

MESSAGE ON THE STATE OF THE NATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC,
NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO, ON TUESDAY, 9TH MARCH 2021, AT PARLIAMENT
HOUSE, ACCRA

Mr. Speaker,

It is always good to be back in Parliament, and to discharge the duty, in accordance with Article 67 of the Constitution, of delivering to the House a Message on the State of the Nation. I am particularly delighted as this Message is the first of my 2nd term, the validity of which was unanimously upheld last week in a well-reasoned and excellent ruling by a seven-member panel of the Supreme Court, presided over by the Chief Justice, on 4th March 2021.

In accordance with protocol and convention, it is good to see that First Lady Rebecca Akufo-Addo, Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia, Second Lady Samira Bawumia, Spouse of Mr. Speaker, Chief Justice Anin Yeboah, and Justices of the Supreme Court, re-elected Chairperson Nana Otuo Siriboe II, and Members of the Council of State, the new Chief of Defence Staff Vice Admiral Seth Amoamah, the Inspector General of Police, Mr. James Oppong-Boanuh, and Service Chiefs, are all present, as are the Dean and Members of the Diplomatic Corps.

Let me use this opportunity to congratulate, once again, the Speaker of Parliament, Rt. Hon. Alban Kingsford Sumana Bagbin, on becoming Speaker of the 8th Parliament. His has been a distinguished career, having entered the 1st Parliament of the 4th Republic in 1993, and I came to meet him in the 2nd Parliament in 1997. He has been Majority Leader, Minister of State, one of the “three wisemen” in a previous Government, 2nd Deputy Speaker of Parliament, and now finds himself in this elevated position of being the third most important person in the governance structure of our country. It is wholly appropriate that, at such a critical period in the history of our country, my senior in Parliament and I should work together for the wellbeing of the Ghanaian people.

Mr. Speaker, I wish you well in the discharge of the duties of this high office.

Mr. Speaker, in 2017, I was here for the first time as President of the Republic, having won the election of 2016, and having inherited a faltering economy and an expectant people. Between that time and 2020, I sought to deliver on the mandate reposed on me and my party, the New Patriotic Party, and gain, once again, the confidence of the Ghanaian people. It was by no means a straight-forward task. We were able to deliver on most of our 2016 promises. In spite of the considerable challenges we confronted, and the setbacks we encountered, we were confident our record in office would put us in good stead before the electorate, and earn us a second term in office, which it did.

It means that the reason for which the Ghanaian people went to the polls on 7th December, i.e to seek an improvement in their living standards and the rapid transformation of the economy, must continue in earnest. It means that the clarion call of “Four More for Nana and the NPP to do more for you” must be realised, and I intend to do so.

The commencement of this process has been facilitated by members of this House, and I am thankful to you for enabling Government to be duly constituted. The expeditious and thorough manner in which my Ministers were scrutinised by the Appointments Committee, and the approval by the full House of each of the twenty-nine (29) substantive Ministers, for me, was an indication of the collective determination of both sides of the House, with mutual regard for each other, to work together for the good of the country. This is what the Ghanaian people demand from us by insisting on virtual parity in the House between the two major parties of our country. The realisation of the Ghana Project, and not the attainment of narrow partisan interests, must be the guiding principle of the business to be conducted in the House.

As President of the Republic, I give my firm commitment to this end, and I assure Mr Speaker and the Legislature of the co-operation of the Executive in this endeavour. As I indicated in my acceptance speech on the night of 9th December 2020, now is the time for each and every one of us, irrespective of our political affiliations, to unite, join hands, stand shoulder-to-shoulder, and work hard to place Ghana where she deserves to be.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of a global pandemic that has ravaged lives and livelihoods in all parts of the world, we cannot afford to pursue interests that will leave our nation and its citizens the poorer for it. COVID-19 has impacted heavily on economic activities, created uncertainty, weakened global growth conditions, whilst putting undue strain on already weak and fragile health systems, particularly in developing countries.

Mr. Speaker, between 2017 and the first quarter of 2020, we had made considerable gains in the management of the national economy, where we witnessed annual average GDP growth of seven percent (7%), single digit inflation, reduced fiscal deficits with three consecutive years of primary surpluses, a relatively stable exchange rate, a significant improvement in the current account with three consecutive years of trade surpluses, strong foreign exchange reserve buffers, markedly reduced lending rates, and appreciable job creation.

According to the COVID-19 Business Tracker survey, conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to job losses, with many Ghanaian businesses and firms being forced to cut costs by reducing staff hours, cutting wages, and, in some cases, laying off workers. This survey, again, showed that about seven hundred and seventy thousand (770,000) workers had their wages reduced, and about forty-two thousand (42,000) employees were laid off during the three-week partial lockdown imposed on the Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Areas and their contiguous districts, Tema and Kasoa. Government, however, succeeded in protecting the jobs and incomes of all public sector workers.

Indeed, the cost of COVID-19 has been enormous. Our overall economic growth rate for 2020 was revised downwards from 6.8% to 0.9%. The non-oil economy was also revised from 6.7% to 1.6%. Revenue shortfall was estimated at GH¢13.5 billion, with additional expenditures related to stemming the tide of COVID-19 estimated at GH¢11.8 billion, with the combined effect amounting to GH¢25.3 billion, or 6.6% of GDP. The resultant fiscal deficit for 2020 was, thus,

revised from 4.7% of GDP to 11.4% of GDP. This was done to reflect the impact of the pandemic. The fiscal responsibility rule of keeping a deficit within a threshold of 5% of GDP and a positive primary balance for every year was suspended in 2020 to enable fiscal operations accommodate the impact of the pandemic.

I indicated at the time that we know what to do to bring the economy back to life, what we do not know how to do is to bring people back to life. That is why Government did not hesitate to institute measures to protect the lives and livelihoods of Ghanaians, even if it was to the temporary detriment of our much sought-after fiscal stability.

