



COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN DISCOURSE: A UNIVERSAL PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT NANA AKUFO-ADDO'S UPDATE NO 26: MEASURES TAKEN TO COMBAT SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examined the 26th official update (speech) of President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana to Ghanaians on the enhanced measures taken to fight the Coronavirus Pandemic. The aim is to examine the extent to which he communicates competently and effectively in managing the spread of the virus. The study adopted the content analytical method which involves qualitative method of data presentation and analysis. The framework employed for the analysis was Habermas' (1979) Universal Pragmatics. Universal Pragmatics posits that anyone acting communicatively cannot avoid raising the following validity claims: uttering something understandable, giving the hearer something to understand, making himself understandable and coming to an understanding with another person. The analysis revealed the update as having met the validity claims set by Habermas and therefore competent and effective in combating the spread of the deadly disease.*

KEYWORDS: Coronavirus, Political speech, Universal pragmatics, Validity claims, President Nana Akufo-Addo



INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus pandemic which struck the entire world in the later part of 2019 altered everyday life across the globe. The effects, while unprecedented, have been profoundly shaped by persistent societal realities such as entrenched social and economic crises, the proliferation of misinformation, and anxieties about the ability of the world's health, social, economic and political survival. Covid19 cases spread rapidly and expand early in 2020 to different parts of the world due to human movement. Presidents of nations immediately swung into action. Increasing stringent measures were put in place by the governments in an effort to isolate cases and stop the transmission of the virus. In Ghana, a part of these measures is the president's constant updates on the issue. He uses these updates to inform Ghanaians of the government's enhanced response to the pandemic. Presidential speech is very important in the affairs and smooth running of a nation. Political discourse is a major discourse in every society because it can either hold together or disintegrate the society (Opeyemi & Ajoke, 2019).

Political Discourse

Political discourse plays a crucial role in determining the destiny of economies all over the world. Because language cannot be separated from human existence, the study of how language operates in a society is very crucial. Politics is generally considered as the use of language to organize people's minds and reorient their opinions and beliefs about the happenings around them. It is thus an instrument to control the conscience of society. It is for this reason that Wilson (2001) postulates that political discourse is a complex cross-disciplinary enterprise that explores the social, psychological, cultural, ideological and linguistic factors. Political discourse has become a popular concept of discourse analysis. Within all types of political systems, political leaders, by virtue of their position, play a critical role in national development and international politics and rely on words to influence, mobilize, persuade and convince their citizens to achieve effective governance (Ugoala & Israel, 2020). Consequently, presidential speeches about coronavirus have become an effective tool for the management of the virus all over the world. Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) explain that a language is a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders for manipulation purposes.

The use of language in politics is for unique purposes and functions. Perhaps, this is the reason Beard in Abuya (2012), is of the view that "looking at the language of politics as an occupation is important because it helps us to understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power." This has made politicians in governance subject of attraction and important as they manipulate words to suit their intentions. The office of the president is the highest in Ghanaian politics and one of the ways the office makes contact with the people is through speech-making, therefore, speeches can be seen as a means of establishing and maintaining close and social relationships, expressing feelings, selling ideas, policies, and programmes in a society (Ayeomoni, 2005).

In line with the above, communicative competence is very crucial to presidents of nations. Communicative competence, which requires a user's firm grip on grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately, plays a critical role in governance. For a president to function effectively in the office and perform the necessary role of keeping the country safe and united, he/she must be able to communicate his/her ideas and thought effectively to the understanding of the citizenry. Communicative competence enables the president with the ability to use language correctly to



communicate appropriately and effectively in a variety of social situations. Communicative roles in governance support the importance of speech delivery in addressing issues concerning the country. Therefore, communicative competence in presidential discourse presents them with high values – bold, confident, committed and forthright. Again, it projects them as communicatively sensitive as they use appropriate markers when addressing sensitive issues (Kantorgorje, Israel & Mwinwelle, 2021)

A cursory search for scholarly works which focus on President Nana Akufo-Addo (PNA-A), shows that no work has focused analysis on his Update No. 26 in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Some of the works carried out on PNA-A include the following: Kyei, Donkor and Appiah (2020) investigated the move structure and linguistic characteristics of PNA-A's 2017 inaugural speech. Dadjo (2018) through speech act theory, investigated two selected speeches by PNA-A about Africa's Dependency on the West. Israel & Botchwey, (2017) examined inaugural addresses in the 4th republic of Ghana with a concentration on PNA-A's. Adukpo, (2017) analysed the registers and lexical cohesion in his political manifesto. Kantorgorje, (2020) explored the epistemic modality of selected (including PNA-A's) inaugural speeches. Ugoala & Israel (2020) examined practice in the first official speeches of presidents President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria and PNA-A of Ghana on coronavirus pandemic.

