

THE COVID CRISIS AND ITS EFFECT ON THE WELFARE OF NIGERIA CITIZENS

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Abstract

The News of the deadly corona virus disease caused by SARS Cov 2 virus, the Severe Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) was first in December 2019 at Wuhan, China. SARS COV is an enveloped virus responsible for covid-19 pandemic. The major research question is how this Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS COV – 2) emerge in the human population. This disease that respected no race, colour, cadre or wealth spread like harmattan fire across the globe. The interest generated in the mind of many scholars is in understanding the root cause of the covid-19 virus. In Nigeria, the first case was reported on February 27, 2020. Within this period, health and safety measures including inter-state and international travels were banned, schools at all levels were closed along side with markets, churches and restriction on mass gatherings. The major and primary effect of the covid-19 in Nigeria is on economy, the crisis ushered into the country the deepest recession ever that is still persisting till today. The major reason for the severe economic recession are the lock down, restriction of people ability to go to work, and on top of it all, the crude oil that represent 90 of the total export revenue and 60% of government revenue tumbled between February and May, at this time inflation started to accelerate at a very high speed. As Nigeria was passing through these problems, other serious cases were there. The case of Fulani herds men destroying agricultural farms, the kidnapers that disturb, and are still doing the worst; the bandits and unknown gunmen were severe. All these have negative effects on the population. All these are seriously affecting the human capital, livelihood and welfare of Nigeria households even now that covid-19 is eradicated.

Keywords: Covid-19, welfare, citizens, lockdown

Introduction

The Covid- 19 pandemic that spread like wild fire affecting almost all the countries of the world and its territories was first identified in Wuhan China in December, 2019. This is the more reason it is being identified world-wide as covid-19. Having notice the effect of this virus on the health of the citizens, all the countries were cautioned by the health experts to take responsive care of their citizens. The strategies used in the protection of the citizens included, hand washing and sanitization, wearing of facemask, physical distancing, avoiding mass gathering and assemblies of people, lockdown of all business and staying at home. Schools at all levels were completely closed down, inter- state travels were banned and local and international flight were cancelled in the first week of August, 2020. Nigeria imposed total/complete nationwide lockdown. It means that at those periods, the roads were deserted, markets were closed, stalls, shops were all closed down. Jonathan and Tara (2021) reported that the country Nigeria recorded its first case in February 19th 2020 and subsequently suffered three distinct waves of infection as follows June 2020, January 2021 and August 2021.

The Economic Impact

Nevertheless, much of the primary effect of covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria has been economic rather than health related impact though both affect each other. The break down in economy of our nation Nigeria is seriously affecting the health sector of the country. The early stage crisis ushered into the country the deepest economic recession ever in history. This partly stemmed from the fact that the Nigeria services and industry have not helped in the development and growth of economy of the country. The lockdown issues restricting people from going to work, buying and selling, above all the price of oil which represent more than 90% of the marine export trade and 60% of government revenue trembled more than 60% between February and May 2020.

In the later stage of the covid-19 crisis, even though normalcy are returning and economic activities began to pick-up, the high rate of inflation, the deviation of naira with dollars started biting hard in Nigeria. The foods items that are crucial for the consumption among the poor, the rich and the vulnerable become unreachable to many especially the poor and vulnerable. The hardest hit in the economy surfaced at the disruption of the markets, trade restrictions, closing of borders Gbemisola (2021). Wrong economic foundation, massive corruption among the leaders were already driving up prices of items in the market and eroding our purchasing power even before the covid-19 pandemic. As the thinking of health indicators are important in the lives of our citizens, and welfare, macro-economic data are also essential for addressing the fundamentals of covid-19 crisis and its damaging effect in the lives of the country. It become very necessary that any attempt or approach in addressing the covid-19 pandemic and its crisis in Nigeria should need detailed information on the mechanism through which the pandemic affect human capital, livelihood and welfare.

In Nigeria, the above recommendation /suggestion is highly important because the pandemic threatened to compound the country's high level of poverty even before and after the covid-19 crisis. Jonathan and Tara (2021) had it that the use of national livelihood phone survey monitoring covid-19 impact on Nigeria livelihood can solve the problems of the data collection and analysis which could be done during the ravaging period of the pandemic. They went on to say that the (NLPS) National Livelihood Phone Survey is a nationally representative survey and distinctive in capturing key socio-economic information from households for 12 consecutive rounds. Jonathan and Tara used this survey in the collection of data to examine how the covid-19 crisis has been affecting human capital, livelihood and welfare of Nigeria household. High Level Panels of Experts (2021) reported that lack of social protection in Nigeria exposes its population to large welfare losses. Gbemisola (2021) reported that before covid-19 pandemic struck, less than 2% of Nigeria population lived in a household enrolled in the country's flagship social protection programme. The national Social Safety Net Project (NASSP) and coverage of most other programme was even lower. The coverage of social protection programme still remains low.

Given the above narrative as it is, the Nigeria household have been adopting negative coping strategy in response to the shock that have accompanied the covid-19 crisis. At this time of the report, the children are at home, the father, mother and other relations are all at home, doing nothing but washing of hands, sanitizing them, sleeping, walking round and eating. Between April and December 2020 according to High Level Panels of Experts (2021) food insecurity increases – more than pre-covid-19 crisis.

