

Grappling with COVID-19: The Implications for Ghana



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1 Introduction

Ghanaians were alerted to a reported COVID-19 case in Nigeria on 27 February 2020 and told to take the necessary precautions before it emerged in the country. That was a time when people were on tenterhooks and the thought that the disease had finally arrived in the West African sub-region sent people into hysteria. Ghana confirmed its first cases of COVID-19 on 12 March 2022. The country's President, Nana Akufo-Addo, subsequently made a nation-wide address to assure the populace of the government's preparedness to contain the pandemic. The government immediately made available US\$100 million to enhance Ghana's response plan and preparedness for the pandemic. It also ordered the suspension of all international travels of public officials except for critical assignments in the days following the detection of COVID-19 in the country.

The initial response showed a strong determination on the part of government to deal with the situation. Some Ghanaians, who hitherto had dismissed the pandemic as a fluke, were, meanwhile, left in no doubt about the enormity of the problem when cases began to soar in the country. The reality of the situation dawned on them when news about the demise of some renowned personalities from the disease reached them. Among the dignitaries who died were Ghana's former President, Jerry Rawlings, who reportedly succumbed to COVID-19 complications in 2020. Following from that, those who had dismissed the pandemic as a distraction began to shift steadily their position and also to observe the necessary protocols that had been put in place.

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The chapter presents a comprehensive review of the COVID-19 situation in Ghana. It provides an insight into the pandemic's impact on major areas like health, education and the socio-economic lives of the people. It also looks at the role played by both government and businesses since the inception of the pandemic and how societal preconceptions and considerations shaped people's opinions about the pandemic. The chapter largely relies on secondary data sources, namely reports from government COVID-19 addresses and documents, briefs from international agencies and media reports.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, it opens up with an overview of the pandemic situation in Ghana. Both the literature review and the methodology employed are subsequently discussed. It then delves into the misconceptions and myths surrounding the disease. From there, the chapter provides some details about Ghana's health system and its supportive role in the fight against COVID-19. It also portrays its challenges too. Following from this, it assesses the pandemic's impact on the educational system and society as a whole. The private sector's role in the fight against the pandemic is also explored. The lessons learnt from the pandemic and what ought to be done in the light of that are also incorporated into the work. This is followed by a conclusion.

2 Literature Review

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in December 2019, a substantial body of COVID-19 literature has been generated. Many scholars have in recent times investigated and written about the COVID issue and its effect on a number of countries. The early COVID-19 medical literature originated primarily from Asia and focused mainly on clinical features and diagnosis of the disease, but many areas of potential research began to be published subsequently (Liu et al., 2020). Considerable efforts have since gone into various aspects of this pandemic to critically assess the way countries have fared in terms of dealing with it. Not only have COVID-19 publications increased exponentially (Palayew et al., 2020), but they have also covered a lot of methodologies too. Despite that, there are still knowledge gaps yet to be filled and areas for improvement for the global research community (Sarpong, 2021).

Some scholars have dealt with the issue through different approaches like clinical trials, surveys and the use of secondary sources. For instance, Silva and Mont'Alverne (2020) explored the social contexts in which the COVID-19 transmission occurs among vulnerable populations in Brazil through the use of online surveys. Sarpong (2021), meanwhile, looked at COVID-19's trajectory and sought to find out whether the lessons from it can be harnessed in the pursuance of the Sustainable Development Goals. Turcotte-Tremblay et al. (2021), on the other hand, examined the unintended consequences of COVID-19 mitigation measures. The rising burden of the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic in South Africa also motivated Reddy et al. (2021) to apply modelling strategies to predict COVID-19 cases and

deaths. Witteveen (2020) dwelt on the induced economic hardship associated with COVID-19 in the UK. Meanwhile, the inequalities that the pandemic brought to the fore have also found space in a number of analyses by scholars. A contribution by Engzell et al. (2020), for instance, investigated the learning inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Netherlands.

Many of these papers have given us much knowledge as to how COVID-19 has impacted differently on people and countries altogether. Quite significantly too have been the different methodologies that were employed in the course of these assessments. In some instances, data for some of the issues on COVID-19 have dwelt mainly on secondary sources.