Universal Pragmatics (UP)

Apart from the grammatically correct use of language, there is the appropriate use of language. For an utterance to be meaningful, it must be appropriate to a given situated context. This appropriate use of language is the concern of pragmatics. Therefore, pragmatics is concerned with how words are used and what speakers mean.

UP is found under formal pragmatics. It is a philosophical study that examines conditions that must be in place for effective understanding in communicative events. This is because, according to Habermas (1976), the social conflicts/problems of the world – conflicts, competitions, war, avarice, confusion etc. stem from the misunderstanding that exists among people. Therefore, any techniques or attempts geared towards achieving understanding can drastically reduce these social conflicts.

UP distinguishes strategic actions and communicative actions. Strategic action glides towards success while communicative action glides towards understanding. Therefore, strategic actions are resident in communicative actions. This implies that communicative action is the primary mode of linguistic interaction and the basic function of communication is to reach a defined mutual understanding. Every language user takes actions geared towards reaching an understanding. The speech act they exchange assume the weight of a mutually recognized validity. This means that the interlocutors are accountable for what they have said, thereby justifying the validity of the understanding that is reached.

The Validity Claims

At the centre of UP is mutual understanding between interlocutors. Therefore, UP aims to identify, study and reconstruct necessary universal conditions for reaching a possible understanding through communication. Again, anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and supposes that they can be fulfilled, which are:



- Uttering something understandable
- Giving the hearer something to understand
- Making himself thereby understandable
- Coming to an understanding with another person

It can be deduced from the above that the basis of UP is to facilitate mutual understanding. No human communication oriented towards achieving mutual understanding could fail to observe validity claims. Coming to an understanding is the process of bringing about an agreement on the presupposed basis of validity claims which can be mutually recognized:

As soon as this consensus is shaken, and the presupposition that certain validity claims are satisfied (or could be vindicated) is suspended, the task of mutual interpretation is to achieve a new definition of the situation which all participants can share.

If their attempt fails, communicative actions cannot be continued.

(Habermas, 1979: 3)

Speech Act Theory (SAT)

There is a big relationship between UP and speech act theory. Habermas (1998) believes that a speech act is generative and it is this generative power that makes it possible for a speech act to succeed or fail. The generative power of speech act consists in the fact that the speaker, in performing a speech act, can influence the hearer in such a way that the hearer can take upon interpersonal relation with the speaker. Therefore, it follows that a generative speech act must have an illocutionary effect on the hearer. UP attempts to reconstruct the universal, context-transcendent features of language use. To this effect, Habermas rejects the term “universal” in favour of “formal”, which offers insights into the relationship that exists between formal semantics, meaning and truth.

Austin’s (1962) SAT of meaning holds that the meaning of a linguistic expression can be explained in terms of the rules governing their use in performing various speech acts – for example, admonishing, asserting, commanding, promising, requesting and warning. To Habermas (2001), while a grammatical sentence fulfils the claims to comprehensibility, a successful utterance must satisfy three additional claims:

- It must count as true for participants in so far as it represents something in the world
- It must count as truthful in so far as it expresses something intended by the speaker
- It must count as right in so far as it conforms to socially recognized expectations.

In line with this, anytime language users take action aimed at reaching an understanding, the speech acts they exchange (their communicative efforts) assume the weight of a mutually recognized validity (Habermas, 1979). He believes that a speech act is generative and it is this



generative power that makes it possible for a speech act to succeed or fail. The generative power of speech act consists in the fact that the speaker, in performing a speech act, can influence the hearer in such a way that the hearer can take upon interpersonal relation with the speaker. Therefore, the goal of UP is the possibility of reaching a consensus that must be based on a speech situation in which all participants make up their own minds, possess communicative competence and be free from coercion.

Research Question

This study sets out to answer the following questions:

- What lexemes were used to express communicative competence in Akufo-Addo's Update No. 26 on coronavirus pandemic?
- What strategies did he use to ensure positive/effective role-play in the update?
- What strategies did Akufo-Addo employ to aid comprehensibility and maximum cooperation from his listeners?

