



COVID 19 – THE GHANA CASE



Background:

23rd June 2020 marked exactly 100 days since the first cases of Covid 19 was reported in Ghana. Before the formal announcement (13th March 2020) of the first two cases in Ghana involving returning residents from Norway and Turkey, Ghanaians were already apprehensive given the awful news on Covid 19 around the globe. There were sustained pressure on the government to close Ghana's entry borders and institute measures to possibly avoid an incidence of Covid 19 or curtail any possible spread should a case be recorded. However, since recording the first cases in March, the country has seen a sharp rise in infections across almost all its 16 administrative regions. The Greater Accra Region (Capital – Accra), Ashanti Region (Capital – Kumasi) and Central Region (Capital – Cape Coast) have for some time been the hottest spots in infections. Today (23.06.2020), 100 days since the announcement of the novel virus (SARS COV 2 or Covid 19), Ghana's case count stands at 14,568 out of which 10,907 have been declared

recovered and sadly 95 officially declared deaths.



Source: okayfm.peacefmonline.com

Imposition of Restrictions

The Ghana Government led by His Excellency President Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo Addo, imposed partial lockdown restrictions on cities like Accra, Kumasi and the densely populated town of Kasoa in the Central Region of Ghana after they emerged as hot spots for the spread of Covid 19. This action was supported by the Imposition of Restrictions Act (2020), Act 1012. However, 21 days into the lockdown, the Government was forced to lift the partial lockdown as businesses and individuals were at risk of losing their livelihoods. Reasons given by the President at the time for

the lifting of the partial lockdown and the gradual removal of some restrictions was said to have been informed by science. Further commentary from high profile officials in the Executive arm of government particularly the Finance Minister of Ghana however suggested the decision was rather based on the economic impact of the pandemic.

Impact of Covid 19 and its Related Restrictions:

Covid 19 has dealt a huge blow to all aspects of life in Ghana. The Government had to realign its budget to contain the pandemic to the detriment of other sectors needing urgent improvements. Health infrastructure has come under serious pressure with the need to have isolation and treatment facilities across the country. The already inadequate health professionals have been put under pressure to deliver care and support to the thousands of infected persons. Ghana's testing facilities have had to be increased in number and their capacities enhanced to be able to respond to the volume of

tests required. The over 87% informal sector economic actors in Ghana have had their livelihoods threatened with weeks of shutdowns. Workers have lost jobs and incomes in the process with some owed salaries running into months due to their employers' inability to make necessary turnovers. From religion to recreation, sports and travels, the ordinary Ghanaian's life has dramatically changed over the last 100 days with the future remaining largely uncertain.

Covid 19 & Vulnerable Groups in Ghana:

The 21-day partial lockdown in Accra, Kumasi and Kasoa revealed a disturbing development where residents cried for support to meet basic needs such as food, water and shelter. With the law enforcement officers deployed on the streets of these urban settlements to enforce the Presidents directives under the Imposition of Restrictions Act, residents both poor and rich were put in the same box to obey the directives. However, scores of residents in certain deprived communities defied the orders to come on the streets in search of food. The government was forced to institute costly measures of providing some meal packages to affected residents. The business community, religious bodies and philanthropists all joined in to provide relief for some of the people badly hit by the Covid 19 related restrictions. Petty traders, 'Kayayeis' (head pots), street hawkers and

beggars were amongst the people badly hit by the pandemic. Plight of groups such as the disabled, widows and children with special needs became more pronounced in the period of the 21-day partial lockdown.



Source: citinewsroom.com

Covid 19 & Ghana's Health Infrastructure:

Ghana's health infrastructure has come under a serious review following the outbreak of Covid 19. With calls from health experts and the general public for the government to create more space to contain the spread of Covid 19, the President, Nana Akufo Addo has announced what has been described as an ambitious project of building 88 hospitals within one year of commencement to boost the health infrastructure of the country. These 88 hospitals will be situated in districts across the country which do not currently have hospitals. Meanwhile, there are on-going expansions of facilities in already existing health institutions in the interim to create needed spaces.