3 Methodology

The methodology for this work comprises a review of the literature. The review covers a search, evaluation and synthesis of the relevant information on COVID-19 and how it has affected Ghana. It dwells extensively on journals, government statements, policy briefs as well as general observations. At a time when vast amounts of data are being collected and archived by researchers all over the world, the practicality of utilising existing data for research is becoming more prevalent (Andrews et al., 2012; Smith, 2008). Given the increasingly availability of previously collected data to researchers, it is important to see secondary data analysis as a systematic research method. In one commonly cited approach in social research, Bowen (2009) recommends first skimming the documents to get an overview, then reading to identify relevant categories of analysis for the overall set of documents and finally interpreting the body of documents.

The chapter, thus, dwelt upon these principles advanced by Bowen (2009). The chapter's quest was to have an insight into the COVID situation in Ghana. Looking out for data in this regard and also determining the kind of information that would be needed were quite vital for the success of this work. The decision was, therefore, made to utilise existing data to assist in unravelling some of the issues that have come about as a result of the pandemic.

4 Overview of the Pandemic in Ghana

Although Ghana's first two cases of COVID-19 were all imported, the pandemic quickly spread through the country, and within a week of the first cases, Ghana confirmed cases in individuals with no links to foreign travel. The majority of cases were in the environs of the two heavily populated cities of Accra and Kumasi. Immediate measures were, therefore, instituted to detect, contain and prevent the spread of the disease. The major measures instituted by the government at that time included:

- A lockdown of the major cities, Accra and Kumasi (from 30 March 2020). The government also included Kasoa, a thriving town in the central region of the country. (The lockdown was lifted on 20 April 2020.)
- Closure of schools, places of worship, restaurants and bars, and limitations on the number of people at gatherings.
- Use of face masks in all public spaces was made mandatory.
- Restrictions on travel (border closure) and public gatherings.
- Free water for domestic users for 6 months to ensure water security in households.

These measures were underpinned with education on the disease and its transmission as well as preventive measures such as personal hygiene. During the period of the lockdown, an enhanced surveillance in the form of active case search and contact tracing strategies were activated to early detect, isolate and treat all confirmed cases.

The government also banned all public gatherings including conferences, workshops, funerals, festivals, political rallies, church activities and other related events at the onset of the pandemic to reduce the spread of the virus. Beaches were also closed likewise basic schools, senior high schools and universities. People were also prevented from travelling beyond a certain radius. These measures were quite unprecedented. As such, some could not put up with this, as they had no experience with such restrictions. The military and other security agencies were, therefore, called in to ensure people did not flout the directives (Asante & Mills, 2020). To a very large extent, the general public adhered to the lockdown directives. The streets were quieter, non-essential shops were closed, and nightlife was virtually non-existent.

The lockdown imposed on the major cities was just for a short while, as the government was swayed to lift it after 3 weeks because of the severe impact on a large segment of Ghanaians. Indeed, the structure of the Ghanaian economy and the severe hardships that came with the lockdown provided the needed impetus for it to be lifted. Ghana has a large informal economy which was seriously impacted by the lockdown. Many traders, artisans and street vendors, among others, were not able to go to work or to buy their daily requirements for the period they were under lockdown (Akinwotu & Asiedu, 2020). Several people complained of severe hardships, and there was ample evidence of vulnerability in many households across the country (ILO, 2020). In several markets within Accra and Kumasi, law enforcement officers were seen reprimanding people because they ventured out of their homes in search of food during the lockdown period. Consequently, the lockdown was eased after the third week by the President during a televised address to the nation.

Post-lockdown measures were vigorously enforced to control the spread of the infection. These included personal hygiene measures, mandatory wearing of masks, ban on social gathering, social distancing, increase in the number of testing sites with enhanced surveillance and other response activities. On 30 March 2022, the President, Nana Akufo-Addo, in another address to the nation, announced new measures which included the reopening of the country's borders and the lifting of embargoes

placed on public gatherings. He cited the rapidly declining infections and a relatively successful inoculation campaign as the reasons behind this.

Nana Akufo-Addo also announced that Ghana would start producing its own COVID-19 vaccines in 2024. He said a National Vaccine Institute would be established to lay out a strategy for the country to begin the first phase of the commercial production of the jabs (Reuters, 2022). To further strengthen the health delivery system, the president reiterated plans by the government to build 111 new hospitals across the country to serve the growing health needs of the population.