METHODOLOGY

The content analysis method which includes a qualitative approach was adopted for this study (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The purposive sampling technique was used to sample PNA-A's address to the nation on updates to Ghana's enhanced response to the coronavirus pandemic, delivered on Sunday, 25th July 2021 titled Update No 26: Measures Taken To Combat Spread Of Coronavirus. The update was downloaded from the internet. To ensure authenticity, the speech was also sought and obtained from the office of the chief press secretary to the president. Update No 26 was purposively selected for this study mainly because, as at the time this study was conducted, it was the latest update in the series of updates the president has been giving to the people of Ghana since the outbreak of the deadly disease on government's response to combat the spread of the Covid19. The goal is to examine the linguistic choices made by the president in the update to ensure effective communication in the ongoing discourse on the spread and management of the virus.

The update came as a narrative and comprises 30 paragraphs. The urgency of the need to curb the spread of coronavirus and the need to maintain all measures the government has put in place to achieve this is paramount to the president. A universal pragmatic analytical tool of communicative validity was used in the analysis. The basic concern in universal pragmatics is utterances (speech acts). Therefore, the utterance in each complete unit of thought rather than the sentence was noted as a basis for the analysis. Excerpts were purposively chosen; 22 excerpts were chosen. They represent all categories of utterances. The update was analysed to reveal the communicative tools PNA-A employed to achieved broad pragmatic goals thereby connecting with his people. At least one excerpt was taken to illustrate each answer to every question. Under the analysis, excerpts were numbered as Excerpt 1, 2, 3 etc. The excerpts were italicized to mark them out from the analysis under them.



ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis and discussion of data in this study centre on the identification of various linguistic techniques PNA-A employed to achieved mutual understanding which is at the centre of universal pragmatics.

Question One: What lexemes were used to express communicative competence in Akufo-Addo's Update No. 26 on coronavirus pandemic?

Assertive verbs/lexemes were employed by PNA-A to ensure communicative competence in his update. This also indicates that there had been prior discussion/updates on the issue at hand. PNA-A asserts a strong sense of responsibility in his action. The assertive verbs in addition to presenting the superior presence of the president also play a role in foregrounding the initial steps the president has outlined in the previous updates, thus giving the people of Ghana something to understand and also making himself understandable.

Excerpts from the Update to illustrate various assertive verbs/lexemes PNA-A used to achieve communicative competence in his speech:

Excerpt 1

I have not come into your homes for some time, because I had hoped that the next time I did so, I would come to announce that we were ready to lift the restrictions and protocols and get our lives and economy back to normal. Alas, that is not the case, so it has become necessary for me to come to your homes this evening, after a ten (10) week absence, to provide you with an update on our nation's COVID-19 situation. (Paragraph 2)

The president used the above excerpt to assert his presence and situate the speech he has to make to Ghanaians and to further notify the citizens of the step government was taking to curb the spread of the virus after a long period of 10 weeks since he gave the last update, Update No 25. This assertion and inference he draws establish a mutual understanding between himself and his listeners.

Excerpt 2

Since that update, the situation improved significantly... (paragraph 6)

In this excerpt, PNA-A asserted that the active case of the virus has reduced since his last update which was due to the government's swift actions towards combating the disease.

Excerpt 3

...we have seen a marked increase in the number of cases. (paragraph. 7)

Here also, in continuation of the previous paragraph, the president continued to assert the positive impact of his measures towards combating the disease.

Excerpt 4

...we have let our guard down... (paragraph 8)



The president used this assertion to bring to notice the second wave of the virus which he attributed to people's attitude of letting their guards down. This is communicatively effective as at this time, many television/radio jingles and announcements were all about the increasing second wave of the virus.

Excerpt 5

Government is, therefore, standing by its commitment to vaccinate twenty million Ghanaians, i.e., the entire adult population, by the end of this year, in spite of the huge global demand for vaccines by countries, and the surge in infections the world over. (paragraph. 17)

In this excerpt, PNA-A achieved communicative competence by letting the people know what the government intended to do towards the ongoing vaccination exercise. This is easy for them to relate with because the vaccination exercise has been ongoing and people are being encouraged to take advantage of the exercise to protect themselves from the spread of Covid19.

