

## **ECONOMY**

1. I am glad to be able to report that the Economic Management Team, under the stellar leadership of the strong, brilliant economist, Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia, has risen to the challenge, and the hard work is beginning to show positive results.
2. We have reduced taxes, we are bringing down inflation and interest rates, economic growth is increasing, from the alarming 3.6% at December 2016, to 7.9% in our first year, and the indications are that it will be even better this year.
3. We have increased our international reserves, maintained relative exchange rate stability, reduced the debt to GDP ratio and the rate of debt accumulation, we have paid almost half of arrears inherited, and, crucially, we are current on obligations to statutory funds.
4. I am also pleased to report that the 3-year IMF-supported Extended Credit Facility Programme, begun in 2015, comes to an end this year. The relatively good macroeconomic performance in 2017 will strongly support our successful completion of the IMF programme.
5. We are determined to put in place measures to ensure irreversibility, and sustain macroeconomic stability, so that we will have no reason to seek again the assistance of that powerful global body.
6. We have restored teacher and nursing training allowances. We have doubled the capitation grant, and, to confound the sceptics and professional naysayers, we have implemented Free Senior High School education. It has enabled 90,000 more students gain access to Senior High School education, in 2017, than in 2016.
7. We have, nevertheless, been able to meet my promise made last year to the House, and reduced the fiscal deficit from 9.3%, to an estimated 5.6% of GDP.

8. The annual average rate of debt accumulation, which, in recent years, has been as high as 36%, has declined to 13.6%, as at September 2017. As a result, the public debt stock as a ratio of GDP is 68.3%, against the annual target of 71% for 2017, and end 2016 actual figure of 73.1%.
9. As a result of appropriate policy, and the normalisation of the power situation in the country, they have also engineered a spectacular revival of Ghanaian industry, from a growth rate of -0.5% in 2016 to 17.7% in 2017.
10. For the first time in a long while, our macroeconomic fundamentals are solid, and all the critical indices are pointing in the right direction.
11. The world is taking notice of Ghana's economic strides. Earlier, in January, the World Bank stated that Ghana's economy would probably grow by 8.3% this year, which would make it the fastest growing economy in the world.
12. Last week, Bloomberg described Ghana's Stock Exchange as the best-performing Stock Exchange in the world for January 2018. The report illustrated how the Ghana Stock Exchange Composite Index has gained 19% since the start of the year, in dollar terms, ahead of the Nigerian, Chinese and Brazilian Stock Markets. Ken Ofori-Atta, the Finance Minister, is proving to be a national asset.

## **PUBLIC PROCUREMENT SAVINGS**

13. In 2017, my first year in office, 394 Sole Sourcing Requests were made, out of which 223 (56.6%) were approved, and 171 (43.4%) were rejected. There were 346 Requests for Restricted Tenders, and 167 (48%) were approved, and 179 (52%) were rejected. The savings, made over the year as a result, amounted to some GH¢800 million.

## **PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY**

14. I believe it bears repeating here that, thanks to these boring figures, for the first time in a long while, we have been able to provide better budgetary support to the

constitutionally-mandated institutions that hold government accountable, i.e. Auditor-General, Parliament, Judiciary, Ministry of Justice, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the Economic and Organised Crime Office (EOCO), and the Police.

## **PENSIONS**

15. We have been able to transfer some GH¢3.1 billion of Tier 2 pension funds into the custodial accounts of the pension schemes of the labour unions, funds that have been outstanding for six years, and about which the labour unions had been loudly complaining.

## **DAILY MINIMUM WAGE**

16. As a result of engagements with organised labour, we ensured that the National Daily Minimum Wage was determined and approved before the laying of the 2018 budget by the Minister for Finance.

## **NO STRIKE ACTIONS**

17. There were no strike actions last year. We will continue the constructive dialogue with organised labour to find mutually satisfactory solutions to their concerns, in order to guarantee industrial peace.

