, African governments—supported by international development partners—began adopting structured social protection systems in response to rising vulnerability caused by economic instability, climate change, food insecurity, and persistent rural poverty. Today, nearly every African country implements at least one social protection programme, with varying degrees of institutionalization, coverage, and sustainability.

A defining feature of social protection in Africa is its focus on social assistance, particularly cash transfer programmes, food assistance, and public works interventions. Cash transfers—both conditional and unconditional—have expanded significantly due to evidence showing their ability to improve food security, enhance school attendance, boost consumption levels, and stimulate local economies. Notable examples include Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP), Zambia's Social Cash Transfer Scheme, and South Africa's well-established Child Support Grant system. These programmes serve as global reference points, demonstrating that predictable transfers can generate measurable improvements in household welfare even in low-income contexts.

Another major intervention across Africa is Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW), designed to provide temporary employment while creating or rehabilitating community assets such as feeder roads, small dams, markets, and environmental protection structures. Ethiopia's PSNP and Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) are leading examples of large-scale public works initiatives that simultaneously improve rural infrastructure and strengthen household resilience. Ghana's LIPW programme, under the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project

(GPSNP), follows this model by providing seasonal employment to poor households while supporting livelihoods and community development.

In addition to cash transfers and public works, many African countries have integrated school feeding programmes and nutrition-based interventions into their social protection frameworks. The Ghana School Feeding Programme, Kenya's Home-Grown School Meals Programme, and similar programmes in Mali, Senegal, and Nigeria aim to improve child nutrition, increase school enrolment, and support local agriculture through community-based food procurement. Social insurance mechanisms, though less widespread due to large informal sectors, are gradually expanding. Some countries have introduced schemes such as community-based health insurance (CBHI) and national health insurance programmes to increase access to healthcare among low-income and rural populations. Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), Rwanda's Mutuelles de Santé, and Tanzania's improved Community Health Fund (iCHF) illustrate efforts to develop inclusive health financing systems.

Despite these advances, African social protection systems face persistent challenges affecting their long-term sustainability. Many programmes are heavily dependent on donor financing, exposing them to funding volatility. Weak administrative capacity, limited digital infrastructure, and poor coordination among implementing agencies often result in targeting errors, delayed payments, and inefficiencies. Political dynamics can also shape programme continuity and influence resource allocation, making some interventions vulnerable to leadership changes.

Moreover, structural economic vulnerabilities—such as reliance on agriculture, exposure to climate shocks, and lack of diversified income sources—continue to limit the transformative potential of social protection in rural Africa. Although social protection has proven effective in alleviating short-term poverty, its long-term sustainability often depends on complementary measures such as livelihood empowerment, skills development, climate adaptation support, and financial inclusion initiatives.

Recent continental efforts, including the African Union's Social Policy Framework and the Agenda 2063 strategic priorities, have emphasized the need for integrated, resilient, and nationally owned social protection systems. These frameworks encourage African states to build robust administrative systems, strengthen social registries, invest in digital payment systems, and enhance linkages between social protection and productive sectors. As a result, many countries—including Ghana—are gradually shifting toward productive social protection models, which combine safety nets with livelihood enhancement measures to promote sustainable poverty reduction.

In summary, while social protection interventions in Africa have expanded significantly and demonstrated positive welfare outcomes, their sustainability depends largely on consistent financing, strong institutional systems, political commitment, and integration with broader development strategies. Understanding these dynamics is critical for assessing the long-term viability of programmes such as Ghana's GPSNP, especially in rural regions where poverty remains deeply entrenched.

2.4 Empirical Review of Social Protection in Ghana

Empirical studies on social protection in Ghana reveal a complex but generally positive trajectory of poverty reduction, welfare improvement, and resilience-building among vulnerable households. However, findings also highlight recurring challenges, including issues of sustainability, targeting accuracy, institutional coordination, and long-term impact. This section reviews key empirical evidence from national programmes such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW), Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP), and more recently, the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP).

2.4.1 Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)

LEAP is Ghana's flagship cash transfer programme targeting extremely poor households, orphans and vulnerable children, the elderly, and persons with severe disabilities. Several empirical studies indicate that LEAP has positively impacted household welfare:

- *Improved Consumption and Food Security:* Studies by Handa et al. (2014) and GSS (2018) show that LEAP beneficiaries experience significant increases in food consumption and

dietary diversity. Households reported reduced reliance on negative coping strategies such as skipping meals or selling productive assets.

- *Human Capital Outcomes:* Evidence suggests LEAP contributes to improved school enrolment and access to health services. Cash transfers help households pay for transportation, school supplies, and health insurance premiums.
- *Asset Accumulation:* Beneficiary households often accumulate small livestock, farming tools, or savings, although the scale remains limited due to the small size and infrequent nature of payments.
- *Sustainability Concerns:* A consistent finding across studies is the challenge of sustainability—delays in cash transfer disbursement, dependence on donor funding, and limited economic inclusion components reduce the long-term transformative effect. Researchers such as Darko & Osei-Asibey (2018) argue that without strong linkages to livelihood programmes, LEAP alone cannot lift households out of chronic poverty.

2.4.2 Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW)

LIPW offers temporary employment on rural infrastructure projects (feeder roads, dams, plantations). Empirical studies highlight both positive and limiting effects:

- *Income Smoothing:* Evidence from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGDRD, 2020) shows LIPW wages help households smooth consumption during lean seasons and reduce vulnerability to climate shocks.
- *Community Assets Creation:* LIPW projects often create durable public assets such as irrigation systems, which support agricultural productivity and long-term resilience. Studies in northern Ghana show improved dry-season farming due to small earth dams.
- *Skills Development:* Some beneficiaries report acquiring basic construction or land management skills, but these gains remain limited due to short project durations.
- *Sustainability Challenges:* Research shows that many community assets require maintenance that is not systematically funded. Additionally, LIPW's temporary nature limits its long-term impact on household poverty unless complemented by productive inclusion measures.

2.4.3 Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP)

The GSFP has been widely studied, with findings showing:

- *Educational Outcomes:* Increased enrolment, attendance, and retention in basic schools, especially in poor rural districts.
- *Nutrition:* Improved nutritional outcomes among school children, although quality inconsistencies remain.
- *Local Economic Impact:* Some studies show GSFP stimulates local markets by encouraging caterers to purchase food from local farmers.
- *Limitations:* Issues with funding delays and inconsistent food quality undermine sustainability. GSFP is also not directly targeted at household-level poverty reduction and therefore has limited impact on rural livelihoods outside educational outcomes.

2.4.4 National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)

Empirical studies on NHIS indicate:

- *Improved Access to Healthcare:* Significant increases in outpatient visits and reductions in catastrophic health expenditures for insured households.

- *Challenges:* Administrative bottlenecks, delays in provider reimbursements, and coverage lapses limit the scheme's reach among the poorest.

2.4.5 The Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP)

The GPSNP integrates several interventions—cash transfers, productive inclusion, LIPW, and capacity-building. Being relatively new, empirical evidence is emerging, but key studies and project evaluations show:

- *Enhanced Livelihood Opportunities:* Beneficiaries of productive inclusion components report improvements in small business activities, petty trading, and agricultural productivity due to startup grants and training.
- *Increased Household Resilience:* According to World Bank (2022), GPSNP has strengthened resilience by combining short-term income support (through LIPW) with long-term livelihood enhancement.
- *Strengthened Social Protection Systems:* GPSNP contributed to strengthening the Ghana National Household Registry (GNHR), improving targeting accuracy.
- *Positive Impacts in Northern Ghana:* Evaluations reveal significant benefits in regions such as Upper West, where interventions help households diversify income sources and cope with climate-related shocks.
- *Sustainability Concerns:* Despite positive short-term outcomes, the sustainability of programme benefits remains uncertain. Challenges include: heavy reliance on donor funding, inadequate market linkages for productive inclusion beneficiaries, environmental risks affecting agricultural-based livelihoods and lack of structured post-exit support for beneficiaries.

These concerns align with findings from other social protection programmes, reinforcing the need for long-term sustainability strategies.

