



**BRIEF ON EFFORTS MADE BY GHANA IN ITS FIGHT
AGAINST COVID-19**

SUBMITTED TO

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The COVID-19 pandemic continues to claim lives, wreak havoc to economies and disrupt livelihoods around the world. Here, in Ghana, we have not been spared. To date (2nd May 2021), 92,828 people have tested positive for the virus; 90,462 have recovered; 1,583 are active cases; and 783 have tragically lost their lives.

According to the COVID-19 Business Tracker survey, conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to job losses with many Ghanaian businesses and firms being forced to cut costs by reducing staff hours, cutting wages, and, in some cases, laying-off workers. Again, the survey showed that about seven hundred and seventy thousand (770,000) workers had their wages reduced, and about forty-two thousand (42,000) employees were laid-off during the three-week partial lockdown imposed on the Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Areas and their contiguous districts, Tema and Kasoa. Government, however, succeeded in protecting the jobs and incomes of all public sector workers.

But along with these challenges, COVID-19 has also revealed opportunities that could be seized to move the nation forward. Accordingly, Government has prepared the Ghana COVID-19 Alleviation and Revitalization of Enterprises Support (2020-2023) document, the “Care Programme”. This document sets out Government’s approach to mitigating the health and economic challenges created by COVID-19. It also presents concrete steps that will be taken during the medium term to revitalize the economy and accelerate the national transformation toward “Ghana Beyond Aid”.

Government Approach and Best Practices

Coronavirus Alleviation Programme (CAP)

In April 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, Government announced a package of economic stimulus measures called the **Coronavirus Alleviation Programme (CAP)**. Key initiatives under the CAP include:

- formulation and implementation of the COVID-19 preparedness and response plan, tracing, testing, treatment;
- waiver of personal income tax and provision of an additional fifty percent (50%) basic salary allowance to healthcare workers;
- expanding the capacities of laboratories to increase COVID-19 testing;
- establishment of isolation centres in all regions and districts;
- fumigation of markets and schools;
- provision of food packages and hot meals for residents in areas affected by the partial lockdown;
- provision of free water for all households, provision of free electricity for lifeline consumers and a fifty percent (50%) discount for all other consumers;
- reduction in the Communication Service Tax (CST) from nine percent (9%) to five percent (5%).

Coronavirus Alleviation Business Programme (CAPBUS) Initiative

This is a coronavirus alleviation programme for the institution of a seven hundred and fifty million cedi (GH¢750 million) loan facility for micro, small and medium enterprises through the CAPBUS Initiative, and the provision of a two billion cedi (GH¢2 billion) guarantee facility to support large businesses, such as schools and pharmaceutical companies. This forms part of

several measures put in place by Government to cushion Ghanaians from the impact of the pandemic.

Reduction in Monetary Policy

These were initiatives, part of stimulus packages to ensure the restoration of the economy back to normalcy in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic. They include:

- Support from the Bank of Ghana to lower the Monetary Policy Rate by one hundred and fifty (150) basis points to 14.5 percent;
- Reduction in the Primary Reserve Requirement from ten percent (10%) to eight percent (8%);
- Reduction in the Capital Adequacy Requirement from thirteen percent (13%) to eleven-point five percent (11.5%), and reduced interest rates based on the Ghana Reference Rate by two hundred (200) basis points. .

Tax Reliefs and Extension of Tax Filing Dates

The Ghana Revenue Authority extended the dates for filing of taxes from four (4) months to six (6) months after the end of the basis year; issued a waiver on Value Added Tax, National Health Insurance Levy and GETFund Levy on donations of equipment and goods for fighting the pandemic; waived income taxes on Third-Tier Pension withdrawals; and permitted the deduction of contributions and donations towards COVID-19 as allowable expense for tax purposes.

Ghana CARES ‘Obaatampa’ Programme

Government has developed and is currently implementing the one hundred-billion-cedi (GH¢100 billion) Ghana CARES ‘Obaatampa’ Programme to transform, revitalise and modernise the economy and return it to high and sustained growth for the next three years. The key projects under the CARES Programme include:

- a) supporting commercial farming and attracting educated youth into commercial farming;
- b) building the country’s light manufacturing sector;
- c) developing engineering/machine tools and ICT/digital economy industries;
- d) fast tracking digitalisation;
- e) developing Ghana’s housing & construction industry;
- f) establishing Ghana as a Regional Hub;
- g) reviewing and optimising the implementation of Government’s flagship and key programmes; and
- h) creating jobs for young people and expanding opportunities for the vulnerable in society, including persons with disabilities.

Vaccine Development and Vaccination Programme

Government recognizes the need to institute measures towards the development of vaccines and to safeguard and protect the population through vaccination. A national committee by Prof Frimpong Boateng has been established by the President and located within the presidency. Scientist at the nation’s research universities and infectious disease centers are collaboratively working to develop a vaccine for the country. Presently, they have managed to sequence the genome of the coronavirus and plans are far advanced with Government support and the

requisite funding to ensure the development of vaccines. Besides, some Professional Herbal Centers have also produced immunity enhancing herbal medicines like CoA Mixture to help fight the pandemic.