5 Current Developments on COVID-19

As of 12 March 2022, more than 12.7 million COVID-19 doses had been administered in Ghana. So far, Ghana has fully vaccinated around 21.4% of its 30 million inhabitants against coronavirus. It has indeed shown a capacity to rein in the disease at an early stage. It also became the first country to receive the COVID-19 vaccines from the COVAX Facility. COVAX is co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi and the World Health Organisation (WHO), alongside key delivery partner, UNICEF. This is the only global initiative that is working with governments and manufacturers to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are available worldwide to both higher-income and lower-income countries.

At the onset of the pandemic, the country struggled to acquire personal protective equipment and medicines to manage COVID-19 cases. Testing was also an issue in the early days of the disease as testing facilities were limited. Since then, testing capabilities have been ramped up across the country. In addition, several dedicated COVID-19 treatment centres were set up, with the aim of having at least one centre in each of the 16 regions in the country. Ghana's preparations towards the pandemic and the measures it undertook received a lot of praises from near and wide in view of these measures.

The personal involvement of Ghana's president, Nana Akufo-Addo, in the fight against the pandemic has been acknowledged by both Ghanaians and international bodies. He has been very relentless in his periodic broadcasts to the nation detailing what Ghanaians should do in the wake of the pandemic. During his 2021 Christmas address, for instance, he urged Ghanaians to act and live responsibly and to adhere to the protocols of social distancing, enhanced hygiene and mask wearing (CGTN, 2021).

Ghana has since come a long way since the pandemic began. The pandemic has affected many people in diverse ways. After a strong and effective initial emergency response to the pandemic, the government's attempts at relaxing restrictions and reopening socio-economic activities were thwarted by the propagation of new variants in Ghana in early 2021 (World Bank, 2021). Numerous interventions have since been made to stop the spread of COVID-19 and its impact on the public. Some of these initiatives have been saddled with challenges, leading to severe hardships among vulnerable groups. Although some of these measures have helped

to avoid a soar in the number of cases, there have been some misconceptions too about the disease which, to some extent, have acted against the COVID campaign.

6 The Social Reality, Misconceptions and Myths About COVID-19

There is still a belief among some Ghanaians that Africans have some immunity against COVID. Some people have remained steadfast in this belief despite the deaths of high-profile Africans. According to Padayachee and du Troit (2020), this came about because the initial cases were mostly recorded in western countries and people, therefore, thought Africans were not particularly susceptible to it. Some young people were also imbued with the notion that the condition only affected the elderly as the death rate soared among the elderly. These misconceptions served as risk attenuators among Ghanaians, especially the younger generation who felt they were somehow invulnerable from it. As the infection evolved in the country, another misconception emerged that the hot climate in Africa inhibited viral replication and transmission (Tabong & Segtub, 2021). The government had to release a statement debunking that.

It also came to a point when certain herbal practitioners even started prescribing remedies for the management of COVID-19. The use of local remedies such as neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) and herbal preparations also came to the fore. Myths about the efficacy of locally manufactured gin (*akpeteshie*) and hydroxychloroquine as prophylaxis also led to abuse of such substances (Tabong & Segtub, 2021). Some people were of view that heavy drinking of the local gin could kill the virus in the blood stream. In general, all sorts of medications gained currency as people tried various means to have some protection against the COVID-19 infection. Some even still hold on to the belief that COVID-19 vaccines can make our body magnetic.

Many of these misconceptions have not yet been lost on the people, and as part of efforts to curtail and also to address these, the Ghana's Health Service, the Ministry of Information, FactSpace West Africa and UNICEF in March 2022, invited some of the country's popular social media influencers to a sensitisation workshop to discuss issues relating to this (UNICEF, 2022). The workshop was also centred on building partnerships in combating online misinformation on COVID-19. It was also focused on creating the needed awareness about the positive impact of vaccine administration in the country. It is worth noting that the preponderance of COVID-19 vaccine myths is causing some Ghanaians to forego vaccinations at a time when new and more transmissible coronavirus variants are spreading across the country and the world as a whole. The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in the country was supposed to be highly patronised, but just as the supply of vaccines has been increasing in Ghana, so too has misinformation about their safety and efficacy been gaining grounds.

