country's GDP per capita to $1,000(about 8 million cedis) per year) within the next five years. Considering the grave picture of the situation painted by the minister, however, this seems to be too ambitious a target.

At independence, Ghana's GDP was comparable to those of Gabon, Botswana, Mauritius and Côte d'Ivoire. Today, Gabon has reached $4,000 per capita, Botswana and Mauritius $3,500 each, and Côte d'Ivoire $700 GDP per capita. Yet Ghana's figure has not even got to $400, only hovering between $370 and $380.

"These are not statistics we are throwing out carelessly. These are statistics we have done," Nduom noted, adding, "Poverty is prevalent in Ghana. That is why we need to do something to about it."

The government, according to the

Food growers are among the poorest in Ghana

minister, wants to reduce the national incidence of poverty from 40 per cent to 32 per cent by the year 2004. To this end, it has undertaken to bring about prudent fiscal and monetary policies; private sector-led industrial production through the application of science and technology; sound and sustainable management of the environment; promotion of commercial agriculture using environmentally friendly technology; increased investment in social services as well as accelerated decentralisation.

For real poverty reduction to take place, Ghana's GDP needs to grow by more than 7 per cent. The government, however, aims to increase growth to an average of 8 per cent by 2010. To reduce the national incidence of poverty from 40 to 32 per cent by 2004, the GPRS aims to improve real GDP growth to 5.0 per cent and per capia growth from 1.4 per cent in 2001 to 2.4 per cent in 2004.

The incidence of poverty among farmers is also targeted to decrease from 59 to 46 per cent. The under-five infant mortality rate planned to drop from 110 per 1,000 to 95 per 1,000, whereas gross JSS (Junior Secondary School) enrolment will grow from 61 to 65 per cent and primary school enrolment from 78 to 82 per cent (from 71 to 80 per cent for girls).

Total value of Ghanaian Non-Traditional Exports is also targeted to increase at least by 50 per cent, with the establishment of some sixty out-grower schemes. Delivery of service by Intermediate Technology Transfer Units (ITTU) is planned to go up by 50 per cent, and the total area under irrigation by 300 per cent.

The District Assemblies Common Fund is to be increased by 7.5 per cent, while the proportion of people with access to safe water will increase from 40 per cent to 54 per cent for rural areas and from 70 to 78 per cent for urban population.

Achieving these targets is not an easy undertaking. Yet the government seems to be determined: "If they (other African countries) can rise, why can't we?" Nduom asked rhetorically.

As in Washington and London, Ghanaians in Berlin agreed that hard work and active government engagement of the private sector will bring about poverty reduction and lead the country to its goal of a GDP per capita of $1,000 within the next five years. Participants also agreed on the need for improvement in education, vocational training, health care delivery, consumption of locally-made products and utilisation of technology, as well as the need for value-added agricultural produce in Ghana's drive to becoming an agro-based industrial country.

The Ghanaians at the discussions in Berlin were clearly concerned about implementation: in spite of the plethora of plans and programmes introduced over the years to reduce poverty in the country, things are just not happening!

The NDPC chairman, however, seems to have identified the hurdle which impedes government's efforts at implementing its plans. "The problem is not lack of money, but lack of efficiency and speed to utilise the money efficiently," Nduom observed at the meeting. To find a real, lasting solution to the problem, the full expertise of the government machinery and the collective will of Ghanaians are crucial. ■

Water for all - but how?

Kwame Ofori-Kuragu in Accra and *Sylvia Arthur* in London report on the continued controversy over involvement of the private sector in water supply in Ghana

This year's UN Day for Water was marked by international condemnation of the growing trend towards water privatisation in developing countries. The spotlight, in particular, was focused on Ghana where the government has embarked on fast track privatisation of the urban water system.

Since it was revealed that bidding for the country's two urban water concessions had begun last May, water tariffs have risen by a staggering 95 per cent in Accra and are set to climb even higher in preparation for a probable takeover.

In the UK consumers pay on average just one per cent of their annual salaries for piped water, much less than in Ghana where only 30 per cent of the population have tap water. that many Africans can ill afford.

Growing populations and limited resources are putting a strain on social and public services the world over, but the challenge for African governments is not merely to increase the capacity of available infrastructure but to modernise it and raise it to standards that make it both relevant and efficient.

