

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC OF GHANA



REPORT OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS

ON THE

**2021 ANNUAL BUDGET ESTIMATES OF
THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION**

PARLIAMENT OF GHANA LIBRARY

MARCH, 2021

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS
ON THE ANNUAL BUDGET ESTIMATES OF THE
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION FOR THE 2021 FISCAL YEAR**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In accordance with article 179 of the 1992 Constitution, the Majority Leader and Minister for Government Business, Hon Osei Kyei-Mensah Bonsu presented the Budget Statement and Economic Policy of Government for the 2021 Financial Year to the House on Friday, 12th March 2021. Pursuant to Orders 140(4) and 182 of the Standing Orders of the House, the Rt. Hon. Speaker referred the Annual Budget Estimates of the Ministry of Information to the Committee on Communications for consideration and report.

1.2 The Committee, consequently met with the Hon. Minister for Information, Mr. Kojo Oppong Nkrumah and Officers of his Ministry on Wednesday, 24th March 2021, and considered the referral. Officials of the Ministry of Finance were also present at the meeting to assist in the Committee's deliberations.

The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Hon. Minister and his team and Officers from the Ministry of Finance for the assistance provided.

2.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

The Committee made reference to the following documents during deliberations:

- i. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana.
- ii. The Standing Orders of the Parliament of Ghana.
- iii. The Annual Budget Estimates of the Ministry of Information for the 2020 Financial Year.

- iv. The Annual Budget Estimates of the Ministry of Information for the 2021 Financial Year.
- v. The Budget Statement and Economic Policy of the Government of Ghana for the 2020 Financial Year.
- vi. The Budget Statement and Economic Policy of the Government of Ghana for the 2021 Financial Year.

3.0 MISSION STATEMENT

The Ministry of Information exists to facilitate free flow of adequate, timely and reliable information and feedback between government and its various publics for socio-economic empowerment and enhanced democratic citizenship.

4.0 IMPLEMENTING DEPARTMENT AND AGENCIES

The Ministry exercises oversight over five (5) Agencies and a Department. These subvented and non-subvented Agencies and Department listed below, have the responsibility of implementing the policies and programmes of the Ministry:

- a. Ghana News Agency (GNA).
- b. Information Services Department (ISD).
- c. Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC).
- d. Ghana Publishing Company Limited (GPCL).
- e. Graphic Communications Group Company Limited (GCGCL).
- f. New Times Corporation (NTC).

5.0 POLICY OBJECTIVES

The broad policy objectives of the Ministry in line with the Medium-Term Development Plan are to:

- i. Deepen transparency and public accountability.
- ii. Enhance capacity for policy formulation and coordination.
- iii. Demystify the Presidency and bring the President closer to the people.
- iv. Promote the fight against corruption and economic crimes.
- v. Improve participation of civil society (media, traditional authorities, religious bodies) in national development.
- vi. Promote discipline in all aspects of life.
- vii. Ensure responsive governance and citizen participation in the development dialogue.

6.0 PERFORMANCE FOR YEAR 2020

6.1 The approved budget for the Ministry of Information for the implementation of its programmes for year 2020 was **One Hundred and Forty Million, Two Hundred and Thirty-Six Thousand, Eight Hundred and Twenty-Three Cedis (GH¢140,236,823.00)**. Table 1 gives a summary of releases as at December 2020.

Table 1

Table 1 : Summary of financial performance by sources of funding

	2020 Budget (A) (GH¢)	Released (Jan- Dec.) (B) (GH¢)	Variance (A- B) (GH¢)	Release as a % of budget	%Variance (A- B)
GoG	115,610,804	98,012,108.36	17,598,696.00	84.78	15.22
IGF	21,766,669.00	15,049,957.00	6,716,712.00	69.14	30.85
Development Partners	2,859,350.00	0	2,859,350.00	0	0
Totals	140,236,823.00	113,062,065.36	27,174,758	80.62	19.38

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Ministry's presentation to the Committee on year 2020 performance

The Committee observed that out of a total budgetary allocation of GH¢140,236,823 made to the Ministry for year 2020, GH¢113,062,065.36 representing 80.62% of the allocation had been released as at December 2020. A sum of GH¢98,012,108.36 representing 84.78 % of the GoG allocation of GH¢115,610,804 had also been released by December 2020. An IGF of GH¢15,049,957 representing 69.14% of the approved budget of GH¢21,766,669.00 was released. No releases were made from Donor funds.