Excerpt 6

Indeed, in Update No.25, the last update I rendered on 16th May, our total active case count stood at one thousand, three hundred and fourteen (1,314), with our daily infection rate standing at one hundred (100). (paragraph 5)

The above excerpt underscores the fact that there have been previous updates. This reference indicates that there had been prior discussion/updates on the matter which enhances mutual understanding.

Excerpt 7

Mask wearing in commercial vehicles and in the market places continue to be mandatory. (paragraph. 14)

For something to continue means that it started happening previously. Therefore, the lexeme "continue" in the excerpt above is communicatively effective to the understanding of the listeners and to aligning their thoughts with that of the president in his speech.

Through these excerpts, Habermas's validity claim of uttering something understandably has been met. It also validates the fact that there is background knowledge between the president and citizens of Ghana on the government's efforts to curb the spread of the deadly disease.

Secondly, the president employed the use of persuasive force as a communicative tool to achieve understanding. Recognizing the resurgence of the disease and its negative consequences on the lives and livelihood of the people of Ghana, PNA-A resorted to persuasive force, a form of superior argument as the president of the country, and requested maximum adherence to all Covid19 protocols the government had already put in place.

Excerpts from the Update to illustrate persuasive force PNA-A employed to achieve communicative competence:

Excerpt 8

The wearing of masks in public places, fellow Ghanaians, continues to be mandatory. There are no exceptions to this rule, and strict conformity with this protocol will be enforced. Anyone



found to be flouting this directive will have him or herself to blame. We cannot afford anyone's recklessness to endanger the lives of the majority of persons in the country. (paragraph 10)

Being extremely troubled to note that the high compliance rate of mask-wearing had fallen alarmingly, which has resulted in an increase in the active case of the virus, PNA-A decided to apply persuasive force as can be seen in the excerpt above. The highlighted lexemes buttressed some form of compulsion and forcefulness to which Ghanaians, recognizing the superior presence of the president, must comply.

Excerpt 9

I have, in previous updates, emphasised the need for the strict observance of safety protocols at all such gatherings. To ensure that such gatherings do not become the sources of infections, the following must be adhered to by all at these gatherings:

the wearing of masks continues to be mandatory, and persons must respect the enhanced hygiene protocols;

all such events must be held in open-air spaces;

the duration of such events is limited to two (2) hours;

there must be observance of the one (1) metre social distancing rule; and

handshakes must be avoided. (Paragraph 11)

The modal auxiliary verb “must” and other lexical items underlined in the excerpt act as a form of persuasive force geared towards combating the virus.

6.2 Question 2. What strategies were used to ensure positive/effective role-play in the Update?

The president involved everyone and different organizations both within Ghana and outside Ghana in one way or another to play positive/effective roles in combating the pandemic. This is not surprising. Because coronavirus is a deadly virus that spares no one and spread rapidly across the length and breadth of the world, it only becomes necessary that in fighting this disease everyone and everything must be involved. By this action, Habermas' idealized presupposition that “everyone that is capable of speech should be accorded the right to participate in a talk exchange and should be entitled to introduce new topics or express attitudes, needs or desires” has been achieved.

Excerpts from the Update to illustrate various lexical items that show the involvement of everyone/organizations in different role-play in the fight of Covid19:

Excerpt 10

...the Ghana Health Service is now reporting that our total number of active cases stands at four thousand, five hundred and twenty-one... (paragraph 7)

As it should be expected, the Ghana Health Services, the governmental body in charge of health and health-related matters in Ghana, should be at the forefront of the fight. And as we can see, the president in his update presented to Ghanaians reports from this sector.



Excerpt 11

Fellow Ghanaians, it is obvious from the data that we have let our guard down... (paragraph 9)

“Fellow Ghanaians” in this opening line of the update serves two purposes. Apart from establishing a basis of communication intersubjectivity with the audience as universal pragmatic theory demands, it brought the audience to the presence of mind that the president is about to embark on a line of communication concerning important issues paramount to the lives of the citizenry. Again, it signified the fact that the president is involving everyone in this struggle, and the collective pronoun “we” signified that for the successful fight of this disease, every Ghanaian, including himself, must be ready to adhere to whatever protocol put in place by the health service organizations.

Excerpt 12

Anyone found to be flouting this directive will have him or herself to blame. We cannot afford anyone’s recklessness to endanger the lives of the majority of persons in the country. (paragraph. 10)

Again, the impersonal pronoun, “anyone” and the collective pronoun “we” in the excerpt above show that the president wants everyone in Ghana to join in curbing this virus.