Increasingly private sector participation, or PSP, is being seen as a useful alternative for providing services that traditionally were the exclusive domain of the state. PSP is now used in the delivery of essential services like

Ghana has abundant water resources - but many Ghanaians are without a good affordable water supply

transport infrastructure, health care delivery, the development of emergency services, and housing and pension schemes.

Even civil society organisations appear to have embraced the idea of PSP. The Global Water Partnership - a coalition of water management agencies - recently called on developing countries to allow private water firms to invest in their systems so that a greater number of people can have access to clean safe drinking water and sanitation.

Speaking at a UN conference earlier this year, Mary Catley-Carlson of the Stockholm-based Global Water Partnership said private investment needed to be substantially increased in order to achieve the globally agreed goal of reducing by half the numbers of people without clean water - two billion - and the numbers without appropriate sanitation - four billion - by 2015.

Private Sector Participation is playing an increasing role in Ghana's national economy. Receipts from divestiture of seven state owned enterprises alone, including the Ashanti Goldfields Company, accounted

Forty per cent of the world's water is to be found in Africa, yet the price placed on it has made it a luxury

for nearly 22 per cent of government revenue in 1994 as against 0.1 per cent in 1990. Since then, the scope of private sector participation has been extended to include the provision of public services which until recently were provided by public utility corporations. But by far the most contentious PSP issue to date has been the proposed privatisation of water.

Passionate arguments have been made for and against introducing PSP in the water sector. Previous attempts at improving efficiency in the water sector included incorporating the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation to form the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL). The Ghanaian government remains committed to reforming the water sector and controversially proposes to lease the only water supply agency in Ghana, the GWCL, which would effectively transfer the water delivery process to the hands of the private sector. There is, however, a strong wave of resistance to the government's plans.

One opposition party, the Convention Peoples Party, argues that water privatisation will commercialise a natural resource vital for the sustenance of life and have called on the government to repeal its decision. According to Dr Abubakar Alhasan, the CPP Chairman, the intended privatisation will only lead to a situation where financially handicapped communities and individuals would be denied access to potable water supply.

The Coalition against Privatisation (CAP) of Water is a collective of NGOs and civil society organisations opposed to privatisation of the water sector. CAP of Water, which professes to mirror the views of the larger Ghanaian populace, wants the government to resist plans to introduce PSP in water provision.

The coalition has taken its fight to London where activists have been canvassing for support against the UK government's role in the privatisation of Ghana's water. Campaigners accuse the British government of holding back vital aid money meant for the water sector pending the completion of the privatisation process.

CAP of Water cites the Kumasi Water Project as an example of how aid is being used to manipulate the government into signing up to the PSP initiative. DFID pledged £10 million for the improvement of the water system in Kumasi, the Ashanti capital, but is allegedly withholding funds until privatisation papers are signed.

The NPP government, whose leaders were against water privatisation during the 2000 election campaign, insists it is not privatising water but merely inviting private sector participation (PSP), on the grounds that the assets are not being fully divested but leased for upwards of 25 years. But the CAP of Water is adamant that PSP is simply privatisation by another name.

"To privatise water is like handing down death sentences to the majority of the urban and rural poor in Ghana because they cannot afford to pay economic rent for such services," says the Christian Council of Ghana, a partner in the campaign against water privatisation. "The right to water is a fundamental, God-given right to all people that dwell on this earth."

