

# Impact of Covid-19 On Performing Arts Groups In Ghana: The Story Of Local Brass Band Musicians In Cape Coast

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## Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent restrictions on public gatherings in Ghana suggests the temporary closure of many of the country's music venues and the termination of live performances in the presence of audiences. There are obvious economic ramifications to such a situation, particularly in less mainstream genres like local brass bands, in which artists depend much more on weekly engagements for their income. Beyond the economic impact, the very removal of regular live performances has adverse impacts on both the musicians and the audience's musical experience is situated in the broader context of cultural experience. Despite the relevance of research such as this, there is no study on the current subject matter in Ghana. Using a phenomenology design, the present study investigated the impact of COVID-19 on local brass band musicians in the Cape Coast metropolis of Ghana. Results revealed that COVID-19 had taken a deep toll on the musicians since the onset of the pandemic. The experiential and in-person nature of the brass band musicians' job has made it especially difficult to be sustained as many venues have remained closed or on limited operations due to restrictions on public gatherings. In the face of these challenges, it is unfortunate that the local musicians are not able to adopt innovative ways musically in their effort to survive until conditions more conducive to in-person engagement return. It is recommended that a 'community music center' be established at the Center for National Culture (CNC) to oversee the affairs of community musicians in general and local brass band musicians in particular.*

**Keywords:** *COVID-19 pandemic, Impact, Performing Arts groups, local brass band, musicians, live musical performance*

## Introduction

The world is in turmoil as it responds to the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic, which originated towards the end of 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei, China. The first case was reported to the office of the World Health Organization (WHO) on the 31st of December 2019 and later declared a

pandemic on March 11, 2020. It has since spread to more than 220 countries and territories, with reported cases of more than 158,992,163 worldwide as of May 10, 2021, according to Worldometers (2021). Age and coexisting conditions such as diabetes or heart disease were independent predictors of adverse outcomes for coronaviruses (Egunjobi, 2020).

This novel coronavirus, known as 2019-n CoV or COVID-19, pneumonia of unknown cause, has caused a global pandemic that has paralyzed the global economy and hindered productive lives (Mahler et al., 2020b). Although the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic is known, the actual cause or origin of COVID 19 is not known as there are conflicting theories, information, and misinformation about the state of COVID-19 reported in every continent of the world. At the initial stages, it was said that it was from bats sold at the Wuhan market in China, a claim which Botao Xiao, as reported by Geraghty (2020), claimed from a research finding was extremely unlikely. This was because these bats were not sold at the market and were unlikely to be deliberately ingested.

There was also a claim that COVID-19 was accidentally leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and the characteristics of the novel coronavirus were claimed to show that it was artificially engineered (Egunjobi, 2020; Gallagher, 2020). This was supported by speculation by many people that China could have unleashed the coronavirus due to some kind of horrible mistake. Pompeo also added, "Remember, China has a history of infecting the world, and they have a history of running substandard laboratories" (as cited in Weissert, 2020, p. 13). Eberstadt and Blumenthal (2020), reporting on New York Post, stated that China's Communist authorities have concealed, misled, and lied about the origins of the epidemic and the death toll of the virus in China, and the World Health Organization has allegedly acted as Beijing's handmaid.

Irrespective of what the theories or explanations are, the fact remains that COVID-19 is real and serious. Arts and culture have experienced significant economic setbacks from COVID-19 (Guibert & Hyde, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).



