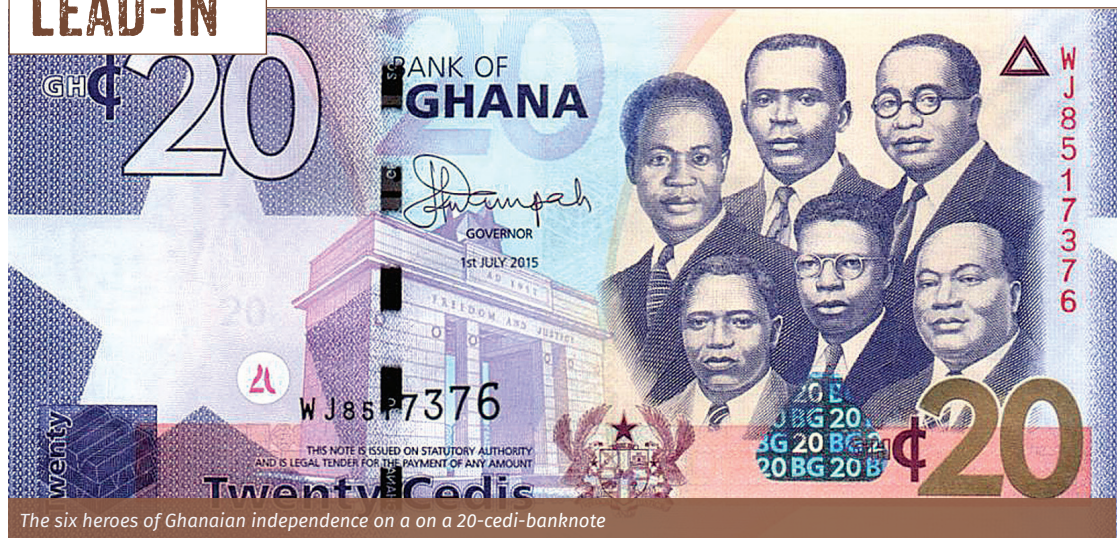


LEAD-IN



The six heroes of Ghanaian independence on a 20-cedi-banknote

Ghana: a political and agricultural history

Considered by many observers to be a “model” African nation, Ghana has established a peaceful and mature democracy while keeping its traditions alive. The country is using its current momentum to overcome the challenges of inclusive development, but remains burdened by inequality and food insecurity.

Timeline

1957: Independence

Turbulent post-independence period

- Kwame Nkrumah 1957 > 1966
- Joseph Arthur Ankrah 1966 > 1969
- Akwasi Afrifa 1969 > 1970
- Edward Akufo Addo 1970 > 1972
- Ignatius Kutu Acheampong 1972 > 1978
- Fred Akuffo 1978 > 1979

1979

Ghana's resurgence... and food insecurity

- Jerry Rawlings 1979 > 2001

2001

Mature democracy

- John Kufuor 2001 > 2008
- John Atta Mills 2008 > 2012
- John Dramani Mahama 2012 > 2016

2015

A liberal conservative in power

- Nana Akufo Addo 2016 > 2020
- 2020: Election présidentielle

In Ghana, a history professor can begin a lecture with a single banknote. The 1, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cedi notes all feature a photo showing a group of six people. The photo dates back to 1948. At the time, none of those individuals thought they would end up as heroes of the independence movement. Two of them went on to become head of state: Kwame Nkrumah (1957–1966) and Edward Akufo Addo (1970–1972), father of the current president. Two political groups took shape (one moderate, the other revolutionary), creating a lasting divide.

A turbulent post-independence period

Ghana was the first sub-Saharan country to free itself from the colonial yoke in 1957, and is now a prime example of a real democracy. The journey has been long and at times painful: 12 years of single-party rule, 23 years of a military regime, 28 years of a multiparty system. During that period, cacao (see p. 25), or “brown gold”, was the most profitable crop for small farmers. A popular highlife song from the 1950s says it all: If you want to send your child to school, it's cacao / If you want to build a house, it's cacao / If you want to get married, it's cacao / If you want to have a truck, it's cacao.

When President Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966, Ghana was a centrally planned economy on a path towards modernisation, with major projects such as the Akosombo Dam, the Port of Tema, the Volta Aluminium Company (Valco) plant, one hundred fifty public companies and three universities. The word *kalabule* also came into use at the time, referring to the nepotism and moral degradation which marked the subsequent military regime. Following that difficult period, the people of Ghana wanted someone who could save the country. That person was former military pilot, Jerry Rawlings.

Ghana's resurgence

Rawlings's era lasted twenty years, with continuous oscillation between authoritarian order and democratic rule of law. It was a period of contradictions, to say the least. The “moral revolution” and negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) occurred simultaneously. The economy was in poor shape. Factories were at a standstill. Shortages were prevalent in cities.

What made Ghana's resurgence unique was that Rawlings was able to maintain control over the economy and slow down the dismantling of public companies while also

attracting foreign capital. The government wanted to reduce the impact of the adjustment measures by offering state benefits to support the poor and promote jobs. It focused its attention more on rural communities than on cities, pursuing a well-drilling programme and expanding the electrical grid.

