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EFFECTS OF THE CONTROL MEASURES AGAINST THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON NIGERIANS

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa is experiencing a new economic and social reality as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first case of Coronavirus infection in Nigeria was recorded on February 28, 2020. The country subsequently recorded more than 50,000 cases and about 1, 000 COVID-19 related deaths. Cases continued to increase until the scientific community discovered and ensured a global attempt to provide a cure for the virus. The spread of the disease (coronavirus) across the globe had led to the lockdown of many countries' socio-economic and political activities while millions of people suffered and still suffer from the negative impacts. However, Nigeria was among the nations in sub-Saharan Africa to have recorded COVID-19 cases at its earliest stage leading to the implementation of stringent measures to prevent the further the spread of the virus. This paper examines the effect of the control measures to control the spread of Covid-19 in Nigeria and utilized secondary sources to gather its data. Some of the effects of the spread of the virus included the drop in the global oil price by 60%, increased poverty, job losses, indoor crimes and a host of others. While the control measures put in place by the government were laudable on the one hand, it also enveloped a lot of Nigerians in extreme poverty and hunger. Many people lost their lives not just as a result of the illness associated with coronavirus infection but also with hunger and starvation due to the lockdown policy as a control measure imposed on the people. The paper recommends among others that, Nigerians should be sensitized on how to live with the virus as it has no known permanent cure at the moment.

Keywords; Covid-19, Pandemic, Citizen, Poverty, Lockdown, and Social Distancing.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic, has no doubt, affected the global economy negatively. In the history of human existence, it has been observed that the Covid-19 pandemic happened to be the first virus that had led to different controversies and complexities which seem to be unimaginable. The outbreak of the virus began in the Republic of China which resulted into the death of many and later spread speedily to other parts of the world with its negative impact. Regrettably, the global pandemic affected virtually all parts of the world. Consequently, political and socio-economic activities were put on hold in the attempt to contain the spread of the virus. Industries were shut down in many affected countries, while the global supply chain has been disrupted (Op-Ed Contributor, 2020). The lockdown measures adopted by most nations to combat the spread of the disease was also no doubt, to the disadvantage of some countries and their people owing to the fact that citizens were compelled to stay indoors with little or no palliative measures to cushion the effects of the lockdown which in turn, led to hunger and starvation.

There is no gainsaying that the stay-at-home policy violated the citizens' fundamental human rights while social interaction was also curtailed. In fact, in some countries during the lockdown period, the poor became poorer, with no access to healthcare facilities as medical care to treat other diseases such as hepatitis, high blood pressure, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, typhoid, malaria, tuberculosis and a host of other diseases. Many people lost their lives in this process as a result of the measure adopted by governments of many countries.

It is fundamental to note that poverty on the other hand, has been regarded as one of Nigeria's greatest problems than even the fear of death caused by the coronavirus. It has been reported that as of 2019, Nigeria surpassed India in the population of those living with poverty (*see,* Op-Ed Contributor, 2020). Suffice it to say that Nigeria became one of the poorest countries of the world as of 2019 based on the report from classified sources. Amidst the corona virus pandemic, the rate of poverty increased as a result of the control measures adopted by the government of Nigeria and some countries of the world. The situation (COVID19 pandemic) recorded a multi facet effects on the country. That is every sector and aspect of life was affected. At this period many Nigerians lost their jobs without compensation which added to the number of the poor people in the country. National and international trade were affected, there was depreciation in prices of some international commodities like oil and gas, individual incomes were cut short; some were not paid salaries; workers were retrenched, schools were closed, and prices of consumable goods increased in Nigeria living the poor with no option to find any means to survive.

The Nigeria state as a political entity also suffered from the effect of the pandemic. The citizens face different kinds of challenges when the containment measures came into effect, thus resulting in increased indoor crimes and social disorder. The federal government was confronted with the simultaneous challenge of combatting the public health crisis caused by the pandemic alongside trying to bolster a weakened economy. Given the mounting evidence that the social and economic impacts of these twin crises are likely to be significant, the government is ramped up policy interventions to mitigate such negative impacts.

It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that this paper examined the effect of the preventive measures adopted by the Nigerian government to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conceptual Clarification

This section of the paper clarifies the basic concept used in this study, which is Coronavirus.