Ghana still has a poor health system, weak government capacity to manage a public health response, and limited water availability and related infrastructure that are crucial to health care (IFC, 2020).

7 Ghana's Health System

Incidentally, the health system in Ghana has faced a myriad of challenges in dealing with the pandemic. There have been weak coordination mechanisms, lack of/or inadequate quarantine and isolation facilities, irregular supply of laboratory supplies and other material and lack of adequate legislation in dealing with public health emergencies (World Bank, 2021). Besides, there is a shortage of adequately trained health workers. This has been compounded by an unequal distribution of health personnel. Many health personnel prefer to be in urban areas and also to work for urban hospitals, a situation that has led to fewer staff taking up roles in rural areas. The chronic lack of investment in healthcare infrastructure and equipment has made it harder for African nations, like Ghana, to retain skilled healthcare workers, provide essential medicines and reduce the mortality rates of perennial diseases like malaria (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

There are also high prices of drugs as well as limited coverage of health insurance in the country. Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) budget is hugely underfunded so a lot of patients are resigned to spending their own money for their health care. The NHIS, which is publicly financed through taxes on goods, services and income, does not cover all disease conditions (Siaw-Frimpong et al., 2021). A notable fact about the healthcare needs and services in the country is that emergency preparedness, coverage of essential services, financial protection of the poorest and most vulnerable population and service accessibility and delivery remain very limited. Therefore, with the onset of the pandemic, many were those who felt that the health service in the country would crumble.

Indeed, the effect of the pandemic on the entire health system in Africa was feared and speculated by several scholars and institutions to be highly vulnerable to the pandemic (BBC, 2020; WHO, 2020). Much of the conversation that surrounded the potential impact of COVID-19 on Africa seemed to have stemmed from uninformed assumption. Doomsday predictions that Africa would have dead bodies on the streets did not really materialise as thought. However, a lot really went on among countries like Ghana to avert any possible disaster. Timely, strategic implementation of targeted emergency care solutions in many African countries has helped to avoid needless human suffering and deaths.

Ghana has impressed in the way it has handled the pandemic within its health systems. In the wake of the pandemic, the Ministry of Health of Ghana through the Ghana Health Service constituted a team of health experts to spearhead the initiation and implementation of strategies to combat the spread of the disease. As a standard practice, this team of experts provided regular updates to the government for onward communication to the citizenry.

Ghana has also received enormous support from multilateral agencies. Recently, the World Bank, through the Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF), provided funds to WHO to enhance the capacity of Ghana's health system to respond to COVID-19 (WHO, 2021). As a result, treatment facilities in all 16 regions of Ghana received critical medical supplies such as oxygen concentrators, patient monitors and arterial blood gas analysers. Some 360 multidisciplinary health staff were also trained to effectively manage COVID-19 patients in isolation, treatment facilities and at home. The World Bank funding helped to a great extent to ensure that a greater proportion of patients infected with COVID-19 and who required intensive care and ventilator support had good chances of survival.

Despite the aforementioned efforts, a disturbing issue that emerged from COVID situation was that the few healthcare workers at the forefront of the fight had to endure so much. Some experienced mental health issues due to stressful working conditions and the perceived fear of acquiring COVID-19 infection. They were extremely worried that they could potentially risk their families and loved ones for COVID-19 as they continued to be in hospital settings for clinical duty. Some were even shunned by their relatives for continuing to be in that setting and had to appear on TV to dispel any rumour and also assure the community of the safety of their work.

Aside from the state of health care in the country which has acted as a hindrance to effective health delivery, the pandemic has also caused a huge blow to the country's educational system.

8 COVID and Ghana's Educational System

Closures across learning institutions of all types remained one of the courses of action by the government to stem the tide of the pandemic. The long period of disruption resulted in serious consequences for the educational sector. Parents had to put up with their wards at home, and some had then lost their jobs and therefore experienced severe insecurities with their wards around them. The pandemic also had a negative toll on children's mental health as they were increasingly confined at home, spent less time with their friends and classmates and had limited possibilities for socialising with other children.