The formulation and implementation of the COVID-19 preparedness and response plan, tracing, testing, treatment, waiver of personal income tax and provision of an additional fifty percent (50%) basic salary allowance to healthcare workers, expanding the capacities of laboratories to increase COVID-19 testing, establishment of isolation centres in all regions and districts, fumigation of markets and schools, provision of food packages and hot meals for residents in areas affected by the partial lockdown, provision of free water for all households, provision of free electricity for lifeline consumers and a fifty percent (50%) discount for all other consumers, reduction in the Communication Service Tax (CST) from nine percent (9%) to five percent (5%), the institution of a seven hundred and fifty million cedi (GH¢750 million) loan facility for micro, small and medium enterprises through the CAPBUS Initiative, and the provision of a two billion cedi (GH¢2 billion) guarantee facility to support large businesses, such as schools and pharmaceutical companies, are amongst the several measures put in place by Government to cushion Ghanaians from the impact of the pandemic.

Support has also been forthcoming from the Bank of Ghana, under its brilliant leadership, which has lowered the Monetary Policy Rate by one hundred and fifty (150) basis points to 14.5 percent, reduced the Primary Reserve Requirement from ten percent (10%) to eight percent (8%), reduced the Capital Adequacy Requirement from thirteen percent (13%) to eleven-point five percent (11.5%), and reduced interest rates based on the Ghana Reference Rate by two hundred (200) basis points.

The Ghana Revenue Authority has also extended the dates for filing of taxes from four (4) months to six (6) months after the end of the basis year, issued a waiver on VAT, National Health Insurance Levy and GETFund Levy on donations of equipment and goods for fighting the pandemic, waived income taxes on Third-Tier Pension withdrawals, and permitted the deduction of contributions and donations towards COVID-19 as allowable expense for tax purposes.

Mr. Speaker, my Government found the resources to cushion the impact of the pandemic because we are good managers of the economy, and we are good protectors of the public purse.

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has exposed the need to expedite the process of moving Ghana to a situation beyond aid. That is why Government has developed and is currently implementing the

one hundred-billion-cedi (GH¢100 billion) Ghana CARES 'Obaatampa' Programme to transform, revitalise and modernise our economy, and return it to high and sustained growth for the next three years. The key projects under the CARES Programme include:

- a) supporting commercial farming and attracting educated youth into commercial farming;
- b) building the country's light manufacturing sector;
- c) developing engineering/machine tools and ICT/digital economy industries;
- d) fast tracking digitalisation;
- e) developing Ghana's housing & construction industry;
- f) establishing Ghana as a Regional Hub;
- g) reviewing and optimising the implementation of Government flagships and key programmes; and
- h) creating jobs for young people, and expanding opportunities for the vulnerable in society, including persons with disabilities.

The establishment of the National Development Bank, under the Ghana CARES programme, is expected to provide support to businesses in Ghana. Government expects economic activity, which has already picked up, to do so even further, following the ongoing vaccination exercise, and the easing of restrictions put in place to curb the effects of the disease. We expect GDP growth to rebound strongly this year to nearly five percent (5%), above the IMF's 2021 January projection of 3.2% growth for Sub-Saharan Africa for 2021.

The medium-term outlook supported by the implementation of the Ghana CARES Programme is bright. We are confident that, together, we will emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic with a stronger and more resilient economy.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to oversee the rebirth and growth of our economy, our people must be healthy, and not succumb to COVID-19. On 24th February, Government secured the first batch of vaccine doses from the COVAX Facility. The vaccination campaign is currently ongoing, with two hundred and sixty-two thousand, three hundred and thirty-five (262,335) number of Ghanaians receiving the first dose of the vaccines as at 10:30am this morning. The target is to vaccinate twenty million Ghanaians, and Government is working hard towards realising this goal. We remain on course to taking delivery of some seventeen million, six hundred thousand vaccine doses by June, with more to come in the course of the year.

I want to urge Members of the House to lend their voices to the public education campaign currently ongoing with regards to the vaccination programme. The vaccine, together with strict compliance with the safety protocols, is what will allow us to open up our country again, and embark on the quest to restore normalcy to our lives and livelihoods. Government is also mindful of a problem associated with vaccinations, and that is how to dispose of used PPEs, vials, needles and syringes that are being used in the vaccination exercise. Government is collaborating with the private sector to establish fourteen (14) medical waste treatment facilities across the country to help address, once and for all, the safe disposal of medical waste.

The pandemic has emphasized the need to expand access to healthcare for every Ghanaian, irrespective of his or her location, and I want to thank, again and again, all our frontline healthcare workers for their devotion to duty and sense of patriotism.

The great amount of work undertaken by Government has meant that we presently have some three hundred and seven (307) functioning and well-equipped ambulances under the One-Constituency-One-Ambulance Initiative, supported by a state-of-the-art, digitised Command Centre to field emergency calls and to dispatch ambulances. Last year, thirty-three (33) major health projects were approved for implementation at a cost of eight hundred and ninety million euros (€890 million). Key amongst them are the Koforidua Regional Hospital, Tema General Hospital, the Nephrology and Urology Centre at Korle-Bu, Redevelopment of the Effia Nkwanta Hospital into a Teaching Hospital, and the Construction of a new Regional Hospital at Agona Nkwanta in the Western Region.

As announced last year, Agenda 111, which will see to the construction of 100-bed District Hospitals in one hundred and one (101) Districts with no hospitals, seven (7) Regional Hospitals for the new Regions, including one for the Western Region, the construction of two (2) new psychiatric hospitals for the Middle Belt and Northern Belt, respectively, and the rehabilitation of Effia-Nkwanta Hospital in the Western Region, is on course. Construction of some of these hospitals has commenced, and will continue without interruption.

