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President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (2017-present) says he is satisfied with the measures government has put in place to deal with the threat of the novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which is yet to reach Ghana. ARC analyses Ghana's preparedness to COVID-19 and how the global epidemic is affecting local business. Akufo-Addo's decision to hold Independence Day celebrations in Ashanti Region, and the notable absence of former President John Dramani Mahama (2012-2017) from the day, illustrate the region's importance as a key political battleground and the poor state of relations between the presidential candidates in December's general election.

How ready is Ghana for COVID-19?

President **Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo** (2017-present) said on 4 March he was satisfied with the measures government has put in place to deal with the threat of the novel **Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)**. The **Ministry of Health** says all suspected cases of COVID-19 in **Ghana** have tested negative, but fears have heightened over a potential outbreak given that Ghana's **West African** neighbours have already confirmed some cases and because of the region's recent memory of another deadly epidemic, **Ebola**. ARC has analysed Ghana's preparedness for COVID-19 and how it will affect business and industry.

Health minister **Kwaku Agyeman-Manu** announced on 5 March that a suspected COVID-19 case reported at **Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital** in capital **Accra** tested negative.¹ To date, Ghana has had 46 suspected cases of COVID-19 but none has tested positive. However, cases are quickly springing up in Ghana's regional neighbours – which means it is likely only a matter of time before the virus reaches Ghana. To date, **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Senegal, Togo** and **Nigeria** have confirmed cases.

Ghanaian health authorities have made numerous public announcements in recent days to assure the public, and foreign citizens and businesses, that Ghana is prepared for a potential outbreak. Agyeman-Manu said on 5 March that he has held engagements with all the country's ports of entry, and that he has told them to strengthen COVID-19 preparedness and surveillance. **Ghana Health Service (GHS)** director general **Patrick Kuma-Aboagye** has said Ghana has intensified its preparedness activities and heightened surveillance at all points of entry, and he has advised citizens to avoid non-essential visits to affected countries. **Ghana Airports Company** managing director **Yaw Kwakwa** has said all passengers are screened on arrival at the airport using thermal scanning devices and are also required to fill in a health declaration form.

Agyeman-Manu also gave details about government's efforts to improve the country's prevention and response measures against COVID-19. He said the health ministry had secured 11m Ghanaian cedi (GHC) (\$2m) to set up a 25-bed special facility with modern equipment to deal with COVID-19. The project is expected to be completed in the next three weeks and is funded with the support of the **World Bank**. He also said government is securing a 100-bed capacity facility at a remote location to quarantine people, which will be operational in two weeks. Agyeman-Manu said the national rapid response team has been activated and national-level training for rapid response teams and local health workers on severe respiratory illnesses completed. Training of regional and district rapid response teams has been planned for execution. Additionally, President Akufo-Addo on 28 January

¹ Ghanaian ministry of health, 5 Mar 2020

commissioned 307 ambulances to the **National Ambulance Service** as a fulfilment of his 2016 campaign pledge.²

Ebola created a template that will stand Ghana, and its West African neighbours, in better stead against COVID-19. The Ebola outbreak led to improved health systems and disease outbreak procedures – particularly in rural areas – and enhanced evacuation strategies and security and quarantine systems. Ghana was home to the **United Nations'** emergency Ebola response headquarters, which pulled in international experts on infectious diseases. Should the COVID-19 outbreak reach Ghana, the skills shared at the Ebola headquarters will better equip the country's response.

There is already some evidence that health workers and citizens are more knowledgeable to stop COVID-19 in its tracks. Health authorities encouraged citizens to adopt the “*Ebola hand-shake*” – a greeting that uses elbow bumps, which is a vital first line of defence against an infectious disease – immediately after news of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Ebola outbreak also led to an improvement in the ability of governments and aid agencies to provide clean water and antibacterial soap to remote locations.

During the Ebola outbreak, misinformation and rumours broke down trust in public health programmes, which jeopardised medical response efforts. This problem is much better recognised now. **UNICEF** on 9 March made a call for a stop to sharing inaccurate information on COVID-19, and said it is actively taking steps to provide accurate information about the virus by working with the **World Health Organisation**, government authorities, and online social media partners such as **Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn** and **TikTok** to make sure that accurate information and advice is available.