Source: noguchimedres.org

Health infrastructure such as testing laboratories with the capacity to test hundreds and thousands of samples in a reasonable period are being supported with new equipment with additional infrastructure in the process of construction. Ghana's premier testing centres, the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research and Kumasi Centre for Collaborating Research (KCCR) came under serious stress as initially they were the only two testing facilities for the entire nation. The Government through the Ghana Ministry of Health has recently boosted capacities of other laboratories in Tamale and Wa to take care of Covid 19 testing for the northern zone of the country.

Government's Response to Fight Covid 19:

Covid 19 has had dire consequence on the finance and budgetary allocations of the government of Ghana. The government of the day had anticipated to develop several sectors of the economy particularly since 2020 is an election year. But the outbreak of the novel Covid 19 virus has caused serious revisions. The Government on the onset committed a total of \$100m for the fight of the pandemic. Additional measures were announced to support various aspects of the economy including:

- GHS 600m support to SMEs
- 3 months free electricity bills for lifeline consumers and 50% reduction for all other consumers (including businesses)

- 3 months free water bills for consumers with tanker water suppliers to areas not connected to the Ghana Water Company systems
- Insurance package for all frontline health workers
- 50% salary increment for frontline health workers
- Daily allowance for Covid 19 contact tracers, etc.

The government continues to announce other incentives to bring relief to Ghanaians amid the Covid 19 pandemic. All these new measures are a cost to the country as a whole. Other development priorities may suffer due to the heavy expenditures being incurred in the health sector. One of the foremost priorities of Ghanaians i.e. the construction and upgrade of road networks that the Akuffo Addo government had promised for the year 2020 may be difficult to achieve judging from the change in priority spending. This is even more so since the global pandemic has equally affected the economies of financiers like the government of the Republic of China who is central to the Ghana government's development agenda on roads.

Gradual Releasing of Restrictions

The decision by the Nana Akuffo Addo led Administration to gradually remove restrictions has been met with mixed feelings by sections of the populace. Some have questioned the rationale behind the President's decision given the fact that at the time of lifting

the partial lockdown and some Covid 19 associated restrictions on Accra, Kumasi and Ksoa, Ghana's case count was steadily rising. The Government led by the Ministry of Health and the Covid 19 Task Force has always maintained that their decision was backed by science. Improved contact tracing and surveillance with more testing capacity were some of the reasons given for the gradual removal of lockdown restrictions as at Monday April 20. Some non-essential businesses were allowed to open whilst the government encouraged all to practice some safety protocols. At the time, only few regions out of the 16 administrative regions of the country had officially recorded Covid 19 cases. Today (23.06.2020), on the 100th day since the country recorded its first two cases, all 16 regions have recorded active cases with calls for support to manage the situation in these regions.



Source: ft.com

The latest attempt by government to bring some normalcy to the lives of its citizens is the reopening of secondary and tertiary schools. Final year students of tertiary institutions were allowed to return to school to complete courses on the 15th of June whilst those in secondary returned on 22nd June.

Disturbing Trend:

The case count of Covid 19 in Ghana is fast rising. Between June 1st and June 23rd, over 50 new deaths were officially recorded. More cases of health professionals are disturbingly being reported with some casualties. The Medical Director of Kwadaso S.D.A Hospital in Kumasi lost his life to Covid 19 in the line of duty. The Mayor of the twin city of Sekondi-Takoradi has also lost his life as a result of Covid 19 related illness with over 13 staff and Members of Parliament reported to have contracted the disease. Ghana's Health Minister, Hon. Kwaku Agyeman-Manu who has been leading Ghana's fight on Covid 19 has reportedly contracted the disease and is currently being managed at home. These few scenarios are indicative of the devastating effect the Covid 19 pandemic is having on the lives and development of the nation.