Across the spectrum of artistic and creative endeavors, restrictions on gatherings, changes in consumer behavior (voluntary or otherwise), and severe unemployment have taken a devastating toll on the sector. The full scope and scale of the impact are hard to discern, in part because of the size and diversity of the industries and occupations that constitute arts and culture in Ghana. Hence, the major thrust of this work is to bring to the fore some of the ordeals that local brass musicians, in particular, had to go through as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a paucity of literature on how the pandemic is affecting the lives of community musicians and performance groups particularly. Of great concern is that the effect of COVID-19 on local musicians seems not to be an area of interest for scholars and researchers in Ghana. Most of the available literature on the impact of COVID-19 in Ghana is largely focused on education (Demuyakor, 2020; Owusu & Frimpong-Manso, 2020; Upoalkpajor & Upoalkpajor, 2020), with nothing at all on local performance groups. It is noteworthy to stress that like existing studies across the length and breadth of the globe, the available literature on the pandemic in Ghana has shown that lack of cooperation with COVID-19 protocols is more related to poverty rather than a disinclination to engage in behavioral change (Durizzo et al., 2020). Such findings reinforce further investigations to advance our knowledge and understanding of how COVID-19 is adversely changing the lives of local brass band musicians in Cape Coast, a city regarded as the treasurer-bed of brass band music in Ghana.

The necessity for a study such as this is further strengthened by the fact that there is a great possibility that the local musicians, who have been asked to stay home for more than a year now, are by now in a precarious financial situation. As indicated by Kazeem (2020), with professions or business ventures that require daily activity to earn income, a long break from work can easily translate to financial peril. By staying home for so long, most local brass band musicians who depend solely on public performances for their livelihood either had no access to affordable food or had completely run out of money to buy food. There were concerns that if the government did not intervene quickly, hunger would kill more vulnerable people in Ghana than the COVID-19 disease. In response to these concerns, the Ghana government and some private organizations distributed food packages and hot meals to needy households and communities in the restricted areas of the partial lockdown in Accra and Kumasi for about 22 days. So one may wonder, what has been the fate of local musicians in other cities of the country who have been out of business for over a year now without government intervention? An investigation into the impact of COVID-19 on local community musicians' living standards will draw relevant lessons for policy actions that will help promote Ghana's poverty alleviation agenda.

Cape Coast, the former capital of the Gold Coast presently Ghana, popularly known for the fortes and castles, is a

place for many musical activities. In this popular historical town, weekdays and weekends witness several music performances; traditional drumming and dancing during weddings, funerals, birthday parties and not forgetting religious and live band performances at popular drinking spots, both in town and at the beach, that attract hundreds of patrons. In the wake of the spread of the novel COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, Ghana confirmed its first case on 12<sup>th</sup> March the same year. As an attempt to contain the spread of the virus, the President of the nation, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, announced a lockdown of Accra and Kumasi metropolitan areas and placed an embargo on all public gatherings across the country. The restrictions on Accra and Kumasi were later lifted after 22 days. However, as the number of confirmed cases increased, the restrictions on mass gatherings remained in place and were eased a little around November 2020 for political campaigns, as 2020 was an election year. As of the time of writing this paper in March 2021, live musical performances in public places are yet to open.

Though the actions of the president concerning the ban on public gathering and live music-making were in good faith—to curb further spread of the virus—it nonetheless had an adverse effect on the finances and livelihoods of many musicians and other performing artists whose economic welfare depends solely on live public performances. Though the impact of the coronavirus on musicians can be felt all over the world, the Ghanaian situation seems severe since most brass band musicians depend solely on engagements for their survival. They do not have salaries or social security. Thereby making their case very difficult.

Although the COVID-19 has impacted the entire arts sector, nowhere has the effect been more direct, deep, and immediate than on the local brass band musicians. There are some inherent structural elements to occupations in music that make many local musicians particularly vulnerable to the underlying changes in the economy caused by COVID-19. Even if relief items are coming in from the government and/or donor agencies, local brass band musicians are often excluded since they are often not registered members of the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA). It is a fact that apart from the few lucky brass band musicians who had the opportunity to join the security or the armed forces bands, most brass band musicians are likely to be self-employed. They also are often employed part-time in multiple menial jobs. Long before COVID-19, independent town/community brass band musicians in Ghana often struggle to secure long-term or consistent income (Dordzro, 2020), epitomizing the “gig economy” and sometimes personifying the “starving artist” axiom (Harvard Business Review, 2020). The chronic lack of access to affordable, employer-subsidized healthcare for local musicians has created an even greater vulnerability and financial burden during the pandemic.

