



Opinion

Ghana Priorities reveals smartest solutions for future

By Prof. Augustin Fosu and Dr Bjorn Lomborg

NO country, however prosperous, can do everything. Although the ongoing election campaign includes lots of additional promises, there are limits to what can be funded in Ghana with the available resources.

That is why it is crucial that every cedi is spent in the best possible way. To achieve that goal, the Ghana Priorities project for over a year has worked with 28 teams of specialist economists from Ghana and abroad to study the costs and benefits of 80 concrete policy solutions to improve the future of the country.

For instance, education economists have analysed the best education solutions for Ghana, finding the cost of each policy and showing how many more cedis of good one extra cedi spent would achieve.

In that way, the project, a collaboration between the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and the award-winning international think tank, Copenhagen Consensus Center, can help everyone figure out the smartest ways to promote development and prosperity

for all Ghanaians.

Panel

Recently, an eminent panel of seven distinguished economists met in Accra to evaluate more than 1000 pages of research across all sectors of government. The panel include the Finance Minister, Mr Ken Ofori-Atta; the Planning Minister, Prof. George Gyan-Baffour; a former Finance Minister, Prof. Kwesi Botchwey; Prof.

Augustin Fosu of the University of Ghana; Prof. Ernest Aryeetey, Secretary-General of the African Research Universities Alliance; Prof. Eugenia Amporfu from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), and the Nobel Laureate economist, Prof. Finn Kydland.

Having read all the research, the panel spent three days discussing and challenging the findings with all the specialist economists.

At the end, the panel's hard task was to prioritise where Ghana can best spend public funds. Here is their top 10:

Rankings

At top came digital revenue collection in Ghana's municipalities through the implementation of a software called District Local Revenue, which would provide benefits many times higher than the cost.

Digitisation would ensure a faster data collection process, improved efficiency and increased revenue for the municipalities which they can use to provide better services to their constituents.

As the Finance Ministry pointed out in the justification for its ranking, "Nothing happens without revenue availability."

In second place came near-universal coverage of testing and treatment for malaria, which could yield phenomenal societal returns of 133 cedis for every cedi spent.

By properly diagnosing malaria and giving early treatment to those infected, 435,000 severe cases and close to 25,000 deaths could be avoided between now and 2030.

Improving maternal and child health was ranked in third place. The Eminent Panel embraced research that shows the potentials of scaling up the Ghana Essential Health Intervention Program (GEHIP) implemented in Northern Ghana.

If this was expanded to include 100 per cent of Ghana's rural population, GEHIP would reduce neonatal mortality by 10 per cent on average over seven years, saving the lives of 7,551 newborn children.

The panel ranked land titling fourth. This programme would survey and document over more than half of Ghana's land area - 170,000 square kilometres - to build a comprehensive and automated national base land map.

The benefits would include increased property value of titled land, improved access to credit, higher certainty for investments and smoother land transactions. Every cedi spent on the reform could yield benefits of around 90 cedis.

Three interventions to deal with the burden of tuberculosis, which causes five per cent of all deaths, were included in the panel's top-10: education and

counselling alongside 'directly observed treatment short-course' to ensure that those receiving TB treatment adhere to the necessary treatment, improved speed and accuracy of diagnosis through implementation of molecular diagnostic tools, and finding and treating active cases in high-risk populations.

Every cedi spent on these interventions will yield impressive social and economic benefits worth GHe190, GHe166 and GHe38, respectively, highlighting the importance and the potentials of addressing TB as a priority.

Promising

Other promising strategies from the top 10 include ambulance maintenance in rural areas, preventive malaria medicine for children in Guinea Savannah, and complementary feeding promotion to reduce childhood malnutrition.

There are 31 million Ghanaians, and there are probably 31 million different opinions about the best ways to help the country prosper. But without real evidence about what works and at what price, it would be difficult to choose among the various options on the menu.

With the results from Ghana Priorities, we have put prices on the menu, and we can all see exactly how

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much is actually paid for each option, and exactly what Ghana gets in return. This is the kick-start for the conversation about Ghana's top priorities

for development.

We will work with many around the country, including youths, to establish the country's priorities. Moreover, the NDPC, in collaboration with Copenhagen Consensus, is determined to continue this evaluation of cost-effective solutions going forward and help translate academic evidence into policy for the benefit of all Ghanaians.

Ghana's future is bright. And now we have the evidence to help make it even brighter!

The writers are Professor in the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana and President of the Copenhagen Consensus, respectively.

Rank

- 1 Digitised property and business fees
- 2 Universal malaria testing and health facility treatment
- 3 Strengthen community health system (GEHIP)
- 4 Land titling programme
- 5 TB patient education for adherence
- 6 Logistics for faster and more accurate TB testing
- 7 Active TB case finding in high risk groups
- 8 Ambulance maintenance in rural areas
- 9 Preventive malaria medicine for children in Guinea Savannah
- 10 Complementary infant feeding promotion