Agenda 111, the largest ever investment in healthcare infrastructure in our history, is part of a massive vision for Ghana's healthcare sector, the realisation of which will lead to Ghana becoming a Centre of Medical Excellence and a destination for medical tourism, and will also see us achieve the following:

1. each of the sixteen (16) regional hospitals will be designated as a Centre of Excellence in the different specialties of medicine. For example, orthopedic surgery, burns, plastic and reconstructive surgery, breast care centre, fertility centre, neonatology and pediatric centre, neurosurgery and spine centre, stroke center, heart and kidney centre and mental health centre to name a few;
2. continuously upgrade our medical curriculum, and continue to train our young doctors and health care professionals in a world class fashion;
3. incentivise the private sector to increase capacity to support demand in healthcare delivery; and
4. encourage Ghanaian medical experts in the diaspora to collaborate and join hands with us to help build and contribute to the realisation of this noble vision.

The West African region is estimated to reach a population of half a billion people by 2030, by which time this vision would have been realised.

Government will continue to invest in the health sector, and will continue to recruit more health professionals, in addition to the one hundred thousand recruited in my first term for our health facilities. Electronic medical records system (E-Health) deployment is currently underway, following its implementation in key health facilities like Korle-Bu, Komfo-Anokye, Ho, Tamale and Cape Coast Teaching Hospitals, and several district hospitals in the Central Region. Upper East, Upper West, and Bono Regional Hospitals will go live on the e-health platform in five (5) days.

Mr. Speaker, when it was needed most, at the height of the pandemic, the ingenuity and creativity of the Ghanaian shone through, which caught the attention of the world. When PPEs were being sold on the world market at extortionist prices, largely because demand outstripped supply, we began producing them in Ghana. Scrubs, medical gowns, sanitisers, masks, and gloves, all of these essential to the fight against COVID-19, were produced in Ghana. In total, fourteen million, six hundred thousand pieces of personal protective equipment have, so far, been produced domestically for health workers, students, teaching and non-teaching staff of tertiary and secondary educational institutions.

We are determined to make our own things, and the Akufo-Addo government will continue with the agenda of rapid industrialisation, with the aim of transforming the structure of the Ghanaian economy from one dependent on the production and export of raw materials to a value-added, industrialised economy. Under the “One-District-One-Factory” (1D1F) initiative, two hundred and thirty-two (232) projects are at various stages of implementation. These include seventy-six (76) operating as 1D1F companies, whilst one hundred and twelve (112), including five (5) medium size agro-processing factories, and sixty-three (63) Common User Facilities are under construction.

The Ghana Integrated Aluminium Development Corporation (GIADEC) has made good progress on the bauxite exploitation programme that will drive our industrial transformation agenda. We are in the final stage of an open and transparent investor engagement process, and are in negotiations to select strategic investors to partner GIADEC for the bauxite mining and alumina refinery projects. The selected partners will be announced imminently. Similarly, the Ghana Integrated Iron and Steel Development Corporation (GIISDEC) has been set up, and has begun its work in earnest.

We have succeeded in attracting major global vehicle manufacturers, under the automotive development policy, to set up in Ghana. So far, Volkswagen has produced one thousand, one hundred and sixty-seven (1,167) vehicles, SinoTruk two hundred and seventy-six (276) vehicles, and our own Kantanka has produced four hundred (400) vehicles. The Japanese conglomerate, Nissan, has also started the assembly of vehicles in the country.

Mr. Speaker, our nation’s food resilience has been severely tested over the past year. The closure of borders, in the midst of the pandemic, meant that we have had to depend largely on food we produced. We have fared well under the circumstances, largely as a result of the bold policies implemented by Government since 2017, such as the programme for Planting for Food

and Jobs, Rearing for Food and Jobs, the 1-Village-1-Dam initiative, 1-District-1-Warehouse policy, establishment of greenhouse villages, revitalisation of the cocoa rehabilitation programme, and the reactivation of our aquaculture industry. I am happy to inform the House that, during this period of the pandemic, we have experienced no food shortages in the country.

There have been increases in maize and rice yields by one hundred and ten percent (110%) and forty-eight percent (48%) respectively. We have, for the first time in a long while, become a net exporter of food, as opposed to the days of importation of tomatoes and plantain. Indeed, in 2019, we exported some one hundred and forty thousand metric tons (140,000 MT) to our neighbours. We are determined to take full advantage of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to produce more in Ghana, to sell more to Africa and beyond, as we move Ghana Beyond Aid.

The Agreement for a Strategic Partnership between Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire has bound our two countries in even closer intimacy, especially in the cocoa sector. We have succeeded in aligning the cocoa production and marketing policies of the two countries, and ensured that we do not continue to be victims or pawns of a global cocoa industry that is dependent on the toil and effort of our farmers. A new trading mechanism has been implemented, and has ensured that a new cost item of four hundred United States dollars (US\$400.00) per ton, for every cocoa sold by the two nations, effective from the 2020/2021 season, is paid to our farmers.

Through the establishment of the Tree Crops Development Authority, Government is determined to end the over-reliance on cocoa, and develop other cash crops such as cashew, cotton, mango, oil palm, rubber, and shea.

Government remains committed to the completion of the mini-harbours and landing sites, which are at different stages of completion, in Senya Beraku, Dixcove, Elmina, Moree, Winneba, Gomoa Fetteh, Teshie, Keta, Mumford and Jamestown.

Mr. Speaker, I am passionate about the education of every child in Ghana, because education opens doors. That is why one of my biggest concerns, during this pandemic, has been to safeguard the education of our children. All over the world, Governments were forced to shut down schools, as we did. However, we took steps to ensure that the education of our children was not truncated. Last year, bold and responsible decisions made it possible for JHS 3 and SHS 3 students to take their final examinations, and final year University Students graduated. Currently, all our children, from kindergarten to University, are in school, studying in conditions of safety. This has taken place despite the outcry and opposition of some. I am required to provide leadership, and that is what I am doing.

Government, through the Ministries of Education and Health, is doing all it can to ensure that the future of our children is not jeopardised by the pandemic.