To add to their woes, festivals, funerals, drinking spots, nightclubs, pubs, restaurants, and the hospitality industry—a regular source of income for the musicians—

have also been disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19, further exacerbating near- and long-term prospects for recovery. There is, therefore, the need for a study such as this to identify the challenges, share experiences and contribute solutions to the unfortunate situation into the future. Looking at the peculiarity of the situation of brass band musicians in the cape coast metropolis, this paper provides an initial overview of the impact of the coronavirus on performing artists, with a particular focus on local brass band musicians. It also explores some of the adaptations and resources that are helping these musicians and instrument owners to survive financially during the pandemic.

### Method

The phenomenology design was used for this study. My aim is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework but remaining true to the facts. According to Welman and Kruger (1999, p. 189), “the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved”. Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology provided a point of departure for Alfred Schultz, who turned it “toward the ways in which ordinary members of society attend to their everyday lives” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, pp. 488-489). A researcher applying phenomenology is concerned with the lived experiences of the people (Greene, 1997; Holloway, 1997; Kruger, 1988; Kvale, 1996; Maypole & Davies, 2001; Robinson & Reed, 1998) involved, or who was involved, with the issue that is being researched. Therefore, the rationale for selecting a descriptive phenomenology design was to enable me to describe the lived experiences of local brass band musicians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, that it helps to understand and explain the experiences of research participants as they give an account of their experiences (Tolentino, 2016; Wertz et al., 2011). The use of ten participants was based on recommendations from previous research (Dukes, 1984; Ray, 1994; Kuzel, 1999; Morse, 2000).

According to Hycner (1999, p. 156), “the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants.” I chose purposive sampling, considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the primary participants. I selected the sample based on my judgment and the purpose of the research (Babbie, 1995; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Schwandt, 1997), looking for those who “have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched” (Kruger, 1988 p. 150). I made contact with brass band practitioners based on the rapport I have already established with them in previous research. Telephone and in-person interviews were arranged with the musicians. These interviewees are the primary unit of analysis (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000), with their ‘informed consent (Bailey, 1996, p. 11; Arksey & Knight, 1999).

In order to trace additional participants or informants, I used snowball sampling. Snowballing is a method of

expanding the sample by asking informants or participants to recommend others for interviewing (Babbie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Bailey (1996), Holloway (1997), and Greig and Taylor (1999) call those through whom entry is gained gatekeepers and those persons who volunteer assistance key actors or key insiders. I requested the purposive sample interviewees to give, at their discretion, the names and contact details of persons who matter when it comes to local brass band music in Cape Coast. Regardless of these strategies, the most accommodating gatekeepers did, as Neuman (2000) cautions, to some extent influence the course of the research unfolding by, for example, steering me to other brass band practitioners.

Bailey (1996) further observes that deception might prevent insights, whereas honesty coupled with confidentiality reduces suspicion and promotes sincere responses. The informed consent agreement form was explained to subjects at the beginning of each interview. Most potential subjects gave verbal consent while others signed the agreement, and those who did not were not pressured to participate in the study. All who ended up being participants were in agreement with its content. Because Boyd (2001) regards two to 10 participants or research subjects as sufficient to reach saturation and Creswell (1998, pp. 65 & 113) recommends “long interviews with up to 10 people” for a phenomenological study, a sample size of ten brass band practitioners, eight brass band musicians who depend solely on performances for their livelihoods and two instrument owners were selected. Data collection spanned from 12 May 2020 to March 2021.

The purpose of collecting data from two different kinds of informants (musicians and band owners) is a form of data triangulation and validation (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bloor, 1997; Holloway, 1997). Data-collection interviews continued until the topic was exhausted or saturated, that is, when interviewees (subjects or informants) introduced no new perspectives on the topic. The specific phenomenon that I focused on is the impact of COVID-19 on brass band musicians in the Cape Coast metropolis. The research questions that guided the study were: What is the knowledge of the musicians about COVID-19? How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact brass band practitioners’ professions? How are the musicians coping with the situation? Despite coming up with these questions, I never forgot Kensing’s (2000) caution that the researcher must allow the data to emerge: “Doing phenomenology” means capturing “rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings” (p. 104).