Chronic food insecurity

Food insecurity is a recurring problem in Ghana that neither Rawlings nor his predecessors were able to solve. The rate of undernourishment fell from 16% in 2000 to 6.5% in 2016, but the condition has not been completely eradicated. The problem persists mainly in the country's northern region. That region is rich in agroecological resources, but the agriculture practised there is mainly small-scale subsistence farming.

The importing of rice—the second most consumed cereal in Ghana, after corn (see p. 30)—started to undermine local production. At the market in Tamale, too many consumers preferred rice from Asia. In the 1970s, local production was not a priority. The Food for Peace programme, which provided food assistance in the form of rice, turned out to be a war machine, and the American taste for long-grain rice took over. So much changed in just one generation, but is it irreversible? According to the FAO, an additional 150,000 hectares would need to be cultivated in order to become self-sufficient.

A mature democracy

When former Oxford student John Kufuor—originally from Kumasi, the Ashanti capital—came to power, Ghana entered a new phase characterised by the democratic transfer of power. The World Bank's 2011–2013 Poverty-Reduction Programme established the idea that people in Ghana were poor. In 2000, 40% of Ghanaians were living below the poverty line, compared with 23% today. Ghana was also classed as an “excessively indebted” country, owing to unreliable management of its imports and borrowing outside the IMF. Creditors were stuck having to reschedule debts and accept write-offs. It was a particularly tough period.

John Kufuor, the reconciler, was able to turn things around. He launched a plan to reduce hunger and poverty. Ten years later, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan country to reduce by half the number of people suffering from hunger within its borders. He left power in 2008, having reached his term limit. His successor, John Atta Mills, had better governance and benefitted from the launch of oil drilling by Exxon off the coast of Takoradi. To avoid the dangers of the “resource curse”, Ghana decided to manage its oil windfall like

the Norwegian model by transferring oil revenue to a sovereign fund. After his death in 2012, John Atta Mills was succeeded by his vice-president, John Dramani Mahama, from Ghana's northern region.

Mahama's term was marred by poor management of public funds and plagued by lacklustre growth susceptible to fluctuations in the price of oil. Black gold did not lead to inclusive growth, as promised. Ghana's debt rose to 73% of gross national product. The country had no choice but to go back to the IMF in 2015 for a loan of nearly one billion dollars. Mahama lost the 2016 election to the current president, Nana Akufo-Addo, marking the third democratic transfer of power.

GHANA'S SENSE OF INITIATIVE HAS BECOME A SOURCE OF NATIONAL PRIDE

Ghana's multiparty system has worked remarkably well since the end of the Rawlings era. For Ghanaians, it is unthinkable that a head of state could change the term limit in the Constitution (another factor that makes Ghana stand out). At the same time, rulers of ethnic groups—particularly the Asantehene, king of the Ashanti people—still hold sway in rural areas throughout Ghana's central region, cocoa farms, mining lands, forest areas and major cities, such as Kumasi and Accra, where land has become an important factor in terms of power.

Since 2017: a liberal conservative in power

Ghana is still a lower-middle-income country. Its GDP per capita was \$1,600 in 2018, which is below the average for emerging countries (\$4,900). To maintain the country's current economic momentum and keep inequality in check, Nana Akufo-Addo's government is focusing on all sectors that create “opportunities for growth and prosperity” to provide funding for schools, hospitals and roads. The aim of the One District, One Factory policy is to help Ghana become an industrialised economy. Some fifty businesses were created in late 2019.

Ghana hopes to maintain its position as the world's second-biggest cocoa produ-

cer without neglecting family farming. The government launched a major programme in 2017 called Planting for Food and Jobs (2017–2020). The goal is to significantly boost yields by using digital-information resources (see p. 19) and by distributing improved seeds and fertilizers at subsidised prices through the market (see p. 15). Major irrigation projects have also been launched in each of the country's 275 districts.

Ghana's official development assistance was reduced by half between 2010 and 2018 (see p. 11). That reduction was decided voluntarily, revealing another factor that makes Ghana stand out: The Ghana Beyond Aid policy, announced in 2017, aims to reduce Ghana's dependence on international assistance and distance the country from external supervision so that it can focus on more innovative and sustainable solutions involving both the public and private sector.

Ghana's sense of initiative—with governance that respects individual rights and liberties according to the Freedom House, Mo Ibrahim and Economist Intelligence Unit indices—is a source of national pride. The country's crowning achievement was in July 2019, when it was announced that the secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area would be established in Accra (see p. 12–13), fulfilling the pan-Africanist vision that Nkrumah had outlined over 60 years earlier. Ghana will hold presidential and parliamentary elections in 2020—a great opportunity for the country to showcase its sound democratic health. ■

Pierre Jacquemot



Pierre Jacquemot is president of Groupe Initiatives, lecturer at Sciences Po-Paris and was the French ambassador to Ghana from 2004 to 2008.