## **JOB CREATION**

18. We have put in place the structures to help small and medium scale enterprises and budding entrepreneurs through the challenging start-up years. The availability of cheaper credit is good news for business in general, and means better prospects for jobs.
19. Government has established the Nation Builders Corps to employ 100,000 young persons, in 2018 alone, to assist in public sector service delivery in health, education, agriculture, sanitation and the revenue collection department of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA).
20. We have launched the Digital Marketing and Entrepreneurship Programme at the Accra Digital Centre. This programme, with ten regional training centres, has already recruited 3,000 young, unemployed people, to undergo a 3-month all-expenses-paid training. I am happy to announce that Ecobank Ghana Ltd has already offered to engage all 3,000 young people, after the training programme. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

## **\$1 MILLION PER CONSTITUENCY**

21. On the first working day of this year, I signed into law the Acts setting up the Development Authorities. Mr Speaker, the creation of these Authorities marks a fundamental change in how part of the development budget, i.e. the equivalent of \$1 million per constituency per year, is going to be spent in our country.
22. Local people will make the decision on what their greatest needs are, and direct the funds to those areas. Luckily, there is some consensus on what constitutes the basic infrastructure needs in all communities, and we expect a smooth take-off in the work of these authorities.

23. We expect, for example, the provision of water and toilets to feature prominently in the agenda of the Development Authorities, until those two items can be taken off the must-do list of all constituencies around the country. Sixty years after independence, the least we can, and should, do is to make sure that every Ghanaian has access to water and toilet facilities.

## **SANITATION**

24. The state of sanitation in our cities is wholly unacceptable. Our cities have been engulfed by filth. There is the urgent need for public authorities to find means of making our cities clean, and, in the case of Accra, fulfilling my pledge, one of the most ambitious of my presidency, to make it the cleanest city in Africa, by the end of my term.
25. Government is working with various private sector operators to tackle this major challenge, with strategies that are intended to effect a change in our attitudes towards waste generation, as well as to improve dramatically our methods of waste management. This will be complemented by the strict enforcement of sanitation rules and regulations.
26. Urgent attention will be given to clearing of rubbish all around the country. Apart from the systematic efforts being made to resolve the legacy of inherited debts in the sector, Government will spend, this year, an amount of GH¢200 million to address the vexed issue of sanitation.
27. I am confident that, by the time I come back next year, God willing, an appreciable improvement would have been made in the sanitation situation in the country.

## **ELECTION OF MMDCEs**

28. It is a firm manifesto commitment of the New Patriotic Party. My discussions with the nation's political leaders, including the former Presidents of the Republic, convince me that it is a step we must take. The constitutional impediment to this, in Article 55 of the Constitution, an entrenched clause, must, therefore, be removed.
29. To ensure the judicious use of the country's resources, I propose that the constitutional processes for a Referendum should be initiated in such a manner that the holding of the Referendum will take place at the same time as next year's District Assembly elections.
30. If successful, the outcome of the Referendum will mean that the current set of MMDCEs will be the last batch of Chief Executives to be appointed under the current system.

## **CREATION OF NEW REGIONS**

31. I am convinced that the creation of new regions alone would not open up our country. That would not, on its own, convince our young people that they do not have to come to Accra to make a living. We have to improve upon the transportation system so that no part of this country feels cut off, or can be deemed to be too far from the centre. That is one of the most effective ways to stop the unsustainable rush to Accra.

## **EASTERN CORRIDOR ROADS**

32. This network of roads has suffered from deliberate, unproductive propaganda. It is hard to believe that, at a time when cocoa prices were going down, contracts were awarded for three sections of the road to be funded by COCOBOD. It comes as no surprise that COCOBOD has issued directives to suspend work on all three sections, which come up to almost 100 kilometres.
33. We are determined to find the needed resources to complete the Eastern Corridor roads. As I have heard it said among the Ewes, that which is important, you cook in an important pot.

## **ROADS**

34. There is a crying need for work to be done on all our roads. The Western Corridor, the Central Corridor, trunk roads, feeder roads, town roads, around the country, all require urgent attention. We are determined to bring our road network to a befitting status, and this year we shall witness much more activity on the roads.
35. I must make mention of the work being done to restore the Accra-Tema motorway to its iconic status. With help from Japan, a loyal friend of Ghana, work is starting to build a three tier interchange at the motorway roundabout, and the plans for expansion into a six-lane motorway will be implemented from this year.

## **RAILWAYS**

36. Last year, I made a brave assertion in this House by stating that the Takoradi to Paga railway would be initiated in the year 2017. I am happy to report that we are making progress.
37. We are in the final stages of agreeing with a significant investor the terms of a BOT Agreement, from Takoradi to Kumasi, which will be presented to Parliament this session. There is already a contractor on site for the construction of the Kojokrom to Manso section of the Takoradi to Kumasi rail line.
38. The process has commenced to select a suitable partner for the construction of the Eastern Line, from Accra to Tema to Kumasi. We aim to break ground this year. The Central Spine, from Kumasi to Paga, is also receiving attention, and consultants have been engaged to advise government on the best model for the development of the line.
39. Ghana and Burkina Faso are in earnest discussions as to the realisation Tema-Ouagadougou railway line. There are fortnightly meetings, either in Accra or Ouagadougou, and we are confident that deliberations will conclude, and actual construction will commence by the third quarter of this year.

