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A comparative look at Ghana and Tanzania's COVID-19 containment

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Compared to Tanzania, Ghana has experienced significantly higher confirmed cases of COVID-19 and consequent deaths, despite announcing stricter containment measures earlier. What explains the difference? Isaac Haruna Ziaba looks to law compliance and global economic integration as determining factors, and argues debt relief could be tied to enforcing further particular measures.

On 9 April 2020, the **World Bank's bi-annual report** bemoaned Africa's fiscal capacity to contain the coronavirus. **Albert Zeufack**, a World Bank Chief Economist, highlighted Africa's poor fiscal position and rising public debt, which makes it unable to contain the virus without the

bilateral debt relief necessary to release enough funds for the fight against COVID-19.

Nonetheless, African countries vary in income levels, implying unequal fiscal constraints on countries' capacities to manage the virus.

Accordingly, Tanzania, a low-income country with a per-capita income of **US\$1,050.7**, should be theoretically less likely to contain the virus than Ghana, a low middle-income country with a per-capita income of **US\$2,202.3**.

Thus, unlike **Tanzania**, Ghana imposed a three-week **lockdown** on two of its vibrant commercial cities, **banned** places of worship and other public gatherings, and closed its borders. Surprisingly, however, **the total number of confirmed cases and deaths** in Ghana as of 15 May 2020 stood at 5,638 and 28 respectively, far higher than Tanzania where the last released data on **29 April 2020** showed 509 confirmed cases and 21 deaths.

These figures show how Ghana is trailing behind Tanzania in containing COVID-19 despite Ghana's stringent measures. However, it is possible that, unlike Ghana, Tanzania may be under-reporting its cases given the apparent opaqueness in the release of **COVID-19-related data**.

Nevertheless, it is likely that the differential outcomes in confirmed cases and deaths appear better in Tanzania than Ghana largely because of the combined effects of differences in law enforcement and compliance and integration into the global economy.

Law enforcement and compliance

Countries with high enforcement of and compliance with basic life-saving regulations, on such issues as sanitation, are said to be more likely to contain public health crisis such as COVID-19 than their

counterparts. Ghana ranks almost twice higher than Tanzania in the **World Just Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index**, suggesting that law enforcement and, perhaps, compliance, are better in Ghana relative to Tanzania.

Moreover, Ghana's capital, Accra, **ranks ahead** of Tanzania's commercial capital, Dar es Salaam, in terms of the cleanest city in Africa, implying Accra has much better sanitation measures generally. This, in addition to Ghana's WJP higher score, should lead us to expect higher compliance with COVID-19 rules in Ghana such as social distancing, hand washing with water and soap, sanitiser and facial mask use, among other measures.

Nonetheless, granted that Accra's COVID-19 confirmed cases by 15 May was **4,314**, 8.5 times higher than the entire cases in Tanzania combined, it appears that either Tanzanians are generally complying with COVID-19 preventive measures more than Ghanaians or Ghanaians are simply disregarding these measures more than Tanzanians.

On the one hand, despite falling behind Ghana in terms of WJP scores, as a regular Uber, taxi, and bajaj passenger in Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and Geita, I observed a high level of compliance with zebra-crossing and other traffic regulations during my fieldwork in Tanzania in December 2019 and January 2020. On the contrary, it is common knowledge that **Ghanaian drivers of all classes** generally violate similar traffic regulations with impunity because of limited enforcement of such regulations. This might mean that Tanzanians are generally observing COVID-19 rules more than their Ghanaian counterparts.

There is also the issue of population. Ghana's 2018 population density of **131 people per square kilometre** is twice as high as Tanzania's of **64 people per square kilometre**, which may also explain the growing COVID-19 cases in Ghana.

This density does not hold, however, at the subnational level between major urban areas. Dar es Salaam's population density is approximately **3100 per square kilometre** or twice as high as Accra's of about **1300 people per square kilometre**, implying that social distancing may work much better in Accra than Dar es Salaam. This, in addition to Ghana's stringent measures, should lead to a lower number of confirmed cases and deaths in Accra. Yet, that Dar es Salaam's cases are fewer suggests that Tanzanian urban dwellers may be relatively complying with requisite preventative measures.

On the other hand, it is fascinating that Ghanaian government officials, with the intent of mitigating a COVID-19-triggered food crisis, shared hot meals to the 'poor' and 'vulnerable' in society in public places. These food distribution exercises **gathered** hundreds, if not **thousands or millions**, of people without regard to social distancing rules, creating a breeding ground for the virus in the process.

If Ghanaian officials' behaviour flouts social distancing rules, it only serves to incentivise citizens to disregard such rules, perhaps explaining Ghana's growing cases.

Integration into the global economy

Tanzania and Ghana vary in their integration into the global economy. President Magufuli of Tanzania has **never travelled outside Africa** since becoming president in November 2015. Meanwhile, following his election in December 2016, President Akufo-Addo of Ghana has embarked on several international travels outside Africa and his last **12-day visit** to four European countries, including **UK, Norway, Switzerland** and **Belgium**, came at a time when these four countries had recorded a total of 58 COVID-19 cases while Europe's total was **909**.

Nonetheless, the President and his officials, having come into contact with an **infected person in Oslo, the Norwegian Ambassador to Ghana**, returned home and continued their routine official duties, interacting with the rest of the Ghanaian populace. It is unclear whether these state officials have been tested or self-isolated.

Ironically, nevertheless, the Norwegian Embassy in Ghana **shut down and quarantined its staff** because of possible contacts of staff with the Ambassador. Again, while the Ghanaian President and his officials may have failed to self-isolate, they nevertheless subjected their citizens returning from abroad to **mandatory quarantine** three-weeks later.

Thus, it is possible that some of the **huge delegations** that accompanied the Ghanaian President in his trips abroad may have returned home infected. The behaviour of the Ghanaian authorities sharply contradicts that of the Botswanan President, Mokgweetsi Masisi, who, after his trip to Namibia in March, went into a voluntary **14-day self-isolation** despite Namibia having reported only three cases. Later in April, when Botswana had 20 confirmed cases and one fatality, President Masisi and all Botswana's MPs were quarantined for **14-days** after they were exposed to the virus when a nurse on duty in parliament tested positive for COVID-19.

The differing presidential trips abroad suggest how Ghana and Tanzania, while seeking to overcome **aid dependence**, oddly see more or less integration into the global economy as a virtue.

Moreover, unlike Tanzania, Ghana is now an aviation hub in West Africa. In 2018, **1,975,803** international passengers passed through Ghana's only international airport while **1,481,557** international and domestic passengers were recorded across Tanzania's **two international airports and 27 domestic airports**.

Although there is no comparable data in 2019, the figure in Ghana for international passengers stood at **2,110,593**.

Besides, Tanzania was less exposed to the virus because the number of potentially infected international passengers were distributed, however disproportionately, across the country's two international airports in Dar es Salaam and Kilimanjaro, compared to Ghana where all such passengers arrived in Accra, the country's hotspot.

The comparison also shows that while countries with high numbers of international passengers passing through tend to be those most financially agile to contain the virus, such countries are also likely to have more COVID-19 cases, which can take a toll on their fiscal wherewithal to fight the virus. Negotiating bilateral debt relief on the basis of which countries are more exposed and vulnerable to the virus, taking into consideration their extent of integration into the global economy and their existing fiscal space, could create a semblance of fairness in fighting the pandemic's further spread.

Photo: A drone shot of the vast landscape of Ghana, Accra by Virgyl Sowah on Unsplash.

About the author



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