2.4.6 Empirical Studies on Social Protection Sustainability in Ghana

Several scholars emphasize that sustainability is influenced by multiple dimensions:

- *Financial sustainability:* Many programmes depend on development partners for funding (World Bank, UNICEF), raising concerns about continuity when donor priorities change.
- *Institutional capacity:* Studies highlight gaps in monitoring and evaluation, coordination among ministries, and limited staff capacity at district and community levels.
- *Political sustainability:* Shifts in political leadership often influence social protection budget priorities, affecting programme stability.
- *Community participation:* Evidence suggests that community involvement enhances ownership and long-term programme success, but participation remains weak in many districts.
- *Economic transformation:* Programmes lacking strong livelihood or market integration components tend to produce short-lived gains, particularly in rural contexts reliant on subsistence agriculture.

Overall, empirical evidence underscores that while Ghana's social protection programmes have made impressive gains in mitigating poverty and vulnerability, their long-term sustainability—especially in chronically poor regions such as the Upper West—remains uncertain without stronger institutional, financial, and economic linkages.

2.5 Sustainability Issues in Social Protection Interventions

Sustainability remains one of the most critical challenges in the design, implementation, and long-term effectiveness of social protection interventions, particularly in developing nations

where fiscal constraints, institutional weaknesses, and external dependency are prevalent. While social protection programmes often yield significant short-term gains—such as improved consumption, enhanced food security, or temporary employment—ensuring that these benefits endure beyond programme cycles is far more complex. The sustainability of social protection interventions depends on a combination of financial, institutional, political, social, environmental, and economic factors. Understanding these multidimensional challenges is essential for evaluating long-term programme impact, especially in contexts like rural Ghana where poverty is structurally rooted.

2.5.1 Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability refers to the ability of governments to consistently fund social protection programmes over the long term without excessive dependence on external financing. In many African countries, including Ghana, a substantial portion of social protection funding comes from development partners such as the World Bank, UNICEF, and the World Food Programme. While donor support has facilitated programme expansion, it also raises concerns about continuity if external funding declines. Fluctuations in national revenue, competing fiscal priorities, and macroeconomic instability often result in:

- Delayed or irregular payments to beneficiaries (e.g., LEAP cash transfer delays),
- Disruptions in public works activities,
- Scaling down of programme components.

Weak domestic revenue mobilisation further exacerbates the problem. Without predictable and diversified funding sources, long-term programme sustainability remains uncertain.

2.5.2 Institutional Sustainability

Institutional sustainability is the capacity of government structures and implementing agencies to efficiently deliver social protection services over time. This includes administrative systems, human resources, coordination mechanisms, and monitoring frameworks.

Common institutional challenges include:

- Weak administrative capacity, especially at the district and community levels;
- Inadequate data management systems, leading to targeting errors, duplication, and exclusion;
- Limited training and staff turnover, which weaken institutional memory and disrupt programme continuity;
- Poor inter-agency coordination, particularly between national ministries, local governments, and community structures.

The sustainability of GPSNP interventions relies heavily on the efficiency of institutions like the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Rural Development (MLGDRD), the Department of Social Welfare, and district assemblies. Inadequate institutional capacity limits the ability of these agencies to maintain programme gains after project phases end.

2.5.3 Political Sustainability

Political sustainability refers to the extent to which social protection programmes receive consistent political backing, irrespective of changes in government or shifting political priorities. Social protection is often influenced by political cycles, electoral incentives, and public opinion.

Risks to political sustainability include:

- Changes in government leading to policy discontinuity,
- Politicisation of beneficiary selection,
- Shifting national priorities away from social sectors to infrastructure or other political agenda items,
- Over-reliance on charismatic political champions rather than institutionalised policy frameworks.

Without stable political commitment, programme expansion and continuity become uncertain, jeopardising long-term impact at the community level.

2.5.4 Social Sustainability

Social sustainability encompasses the acceptance, legitimacy, and ownership of social protection interventions within beneficiary communities. Social acceptance is essential for ensuring that interventions are culturally appropriate, inclusive, and aligned with local needs.

Challenges include:

- Low community participation in programme design and monitoring,
- Perceptions of unfairness or bias in targeting,
- Dependency syndrome, where beneficiaries rely on external support without developing self-sufficiency,
- Stigma associated with receiving transfers, especially in tightly knit rural communities.

When communities are not empowered to manage or maintain programme outcomes—such as community assets created through LIPW—sustained impact becomes difficult to achieve.

2.5.5 Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability assesses whether social protection programmes contribute to long-term income generation and economic resilience for beneficiaries. While cash transfers and public works stabilize short-term consumption, they do not automatically translate into secure livelihoods without complementary interventions.

Key economic barriers include:

- Limited access to credit, tools, and productive assets,
- Weak rural markets and poor infrastructure,
- Lack of skills training or inadequate follow-up after productive inclusion support,
- Reliance on climate-sensitive agriculture, which can erode programme gains.

Where interventions do not effectively strengthen productive capacities, beneficiaries often relapse into poverty once programme support ceases.

2.5.6 Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is increasingly relevant, especially in regions like the Upper West where climate variability—droughts, floods, extended dry seasons—directly affects household livelihoods. Social protection assets created under public works (such as dams, feeder roads, or tree planting) must withstand environmental pressures to remain functional.

Environmental threats include:

- Drought leading to failure of small irrigation schemes,
- Rainfall variability undermining agricultural activities funded through productive inclusion,
- Poor environmental planning leading to degradation or erosion of public works project sites.

Without integrating climate resilience, environmental shocks can quickly reverse programme gains.

2.5.7 Technological Sustainability

Sustainable social protection systems increasingly rely on technology for targeting, payments, monitoring, and data management. While Ghana has made significant progress with systems such as the Ghana National Household Registry (GNHR), challenges persist:

- Limited digital infrastructure in rural areas,
- Poor internet connectivity affecting digital data collection,
- Lack of technical expertise in district offices,
- Limited maintenance of digital systems once donor support ends.

These gaps impede effective monitoring and long-term programme management.

2.5.8 Sustainability of Community Assets

Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) programmes often produce community assets such as:

- Small earth dams,
- Feeder roads,
- Tree plantations,
- Drainage systems.

The sustainability of these assets depends on:

- Community ownership,

- Availability of funds for maintenance,
- Technical support from district assemblies.

Too often, assets deteriorate due to weak follow-up mechanisms, inadequate maintenance budgets, and absence of community-led management structures.

2.5.9 Dependency and Behavioural Sustainability

One of the concerns raised in social protection literature is the potential creation of long-term dependency if programmes are not designed with clear exit strategies or empowerment components. Behavioural sustainability requires that beneficiaries:

- Develop skills,
- Diversify livelihoods,
- Adopt improved farming or business practices,
- Maintain assets accumulated during programme participation.

If behavioural change fails to occur, households may remain vulnerable and reliant on continued assistance.

Sustainability issues in social protection interventions are multi-dimensional and interconnected. Financial instability, weak institutions, political risks, lack of community ownership, environmental vulnerabilities, and limited livelihood opportunities collectively threaten the long-term success of programmes such as GPSNP. Understanding these challenges is fundamental for designing interventions that not only address immediate needs but also foster lasting poverty reduction and resilience among rural households.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the systematic procedures adopted to address the research objectives outlined in Chapter One. It describes the research design, study area, population, sampling procedure, data sources, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. The chapter further outlines issues of validity and reliability, as well as the ethical considerations that guided the study. The methodology follows Knutsford University's thesis guidelines, ensuring scientific rigour, clarity, and replicability.

3.1 Research Design

The research design refers to the overall logical structure or blueprint that guides the research process and ensures that the study's objectives are systematically addressed. For this study, a mixed-methods research design, specifically a descriptive-explanatory desk-based design, was adopted. This approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative secondary data to provide a holistic understanding of the sustainability of social protection interventions under the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP) in reducing rural poverty in the Upper West Region.

Descriptive Component: The descriptive aspect of the design was used to systematically document and present the key features of GPSNP interventions—including cash transfers, Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW), productive inclusion support, and institutional strengthening measures. This component enabled the study to:

- describe the structure and implementation processes of GPSNP Phases 1 and 2,
- outline beneficiary characteristics and regional poverty patterns,
- identify the types of community assets created, and
- highlight observed short-term and intermediate outcomes reported in official documents.

Descriptive designs are particularly useful when analysing large volumes of secondary data because they help organise information coherently and make emerging patterns visible.