- 6.3 To deepen transparency, public accountability and provide access to information, the Ministry of Information through its agencies executed, among others, the underlisted activities during the year under review:
- a. The Ministry organised two(2) Town Hall meetings out of the four(4) originally planned for the year 2020. The Ministry's inability to meet its target of 4 was due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions placed on gathering to prevent its spread.
 - b. Following the passage of the Right to Information Act, 2019, the President swore into office a seven-member Board for the Commission to operationalise the implementation of the Act. The Commission in collaboration with the Ministry of Information recruited 100 Right to Information officers who were deployed to various public institutions.
 - c. In conjunction with the Information Services Department(ISD), the Ministry organised eight(8) Meet-the-Press series. These series have been designed

- to create opportunity for all Ministers to account to stakeholders and the public on developments within their respective sectors.
- d. The Ministry, in 2020 held press briefings to communicate government's response on COVID-19 pandemic. It also organized public education campaigns, stakeholder engagements to create awareness of the pandemic; the importance of staying home, wearing masks and observing the various Covid-19 protocols in order to stem community spread of the virus.
 - e. The Information Services Department carried out four Public Education Campaigns centred on the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ghana National Household Registry (NHR), National Identification Authority, and the Ghana Card registration exercise. These exercises went a long way to boost the interest of the general public in these programmes.
 - f. The Ministry ran mass media campaigns and aired infomercials on various subjects of national importance.
 - g. The Ghana News Agency(GNA) currently has an audience market share of 45 percent. In 2020, the GNA produced 11,355 local news stories, 1,305 foreign news and 145 feature stories covering health, social, human interest, sports, education, science, politics, business and economics to educate the public. The Agency also received various awards for stories reported on health, justice, crime and agriculture related issues both locally and internationally.
 - h. During the year under review, Ghana News Agency (GNA) projected stories about Ghana to the website of the 25-member Atalantic Federation of African Press Agencies based in Rabat Morroco. The Agency also partnered with several international news agencies to share stories on their platformas

and network and was adjudged the second highest contributor of stories. The international networks include China News Agency, South Korea News Agency, DPA of Germany, Agence Ivoirienne de Presse, and Trust of India.

7.0 BUDGETARY ALLOCATION FOR YEAR 2021

7.1 A total budgetary allocation of **One Hundred and Twenty –Five Million, Nine Hundred and Seventy-Six Thousand, One-Hundred and Seventy-Seven (GH¢125,976,177.00) Ghana Cedis** comprising GH¢102,153,361 as GoG and GH¢23,822,816 as IGF has been made to the Ministry of Information to implement its programmes and activities for the 2021 fiscal year. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the allocation to the Ministry by economic classification and sources of funding.

Table 2

2021 Budgetary allocation by economic classification and sources of funding

Economic Classification	SOURCE OF FUNDING					
	GoG	ABFA	IGF	DONOR	Total	%
Compensation	83,084,667				83,084,667	65.95
Goods and service	9,068,694		23,227,246		32,295,940	25.64
Capex	10,000,000		595,570		10,595,570	8.41
Total	102,153,361		23,822,816		125,976,177	100.00
%	81.09	0.00	18.91	0.00	100.00	

Source: Budget statement and economic policy of the government for the 2021 Financial Year

The Committee noted that, out of the total budgetary allocation of GH¢125,979,177.00, a sum of GH¢102,153,361.00 representing 81.09% of the allocation will be funded from GoG sources while GH¢23,822,816.00 representing 18.19%

of the allocation will be funded from IGF sources. It is worth noting that there was no budgetary allocation from Donor funding for year 2021.

The Committee further noted that the CAPEX allocation of GH¢10,000,000 under GoG will be dedicated solely to the RTI Commission for the full operationalisation of the Right to Information Act.

