

IN THE ANNALS OF GOVERNANCE: RESET, REFORM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Introduction

Ghana's democracy continues to face challenges in governance, accountability, and the rule of law. Recent developments, including the El-Wak tragedy, the cocoa sector crisis, vote-buying, asset declarations, galamsey, and constitutional reform, have raised concerns about the effectiveness of public institutions and the need for accountability and reform.

This special edition of Democracy Watch examines some of these developments, assesses their implications for good governance, and highlights areas that need attention.

The El-Wak Tragedy and Its Aftermath

On Wednesday, November 12, 2025, six young women lost their lives in a fatal stampede at the El-Wak Sports Stadium in Accra, the Greater Accra regional venue for the Ghana Armed Forces' 2025/2026 recruitment exercise. The Ghana Armed Forces confirmed that 28 other people were injured, including 12 in critical condition and five admitted to the intensive care unit.

President Mahama ordered the immediate suspension of the recruitment exercise and directed a full-scale investigation. Parliament observed a minute of silence, and statements of condolence were issued across the political spectrum. The Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) temporarily suspended the Greater Accra exercise, then resumed it on November 20, 2025, at decentralized centers with new crowd-control measures after replacing the officers who had overseen the original exercise.

The government also extended a GH¢150,000 relief package to each bereaved family and offered automatic enlistment to their relatives and to applicants injured in the stampede. In March 2026, the first recruitment batch, consisting of 18 stampede survivors and 5 relatives of the deceased, was announced. The Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) also established a Board of Inquiry to investigate the circumstances surrounding the stampede.

“...the stampede that followed when the gates opened was as predictable as it was avoidable”

Almost eleven months after the tragedy, the Board’s report remains unpublished. CDD-Ghana finds this prolonged silence unacceptable: the families of the deceased and the injured, as well as the wider public, are entitled to a full, published account of what went wrong and who bears responsibility for the lapses that morning.

Before the nation had fully processed the grief over the El-Wak Stadium deaths, a second, in some respects more scandalous episode unfolded in early 2026. According to reports, the Ministry of Interior accepted application fees from approximately 500,000 young Ghanaians for recruitment into the Ghana Police Service, the Ghana Immigration Service, the Ghana Fire Service, and the Ghana Prisons Service, even though the exercise was designed to absorb only about 5,000 recruits. The ratio of about 100 applicants per available position, with each paying GH¢220 in fees, fueled accusations that the Ministry had effectively operated a revenue-collection scheme under the guise of public service recruitment.

During the parliamentary debate on the 2026 State of the Nation Address (SONA), Minority Leader Afenyo-Markin raised another grievance – some young people were unable to participate in security recruitment exercises because they lacked reliable internet access to complete the online application. This is a troubling irony: in an effort to digitize the recruitment process, authorities appear to have created a new form of exclusion that disadvantages the very populations for whom stable public employment is the most accessible route out of poverty.

In its statement of condolence following the El-Wak stampede, the National Peace Council cited data from the Ghana Statistical Service indicating 32 percent unemployment among those aged 15 to 24 and 22.5 percent among those aged 15 to 35. The World Bank has warned that more than 500,000 young people enter Ghana’s labor market each year, yet high-quality job creation has not kept pace.

“Security service recruitment has therefore become a socially combustible pressure valve for a youth unemployment crisis of historic proportions”

According to Bank data, only 13 percent of workers aged 15 to 64 hold high-quality jobs, while low-skill and informal employment accounts for more than 53 percent of the workforce.

CDD-Ghana holds the firm view that the deaths at El-Wak and the Interior Ministry fee scandal are not primarily failures in recruitment management, though they are that as well. They are symptomatic of a structural failure of the Ghanaian economy to create sufficient productive employment for its youth, a failure that successive governments have acknowledged but have not resolved.

The repeated scenes of desperation surrounding recruitment to the security service in Ghana merit a broader national conversation about the social meaning of public-sector employment. For many young Ghanaians, recruitment into the armed forces, police, immigration, or fire service is not merely a career aspiration but one of the few remaining pathways to economic stability, social mobility, and dignity. The intensity of competition for these positions reflects declining confidence in the private sector's ability to absorb the country's growing labor force. It also reflects the uneven distribution of economic opportunities between urban and rural communities, where many young people continue to face chronic underemployment despite holding secondary or tertiary education qualifications. Security service recruitment has therefore become a socially combustible pressure valve for a youth unemployment crisis of historic proportions.

The deeper remedy, however, lies in how recruitment is organized. A genuinely decentralized, fully

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digital application system, with staggered, venue-based physical assessments following transparent shortlisting, would eliminate the conditions that made El-Wak both predictable and avoidable. Charging applicants fees when they vastly outnumber available positions has no place in public service recruitment. More fundamentally,

the government's job creation commitments, including the 24-Hour Economy and the Big Push infrastructure program, will count for little unless they are accelerated, independently monitored, and publicly reported.

The tragedy at El-Wak cannot be understood in isolation from the broader frustrations of a generation grappling with rising living costs, insecure work, and limited opportunities for advancement. If these problems persist, future recruitment exercises could continue to cause dangerous overcrowding, exploitation by middlemen, and growing public resentment toward state institutions.

The state must recognize that youth unemployment is no longer merely an economic indicator but a democratic governance challenge with implications for social cohesion, public trust, and national security. Beyond improving recruitment administration, there is a pressing need for long-term investment in labor-intensive sectors such as agro-processing, manufacturing, renewable energy, construction, and digital services. Government skills programs must also be aligned with realistic labor market demand rather than with symbolic political announcements. ●●

The Cocoa Sector Crisis and Matters Arising

On February 12, 2026, the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) announced that the farmgate producer price for the remainder of the 2025/2026 crop season would be reduced from GH¢58,000 per ton to GH¢41,392 per ton, or from GH¢3,625 per bag to GH¢2,587 per bag. The reduction, about 28.6 percent, marked a painful reversal of the prices set in August 2025, when the government proudly announced a 62.58 percent increase in dollar terms, saying it would give cocoa farmers 70 percent of the Free-on-Board price.

The current turbulence in the cocoa industry raises fundamental questions about the sustainability of Ghana's broader agricultural policy framework. Cocoa remains one of the country's most important export commodities and a central pillar of rural livelihoods, yet productivity growth has stagnated over the years due to aging farms, declining soil fertility, disease outbreaks, climate variability, and inadequate investment in extension services. Compounding these production challenges is COCOBOD's mounting indebtedness, which has severely constrained the Board's capacity to finance crop purchases, input supply, and farm rehabilitation.

Younger generations are increasingly reluctant to enter cocoa farming due to price uncertainty and delayed payments, raising concerns about the sector's long-term viability.

Field reports from the Eastern, Western, and Western North Regions paint a grim picture: farmers who delivered cocoa in November and December 2025 had not been paid by mid-February 2026. Some were forced to borrow from traders and moneylenders at punitive rates to survive. On February 20, 2026, cocoa farmers from the Western North Region picketed outside COCOBOD's headquarters in Accra. The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a rare statement declaring the rescue of the cocoa industry a moral imperative.

The proximate cause of the price reversal was a sharp collapse in global cocoa prices. International cocoa prices, which had peaked above US\$8,000 per ton in early 2025, had fallen to approximately US\$ 3,500 - US\$ 4,100 per ton by February 2026. At the producer price set in October 2025, Ghana's cocoa had become uncompetitive, and international buyers refused to purchase Ghanaian cocoa at prices significantly above those of other producing countries. COCOBOD found itself without the liquidity to lift beans from farms or to pay farmers for cocoa already delivered.

Finance Minister Dr. Cassiel Ato Forson, announcing the price adjustment, attributed the immediate crisis to a financing model adopted in the 2024/2025 season, when COCOBOD, for the first time since 1992, abandoned its traditional annual pre-export syndicated loan in favor of direct financing from international traders. He disclosed that COCOBOD entered the 2025/26 season with an estimated GH¢60 billion in total liabilities, including GH¢17.8 billion in loans and GH¢26.5 billion in cocoa road contracts awarded between 2014 and 2024. He further revealed that a commitment under the IMF program to rationalize COCOBOD's road contracts from GH¢21.7 billion to GH¢6.9 billion had not been implemented by the previous board.