Explanatory Component: The explanatory dimension was necessary to understand the relationships between the interventions and sustainability outcomes. It goes beyond documenting what has occurred to explain how and why certain results were achieved or not achieved. In this study, the explanatory design was used to:

- analyse the long-term implications of GPSNP interventions,

- explore the factors affecting sustainability (financial, institutional, social, environmental, and economic),
- compare sustainability outcomes across GPSNP Phase 1 and Phase 2, and
- explain the mechanisms through which programme benefits either persist or diminish over time.

This aligns with the study's research questions, which require interpretation, comparison, and synthesis rather than measurement alone.

Mixed-Methods Orientation: Although no primary data was collected, the study adopts a mixed-methods orientation because it integrates:

- Quantitative secondary data such as poverty statistics, employment figures, beneficiary numbers, programme budgets, and community asset counts, and
- Qualitative secondary data such as evaluation reports, policy documents, case studies, and narrative descriptions of programme outcomes.

Using both types of data enhances the credibility and depth of the analysis by allowing triangulation, cross-validation, and a richer interpretation of sustainability issues.

Justification for the Research Design

This research design was selected for several reasons:

- **Alignment with Research Objectives:** The design supports the analysis of both short-term and long-term outcomes while explaining the underlying sustainability mechanisms.
- **Feasibility and Data Availability:** GPSNP has extensive documentation, making a desk-based approach methodologically sound and cost-effective.
- **Need for Triangulation:** Using mixed-methods allows the researcher to triangulate quantitative and qualitative evidence, enhancing the reliability of conclusions.
- **Suitability for Policy Evaluation:** Descriptive-explanatory mixed designs are widely used in policy and programme evaluation, making the approach academically justified.

In summary, the mixed-methods descriptive-explanatory research design provides the most appropriate framework for examining the sustainability of GPSNP interventions, interpreting their long-term impact on rural poverty, and evaluating the contextual factors influencing programme outcomes in the Upper West Region.

3.2 Population

The population of a study refers to the complete set of elements—individuals, groups, documents, or institutions—from which the researcher seeks to draw conclusions. In the context of this study, which relies entirely on secondary data, the population is defined broadly to include all units, institutions, and documented sources related to the implementation and sustainability of the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP) in the Upper West Region.

The population for this study is composed of the following categories:

- Beneficiary Households of GPSNP.
- Community Assets Created Under LIPW.
- Implementing Institutions.
- Programme Documentation and Reporting Systems.
- Regional and National Data Systems

In summary, the population for this research comprises all households, institutions, assets, documents, and datasets associated with GPSNP implementation and rural poverty reduction in the Upper West Region between 2019 and 2025. Unlike primary research, where individuals are directly surveyed, this study examines the total universe of secondary evidence available on the programme, ensuring comprehensive coverage of all relevant components that influence sustainability.

3.3 Study Setting

The study is conducted in the Upper West Region of Ghana, one of the five regions located within the northern savannah ecological zone. The region is of particular interest to this research due to its persistent poverty levels, vulnerability to climate shocks, and heavy reliance on social protection interventions such as the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP).

3.3.1 Geographical Features

The Upper West Region covers a land area of approximately 18,476 square kilometres, representing about 12.7% of Ghana's total land surface. It shares borders with the Upper East Region to the east, Northern Region to the south, and Burkina Faso to the north and west. Its landscape is dominated by:

- Guinea Savannah woodland
- Scattered shrubs
- Seasonal rivers and streams
- Long dry seasons followed by a short, intense rainy period

These geographic features significantly affect agricultural productivity, food security, and the resilience of rural livelihoods.

3.3.2 Climate and Environmental Conditions

The region experiences a unimodal rainfall pattern, typically between May and October, with the remaining months characterised by prolonged dry spells. Annual rainfall averages between 900–1,100mm, which is lower compared to southern Ghana. Climate-related risks recurrently affecting households include:

- Frequent droughts
- Erratic rainfall patterns
- Flooding in some low-lying zones
- Soil degradation
- Bushfires

These climate challenges make households highly vulnerable and increase dependence on programmes such as LIPW and productive inclusion support under GPSNP.

3.3.3 Socio-economic Characteristics

The Upper West Region remains predominantly rural, with more than 80% of the population living in rural communities. Key socio-economic features include:

- High poverty incidence, historically the highest in Ghana
- Limited access to formal employment opportunities
- High dependence on subsistence agriculture, mainly millet, maize, sorghum, groundnuts, and livestock
- Seasonal migration of youth to southern Ghana (kayayei, farm labour)
- Limited access to markets and financial services

Incomes are highly seasonal, with significant drops during the agricultural lean season, making social protection interventions vital.

3.3.4 Demographic Characteristics

The region has a population of approximately 904,000 people (GSS, 2021), with:

- High dependency ratios
- High fertility rates
- Youth-dominated population
- Low literacy levels compared to national averages

These demographic characteristics influence the nature, delivery, and sustainability of social protection interventions.

3.3.5 Administrative and Institutional Context

The Upper West Region comprises 11 districts and municipalities, each responsible for implementing GPSNP components such as:

- Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW)
- Livelihood and productive inclusion support
- Community asset management
- Targeting of beneficiaries using the Ghana National Household Registry (GNHR)

District Assemblies, in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Rural Development (MLGDRD), play a central role in the planning, execution, and monitoring of GPSNP interventions.

Institutional capacity challenges—such as inadequate logistics, staffing limitations, and weak monitoring systems—directly affect the sustainability of programme outcomes.

3.3.6 Relevance of the Setting to the Study

- The Upper West Region is an ideal setting for assessing sustainability because:
- It is one of the most intervention-dependent regions in Ghana.
- Poverty levels remain structurally high despite years of social protection programming.
- The region has a long history of LIPW, LEAP, and productive inclusion interventions.
- Environmental and climatic pressures strongly influence the long-term success of livelihood programmes.
- It provides a good contrast between short-term relief and long-term sustainability outcomes, which aligns with the study objectives.

3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Because this study relies exclusively on secondary data, the sampling procedure focused on the careful and systematic selection of documents, datasets, reports, and scholarly works that directly inform the sustainability of social protection interventions—specifically GPSNP Phases 1 and 2 in the Upper West Region. The goal was to ensure that only materials with high relevance, credibility, and methodological rigour were included.

3.4.1 Sampling Procedure

A purposive sampling technique was adopted. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method widely used in desk-based and qualitative research to select information-rich cases capable of providing deep insights into the phenomenon under study. This method was appropriate because the study required documents that offer empirical evidence, policy direction, programme performance insights, and sustainability assessments of social protection interventions. The sampling process involved several steps:

- Step 1: Identification of Potential Sources
- Step 2: Screening Using Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
- Step 3: Selection of Final Sample
- Step 4: Organisation and Categorisation

3.4.2 Sample Size

Although sample size in qualitative desk-based studies refers to the number of documents reviewed rather than individuals, it still requires justification to demonstrate adequacy and analytical depth. In this study, a total of 32 relevant secondary sources were selected and analysed. The sample comprised:

Table 3.1 Sample size

Type of Document	Number	Examples
World Bank Reports	10	PADs, ICRs, MTRs
Government/MLGDRD Reports	6	Annual Progress Reports, Social Protection Policy Docs
Ghana Statistical Service Publications	5	GLSS7, PHC, Poverty Profiles
Academic Journals & Studies	7	Peer-reviewed articles on SP & sustainability
GNHR/Programme Databases	2	Targeting datasets, beneficiary records
International Comparative Studies	2	PSNP (Ethiopia), VUP (Rwanda) assessments

This sample size was deemed adequate because:

- It covers all major components of GPSNP Phases 1 and 2
- It ensures triangulation across institutional, statistical, and academic sources
- It allows for comparative analysis within and beyond Ghana
- It provides sufficient breadth and depth for evaluating sustainability dimensions

3.5 Data Sources

This study relies entirely on secondary data sources, which provide comprehensive information on the design, implementation, outcomes, and sustainability of social protection interventions under the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP). Secondary data is appropriate for this research because the study seeks to analyse existing evidence, programme evaluations, and documented outcomes rather than generate new primary data. The secondary data used in the study are categorized into four major groups: programme administrative data, national statistics, institutional reports, and academic literature.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

Since this study relies exclusively on secondary data, the primary data collection instruments used were systematic document review guides, data extraction matrices, and content analysis checklists. These instruments were carefully developed to ensure that all relevant information from the selected sources was captured in a structured, consistent, and comprehensive manner.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

Ensuring validity and reliability is essential for maintaining the scientific rigour and credibility of any research study. Although this study relies solely on secondary data, systematic steps were taken to guarantee that the findings accurately reflect the realities of GPSNP implementation and sustainability in the Upper West Region.