I conducted semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews with both musicians and instrument owners. My questions were “directed to the participants, experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about the theme in question” (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196). I focused on what has become a daily routine with the participants and got participants who cannot express themselves fluently in English to describe their lived experiences in the local

language (Fante). Data storage included audio recordings and field notes. As soon as possible after each interview, I listened to the recording and made notes. I transcribed keywords, phrases, and statements in order to allow the voices of research participants/informants to be heard. I employed a translator, who also doubled as a research assistant, to transcribe and translate all interviews conducted in the local language into English. Colaizzi’s process for phenomenological data analysis was adopted for this study (Morrow, Rodriguez & King, 2015). Pseudonyms were given to individual participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The findings derived from the analyzed data were presented in themes.

The researcher, a formal student of psychology, employed some simple strategies and sentence stems to help engage the respondents in supportive conversations about their stress reactions during the Covid-19 outbreak. Dealing with a vulnerable group such as this demanded I identify potential ways to show empathy and care. Therefore, I did not visit the musicians empty-handed. I cannot say that the gifts I gave them before interview sessions can be described as perfect support. However, I know that often persons in such situations just need to know that someone cares enough to check on them and to listen if they are able to talk about what they are grappling with. Even a short conversation can be helpful in conveying that the person is not alone and that someone cares about them. As ways to encourage discussions, I found an uninterrupted time and place to conduct all in-person interviews; I showed interest, attention, and care; I let them talk without interruption as much as is possible; I tried not to be judgmental; I tried to make them feel and know that they are not alone; I reminded them of their strengths and values; and also offered to talk any time they need me.

**Findings and discussion**

The respondents expressed their knowledge about COVID-19 and how their lives and communities were impacted. I received responses from 10 brass band practitioners as of 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021. The respondents were all males with ages ranging from 24-58. The highest academic qualification of respondents was a senior high school certificate. The findings were categorized under the following themes: attitude/perception/knowledge toward the virus and lockdown protocols/policies, adjustments to community music-making, the effect of COVID 19 on festivals, and support for others and from others.

***Attitude/perception/knowledge toward the virus and lockdown protocols/policies***

All respondents believed that the virus was not real and that it is just an attempt on the part of the Whiteman to continue its domination over the world. Most of the respondents opined that COVID 19 is “a biological weapon designed by the western world to eliminate the blacks from the face of the earth”. Despite holding these divergent views about the reality of the virus, all respondents reported that they showed a positive attitude to government instruction to stay home as most are not in the essential services which require them to go out to

work. Regarding the knowledge about the mode of transmission, all participants indicated that it is transmitted by inhaling droplets in the air and touching contaminated surfaces. Seven out of the ten participants accurately associated coughing, difficulty in breathing, sneezing, fever, and loss of sense of taste as symptoms of COVID 19. At the same time, the remaining three participants claimed to have no idea about the major symptoms of the disease. Consuming hard liquor, garlic, ginger, herbal mixtures, taking enough soup, Regular hand washing, social/physical distancing, and staying at home were some of the preventive measures the participants espoused against COVID 19. See table 1.

**Table 1: COVID 19 Preventive measures**

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Consuming hard liquor (akpeteshie, gin, wisckyetc)
Consuming garlic, ginger, pepper, and herbal mixtures
Eating well and taking in enough hot soup
Handwashing with soap under running water
The hot Ghanaian weather
Social/Physical distancing
Staying at home
The use of hand sanitizer

