

The burden of COVID-19 should not weigh heavily on the poor¹



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Nearly three weeks into COVID-19, one key lesson has been learned: Government of Ghana (GOG) should put in place adequate measures to ensure that the burden of COVID-19 does not unduly weigh on the poor who make up 23 percent of Ghana's estimated 30 million population. The burden of COVID-19 falls into three broad categories: health, economic and social.

Health burden is due to the cost associated with protecting oneself against contracting the virus, quarantine, drugs, and good nutrition to help build immunity against the virus. Economic burden involves the loss of means of livelihood, for example, employment, petty trading or food production. The social burden has to do with insufficient access to social services, including shelter, water, sanitation, and education; being victims of trauma, stigma, discrimination or subjected to diverse forms of abuse, including

gender-based violence, especially of adolescent girls. As reported in various columns of these updates, these 3 burdens are being exacerbated among the poor by the promotion of social distances and the use of lockdown by GOG to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

According to Oxfam's 2018 report on 'Building a More Equal Ghana', the wealthiest 10% Ghanaians share 32 % of Ghana's total consumption, while the very poorest 10% of the population consumes only 2%. The Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS) of 2017 estimated that the extreme poor adult Ghanaians live on less than GHC 792 per annum (US\$ 136 per annum). In other words, if they devoted all their income to foodstuff, it will not be adequate to satisfy their nutritional requirements per day. In fact, the GLSS emphasized that the number of people living in extreme poverty increased from 2.2 million in 2013 to 2.4 million in 2017."

The poor and extreme poor in particular earn their living in informal economic activities that yield low income, and those who are farmers do not produce adequate foodstuff. Regarding health, the poor are mal-nourished and have low access to preventive health services including under-five and maternal health care. These weak economic and health conditions are made worst and perpetrated by high level of illiteracy, overcrowded neighborhood, limited water, and sanitation infrastructure as well as traditional norms and practices inimical to the rights of women and girls.

¹ This editorial was prepared just before Mr. President's 5th COVID 19 Address to the nation. His speech addressed the need to share the burden, however, we opted to go ahead with it because he did indicate what additional anti-corruption measures will be put in place to prevent the poor from been shortchanged

This is why SEND West Africa is especially pleased about the outpouring of donations into the fund set-up by the GOG to alleviate the COVID-19 effects on vulnerable Ghanaians. As reported in the Public Response Column faith-based groups, corporate bodies, politicians, traditional leaders, and individual Ghanaians have started making substantial contributions to the funds. However, as Manasseh Azure Awuni reminds us in his book (2020) **John Mahama: Reign, Rejection and Rebound**, pro-poor programs, time and again are used by corrupt politicians and businessmen and women to line their pockets at the expense of their intended beneficiaries. We thus, call on Mr. President to put in place a transparent and accountable mechanism for the management of the funds.