

# Current State of Affairs: Ghana's Informal Economic Sector in the Face of a Pandemic

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## Abstract

The author exposes an idea of universal sustainability, which capturing on a whole the interconnected processes of sustainable changes in society. Applying this conceptual idea opens the door for ripen implementation of overall social strategy at global and national levels in the coming decade.

**Keywords:** Sustainability • Agenda • Social strategy • Inclusive institutions

## Description

The world is experiencing a second and for some parts, a third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The current statistics in Ghana as of February 26, 2021 stands at a total of 84023 with 77972 recovered; 5444 active cases and 607 deaths. The numbers of cases keep rising and are mostly reported cases of symptomatic patients; an indication that most asymptomatic cases go undetected. The need to include informal workers in the discussions on the effects and response to the pandemic remains essential. In our recent work; the article titled "Ghana's informal economic sector in the face of a pandemic" stressed that assertion. The authors sought to conceptualize informality during a pandemic and discuss governance response to Covid-19 in Ghana. By relying on secondary data gathered from research articles, reports, and government and ministerial websites, the authors speculated that the government decision to lift the lockdown was born out of economic distress from pressures mounted by informal workers. The government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic over the period the paper was published has given credence to the authors' assertion [1-5].

In his recent televised 24<sup>th</sup> address to the nation on measures taken to fight against the pandemic in Ghana, the President; Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo confirmed the arrival of a first consignment of 600,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine in the country. The president further iterated four categorized groups of people that will be taking the vaccine as and when they arrived for use in the country namely.

Group 1: Persons most at risk and frontline State officials.

Group 2: Essential service providers and the rest of security agents.

Group 3: Would be the rest of the general Ghanaian populace.

Group 4: Includes pregnant, nursing mothers and persons under age of eighteen (18) who would have to wait till the vaccines had been proven to be with no adverse effects. Informal workers, with whom the majority of people engaged with on a daily basis, would fall into the third class of general citizenry to be accessing the vaccines. This is another major indication of the negligence of the government regarding the informal sector and the power wielded by the sector to improve or worsen the spread of Covid-19 cases in the country [6-10].

The turn of the New Year has seen Ghana record a surge in Covid-19

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**Received** 01 March 2021; **Accepted** 15 March 2021; **Published** 22 March 2021

cases. The new viral strain; B.1.1.7 variant first identified in the UK and estimated to be up to 70 percent more transmissible than the old variant has been recorded in Ghana. This has caused the parliament of Ghana to shut down for at least three weeks while schools and open markets remain opened. Although the Covid-19 cases are skyrocketing and threatening to overwhelm the country's health system, the president of Ghana has only unconvincingly threatened to impose another partial lockdown if the citizens continue to disregard the Covid-19 protocols. With informal workers and artisans still benefiting from the Corona virus Alleviation Programme (CAP) through the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI), the decision to have an open society in a worse situation is partly borne out of economic rather than public health concerns.

Moreover, although narrowly discussed in the article, the approach of the government of Ghana to the pandemic has revealed fundamental flaws in the country's neoliberal approach to governance that seeks to disregard the informality as a basic component of global south economic growth and development. By considering the individual as unattached and self-responsible market player, neoliberals exalt an individual's freedom is at the center of public policy. In this regard, the government of Ghana has continued to rely on personal responsibility as the deciding factor in the fight against Covid-19.

This has meant that the state has ceded its responsibilities that include ensuring the citizens and organizations follow the safety protocols to the citizens. With the compliance levels still low, the personal responsibility strategy has proven ineffective. Another point to rise which was initially missed is that the lockdown was lifted for political expediency. After the lifting the three-week long lockdown weeks; the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana started a nationwide voter registration exercise on June 30, 2020. The decision to carry out the registration exercise was opposed by a section of the public including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and some two hundred and twenty-one (221) health workers who signed a petition to ask the EC to pause the exercise.

These calls were ignored with the explanation that all the necessary Covid-19 protocols have been put in place and officers trained to ensure compliance even though as it turns out, these protocols were not duly adhered to in the registration centers. The registration happened at the time when Covid-19 contact tracers had laid down their tools after their allowances were slashed. The succession of these events highlights the resolve of politicians to place political gains ahead of human lives. Also, ahead of the December 2020 general elections, the political parties went into a full campaign mode where they gathered large crowds to sing party songs and make loud boogieing blast from vuvuzelas. For context, this was all happening when the Ghana Health Service had estimated that more than 80 percent of Ghanaians were not wearing face masks [11-14].

# Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion so far indicates that the continual rise in case numbers would have worsened health and economic implications for informal workers in the event of another lockdown. The low-income workers in the informal sector bear the brunt of poor government policies and the fight against Covid-19 is no different. The informal workers have been treated as an afterthought and this approach is likely to widen the already increasing income inequality. Researchers and local governments should focus on the effects of the pandemic on the informal urban workers so as to prescribe and implement intervention policies that specifically address their concerns.

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**How to cite this article:** Akuoko, Philipa Birago, Vincent Aggrey, Anastasia Amoako-Arhen. "Current State of Affairs: Ghana's Informal Economic Sector in the Face of a Pandemic." *Arts Social Sci J* 12 (2021) 474