Table 3

Comparison between the 2020 and 2021 Budgetary Allocation

Source of funding	2020 (GH¢)	%	2021 (GH¢)	%
GoG	115,610,804	82.44	102,153,361	81.09
IGF	21,766,669.00	15.52	23,822,816	18.91
ABFA			--	
DONOR	2,859,350.00	2.04	--	
TOTAL	140,236,823		125,976,177	100

Source: Ministry's Presentation to the Committee

Table 3 shows a 10% decrease in the total budgetary allocation to the Ministry from GH¢140,236,823 in year 2020 to GH¢125,976,177 in year 2021. A comparison of the GoG figures show an 11.64% decrease in budgetary allocation from GH¢115,610,804.00 to GH¢102,153,361.00 while that of IGF shows an 8.63% increase in budgetary allocation from GH¢ 21,766,669 to GH¢23,822,816. It was noted that no allocation was provided from donor funding for 2021. This development might have been informed by the fact that there were no releases made from donor funding from 2020.

8.0 OUTLOOK FOR YEAR 2021

- a. The Ministry, in year 2021 will pursue various sector policy objectives in accordance with the Sector's Medium Term Plan and SDGs. In this vein, the Ministry will continue the implementation of the Media Capacity Enhancement Programme. This programme is designed to enhance the capacity of practising journalists and would be available to interested parties who may participate by applying on-line.
- b. In order to operationalise the implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2019 (Act 989), and foster a culture of transparency and accountability in public affairs, the Ministry will in 2021, present to Parliament a draft Legislative Instrument for consideration and passage into law. This is to ensure that public institutions comply with the provisions of the Act.
- c. In year 2021, the Commission will introduce innovative programs to educate the general public about the Right to Information Commission and its mandate to ensure that the citizenry is made aware of their fundamental right to access information.
- d. The Ministry would also present to Parliament the draft Broadcasting Bill for consideration and passage into law. The draft Bill contain provisions dealing with fake news. Stakeholder engagements on the revised Bill has been completed and similar engagement would be held with the Committee of Parliament.
- e. Furthermore, the Ministry in collaboration with the National Media Commission (NMC) would run a Coordinated Mechanism on Safety of Journalists. This would be done through a Secretariat set-up to receive reports of threats and attacks on media, investigate and validate such reports, and publish in a report, the findings of the investigations .

- f. The Ministry through the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) will increase its on-line presence with radio and television content. This will reflect the diversity of the Ghanaian culture and values. Again, the number of local languages broadcast will see a significant rise.
- g. The Public Relations Officers (PROs) of the Information Services Department in the various Ministries would hold five (5) need-to-know series with the Ministers. The purpose of the series is to enhance the PROs knowledge on government policies and programmes across the various MDAs.

9.0 **OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 **Head Office**

9.1.1 The Committee was informed that the Ministry's proposed budget to effectively execute its mandate for year 2021 was GH¢191,295,735.39. However, the Ministry of Finance gave a ceiling of GH¢125,976,177.00 to the Ministry. The Committee noted that out of an amount of GH¢35,239,632.00 proposed for Goods and Services, only GH¢9,068,694.00 was allocated to the entire Ministry.

9.1.2 The Main Ministry or headquarters projected a GoG budget of GH¢13,561,216.40 for Goods and Services but was provided GH¢6,768,694.00 resulting in a shortfall of GH¢6,792,522.40. A sum of GH¢2,768,694.00 out of the allocation of GH¢6,768,694.00 is earmarked for operational cost while the remaining GH¢4,000,000.00 will be committed to government communications.

It came to the fore during deliberations that the operational cost for Headquarters alone for year 2020 came to GH¢3,700,000.00. The headquarters is indebted to other Agencies to the tune of GH¢961,216.00. In year 2020 for instance, the

electricity supply to Headquarters was cut off due to the non-payment of bills. The effect of the shortfall is that Headquarters cannot meet its operational obligations as well as implement key activities such as the introduction of a Broadcasting Bill and drafting of a subsidiary legislation for the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Furthermore, the Ministry's headquarters may be unable to support the implementation of Media enhancement programmes and the framework for the safety of journalist in Ghana, by the National Media Commission (NMC).

