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Policy Brief

PANDEMIC RESILIENCE IN MARKETPLACES

GUIDELINES FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

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SUMMARY

Large market infrastructure in African cities are sites of dense interaction and exchange, which could facilitate the transmission of infectious diseases. However, markets also ensure the distribution of essential goods and are the source of livelihood for a broad demographic. Several non-economic functions of the marketplace make it clear that infection control measures can only be a small part of a viable pandemic prevention policy at those sites.

We present the findings of an international research collaboration that investigated efficient infection control measures with a view to developing pandemic resilience in marketplaces in African cities. From August 2021 until March 2022, we conducted qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with market workers and officials in three case study markets in Accra and Kumasi. The unprecedented interventions in response to the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic provided us with a unique opportunity to evaluate the dynamics of urban governance in these marketplaces.

Our findings underline the importance of direct and indirect measures to improve pandemic resilience in the marketplace. As a direct hygiene measure, the dependable provision of booths with handwashing facilities, hand sanitizers and nose masks can make a difference. Pandemic resilience in the marketplace could also be strengthened indirectly by resourcing the informal workforce with relief funds and timely information to deal with a rupture in trade and business activities.

A SNAPSHOT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS IN ACCRA AND KUMASI MARKETS

CHALLENGES

1. Inaccessible and limited pandemic support scheme
2. Lack of responsibility for the provision of sanitary equipment
3. Difficulty in enforcing social distancing

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Broaden access and scope of pandemic support scheme
2. Provide handwashing booths in marketplaces
3. Encourage hygiene markets rather than social distancing

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This policy brief is based on an international collaborative research project titled “Markets in Ghana and Infection Control after Covid-19: Conflicting Strategies of Public Health and the Perspective of Relational Urban Health” (German Research Foundation Covid-19 Focus Funding).

The research project was conducted in the 31st December Market, Makola Shopping Mall and Kejetia Market. Our respondents in these markets comprised traders, head porters, truck pushers, security officers and market managers.

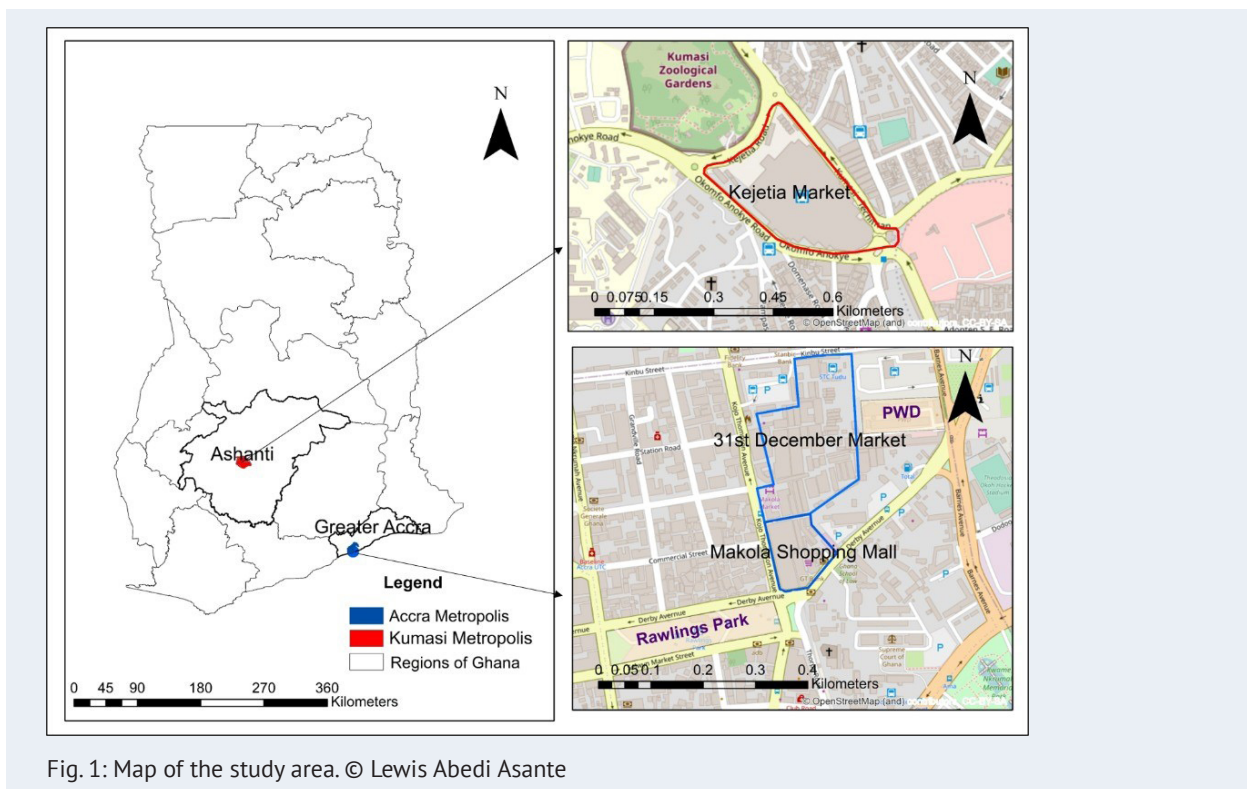


Fig. 1: Map of the study area. © Lewis Abedi Asante

From August 2021 to December 2021, through semi-structured qualitative interviews, we gathered the diverging experiences of our respondents with the infection control measures and the lock-down employed at those markets. In February and March 2022, we refined results and policy recommendations through several focus group discussions with different types of market workers. Our in-depth evaluation of the Covid-19-related infection-control measures at the three markets in Accra and Kumasi underlines the importance of state and non-state actors working together, via formal and/or informal avenues, to make collective decisions and to achieve future pandemic resilience in marketplaces. Long-term planning and visioning should be embedded

in the collaboration, otherwise the gains may be reversed.