Source: ama.gov.gh

Imposition of New Restrictions:

The continuous infection of hundreds and thousands of Ghanaians has given rise to the government announcing new measures to help curtail the spread of Covid 19. The mandatory wearing of face masks is the latest of such measures. Supported by an

Executive Instrument (EI), it is now an offence for anyone in Ghana to be in public without a face covering (mask) and the punitive measures attached to the flouting of this regulation is so severe that it has been described by some as draconian. An offender risks being imprisoned for a period up to 10 years or fined a sum from GHS 12,000.00 to GHS 60,000.00. There are on-going discussions in the public space for a more enforceable action to adopted rather than what has been prescribed by the EI 164.

Borders Remain Closed:

Ghana's entry borders remain closed though there has been the gradual removal of Covid 19 related restrictions. The Measure was part of initial strategies to stop the importation of the Covid 19 virus into the country as has been instituted by several countries around the globe. This measure though necessary continues to put untold pressure and hardship on individuals and businesses. Several Ghanaians continue to make a case from their current places of domicile outside Ghana, for the government to assist them return home. Some efforts have already begun in this regard with some Ghanaians recently evacuated from some Arab nations. Certain Missions in Ghana have also initiated steps to return home some of their citizens who were affected by the lockdown in Ghana. The governments of Canada, the United States of America and the United Kingdom are some

of the countries that have since repatriated their nationals from Ghana.

Cargo and passenger movement across Ghana's borders (both air and land) have been greatly affected. During the lockdown, only goods classified as essentials (Food, drugs and other consumables) were allowed to come into Ghana. There were reported cases of haulage trucks stuck at the borders of Ghana's neighbouring countries with peoples' investments getting wasted. Ghanaian business men continue to count their losses with their inability to bring in their imports as countries like China, USA and several European countries also shut down their economy to fight the deadly virus.

Covid 19 & Election 2020:

Ghana will be going to the polls on 7th December 2020 to elect a new president and members of parliament all things being equal. The stakes are high with political parties gearing up to wrestle for power come December 2020. Covid 19's negative impact on Ghana's 2020 General Elections cannot be overemphasized, although all factions seem to have agreed that the elections must come off whatever be the case. Ghana's Independent Electoral Commission (EC) has also assured electorates of instituting the strictest of protocols to ensure the non-spread of the virus during the exercise. However, a thorny issue that was raging on even before the country recorded its first cases of Covid 19 on 23rd

March, was the the EC's uncompromising resolve to compile a new voters' register. Whilst the opposers of this exercise raised concerns initially about legitimacy and timing for a new register (the case is currently being settled in the Supreme Court of the land), Covid 19 has now brought an even scarier situation which leaves more people concerned about getting registered or not.



Source: ghanabusinessnews.com

Covid 19 & the Can-Do Spirit:

It is often said that "scarcity is the mother of all inventions" and this saying has been amplified in Ghana's Covid 19 fight. With the realization that the pandemic was having worldwide effect and countries which used to supply certain essentials to Ghana will not be able to do so since they have need for these essentials themselves, the country went to work. The President announced the commencement of local production of PPEs and other essentials. Businesses sacrificed parts of their production lines to produce needed medical items to support the national fight. Beverage companies started

producing local sanitizers after the population complained of the exorbitant prices being charged for imported ones, nose masks were sown locally, research institutions manufacture local ventilators and automatic sanitizing machines among others.



Source: ghanachamber.org

The private sector has come on board to supply needed PPEs to health centres across the country and in some cases have even put up health infrastructures to serve as isolation and treatment centres. Religious institutions have likewise joined in to supply some of these items and offered their facilities as holding centres for infected persons. All these and more of such go to support the assertion that the African is capable of managing his own affairs.

Conclusion:

The government continues to announce other incentives to bring relief to Ghanaians amid the Covid 19 pandemic. All these new measures are a cost to the country as a whole as other development priorities may suffer due to the heavy expenditures being incurred in the health sector. The future remains very much unpredictable so long as a cure or vaccine remain yet to be found for the treatment of Covid 19. But good governance must continue unabated.

Verifiable Sources

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