Coronavirus

The coronavirus pandemic which is also known as COVID-19 is a disease that broke out in the late 2019 in the Republic of China and spread to other parts of the world. Since the outbreak of the virus, millions of people have lost their lives as a result of infections caused by the virus. The virus is said to have originated from an animal while others hold that it is a conspiracy and artificially created for certain reasons. According to Cennimo, (2019), some coronaviruses that typically infect animals have been known to evolve to infect humans, adding that SARS-CoV-2 was likely to be one of such viruses, seen to have originated from a large animal and seafood market. The World Health Organization (2020:1) considered SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and primarily transmitted between people via respiratory droplets and person-to-person contact route. According to Stewart, Connelly, and Robinson, (2020), SARS-CoV-2 belongs to a family of single-stranded RNA viruses known as coronaviridae, a common type of virus which affects mammals, birds and reptiles. In humans, it causes mild infections, similar to the common cold, and accounts for 10–30% of upper respiratory tract infections in adults (Paules, Marston & Fauci, 2020). Also, more serious infections are not common, although coronaviruses can cause enteric and neurological disease (i.e., headache, altered mentality). Illness caused by SARS-CoV-2 was termed COVID-19 by the WHO, the acronym derived from "coronavirus disease 2019" (Cennimo, 2019).

Overview of Coronavirus

Corona virus also known as COVID-19 is a disease that came into reality in 2019 in Wuhan, a city in China's Hubei province which has a population of 11 million. The virus was never taken seriously until it started spreading speedily to almost every part of the world. The WHO (2020) reports that the virus has now spread to over 200 counties and territories across the globe, and subsequently characterized it as a pandemic. The virus was believed to have spread to other countries more in March 2020. To begin the battle against the spread of the virus in China, the government of China put so much effort in developing health infrastructure within a limited time. In fact, medical infrastructures were set up within eight days. At this period, researchers were more concerned about the causes and not the solution or cure. In the early 2020, after the December 2019 outbreak of the coronavirus in China, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified SARS-CoV-2 as a new type of coronavirus.

It has been observed that the virus is primarily transmitted between people via respiratory droplets and person-to-person contacts. This accounts for why the WHO, (2020) notes that the transmission may also occur by touching objects or materials carrying infection (fomites) in the immediate environment around the infected person.

Otrompke and Pharm, (2014); WHO, (2004) agreed that, previous coronavirus outbreaks included Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) which was first reported in Saudi Arabia in September 2012, and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), identified in Southern China in 2003. MERS infected around 2,500 people and led to the death of more than 850 others while SARS infected more than 8,000 people and resulted in nearly 800 deaths (WHO, 2019; CDCP, 2017) cited in (Stewart e'tal, 2020). It was reported that the case fatality rates for these conditions were 35% and 10%, respectively.

In their publication in the pharmaceutical journal, Stewart e'tal, (2020) stated that "SARS-CoV-2 is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. They stated further that although the incubation period of this strain is currently unknown, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that symptoms may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure (see CDCP, 2020), while Chinese researchers indicated that SARS-CoV-2 may be infectious during its incubation period (Bai, Yao, and Wei, 2020).

Regarding the symptoms of the disease, the most common symptoms of COVID-19) are fever, dry cough, and tiredness. Also, other symptoms that may be less common and may affect some persons include aches and pains, nasal congestion, headache, conjunctivitis, sore throat, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell or a rash on skin or discoloration of fingers or toes. Some people could become infected but only have mild symptoms and while others could be infected with SARS-CoV-2 have no symptoms at all.

Concerning the origin of the virus, there are various speculations and suspicions regarding the source of the virus. Arguably, the virus was said to have originated in a food market in Wuhan and subsequently spread from animal to human (Stewart e'tal, 2020). Another submission indicated that, some researchers claimed that the cross-species transmission may be between snake and human; however, this claim has been contested (Ji, Wang, and Zhao, 2020; Callaway and Cyranoski, 2020).

Arising from the above a number of preventive measures were adopted to mitigate the further spread of the virus. These included "regular and thorough hand hygiene; physical/social distancing; avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth; good respiratory hygiene and the wearing of medical masks for at-risk individuals or fabric masks for the general public where there is community transmission and physical distancing cannot be maintained" (WHO, 2020). Furthermore, "appropriate ventilation of buildings and indoor settings, and environmental cleaning and disinfection in particular of frequently touched objects and surfaces can help reduce the risk of infection" (WHO, 2020:1). Medically, the aged people are more vulnerable to the virus and could easily be infected. This is because their body system is no longer strong enough to fight the virus in the body. Therefore, the aged people have less chances of survival if infected with the disease. On the other hand, the younger people have significant chances of survival even when infected with the virus.

Meanwhile, up till now, no actual vaccine has been found to permanently cure the virus, but scientists and researchers are relentless towards achieving that.