In 2020, the first batch of Free SHS students wrote their WASSCE successfully. Results of the 2020 WASSCE indicates that more than fifty percent (50%) of candidates who sat the examination obtained A1 to C6 in all core subjects. This was an impressive WASSCE performance, with over sixty percent (60%) of candidates scoring between A1 and C6 in their best six subjects, including English and Mathematics, which qualifies them for tertiary education.

Sixty-four (64) years after independence, we still do not have the critical mass of tertiary education graduates that is required for our socioeconomic transformation. Currently, Ghana's Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio stands at 18.8%, which, albeit very low, is still one of the highest in Africa. We must, therefore, introduce measures to increase consciously the proportion of our population with relevant tertiary education to accelerate the transformation of our country. Our target is to increase the ratio from the current 18.8% to 40% by 2030, focusing on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related fields, with emphasis on engineering. This will be achieved by significantly increasing enrolment in existing public and private universities and through the establishment of an Open University. We expect record numbers of enrolment over the next four (4) years. Accordingly, we will fulfil our campaign manifesto promise by removing the guarantor requirement that makes it difficult for most students to apply for loans through the Student Loan Trust Fund programme.

As part of our commitment to the advancement of STEM, Government will continue with the development of twenty (20) STEM centres and eight (8) model Science Senior High schools across the country. These institutions will be fitted with state-of-the art equipment and laboratories, which will facilitate teaching and learning in all areas, including artificial intelligence and robotics.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank this august House for passing the Education Regulatory Bodies' Act, 2020 (Act 1023). The passage of this Act has established the Commission for Technical Vocational Education and Training (CTVET) and the TVET Service. All these will help to streamline delivery of TVET, and avoid overlaps and duplication. We are also building thirty-two (32) TVET institutions across the country to augment existing infrastructure for effective TVET delivery.

In line with our commitment to address the issue of youth unemployment through TVET, Government will commence the implementation of the Ghana Jobs and Skills project this year. This project seeks to expedite the development of competency-based training curricula on the National TVET Qualification Framework for one hundred (100) trades/professions from level one (1) (National Proficiency 1) to level five (5) (Higher National Diploma) as well as training some twenty-five thousand (25,000) beneficiaries and provide entrepreneurial support to about fifty thousand (50,000) individuals. It will also seek to implement the Ghana Labour Market Information System, and upgrade of district public employment centres and services.

A key objective of our effort to improve quality education and ensure that our students become globally competitive is to maintain the integrity of our examinations and assessment. In

connection with this, Government, working through WAEC, will introduce new measures to curb examination leakages and malpractices.

I acknowledge that the teacher is at the centre of every reform in the field of education. Prioritising the welfare of teachers remains a key objective of Government. After the restoration of teacher training allowances, Government is now paying professional allowances to both teaching and non-teaching staff. I am happy to announce that Government is facilitating the acquisition of two hundred and eighty thousand laptops for members of the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) and the Coalition of Concern Teachers (CCT) this year. Moving forward, the Minister for Education will soon detail an action plan for the implementation of the National Teacher Policy.

Government has also introduced several interventions at the high school level. Some of these are the one hundred and ninety-eight million cedi (GH¢198 million) academic intervention support programme dedicated for extra classes for students in SHS, implementation of free internet connectivity for secondary schools, full absorption of BECE registration fee for all for students in public junior high school from 2017 till date, and full absorption of WASSCE registration fees for students, which started last year.

Mr. Speaker, our effort at digitisation is gathering steam. When my government assumed office in 2017, we faced the challenge of a largely informal economy. The features of the informal economy included the absence of unique identification for citizens and residents of Ghana, and the absence of a working property address system across the country. Further, only a small proportion of our population was registered by the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) with Tax Identification Numbers (TINs), and by SSNIT for social security. Seventy percent (70%) of the adult population did not have access to a bank account, financial transactions were dominated by cash, and the processes of service delivery in most MMDAs were largely manual and highly bureaucratic. It was in this context that we set about the process of formalizing our informal economy through digitisation.

Mr. Speaker, after four years in office, I am happy to state that there has been more progress in formalising the Ghanaian economy than there was in the previous sixty (60) years since independence.

Mr. Speaker, for the first time, we have enrolled 15.5 million people onto the National ID card system (the Ghanacard), and we will complete the process this year. From 1st April, and this is not an April Fool's prank, all National ID numbers will become Tax Identification Numbers. In so doing, the number of people registered by GRA for tax purposes will increase from the current three million (3 million) to 15.5 million. I should recall that at the end of 2016, only 750,000 people had TIN numbers. The increase to 15.5 million in just four years is simply phenomenal.

Similarly, from the 2nd quarter of this year, all National ID numbers will also become SSNIT numbers. This will increase the number of people on the SSNIT database from four million (4

million) to 15.5 million, making it easier for new contributors to be enlisted on the scheme. The National ID numbers will also become NHIS numbers. Very soon, we will link the National ID to all SIM cards, bank accounts, Births and Deaths Registry, DVLA documents, and passports.

Mr. Speaker, for the first time, through the implementation of the Digital Property Addressing System, every location in Ghana has a digital address. The process of affixing unique property address plates for some 7.5 million properties in all sixteen (16) regions has also started.

Mr. Speaker, for the first time in Ghana, more than seventy percent (70%) of the population has access to financial services either through a bank account or a mobile money account. We have been able to do so through the implementation of mobile money interoperability (between bank accounts and mobile wallets), with Ghana as the first and only country in Africa to have done so. It is, therefore, not surprising that Ghana is the fastest growing mobile money market in Africa. Furthermore, our successful introduction of the Universal QR (Quick Response) CODE for payments across banks, telcos, fintechs and merchants will propel Ghana to be amongst the first countries in Africa (if not the first) to move towards a largely cashless economy, when fully rolled out across the country with the support of the Bank of Ghana.