That said, sources in Ghana note that the public health systems in Ghana are not up to international standards and run a serious risk of being overwhelmed.³ Sources note that while central government has been quick to announce plans to improve the country's readiness and response to COVID-19, local hospitals remain inadequate. A government adviser told ARC:

“Ministry of Health say they are well prepared. Two days ago, the president inspected their preparedness and he said he was ‘satisfied’. I think for most people on the ground, this remains to be seen. Personally, I know of someone who presented COVID-19 symptoms at a local hospital but was not asked any questions and was discharged without testing. The person just had a cold but to emphasise the point of how ready they are at the local level as opposed to the government level could be significant.”⁴

A local journalist told ARC:

*“People are nervous and appear not to buy into the optimism of government's preparedness. Most people have bought face masks in case of an outbreak. Churches have stopped shaking of hands. In fact, the **Catholic Church** has issued guidelines in its services to avoid close contacts. A mere fact that the biggest hospital in Ghana, Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, doctors and nurses have been running away from reported cases is a summary of how nervous people are.”⁵*

How is the epidemic affecting local business?

A source in the banking sector said, so far, small-scale traders have been most impacted. The deputy minister for trade has advised the business community to find other sources of products, such as **Dubai** and **Turkey**, to substitute **China**, rather than increasing prices because of short supply. **Abossey Okai Spare Parts Dealers Association** co-chairman **Clement Boateng** has said COVID-19 is having a serious toll on the spare parts business in the country. He said players in the industry

² Ghanaian ministry of health, 28 Jan 2020

³ Source, government adviser, Ghana; source banking sector, Ghana; source, journalist, Ghana

⁴ Source, government adviser, Ghana

⁵ Source, journalist, Ghana

could not replenish their dwindling stocks as they could not travel to China and other **Asian** markets such as **Korea** and **Japan**, which are major markets for spare parts. Boateng expects shortages and price increases in the car spare parts market in the near future. This problem is likely to be reflected in many other parts of the Ghanaian economy with strong links to China.

The lucrative bauxite extraction industry is also likely to be significantly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak in China. Roads and highways minister **Kwasi Amoako-Atta** said on 2 March the epidemic has dealt a blow to the multibillion-dollar bauxite-for-infrastructure deal. The Chinese government would allot \$2 billion to bankroll many infrastructural projects in Ghana in exchange for bauxite. Amoako-Atta said:

“So far, four out of the ten projects under the deal, have commenced. But the coronavirus outbreak has affected things.”⁶

Missing at Independence Day?

Former President **John Dramani Mahama** (2012-2017) was absent from Ghana’s 63rd Independence Day celebration at the **Kumasi Sports Stadium** on 6 March, which some observers interpret as an indication of the breakdown of relations between the presidential candidates and their respective political parties in December’s upcoming general election.⁷ As elections approach, speculation mounts about the activities of Mahama and the opposition **National Democratic Congress (NDC)**.

One current talking point about Mahama is his delay in announcing his running mate for December’s election. A source in Ghana told ARC that he was “*a bit curious*” about why the opposition party has been hesitant to announce a running mate. He speculated whether this was because of the ongoing **AirBus** corruption scandal, which allegedly involved senior members of the NDC (see *ARC Briefing Ghana February 2020*).⁸ The source also speculated whether a running mate has not been declared because of other corruption scandals against senior members of the NDC that the ruling **New Patriotic Party (NPP)** is holding back on until further into election season (see below). Announcing a running mate early shows how a political party plans to market itself for an election and allows it to start building its ticket. Mahama’s move to delay this may look to some voters as a sign of a party in disarray.

There is also speculation that the ruling NPP plans to announce potential corruption investigations into NDC members as election season draws closer. This information came from a reputable source in the banking sector in Ghana, who told ARC that there are “*increasing rumours*” of key NPP members “*getting ready to release corruption investigations*” against key opposition NDC members.⁹ If the rumours are true, a series of new corruption scandals against the NDC, coupled with the party’s alleged links to the Airbus scandal, will significantly damage its chances at the polls in December – particularly considering that the NDC is still trying to shake off its reputation as a deeply corrupt party from its previous time in government.

