

Regional

LEAP to cover families in areas affected by galamsey

By Caroline Boateng, ACCRA

THE Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSF), Ms Otiko Afisa Djaba, has announced the expansion of the social protection programme, the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP). She said the programme would be extended to cover families living in communities affected by galamsey as well as those in areas that were prone to human trafficking.

That, she said, was because families in such areas were vulnerable and likely to engage in galamsey activities or allow their children to be trafficked on account of being poor.

She said it was expected that spreading the LEAP programme would minimise the impact of poverty in those areas.

Ms Djaba made the disclosure at a multi-stakeholder conference on financing social protection in Accra last Tuesday.

The conference was organised by SEND Ghana in collaboration with UNICEF, OXFAM, the Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC), the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), the Christian Aid and the Forth Foundation.

The meeting took stock of the

manner poverty and inequalities in the country were being addressed and to get the commitment of partners to campaign for increases in budgetary allocations for social protection.

LEAP+ and exit

Focusing on the two critical social protection programmes, LEAP and the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP), Ms Djaba said besides expanding the LEAP programme, beneficiaries of the facility were going to be linked to what she termed the LEAP+.

She said capacities of beneficiaries were going to be built through the LEAP+, for them to have opportunities in business and place them strategically to become potential clients of banking institutions.

Ms Djaba also announced that there were plans for people who benefited from LEAP to exit successful owners of enterprise.

"We will leap beneficiaries out of LEAP," she told participants.

Ms Djaba said further that the GSFP was also going to be expanded to cover more children over its current national

total coverage of 36 per cent.

Consequently, she said her ministry was engaging farmers in some districts "to make available locally produced foods to be fed to our children."

Support

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Employment, Social Welfare and State Enterprises, Mr Anyimadu Antwi, promised that the committee would use its "legislative, financial and oversight

mechanisms to support social protection programmes and make them effective."

The Clerk of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Poverty Reduction, Mr Samuel Addai,

who represented the Chairman of the committee, Mr Appiah Kubi, said information received from the World Bank indicated that Ghana contributed only about 0.6 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to social protection programmes.

He said figures from 2016 showed that the government's expenditure was taken up mainly by wages, statutory and interest payments amounting to about 96 per cent of GDP. He said it was

critical under the circumstances to look for alternative sources of funding for social protection programmes.

A Principal Economic Officer of the Ministry of Finance (MoF), Mr Kojo Ansah, conceded that gains had been made in reducing poverty.

He noted though that the gains made had been eroded in some regions by socio-economic challenges.

Rational

The Country Director of SEND Ghana, Mr George Osei-Bimpeh, spoke on behalf of the Civil Society Organisation's (CSO) platform on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly on Goal 10 which deals with reducing inequalities, saying that some communities, districts and groups were missing out on gains in economic growth.

He said information received recently from UNICEF showed that the Upper West Region registered the highest inequality in the country.

The event moderator, Dr Mrs Esther Offei-Aboagye, a development consultant, urged participants to work and achieve sustainable sources of financing for social protection programmes since it was the lifeblood of the initiatives.

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