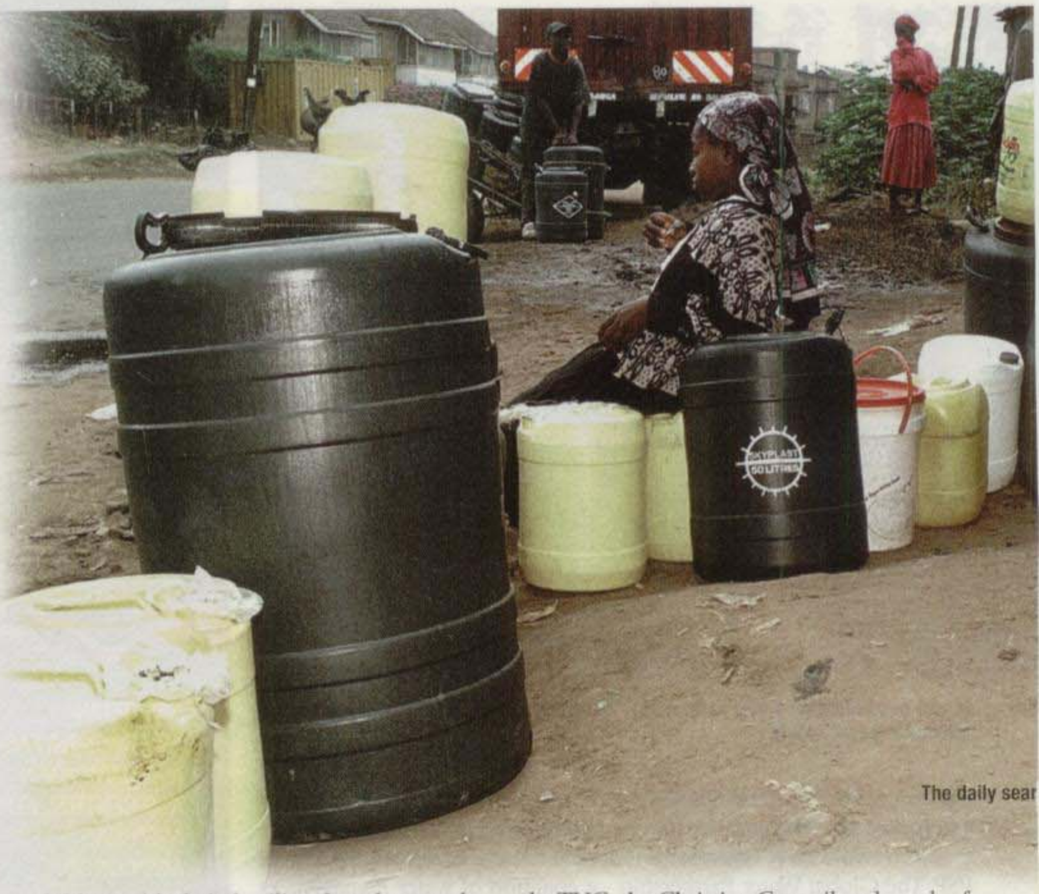
Hawa Amadu, a widow in her seventies, is the landlady of a compound house in the densely populated Nima district of Accra. She is typical of other Nima residents in that she lives in a house with three of her six surviving children with their families. Amadu says she spends between the equivalent of $0.4 and $0.6 a day on water, which her grandchildren fetch from an area known as the Lowlands over a mile away.

"Sometimes I will go without food so my grandchildren have water," says Amadu. "The government should understand this: water comes before food."

According to Dr Yao Graham of the Third World Network, "People already have to pay market tariffs before privatisation. Market rates would bring us up to about 80 cents per litre."

On the streets of Ghana, water retailing is big business. Young children, many of school age, can be seen with head loads of water in small polyethylene bags for sale. The warm tropical climate means demand will never decline. An unfortunate mix of high water and electricity tariffs means iced water is an expensive necessity.

The Ghanaian government has been accused of shrouding the bidding process in secrecy and the NPP administration is clearly nervous about public reaction especially since the TUC, the Christian Council and much of the independent press are against it.



The daily sear

Anti-privatisation campaigners insist they are not against privatisation *per se* but want the government to instigate a period of public consultation and a thorough consideration of the alternatives before signing away the rights to the country's water. Though they admit that the GWCL has had little success in improving water access, CAP of Water says consistent under-investment in infrastructure has been the main problem and that can be cured by domestic engineers replacing 30-year-old pipes if given the money.

"It's just reinforcing the stereotype that Africans can't do anything for themselves," said an ISODEC representative speaking at the London launch. Kwesi Owusu, co-ordinator of the UK NGO Southern Links, says the issue of water privatisation needs to be put into context with the whole WTO and GAT debate and the relationship between trade and debt.

In Bolivia, water privatisation had to be cancelled after mass strikes and demonstrations bought the country to a standstill. In Guinea the benefits of privatisation are yet to be assessed since campaigners complain of lack of regulation over the foreign enterprises that run the country's water system

In Ghana, under the proposals, water supply will be split in two - rural and urban. The supply of urban water will be leased to two private companies for 25 years while rural supplies - already under the auspices of

'To privatise water is like handing down death sentences to the majority of the urban and rural poor in Ghana because they cannot afford to pay economic rent for such services,' says the Christian Council of Ghana