Excerpt 13

In the short term, the Frimpong-Boateng Committee is facilitating the capacity of domestic pharmaceutical companies to fill and finish COVID-19 vaccines. (paragraph 23)

Since Covid19 is all about health matters, it is apparent that the pharmaceutical companies in Ghana should be involved in this matter. Therefore, the president involved them.

Excerpt 14

We are expecting, through the COVAX facility and the African Union... 1,229,670 doses of the Pfizer vaccines from the Government of the United States of America, and... 249,000 AstraZeneca vaccines from the Government of the United Kingdom. Government is also in the process of procuring... 17 million single doses per person Johnson & Johnson vaccines, through the African Medicine Supply Platform... (paragraph 18)

From the excerpt above, we can see that PNA-A has involved everyone and organizations internally and internationally in this fight. The COVAX facility (a facility the government established for the sole purpose of fighting Covid19 in Ghana) is involved, the government of the USA is involved, the government of the UK is involved and the African Medicine Supply Platform which was established to ensure the effective distribution of vaccines to African nations is equally involved.

Excerpt 15

...all the vaccines to be used in the country have been certified as safe-for-use by our national regulatory agency, the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA). (paragraph 20)

As expected, the president also involved the food and drug regulatory body in the fight.



Excerpt 16

The global shortage of vaccines means that we must develop our capacity to produce our own vaccines domestically and reduce our dependence on foreign supplies. We must be self-sufficient in this regard ... and prepare ourselves better to deal with any such occurrences in the future. (paragraph. 21)

The collective/possessive/reflexive pronouns we/our/ourselves the president used in paragraph 21 represent effectively, the involvement of everybody in the fight.

7.3 Question 3. What strategies did President Nana Akufo-Addo employ to aid comprehensibility and maximum cooperation from his listeners?

PNA-A employed the strategy of truth and common concern (goodwill). He also employed the strategy of common code (code switch) and other felicitations. As Habermas (1976) explained, any meaning that meets the validity conditions and is recognized by another as having done so is considered to be vindicated or communicative competent. Thus, a successful utterance must satisfy three additional claims if it wants to have any claim to comprehensibility – “One of the claims is that the utterance must represent something in the world... a statement is true, and intentional expression is truthful, or an utterance is correct.” Covid19 is real and the fight against it all over the world is in the lips of everyone, therefore, it is very easy for PNA-A to make meaning in his update.

Excerpts from the update to illustrate the truth conditions, common concern (goodwill) and common code (code switch) in the fight of Covid19:

Excerpt 17

Fellow Ghanaians, good evening. (Para.1)

As can be seen in this excerpt, PNA-A, at the very beginning, saluted the citizens, including himself. This was to draw attention to the speech he was about to make to Ghanaians. All through the Update, he continued to reach out to Ghanaians by using the felicitous phrase – Fellow Ghanaians in paragraphs 8, 10, 17, 20 and 26. This phrase is communicatively effective and endeared him to Ghanaians as one will often hear from people: When is the next Fellow Ghanaians? Meaning, when is the president’s next update on covid19.

Excerpt 18

These increased infections have largely been driven by the Delta Variant of the virus, which, according to the World Health Organisation, has increased transmissibility rates... (paragraph 4)

The above excerpt is factual, and therefore, truthful. This update was given at the peak of the second wave of the virus which the World Health Organization had attributed to being a result of the new variant of the disease called the Delta Variant which is highly transmissible but not necessarily more deadly. So he employed the principle of truth to effectively communicate the government’s thoughts about the pandemic.



Excerpt 19

With workplaces currently witnessing a resurgence in COVID-19 infections, it is important that owners and managers of businesses and workplaces implement strictly the guidelines on staff management and workplace protocols... (paragraph 13)

Again, it was the truth that many workplaces across Ghana were witnessing a resurgence in the Covid19 cases. Radio/TV jingles and social media were awash with such information and everyone was aware of this phenomenon. Therefore, it is easy for PNA-A's listeners to identify with this truth easily.