9.1.3 The Committee noted that although a sum of GH¢6,000,000.00 was provided in the 2020 budget for government communications to propagate and educate the public on government policies, programmes and projects for effective buy-in, this amount was not placed in the budget of the Ministry of Information. It rather appeared in the list of 'cost of government flagship programmes' on appendix 6 of Budget Statement and Economic Policy of Government for the 2020 Financial year. The Ministry explained that although these monies were disbursed by the Ministry of Finance from projects under the flagship programmes, public education on these programmes was carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Information.

9.1.4 The Committee however observed that for year 2021, an allocation of GH¢4,000,000.00 for government communications has been made under the Goods and Services Budget of the Ministry. The Committee expressed concern about the application of this amount and elicited some assurance from the Minister that this allocation will not be disbursed to party communicators. The Hon. Minister assured the Committee that the allocation for government communication will not be disbursed as stipends to party communicators. Upon the request of the Committee, the Ministry submitted a breakdown of the disbursement of the 2020 allocation and a breakdown of the allocation for year 2021.

9.1.5 For year 2021, the Ministry proposed a budget of GH¢12,640,000.00 for CAPEX but was allocated a sum of GH¢10,000,000.00, creating a shortfall of GH¢2,640,000.00. The Committee was informed that the allocation will be committed to the implementation of outstanding activities under the RTI such as development of I.T solution for archiving data across all public institutions, deploying I.T solutions across public institutions and equipping RTI units across public institutions. However, the shortfall in allocation will affect the Ministry's ability to replace key operational equipment, continue with the rehabilitation of its office building which has stalled since 2018, meet key operational expenses such as electricity bills and other utilities and implement some key programmes such as the Nation's building Updates.

9.1.6 Generally, the Ministry and its Agencies continue to face challenges such as lack of adequate office space, high attrition rate of technical staff arising from resignation and retirement, delays and in some cases non-release of funds and inadequate allocation thus hampering the effective discharge of their mandate.

9.2 Ghana News Agency (GNA)

9.2.1 An amount of GH¢8,849,999.00 comprising a Compensation of GH¢7,749,999.00 and Goods and Services of GH¢1,100,000.00 has been allocated to The Ghana News Agency for the 2021 financial year. No allocation was made for Capital Expenditure.

9.2.2 The Committee noted with concern that GNA was not allocated funds for CAPEX for years 2017, 2018 and 2020. Regrettably, no allocation was made for CAPEX for year 2021. The Agency does not have functional vehicles to work with and currently relies on two (2) over-aged vehicles purchased as far back as 2007. This

unfortunate situation often compels GNA's editorial staff to use their own resources to cover news assignments. Again, the Agency operates with old and obsolete equipment. Its offices in Accra, Ho, Tamale and Bolgatanga require urgent refurbishment. The poor state of the buildings the Committee noted, has resulted in GNA's tenants vacating its premises.

9.2.3 It is important to observe that, the non allocation of CAPEX over the years has hindered the Agency's ability to procure logistics to fully digitalise its operations, purchase the needed logistics such as computers, cameras and recorders for its regional offices to speed the processing and transmission of stories, introduce audio/visual news content and optimise its social media operations among others.

The Agency informed the Committee that it would require an amount of GHC 8,000,000.00 to fully digitise its operations. The Agency in year 2021 plans to invest in multimedia software and equipment, invest in logistics, create a photo bank service for subscribers and prospective clients, set up an ultra modern TV Studio for production of audio/visual content for subscribers and a multimedia news production suite, to deliver news in various formats.

9.2.4 It came to the attention of the Committee that as December 2020, GNA's indebtedness to various institutions stood at GHC843,362.72. The Agency explained that it owed Ghana Cocoa Board (Cocobod) an amount of GHC87,130.83 as accrued rent for its Kumasi and Sunyani offices, the Graphic Communications Group Company Limited (GCGCL) and New Times Corporation (NTC) an amount of GHC335,493.00 and GHC309,789.64 respectively for news paper subscription and advert placements and Social, Security and National Insurance Trust an amount of GHC110,949.25 for bungalows purchased since 2004. The Agency further explained that it has written to Cocobod to enter into

payment terms and also initiated reconciliation talks with Graphic as the latter owes the Agency monies for subscriptions and rent for its Ho office.