Mr. Speaker, we have also digitised the operations of many government institutions including the ports, NHIS, DVLA, GRA, and the Passport Office. One of the most dramatic examples of this development has been the ability of SSNIT to pay pensions within ten (10) days of application, as opposed to the endless delays of the past. To make it easy to obtain government services, a portal, Ghana.Gov, has been established where all MMDAs are being onboarded. It is a one stop shop where anyone can apply for and pay for a government service. We expect to complete the onboarding of all MMDAs this year, and, in so doing, significantly enhance the efficiency and reduce the cost of delivery of government services to our people.

The Integrated Customs Management Systems (ICUMS), which is an end-to-end customs management system at the Ports to enhance management and collection of customs duties, has, despite initial resistance and controversy, succeeded in eliminating the multiple routes prior to payment of duties, ensuring seamless processes, increasing revenues, and speedy processing of pre-manifest declaration and valuation on the same system. We have also integrated the Ghana.gov platform and the Integrated Tax Application Preparation Systems (ITaPs), which allow taxpayers to make payments at their convenience online and through taxpayers' banks, and the use of mobile money, credit cards and debit cards.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that we have made significant strides in formalising the economy, and we will do even more going forward.

Mr. Speaker, our judicial system has not been left out of the digitisation programme. Today, the e-Justice and e-Case register initiatives, for example, are helping to ensure that the law keeps pace with technology, ending the age-old "missing dockets" phenomenon and endless litigations, which have plagued the efficient delivery of justice in the country for many, many years.

Government, through the Ministry of Local Government and the District Assembly Common Fund, has commenced, in an unprecedented initiative, the construction of ninety (90) Courts with accompanying accommodation for judges across the country, to help address the problem of inadequate court infrastructure. These structures are at advanced stages of completion. Again, through the same medium, twenty (20) townhouses and a guesthouse are being built to be used as permanent residences for Court of Appeal Judges based in Kumasi, who are mandated to handle cases in the northern part of the country.

With the coming into force of the Courts Regulation 2020, LI 2429, on 16th December 2020, the relevant sections of the Courts Act (Act 459) have been amended, and has led to an expansion of the jurisdiction of the Lower Courts. Indeed, prior to the amendment, the monetary values of cases that could be heard by the District and Circuit Courts were twenty thousand (GH¢20,000) and fifty thousand cedis (GH¢50,000) respectively. Today, the District Court's jurisdiction over cases brought before it has been increased to five hundred thousand cedis (GH¢500,000), whereas that of the Circuit Court has been increased to two million cedis (GH¢2 million).

Mr. Speaker, this increase in jurisdiction will ensure that more cases are heard in the District and Circuit Courts, thus easing the burden on the High Courts. All these measures will go a long way to enhance justice delivery in the country, and help consolidate the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, when I appeared before this House on 4th January 2021, to deliver the last Message on the State of the Nation at the dissolution of Parliament, I called for a national discourse on the long-standing issue of illegal small-scale mining in our country. Yes, in the last four years so much has been achieved in cleaning up this industry, training miners in the best methods of mining, introducing community mining, enacting additional regulatory legislation, but the reality is that illegal small-scale mining remains a major problem. I am confident that the new, energetic Minister for Lands and Natural Resources and Member of Parliament for Damongo Constituency, Hon. Samuel Abu Jinapor, will rapidly facilitate the holding of this national dialogue, and will work to build on the progress of his predecessors by enhancing regulation of this sector, which should be anchored on the protection of the environment and on community mining.

Mr. Speaker, let me, at this point, assure the House that, in the course of this session of Parliament, Government will come back to engage the House on the steps it intends to take on the future of the Agyapa transaction.

Mr. Speaker, land administration continues to be bedevilled with, apparently, intractable challenges. This year, government intends to roll out a programme for the digitisation of all land records for purposes of ensuring effective land administration. Aggressive afforestation will be pursued in the course of the year, with the expected launch of a Green Ghana Project, which will see the mobilisation of Ghanaians in all fields of endeavour to participate in a nationwide tree planting exercise.

Mr. Speaker, in 2018, Ghana won the bid to host and organise the 2023 African Games for the first time since the tournament started in 1965. A nine (9) member Local Organizing Committee has been constituted and inaugurated to handle the technical and events aspects of the 2023 Africa Games. Government intends to provide maximum support to the LOC to help ensure we organise and host successful games.

The construction of ten (10) Youth Resource Centres (YRC) across the country which are at different levels of completion of between eighty-five percent (85%) and ninety-five percent (95%). We are, as well, renovating and rehabilitating many other abandoned sports facilities. We are paying allowances to about one thousand (1000) athletes through the Youth Employment Agency. The Ghana Premier League has started, and hopefully, when we return to normalcy, capping of spectators at the stadiums will be a thing of the past. This is a proper occasion for me, once again, on behalf of all Ghanaians, to congratulate the Black Satellites on their splendid victory in winning the nation's 4th Under-20 African Nations trophy, when they defeated Uganda by two goals to zero, on Sunday, in Nouakchott, capital of the Republic of Mauritania. Ayekoo to the Black Satellites and to the technical and management teams. I look forward to receiving them at Jubilee House later this afternoon. Hopefully, this should be the beginning of a new era of success for Ghanaian football.

Mr. Speaker, the creation of the six (6) new regions led to the establishment of six (6) new regional houses of chiefs. In my tour of the country last year, I inaugurated these new Houses, and cut the sod for the construction of six (6) new buildings for them, which are ongoing. Government, through the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs, will continue to engage our traditional and religious rulers in matters of our common interest, such as the protection and preservation of the environment. Government is also determined to provide the funding necessary for the Judicial Committees of the various Houses of Chiefs to be able to do their work effectively and efficiently, so as to bring closure to many longstanding chieftaincy disputes.

Mr. Speaker, our nation continues to benefit from the "Year of Return." Since then, we have intensified our engagement with Africans in the diaspora and all persons of African descent more positively in areas such as trade and investment co-operation, and skills and knowledge development, in what we call "Beyond the Return". The Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, together with its implementing agency, the Ghana Tourism Authority, is working towards the realisation of this initiative, which will bring even greater spotlight on our nation Ghana.