Excerpt 20

Anuanom, nawotwi miensa ntem ni, yaree no asan ama nihoso biom, enam see yendi nhyihye niso, ni titriw, yegyai mask no hye. Mesre mo, nhyihye aa yaye efa masks noho, mondiso. Se wofri efiye aa, hye mask. eno ena ebebo yehu ban, ama yetumi apam yaree efri yeman mu. (paragraph 25)

Anyemime, otsii ete miine, hela esaa ewo eheno ekon, ejaake woyeee helaa gbejianɔ to, titiri mask wo. Minkpa nyefai, gbejianɔ to ni ake fɔshi ye mask wo, nye ye anɔ. Ke oshi shia, wo mask. No ni baabu wɔhe, ni baawa ni wɔ shwe helaa keje wɔ man nee min. (paragraph. 26)

In the two excerpts above, PNA-A decided to address his listeners in a common code that is understood by the majority of Ghanaians (Akan language) (code switch). Ghana is a multilingual country but the Akan language is understood by the majority of people in Ghana (Mpotsiah, 2019). This act has a pragmatic implication and this is another illustration of felicity. By switching over to a Ghanaian language, PNA-A reached out to every Ghanaian, educated and not educated and made his speech as understandable to all as possible. And in doing this, he increased his communicative competence and felicity. The two paragraphs loosely summarized all he had said in the previous paragraphs.

Excerpt 21

May God bless us all and our homeland Ghana, and make her great and strong. (paragraph 29)

The reference to God in excerpt 29 showed man's frailty, vulnerability and limited knowledge/power in the face of the ongoing pandemic; this served to bring hope and succour to all citizens including the president himself. This has high communicative (competence) implications especially as Ghana is noted to be a highly religious country (Awukuvi, & Israel, 2018).

Excerpt 22

I thank you for your attention and good night. (paragraph 30)

In this last paragraph, paragraph 30, PNA-A saluted Ghanaians again as he did in the opening paragraph. This was a way of showing goodwill and encouraging Ghanaians to give them hope that the country would be great again – posts Covid-19.



CONCLUSION

In pragmatics, the context of a speech plays a great role in determining the meaning of words and phrases used in a speech. This paper has used Habermas' (1987) idealized presupposition and validity claims to analyse PNA-A's update No 26 on the measures the government of Ghana is taking to combat the world's most disturbing health crisis in the 21st century. It was noted that the update adhered to the claims and proposition laid out by Habermas that anyone acting communicatively must, in performing a speech act, raise some idealized presuppositions and validity claims and assumes that they can be vindicated (i.e. becomes communicatively competent). PNA-A's update is meaningful and effective to the current situation of coronavirus pandemic in Ghana as it emphasizes the measures put in place to further combat the disease and the position of the government towards lockdown, vaccination, border closure and economic situation. Also, the third universal validity claim has been met as delivering the speech in English/Akan and issues related to human life, the speaker paves the way for people to understand him. The Update also retained its profundity even when it was translated to other languages (Akan) because it addressed issues that are pertinent to life and the world "regardless of time and space" (Habermas, 1979: 28). It, therefore, facilitates mutual understanding in addition to carrying out actions of leadership.

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APPENDIX

PNA-A's Update No 26: Measures Taken To Combat Spread Of Coronavirus

Address To The Nation By The President Of The Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, On Updates To Ghana's Enhanced Response To The Coronavirus Pandemic, On Sunday, 25th July 2021.

Fellow Ghanaians, good evening.

I have not come into your homes for some time, because I had hoped that the next time I did so, I would come to announce that we were ready to lift the restrictions and protocols and get our lives and economy back to normal. Alas, that is not the case, so it has become necessary for me to come to your homes this evening, after a ten (10) week absence, to provide you with an update on our nation's COVID-19 situation.

As per data available from the Ghana Health Service, it appears that, unfortunately, our nation, like many others, is experiencing a third wave of COVID-19 infections.

These increased infections have largely been driven by the Delta Variant of the virus, which, according to the World Health Organisation, has increased transmissibility rates, and, in our case in Ghana, has led, in recent weeks, to a rise in hospitalisation and ICU bed uptakes, and, tragically, deaths.

Indeed, in Update No.25, the last update I rendered on 16th May, our total active case count stood at one thousand, three hundred and fourteen (1,314), with our daily infection rate standing at one hundred (100). One million, one hundred and twenty-one thousand, one hundred and sixty-eight (1,121,168) COVID tests had been conducted, out of which ninety-two thousand, four hundred and sixty (92,460) persons had been infected, ninety-one thousand, one hundred and forty-six (91,146) persons had recovered, with a total of seven hundred and eighty-three (783) deaths.