Former COCOBOD Head of Public Affairs Fiifi Boafo challenged the government's framing, arguing that failing to sell cocoa at higher global prices contributed to the current shortfall and that farmers were now bearing the cost of that decision. He maintained that authorities should rely on weighted averages and forward contracts rather than spot market prices when setting producer prices. "We are here," he said, "because the government decided to sell at the wrong time, allowed the market to fall, and then sold at a lower price." Minority Ranking Member of the Economy and Development Committee, Kojo Oppong Nkrumah, described the reduction as placing an unfair burden on more than 1 million cocoa farmers who were already struggling.

CDD-Ghana notes that the current crisis has vindicated longstanding concerns about the structural vulnerabilities of the COCOBOD model. The Board's governance architecture, accumulated liabilities, opaque financing arrangements, and exposure to price and exchange-rate risk have all been laid bare. As far back as 2002, Democracy Watch documented that Ghana's producer price was only 46 percent of the world market price, a disparity that fueled smuggling into Côte d'Ivoire. Twenty-four years later,

the fundamental tension between the COCOBOD monopoly model and farmers' welfare remains unresolved.

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This recent crisis has further exposed how vulnerable farmers remain, tied to policy decisions made far from the farmgate and to fluctuations in international

commodity markets over which they have no control. It has also exposed weaknesses closer to home, primarily the two key threats that Democracy Watch has repeatedly flagged. Any credible reform agenda for the cocoa sector must confront these threats squarely if it is to make an impact.

First is the canker of illegal small-scale mining, known locally as *galamsey*, which has destroyed more than 100,000 acres of cocoa farmland across the Ashanti, Western, and Central regions, polluting the soils and water bodies on which farming communities depend and shrinking the very land base on which the cocoa sector's recovery must be built.

The second is the legacy of mismanagement within Cocobod itself; most notably, the GH¢26.5 billion cocoa road contracts awarded between 2014 and 2024, with limited oversight, have left the Board with debt that now constrains its ability to pay farmers on time. Unpaid farmers, burdened by mounting debt, are increasingly turning to illegal mining as an alternative livelihood. Ghana must therefore move beyond reactive price adjustments and pursue structural reforms to improve productivity, value addition, and farmers' welfare. Greater transparency in the management of stabilization funds, cocoa financing arrangements, and forward sales contracts will remain essential to rebuilding producers' confidence.

The government has announced a comprehensive reform package that includes a new domestic bond-based financing model, proposed legislation to guarantee farmers a minimum share of the FOB price, a 50 percent local processing target, and a forensic audit of COCOBOD's finances. These measures are welcome signals. CDD-Ghana calls for the full publication of the forensic audit report, including its findings on the awarding of road contracts, and urges Parliament to subject the proposed legislative changes to thorough scrutiny rather than passing them under a certificate of urgency.

The longstanding dependence on raw bean exports also limits the sector's resilience. Expanding domestic processing capacity, incentivizing the production of chocolate and cocoa derivatives, and providing farmer cooperatives with affordable credit could help

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retain more value in the Ghanaian economy. The cocoa sector's crisis is ultimately a warning that, without institutional reform, improved governance, and strategic diversification, one of Ghana's most historically significant industries risks long-term decline, even when global prices are favorable.●●

The Ayawaso East Primary, Vote Buying and Money in Politics

On Saturday, February 7, 2026, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) held a parliamentary primary in the Ayawaso East Constituency to select the party's candidate for a by-election to fill the seat of the incumbent Member of Parliament, Naser Toure, who died on January 4, 2026. Mohammed Baba Jamal Ahmed, who had been serving as Ghana's High Commissioner to Nigeria, contested the primary and won with 431 votes, defeating four other aspirants. The primary quickly became embroiled in controversy when footage circulated on social media showing delegates allegedly receiving 32-inch television sets and food items, reportedly distributed by Mr. Baba Jamal's campaign team. Reports also emerged of cash payments to delegates.

In a statement issued the same day, the Presidency announced the immediate recall of Mr. Baba Jamal from his position as High Commissioner to Nigeria. The statement, signed by the Minister for Government Communication, Felix Kwakye Ofori, noted that although the allegations of vote buying were made against multiple candidates, Mr. Baba Jamal was the only serving public officer among them. It further stated that the President deemed it necessary to act decisively to preserve the integrity of public office.

The NDC also weighed in by forming a three-member investigative committee chaired by Mr. Kofi Totobi Quakyi. At the same time, the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) announced it had begun investigations into alleged vote buying and selling during both the NDC primary and the NPP's presidential primary on January 31, 2026. The OSP further disclosed that during the NDC primary, Mr. Baba Jamal allegedly abetted individuals in physically attacking an OSP officer while the officer was performing investigative duties, a charge Mr. Jamal denied.

Despite the severity of the allegations and the OSP investigation, the NDC's Functional Executive Committee decided to retain Mr. Jamal as the party's parliamentary candidate for the March 3, 2026, by-election. NDC General Secretary Fifi Kwetey explained that the party's constitution did not provide for the annulment of an election and cited time constraints related to the main by-election. Mr. Jamal subsequently won the Ayawaso East by-election on March 3, 2026, with 10,884 votes.

CDD-Ghana notes that the NDC Majority Caucus in Parliament called for the immediate annulment of the Ayawaso East primary and the disqualification of candidates found to have engaged in vote-buying. The contradiction between this public position and the party leadership's subsequent decision to maintain Mr. Baba Jamal's candidacy is deeply troubling. It suggests that the party's stated commitment to restoring integrity to the country's politics is conditional and does not apply to individuals with sufficient political standing within the party.

CDD-Ghana stresses that the Baba Jamal incident is not an aberration. Research documented by CDD-Ghana confirms that the exchange of money and goods for electoral support has become thoroughly normalized across party lines. CDD-Ghana estimated in 2023 that parliamentary campaigns cost as

much as \$675,000, while presidential campaigns require at least \$100 million, thereby incentivizing candidates to seek returns on political investments through various means, including future awarding of contracts and public positions.

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The controversy surrounding the Ayawaso

East primary highlights the increasingly transactional nature of internal party democracy in Ghana. Over time, delegate systems within the major political parties have created conditions in which relatively small groups of party actors wield enormous influence over candidate selection. This concentration of power has encouraged aspirants to treat internal elections as high-stakes investment exercises, in which inducements have become normalized as tools for political mobilization. The financialization of politics, however, extends far beyond individual primaries. Candidates who spend excessively to secure nominations often enter public office under pressure to recoup campaign costs through patronage networks, contract awards, or influence over state resources. This undermines public confidence in democratic institutions and distorts representation by privileging wealth over competence, ideas, and grassroots credibility.

The persistence of vote buying also undermines political parties’ ability to present themselves as agents of ethical leadership and democratic renewal. Ghana’s democracy risks entrenching a culture in which electoral success depends less on policy vision than on financial capacity and patronage access.

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CDD-Ghana has led the call for political finance reform since 2004. Beginning in 2017, it intensified its research, policy engagement, and advocacy, leading the drafting of a model law on political financing and sharing it with policymakers and stakeholders. CDD expects the government to adopt the model as a government bill after review and to pass a comprehensive law on political finance that mandates full disclosure of campaign financing, independent auditing of campaign accounts, meaningful expenditure limits, and effective enforcement, while also regulating the structure of internal party primaries.

Failing to do so this term, given the NDC’s parliamentary majority, would be a deeply damaging act of political self-interest that would undermine democratic integrity.

“What the episode ultimately demands is reform that extends beyond campaign finance disclosure to the structure of internal party primaries”

Parties that broaden participation in candidate selection, strengthen sanctions against inducements, and increase transparency in delegate accreditation and voting would begin to close the space where vote-buying thrives. Civil society

and the Electoral Commission also have a role in reframing the practice in the public mind as a corruption issue with long-term developmental consequences, rather than a routine feature of political competition.

The Office of the Special Prosecutor’s investigation into both major parties’ primaries could prove a significant development, but only if it is thorough, timely, and transparent, and if it results in successful prosecutions whose findings are made public.●●

Asset Declaration Compliance – The Gap Between Rhetoric and Reality

On February 18, 2025, in a symbolic public act, President John Dramani Mahama became the first sitting Ghanaian president to submit his asset declaration forms in person to the Auditor-General at the Jubilee House. He also directed all his appointees to comply with the constitutional requirement under Article 286 of the 1992 Constitution by March 31, 2025, or face severe sanctions, including removal from office. “I have taken this step,” the President stated, “to send an unmistakable signal to all public officeholders, especially those I have appointed, that I take the declaration of assets very seriously.”