## **FORMALISATION OF ECONOMY**

40. The start of the digital address system, the introduction of paperless transactions at our ports, the rapid and continuing spread of broadband services are all helping to formalise and modernise our economy.
41. Subsequent to Cabinet approval, the framework agreement between Ghana and the Republic of Mauritius, for an initial investment in the development of a technology park in Dawa, in the Greater Accra Region, has been ratified by Parliament for implementation to begin. Unfortunately, and predictably, a whole new set of dangers of cyber insecurity and fraud have emerged with these modern tools.

42. We are working to strengthen cyber security to build confidence, and protect the use of electronic communications in national development, and ensure that our young technologically savvy people would keep Ghana firmly in the exciting IT economy and its many opportunities.

## **EDUCATION**

43. We need an educated and skilled workforce to be able to operate the modern economy we are creating. The Free SHS is a start towards this goal. It is a policy that has come to stay.
44. We are reforming the schools' curricula to deal with the weaknesses in our education system, and lay greater emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (S.T.E.M), reading, history, and technical and vocational skills. A look at the national budget would tell you we are spending a lot of money on education.
45. It is, in my view, also important that the reform of our schools' curricula should instil in our youth respect for the traditional values of discipline, fellow-feeling, hard work, honesty, integrity, and patriotism, without which no healthy, social development can occur.

## **HEALTH**

46. We dare not compromise on the health of the population. We have cleared a substantial part of the debts and arrears that were choking the National Health Insurance Scheme. This has led to the revival of the NHIS, and the renewal of respect for the NHIS card. The health needs of our people are being better served.

## **PERSONS LIVING WITH DISABILITY**

47. We promised, last year, to increase the share of the District Assemblies Common Fund to persons with disabilities from 2 percent to 3 percent, and we delivered.
48. Effective July last year, the policy of ensuring that 50% of the persons who manage the country's toll booths are Persons with Disabilities started. Nonetheless, we are determined to address the other concerns of Persons living With Disabilities.

## **AGRICULTURE**

49. This year, the One-Village-One-Dam project starts full operation. It is a simple, low-tech project, but these dams will make a big difference to all our lives and the livelihoods of our farmers.
50. Already, many of the little dams that had been abandoned, have been rehabilitated and brought back into use. A deliberate and specific intervention to help farmers is paying off.
51. Our farmers can see that the government is putting resources to back up the usual words. The 50% subsidy on fertilizer, and the increase in the provision of extension services, are making a great difference to the performance of Ghanaian agriculture.
52. Under the Planting for Food and Jobs scheme, we are witnessing a fresh interest in farming. The success of the first year has encouraged us to increase the scope of the programme, and, this year, some half a million farmers would be signed on, up from the figure of two hundred thousand (200,000).

## **FISHERIES**

53. This past year, we made sure that the close season was respected not just by the industrial tuna vessels, but, also, by the trawlers. We will adhere to this policy for the foreseeable future, which should help us replenish our depleted stocks.
54. More effective measures are being taken against illegal, unreported and unregulated methods of fishing.
55. We have also instituted measures to avert premix diversions, and strict auditing of landing beaches are in place. I can state that, since November, there has been no report of premix diversion, a marked improvement from the past.
56. We have identified 100 dams in five regions across the country – Upper East, Upper West, Northern, Volta and Western – and stocked them with fingerlings. This is the start of big things to come.

## **1-DISTRICT-1-FACTORY**

57. Agriculture forms the backbone of our flagship 1-District-1-Factory programme. The majority of the proposals that have been evaluated and accepted for support under the scheme are agro-based. It is food processing after all that has been the take-off point for industrialization in most developed societies. It also fits in with our determination to open up our country, and make jobs and facilities available in all parts of the country.

## **GALAMSEY**

58. We are waging a valiant struggle to bring the galamsey phenomenon under control. We have had to ban small-scale mining for the past **nine months**. We acknowledge that the banning of small-scale mining cannot be the long-term solution in a country such as ours, which is blessed with so many minerals; but, as the saying goes, desperate situations call for desperate remedies.
59. We cannot look on, as our very existence as a country is put in jeopardy and our water bodies, forests and land mass are destroyed.