9.2.5 The Committee took note of the fact that the Agency does not have its full compliment of staff to perform its functions. Due to resignations and retirement, About 60 staff who have exited from the Agency since 2004 are yet to be replaced. The Agency therefore has had to fall on interns to carry out some assignments. The Agency urgently needs to recruit staff, particularly, for its editorial department to drive modern news agency practices. Fortunately, the Agency received approval from the Ministry of Finance late last year to recruit 41 persons to augment its staff strength. The Committee urges both the Ministry and the Agency to speed up the process of recruiting staff.

9.2.6 GNA, as the nation's newswire service, continues to provide authentic, unbiased and credible news stories to a host of media and other subscribers. The Agency's local and foreign news cover a wide range of areas such as politics, economics, science, sports, health, education, crime, gender issues, culture and entertainment.

Owing to the fact that GNA lacked a functional digital platform for commercial news gathering and dissemination of information, it lost its audience market share in the media space to hi-tech private media. The Committee was happy to note that with the effort made at digitalising its operations, the Agency has increased its audience market share from 37% to 45%.

Having established the online and social media unit with new content on multiple platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, Whatsapp, Instagram and Twitter to grow new audiences, the Agency plans to leverage on technology to improve on funds

generated internally. It further plans to embark on an aggressive marketing drive to attract new audiences.

9.2.7 Notwithstanding the challenges that the Agency faces, it was able to generate internally an amount of GH¢318,248.61 in year 2020 through subscriptions from print and electronic media, international news agencies, online news portals, corporate and government institutions, diplomatic corps and the public. The Committee noted that the Agency does not retain a percentage of its internally generated funds.

Having regard to the numerous challenges confronting the Agency, the Committee recommends that the Ministry of Finance gives an exception to the Agency to retain a 100 percent of its IGF to enable it settle legacy debts and support some critical operations in year 2021.

9.2.8 It came to light in 2017 that the Agency had sublet its website to a private entity to manage because it could not pay for the services of a website engineer. An arrangement was therefore reached for the engineer to manage the website and use the proceeds from adverts to offset the cost of the service. The Committee at the time expressed grave concern that in spite of the directive that all websites of government agencies be hosted by NITA, GNA had its website hosted by a private entity.

The Committee noted with satisfaction during deliberations that the Agency has taken steps to rectify the anomaly and now has its own website and mobile application that has replaced the old one that was managed by a private entity. The Committee was informed that although the website became fully functional in July 2020, the Agency recorded significant revenue from advertising.

9.3 Ghana Broadcasting Corporation ((GBC)

9.3.1 Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) has been provided an amount of GH¢64,182,687.83 to fund its programmes and activities for the 2021 financial year. This comprises GH¢40,359,872.00 as Compensation, GH¢18,959,653.83 as Goods and Services and GH¢4,863,162.00 as Capital expenditure. It came to fore that, the Corporation has critical operational needs which include the acquisition of two(2) OB vans, operational vehicles, rehabilitation of studios to HD and transmitters for its operation. No funds were made available for these activities under the Capex.

9.3.2 The Committee noted that GBC, as a national media broadcaster, is mandated to broadcast important national programmes using audio-visual content, tailored to suit the general public. As a nation's broadcaster the overall objective of GBC is to serve the best interest of the country. However, government's support to GBC over the years has dwindled. Over the years, the non-payment of services rendered by GBC to government and its agencies have combined with other challenges to weigh down the operations of GBC as a public broadcaster. The Corporation is saddled with a total debt stock of GH88,026,664.03 arising from electricity bill, long service award, judgment debts and Satellite expenses to K-Net. Payments of the debts have become critical and needs government's intervention.

9.3.3 The Committee recommends the need for the Ministry to take steps to re-organise the operations of GBC to make it more viable with the active involvement of all stakeholders including the National Media Commission (NMC), which is the constitutionally mandated body entrusted with the oversight of the State owned media. It is the firm belief of the Committee that the Ministry would champion the development of sustainable funding model for public service Broadcasting in the country.