On 24th February, Government secured the first batch of vaccine doses from the COVAX Facility. The vaccination campaign is currently ongoing, with two hundred and sixty-two thousand, three hundred and thirty-five (262,335) number of Ghanaians receiving the first dose of the vaccines as of 9th March 2021. The target is to vaccinate twenty million. Government is working hard towards realizing this goal and plans are in place to take delivery of some seventeen million, six hundred thousand vaccine doses by June with more to come in the course of the year. Public education campaign is currently ongoing with regard to the vaccination programme. The vaccine, together with strict compliance with safety protocols, is what will allow the country to open up again and embark on the quest to restore normalcy to lives and livelihoods.

Government is also mindful of problem associated with vaccinations - that is how to dispose of used Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), vials, needles and syringes that are being used in the vaccination exercise. Government is collaborating with the private sector to establish fourteen (14) medical waste treatment facilities across the country to help address, once and for all, the safe disposal of medical waste.

Revamping and Improvements in overall Health System through Agenda 111

Government acknowledges the fact that the pandemic has emphasized the need to expand access to healthcare for every Ghanaian, irrespective of their location. Government has embarked on Agenda 111 which will see to the construction of 100-bed District Hospitals in one hundred and one (101) Districts with no hospitals; seven (7) Regional Hospitals for the new Regions, including one for the Western Region; the construction of two (2) new psychiatric hospitals for the Middle Belt and Northern Belt, respectively; and the rehabilitation of Effia-Nkwanta Hospital in the Western Region.

Agenda 111 is part of a massive vision for Ghana's healthcare sector, the realization of which will lead to Ghana becoming a Centre of Medical Excellence and a destination for medical tourism. Agenda 111 will achieve the following;

- Designate each of the sixteen (16) regional hospitals as a Centre of Excellence in the different specialties of medicine. For example, orthopedic surgery, burns, plastic and reconstructive surgery, breast care center, fertility center, neonatology and pediatric center, neurosurgery and spine center, stroke center, heart and kidney center and mental health center to name a few;
- Upgrade medical curriculum and continue to train young doctors and health care professionals in a world class fashion;
- Incentivize the private sector to increase capacity to support demand in healthcare delivery; and
- Encourage Ghanaian medical experts in the diaspora to collaborate and join hands to help build and contribute to the realization of this noble vision.

Local Manufacturing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs)

Ghana started a drive to produce its own local PPEs at a time they were being sold on the world market at extortionist prices, largely because demand outstripped supply. At the height of the pandemic, the ingenuity and creativity of the Ghanaian was exhibited. Scrubs, medical gowns, sanitisers, masks, and gloves all of these essential to the fight against COVID-19, were

produced in Ghana. In total, fourteen million, six hundred thousand pieces of personal protective equipment have, so far, been produced domestically for health workers, students, teaching and non-teaching staff of tertiary and secondary educational institutions.

Legislation to enforce COVID-19 Eradication

Government has passed a legislative to enforce the compulsory wearing of mask at all public places. Besides, efforts have been intensified on the washing of hands, use of sanitizers, ban on mass public gathering, restriction on the number of participants at public programmes, adoption of flexible working hours in Ghanaian public and private working institutions, closure of the country's borders, enhanced testing at the airports and periodic COVID-19 tracing and testing, among others. These regulations are in force and represents one of several key initiatives towards combating COVID-19.

Role of Science, Technology and Innovation in the Fight against COVID-19

In May 2020, the President challenged Ministers to take a hard look at their programmes in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that COVID-19 had “provided the opportunity to recreate the country; an opportunity to do something meaningful; this is a challenge we must seize”.

Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) permeates all facets of socio-economic life. Government's approach is to place Science, Technology, and Innovation at the Centre of socio-economic development. Through this, the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) is to collaborate with all Ministries to mainstream issues of Science, Technology and Innovation in their activities. With regards to COVID-19, MESTI will support the fight against COVID-19 in the following areas:

- Encourage and support STI institutions to continue the local production of PPEs and sanitizers to support, especially schools;
- Continue to lend support to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Ghana Atomic Energy Commission to collaborate with relevant institutions in the development of vaccines.
- Leverage on sector plans through the eventual launch of the “Decade of Innovation” initiative to maximize the use of technology in the midst of the pandemic.
- Build capacity in STI-related activities to ensure the availability of skills and qualified personnel to assist in driving Government's overall agenda in “COVID-19 Alleviation and Revitalization Programme.
- Forge the needed partnership with relevant regional and international bodies in the overall fight against COVID-19.

Conclusion

Ghana through the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) remains committed to joining hands with COMSATS in the fight against COVID-19. Ghana has made progress in this direction in the sub-region and we pledge our support to assisting COMSATS to ensure the collation and sharing of relevant information to help in addressing the challenges related to COVID-19 Pandemic.