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The optimistic attitude of the musicians revealed in this study is worth mentioning. The results presented above show that most of the respondents generally had positive attitudes recognizing the importance of social distancing and following the COVID-19 protocols. However, some local musicians got infected, and some even passed away, perhaps due to the severe economic hardship they are faced since the inception of the pandemic. It is difficult to blame some of these musicians for not following all protocols to the latter since they are a group who need to earn their daily wages at all costs since they were not included in the government’s relief agenda. This point is further buttressed by Kojo when he complained bitterly about the state of affairs in the country: “For me, I don’t believe that the government is doing enough. Look at people like us. How can I stay home when I am hungry? We are hungry. I can’t see anything that they are doing to curb the spread of the virus”. These statements validate the myriad of concerns from the COVID-19 literature that the virus is taking its highest toll on economic activities (Mahler et al., 2020b). Evidence from Austrian et al. (2020); Bukari et al. (2021), and Malik et al. (2020) so far suggests that COVID-19 has significantly increased poverty which is manifested through a decrease in incomes, loss of jobs, lack of access to basic health services and decrease in per capita household consumption of food and non-food goods. To make matters worse, market trading in Ghana is heavily reliant on imported goods from neighboring countries like TBurkina Faso and Nigeria as well as further away countries like China, India, and Vietnam. Amidst the shortage in supplies caused by

the global surge of COVID-19 cases, there were sharp increases in food prices in urban markets across the country (Asante et al., 2020).

From all indications, the pandemic may be described as a threat to the developmental agenda of the nation as it is “entrenching poverty thereby deteriorating standards of living” in most towns and villages in Ghana, including Cape Coast (Bukari et al., 2021, p. 3). Already, the prediction is that more Ghanaians will become extremely poor as the number of people living in “extreme poverty increased from 2.2 million in 2013 to 2.4 million in 2017” based on the 2010 Population and Housing Census (PHC) projections (GSS, 2018, p. 5). Now with COVID-19, the quest for ending poverty in all its forms, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, has become even more enormous than ever.

Apart from the inability of the government to include local musicians in the sharing of relief items, some of the distrusts in the management of the pandemic was based on the non-existence of a cure, difficulty in acquiring vaccines, low testing capability, and lack of strict enforcement of the compulsory lockdown. More so, in many African countries, reports of porous borders, congested cities, increased hunger and poverty, poor health literacy, and expensive face masks and hand sanitizers have all been obstacles against control measures (Lucero-Prisno, Adebisi & Lin, 2020).

#### ***Adjustment to community music-making***

The ban on public gathering and music-making had and continue to have grave repercussions for brass band musicians, especially those who depend solely on live performances daily/weekly engagements for their daily bread. Social gatherings such as funerals, weddings, sports events, street carnivals, parties, and all big private events alike rely heavily on live local brass band music performances for their sustenance and vitality. This ecosystem is vital to the sector and now faces bankruptcy due to a sudden and massive loss of revenue opportunities as a result of COVID 19. One of the two band owners included in this research has this to say:

The whole world is at a standstill because of the so-called COVID-19. In my almost 60 years of living on this earth, I have never come across anything like this. Now the president of the country has asked all musicians to stay home. He has placed an embargo on funerals, weddings, and all public musical performances. We are all suffering o, my brother! But I feel more for my boys (referring to the musicians), especially for Ekor and Ansah, who don't have any other employment apart from playing in the band(Interview, Band owner 1).

The quotation above supports the fact that the local music scene in Ghana is characterized by high shares of non-standard forms of work. The use of non-standard contracts is a common feature of local brass band music jobs. To a large extent, most musicians in the informal sectors are

self-employed. More than 55.1 percent of the Ghanaian workforce is employed in the informal sector (Ghana Statistical Service, 2016). The sector is characterized by underemployment, bad working conditions, uncertain work relationships, and low wages. The majority of people are living with high-income insecurity.

