

### **AFRICA**

#### **General Africa**

Identifying Africa's COVID-19 timeline has been problematic, which itself indicates how unimportant Africa is on the scale of things. However, the World Health Organisation's page for Africa (*afro.who.int*) reminds us of African background: its three leading articles are "Nigeria's polio community health agents take on COVID-19 detection", "Drawing on Ebola readiness to tackle COVID-19", and "Benin goes on digital offensive against COVID-19". Benin's first case of COVID-19 was announced on 16 March. By 20 March, digital platforms had been set up in fifteen local languages to combat both the disease and the "infodemic" of misinformation which surrounded it. Spearheaded by Wilfried Léandre Houngbédji, a former journalist, and supported by well-known Beninese social media expert, Stévy Wallace, a state-appointed team of around 15 people is using WHO guidelines to disseminate information on prevention and highlight the actions being taken by health authorities to deal with the unfolding crisis. Benin now has a centralized official government platform that is freely accessible to all mobile phone users and the digital strategy team has put out radio inserts and awareness videos and press releases across different groups directly with citizens both in Benin and in the diaspora. One problem, Wallace points out "is that we cannot reach certain sections of the population who do not have internet access or who are illiterate. So we need each internet user to pass on the correct information in their homes, their neighbourhood, their community. The cause must be a common one." This notion of "snowballing" information is an interesting one: What 'seed' will snowball reliably, and what will melt without impact? Is misinformation more resistant than the truth? One unfortunate victim of misinformation in Africa has been Chi who was *en route* from Britain to China via a circuitous route, and found himself in this part of Africa in March 2020. Infodemia and pandemic was rife, and not only did Chi find that he could not cross a normally-open border, but also he was suspected as a possible COVID-19-carrier by locals and had an extremely difficult time getting accommodation or any assistance at all. This is a most untypical African welcome; we must remember that this happened in a region traumatized by recent contact with Ebola and the understandable panic that such diseases engender.

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#### **Ghana**

"Everybody in Ghana has become a statistician" tweeted Seyram Komla Bulliom (@sey\_degenius) on 22 April, and in that he probably reflected what has been observed throughout the world. Certainly, Ghana's health and informational infrastructure are probably as strong as anywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa. To that extent Ghana is not really representative of the region as a whole. Some comparative data illustrate this point: 1. Ghana's 2017 GDP was \$4,600 per capita. This compares with the African median of \$3,300 (Cameroon/Tanzania) and quartiles of \$6,900 (Angola/Cape Verde) and \$1,700 (Sierra Leone/Gambia). (UK and US mean GDP pc are \$48,000 and \$67,000)

- In 2007-2013 there was just one physician per 10,000 population in Ghana. By comparison, South Africa, UK, USA and Cuba had 8, 21, 27, and 67 respectively

Ghana's COVID-19 experience has been tightly linked with developments in Europe:

- The first two cases in Ghana were diplomats returning from Europe
- The first three Ghanaians to die of COVID-19 were Ghanaians in Europe -not in Ghana
- One of the first COVID-19 deaths reported in Ghana, on 10 April, was that of Professor Jacob Plange-Rhule, a 62-year old Manchester graduate and Rector of the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons.
- As of 24 April 2020, the total number of official COVID-19 deaths in Ghana is ten. 85% of the total 1300 detected cases are in Accra, the capital, which has only 8% of the total population <https://www.ghanahelthservice.org/COVID-1919/> (Sources: Wikipedia, StatsGhana, Ghana newspapers)
- Ghana has a general election scheduled for 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic could disrupt this. Already (April 2020), parliamentary primaries have been postponed.
- In an article entitled "Pandemic Blues", a Ghanaian lawyer complains that the minimum fine for breaking the Ghanaian pandemic restriction is some five times the national average annual wage. The alternative is four years in jail. (Three church workers in Ho who flouted the ban have indeed been imprisoned for 4 years.) This compares with half a day's work at the minimum wage in the UK and corresponding fines to 2-4 days at the UK minimum wage in Europe and the USA. <https://thechronicle.com.gh/pandemic-blues-how-ghanaians-got-crucified-in-the-imposition-of-restrictions-act-2020-act-1012-by-kweku-y-paintsil-esq/>
- The Ghanaian social distancing directive included a ban on motorcycle pillion-riding; the *Daily Graphic* for 25<sup>th</sup> April reported that 130 riders had been arrested on one day for breaking this protocol. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-130-riders-arrested-for-violating-social-distancing-protocol.html>
- throughout Ramadan, despite normal protocol: "We have been advised not to touch our faces, mouths and noses. However, in performing ablution, we touch these parts of our bodies a lot, so the advice is that we should wash our hands with soap before going through the process". <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-adhere-to-safety-directives-chief-imam-reminds-muslims-at-ramadan.html>
- The *Daily Guide* of April 8<sup>th</sup> also reported the arrival of 15 Chinese doctors in neighbouring Nigeria <https://statsghana.gov.gh/COVID-19-19%20press%20release%20report%20-%20analysis%20overview%20-%20final.pdf>
- The government has gained initial insights from an analysis of mobile phone data StatsGhana (3 April 2020) "Mobility Analysis to Support the Government of Ghana in Responding to the COVID-19 Outbreak. Initial Insights into the Effect of Mobility Restrictions in Ghana Using Anonymised and Aggregated Mobile Phone Data." <https://statsghana.gov.gh/COVID-19-19%20press%20release%20report%20-%20analysis%20overview%20-%20final.pdf>