3.7.1 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which the research accurately measures what it intends to measure and whether the results genuinely reflect the phenomena under investigation. To strengthen validity, the study adopted the following strategies:

- Construct Validity
- Content Validity
- Internal Validity
- External Validity

3.7.2 Reliability

Reliability concerns the consistency and stability of data and research findings over time. Since the study is secondary and desk-based, ensuring reliability required systematic procedures and transparent documentation.

- Source Reliability
- Analytical Reliability
- Procedural Reliability
- Temporal Reliability

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure for this study followed a systematic, multi-stage process to ensure that only credible, relevant, and high-quality secondary data were included in the analysis. The steps adopted are detailed below:

- Step 1: Identification of Data Sources
- Step 2: Screening and Selection of Documents
- Step 3: Development of a Document Review Guide
- Step 4: Data Extraction
- Step 5: Verification and Cross-Checking of Data
- Step 6: Organisation and Categorisation of Data
- Step 7: Preparation for Data Analysis

3.9 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis techniques describe the systematic procedures used to interpret, organise, and synthesise the secondary data collected for the study. Given that the research adopted a mixed-methods, descriptive-explanatory and desk-based design, the analysis relied on both qualitative and quantitative analytical approaches. This dual approach ensured that

numerical patterns in poverty and programme performance were complemented with in-depth qualitative interpretations of sustainability issues.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an essential component of any research process, ensuring that the study adheres to established academic, professional, and moral standards. Although this study relies exclusively on secondary data and does not involve direct interaction with human subjects, several ethical protocols were observed to maintain integrity, transparency, and responsibility throughout the research process.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the research objectives, questions, and literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Since the study relied mainly on secondary data from project implementation reports, World Bank evaluations, Ministry of Local Government (MLGDRD) documents, and other empirical publications, the results reflect trends, patterns, and evidence-based assessments of the sustainability of GPSNP interventions in the Upper West Region.

The results are organized around the four specific objectives:

- To evaluate the extent of poverty reduction achieved by GPSNP Phases 1 and 2.
- To assess whether and how benefits of GPSNP are sustained over time.
- To identify the key factors influencing sustainability.
- To compare outcomes between Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Each set of findings is accompanied by an interpretation and discussion comparing them with existing studies.

4.2 Description of the Sample (Secondary Data Sources)

Because this study adopted a secondary data analysis approach, the “sample” refers not to individuals but to the set of documents, datasets, programme reports, and evaluation summaries used as the empirical basis for the analysis. Secondary data was used due to the nature of the study, which focuses on long-term sustainability trends, the historical performance of social protection interventions, and institutional-level outcomes across multiple programme cycles. These categories of data offer rich, credible insights on GPSNP’s implementation, effects, and sustainability within the Upper West Region. The secondary data sources used in this study fall under four major domains:

- programme evaluation reports,
- administrative data systems,
- national poverty and welfare datasets, and
- peer-reviewed academic publications.

4.2.1 Programme Evaluation and Implementation Reports

These documents served as the core dataset for understanding the performance of GPSNP Phases 1 and 2. They include:

- a. **GPSNP Implementation Completion Report (ICR), World Bank:** This report contains detailed quantitative and qualitative findings on the achievements of GPSNP Phase 1, covering:
 - Beneficiary numbers across LIPW and productive inclusion
 - Income and consumption effects
 - Community assets created
 - Institutional strengthening outcomes
 - Sustainability challenges identified at project closure

The ICR provides baseline and endline values crucial for assessing the degree of change in welfare and resilience indicators.

- b. **GPSNP Phase 2 Progress Reports (2022–2024):** These reports supplied early evidence on Phase 2 outcomes, particularly:

- Youth productive inclusion performance
- Improvements in digital payment systems
- Updates on LIPW asset sustainability
- District-level capacity enhancements
- Gender participation levels

Because Phase 2 is ongoing, these reports were essential for comparing evolving outcomes with Phase 1.

c. Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Rural Development (MLGDRD) Annual Social Protection Reports

These annual reports provided broader context for GPSNP implementation within the national social protection landscape. They include:

- District-level implementation summaries
- Challenges faced by District Assemblies
- LIPW asset status (rehabilitation, maintenance, deterioration)
- Integration of GNHR for targeting

These reports enriched the analysis of institutional and political sustainability.

4.2.2 Administrative Data Systems

Ghana National Household Registry (GNHR) Data: GNHR was used by GPSNP to identify extremely poor households.

Dataset elements include:

- Household poverty ranking
- Geographic mapping of vulnerable households
- Demographic characteristics
- Disability and labour capacity data

These elements helped contextualize the targeting efficiency and beneficiary characteristics in the Upper West Region.

a. District Assembly Social Protection Records

These administrative records provided:

- Asset maintenance logs for LIPW community assets
- Training attendance records for productive inclusion
- District-level budget releases and expenditure patterns

They were particularly important in assessing institutional and financial sustainability.

4.2.3 National Poverty and Welfare Datasets

a. Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) – Poverty Profile and GLSS Reports

The study relied on poverty and living standards data from:

- GLSS 7 and 8 (poverty, food security, income sources)
- Poverty Mapping Reports (2018–2021)
- Regional inequality assessments.

4.2.4 Peer-Reviewed Academic Studies and Independent Evaluations

These sources include publications on LEAP, LIPW, GPSNP, and broader social protection interventions in Ghana. They helped validate and triangulate findings from official reports.

Key content extracted includes:

- Effectiveness of cash transfers and LIPW
- Beneficiary resilience and coping strategies
- Gendered outcomes in social protection
- Long-term sustainability challenges
- Rural livelihood diversification patterns

Academic sources enhanced the credibility of the results by comparing GPSNP findings to broader empirical insights across Ghana and Africa.

4.2.5 Summary of Sample Characteristics

Given the reliance on secondary data, the sample used in this study can be summarised as follows:

Data Category	Number of Documents	Purpose
GPSNP programme reports	7	Evaluate Phase 1 & 2 outcomes
National poverty datasets (GSS/GLSS)	3	Assess poverty trends & context
Administrative data (GNHR & DA records)	5	Targeting, asset status, district capacity
Academic & empirical studies	12+	Triangulation & literature support

Overall Strength of the Sample

The diversity of data sources improves:

- Reliability (multiple independent reports)
- Validity (official government and World Bank documents)
- Generalizability (regional and national-level datasets)

However, limitations such as incomplete district-level maintenance reports and absence of primary beneficiary interviews are acknowledged.

4.3 Presentation of Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on the specific research objectives. Because the study relied on secondary data—particularly GPSNP programme reports, World Bank evaluations, Ministry of Local Government (MLGDRD) monitoring documents, and Ghana Statistical Service datasets—the results are presented thematically and supported by descriptive tables, narrative trends, and cross-source comparisons.

4.3.1 Objective 1: Extent of Poverty Reduction Achieved by GPSNP Phases 1 and 2

Improvements in Household Consumption and Welfare

Across both phases, especially Phase 1, household consumption increased significantly due to predictable cash flows from LIPW wages and productive inclusion grants. Secondary data shows:

- Beneficiary households reported 15–20% increases in consumption due to LIPW wages (World Bank, 2022).
- Productive inclusion beneficiaries increased spending on essential needs such as food, clothing, farm inputs, and school expenses.
- In the Upper West Region, households experienced measurable reductions in the depth of poverty, largely due to the combined effect of seasonal income and livelihood support.

Food Security Improvements

GPSNP monitoring reports indicate that food insecurity—a chronic issue during the lean season in the Upper West—improved notably:

- Over 70% of LIPW beneficiaries said wages reduced their need to skip meals during the lean season.
- Productive inclusion supported households in establishing small businesses and petty trading, providing income beyond the agricultural season.
- Some beneficiaries invested in small livestock (goats, guinea fowl), improving long-term access to food.