Since that update, the situation improved significantly, whereby, in June, our active cases stood at some one thousand, two hundred (1,200); our daily infection rate fell to fifty (50) cases; we recorded ten (10) deaths in the whole of the month.

However, in recent weeks, we have seen a marked increase in the number of cases. As of Friday, 23rd July 2021, three (3) weeks later, the Ghana Health Service is now reporting that our total number of active cases stands at four thousand, five hundred and twenty-one (4,521). A total of one million, four hundred and six thousand, and eleven (1,406,011) tests have been conducted, out of which one hundred and two thousand, one hundred and three (102,103) persons have been infected with the virus, and ninety-six thousand, seven hundred and fifty-nine (96,759) persons have recovered. Our daily infection rate for the past week is three hundred and fifty (350) cases, and, sadly, forty (40) more people have died from COVID over the last ten (10) weeks, bringing the cumulative number of deaths to eight hundred and twenty-three (823) since the onset of the pandemic. Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi Metropolitan areas remain the hotspots of infections. This entire development is very alarming.



Fellow Ghanaians, it is obvious from the data that we have let our guard down, with many going about their daily duties in clear breach of and disregard for the protocols. At a time when the economy is on the rebound, and business activities picking up, we must do everything possible to contain this outbreak. We cannot afford to return to the days of partial lockdowns, which brought considerable hardships and difficulties for all of us.

You returned me to office in the elections of 7th December with a clear and decisive mandate to protect lives and livelihoods, and steer our nation out of the grips of the pandemic, and onto a path of sustained economic growth and progress. Fortunately for us, we have tried and tested response protocols which we have implemented since March 2020. They have stood us in good stead, and we have no choice but to return to the strict implementation of some of them.

It is extremely troubling to note that the high compliance rate with mask-wearing has fallen alarmingly. The wearing of masks in public places, fellow Ghanaians, continues to be mandatory. There are no exceptions to this rule, and strict conformity with this protocol will be enforced. Anyone found to be flouting this directive will have him or herself to blame. We cannot afford anyone's recklessness to endanger the lives of the majority of persons in the country.

The COVID-19 Taskforce, which I chair, has recommended that a second look be taken at the protocols that have been put in place for social and public gatherings, in particular weddings and funerals, across the country. I have, in previous updates, emphasised the need for the strict observance of safety protocols at all such gatherings. To ensure that such gatherings do not become the sources of infections, the following must be adhered to by all at these gatherings:

the wearing of masks continues to be mandatory, and persons must respect the enhanced hygiene protocols;

all such events must be held in open-air spaces;

the duration of such events is limited to two (2) hours;

there must be observance of the one (1) metre social distancing rule; and

handshakes must be avoided.

Furthermore, given that people sitting together to eat, drink, laugh, dance and talk in large gatherings, without masks, are the riskiest activities for spreading the virus, all post-event receptions, particularly related to weddings and funerals, are banned. I want to reiterate that protocols surrounding activities in churches and mosques remain the same, as are protocols in schools.

With workplaces currently witnessing a resurgence in COVID-19 infections, it is important that owners and managers of businesses and workplaces implement strictly the guidelines on staff management and workplace protocols, such as the use of a shift system and technology, mask-wearing, social distancing and hygiene protocols, as was required in the earlier days of the pandemic.



Mask wearing in commercial vehicles and in market places continue to be mandatory.

The Ghana Health Service has moved to fortify its contact tracing, testing and treating campaigns, especially across the hotspots of Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi Metropolitan areas. COVID-19 treatment centres continue to be resourced with medical supplies, personal protection equipment, and health workers.

We will continue to ensure that all arriving passengers at the Kotoka International Airport are in possession of a negative PCR test result upon their arrival in Ghana, a test which should have been conducted not more than seventy-two (72) hours before the scheduled departure from the country of origin. In addition, all passengers will continue to be subjected to a mandatory COVID test on arrival.

Fellow Ghanaians, indications are that, in the course of this quarter of the year, the availability of vaccines for our country will ramp up. Government is, therefore, standing by its commitment to vaccinate twenty million Ghanaians, i.e., the entire adult population, by the end of this year, in spite of the huge global demand for vaccines by countries, and the surge in infections the world over. So far, one million, two hundred and seventy-one thousand, three hundred and ninety-three (1,271,393) vaccine doses have been administered, with eight hundred and sixty-five thousand, four hundred and twenty-two (865,422) persons having received a single jab, and four hundred and five thousand, nine hundred and seventy-one (405,971) persons have received their full dose of two (2) jabs.