A lot of work has been undertaken in revamping our tourist sites, and making them attractive. Digital revenue collection systems have been installed at the Elmina and Cape Coast Castles, Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park and Wli Waterfalls. Government has upgraded five (5) tourism sites to meet international standards for increased visitation, and create jobs and incomes for the people. The new Minister for the sector, the industrious Ibrahim Awal Mohammed, has also indicated his determination to strengthen the Creative Arts industry in Ghana. Already, the first-ever Creative Arts Senior High School, located in Kwadaso in the Ashanti Region, is nearing

completion; the governing board of the National Film Authority is in place; and even greater attention will be paid to this sector by Government.

Mr. Speaker, our quest to ensure an improved sanitation system across the country was bolstered last year by the commencement of construction of sixteen (16) integrated recycling and solid waste processing facilities. It is expected that all sixteen (16) facilities will be completed before the end of the year.

The Sustainable Rural Water and Sanitation Project and the Water Supply Improvement Project of the Ghana-Spain Debt Swap Development Programme have been completed. In September 2020, I joined the people of Amedzofe, Ziope, Akpokope/Batume Junction, Matse, Dzolo Gbogame, and surrounding communities to commission the five (5) Piped Water Supply Systems under the Project.

Concrete preparatory works have also commenced on a number of water supply projects across the country, including the Wenchi Water Supply Project, Keta Water Supply Project, Five Districts Water Supply Scheme Phase 3, Tamale Water Supply Project, Damongo Water Supply Project, and Yendi Water Supply Project.

Our efforts at ending open defaecation received a boost with the construction of one hundred and three thousand, one hundred and forty-nine (103,149) toilet facilities for vulnerable households in towns and villages across the country, under the Household and Institutional Toilet Programme. The cumulative result of this has been that some eight hundred and twenty-two thousand (822,000) persons have benefitted nationwide. Some five thousand, five hundred communities have also been declared open defaecation free.

Mr. Speaker, in the energy sector, the National Energy Policy, 2020, has been completed to improve the framework and strategies to meet contemporary energy needs of the country. The government has improved the financial sustainability of the energy sector through several interventions, including paying up the energy legacy debts. Furthermore, negotiations with Independent Power Producers, the terms of whose contracts entail substantial financial charges on the state, are ongoing, and should be completed by the end of the year. This should result in a more affordable cost of power for the Ghanaian people.

Under the National Electrification Scheme, a total of one thousand, four hundred and thirty-six (1,436) communities have been connected to the national grid, which has increased the national electricity access rate to 85.17% as at October 2020. My ambition is that, by the end of my term, the figure will be one hundred percent (100%).

The Ghana National Petroleum Corporation has accelerated petroleum exploration activities in the inland Voltaian Basin. It has successfully acquired and processed two thousand, five hundred and thirty-eight (2,538) line kilometre of 2D seismic data, analysed one thousand, five hundred and thirty-seven (1,537) geochemical samples, and established a working petroleum system. A gas processing plant-train is being constructed in the Western Region to compliment

the Atuabo Gas Processing Plant, so as to increase dry gas delivery for power and non-power users.

The Takoradi portion of the Takoradi-Tema Interconnection Project (TTIP) has been completed with an increased capacity of gas exports from Takoradi to Tema, through the West African Gas Pipeline. GNPC and its private sector partners have advanced the work on the Tema LNG project, Ssub-Saharan Africa's first LNG regasification terminal, which is expected to come on stream in the course of the year, to improve gas supply reliability for power and non-power industrial applications. The facility will also become a hub for regional energy security, ensuring low-cost fuel for both Ghana and her partners in the ECOWAS Region.

Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of my first term of office, in 2017, Government outlined its social development goals to include the promotion of gender equity and equality, survival and development of children, as well as the harmonisation of social protection interventions and programmes to contribute to the development of our nation.

I am pleased to inform the House that, in the course of this session of Parliament, the new Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon. Sarah Adwoa Safo, MP for Dome Kwabenya, will resubmit to the House the Affirmative Action Bill. Our mothers, wives, sisters and daughters are looking up to us on this. Indeed, it will make our society the richer, and I am appealing to the House, on both sides, to make one big effort to ensure its enactment.

The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme has increased the number of pay points from seven thousand two hundred (7,200) to fourteen thousand, three hundred (14,300) in order to make it easy for beneficiaries to access their grants. In all, a total of three hundred and thirty-four thousand, four hundred and thirty-eight (334,438) households benefitted from the Programme.

The Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) currently feeds over three million, three hundred thousand (3.3 million) beneficiary pupils, in some nine thousand (9,000) kindergarten and primary schools, with one hot nutritious meal every day per child.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment to the development of inner cities and zongo communities is unwavering. Projects such as the construction of classroom blocks, astro-turfs, establishment of ICT centres, installation of streetlights, entrepreneurial and vocational skills training, supporting needy students, and the rehabilitation of access roads and drains, have been undertaken. Another key policy initiative has been the re-introduction of the Arabic Instructors Programme. The Zongo Coders Programme and Starhub Programme are initiatives meant to redirect the energies of young men and women of Zongo communities into productive ICT ventures. So far, several hundred young men and women have been trained under these programmes.