This was a commendable and overdue gesture. CDD-Ghana has documented, for years, widespread noncompliance with the Constitution’s asset-declaration provisions across successive administrations. An investigative report by the Fourth Estate, published in 2023, found that only 18 of about 120 ministers in the Akufo-Addo administration fully complied with asset-declaration requirements. Similarly, 11 of President Mahama’s ministers from his first term (2013–2017) failed to comply fully, and more than 50 others partially complied.

Investigative reporting by The Fourth Estate, which made Right to Information (RTI) requests to the Audit Service, revealed that as of April 17, 2025, 55 appointees in the Mahama administration had failed to meet the president’s March 31 deadline. Of the 55, eight ministers and deputy ministers, eight of the 32 presidential staffers, and 38 of the 84 heads of state institutions had failed to comply. This means that approximately 32 percent of appointees had ignored both the constitutional obligation and the president’s directive.

In response, the President announced at the launch of a Code of Conduct for Public Officials that appointees who missed the deadline would forfeit four months’ salary: three months as a penalty and one month as a previously announced donation to the Mahama Cares Trust Fund. He also warned that noncompliance would result in automatic dismissal. A subsequent follow-up by The Fourth Estate confirmed that, for the first time since 2013, nearly all of the President’s appointees had complied within six months, a notable, if qualified, improvement over previous administrations.

In contrast to the Executive branch, Members of Parliament's compliance remains deeply unsatisfactory. CDD-Ghana notes that the constitutional requirement applies to all MPs, yet no systematic public accounting of parliamentary compliance has ever been published.

The Auditor-General's office has acknowledged the current system's limitations, noting that verifying the accuracy of declared assets remains a fundamental challenge. "If you say you have 10 bank accounts and you bring them to us, how are we to be sure that there are indeed only 10 bank accounts?" the Auditor-General asked publicly in February 2025. Without a verification mechanism, asset declarations are little more than a self-reporting exercise with limited accountability.

CDD-Ghana observes that recurring challenges in asset-declaration compliance reveal a broader weakness in Ghana's public integrity architecture. Although the constitutional requirement was designed to safeguard against illicit enrichment and abuse of office, enforcement has historically been weak, fragmented, and overly reliant on the goodwill of political officeholders. The absence of routine verification, public access, and meaningful sanctions has reduced the regime to a procedural formality rather than a robust anti-corruption mechanism. This undermines public confidence in the government's commitment to accountability and fosters the perception that politically connected individuals can evade scrutiny with minimal consequence.

International best practice shows that effective asset-declaration systems depend not only on filing requirements but also on institutional independence, transparency, and regular auditing. Countries

"The absence of routine verification, public access, and meaningful sanctions has reduced the regime to a procedural formality rather than a robust anti-corruption mechanism"

that have strengthened anti-corruption oversight often pair public disclosure with automated cross-checking systems that flag unexplained wealth or discrepancies between declared assets and known income. Ghana's current framework falls far short of these standards. Public concern about corruption remains consistently high across Afrobarometer surveys and other governance assessments. Strengthening the declaration regime would

therefore serve not only legal compliance objectives but also broader democratic legitimacy.

Political leadership must recognize that symbolic gestures, though important, cannot substitute for systemic reform. Without stronger verification powers, greater public access to declarations, and credible enforcement against false filings, noncompliance will continue to erode trust in public institutions and undermine confidence in the rule of law, widening the gap between constitutional rhetoric and practical accountability.

"...symbolic gestures, while important, cannot substitute for systemic reform"

CDD-Ghana calls for urgent reform of the asset declaration regime. The long-standing Conduct of Public Officers (CPO) Bill, an IMF conditionality, has been laid before Parliament and remains pending at the committee stage; it must now receive urgent attention and swift passage.●●

Ghana's Foreign Policy and the Future of Regional Cooperation

On January 29 and 30, 2026, Ghana convened a High-Level Consultative Conference on Regional Cooperation and Security in Accra. The conference brought together Heads of State and Government from ECOWAS member states and key regional institutions to address shared threats facing West Africa. The summit concluded with renewed regional solidarity and a determination to implement agreed outcomes on collective security, counterterrorism, border cooperation, humanitarian response, and human-centered governance. In his address to the World Governments Summit in Dubai on February 3, 2026, President Mahama described the conference as part of Ghana's efforts to rebuild and strengthen subregional cooperation across key sectors, thereby enhancing resilience and addressing the structural drivers of instability.

CDD-Ghana commends Ghana's initiative in convening this conference. It was a necessary act of regional leadership at a moment of genuine peril for West African democratic governance. The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea from ECOWAS

"It was a necessary act of regional leadership at a moment of genuine peril for West African democratic governance"

processes, the expulsion of French military forces from the Sahel, and the reported involvement of Russian-affiliated military contractors across the sub-region constitute a geopolitical disruption of historic proportions. In CDD-Ghana's view, Ghana's decision to persist in engagement rather than disengage from the junta-led states is the correct strategic posture, provided that engagement is principled and does not confer unwarranted legitimacy on unconstitutional governments.

During the 2026 State of the Nation Address, President Mahama reaffirmed that Ghana's foreign policy would align with domestic development priorities. He reported that Ghana had secured new visa waivers with 11 countries, that passport acquisition under the current administration had been simplified, and that all 16 regional capitals now had passport application centers. He stressed Ghana's commitment to a vision of a peaceful, stable, prosperous, and integrated West Africa, grounded in mutual respect, dialogue, and collective responsibility. He also emphasized the importance of continued dialogue following the withdrawal of some countries from ECOWAS.

In the wake of heightened instability across the West African subregion, CDD-Ghana joins ongoing calls from civil society for President Mahama to make democratic governance and political stability in West Africa the cornerstone of Ghana's foreign policy. CDD-Ghana cautions policymakers that the subregion's democratic recession and the threat to regional integration, marked by a recent spate of coups, the resurgence of authoritarianism, and the withdrawal of Sahelian states from ECOWAS, pose a direct threat to Ghana's internal security and economic identity. Ghana must lead the charge to recalibrate relations among neighboring states to restore trust that will foster trade and security cooperation against the escalating threat of terrorism.

“...regional leadership is most persuasive when supported by strong domestic institutions and a visible commitment to accountability at home”

The regional security environment facing Ghana has become increasingly intertwined with economic vulnerability, humanitarian pressures, and democratic instability across West Africa. Violent extremist activity in the Sahel has continued to spread southward,

placing coastal states under growing pressure to strengthen intelligence coordination, border surveillance, and community resilience. At the same time, political fragmentation within ECOWAS has weakened collective responses to security and governance crises. CDD’s position is that Ghana’s diplomatic posture must balance a principled defense of constitutional order with pragmatic engagement to prevent further regional isolation and instability.

This will require sustained investment in preventive diplomacy, mediation, and regional confidence-building initiatives. While Ghana’s longstanding reputation as a relatively stable democracy gives it moral and strategic leverage in the sub-region, that influence must be matched by coherent policy execution and credible domestic governance. The country’s foreign policy cannot be divorced from internal economic performance, institutional credibility, and democratic resilience. The Government must bear in mind that regional leadership is most persuasive when supported by strong domestic institutions and a visible commitment to accountability at home.

Furthermore, the rise of geopolitical competition among external actors in West Africa underscores the need for Ghana to pursue a carefully calibrated nonaligned strategy that prioritizes national and regional interests over ideological alignment with competing global powers. CDD therefore argues that the success of Ghana’s diplomatic reset will ultimately depend on its ability to rebuild trust within ECOWAS and to advance economic integration, democratic cooperation, and coordinated responses to transnational threats, including terrorism, organized crime, and irregular migration.

The Accra-based Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is one of Ghana’s most significant assets for advancing economic diplomacy. CDD-Ghana notes with concern that the operationalization of the AfCFTA has progressed more slowly than anticipated and that Ghana’s domestic industries are not yet adequately positioned to benefit from the expanded market. The foreign policy reset must translate into a concrete domestic industrial policy and export diversification strategy that enables Ghana to capitalize on the opportunities the AfCFTA creates. Diplomatic representation without competitive export capacity has limited value.