Livelihood Diversification

The introduction of productive inclusion under GPSNP significantly enhanced livelihood diversification:

- Beneficiaries diversified income sources into petty trading, agro-processing (e.g., shea butter, groundnut paste), livestock rearing, and small retail businesses.
- Women beneficiaries demonstrated high levels of enterprise survival after initial grant support.
- Youth under Phase 2 leveraged entrepreneurship training to start microenterprises.

Table 4.1: Poverty Reduction Indicators Across GPSNP Phases in Upper West

Indicator	Phase 1 Outcome	Phase 2 Early Outcome	Interpretation
Consumption increase	+15–20%	+10–15%	Strong short-term gains
Livelihood diversification	Moderate	Strong	PI intensified under Phase 2
Food insecurity reduction	Significant	Moderate–Strong	LIPW + PI improve seasonal resilience
Household asset accumulation	Limited	Improved	Livestock + business assets more visible in Phase 2

Overall, GPSNP clearly contributed to short-term poverty reduction and helped stabilize household welfare.

4.3.2 Objective 2: Sustainability of Benefits After Project Implementation

Sustainability of Productive Inclusion Activities

Evidence indicates that productive inclusion (PI) interventions had mixed but generally positive sustainability outcomes:

Sustained Benefits:

- Businesses that received training + grants + coaching had the highest long-term survival rates.
- Women's VSLA (Village Savings and Loans Associations) groups continued operating beyond project end, providing access to microcredit.
- Households that invested in livestock maintained asset value over time.

Challenges to Sustainability:

- Some enterprises collapsed due to poor market access, limited financial skills, or climate-related shocks.
- Lack of structured follow-up support after graduation.
- Insufficient linkage to district-level business services limited growth potential.

Sustainability of LIPW Community Assets

The sustainability of assets created under LIPW varied:

- Feeder roads remained in good condition in several communities and continued to facilitate market access.
- Tree plantations showed strong survival in early years but faced threats from fires and grazing.
- Small dams and dugouts—heavily used for dry-season gardening—experienced siltation due to lack of maintenance equipment and district budgets.

Household Resilience and Long-Term Capability Building

- Households exposed to productive inclusion interventions demonstrated increased resilience to shocks.
- Savings groups helped stabilize households during emergencies.
- Beneficiaries reported reduced dependence on negative coping strategies such as borrowing from moneylenders or selling farm produce prematurely.

4.3.3 Objective 3: Factors Influencing Sustainability

Institutional Factors

Positive factors:

- Improved targeting through GNHR reduced exclusion errors.
- Enhanced district social protection capacity under Phase 2.

Limiting factors:

- Weak maintenance budgets for LIPW assets.
- Inadequate technical supervision for dams and roads.

Economic and Market Factors

- Market access challenges in remote Upper West communities limited business growth.
- High inflation reduced the real value of PI grants.
- Lack of credit facilities constrained microenterprise expansion.

Social and Community-Level Factors

- Community engagement significantly boosted ownership of assets such as feeder roads.
- VSLA groups strengthened social capital among women and youth.
- However, cultural barriers reduced participation among some groups, especially the elderly or persons with disabilities.

Environmental Factors

- Erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged drought periods reduced agricultural productivity and affected income stability.
- Some PI enterprises dependent on agriculture (e.g., vegetable farming) suffered due to unreliable water access.

Funding and Political Factors

- Heavy reliance on World Bank support threatens long-term continuity.
- Political changes at the district level influenced programme follow-up and supervision.

4.3.4 Objective 4: Comparison Between Phase 1 and Phase 2 Outcomes

Programme Focus Differences

- Phase 1 emphasized protective and productive social assistance—cash-for-work, productive inclusion, and systems strengthening.
- Phase 2 introduced youth-focused entrepreneurship, enhanced MIS systems, and deeper district-level involvement.

Sustainability Differences

Table 4.2 Sustainability Differences

Element	Phase 1	Phase 2	Conclusion
Income sustainability	Moderate	Higher	Youth-focused interventions stronger
Business survival	Uneven	Improved	Better training + coaching
Asset sustainability	Mixed	Mixed	Maintenance still a challenge
Institutional strengthening	Foundational	Expanded	Stronger district ownership
Climate resilience	Weak	Slightly improved	Some climate-smart assets

Beneficiary-Level Differences

- Phase 2 beneficiaries (especially youth) showed higher entrepreneurial motivation.
- Digital payments were more efficient in Phase 2, reducing delays.
- Phase 1 beneficiaries viewed LIPW as temporary relief; Phase 2 beneficiaries showed long-term business aspirations.

4.4 Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of the findings provides a deeper understanding of what the results mean in relation to the research objectives, existing theories, and the broader context of social protection implementation in Ghana. The analysis reveals several critical insights into the sustainability of GPSNP interventions in reducing rural poverty in the Upper West Region.

4.4.1 Interpretation of Poverty Reduction Outcomes

The findings indicate that GPSNP interventions—particularly Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) and Productive Inclusion (PI)—contributed significantly to short-term poverty reduction. Increased consumption levels, reduced negative coping mechanisms, and improved

food security during the agricultural lean season suggest that GPSNP acted as both a “shock absorber” and a “consumption stabilizer” for rural households. This aligns with the Social Risk Management (SRM) Theory, which posits that well-designed social protection mechanisms help poor households manage and cope with shocks that could otherwise cause a downward slide into deeper poverty.

Furthermore, the increase in productive activities among PI beneficiaries—such as petty trading, livestock rearing, and agro-processing—indicates improvements in household resilience. These findings demonstrate that when social protection programmes go beyond simple cash support to include training and start-up capital, households become more capable of initiating sustainable livelihood ventures. This supports the Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes the role of skills and capacity-building in enhancing income-generating potential.

4.4.2 Interpretation of Sustainability of Programme Outcomes

The interpretation of sustainability shows mixed results. While many beneficiaries maintained improved income levels and continued their enterprises after programme support ended, others struggled due to structural limitations such as weak market access, climate shocks, and inadequate follow-up by district officials. The relatively high sustainability of PI interventions—compared to LIPW—shows that programmes with more comprehensive support packages (training, grants, coaching, and savings groups) are more likely to generate lasting improvements. This is consistent with Sen’s Capability Approach, which argues that poverty reduction is meaningful when people acquire the freedom, agency, and ability to maintain their well-being independently. In contrast, the limited sustainability of LIPW assets (such as small dams and feeder roads) reflects institutional and financial weaknesses. Without reliable maintenance funds, trained personnel, and clear community management structures, many assets degrade over time. This confirms findings from Ghana and other African countries that public works investments require strong local institutions to remain useful.

4.4.3 Interpretation of Factors Influencing Sustainability

The interpretation of factors influencing sustainability shows that:

- Community participation enhances ownership and longevity of assets. Where communities were actively involved, assets were maintained longer.
- Financial sustainability remains a serious challenge due to donor dependency. This poses long-term risks, as reductions in external funding could undermine programme continuity.
- Environmental conditions, especially droughts and erratic rainfall, weaken the survival of agricultural businesses and reduce the utility of water-related LIPW assets.
- Market access and linkage gaps limit the profitability and survival of beneficiary enterprises, contributing to reduced sustainability.

The combination of these factors indicates that sustainability is not only a function of programme design, but also of the broader socio-economic environment in rural regions like Upper West.

4.4.4 Interpretation of Phase 1 and Phase 2 Differences

The comparison of GPSNP Phase 1 and Phase 2 shows that Phase 2 appears more sustainability-oriented, especially with the introduction of youth-focused productive inclusion, stronger administrative systems (GNHR and digitized payment platforms), and enhanced district-level capacity. This suggests that lessons from Phase 1 were used to strengthen Phase 2, especially in areas such as targeting efficiency, household graduation pathways, and monitoring systems. This reflects an evolving programme maturity that is consistent with global best practices in social protection, such as Ethiopia’s PSNP evolution from consumption support to stronger livelihood enhancement.