In the narration of Jonathan and Tara (2021), before the coming of covid-19, there was relatively small increase in the prices of commodities in the market, the prices of these commodities went high at the coming of covid-19, surprisingly now that we are at post-covid-19, it is very clear that the prices of these commodities are becoming higher and higher at daily or weekly interval. Today, you cannot buy a commodity in the market and go back to that very market next week and still get the same goods at the same price.

Food Scarcity and Nutrition

Eze (2022) reported that rapid and extensive spread of covid-19 around the globe since 2019 has had a profound implication for food security and nutrition. The report further said that the pandemic has affected the world food system and threatened people's access to food supply through multiple dynamics associated by the waves of claims of lock down, stay at home, isolation etc. The lock down and stay at home naturally slowed down economy, food supply and nutrition. Adichie (2021) reported that the result of claims of lock down has seriously affected lower income group especially those working in private establishment and high prices of available food supply in the market. The result is that the available food is out of the reach of the many in the society. The situation at this period becomes characterized by high level degree of uncertainty and confusion.

At this time of the pick of crisis, borders were closed, flight both national and international was closed, markets where food can be bought were also closed with restriction in inter-state movement. These paralyzed the supply of all the essential commodities for the citizens of the country. Yet in all these, some have positive comment on covid-19 crisis. That the lock down and stay at home has helped the junior public servant in going back to farm and assist the peasant making food available for the citizens. This comment is correct but Nigeria cannot feed themselves. This is not attainable as the inter-state movement has been restricted. In the east, we have palm oil that we carry to other zones, we receive yams, tomatoes and some other fruits from the North. This reason also failed because you cannot plant today and harvest tomorrow. In otherwords, the lockdown and restriction of movement never solve the problem of food scarcity.

The lockdown and restriction in movement were intended to reduce the spread of corona virus pandemic otherwise known as covid-19 and not to send the junior public servant to farm, it therefore created condition for major disruption of the supply of essential commodities including the supply of food. Rebecca (2021) said that the result of the pandemic has given rise in global food prices and the decline in the household income for small scale farmers that constitute more than 60% of the total African population. It also prevents the farmers the chance of searching for the best/viable seeds to sow. This also affected the labour disruption and wrecking havoc on food supply chain. Delia, et al (2021) had it that covid-19 crisis created many threat to sustainability in Agricultural Sector which is very sensitive because of food supply and food security.

With the closure of market, restriction of movement, closure of borders and airports, Nigeria entered into the top gear of poverty and crisis. As Nigeria was passing through this hardship, another problem was threatening the country. The Fulani Herdsmen were ravaging agricultural farms, the notorious activities of the kidnappers were on the increase. There arise within this period the bandits and unknown gunmen seriously causing fear, intimidation, harassment of the innocent citizens. These in combination give rise to serious scarcity of food leading to starvation, confusion and death not from corona virus infection.

WHO (2021) observed lack of social protection in Nigeria and this led to the exposure of its population to large welfare losses. The body went further to infer that before the pandemic struck, less than 2% of Nigerian population live in a household enrolled in the country's flagship social protection programmes. The national social safety net and the coverage of most other programmes were even lower. Less than 4% of the entire household in the country receives support in form of cash from the federal, state or local government. This is significantly below what would be needed to counteract the widening and deepening crisis and poverty brought out by the covid-19 pandemic.

The Way Forward

The crisis lesson from covid-19 pandemic is gradually showing down. What the country is facing today is the monkey pox that is gradually gaining ground. The federal government demonstrated its political will in pursuance to curb the crisis of covid-19. The president and the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, his vice and other top government officials in the administration presented themselves publicly before Nigerian and received the vaccination against the pandemic. The big lesson we should learn from the crisis is that God is not a respecter of wealth, place of origin, your class, colour, religion or position. It is good that the population maintain the guideline for the prevention of covid-19 be enforced to the populations since there are other contagious diseases that can be transmitted through contacts. It should be a little courageous if the sit at home, closure of borders, markets and restriction in movement be followed by palliative measure in case such crisis repeat itself (but God forbid). As there are noted distortions of economy in all facet of lives during and post covid-19, the Federal Government and State should assist household/families to alternate their suffering as prices of many commodities in the market have gone up beyond their reach.

Finally, it is being said that Nigeria rank high in the serving medical doctors in America and Europe. These are the places we run to for medical treatment mostly by our leaders. The lesson from the covid-19 crisis should make these two tiers of government to look into the health sector of the country by improving the health facilities to reduce the drain of our medical experts from Nigeria to other countries. When this is done, the medical facilities in the country should improve and most if not all the medical condition we rush abroad can be treated here in Nigeria.

Conclusion

During this period under review, the world was thrown into deep confusion as the crisis arising from covid-19 continued to cause havoc globally. In Nigeria for instance, many health were reported not as a result of covid-19 but the closure of border and international flight. These prevented these people to be flown to countries where they have been receiving their medication. We hope Nigeria should learn a big lesson from the pandemic and consider it necessary to equip the existing health facilities in the country, improve the working condition of health workers and restrict these professionals from leaving the country. Till today, many still believe that there was nothing like coronial virus, that what we had was international politics. Though, they are now facing the post covid-19 pandemic. Now we have what we can surely say "confusion in the daily prices of commodities". To feed families now is a big task, before health conditions, school fees and social engagement.

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