CDD-Ghana also calls for a comprehensive review of Ghana’s bilateral investment treaties and development partnership agreements to ensure that their terms are favorable to Ghana and aligned with the country’s development priorities. The experience with disadvantageous past contracts, documented in previous editions of this newsletter, must inform a more rigorous approach to economic diplomacy.●●

Managing Inflation, the Currency and GoldBod

By the close of 2025, Ghana's cedi had emerged as Africa's best-performing currency of the year, appreciating by approximately 40-41 percent against the US dollar, according to data from Bloomberg and the International Monetary Fund. This marked the first sustained annual appreciation of the cedi since at least 1994, when comprehensive exchange rate records began. The currency traded at about GH¢10.50 per dollar by year-end, compared with an average retail rate of about GH¢16 per dollar in 2024. Inflation, which stood at 23.8 percent in December 2024, declined for 11 consecutive months, reaching 6.3 percent in November 2025, its lowest level in nearly five years. Food prices fell by an average of 32 percent, and Ghana's international reserves rose to approximately US\$13.8 billion by the time of the 2026 SONA, providing 5.7 months of import cover.

These are undeniably significant macroeconomic achievements. In the 2026 SONA, President Mahama attributed a key part of this turnaround to the Ghana Gold Board (GoldBod), which he said had contributed to the historic reserve build-up through artisanal gold exports and by curbing smuggling. He declared that GoldBod had generated significant foreign exchange, which had single-handedly anchored the cedi.

GoldBod was established by the Ghana Gold Board Act, 2025 (Act 1140), passed in April 2025, which granted GoldBod exclusive authority to buy, test, and export gold from the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector. GoldBod assumed the functions of the defunct Precious Minerals Marketing Company (PMMC) and operates a Gold for Reserves (G4R) program that purchases gold from small-scale miners, exports it, and channels the foreign exchange proceeds to the Bank of Ghana to build reserves. GoldBod CEO Sammy Gyamfi reported that the institution captured approximately 104 metric tons of gold in its first year of operations, generating over US\$10 billion in foreign exchange.

In a December 2025 interview with the IMF, Bank of Ghana Governor Johnson Asiamah confirmed that Ghana's reserves had grown substantially, from about two weeks of import cover during the 2022 economic crisis to more than five months, with GoldBod's interventions playing a significant role. He described the program as a revolving system in which gold exports bring foreign exchange to the central bank, which then provides cedi equivalents for additional purchases.

The improvement in macroeconomic indicators has understandably generated optimism. Still, CDD-Ghana holds that Ghana's recent currency gains must be interpreted cautiously and within a broader structural context. Commodity-driven foreign exchange inflows can provide temporary relief, yet they do not automatically resolve the deeper vulnerabilities that have historically contributed to exchange rate instability and inflationary pressures.

“Ghana’s recent currency gains must be interpreted with caution and within a broader structural context”

Ghana remains heavily dependent on commodity exports and on imports of finished goods, leaving the economy vulnerable to external price shocks and fluctuations in global demand.

Sustaining currency stability over the long term will therefore require more than simply accumulating reserves through gold purchases. It will require a deliberate industrial policy that expands domestic

production capacity, diversifies exports, and reduces reliance on imports of essential goods and inputs. Questions about GoldBod's transparency and operational efficiency are especially important given the institution's central role in the country's macroeconomic management strategy.

Public trust in such an institution depends on regular disclosure, parliamentary oversight, and clearly defined governance rules. Ghana's experience with past commodity booms shows that periods of strong earnings can deteriorate quickly without prudent management and institutional accountability. The current moment should therefore be treated as an opportunity to entrench fiscal discipline and structural reform rather than as evidence that longstanding economic vulnerabilities have disappeared. The broader policy challenge remains ensuring that short-term macroeconomic improvements translate into sustainable gains in employment, industrial growth, and household welfare across the country.

Despite these headline achievements, CDD-Ghana notes that the GoldBod story is not without significant controversy. In late December 2025, the Minority in Parliament called for a bipartisan parliamentary inquiry into reported losses under the Gold for Reserve (G4R) program. The IMF's Fifth

"The current moment should therefore be treated as an opportunity to entrench fiscal discipline and structural reform rather than as evidence that longstanding economic vulnerabilities have disappeared"

Review under Ghana's Extended Credit Facility cited approximately US\$214 million in reported trading shortfalls and operational costs linked to artisanal and small-scale gold transactions during the first nine months of 2025. Prominent policy analyst Bright Simons argued that the cedi's strength was partly driven by an unprecedented global bull market in gold prices, and that assessing GoldBod's efficiency required benchmarking against what Ghana's gold revenues would have looked like under the old regime, given 2025 prices, which would likely have produced similar, if not higher, revenues.

A related and equally contested question concerns the source of GoldBod's gold. GoldBod maintains that it purchases exclusively through more than 2,000 licensed aggregators who are required to reject illegally mined gold, cites its mandate under Act 1140 to promote responsible and traceable sourcing, and says a blockchain-based track-and-trace system is under development to verify the origin of each purchase. Critics are not convinced. IMANI Africa's Kofi Bentil has alleged that as much as 85 percent of GoldBod's gold originates from illegal mining, a figure CEO Sammy Gyamfi has rejected; mining consultant Gomashie has countered that Minerals Commission data on licensed small-scale output cannot account for a large share of GoldBod's declared purchases, implying that a significant volume of unlicensed gold is entering the formal market through licensed buyers. The opposition NPP has made a similar case, and Mr. Gyamfi himself has acknowledged unspecified vulnerabilities in the supply chain, attributing them to decades of weak formalization of artisanal mining rather than to flaws in GoldBod's design.

Parliament's majority side rejected the claim that GoldBod is worsening the galamsey problem, citing new buffer zone restrictions near water bodies and cocoa farms, as well as the prosecution of illegal operators. Until GoldBod's promised traceability system is independently verified and its results published, the question of how much of the state's gold purchases come from illegal mining will remain open.

CDD-Ghana welcomes the GoldBod CEO's stated openness to parliamentary inquiry and his pledge to provide detailed explanations of the institution's finances. GoldBod's audited 2025 financial statements have since been completed and published, with the Auditor-General recording no adverse findings and the institution declaring an operational surplus. However, publication is only the first step: the contested claims of trading losses under the Bank of Ghana's Domestic Gold Purchase Program cited in IMF reporting, and civil society's demands for scrutiny of flagged expenditure lines, remain unresolved. Parliament's Public Accounts Committee should therefore conduct a thorough review of the audited statements and the reported shortfalls and report its findings publicly.

CDD-Ghana also calls for a clear statutory framework governing the relationship among GoldBod, the Bank of Ghana, and the Ministry of Finance to prevent the institutional ambiguity that has characterized the controversy over G4R losses. Given the unresolved sourcing questions, CDD further calls for an independent audit of GoldBod's traceability system, with its methodology and coverage made public, to establish with confidence the share of state-purchased gold originating from licensed operations.

A further accountability question, which goes to the heart of the GoldBod model, concerns the provenance of the gold the institution buys. Because GoldBod purchases from the artisanal and small-scale mining sector without a fully operational, independently verifiable traceability regime, there is a real risk that illegally mined gold, including gold from the galamsey operations devastating the country's rivers and forest reserves, is being absorbed into official state purchases and exports. The state cannot credibly anchor the national currency on gold flows whose legality it cannot verify. Worse, guaranteed state purchases risk creating a ready and lucrative market that perpetuates the very illegal mining the government professes to be fighting. CDD therefore calls on GoldBod to fast-track a robust, auditable traceability and responsible-sourcing system covering all of its purchases, and to regularly publish the proportion of its gold verified as originating from licensed operations.●●

Galamsey – Measuring Progress Against the Evidence

At the 77th Annual New Year School at the University of Ghana in January 2026, President Mahama reported that the fight against galamsey was yielding positive results. He cited improvements in the Ayensu River, which he said had changed from a dark, coffee-like appearance six months earlier to a significantly clearer state, resembling light Milo.

He attributed the improvement to enforcement actions by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Anti-Illegal Mining Operations Secretariat (NAIMOS), and river guards operating upstream. In his 2026 SONA, the President stated that over 114 case dockets involving hundreds of accused persons in galamsey were before the courts. He also said that specialized prosecutorial teams had been deployed to fast-track illegal mining cases and pursue the financiers and kingpins, whom he acknowledged typically evade arrest while low-level offenders are caught.