Beyond students, school closures also affected teachers and parents in diverse ways, although things are easing up now with the reopening of all educational institutions. In many instances, educators, often in collaboration with parents and guardians, had to maintain a distance learning environment with varying degrees of success. Many teachers faced frustrations relating to logistical difficulties, lack of support and training as they resorted to remote teaching. At the same time, the burden placed on parents to facilitate the learning of their primary or secondary school children stretched beyond available resources. For these parents and guardians, attention allocated to ensure children remain engaged amidst learning disruption, came at the cost of time spent at work, with a disproportionate impact on

women, thus causing further pressure and stress in these households where a loss of income generates further pressure (UNESCO, 2020).

9 The Socio-economic Impact of COVID

The life-threatening health situation and the widespread disruptions in economic and social life arising from COVID-19 unleashed differential impact on communities in the country. Some sectors and some social groups were hard hit than by others. Women, youth and informal sector workers were the hardest hit. Prior to the pandemic, economic and social conditions in Ghana were challenging enough. The pandemic, meanwhile, added a fillip to the already precarious conditions some of these people were faced with. The swift and aggressive containment measures came at enormous economic cost to many people. Ghana's rapid growth (7% in 2017–2019) was halted by the pandemic (World Bank, 2022a). According to the World Bank, Ghana's economy continues to suffer the impacts of the pandemic as growth is yet to get back to pre-pandemic levels, and this could be compounded by the war in Ukraine. These developments have since given rise to high prices for several key commodities, including food and fuel, adding to prior inflationary pressures in Ghana.

The World Bank Group's (WBG) Board of Executive Directors has, meanwhile, discussed a new 5-year Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Ghana for 2022–2026. The CPF is expected to support Ghana in its COVID-19 and medium-term development agenda. It is designed around three mutually reinforcing focus areas, namely enhancing conditions for private sector development and quality job creation; improving inclusive service delivery; and promoting resilient and sustainable development (World Bank, 2022b).

Whilst President Akufo-Addo has been widely commended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for using effective COVID-19 measures, these same measures seem to strike a disproportionate cost on the working class and the poor who can least afford the burden. For instance, jobs in the informal sector, like petty trading, account for a large number of people; hence, it was improbable to permit such people to work from home. The shutdown stifled their livelihoods because of the nature of their work. They had virtually no savings or substantial wealth to fall back on to sustain them throughout the public health measures. Some firms had to close, sending workers home with no idea when or if they might return to work. Though things have since normalised in recent times, the considerable hardships that were experienced are still ongoing.

10 Economic Response Package and Support

Ghana was one of the first in the West African sub-region to implement a COVID-19 economic response package. The monetary measures included the Central Bank reducing monetary policy rate to 14.5% (lowest in 8 years) and the primary reserve requirement to provide liquidity to accelerate domestic investment. The fiscal stimulus consisted of tax forbearance and 3 months' absorption of the water bill for all households, full electricity bill rebate for over one million active 'lifeline customers'—poorest households—and 50% for non-poor households and businesses, based on March electricity consumption. There was also distribution of food supplies to the poorest communities. These measures were in place until October 2020.

To further lessen the economic impact of the pandemic on Ghanaians, Parliament approved a COVID-19 Alleviation Programme to support businesses and households. Ghana's efforts to combat the virus even caught the attention of the international community and donor agencies, prompting the IMF to approve a package as direct budget support to the government (IMF, 2020). Whilst governments around the world put up considerable funds to protect their citizens from income shortfalls and job losses, support in most African countries, including Ghana, was so limited (Lakemann et al., 2020).

Donations have, however, come from individuals, churches, the private sector and various entities towards the COVID-19 Fund set up by the government to mobilise funds to be used in complementing the government's efforts in addressing the pandemic issues. Relief projects have also been established by some organisations to provide support to vulnerable families by ensuring that basic necessities such as food and water are provided. The quest to help the government in the fight against the pandemic has been quite massive. Other donations have also found their way into hospitals, research centres, prisoners, the destitute, etc. Throughout the pandemic, the government partnered with the private sector to roll out economic reliefs and recovery programmes.