Creative professions, for that matter, brass band musician jobs, often come in precarious forms of employment, and the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted how such jobs are often overlooked in terms of public support. Normally, to make a living throughout the year, a local brass band musician will have several engagements/programs as a self-employed or a freelancer, sometimes combined with a part-time salaried job, or the combination of a main salaried job (often in a non-creative sector) with a second artistic job. A conversation with Victor, a lead trumpeter in Adom brass band, gives credence to the foregoing statement:

In fact, this coronavirus has brought lots of suffering to us brass band musicians. As if we are not suffering already, it has actually compounded our woes. This is my only source of income. Presently (showing me his empty pocket), I have nothing on me. Money to eat is a problem. I have really missed my performance days. One of us was beaten the other time mercilessly for stealing. All I want is just to start playing again. I am pleading with the president of the nation to lift the embargo so we can start earning small monies. Though I don't earn enough even when playing, it is far better than my current situation. I have to roam from one construction site to another before I can get some small money to eat(Victor interview 20th February 2021).

It can be deduced from the quote above that the musicians included in the current study did not have active or permanent employment. This finding has far-reaching consequences than one can imagine. This implies that these musicians lack access to benefits and protections available to employees, such as affordable health insurance, unemployment insurance, and other benefits that their counterparts who are salaried workers enjoy. Can this finding be correlated with the rise in crime rates in the Cape Coast metropolis? Violent crime is on the rise, including armed robberies in residential areas. Most cases occur at night. Nationwide, violent crime results in more than 500 deaths per year (Avuyi, 2017). Street crime is a serious problem throughout the country and is especially acute in Accra and other large cities like Cape Coast (Ghana Crime Rates and Statistics, 2001-2021).

The harsh condition is not peculiar to the musicians included in this study, though. The findings of this study reflect what is going on in other parts of the globe; however, our case might be more severe based on the low economic status of the country at large. Contract or part-time work is prevalent in well-developed economies as well. More than half of actors, nearly half of musicians and

dancers, and entertainers in the United States are reported to be working part-time. Thirty-six percent of New York City-based creative workers were self-employed in 2017, compared to just 10% of the City's overall workforce (OECD Policy responses to Coronavirus, 2020).

Above and beyond the immediate impacts on jobs and revenues, the current crisis and the social distancing measures are likely to have long-lasting effects on the musicians' performance abilities. The limited demand for musical services as a result of the ban on social gathering and community music-making may cause the disappearance or significant reduction in the activity of otherwise viable and valuable patrons that support the sector by engaging the musicians. The result would be the loss of skills on the part of brass band musicians who would have to abandon their creative activities and seek other jobs to make a living. This was vividly captured in an interview with Odza, a renowned trombonist:

... For me, the last time I touched my instrument was 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 during the new year's day fancy dress street carnival (tears gathering in his eyes). I am not sure I will be able to play my instrument at the same level of mastery I had at that time now. My brother, I am hungry. I hardly get food to eat these days. How can I rehearse? I am always running around looking for menial jobs to keep my body and soul together (Odza interview 4th October 2020).

In sharing experience of self-quarantine, all respondents indicated they were frustrated due to poor living conditions, loss of employment, no place to go, plenty of time but less to do, and lack of physical contact with people as before. According to Patrick, "besides that, my whole body is too weak to focus on anything right now and physically weak having problem to eat and feed my family because my brain cannot really function as usual and my body feels weak". The former and latter quotations spell doom for the local music sector. The impoverishment and downsizing of the cultural and creative sectors undoubtedly had a negative impact on cities and regions not only in terms of direct economic and social impact but also in terms of well-being, the vibrancy of cities and communities, and cultural diversity.

### ***Effect of COVID-19 on festivals***

As the music of the brass band hits a crescendo, a throng of youths and adults flooded the Cape Coast Kingsway road. This is a typical description of the scenery on major streets of Cape Coast during festivals and community celebrations. Festivals have extensive economic and social implications for the people of Cape Coast, from tourists to drummers to dancers to stages to tents and catering, and the supply chain hits local brass band musicians and many other performing arts groups, generating large economic benefits for the creative artists. The list of festivals and important musical events that have been canceled in Cape Coast due to the pandemic crisis is striking, ranging from the renowned annual traditional festival of the people of