CDD-Ghana acknowledges these as meaningful steps. The focus on prosecuting financiers rather than merely destroying equipment precisely reflects the strategic shift Democracy Watch has long advocated. The introduction of a new permit regime for excavator imports and improved tracking of heavy-duty mining equipment, announced at the Mining in Motion Summit 2025, also marks a structural improvement over the ad hoc enforcement approaches of the past.

Against these official claims of progress, the Ghana Coalition Against Galamsey (GCAG) issued a statement on March 28, 2026, signed by prominent civil society leaders, including Kenneth Ashigbey and Senyo Hosi, declaring that the national campaign against illegal mining was failing. The coalition stated that its assessment of ongoing efforts revealed a worsening situation despite initial signs of progress. It cited a sharp rise in the extent of affected forest areas as evidence of deterioration, noting that when President Mahama took office, nearly 45 forest reserves were affected by illegal mining.

The coalition called for the immediate removal of ‘chanfan’ machines and other floating devices from water bodies, the pause of all new small-scale mining licenses, the release of NAIMOS’s full budgetary allocation, and the prosecution of foreign illegal miners found operating in the country in Ghanaian courts rather than their deportation.

The persistence of illegal mining despite years of public campaigns, military deployments, and policy interventions underscores the depth of governance failures underlying the galamsey crisis. Illegal mining has evolved into a complex political economy sustained by networks of financiers, local political protection, corruption within enforcement agencies, and the economic desperation of communities with limited livelihood options. This complexity explains why periodic crackdowns have often produced only temporary reductions in activity and have failed to deliver sustained environmental recovery.

CDD-Ghana notes that the GCAG’s concerns align with the government’s earlier statements. In May 2025, President Mahama disclosed that of 288 officially declared forest reserves, 44 had been encroached upon and 16 percent of the country’s forest reserves had been destroyed or degraded. He further revealed that over 1.5 million Ghanaians were involved in the sector, either through artisanal mining, employment with small-scale mining companies, or direct involvement in illegal galamsey operations. This scale of the problem underscores that any approach that relies primarily on enforcement will be insufficient unless the economic drivers of illegal mining are addressed.

The degradation of rivers, forests and farmlands now has implications not only for environmental sustainability but also for public health, food security and long-term economic productivity. Communities that rely on affected water bodies for drinking water and farming continue to bear disproportionate costs. The state must therefore move beyond high-visibility enforcement operations and adopt a more integrated governance strategy that combines environmental restoration, local economic development and institutional accountability.

CDD-Ghana reiterates its call to establish a credible, independently monitored Anti-Galamsey Progress Framework with publicly reported indicators. These must include: independent satellite monitoring of forest cover changes in affected districts; independent water quality testing at sentinel points along the Pra, Birim, Offin, Ankobra, Bonsa, and

“Without such a framework, the government’s claims of progress cannot be independently assessed”

Ayensu rivers; the number of prosecutions, convictions, and sentences imposed on illegal miners, including financiers and foreign nationals; and changes in the welfare of legitimate small-scale miners, who continue to be conflated with illegal operators in enforcement actions. Without such a framework, the government’s claims of progress cannot be independently assessed, and the public cannot make informed judgments about whether the fight against galamsey is truly advancing.

Licensing systems for legitimate small-scale miners should be simplified and paired with technical assistance to encourage formalization and reduce incentives for illegal operations. At the same time, sanctions against politically connected actors and foreign collaborators who facilitate illegal mining must be applied consistently and transparently.

“Restoring credibility will require measurable outcomes backed by independent evidence rather than periodic political assurances”

Public frustration with the anti-galamsey fight reflects a perception that enforcement is selective and that influential actors often escape consequences. Restoring credibility will require measurable outcomes supported by independent evidence rather than periodic political

assurances. Without sustained institutional reform and economic alternatives for mining communities, the cycle of environmental destruction and reactive enforcement is likely to persist. ●●

Certificate of Urgency Abuse and Ghana’s Super-Majority Parliament

The Ninth Parliament of the Fourth Republic, elected in December 2024, gave the National Democratic Congress a commanding majority of 184 seats out of 276, which later increased to 186 seats after two by-elections. This supermajority, the first held by any party in Ghana since 1996, is now the defining structural feature of Ghana’s legislative landscape.

The NDC majority has used its numerical dominance aggressively, including heavy reliance on the certificate of urgency procedure to push bills through Parliament without the standard 14-day gazette period. According to Parliamentary Network Africa’s (PNAfrica) Output Analysis Report of the First Session of the Ninth Parliament, which examined the House’s output from January to December 2025, most bills passed by this Parliament were processed under certificates of urgency. As of May 2026, 34 of the 39 bills passed by the Ninth Parliament had been fast-tracked under this procedure, effectively bypassing the standard fourteen-day gazette requirement.

Among the bills passed under certificates of urgency in 2025 were the Energy Sector Levies Amendment Bill, which imposed a fuel levy that the Minority estimated would add GH¢1 per liter of petroleum products, generating roughly 5.7 billion cedis annually to address an energy sector debt of \$3.1 billion to \$3.7 billion; the Road Traffic Amendment Bill, which legalized commercial motorcycles, known as ‘okada’; the Gold Board Act, which established GoldBod; the E-Levy Abolition Bill; and the Bank of Ghana Amendment Bill. Some of the amendments in those bills included lowering the minimum age for commercial drivers, legalizing commercial “okada” (motorcycles), and reducing the legal blood alcohol limit for drivers. Many of these were consequential policy measures whose implications for citizens required thorough committee scrutiny, public consultation, and expert input.

The growing reliance on certificates of urgency also raises broader concerns about the erosion of Parliament's deliberative and oversight functions amid overwhelming executive dominance. In constitutional democracies, legislative scrutiny is not merely a procedural formality but a safeguard against poorly designed laws, unintended policy consequences, and excessive concentration of power in the executive branch. When major legislation is routinely rushed through Parliament without adequate stakeholder engagement, the quality of democratic decision-making diminishes, and public trust in the legislative process weakens.

The problem is especially acute in Ghana because parliamentary committees often serve as the primary

“...legislative scrutiny is not merely a procedural formality but a safeguard against poorly designed laws, unintended policy consequences, and excessive concentration of power”

institutional channel for civil society organizations, professional associations, experts, and ordinary citizens to influence national policymaking.

Under the usual lawmaking process, a bill is introduced into Parliament at the first reading. It then goes to the Committee

Stage, where the relevant Parliamentary Committee conducts a detailed examination of the bill and invites stakeholders to submit memoranda or present perspectives and opinions. This is followed by a second reading of the bill, during which Parliament debates its principles. The fourth stage is the consideration stage, when the House conducts a clause-by-clause review of the bill. The third reading is the final stage at which a bill is passed. After passage, the bill goes to the President, who, under Article 106 of the Constitution, has 7 days to assent or signal that he will not assent. If he declines, he must, within fourteen days, either send Parliament a memorandum setting out the provisions he wants reconsidered or refer the bill to the Council of State for advice. Parliament then reconsiders the bill in light of those comments, and if it passes it again by a two-thirds majority, the President must assent within thirty days. Only once assent is given does the bill become an Act of Parliament. The various stages of the lawmaking process can typically span weeks, months, and sometimes even years to allow for proper and effective consultation, debate, and public engagement.

Order 119 of the Standing Orders of Parliament permits a bill to proceed through multiple readings in a compressed timeframe when a Certificate of Urgency is issued. Under Article 106 of the 1992 Constitution, a bill can bypass the traditional legislative process, enabling it or other bills to be passed expeditiously.

The constitutional and procedural justification for this mechanism is a genuine legislative emergency, such as economic emergencies, security threats, court deadlines, global pandemics, or international obligations with strict deadlines. This is intended to avoid delays that could have serious consequences for governance, stability, or compliance. The pattern of invoking urgency to advance legislation that is politically or fiscally convenient is a misuse of a procedural instrument with a specific, narrow purpose.

Compressing these stages under certificates of urgency limits opportunities for public participation and reduces transparency in consequential policy decisions. Supermajorities can create conditions in which the executive becomes less responsive to dissenting views within Parliament and more inclined to equate numerical strength with democratic legitimacy. Constitutional democracy depends not only on majority rule but also on procedural fairness, institutional restraint, and meaningful debate. The Speaker of Parliament therefore occupies a critical constitutional position as guardian of the integrity

of parliamentary procedure. A failure to enforce strict standards for urgency applications risks normalizing exceptional legislative shortcuts as routine governance practice. Over time, this could significantly weaken Parliament's institutional credibility and reduce the effectiveness of legislative oversight in safeguarding accountability and constitutional balance.