It is worth noting that the Independence Day speech by President Akufo-Addo took place in the **Ashanti Region** for the first time. The region has been a hotspot for political violence – particularly around election time – and the upcoming election is expected to be no different. Mahama has asked President Akufo-Addo to ensure that people responsible for the violence that marred the **Ayawaso West Wuogon** by-election last year are sanctioned. A source told ARC that a white paper recommending sanctioning those involved in the by-election violence has been sitting on President Akufo-Addo’s desk for “*an undue period of time*”. The source said Akufo-Addo is avoiding actioning the paper because members of the ruling NPP would be implicated.

⁶ Alcircle, 2 Mar 2020

⁷ GhanaWeb, 10 Mar 2020

⁸ Source, banking sector executive, Ghana

⁹ Source, banking sector executive, Ghana

Planner

25 Apr 2020 **(Ghana)** Ruling **New Patriotic Party** holds presidential primaries;

3 Jun 2020 Accra **(Ghana)** West African International Mining Power Exhibition (WAMPEX);

1 Jul 2020 **(Africa)** African Continental Free Trade Area deadline for 90% tariff liberalisation;

Dec 2020 **(Ghana)** General elections;

Chronology

10 Mar 2020 **Ashanti Region (Ghana)** *GhanaWeb*. The **National Parliamentary Vetting Committee** of the **New Patriotic Party** passes 107 parliamentary candidates in the **Ashanti Region**;

5 Mar 2020 **Accra (Ghana)** *B&FT*. **United States**-based ratings agency **Moody's** says **Ghana's** credit strengths include the favourable growth outlook over the next few years but debt affordability remains the main credit constraint;

5 Mar 2020 **Accra (Ghana)** *B&FT*. Health ministry secures GHC11m (\$2m) to support preparedness and response measures to a potential **COVID-19** outbreak and says government is securing a 100-bed capacity facility at a remote location to quarantine people;

2 Mar 2020 **Accra (Ghana)** *WorldOil*. Finance minister **Ken Ofori-Atta** says a capital gains tax claim for about \$500m is holding up **France**-based **Total SA's** acquisition of **Occidental Petroleum Corp's** assets in **Ghana**;

27 Feb 2020 **Accra (Ghana)** *Ghana Business News*. Parliament approves a contract agreement covering over \$993m between government and **Powerchina International Group Limited** for the construction of a 50MW hydropower plant at **Pwalugu**, in the **Upper East Region**;

27 Feb 2020 **Accra (Ghana)** *Business Day*. **MTN's Ghana** unit reports a 22.8% rise in service revenue to \$958m, while earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation was up by 65.7% to \$490m in its year to end-December;

21 Feb 2020 **Accra (Ghana)** *Business Ghana*. President **Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo** delivers the **State of the Nation Address** to parliament, stating that his administration has fixed the broken economy it inherited and placed it in good health;

20 Feb 2020 **Accra (Ghana)** *Bloomberg*. President **Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo** says the government will spend \$937m to refund money that was locked up when the country closed down scores of second-tier lenders and micro-credit companies last year;

20 Feb 2020 **Accra (Ghana)** *Reuters*. A source says overly hot and dry winds in **West Africa** are threatening to reduce cocoa production for the second year, with production estimated to fall from 820,000 to 790,000 tonnes in 2019/2020;

15 Feb 2020 **Accra (Ghana)** *MyJoyOnline*. **United States (US)** department of health and human services says **Florida (US)**-based **Ghanaian** doctor **Moses deGraft-Johnson** swindled the US government and health insurers of more than \$26m to finance his political ambitions in Ghana;

15 Feb 2020 **(Africa)** *UN News*. **Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Ghana** and **Zambia** license an **Ebola** vaccine which the **United Nations** health agency described as a 'milestone in the fight' against Ebola in **Africa**;

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