Mr. Speaker, activities of the then Ministry of Special Development Initiatives (MSDI), like those of the Inner City and Zongo Ministry, have been brought under the ambit of the Presidency. The record of work undertaken in the Ministry was remarkable – five hundred and sixty-eight (568)

units of ten-seater community water closets, forty-two (42) warehouses, four hundred and twenty-seven (427) dams, forty (40) rural markets, twenty (20) fully equipped community clinics, three hundred and seven (307) fully equipped ambulances.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of coastal management, we continue to improve the resilience of the country's coastline against tidal wave erosion that poses a significant threat to lives, livelihoods and properties of the people living along the coastline. Consequently, we have implemented a number of coastal protection works at Aboadze, Nkontompo, Adjoa, Blekusu, Elmina, Dansoman, Amanful Kumah, Dixcove, Axim, Cape Coast, Komenda, Anomabu and Ningo-Prampram, which protect, in all, a total stretch of fifty-four (54) kilometres, and are at various stages of completion. Government has also implemented the annual National Flood Control Programme (NFCP), with the overall goal of reducing the incidence of flooding across the country.

The construction of the Multipurpose Pwalugu Dam project is aimed at mitigating the regular floods that occur in the White Volta basin, covering parts of the Upper East and North East Regions. Preparatory activities started in 2020 and will be completed by the first half of this year, with actual construction commencing in the second half of this year. Commissioning is expected in 2025.

It is the single largest investment in the northern part of Ghana made by any government. Once completed, it will add sixty megawatts (60MW) of hydropower and fifty megawatts (50MW) of solar power to the national grid, thereby improving the quality of power supply in the northern part of Ghana. The 25,000-hectare irrigation scheme will be bigger than the total size of all irrigated projects implemented in the country since independence, and will boost food production in the northern part of Ghana, thereby boosting economic development in northern Ghana and creating jobs for the youth.

Mr. Speaker, another important infrastructural development is the construction of the Boankra Inland Port, which will transform totally inland trade, and ease the movement of goods and services, especially for traders as well as our land-locked neighbours. The Korean contractors are due to start work any moment from now.

Under housing, the Government of Ghana Affordable Housing Programme, which seeks to increase access to safe, secure, adequate and affordable housing units across the country, is continuing in earnest. Thus far, one thousand, four hundred and sixty-four housing units in Borteyman, one thousand, and twenty-seven (1,027) in Asokore Mampong, and three hundred and twelve (312) housing projects have been completed in Kpone. The Koforidua, Tamale and Wa Housing Projects have been handed over to the State Housing Company Ltd for completion.

Mr. Speaker, it is my intention to place special emphasis on resolving the problems of the housing sector in the country, because tackling the housing deficit is long overdue.

Mr. Speaker, one of the ministries created in my first term as President was the Ministry of Railways Development, and the benefits of its creation are showing. Government is mobilising some two billion dollars (US\$2 billion) towards the development of railway infrastructure and services.

To this end, Government has rehabilitated a section of the narrow-gauge Western line from Kojokrom to Tarkwa through Nsuta to facilitate the haulage of manganese from Nsuta to the Takoradi Port, and also to provide a passenger rail service along the corridor. Construction of a new standard gauge line from Kojokrom through Eshiem to Manso is ongoing. A five hundred-million-euro (€500 million) contract has been signed for the construction of a standard gauge railway line from Manso to Huni Valley, a contract which includes the conversion of the narrow-gauge tracks between Takoradi and Sekondi to standard gauge, and the development of standard gauge tracks from the Takoradi station to the Takoradi Port for efficient and effective access for cargo handling. The development of the project will result in the construction of one hundred and two (102km) kilometres of rail tracks between the Port of Takoradi and Huni Valley.

Contracts for standard gauge railway lines from Kumasi to Kaase, Kaase to Eduadin, Eduadin to Obuasi, Eduadin to Ejisu with a linkage to the Boankra Inland Port, Manso to Dunkwa, have all been signed. The Tema to Mpakadan rail project is currently about eighty percent (80%) complete, with the rehabilitation of the Railway Training School and two (2) location workshops being completed. The Ghana School of Railways and Infrastructure Development, a school under the George Grant University of Mines and Technology, has matriculated its first batch of students, and will begin awarding certificates and diplomas in engineering and other related courses.

Mr. Speaker, in my inaugural address, I declared 2021 as the “Second Year of Roads”. This declaration is intended to continue to prioritise road construction so that road projects that started under the Sinohydro facility will be completed, as will interchanges that are at various stages of completion. Specific details of the road projects are going to be outlined in the budget that will be read on Friday.

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet has granted policy approval for the establishment of a National Flag Carrier (Home Based Airline) with strategic partner participation. The House will be duly informed on developments in this area. Construction of the second and third phases of the Kumasi Airport, second phase of Tamale Airport, and rehabilitation of the Sunyani airport, are all proceeding satisfactorily. A decision on the siting of the proposed airport in the Central and Western Regions is imminent.

Mr. Speaker, in order to revive the fortunes of the metro mass public transport system, Government has provided a total of one hundred (100) new intercity buses for Metro Mass Transit Limited (MMTL), and an additional one hundred (100) buses for the Intercity STC Coaches Limited. The construction of a new dedicated container terminal at the Tema Port is

ongoing, and three (3) out of the four (4) berths have been completed to facilitate maritime and inland waterways transportation.

The development of a multipurpose container terminal at the Takoradi Port is progressing. Removal of tree stumps along the navigable pathway at the Dambai to Dambai-Overbank, Yeji-Makango, and Yeji-Aworjekope has been completed to improve the safety of navigation, and reduce accidents on the Volta Lake. The construction of ferry landing sites along the Volta Lake at Dambai and Dambai Overbank is sixty-eight (68%) complete, whilst that of Yeji, Makango and Agodeke is forty-six percent (46%) complete. In total, seven (7) rescue and high-speed patrol boats have been procured by the Ghana Maritime Authority and deployed into service to improve safety and security of our maritime domain and inland waterways.

Mr Speaker, our security services have been retooled and re-equipped substantially under this administration. Indeed, the first four (4) units of four (4) storey blocks of sixteen (16) flats under the Barracks Regeneration Project have been commissioned, and the remaining part of forty (40) 2-bedroom self-contained accommodation units for the Six-Battalion of Infantry and AirBorne Force, in Tamale, have also been completed. Pick-ups, SUVs, trucks, high occupancy buses, ambulances and Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) have been added to the inventory of the Armed Forces over the period, as well as the imminent completion of a Forward Operating Base (FOB) at Ezinlibo in the Jomoro District of the Western Region. And, in response to the creation of additional ranks within the Military, Government reviewed salaries and allowances for Ghana Armed Forces and Civilian Employees upwards effective 1st January, 2020.