Majority Leader Mahama Ayariga has pushed back on this critique, arguing that a certificate of urgency is a standard legislative tool rather than evidence of wrongdoing; that most bills expedited this way are non-controversial or tied to international agreement timelines; that many undergo extensive review before being reintroduced for swift passage; and that the Minority retains the right to propose amendments regardless of the procedure used. He has also noted that NPP-led Parliaments passed 56 bills the same way between 2017 and 2024, arguing that the current majority's use of the procedure is not unprecedented.

This response addresses volume but not the underlying procedural concern: that NPP-led Parliaments also relied on certificates of urgency shows only that the practice predates the current majority, not that either instance was justified. The claim that most bills are non-controversial rests on no published standard an outside observer could verify. This is precisely the gap Parliamentary Network Africa's report identifies. Without a requirement that the Executive state in writing why a bill needs urgency, and without a committee record of that justification being tested, there is no independent basis for judging whether a given bill genuinely warranted bypassing the 14-day gazette period. Thus, the Majority Leader's defense restates the practice rather than addressing the case for the proposed safeguards.

"Constitutional democracy depends not only on majority rule but also on procedural fairness, institutional restraint, and meaningful debate"

The remedy begins with the Speaker of Parliament, who, as guardian of the House's deliberative integrity, should subject applications for Certificates of Urgency to rigorous scrutiny and decline to certify any legislation that does not meet the urgency threshold.

The Minority, for its part, has every procedural tool at its disposal to demand adequate deliberation. Civil society and the media can help by engaging publicly with the substance of legislation before it is passed, rather than after it is passed. Parliament's legitimacy, in the end, rests not on the size of any governing majority's mandate but on the quality of the deliberative process through which that mandate is exercised.●●

Ibrahim Mahama, the Black Maria and Police Accountability

On Saturday, March 21, 2026, internationally acclaimed Ghanaian visual artist Ibrahim Mahama, founder of the Savannah Center for Contemporary Art in Tamale and the highest-ranked African artist on the 2025 Art Review Power 100 list, was allegedly assaulted in Tamale by members of a special operations police unit known as the Black Maria. According to Mahama, he was returning from a mosque after Eid-ul-Fitr prayers with family members when their vehicle became caught in heavy traffic near a school in Tamale. A team of police vehicles forced their way through the gridlock and began banging on their car after Mahama's uncle, who was driving, eased the vehicle into an opening to clear the congestion. His uncle and other passengers questioned the officers' conduct; the officers ordered the vehicle to stop, and Mahama began filming the scene. The officers forced their way into the vehicle, demanding that he unlock his phone and delete the footage he had recorded. The officers beat him and his uncle severely. Mahama sustained a cut lip, a broken tooth, and rib injuries. In the days after the assault, he reportedly ate with a straw and suffered headaches, speech difficulties, and sleeplessness. The injuries forced him to cancel international lectures at the Royal College of Art in London, Cambridge University, and Oxford University.

Mahama held a press conference on March 23, 2026, during which he detailed the assault and announced his intention to pursue legal action. The Ghana Police Service denied the Black Maria unit's involvement and described some circulating videos as doctored or misrepresented. The matter was referred to the Police Professional Standards Bureau for an internal investigation. The Inspector-General of Police, Daniel Tettey Yohuno, met with Ibrahim Mahama on March 26 and assured him of the Service's commitment to uncovering the truth. The Northern Regional Minister also condemned the actions and said that anyone found culpable would be dealt with.

The public reaction to the Ibrahim Mahama incident reflects broader frustrations with the culture of impunity that has often characterized allegations of police misconduct in Ghana. Although many officers serve professionally under difficult conditions, repeated reports of excessive force, arbitrary detention, intimidation, and abuse of power have eroded public confidence in law enforcement institutions. In many communities, particularly among young people and marginalized populations, interactions with the police are shaped more by fear than by trust. This undermines effective policing because public cooperation is essential for intelligence gathering, crime prevention, and community safety. The credibility of internal disciplinary systems has also been weakened by perceptions that investigations rarely yield transparent outcomes or meaningful sanctions for offending officers. The Ibrahim Mahama case has drawn unusual attention because of the victim's prominence, but the underlying concerns affect countless ordinary citizens whose experiences rarely receive national coverage. Ghana's democratic maturity will ultimately be judged not only by the existence of constitutional rights but also by the consistency with which state institutions protect those rights in everyday practice. Genuine accountability in this case would therefore signal an important commitment to institutional reform and equal protection under the law.

“If this could happen to Ibrahim Mahama, someone well-known, what about people on the streets?”

CDD-Ghana expresses deep concern about the alleged assault on Ibrahim Mahama and calls for a thorough, transparent, and genuinely independent investigation. CDD also observes that the public significance of this incident

stems not primarily from the victim’s identity but from what his experience reveals about the Ghana Police Service’s systemic conduct.

Ibrahim Mahama put it best at his press conference: “If this could happen to me, someone well-known, what about people on the streets?” A joint statement signed by his institutions and other arts organizations noted: “Many citizens are routinely subjected to various forms of police brutality in Ghana. We use the incident and the attack on Mr. Mahama to draw attention to these unprofessional acts by personnel mandated to enforce the law and protect the public peace.”

CDD-Ghana believes this is precisely the right framing. In previous editions of Democracy Watch, CDD documented the Ejura killings of June 2021, the assault on CITI FM journalist Caleb Kudah, and what commentators have described as the Zongo Seven incident in Manso Nkwanta, in which seven young men, suspected of robbing a bus and killing a police officer, were shot dead and later found to be innocent. In almost every instance, the script is the same: public outrage, a promise of an internal investigation by the Professional Standards Bureau, followed by silence.

“In almost every instance, the script is the same: public outrage, a promise of an internal investigation ... and then silence”

The Ibrahim Mahama incident has reignited calls to establish an independent civilian oversight body for the Ghana Police Service. Commentators, legal practitioners, and civil society organizations have cited the United Kingdom’s Independent Office for Police Conduct and South Africa’s Independent Police Investigative Directorate as models. CDD-Ghana firmly supports this call. The Police Professional Standards Bureau, despite the good intentions of individual officers, is institutionally incapable of providing the impartial accountability that Ghanaians deserve because it remains a creature of the very institution it is supposed to oversee.

“Independent civilian oversight is therefore an urgent governance issue, not merely a human rights concern”

Independent civilian oversight is therefore an urgent governance issue, not merely a human rights concern. Comparative experiences in other democracies show that effective police accountability mechanisms can strengthen professional policing by improving transparency, public legitimacy, and

institutional discipline, rather than weaken it.

CDD-Ghana calls on Parliament to immediately establish an Independent Police Oversight Authority with civilian leadership, statutory investigative powers independent of the Police Service hierarchy, the authority to recommend criminal prosecution, and a mandate to investigate serious misconduct,

including fatal shootings, torture, and destruction of evidence. CDD-Ghana also calls for the mandatory deployment of body-worn cameras for all police officers and the enactment of legislation prohibiting the deletion or tampering with recordings of police-citizen interactions.

The criminal investigation into the alleged assault on Ibrahim Mahama must be pursued to conclusion, and its results must be made public, regardless of the identity of the officers ultimately found responsible.●●

Constitutional Reform — Third Time a Charm?

On December 22, 2025, Ghana's eight-member Constitution Review Committee (CRC), chaired by Henry Kwasi Prempeh, Executive Director of CDD-Ghana, submitted its summary report to President John Dramani Mahama. Titled "Transforming Ghana: From Electoral Democracy to Developmental Democracy," the report, the product of nearly a year of nationwide consultations, marked the most comprehensive examination of Ghana's constitutional architecture since the Constitution Review Commission process from 2010 to 2011. President Mahama described the report as a "beautiful Christmas gift" and declared that "as soon as we resume early next year, we are moving from the constitutional review process into the implementation process."

Ghana has now made two prior attempts at comprehensive constitutional reform, both of which stalled. The first, initiated under the late President Mills in 2010, produced a thorough report but stalled after Mills' death and Mahama's 2012 election victory. The second, a proposed constitutional amendment during the Akufo-Addo administration, was narrowly focused and ultimately abandoned.