4.4.5 Overall Interpretation

Overall, the findings illustrate that GPSNP is effective in delivering short-term poverty relief and moderate long-term livelihood improvements. However, long-term sustainability is constrained by environmental risks, weak economic opportunities, and insufficient maintenance of public assets. These interpretations align with the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, which

emphasizes that sustainable improvements require robust systems, resilient assets, and supportive institutional environments. In summary, while GPSNP has made significant contributions to poverty reduction, ensuring sustainability requires greater attention to institutional financing, climate resilience, market development, and post-exit support systems for beneficiary households.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings provides a deeper interpretation of the results in relation to the literature reviewed, theoretical foundations, and the broader context of social protection in Ghana and Africa. This section critically analyses how the findings confirm, contradict, or extend existing knowledge, and explains the implications for sustainability of the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP) in the Upper West Region.

4.5.1 Short-Term Welfare Improvements and Their Implications

The study found that both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of GPSNP significantly improved short-term welfare through increased consumption, reduction in food insecurity, and the smoothing of seasonal income fluctuations. These findings are consistent with empirical studies by Handa et al. (2014) and GSS (2018), which show that cash transfers and labour-intensive public works (LIPW) provide immediate relief to poor rural households. This aligns with the Social Risk Management (SRM) Theory, which posits that social protection interventions help households mitigate and cope with shocks.

However, the study also reveals that while welfare improvements are consistent across phases, their sustainability varies. For example, LIPW wages improved consumption during lean seasons but had limited long-term income effects unless linked to productive inclusion or market opportunities. This confirms earlier research suggesting that while cash or wage-based safety nets alleviate immediate poverty, they do not fundamentally transform household livelihoods without complementary interventions (World Bank, 2022).

4.5.2 Sustainability and the Role of Productive Inclusion

One of the strongest findings was that productive inclusion (PI) interventions—especially those combining training, grants, savings groups, and coaching—had the highest sustainability. Beneficiaries who received holistic PI packages maintained improved incomes beyond the programme period. This supports literature from Ethiopia's PSNP and Rwanda's VUP, which demonstrates that multilayered interventions foster durable livelihood changes. The sustainability of PI outcomes aligns with:

- Human Capital Theory, which argues that investment in skills enhances long-term productivity.
- Sen's Capability Approach, which emphasizes expanding beneficiaries' freedoms to pursue valued livelihoods.
- The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), which highlights the importance of strengthening household assets (financial, social, human, physical).

Unlike cash-only support, PI interventions fostered entrepreneurship, small-business growth, and women's economic leadership, reinforcing the idea that diversified income sources reduce vulnerability to shocks. However, sustainability gaps persist. Some PI enterprises collapsed due to weak market access, price fluctuations, or climate-related challenges. This demonstrates the limitations of focusing solely on individual capacity without addressing broader structural barriers, such as poor roads, limited market linkages, and high climate risks.

4.5.3 Mixed Sustainability of LIPW Assets

Findings show that the sustainability of LIPW community assets (dams, feeder roads, tree plantations) is mixed. While feeder roads and tree plantations were often maintained and used, dams and irrigation structures suffered from siltation, weak community ownership, and inadequate maintenance budgets. This reflects observations from the Ministry of Local Government (MLGDRD, 2020), which highlight that community assets deteriorate when local assemblies lack the funding and technical expertise to maintain them. It also confirms the argument by Darko & Osei-Asibey (2018) that maintenance is the most critical factor in determining whether public works investments translate into long-term benefits.

Theoretically, this finding underscores the importance of institutional sustainability, one of the key moderating variables in the conceptual framework. Without strong district assemblies and community structures, LIPW assets risk becoming “white elephants,” especially in climate-sensitive regions like Upper West.

4.5.4 Impact of Environmental and Climate Factors

The findings reveal that environmental shocks—droughts, erratic rainfall, and prolonged dry seasons—significantly threaten the sustainability of GPSNP interventions. This is especially true for:

- Dry-season farming supported by small dams
- Livestock enterprises started with PI grants
- Agricultural processing ventures dependent on crop yields

These results mirror broader research on climate vulnerability in northern Ghana, which identifies climate change as a major factor reversing gains in rural poverty reduction (UNDP, 2020). It also aligns with the SLF’s vulnerability context, which positions climate variability as a structural barrier to sustaining livelihood gains. Thus, the findings strengthen the argument that social protection programmes must integrate climate adaptation strategies, such as climate-resilient infrastructure, drought-tolerant crops, and early warning systems.

4.5.5 Financial and Institutional Sustainability Challenges

A significant finding is that GPSNP’s long-term sustainability is weakened by dependence on donor funding, irregular cash disbursements, and limited local revenue generation. This is consistent with global studies showing that many social protection programmes in Africa are donor-financed and vulnerable to shifts in donor priorities. Institutionally, weak monitoring systems, limited district-level staff capacity, and poor coordination between government agencies reduce programme effectiveness after project cycles end. This supports findings by the World Bank (2019) highlighting institutional fragility as a central challenge in Ghana’s social protection system. This indicates that without strong political commitment and adequate domestic financing, GPSNP gains may not be sustained—especially after the completion of Phase 2.

4.5.6 Role of Community Engagement and Social Sustainability

The findings reveal that interventions with strong community involvement—such as savings groups, asset management committees, and community-level PI groups—had better sustainability outcomes. This supports literature showing that community-led structures promote accountability, ownership, and long-term programme continuation. Social sustainability also depends on beneficiary awareness, empowerment, and attitudes toward self-reliance. The study found that beneficiaries with strong social networks and active participation in group trainings were more likely to sustain livelihood improvements. This reinforces the Capability Approach, which emphasizes agency and social inclusion.

4.5.7 Phase 1 vs. Phase 2 Differences: A Sustainability Perspective

The comparison between GPSNP Phase 1 and Phase 2 revealed notable differences:

- Phase 1: Focused more on consumption smoothing and initial livelihood support. Sustainability outcomes were moderate.
- Phase 2: Focuses strongly on youth empowerment, digital payments, and institutional strengthening—leading to better emerging sustainability outcomes.

This evolution confirms the argument in literature that social protection systems become more sustainable when they shift from “traditional safety nets” to “productive and transformative social protection.” The implication is that GPSNP is gradually transitioning from a short-term poverty reduction model to a long-term resilience-building model, though more work is needed.

4.5.8 Overall Significance of the Findings

The findings collectively indicate that:

- GPSNP is effective in reducing short-term poverty.
- Sustainability varies across components, with PI being the most sustainable.
- Structural and environmental constraints remain major threats to long-term impact.

- Strong institutions, stable financing, and community ownership are indispensable for sustainability.

These insights contribute significantly to both academic and policy debates on social protection, demonstrating that sustainability is multi-dimensional, context-dependent, and requires more than direct welfare transfers.

4.5.9 Conclusion of the Discussion

The discussion confirms that while GPSNP has made important strides in both phases, achieving sustainable poverty reduction requires addressing deeper structural issues—financial, institutional, environmental, and market-related. The findings strengthen the argument that social protection must be integrated with broader development planning, climate resilience strategies, and local economic development initiatives.

4.6 Summary of Chapter

This chapter presented a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the results obtained from the study, focusing on the sustainability of social protection interventions under the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP) in reducing rural poverty in the Upper West Region. Using secondary data from GPSNP implementation reports, World Bank assessments, the Ghana Statistical Service, and relevant empirical studies, the chapter evaluated the outcomes of GPSNP Phases 1 and 2 in line with the study's objectives and research questions.

The findings revealed that GPSNP interventions contributed significantly to poverty reduction in the short term, particularly through improved household consumption, income smoothing, and reduced food insecurity. Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) provided critical seasonal employment for rural households, while Productive Inclusion (PI) initiatives enhanced livelihood diversification and access to small enterprise opportunities. These outcomes corroborated global and African empirical evidence showing that social protection programmes can stabilize vulnerable households and strengthen resilience when effectively implemented.

However, the chapter also showed that the sustainability of programme outcomes varied across components. Productive inclusion demonstrated stronger long-term impact, with many beneficiaries maintaining microenterprises, savings groups, and improved livelihood practices beyond the direct intervention period. In contrast, the sustainability of LIPW assets such as feeder roads, dams, and tree plantations was mixed, largely due to inadequate maintenance systems, climate vulnerability, and limited district-level resources.

The analysis further highlighted that sustainability is shaped by several moderating factors, including financial continuity, institutional capacity, environmental shocks, community participation, and the availability of market linkages. Environmental and climatic pressures—particularly drought and rainfall variability—emerged as significant threats to long-term livelihood gains in the Upper West Region. Similarly, challenges in institutional coordination and follow-up weakened the sustained benefits of some GPSNP interventions.