Cape Coast, FetuAfahye, street carnivals, fancy dress competitions, Pan African Festival (PANAFEST- held in Ghana every two years for Africans and people of African descent) among others. The crisis has resulted in a severe loss of performance opportunities, hence musicians' finances. Uncle Badu, an instrument owner, and repairer, has this to say:

We have lost many performance opportunities for the second year of running. We use to play many programs. Almost every weekend, we are on the road performing somewhere. My boys play fancy dress processions a lot. They provide music for the fancy dress here in Cape Coast, Takoradi, Winneba, Tarkwa, and beyond. Last year, for instance, we spent two weeks continues in Tarkwa performing. For the FetuAfahye, I don't want to talk about it. It pains me a lot any time I think of that (Badu interview 29th February 2021).

Brass band musicians keep counting their losses each and every day that passes by. This loss for musicians and band owners is significant because patrons who usually pay for their services cannot engage them now and might not have a similar capacity in the future due to the reductions of their own revenues affected by the crisis. Cash sponsorship of festivals will be frozen until events pick up again, and it is unlikely that festivals can meet sponsor targets for future editions in light of likely drops in attendance due to regulations on movement of local/international tourists and social distancing. Moreover, festival programming has to be defined long in advance, and the current crisis has therefore largely disrupted the programming cycle and cast deep uncertainty on the timing of a future recovery. This will definitely result in the adjustment of program ambitions, limiting musical performances and group engagements in subsequent years. Brass band musicians and band owners, though not able to go for programs due to cancellation of events, do not receive any copyright revenue or any other relief funds from the government.

### ***Support for others and from others***

It is clear from the interview data that the only way the musicians included in this study are dealing with the harsh economic conditions imposed on them by the coronavirus is mainly through support from other musicians, band owners, and family. It has been nearly a year and a half since COVID-19 essentially shut down public gatherings and live musical performances — the financial backbone of most local brass band musicians – in Ghana. As a result, hundreds and thousands of musicians and touring professionals, many of whom work as nonunion independent freelancers, are still out of work and struggling to make ends meet during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. When asked about how they are coping with their present situation, Nana Otu explains:

Most of us are surviving by the grace of God. Unfortunately, I heard that two instrumentalists died as a result of the COVID around Nkafua (a suburb of Cape Coast). My boss, the person who

is the owner of the band I play for, has been very supportive. He is a big businessman, so he has been supporting me a lot. I heard he supports some of the other band members too. Things are very difficult for us right now. For me, my wife is a petty trader, so she tries her best to support the family (Nana Otu interview 21st December 2020).

The revelation from the quotation above concerning women becoming the breadwinner of homes is particularly striking. This is because one major highlight from the available literature states that COVID-19's impact on households is more likely to be heterogeneous across gender, with male-headed households better positioned than their female counterparts in dealing with the shock (Bukari et al., 2021). However, this seems not to be the case in the current study. It is important to emphasize that poverty-gender heterogeneities have a long-standing history with women continuously being disfavoured (Betti et al., 2020; Depew & Price, 2018; Grossbard-Shechtman & Neuman, 1998). That is the reason why it is surprising that it is rather the women who are strongly positioned to support the home in the current instance, as revealed in the quotation above. Interestingly, this seems to be the case with the other respondents. Those who were not yet married also indicated that their girlfriends are their pillar of hope during these difficult moments. A possible explanation for this result may be that all the wives of the musicians were self-employed; market traders providing essential services like distribution and marketing of food, beverages, paper, and plastic packages and were therefore allowed to work despite the ban on the social gathering. However, there is the need for further research with a larger population to confirm if the status-quo is really changing or just that there is something peculiar with the wives of the musicians included in this study.