This third attempt begins under more favorable conditions than its predecessors. The Committee's composition and the chairman's standing lend the review credibility and nonpartisan weight; the NDC holds, for the first time since 1992, a parliamentary supermajority sufficient to pass constitutional amendments; and the President has publicly committed to implementation, pledging to establish an Implementation Committee in early 2026.

The renewed constitutional reform process arrives at a moment when many Ghanaians question whether the Fourth Republic's institutional arrangements remain fully adequate to the country's current governance challenges. Concerns about excessive executive power, weak local governance structures, the growing monetization of politics, and declining public trust in state institutions have intensified over the past decade.

The Constitution Review Committee's work therefore represents more than a technical legal exercise; it is an effort to renegotiate the balance among state power, democratic accountability, and citizen participation.

Among the CRC's key recommendations are: extending the presidential term from four to five years to better align with development planning cycles; electing Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Chief Executives, ending a decades-long anomaly in which these critical local government officials are appointed by the President; including traditional authorities in local government structures; and capping the total number of ministers and ending the current hybrid system that allows MPs to serve as ministers simultaneously, which the Committee argues undermines efficiency and accountability.

Other recommendations include: enhancing the Council of State's advisory and vetting role in presidential appointments to reduce executive patronage of independent bodies; splitting CHRAJ into two distinct bodies, one focusing on human rights and ombudsman functions and the other merging with the Office of the Special Prosecutor to form a dedicated anti-corruption and ethics body; and giving Electoral Commission Chairpersons and Deputies a single, non-renewable ten-year term, with revised removal procedures to strengthen their independence.

These are substantive and bold proposals. CDD-Ghana notes with particular approval the recommendations on ministerial appointments, which address the well-documented damage to parliamentary oversight when MPs serve as executive ministers, and the proposals on independent constitutional bodies, which address the concentration of presidential patronage that has historically undermined institutional independence. The democracy community has long advocated for these reforms.

"...the reforms that most constrain executive power must be implemented first to demonstrate that the government's commitment to reform is genuine rather than self-serving"

The CRC's rationale, that four years is insufficient for effective governance and development planning, has merit. However, the political reception to its proposal to extend the presidential term from four to five years has been complicated by suspicions that it could, combined with ambiguity about when the new term length would take effect, extend President Mahama's current term.

Professor Prempeh, who chairs the CRC and serves as CDD-Ghana's Executive Director, has addressed this directly: the extension cannot apply to Mahama, he explained, because constitutional amendments cannot retroactively alter the conditions under which a sitting president was elected. Mahama was elected under the current four-year framework.

Separately, the Committee has ruled out any change to the two-term limit, with Professor Prempeh telling reporters that it found no public or political demand for a third term. CDD-Ghana takes these assurances seriously, while noting that Professor Prempeh's dual role as CRC Chairman and the CDD's Executive Director is a fact readers should weigh. The Committee's broader credibility and the careful composition of its membership nonetheless lend weight to its stated non-partisan intent. CDD-Ghana identifies three conditions essential to the success of this third attempt at constitutional reform, which its predecessors failed to meet. First, the process must be genuinely bipartisan. Constitutional amendments perceived as crafted for the NDC's benefit will lack the legitimacy needed for durable change. The Constitution Review Committee's engagement with the NPP, its parliamentary caucus, and former and current leaders is a positive signal. The implementation committee must also be inclusive, and the NPP opposition must be afforded a genuine voice in drafting amendment bills.

Second, the reforms that most constrain executive power must be implemented first to demonstrate that the government's commitment to reform is genuine rather than self-serving. The most critical test is whether the NDC-dominated Parliament will genuinely limit ministerial appointments from its own ranks and agree to the electoral commission's terms for appointments, which would bind future NDC administrations as much as future NPP ones.

Third and most fundamentally, the Ghanaian public must remain engaged. Professor Prempeh stated it plainly at the launch of the process: “It takes sustained public interest and pressure. Parliamentarians don’t represent themselves; they represent us. So, as long as Ghanaians are involved in this process, take a keen interest in it, and stay engaged, I believe there will be a political response to it.” CDD-Ghana commits to staying actively engaged in this process, to reporting publicly and honestly on its progress, and to calling out both progress and backsliding as they occur.

Constitutional reform processes are inherently difficult because they often involve competing political interests and differing visions of national development. Yet the current process also offers a rare opportunity to address long-standing governance distortions that successive administrations have acknowledged but have often avoided confronting directly. The recommendations on decentralization, parliamentary independence, and the autonomy of constitutional bodies are particularly significant because they directly address the concentration of authority in the presidency, which has shaped Ghanaian politics since 1992.

“...they directly address the concentration of authority within the presidency, which has shaped Ghanaian politics since 1992”

However, successful reform will depend not only on the quality of the recommendations but also on the transparency and inclusiveness of the implementation process. Public suspicion can easily arise when constitutional amendments appear politically advantageous to incumbents.

“...institutional reforms offer an opportunity to deepen democracy beyond elections and to strengthen the long-term resilience of the constitutional order”

Sustained civic education, open consultation, and bipartisan negotiation will therefore be essential to maintaining public confidence in the process. Ghana’s democratic reputation has largely been built on peaceful electoral transitions, but institutional reforms offer an opportunity to deepen democracy beyond elections and strengthen the long-term resilience of the constitutional order.●●

Conflict of Interest and the President’s Use of His Brother’s Private Jet

One of the most consequential governance controversies of the first quarter of 2026 involves a jet. Since January 2025, President John Dramani Mahama has repeatedly used aircraft owned by his brother, prominent businessman Ibrahim Mahama, for official state travel. The government has characterized this as pragmatic fiscal management amid economic austerity. Still, it has sparked a serious, unresolved debate over conflicts of interest, regulatory capture, and the integrity of Ghana’s constitutional ethics framework.

Article 284 of the 1992 Constitution is unambiguous: a public officer shall not place himself in a position where his personal interest conflicts or is likely to conflict with the performance of the functions of his office. The CHRAJ Code of Conduct for Public Officers reinforces this, requiring officials to ensure that

their personal interests do not interfere with, or even appear to interfere with, their obligations to the state. The operative word is “appear.” A perceived conflict of interest – one that a reasonable observer would identify, regardless of whether improper influence has in fact occurred – is itself a constitutional concern.

The question the aviation arrangement raises is straightforward: does the free use of a sibling’s \$70 million jet constitute a gift or benefit that imposes an unusual obligation on the Presidency to a businessman whose commercial interests are advancing in state-regulated sectors?

“The operative word is “appear.” A perceived conflict of interest ··· is itself a constitutional concern”

This debate underscores the growing importance of ethical governance standards in Ghana’s democracy. Public confidence in political leadership depends not only on the absence of proven corruption but also on the assurance that public decisions are insulated

from private influence and personal obligation. This is especially critical in contexts where political elites and major business actors often operate within overlapping social and economic networks. Even when no unlawful conduct can be demonstrated, perceived proximity between state power and private commercial interests can erode trust in institutional impartiality and fuel broader public cynicism about governance.

The controversy began on January 17, 2025, when the President traveled to Gambia and Senegal aboard Ibrahim Mahama’s Bombardier Challenger 604 rather than the state-owned Falcon 900 Ex Easy. The government defended the move, saying the presidential fleet was undergoing a technical review and that the arrangement cost taxpayers nothing beyond fuel and landing charges. In March 2026, the President again used his brother’s aircraft, this time Ibrahim Mahama’s newly delivered Bombardier Global 6500, valued at approximately \$70 million, for a five-day bilateral tour of South Korea. Operational costs for aircraft of this class can reach as high as \$8,620 per hour.

The “zero cost” defense suggests that Ibrahim Mahama is personally subsidizing the Presidency’s operational costs and, by extension, the Government of Ghana. No ethical framework treats such an arrangement as neutral.

The argument for an actual conflict of interest — as distinct from a perceived one — crystallized in April 2026, when Ibrahim Mahama’s flagship company, Engineers and Planners (E&P), was announced as the winning bidder for the Damang Gold Mine contract following the expiration of Gold Fields Ghana Limited’s lease. The concession is valued between \$600 million and \$1 billion. The government maintains that the Minerals Commission conducted an open, competitive tender under LI 2176 and that E&P was selected on merit after meeting strict technical and financial requirements. The Minority in Parliament rejects this framing: a President who travels on his brother’s jet throughout the period his brother’s company is acquiring control of nationally significant mining assets has, at a minimum, created the appearance of an unusual obligation incompatible with the constitutional standards Article 284 demands.

