



2022 GHANA URBAN FORUM

Labadi Beach Hotel, Accra | October 31 - November 01

URBAN JOURNALISM ACADEMY REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Ghana through the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Rural Development (MLGDRD) organised the Ghana Urban Forum (GUF) 2022 to offer practitioners, opinion leaders, civil society, and ordinary Ghanaians a say in the governance of their communities and urban spaces. The Ministry also sought to leverage the biennial Forum to engage stakeholders and receive inputs that would inform the National Urban Policy currently under review, and start a national discourse around sustainable urban growth, engaging the private sector in the delivery of urban services, and most importantly, defining urban areas beyond a population threshold.

The Urban Journalism Academy breakfast meeting held on 31st October 2022 at the Labadi Beach Hotel prior to the formal launch of GUF 2022, was an opportunity to engage and inform the media about the ministry's urban agenda and provide a statistical overview of Ghana's urban landscape per the 2021 Population and Housing Census carried out by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS). Approximately 40 participants took part in this hour-long meeting, including policy makers, representatives from print and electronic media, development partners, and academics. The meeting was chaired by Hon. Daniel Botwe, the sector minister, and facilitated by Dr. Esther Ofei-Aboagye.

Welcome Remarks

Hon. Botwe was pleased to welcome the diverse mix of participants and stated that Ghana is now an urban country, having increased its urban population share from 50.1% in 2010 to 56% after the 2021 Census. The breakfast meeting was to be a precursor to quarterly meetings with media representatives to chart the trajectory of progress made on consensus at the Forum, and collaboration with the Department of Planning at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) was sure to boost the ministry's efforts. He hoped that making rural areas liveable would also be part of upcoming discussions in order to slow the urban growth rate in coming years and urged the media practitioners present to engage fully with the meeting and Forum proceedings.

PRESENTATION

Prof. Samuel Kobbina Annim, Government Statistician, gave a presentation on "Ghana's Urban Population Growth and Trajectory: a call for sustainable and inclusive approaches to development." Prof. Annim noted that the 2012 National Urban Policy had 76 recommendations and 12 policy initiatives, but no statistical targets that could be used to track the nation's progress on the urban agenda. It is thus imperative to engage in data-informed, rigorous policy conceptualisation and assessment. Ghana needs to rethink concepts of urban areas and urban growth and reimagine urbanisation beyond physical expansion perspectives of changing frontiers and boundaries. A national consensus is needed on how cities, towns, suburbs, localities, settlements, and slums are conceptualised and measured. Sustainable and inclusive development must acknowledge all categories of vulnerability, with data disaggregated for different groups.

Ghana's urban population of 56.7% is largely driven by four (4) out of 16 regions, namely Greater Accra, Ashanti, Bono and Central Regions. are urbanised with reporting urban populations. Overall population in Ghana increased 4.6 times since 1960, while the urban

population has multiplied 11.3 times. Different definitions of “urban” result in different configurations:

1. Using the 5000-population definition resulted in 7 urbanised regions, 106 districts, and 1150 localities
2. Using the population plus essential services definition resulted in 4 urbanised regions, 95 districts, and 1054 localities.

The 2021 PHC also revealed that the youth bulge is more evident in the urban population than rural populations, but more analysis to fully understand the implications of youth not in education, employment, or training; vulnerable employment in urban areas; employment and security issues; multidimensional poverty in urban areas; food insecurity affecting 40% of urban dwellers; issues around inadequate housing, overcrowding, and open defecation. A painful, but necessary examination must be made of the politicisation of statistics and a decision made on the thresholds used for analysis and policy making. Disparities across regions must be recognised and addressed appropriately, especially in the Northeast and Savannah Regions, where waste disposal and high numbers of residential clusters without nearby essential service facilities present huge challenges.

The Statistical Service aims to make Ghana a statistical community by providing relevant leadership and building statistical literacy.

Emerging Issues from Plenary

1. The Census uses a de facto approach that counts what is present, thus seasonal urban settlements and demolished temporary housing structures would not be recorded if absent at the time of data gathering.
2. GSS has improved the timeframe within which it communicates census results and has emphasized media engagement to make data more digestible and accessible to ordinary people. The Service has also provided 10% of the census data to academics and researchers for deeper analysis.
3. Ghana must be able to harness the demographic dividends of the youth bulge and provide adequate education and training to this group.
4. Statistics can help urban managers address the climate crises and natural resource degradation by superimposing population data on available climate change, geospatial and other relevant data to make informed decisions.
5. Sustaining policy implementation through policy audits and integrating statistical targets in policies can minimize or eliminate policies that appear to peter out after brief bursts of enthusiasm.
6. Institutions such as religious bodies, traditional authorities and political parties need to be better informed about the hard data of population and development in Ghana.

CLOSING REMARKS

Hon. Botwe was of the opinion the breakfast meeting had illustrated the need for more media engagement to introduce new policies and progress made by the Ministry and its various departments and agencies. Prof. Annim's insightful presentation could not be digested in a single one-hour long session, thus the Ministry would organise another event by the end of November 2022 to give journalists and media practitioners the opportunity to delve deeper into some of the issues raised during the presentation. The Ministry would also engage with the House of Chiefs, religious bodies, political parties and other institutions to ensure they are also better informed about the data of population growth and development in Ghana. He thanked all participants for their presence, engagement and insights and looked ahead to a successful GUF 2022.

Albert Oppong-Ansah from the Ghana News Agency was pleased to have been part of the insightful event and hoped that the GSS and other government agencies would share more data and information with media personnel and outlets for onwards dissemination to the Ghana public, at home and abroad.