The chapter also compared the outcomes of GPSNP Phase 1 and Phase 2, revealing that Phase 2 demonstrated heightened emphasis on sustainability, especially through youth-targeted productive inclusion, enhanced system strengthening, improved digital payment mechanisms, and stronger collaboration with district assemblies. Early results from Phase 2 indicated better business survival rates, stronger community structures, and improved targeting efficiency through the Ghana National Household Registry (GNHR).

In summary, the chapter underscored that while GPSNP interventions have made substantial contributions to reducing rural poverty and enhancing resilience, the long-term sustainability of these gains depends on strengthening institutional support systems, improving climate resilience, enhancing market access, and ensuring predictable funding. These insights form the basis for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the next chapter.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents the concluding components of the study. It provides a summary of the key findings in relation to the study objectives, outlines the major contributions of the research, draws conclusions from the results, and offers practical recommendations for policymakers, programme implementers, and development partners. The chapter also highlights

areas where further research is needed to expand the knowledge base on the sustainability of social protection interventions in Ghana, particularly within chronically poor rural regions such as the Upper West Region.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

This study examined the sustainability of social protection interventions implemented under the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP Phases 1 and 2) in reducing rural poverty in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The findings are presented according to the four specific objectives of the study and reflect a synthesis of empirical evidence, theoretical implications, and documented programme evaluations.

5.2.1 Poverty Reduction Achieved Through GPSNP (Objective 1)

The findings indicate that GPSNP has produced significant short-term poverty reduction outcomes in the Upper West Region. Specifically:

Improvement in Household Consumption and Food Security

- Beneficiary households reported higher and more stable consumption levels compared to non-beneficiaries.
- Cash transfers—both under LEAP and productive inclusion grants—enabled households to meet basic needs, reducing the frequency of hunger days and reliance on negative coping strategies (e.g., selling livestock, borrowing food).
- Food security improved particularly during lean seasons due to LIPW-generated income.

Short-Term Employment Creation

- LIPW created predictable, seasonal employment that helped stabilize incomes during periods when farming activities were minimal.
- The wages earned reduced households' vulnerability to immediate shocks and supported consumption smoothing.

5.2.2 Sustainability of GPSNP Benefits (Objective 2)

The second objective examined whether the observed improvements endure after project support ends. The findings reveal a mixed level of sustainability, influenced by several constraints.

Limited Long-Term Viability of Livelihood Enterprises

- Many microenterprises established under productive inclusion struggle to grow due to inadequate capital, limited access to formal credit, poor market linkages, and low business management skills.
- Some businesses collapse after one or two seasons, especially those dependent on climate-sensitive agriculture.

Weak Maintenance of Public Works Assets

- Community assets created under LIPW—such as feeder roads, dugouts, tree plantations, and irrigation structures—often lack structured maintenance plans.
- District Assemblies lack the financial resources and technical teams to support asset upkeep, leading to rapid deterioration.

Continued Vulnerability to Climate Shocks

- Droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall continue to negatively affect agricultural activities funded through productive inclusion.
- This increases the likelihood of beneficiaries slipping back into poverty.

5.2.3 Factors Influencing Sustainability (Objective 3)

The study identified multiple interconnected factors that influence whether GPSNP outcomes can be sustained in rural communities:

Financial Factors

- High dependence on donor funding exposes the programme to fiscal risks.

- Inconsistent local government budgeting further limits sustainability.

Institutional Factors

- Weak monitoring and evaluation systems hinder effective follow-up.
- Limited capacity of district social welfare units constrains programme quality.
- Insufficient coordination between local government agencies and implementing partners affects implementation consistency.

Economic Factors

- Poor market access in rural areas limits profitability of productive inclusion enterprises.
- High transportation costs reduce competitiveness of rural enterprises.
- Low savings culture and limited access to micro-credit affect working capital sustainability.

Social Factors

- Low community ownership of public assets contributes to rapid deterioration.
- Perceptions of political influence in beneficiary selection reduce trust.
- Beneficiary dependency reduces motivation for self-reliance.

Environmental Factors

- Climate variability undermines agricultural-based livelihood gains.
- Public works assets suffer from erosion, drought effects, and limited environmental protection measures.

Technological Factors

- GNHR and digital payment systems improve targeting, but rural ICT gaps reduce efficiency.
- Digital monitoring tools are not fully integrated at district level.

5.2.4 Comparison Between GPSNP Phase 1 and Phase 2 (Objective 4)

The final objective compared the sustainability of interventions implemented under both phases.

Strengths of Phase 1

- Provided foundational structures (e.g., GNHR expansion, LIPW assets).
- Successfully piloted the productive inclusion model.
- Demonstrated strong short-term poverty reduction outcomes.

Limitations of Phase 1

- Weak institutional capacity and lack of structured exit strategies.
- Limited emphasis on long-term livelihood transformation.
- Inadequate climate adaptation strategies.

Improvements in Phase 2

- Increased focus on youth entrepreneurship and skills development.
- Strengthened monitoring systems and targeting accuracy.
- Better integration of systems strengthening (e.g., MIS upgrades, GNHR use).
- Improved coordination between central and district-level actors.

Persistent Challenges in Phase 2

- Funding delays continue due to national fiscal pressures.
- Market linkages remain weak, limiting business expansion.
- Community ownership of assets is still low.
- Climate-related vulnerabilities persist.

5.3 Contributions of the Study

This study contributes meaningfully to academic scholarship, policy development, and practical implementation of social protection programmes in Ghana. The contributions are organized into three major domains: academic contributions, practical/policy contributions, and

social/developmental contributions. This study offers substantial contributions across academic, policy, and practical domains.

Academic Contributions

- Adds empirical insight into the long-term sustainability of social protection interventions in rural Ghana.
- Integrates multiple theoretical frameworks—Social Risk Management, Capability Approach, Human Capital Theory, and Sustainable Livelihoods Framework—to assess sustainability holistically.
- Contributes to the limited literature on GPSNP Phase 2, which remains under-researched.

Practical and Policy Contributions

- Highlights gaps in institutional capacity and funding predictability, providing evidence to guide reforms.
- Identifies actionable strategies to enhance the long-term viability of LIPW assets and productive inclusion initiatives.
- Helps policymakers understand how climate variability and weak market systems erode project gains.

Developmental and Social Contributions

- Provides insight for strengthening rural resilience against poverty and environmental shocks.
- Supports community-level advocacy for improved social protection mechanisms.
- Encourages policy actors to emphasize sustainability rather than short-term outputs.

5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to assess the sustainability of social protection interventions implemented under the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP Phases 1 and 2) and their contribution to long-term poverty reduction in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The findings reveal a complex but insightful narrative regarding the dual nature of social protection interventions in Ghana—while effective in producing short-term welfare gains, their long-term sustainability remains constrained by systemic, institutional, environmental, and socio-economic factors.

First, the study concludes that GPSNP interventions have significantly contributed to short-term poverty reduction among rural households. Cash transfers, productive inclusion grants, and Labour-Intensive Public Works (LIPW) have enhanced household consumption levels, stabilized incomes during lean agricultural seasons, and enabled small-scale investments in livelihoods. These immediate outcomes affirm the importance of social protection as a core poverty reduction strategy in rural Ghana, particularly in regions with chronic deprivation such as the Upper West Region.

However, the study further concludes that the extent to which these gains are sustained over time is limited. Many beneficiaries experience improvements during the programme period, but these often decline once external support ceases. Several livelihood enterprises supported under productive inclusion lack the capacity to grow or survive beyond the initial capital injection due to challenges such as poor market access, inadequate business management skills, limited savings capacity, and exposure to climate-related shocks. Similarly, LIPW community assets—such as feeder roads, small dams, and tree plantations—suffer from inadequate maintenance and weak community ownership, reducing their long-term functionality and economic value.

The study also concludes that sustainability is heavily influenced by institutional, financial, and environmental factors. Institutional weaknesses, including inconsistent monitoring mechanisms, limited district-level technical capacity, and insufficient inter-agency coordination, undermine the continuity of programme benefits. Financial sustainability remains a major challenge, as a significant proportion of social protection funding depends on donor support rather than stable domestic financing. Climatic stressors, particularly prolonged droughts and unpredictable rainfall patterns, further threaten the viability of livelihood outcomes, especially those dependent on agriculture.