11 COVID-19 and Responsible Business

Companies are often seen to have the capacity and resources to promptly and systemically mobilise. They are thus seen as especially effective in executing disaster relief and recovery management (Ballesteros et al., 2017; McKnight & Linnenluecke, 2016). Hence, the involvement of the private sector in disaster relief and their engagement in society has become more common and important (Johnson et al., 2011; McKnight & Linnenluecke, 2016). In one way or the other, it is a means by which companies can also shore up their corporate social responsibilities (CSR).

Such activities range from responsive and episodic-based measures to proactive activities such as raising funds and partnering with relevant organisations in disaster

relief (Johnson et al., 2011). Given the emergent situations that arise during disasters, companies' disaster relief CSR activities have particular importance to society, benefiting many people and local communities in need (Ballesteros et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2011; McKnight & Linnenluecke, 2016).

Many organisations in Ghana were quick to offer their help in the course of the pandemic. Fidelity Bank, a Ghanaian-owned bank, for instance, donated GHC 1 million to support the building of the COVID-19 Infectious Disease and Isolation Facility, the first of this type of facility to be built in Ghana, that the government came up with. The bank also reduced interest rates on personal loans for qualifying customers to 17.5%, which included a relief option of a maximum 3-month repayment holiday. It also postponed loan repayments and restructured loans for existing borrowers hard hit by COVID-19. Besides, it waived interbank transfer fees on all digital transactions and mobile wallet transaction fees at the early stages of the pandemic. Some other banks pursued similar lines of engagement.

Ghana also received vaccines donated as part of the MTN Group's vaccination programme to African countries. Other donations in the form of handheld thermometers, sanitisers, goggles, face masks, protective gowns and other COVID-19 prevention equipment were made by a number of firms. The government set up a COVID-19 Trust Fund to which several companies in Ghana contributed to. The acts of corporate philanthropy saw firms donating money and other equipment to several public sector institutions too. The corporate donations augmented the government's effort in the fight against the pandemic. Many of the firms endeared themselves to Ghanaians as they showed a high level of responsibility. Some were able to ask their employees to work from home for a period.

During the pandemic, more active and responsible actions from the business sector had been required. The benevolent acts of the firms drew in a lot of public commendation for the way the firms cemented their role in society. The acts positioned them as socially responsible as they helped to address the challenges the country was facing. The companies' systemic donations during the disaster benefited their businesses by increasing stakeholders' awareness of their CSR activities and, accordingly, increased trust towards them and their reputation (see Qiu et al., 2021; Madsen & Rodgers, 2015). Through this means, they were able to leverage the risks surrounding COVID-19 as opportunities for their future sustainable businesses. Such a role implies that they can be seen as rescuers who can help solve the economic and social problems that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused.

The motive of companies' CSR activities has been argued to be mainly self-serving, ultimately pursuing certain economic benefits (Matten & Crane, 2005); however, many of the acts seen in the recent past suggest that the donations were not just for their own interests but rather for common economic and social benefits, with a good and genuine motive. As argued by McKnight and Linnenluecke (2016) and Johnson et al. (2011), respectively, the role of the private sector is important and effective during disasters. The private sector's capabilities of resources and experiences, as well as the mobilisation and transformation of resources, complemented government's efforts.

Although most businesses were challenged by the pandemic, they have continued to reach out to society and showed citizenship behaviours (Mahmud et al., 2021). The need for public support and the public's desire to see the involvement of such firms has made the companies to feel obligated to implement CSR activities so that they can be seen as good corporate citizens. Whilst society expects such responsible roles during difficult times, the performance of these roles is also a useful foundation from which to obtain positive business outcomes in the future (see Johnson et al., 2011).

12 Lessons Learnt

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to claim lives, wreak havoc to economies and disrupt livelihoods around the world. Both the private and public sectors in Ghana have been severely affected. Across the private sector, informal businesses, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as well as large businesses are still under severe strain. For instance, the hospitality sector has suffered tremendously. The occupancy rates have been quite low, with many hotels closed and others still on the road to recovery.

The economic impact of COVID-19 has exposed major vulnerabilities within both the social setting and business operations in the country. Whilst some companies shielded their workforce from such impacts, many others had to lay off workers or reduce their working hours. There were enormous challenges for both small and large businesses. The government took the extraordinary step to support business with aid packages to struggling companies and workers (Adams, 2020).