In this Policy Brief we present selected findings of direct relevance for policy intervention in marketplaces. The **first part** details some of the **challenges** regarding the actual implementation of infection-control interventions that we found at the three case-study markets in Kumasi and Accra. A better understanding of the actual barriers can inform the formulation of future measures. The **second part** points out three **recommendations** to improve future pandemic resilience in the marketplace.



Fig. 2: Frontage of the Makola Shopping Mall. © Lewis Abedi Asante

SELECTED FINDINGS

CHALLENGES

I. Inaccessible and limited pandemic support scheme

In 2020, the Government of Ghana introduced the COVID-19 Alleviation Programme (CAP) to provide emergency relief funds for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to ameliorate the impact of the pandemic. Although the basic requirements of the CAP – Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN), any national ID card, passport picture and annual sales – were not unreasonably stringent, a considerable number of the informal market traders could not apply for the funds because they did not have a TIN. Some eligible market traders in Accra and Kumasi submitted applications for financial support under the CAP. Nevertheless, most of them did not receive any feedback on their applications nor did they secure funding to revive their businesses that had been adversely impacted by the pandemic. Moreover, there was no dedicated financial support under the CAP or related programmes to support vulnerable groups in marketplaces, such as head porters, truck pushers and shop assistants, who equally suffered the economic impact of the pandemic. Admittedly, government alone may not have the financial resources to provide relief funds for all identifiable groupings in the marketplace.

II. Lack of responsibility for the provision of handwashing facilities

Hand hygiene – through regular handwashing and/or with the use of hand sanitizer – is one of the most effective protocols of limiting the transmission of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. As hand hygiene became critical in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, market authorities in Accra and Kumasi improvised handwashing facilities with Veronica buckets – filled with water – together with liquid soaps and hand sanitizers. This sanitary equipment was mostly donated by individuals, traditional authorities and corporate institutions. When these donations ran out, there were no dedicated funds to re-supply sanitary equipment for use in the marketplaces. There was also no arrangement with market traders to provide sanitary equipment for general use in the market. Shop assistants, head-porters and truck pushers were not obliged to regularly fill Veronica buckets with water. Consequently, the handwashing protocol was, in most cases, relaxed after a few weeks of implementation in marketplaces in Accra and Kumasi.



Fig. 3: Brisk trading activities at the 31st December Market © Lewis Abedi Asante

III. Difficulty in enforcing the social distancing protocol

In order to enforce the social distancing requirement of one metre between traders and other market users, market authorities introduced the shift system in Accra and Kumasi to decongest the densely populated marketplaces. However, market authorities indicated that it was difficult, if not impossible, to enforce the social distancing

protocols in Ghanaian marketplaces, where trading activities thrive in interactive and congested open spaces. This brings to bear the need for policymakers to rethink the global guidelines for enforcement in marketplaces in Ghana and Africa more broadly. Space limitation in marketplaces, coupled with the interactive lifestyle of market people, calls for a set of approaches that reflect the local context in controlling infectious diseases in marketplaces in Ghana and Africa.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Broaden access and scope of pandemic support schemes

While the Ghana government deserves commendation for introducing the CAP, it should have taken advantage of the relief scheme to register ineligible informal traders for the TIN. This would have helped the government to expand the tax base and enabled traders to access relief funds under the CAP and during future pandemics. More importantly, authorities should ensure that

all applications submitted, particularly by micro and small businesses, are processed and funds are disbursed to them accordingly. Industries in Ghana, many of which supply products for sale in the marketplace, could do more through their corporate social responsibility either by supplying goods to traders at a reduced price or by supporting (loyal) traders with relief funds during pandemics. Trader associations could also support their members through their welfare schemes.



Fig. 4: The multi-storey Kejetia Market in the centre of Kumasi © Lewis Abedi Asante

II. Provide handwashing booths in marketplaces

Although infectious diseases are not new in Ghana and Africa more broadly, municipal and market authorities have not provided handwashing facilities in many markets across the country, not even in newly developed markets. It is suggested that market authorities invest in the construction of handwashing booths in existing and new markets to encourage and normalize regular washing and sanitizing of hands among market workers and users. Trader associations should also support with the provision of liquid soap, tissues and sanitizers to ensure a well-functioning handwashing booth. This will ensure the preparedness of market infrastructure for future outbreak of infectious disease.

III. Encourage hygienic markets rather than social distancing

While global measures of infection control are effective and applicable in many places, it is important for countries to select measures that fit their context. Instead of closing down market facilities or running a shift system to enforce social distancing in a marketplace where several informal workers are dependent on a daily wage for survival, market authorities should exert their energy towards providing hygienic conditions in the marketplace through improved sanitation and regular fumigation. Indeed, a handwashing protocol and regular fumigation are relatively easier to implement than social distancing protocols. These measures are less destructive to businesses and the economic life of the market players, especially the vulnerable groups. What is needed is the commitment of stakeholders to make resources available to sustain the supply of hygiene consumables.



Fig. 5: Food and clothing sections in the Kejetia Market in Kumasi © Lewis Abedi Asante

CONCLUSION

Our research has revealed the limitations in the governance of infection control measures in Ghanaian marketplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have provided relevant policy recommendations to ensure pandemic resilience in marketplaces and

to strengthen good governance for the benefit of market workers and the society at large. While the research was conducted in Ghana, it has implications for the governance of infection control measures in marketplaces in other West African countries.



Fig. 6: Truck pusher delivering tomatoes in the 31st December Market © Lewis Abedi Asante

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