60. Even with the ban, it has been a never-ending battle with the galamseyers, and I am sure the House will want to join me, in paying tribute to the members of our forces in the Operation Vanguard that are protecting our environment. They are Ghanaian patriots of the first order.
61. We have started various schemes to find sustainable alternative sources of income for the galamsayers. Nothing will ever equate the attraction of the search for gold or diamond, and maybe the drama of actually finding some, but this generation of Ghanaians dare not preside over the destruction of our lands.
62. The state of our rivers and forests remains a great cause for worry, and it is our sacred duty to protect them. I hope I can count on the total support of the House to help nurse our degraded lands and rivers back to health.
63. I am equally grateful to those chiefs who have supported the fight against galamsey. My government will continue to reach out to our traditional rulers, so that, together, we can address pressing issues facing our nation and its peace and stability.

## **ENERGY**

64. A lot of hard work has gone into easing the intolerable debt situation that threatened to paralyse the energy industry. We still have problems with the cost of power, and we are working to put Ghana at a competitive advantage.
65. We intend to find private sector operators to buy into the state owned thermal plants, and inject the capital needed to bring power tariffs down for both domestic and commercial consumers.
66. I am sure that the House shares my relief that DUMSOR is no longer part of our everyday lexicon. Long may it stay so.

## **SECURITY**

67. The police, the prosecution services and the judiciary owe it to all of us to make us feel and be safe. I do not need to repeat that crime wears no political colours, and I am certain that message has gone down to all. The law enforcement agencies will crack down very hard on all those who would disturb the peace of our nation.
68. We will give the Police the resources they need to do their job. An initial amount of GH¢800 million is being made available to procure and supply, within the next six months, critical, modern policing equipment and gadgets to enhance the capacity of the police to enforce law and order, including one thousand (1,000) vehicles, motorbikes, and ammunition. Already, the successful renegotiation of existing contracts has enabled us purchase, forthwith, 100 vehicles for the Police.
69. In the medium to long-term, we will purchase drones and helicopters to assist the police combat violent and environmental crime. The crime laboratories will be modernised, and properly equipped to provide the necessary support. The police intelligence unit will also be strengthened. The perennial problems associated with police accommodation will be tackled, and a compensation package introduced to cover officers in their line of duty.
70. We shall not allow miscreants of any sort to terrorize our population; and I promise that there will be no hiding place for criminals. I am certain that the interventions we are introducing will boost morale in the service, and I urge the House and all citizens to support the police to deliver the service we deserve.

## **CATTLE RANCHING**

71. We are rehabilitating the kraals or ranches that were abandoned after the Kufuor-led NPP government left office in 2009. They will become operational shortly to provide secure, grazing places for cattle. At the same time, efforts are also being intensified to find an ECOWAS-wide solution to an issue, which goes beyond the boundaries of our country, and is affecting the entire West African region.

## **ARMED FORCES**

72. We are beginning to address the problems of our Armed Forces. I am happy to report that work has started on the Barracks Regeneration Programme. The acute accommodation problems that face our security agencies must be, and are now being tackled
73. It is vital that all of us give maximum support to the noble and brave men and women of our security services, involved in Operation Calm Life, Operation Vanguard, and Operation Cow Leg, aimed at guaranteeing the safety of our people, the integrity of our environment, and the peace of our nation.

## **HOUSING**

74. We have begun the difficult process of making housing affordable for Ghanaians. Government, last year, abolished the 5% VAT/NHIL on real estate sales, and continues to create a conducive environment that is reducing interest rates on mortgage loans.
75. Discussions are also on-going between the Pensions Regulatory Authority and the Banks to underwrite an effective mortgage system. This will facilitate access to housing for the ordinary budget. Government will also continue to create the enabling environment that will promote private sector investment in cheaper housing for the people.

## **OFFICE OF SPECIAL PROSECUTOR**

76. The Special Prosecutor Act is an essential step in our overall strategy to combat corruption. I look forward to Parliament dealing speedily with the process of confirmation of the nominee, a person of proven professional ability, with an established record of integrity and independence of character. There is enough goodwill in the country to propel the first occupant of this position into setting a good and firm foundation for the position of the Special Prosecutor.