The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated some ingrained social issues too, such as poverty and inequality. The poor have been at the receiving end as many remain jobless in view of the ramifications of the pandemic. Meanwhile, others are still struggling to access health care because they do not have the means to do so. The government has since stated that it is determined that health care, especially, will be within easy and affordable reach of every Ghanaian in foreseeable future. It has reiterated its desire to ensure that each district in the country has a state-of-the-art district hospital within the shortest possible time. The importance of pursuing this goal has been reinforced by the lessons from COVID-19.

In the informal sector, which supports the livelihoods of many citizens, many small businesses are reporting the loss of revenues across board. Meanwhile, the government's public finances are also under severe strain as Ghanaians call out for more support in view of the hardships they are currently experiencing. Incidentally, government revenues are down sharply, whilst expenditures have risen significantly resulting in a much larger fiscal deficit than originally planned owing to the ramifications of the pandemic. Although government's interventions over the past few years have brought some relief, a lot more needs to be done to help the citizenry.

Although the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, there is considerable evidence of fruitful private-public partnerships to alleviate the hardships in the country. If Ghana continues to demonstrate this level of shared support,

philanthropy and cooperation, it could reap the benefit of a smooth path to recovery from the pandemic. Therefore, one can envision the post-pandemic period as one that can ensure responsible business through the efforts of strong CSR commitment and strategies. There are significant opportunities for companies to help in addressing some of these social issues as their help would be needed in tackling them during this pandemic as well as in the long run.

Ghanaians have, indeed, witnessed the generosity of people, organisations and the government working hand in hand with each other. Community engagements and solidarity exemplified by the relationality of mankind have been commonplace. People checked on each other and also helped in feeding the less privileged ones in society during the pandemic. The amazing initiatives that took place from the initial stages of the pandemic, from the very small acts of kindness that people showed towards each other to big donations from private organisations, churches and hotels supplying empty rooms for quarantined people during this tragedy, are all testimonies of what humanity has brought into people (Sarpong, 2021). Many people ramped up their responses to the pandemic through philanthropic efforts to fulfil a role that should mostly be played by government. The moments of crisis highlighted how important people's priorities are in serving humanity.

13 The Way Forward

The pandemic has had huge impacts on incomes and food access in many parts of the country. It has also magnified existing disparities and inequalities faced by vulnerable groups. One notable thing about this too is that Ghana has been able to demonstrate a strong ability to manage such an emergency thoughtfully. In spite of the pressure from different groups, the government was also able to implement the right decisions for the betterment of the country. This is in spite of the fact that the measures were quite difficult for some groups. The social and economic disruption has laid bare unavoidable truths that can no longer be ignored. First, a significant number of the population live from 'hand to mouth' and in very precarious conditions. This situation obviously needs to be seriously addressed. The need for clean water is also essential for many people especially those in rural areas who still suffer from lack of potable water.

Besides, there is an urgent need to upgrade, build and fund Ghana's health sector to reduce the inequalities within the health delivery system. That said, the government's preparedness to work towards building more hospitals in the country can help in this direction. In addition to emergency relief, strengthening social protection systems and prioritising spending on human capital development would be needed.

Quite significantly, this pandemic is happening against the backdrop of a convergence of global economic and other challenges which, together, are compelling a rethink of policy responses at all levels. Developing countries like Ghana with inadequate health, social and economic systems, therefore, have a dire reality to deal with such issues especially so with many people currently being jobless and facing hard financial times.

14 Conclusion

The primary objective of this chapter was to provide a picture of Ghana's engagement with the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also to explore measures taken by Ghana to stem the spread of the pandemic. The chapter examined the key challenges Ghana faced in the light of the pandemic and also brought to the fore the role played by both government and businesses since the inception of the pandemic. It noted that Ghana has made some considerable gains in the fight against the pandemic in spite of its current challenges.

The chapter attributes this relative success to the prompt response by government, its partnership engagement as well as society's desire to do away with the pandemic. In all these, there has been a marked resilience of the Ghanaian people in adversity. Indeed, COVID-19 has changed the world. It has cost lives, battered health systems, and damaged livelihoods, but, through these challenges, we have seen the best of humanity exemplified through a strong support by people from all walks of life, the business community and government as a whole.

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