Despite the devastating effect of COVID-19, many performing arts companies and artists have found new ways of coping with the situation. Several artists have gone online with their productions. Some bands, orchestras, and musicians have used Zoom, Facebook, Instagram, and other web-based resources for live concerts. Importantly, some virtual platforms enable private performances that allow for more access control, making it easier for artists to sell tickets and generate some revenue for their concerts. Some touring musicians have also turned to teach—in many cases using virtual platforms—as a source of income, while others have taken up freelance or temporary employment in other sectors. In an attempt to find out the steps local brass band musicians have taken to adapt to the new normal, Opoku states:

In my capacity as a brand owner, I realized that my boys were going to go hungry after the embargo on public gatherings, so I tried going virtual with some videos. I have several recordings of my band on YouTube, but that is not bringing me any money. I heard you have to get over one thousand or a million views before you are given something. For virtual concerts,

you know our people; as soon as you start playing music right now, the whole community will gather to dance, and the police will descend on us. I don't want any trouble with the police, so I have not tried that. Come to think of it, and people don't want to send their data to watch our videos online, how much more asking them to pay for a virtual concert? (Opoku interview 26th January 2021).

While virtual platforms have been one of the most widely adopted adaptations for performing artists, they come with some severe limitations, especially in an environment where local musicians live from hand to mouth. For example, many musicians and band owners have to rent or purchase new equipment and systems, learn new skills such as video and sound editing, and learn how to monetize their offerings in a virtual environment. At the same time, it is not guaranteed that audiences, most of whom do menial jobs, will be willing and able to fully adapt to a virtual environment. These and many more concerns highlight some important indicators of the limitations of a virtual-only environment for long-term viability. It also remains unclear whether virtual art experiences, if they remain the dominant mode of live arts and cultural experience, will be patronized by the local people, most of whom cannot afford the gadgets or the air time.

With no end in sight with the scarcity of vaccines around the world and no firm forecast for a return to normal touring in the future, I cannot imagine how these musicians are going to survive another year under COVID-19 restrictions. They are really in need of help now than ever.

## Conclusion

This study explored the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on local brass band musicians. Though social/physical distancing, which resulted in a ban on public gathering, may help stop the spread of the virus permanently to other people and offer the front liners the chance to give full attention to infected persons, there is a minority group whose lives are put on hold as a result of the restrictions in an attempt to prevent local transmission of the virus and to reduce infection in communities. Findings from studies support the fact that music has contributed to the fight against diseases and pandemics in the past, and it is doing the same currently; as an enjoyable supplement that reinforces or amplifies educational efforts in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (Thompson et al., 2021; Kwong, 2016; McConnell, 2016; Okigbo, 2017; Frishkopf, 2017). However, it is ironic that musicians who are playing a major role in the fight against the pandemic are wallowing in advert poverty caused by the same pandemic. It is overwhelmingly clear from the data presented in this study that COVID-19 has taken a deep toll on the local music sector since its inspection in Ghana around March 2020. It is refreshing to note that despite the distress and hunger, coupled with disbelief and



misconceptions, the respondents sounded optimistic that obeying the instructions of the authorities and exercising patience shall bring back their freedom and social interaction so much yearned for. The experiential and in-person nature of the brass band musicians' job has made it especially difficult to sustain their livelihoods as many performance avenues and venues have remained closed. Therefore, atypical forms of employment, such as local brass band musicians, necessitate specific policy responses to ensure social protection, career development, and skills upgrading pathways for creative workers in general, and local brass band musicians in particular in the face of a crisis such as COVID-19.

### Recommendations

The following are some recommendations based on the findings of this research: Firstly, there is the need to intensify education about the pandemic by the Ministry of Health to put to rest all doubts and myths. Also, The Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) should find a way of identifying and supporting community musicians, like local brass band musicians, whose livelihood depends solely on weekly engagements and live performances. More so, while the performing arts industry continues to face daunting challenges, arts organizations, artists, and performers are finding innovative ways to adapt and survive during the pandemic. It is a fact that online tools have provided an opportunity for artists and arts organizations to reach many more audiences during the pandemic than might have been possible otherwise. Therefore, it is suggested that local brass band musicians may shift to virtual concerts. In addition, it is recommended that a 'community music center' be established at the Center for National Culture (CNC) to oversee the affairs of community musicians. Lastly, policies should be enacted to ensure fewer mainstream genres like local brass band musicians easy access to social protection, career development, and skills upgrading pathways.

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