## **AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT**

77. The Auditor-General's Report on MDA liabilities as at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2016, makes truly alarming reading. I make reference to the fact that a staggering amount of GH¢5.4 billion has been identified as constituting fictitious claims.
78. Every day, we hear reports on our radios and televisions of dilapidated classrooms, and children who sit on floors at school. Just think of the difference that GH¢5.4 billion would

make to the nation's finances. That would certainly be enough to build and furnish hundreds of classrooms, and construct the Eastern Corridor roads.

79. Every citizen is affected by acts of corruption, and we should all work to tackle them. Government has an obligation to treat the Auditor-General's Report seriously, and to work to retrieve illegally acquired monies from those who would impoverish us all.
80. The role of OccupyGhana in increasing awareness of the importance of the work of the Auditor-General should be recognised.

## **ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION**

81. The Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic enjoins each one of us to uphold the principles of Freedom and Justice, Probity and Accountability. In furtherance of these principles, I have made it publicly known that anyone, who has information about acts of corruption by any of my appointees, should bring it forward, and should be prepared to back it up with evidence, for I will have it investigated.
82. So far, every single alleged act of corruption levelled against any of my appointees has been investigated by independent bodies, and, in some cases, by Parliament itself, and the findings made public.
83. It is important to note that, in my first year of office, despite having a clear parliamentary majority, two separate bi-partisan probes in Parliament have been established to inquire into allegations of corruption, as against zero in recent years, notwithstanding the persistent calls by the then Minority over several allegations.
84. With the greatest of respect, and in the words of the articulate Minister for Information, Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, no matter how long a log stays under water, it will never become a crocodile.

## **ONSHORE OIL DISCOVERY**

85. Last year, I directed our state-owned oil development company, the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC), to pay particular attention to this potential. It is good to hear that that directive appears to be yielding dividends, as GNPC, from the results of its pilot survey in the Voltaian basin, has established the presence of a working petroleum system. I hope that, eventually, there will be something big for us to cheer about.

## **SPORTS**

86. This year, we will continue the process of passing the Legislative Instruments of the National Youth and Sports Act, pursue the enactment of the draft National Sports College Bill, and create a Sports Fund to improve sports development in the country. Government also remains committed to the development of football in the country.
87. We have begun the rehabilitation of the Accra Sports Stadium, aka Ohene Djan Sports Stadium, and in partnership with the Inner City and Zongo Development Ministry and the Ghana Football Association, we are constructing a number of football pitches in the Zongos and across the rest of the country, to aid in the revival of colts football, which has been responsible for the production of talents like Abedi Pele and Tony Yeboah.

## **FOREIGN POLICY**

88. I have been active in keeping up and promoting the historical role of Ghana within these communities. I have travelled around our neighbourhood and beyond, and I am glad to report that the Black Star is shining. It is the reason for the unprecedented numbers of world leaders – African, Asian and European – who have thronged our shores this past year, and enjoyed our renowned Ghanaian hospitality.

## **CREATIVE ARTS**

89. I am very much aware that we have to create the space and atmosphere for our artists and creatives, and we shall support them. The foundations for the passing of the Creative Arts Bill have been laid, and, ultimately, processes for the setting up of the Creative Arts Fund will be completed to enable our creative artists to access funds to boost their art.

## **TOURISM**

90. We are building a Ghana, where tourists will feel at home, and we shall feel proud when they say “I was in Ghana.” On December 15, 2017, I joined the chiefs and people of Osu and Gbese to cut the sod for the 241-acre Accra Marine Drive Project. This project, during construction and upon completion, will generate thousands of jobs for the local community and across the value chain, and position Ghana as a key tourism destination.

## **GENDER**

91. I promised last year we would endeavour to pass into law the Affirmative Action Bill. This did not happen. My commitment to the promotion of the advancement of women is without question. Women constitute the majority of the population, and our success or otherwise as a nation will be measured by how well women are doing. The Bill will definitely come to Parliament this session.

92. I have thrown my full weight behind the HeforShe campaign, and the Gender and Development Initiative for Africa (GADIA), an initiative stemming from my position as the African Union’s Gender Champion. I urge all Ghanaian males to join together in giving Ghanaian females the dignity they deserve.

93. I further entreat all of us, male and female, to support the implementation of the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which have been incorporated into Government’s Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies, which was laid before this House on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2017, and the execution of which will ensure that no Ghanaian is left behind.

94. Our nation is on the right path. We will build a Ghana Beyond Aid.