An important conclusion of the study is that GPSNP Phase 2 demonstrates structural improvements—such as strengthened institutional systems and enhanced youth entrepreneurship support—yet it still faces similar sustainability barriers as Phase 1. While Phase 2 offers a more integrated approach, the long-term outcomes depend largely on the commitment of local institutions, market actors, communities, and beneficiaries themselves.

Overall, the study concludes that social protection interventions in the Upper West Region deliver substantial short-term relief but insufficient long-term transformation unless they are complemented by broader economic, institutional, and environmental reforms. Sustainable poverty reduction requires a shift from temporary support toward long-term resilience building, including stronger livelihood systems, robust local institutions, climate-resilient interventions, and increased domestic funding.

In summary, while the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project has made meaningful strides in alleviating poverty among vulnerable rural households, its long-term sustainability hinges on deeper structural changes. Strengthening institutional capacity, improving market access for livelihood enterprises, enhancing community ownership, and integrating climate resilience are essential steps toward ensuring that the gains from social protection interventions endure beyond the project lifecycle. The conclusions reaffirm that sustainable poverty reduction is not achieved solely through social protection, but through a holistic integration of economic empowerment, institutional strengthening, and community participation.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the study's conclusions, the following comprehensive and actionable recommendations are proposed to enhance the long-term sustainability of social protection interventions—especially those under the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project (GPSNP)—in the Upper West Region and Ghana as a whole.

5.5.1 Recommendations for Government and Policymakers

Increase Domestic Financing for Social Protection

GPSNP and related programmes rely heavily on donor funding, which threatens sustainability when external support declines.

Actions:

- Allocate a fixed percentage of national revenue to social protection (e.g., 1–2% of GDP over time).
- Integrate GPSNP budget lines into the national medium-term expenditure framework.
- Strengthen the Social Protection Fund under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to ensure predictable financing.

Expected

Outcome:

Improved financial sustainability and uninterrupted programme delivery.

Strengthen Institutional Capacity at All Levels

Sustainability is undermined by weak administrative systems, staff shortages, and poor coordination.

Actions:

- Conduct periodic training for district and regional officers in monitoring, data management, asset maintenance, and community facilitation.
- Improve staffing at district assemblies, especially in engineering, planning, social welfare, and community development roles.
- Establish inter-agency coordination platforms linking MLGDRD, MoGCSP, District Assemblies, and GNHR.

Expected

Outcome:

Efficient programme delivery, better targeting, and stronger sustainability of interventions.

Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Graduation Strategy

Most beneficiaries exit programmes without sufficient capacity to sustain progress.

Actions:

- Introduce multi-year plans that transition beneficiaries from social assistance to market-linked livelihoods.

- Provide ongoing coaching, mentorship, and business support for at least 12–24 months post-exit.
- Link beneficiaries to microfinance schemes, cooperatives, and agribusiness value chains.

Expected

Outcome:

Improved self-reliance and reduced risk of returning to extreme poverty.

Integrate Climate Change Resilience into All GPSNP Components

The Upper West Region is highly vulnerable to drought, floods, and erratic rainfall.

Actions:

- Introduce drought-resistant crops and climate-smart agriculture training.
- Prioritize irrigation facilities, soil conservation structures, and green public works assets.
- Train communities in asset protection, early warning systems, and water management.

Expected

Outcome:

Reduced climate-related reversals of programme gains.

Strengthen Market Linkages and Rural Economic Opportunities

Many productive-inclusion businesses collapse due to poor access to markets.

Actions:

- Establish district-level partnerships between farmer groups, producer associations, SMEs, and GPSNP beneficiaries.
- Develop rural market infrastructure (storage, transportation, market sheds).
- Facilitate contracts with agribusinesses, processors, and local anchor companies.

Expected

Outcome:

Improved profitability, sustainability, and long-term growth of beneficiary enterprises.

5.5.2 Recommendations for Programme Implementers (MLGDRD, District Assemblies, GNHR, Social Welfare Department)

Improve Monitoring and Follow-Up Services

Weak follow-up contributes to poor sustainability of assets and businesses.

Actions:

- Establish dedicated monitoring teams at district level.
- Conduct monthly visits to productive inclusion beneficiaries for business coaching.
- Use digital tools (GPS, mobile monitoring apps) to track LIPW assets and beneficiary progress.

Expected

Outcome:

Better oversight and early identification of threats to programme gains.

Strengthen Maintenance Systems for LIPW Community Assets

Many assets—such as feeder roads and small dams—deteriorate due to lack of maintenance.

Actions:

- Create Community Asset Management Committees (CAMCs) to oversee routine maintenance.
- Allocate 2–5% of the district assembly budget for annual asset maintenance.
- Train local artisans and youth to maintain feeder roads, tree plantations, and water structures.

Expected

Outcome:

Longer lifespan of public assets and more durable community benefits.

Enhance the Quality of Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Training

Some beneficiaries lack the managerial capacity to sustain small businesses.

Actions:

- Strengthen training modules in recordkeeping, pricing, savings, bookkeeping, branding, and market analysis.
- Facilitate partnerships with NBSSI/GEA, MASLOC, and agricultural extension officers for technical support.
- Provide refresher training sessions every 6–12 months.

Expected

Outcome:

Increased survival rate of businesses started under the productive inclusion programme.

Promote Savings, Group Cooperatives, and Access to Credit

Low savings and limited capital weaken business sustainability.

Actions:

- Support the establishment of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) in all beneficiary communities.
- Encourage group purchasing, group sales, and cooperative farming to reduce costs.
- Connect beneficiaries to microfinance and rural banks with favorable repayment terms.

Expected

Outcome:

Stronger financial stability and business growth among beneficiaries.

5.5.3 Recommendations for Development Partners (World Bank, UNICEF, WFP, USAID)

Align Funding with Long-Term National Sustainability Priorities

Most donor support is project-specific and short-term.

Actions:

- Support multi-phase programmes (5–10 years) rather than short-term pilots.
- Invest more in system-building rather than standalone interventions.
- Support knowledge-transfer initiatives for government ownership.

Expected Outcome: Enhanced continuity and reduced dependency.

Expand Investments in Technology and Data Systems

Digital systems are crucial for sustainability.

Actions:

- Scale up electronic payment systems to reduce leakages and delays.
- Strengthen GNHR, MIS platforms, and real-time monitoring tools.
- Support digitization of beneficiary records, public works tracking, and grievance redress systems.

Expected Outcome: Improved targeting, efficiency, and governance of social protection systems.

5.5.4 Recommendations for Beneficiaries and Community Structures

Strengthen Community Ownership and Participation

Community engagement is critical for sustaining public assets.

Actions:

- Participate actively in community asset committees.
- Contribute labor or small maintenance fees for LIPW assets.
- Engage in community planning meetings related to GPSNP.

Expected Outcome: Greater sustainability of assets and stronger local governance.

Adopt Good Financial and Business Practices

Many beneficiary businesses struggle due to poor financial discipline.

Actions:

- Maintain accurate business records.
- Reinforce savings habits through VSLAs or mobile savings platforms.
- Invest profits back into business expansion.

Expected Outcome: Longer-lasting business ventures and improved household income.

Diversify Income Sources

One income source is not sufficient given climate and market risks.

Actions:

- Combine farming with small trading or value addition.
- Engage in dry-season farming when irrigation assets are available.
- Learn new skills through community training programmes.

Expected Outcome: Increased economic resilience and reduced vulnerability.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

The study recommends that future research should explore:

- Longitudinal studies assessing the sustainability of GPSNP benefits 5–10 years after programme exit.

- Comparative studies on sustainability between northern regions of Ghana to identify region-specific dynamics.
- Beneficiary-level qualitative studies exploring lived experiences, perceptions, and behavioural changes.
- The role of climate adaptation strategies in enhancing the long-term viability of social protection programmes.
- Digital transformation in social protection—including mobile payments, digital registries, and e-monitoring systems—as a driver of sustainability.

Such research will contribute to a stronger evidence base for designing resilient, inclusive, and sustainable social protection systems in Ghana

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