With the current challenges of GBC which if left unattended to, could potentially deny the state of the invaluable services of GBC as a state broadcaster.

9.3.4 It has been noted however that the services of GBC is largely centred on its mandate as a state and public service broadcaster leaving the entity with a limited room to operate effectively as a commercial broadcaster. Unfortunately, GBC does not generate the needed revenue from the services provided in the performance of its mandate as a state and public service broadcaster. As a result, this development deprives GBC of the requisite resources to fund its operational activities and respond adequately to the emerging trends within the broadcasting industry. The Committee strongly recommended that it would be important to refocus GBC to concentrate more on content generation and reduce its footprints in transmission and operational activities of broadcasting.

The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Information, as a matter of urgency, submits to Parliament a draft amendment Bill to the GBC Act for necessary action.

9.4 Information Services Department (ISD)

9.4.1 An amount of GH¢30,199,998.00 has been earmarked for spending by the Information Services Department (ISD) for the financial year 2021. This constitutes an amount of GH¢28,999,998.00 as Compensation and a sum of GH¢1,200,000.00 as Goods and Services.

As the Principal Public Relations Outfit of the government, it operates within the 16 regions and in 231 districts with a staff strength of 1,084. It also operates in three (3) foreign missions in New York, Washington and London. The core function of the ISD is to create awareness of government policies, programmes and activities, provide feedback to government, market Ghana internationally and provide public relations support to MDAs, MMDAs and the presidency. Having regard to the above, the ISD as the key agency spearheading the implementation of the RTI recruited and deployed 100 officers to selected state institutions to sensitise Heads of institutions on the objects of the the Act. The Department also trained

227 designated officers and 228 records officers on Data Mapping, the RTI Act(2019) and Information Manual.

9.4.3 The Committee was informed that ISD is embarking on a transformational programme at the cost of GH¢137,097,122.28 to be implemented over a five-year period. The transformation programme has started through the setting up and operationalisation of the RTI office. The Committee noted that ISD under this programme, seeks to enhance its multimedia capacity by purchasing ultra-modern cinema vans and equipment to effectively discharge its mandate. It also seeks to refurbish and resource the research section and re-orient Public Relations Officers to discharge their duties effectively.

The Committee was informed that the Ministry of Finance has made a commitment to provide funding of GH23,905,500 for the first phase of the programme. The Committee entreats the Ministry of Finance to honour its commitments to enable the ISD effectively execute its mandate

9.4.5 The ISD is indebted to various service providers to the tune of GH¢1,996,549.40. However, the Agency's allocation for Goods and Services was only GH¢1,200,000.00. This allocation fell far below the Agency's expectation as it is inadequate to meet its operational needs. Given this picture, the Agency may find it impossible to settle some of its debts if no remedial action is taken to address the Agency's budgetary requirements. The Committee was informed that the Main Ministry building had its electricity supply cut off for non-payment of bills. The Committee recommends that to avoid such embarrassing recurrence, the Finance Ministry should consider increasing the budgetary allocation of the ISD and also take steps to exempt them from the capping policy. This would help the Department retain some resources to honour its obligations and on time.

10.0 CONCLUSION

The Ministry of Information plays a crucial role in fostering participation, transparency and accountability in governance. Undertaking this critical role that underpins the sustenance of every democratic society demand that the need for the Ministry to be provided with adequate resources to achieve this important objective.

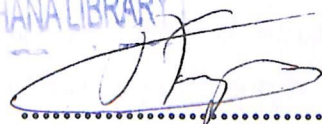
In the light of the above, this House is hereby requested to approve the sum of ***One Hundred and Twenty -Five Million, Nine Hundred and Seventy-Six Thousand, One-Hundred and Seventy-Seven Ghana Cedis (GH¢125,976,177.00)*** for the services of the Ministry of Information for the Financial Year ending 31st December, 2021.

Respectfully submitted.



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CYNTHIA MAMLE MORRISSON (HON.)
(CHAIRPERSON, COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNICATIONS)

PARLIAMENT OF GHANA LIBRARY



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JANET FRIMPONG
(CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE)

March 2021