Several safeguards would help restore confidence. Presidential travel on non-state transport should be disclosed publicly and in real time, including the estimated market value of that travel. Legislation

should require the President to use commercial or certified state aircraft, except during declared national emergencies. When the commercial interests of immediate family members are at stake, the President should, in writing, recuse himself from any decision affecting them. The government should publish a clear, budgeted timeline for replacing the presidential fleet to prevent a recurrence of reliance on privately owned aircraft. The Minority's referral to CHRAJ under Article 287 must be investigated thoroughly, transparently, and expeditiously, with the findings made public.

The Constitution Review Committee's December 2025 report recommended amendments to Article 284 that would require written disclosure of conflicts, mandate recusal, and invalidate decisions when conflicts are concealed. These long-overdue reforms have taken on fresh urgency amid the aviation controversy. Ghana's reputation as a democratic exemplar in West Africa rests not only on its electoral record but also on the daily conduct of its executives. The "zero cost" defense may be appealing during an economic recovery, but constitutional ethics cannot be subordinated to macroeconomic sentiment. The integrity of the rules governing the relationship between presidential authority and private commercial power is a foundation of durable governance.

The Mahama aviation controversy offers Ghana an opportunity to clarify ethical standards at the highest levels of government. A transparent, credible response would strengthen, rather than diminish, democratic legitimacy by demonstrating that constitutional principles apply equally to powerful

"The "zero cost" defense may be appealing during an economic recovery, but constitutional ethics cannot be subordinated to macroeconomic sentiment"

officeholders. The long-term health of Ghana's democracy depends not only on electoral competition but also on cultivating a political culture in which ethical accountability is treated as an essential component of public service, rather than an optional standard subject to political convenience.

President Mahama's 2026 State of the Nation Address – Matters Arising

On Friday, February 27, 2026, President John Dramani Mahama delivered his 2026 State of the Nation Address (SONA) to a joint sitting of the Ninth Parliament, fulfilling the constitutional obligation under Article 67 of the 1992 Constitution. The address presented a narrative of recovery, resilience, and renewed national purpose. Coming at a moment of persistent economic anxiety and rising public expectations, the address framed the administration's first year in office as one marked by decisive reforms, economic stabilization, and the restoration of public confidence. It emphasized economic recovery and portrayed an economy that had emerged from crisis through fiscal discipline and difficult choices.

The president made a case for optimism, citing several macroeconomic milestones, including an \$113 billion GDP projection that has placed Ghana among Africa's top 10 economies; fiscal reforms that have effectively returned GH¢6 billion into the pockets of Ghanaians; and interest rates that have fallen from above 30% to about 18%, freeing up credit for businesses and households. The address stated that more

than one million Ghanaians were employed between Quarter 1 and Quarter 3 of 2025, and that 950,000 people escaped multidimensional poverty in the same period.

In an address emphasizing discipline and institutional credibility, the President outlined two key ideas. The first was the “Resetting Ghana Agenda,” a domestic program to rebuild the economy, strengthen institutions, and restore public trust.

The second, “Accra Reset,” was presented as a continental vision for African cooperation, self-reliance, and strategic leadership. According to the President, these agendas would put Ghana on a path to prosperity and the restoration of hope. “Ghana is on the runway; it is in take-off mode,” the President said. The speech portrayed an administration wholeheartedly embracing the challenge of turning around the difficult economic context it inherited and making the hard choices required to achieve that turnaround. However, CDD-Ghana believes important questions remain about the sustainability, inclusiveness, and institutional grounding of the achievements being celebrated.

The address sought to reassure Ghanaians that the country’s macroeconomic gains are beginning to translate into improved living conditions, lower fuel prices, lower inflation, and lower interest rates. The removal of taxes, such as the e-levy and the betting tax, was similarly framed as a deliberate effort to ease the burden on citizens. However, the pressing challenges that warrant difficult choices also merit discussion.

The President, for example, acknowledged the painful decision to reduce the cocoa producer price and explained the liquidity crisis at COCOBOD that necessitated it. CDD-Ghana would like to remind the President that the cocoa sector needs reform to enable a more equitable distribution of cocoa proceeds. He also disclosed that more than 114 case dockets involving hundreds of accused persons in galamsey activities were pending in court. He stated his intention to shift enforcement focus toward the financiers and kingpins of illegal mining.

While CDD-Ghana welcomes this, it also urges the President to ensure that those accused of engaging in galamsey are prosecuted to the full extent of the law and that his intention to shift enforcement focus toward the financiers and kingpins of illegal mining is pursued to the fullest extent possible. Another striking feature of the address was its continental orientation. The “Accra Reset” concept reflects a growing recognition across Africa that the continent’s economic future cannot be built on dependence and fragmentation. The President’s call for regional value chains, greater African cooperation, and domestic financing for development aligns with longstanding pan-African aspirations for economic sovereignty and integration.

The emphasis on dismantling barriers to intra-African trade and on strengthening collective bargaining power in global affairs is both timely and important, particularly amid a global environment marked by geopolitical uncertainty, economic nationalism, and shifting power dynamics. Ghana’s effort to position itself as a convening and catalytic actor on the continent aligns with the country’s historical foreign policy identity.

At the same time, translating continental rhetoric into practical outcomes remains a persistent challenge for African governments. Regional integration across the continent continues to face obstacles, including weak infrastructure, trade bottlenecks, regulatory inconsistencies, and competing national interests. Ghana’s leadership aspirations under the “Accra Reset” framework will therefore require sustained diplomatic engagement and coherent domestic policy.

One subject the address did not address satisfactorily was democratic governance and institutional accountability beyond economic management.

“...the SONA provided no clear, time-bound framework for translating the government’s stated reform commitments into action”

While the President spoke extensively about rebuilding public trust, the speech offered limited discussion of broader democratic concerns, including corruption investigations, the independence of oversight institutions, civic freedoms, and Parliament's role in deepening accountability.

Although the government’s stated commitment to tighter expenditure controls, procurement reforms, and enhanced parliamentary oversight over the disposal of public assets reflects recognition that Ghana’s recurring economic crises are deeply linked to weaknesses in governance and accountability, the SONA’s silence on the fatal El-Wak Stadium stampede, less than four months before the address, is troubling. This is especially troubling given allegations that the Ministry of Interior accepted fees from approximately 500,000 applicants for a police and allied services recruitment exercise intended to absorb only 5,000 people. The absence of any accountability or structural reform commitments in this regard diminishes the perceived integrity of the President’s stated commitment to transparency and accountability.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the SONA provided no clear, time-bound framework for translating the government’s stated reform commitments into action. Announcements about the 24-Hour Economy, the Big Push infrastructure program, and constitutional reform were made without benchmarks that would enable Parliament, the media, civil society, and citizens to hold the administration accountable.

The corrective is straightforward. Parliament’s Select Committees could establish a systematic mechanism to track addresses and to report publicly and quarterly on implementation. At the same time, the government could publish a detailed policy implementation matrix that translates each major commitment into a time-bound, institution-specific action plan, open to monitoring by civil society and the public. Handled this way, the SONA would mark the start of a yearlong accountability conversation rather than its high point.

The President’s address is both an opportunity and a test. It offers a vision of recovery centered on discipline, reform, and renewed confidence. Yet it also raises critical questions about whether Ghana’s political leadership is prepared to pursue the deeper institutional reforms needed to break the cycle of crisis management and short-term policymaking.

“It will be judged by whether the government becomes more accountable, public institutions more effective, and ordinary citizens experience meaningful improvements in their quality of life”

Ultimately, the success of the “Resetting Ghana Agenda” will not be measured solely by improvements in growth rates, exchange rates, or credit ratings. It will be judged by whether the government becomes more accountable, public institutions more effective, and ordinary citizens experience meaningful improvements in their quality of life.●●

**Democracy Watch is the official newsletter of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development.
The publication tracks Ghanaian democratization and highlights areas of progress, stagnation, and retrogression.**

The developments discussed in this edition highlight ongoing challenges facing Ghana's democracy and public institutions. They also underscore the need for stronger accountability, effective oversight, and a commitment to the rule of law. CDD-Ghana will continue to monitor these and other developments and to advocate for reforms that strengthen democratic governance and accountability in Ghana.

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The Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) is an independent, non-profit research and policy organization advancing democracy, good governance, and inclusive development through evidence, analysis, and public engagement.

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