

The 13th African Games, the continent's Olympics that were scheduled to be held in Ghana have been put on halt, Rwanda Dispatch has learnt.

Ghana was due to host the African Games this August, but 2023 has seen the West African side, racing against time to successfully deliver facilities to host the 13th African Games, the continent's Olympics.

Five thousand participants were expected from 55 countries for the two-week, multi-sport event, but things are moving too slow in Accra due to economic constraints.

Furthermore, the facilities will not be ready before August 4, when the Games are scheduled to start.

Nearly five years on from when Ghana beat bids from Nigeria and Burkina Faso to host the Games, the proposed venue for the competition, a new stadium at Borteyman, a district in the capital city, still needs to be completed.

Media sources that have visited the University of Ghana Sports Complex for athletics events, the site was still under development.

"I think those people that bid for it didn't actually bid for it in the name of Ghana because even at that point, things weren't looking too good for us economically, and there would be a big issue whether we could divert resources from elsewhere to plow into this project," Nana Kwaku Agyemang, a Ghanaian public affairs critic, told media.

In 2022, Ghana saw a 58% fall in its currency value, and the country even had to ask for a \$3 billion International Monetary Fund lifeline to keep the economy running.

By December, Ghanaian inflation had risen to 54.1%, its highest in 22 years and the seventh highest globally. Food prices rose by 59.7% and transport costs increased by 71.4%, according to the country's statistics office.

Ghana last hosted a major sports event in 2008 when, at a more prosperous time, it welcomed 16 countries for the Africa Cup of Nations.

Even then, despite the huge investments in infrastructure, some of the stadiums have become under-utilized, with facilities rotting away.

All of this is making Ghanaians increasingly question the idea behind hosting such a financially intensive event like the African Games at this moment in the country's history.

The All African Games are Africa's premier multi-sport event. Like most hosts of big sports events, Ghana hoped to use it to build new infrastructure and to stimulate its economy.

However, after the Ghanaian government won the bid to host the event in 2018, it did not appoint a local organizing committee until two years later.

"The outbreak of Covid-19 really affected our plans," said Dan Kwaku Yeboah, communications director of the Accra Games.

Ghana had plans to construct a new 60,000-seater stadium, but the pandemic meant this could not happen. Instead, they decided on a hybrid model where the University of Ghana and the new Borteyman Sports Complex would host events. The university's accommodation would host athletes from participating countries.

Former Ghanaian President John Mahama criticized the decision of his successor Nana Akufo Addo to host the Games and has asked for the country to pull out of the Games. But the organizers are digging in.

"Over 200 million dollars have been committed to the project. The economic challenges are there, but the government is 100 percent committed that Ghana will deliver the Games," said Kwaku Yeboah.

It seems for Ghana, it is too late to turn back now.

There has been silence from partners, the African Union, its main stakeholder, and the Association of Olympic Committees of Africa (ANOCA). DW reached out to ANOCA, the event's technical partners, for comment, but received no response.

The Games have come at the wrong time, says Ghanaian economist Daniel Anim Amateye.

"Taking into consideration the state of our economy it will not be prudent to host the Games," Anim Amateye said. "Our conditions are so bad that the government has to hold onto funds from bondholders' investments, so any money that comes in, one expects to have reinvested in the economy."

Despite the hope the event will boost tourism; the Games are not expected to bring in immediate rewards for a populace that is strained by financial pressures.

“The fact is that this government is broken,” says Amateye. “The government cannot pay investors, people that have invested in government security, this has affected pensioners. The government cannot meet its obligation.”

Many international sports events have faced postponements in the last two years due to the tough conditions brought about by Covid-19 and its aftermath.

Ghana can either raise its hands in surrender or ask the African Union for more time to put things in order, neither of which would be seen as a failure on the part of Ghana.