The capacity of the Ghana National Fire Service has been raised with the procurement of five (5) sets of extrication equipment, and two (2) hydraulic platforms procured.

Indeed, when I took office in January 2017, the Police Service had a total of four hundred and ninety-two (492) serviceable cars. Government has, since then, procured for the Police some seven hundred and thirty-five (735) additional vehicles, including fifteen (15) operational buses, a feat unprecedented in the history of the Service. Three hundred and twenty (320) housing units are being constructed at National Police Training School to reduce the accommodation deficits of the Service. Modern communication equipment, and fragmentation jackets have been procured and delivered to the Service to protect officers, and ensure effective policing. The Construction of Hangers at the Police Depot, Accra, for four (4) helicopters already procured for the Ghana Police Service, is ninety-nine percent (99%) complete. An air-wing unit has been established by the Ghana Police Service, and six (6) pilots have been trained and passed out to man the wing. A new K-9 Unit has been established with thirty (30) dogs and thirty (30) police officers. The Criminal Investigations Department has been equipped with a digital forensics laboratory, and, for the first time in the history of the Department, crime officers are given a monthly allowance to support their investigations. We are retooling the CID Forensic Science lab; the CID building has also now become disability friendly; and there is continuous training of CID officers.

Eighty-four (84) apartment units being constructed at Odorkor, in Accra, for the Immigration Service, are ninety-eight percent (98%) complete, and their completion will help reduce the accommodation challenges faced by officers and men of the Immigration Service.

Government is also constructing an eight hundred (800) inmate capacity remand prison at Nsawam, which is sixty percent (60%) complete. Its purpose is to reduce further overcrowding in prisons, as remand prisoners will now be kept separately from the convict population.

Mr. Speaker, these large investments in equipping our security services is inspired by the recognition that the peace and stability of our nation are critical for our development, especially as we live in a difficult and, sometimes, dangerous world.

Mr. Speaker, amongst the milestones of our international relations, I have been re-appointed Chairman of the Authority of ECOWAS for a second term. Under my leadership, and in collaboration with colleagues in the region, we have restored peace and political stability to Mali through a landmark transitional arrangement, which brought under control a period of bloodshed and uncertainty, and which has committed itself to a roadmap for a peaceful, democratic outcome from the transition.

In addition to strengthening co-operation and deepening bilateral and multilateral trade and economic ties with host countries, it is exciting to note that presidential visits overseas have yielded significant dividends. The re-establishment of the Economic, Trade and Investment Bureau of the Ministry has enabled the positioning of the Ministry as a strategic partner to help facilitate domestic and foreign investments in the country. Indeed, the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre has reported, today, a surge in foreign direct investment into our country of US\$2.1 billion in 2020, compared to \$1.1 billion the previous year, representing a more than ninety percent (90%) increase.

Mr. Speaker, the sum total of all of this is that, in spite of the ravages of the pandemic, our nation is still very much in rude health, and remains very attractive to investors. Yes, we are reeling from the effects of COVID-19, but I am confident that, with the progress of the vaccination programme, we will recover quickly, and work towards putting our nation back onto the path of progress and prosperity. We are building a more inclusive society, and, soon, things will work for all in Ghana, and then we will fulfill our true potential as the Black Star of Africa.

Crucial to achieving this vision is my uncompromising commitment to strengthening the institutions of our democracy, and managing public resources with integrity, fairness, openness and accountability.

Ours is not a government that shies away from public scrutiny. Far from it. That is not the NPP way. That is why, in 2001, under the outstanding leadership of the 2nd President of the 4th Republic, His Excellency John Agyekum Kufuor, and with me as his Attorney General, the Criminal Libel Law was repealed to protect and expand media freedoms in the country, and, in

2003, the Public Procurement Act was introduced to protect the public purse. That is why it was my government that took the bold steps in 2018 to bring about the establishment of an independent prosecutor, with the setting up of the Office of Special Prosecutor. That is why it was my government that, in 2019, enacted the Right to Information Act, which had been shirked by previous administrations, despite decades of agitation by journalists and civil society groups. That is why, within two years of being in office, we more than doubled funding for accountability institutions of state, like CHRAJ, EOCO, the Judiciary and the Auditor General. Government and the people expect those in charge of our governance institutions to do their work with professionalism and good faith. Indeed, the institutions of our nation, whether the Executive, Legislature or Judiciary, are working.

The Supreme Court, for example, last week determined the challenge to the validity of the 2020 presidential election, and affirmed its validity in a unanimous decision. The Court has spoken. It is time for all of us to move on, and, in a united manner, confront the problems of post-COVID Ghana.

Let me, in conclusion, Mr Speaker, recall the following statement I made in my very first Message on the State of the Nation on the Ghana I hoped to help construct, a statement which is at the heart of everything Government has sought to do since I took office in 2017.

“This Ghana will be defined by integrity, sovereignty, a common ethos, discipline, and shared values. It is one where we aim to be masters of our own destiny, where we mobilise our own resources for the future, breaking the shackles of the “Guggisberg” colonial economy and a mind-set of dependency, bailouts and extraction. It is an economy where we look past commodities to position ourselves in a global marketplace. It is a country where we focus on trade, not aid, a hand-up, not a hand-out. It is a country with a strong private sector. It is a country that recognises the connectedness of its people and economy to those of its neighbours.

This requires a forward-looking vision for our country, enabling us to confront our challenges and embrace our opportunities, not one fastened in the rear-view mirror. It is a Ghana beyond aid.”

Mr. Speaker, I remain wholly committed to fulfillment of this vision.

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

I thank you for your attention.