We are expecting, through the COVAX facility and the African Union, one million, two hundred and twenty-nine thousand, six hundred and seventy (1,229,670) doses of the Pfizer vaccines from the Government of the United States of America, and two hundred and forty-nine thousand (249,000) AstraZeneca vaccines from the Government of the United Kingdom. Government is also in the process of procuring seventeen million (17 million) single dose per person Johnson & Johnson vaccines, through the African Medicine Supply Platform, in this quarter.

We have, as such, upgraded our national, regional and district cold chain facilities in order to widen our access to vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna, that require minus seventy degrees Celsius (-70°C) cold chains. These include sixteen (16) ultra-low cold freezers, fifty-eight (58) units of ultra-low freezers, fifty (50) normal vaccine refrigerators, three hundred (300) boxes to be filled with ice packs, three hundred (300) ice packed freezers, ten (10) cold chain vans, and one hundred and twenty (120) temperature monitoring devices. These are in addition to the existing Zipline cold chain distribution service, for which we are grateful. I thank, as well, UPS, the American multi-national shipping, receiving and supply chain management company, and Kosmos Energy, the American oil and gas company, for their generous donations towards this development.

Fellow Ghanaians, it is important to stress, once again, that all the vaccines to be used in the country have been certified as safe-for-use by our national regulatory agency, the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA). There should, therefore, be no hesitancy amongst the population who are yet to be vaccinated. As the oft-cited saying goes, it is better to be safe than sorry.

The global shortage of vaccines means that we must develop our capacity to produce our own vaccines domestically and reduce our dependence on foreign supplies. We must be self-sufficient in this regard in the future, and prepare ourselves better to deal with any such



occurrences in the future. To this end, the Committee I established, under the leadership of the world-renowned Ghanaian scientist, Professor Kwabena Frimpong Boateng, to investigate Ghana's potential as a vaccine manufacturing hub, to meet national and regional needs, has presented its preliminary report which, amongst others, recommends the establishment of a National Vaccine Institute to spearhead this development. The government has committed to injecting seed funding of some twenty-five million United States dollars (US\$25 million) this year into this whole enterprise.

The Institute will be charged with delivering six clear mandates:

establishing local vaccine manufacturing plants;

deepening Research & Development (R&D) for vaccines in Ghana;

upgrading and strengthening the FDA;

forging bilateral and multilateral partnerships for vaccine manufacturing in various areas, such as funding, clinical trials, technology transfer, licensing, and assignment of intellectual property rights;

building the human resource base for vaccine discovery, development, and manufacture; and

establishing a permanent national secretariat to coordinate vaccine development and manufacture.

In the short term, the Frimpong-Boateng Committee is facilitating the capacity of domestic pharmaceutical companies to fill and finish COVID-19 vaccines.

Anuanom, nawotwi miensa ntem ni, yaree no asan ama nihoso biom, enam see yendi nhyihye niso, ni titriw, yegyai mask no hye. Mesre mo, nhyihye aa yaye efa masks noho, mondiso. Se wofri efiye aa, hye mask. eno ena ebebo yehu ban, ama yetumi apam yaree efri yeman mu.

Anyemimeɪ, otsii ete miine, hela esaa ewo eheno ekon, ejaake woyeee helaa gbejianɔ to, titiri mask wo. Minkpa nyefai, gbejianɔ to ni ake fashi ye mask wo, nye ye ano. Ke oshi shia, wo mask. No ni baabu wɔhe, ni baawa ni wɔ shwe helaa keje wɔ man nee min.

Fellow Ghanaians, we must remember that the virus continues to jeopardise our lives and livelihoods. Without a doubt, God has been gracious to us. I appreciate that the wearing of masks is difficult for all of us, but I entreat you to wear the mask. This is what will save us.

I ask this evening that we remain steadfast in our adherence to the protocols, so we can overcome this third-wave of infections. If we do so, we will soon be able to return to our normal way of life.

Zero active cases must remain the overarching goal, and I have no doubt that, together, and with the help of God, this too shall pass, for the Battle is still the Lord's.

May God bless us all and our homeland Ghana, and make her great and strong.

I thank you for your attention and good night.