However, in order to curtail the effect of the virus on citizens, there was a gradual re-opening of public places and organizations with the following cautions; in organizations and offices, the reception desks were encouraged to have personal protective equipment (PPE) kits. The kits should and must include the following items:

- Disinfectant and cloths or disinfectant wipes for surface cleaning
- Medical mask and eye protection, separate or combined, face shield, goggles (disposable)
- Gloves (disposable)
- Plastic apron (disposable)
- Isolation gown (disposable)
- Biohazard disposable waste bag

Control Measures adopted by Nigeria government

The control measures adopted by the Nigerian government in the wake of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic were similar to those suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO). These control measures were also called the Public Health measures. Some of these control measures employed in Nigeria were;

- Personal protective measures (hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette),
- environmental sanitation
- Physical distancing and travel-related measures. Physical distancing measures apply to individuals (e.g. isolation of cases and quarantine of contacts) or to communities, specific segments of the population, or to the population as whole (WHO, 2020:1).

In addition, large scale public health and social measures (PHSM) that were deployed by the government of Nigeria include movement restrictions, closure of schools and businesses, geographical area quarantine, and international traveling restrictions. These are sometimes referred to as "lockdown" or "shutdown" measures. Although, the control measures were positive to an extent, but the effect on the socio-economic condition of Nigerians still remain a great challenge.

Discussion

Poverty and the control measures amidst COVID-19

Reactions from most Nigerians against the control measures adopted in the country were triggered by the level of poverty being witnessed. Nigeria is believed to be the number two county with people living with poverty in the world after India as reported by the Human Development Index in 2018/2019. According to Op-ed Contributor, (2020), "living in typically high-density houses, with reduced access to sanitation, and a lack of savings to facilitate self-isolation, Nigeria's poor are at greater risk of contracting the disease. According to Okafor, (2020) while 44 percent of Nigerians sampled in the survey by Novare commissioned CIT Group, a financial holding company, said that coronavirus outbreak was accelerating rapidly in Nigeria, 47 percent noted that poverty was the most important issue facing the country.

Even before the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, many Nigerians were already in the pool of poverty as they were struggling to make ends meet daily. Coronavirus as a disease did not really have effect on the poor people but the control measures adopted by governments of different countries including Nigeria affected the people and contributed to the increase in the poverty level of many Nigerians. It should be noted that most Nigerians depend and live on daily informal sector-driven economic activities to feed and provide for their families. With the enforcement of the control measure of "lockdown", many people found it very difficult to feed and to survive leading to increases in hunger and starvation. Therefore, the measure adopted

by the government to curtail the further spread of the virus was not to the advantage of the poor people of Nigeria.

Effects of the control measures on Nigerian citizens

In the words of Karl Max; economy is the basis of every society. Suffice it to say that, once the economy of a society is affected, the entirety of life in such a society is affected. Economic pain became more acute for Nigerian households due to the measures targeted at flattening the coronavirus curve in Africa's largest economy (Okafor, 2020). Therefore, the effect of the control measures of the coronavirus pandemic cannot be overemphasized. The control measures imposed by the federal government caused a variety of setbacks in the economic system as well as in the lives of many Nigerians. But the hoi polloi of the Nigerian society were the most affected. Schools and other educational activities were put on hold throwing especially private schools' teachers, parents and students into severe disadvantage.

The lockdown measures greatly led to loss of jobs and largely increased unemployment in spite of the fact that Nigeria has been facing the challenge of unemployment and underemployment. Due to the sit-at-home measures, many companies and factories folded up while many workers were retrenched in Nigeria. The economy stood still living the masses with no option for survival. The NBS, (2021) disclosed this in a study jointly conducted with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and released. The report, which centred on the impact of COVID-19 on business enterprises in Nigeria, interviewed almost 3,000 businesses from the formal and informal sectors across major industries. According to the report, the pandemic affected the nation's workforce and caused an increase in the unemployment rate - moving from 27 percent to 33 percent between Q2 2020 and Q4 2020 (The cable September 21, 2021).

Amidst the pandemic, Lagos State government banned the use of tricycles and motorcycles for commercial purposes. The immediate and most significant effect was the sudden rise in unemployment. The ban affected about 14,000 bike-hailing employees and about 50,000 tricycles and informal motorcycle riders. This was a further strain on income resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic which devastated workers. According to the report of the COVID-19 impact monitoring survey released in July 2020 by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on employment and income of Nigerians have been widespread. It was observed that out of the 1,950 households surveyed on a nationally representative sample, 42% of the respondents who were working before the outbreak were no longer working the week preceding the interview for reasons related to COVID-19.

The implementation of the control measures resulted in high prices of consumable goods and other goods as well. Many consumable good prices were heightened that many Nigerians could hardly afford. According to a report by Doris Dokua on February 1, 2022, as of January 2021, the greatest majority of Nigerian households reported experiencing an increase in the prices of essential food items, as over 87 percent of households said that the prices of beans, cassava, yam and sorghum shut higher since January 2020. Moreover, 79 percent of respondents said that the prices of rice increased over the same time span and 74 percent found onion more expensive than it used to be. This also added to the growing level of hunger and starvation among many Nigerians during the pandemic since they have no resources to get the goods needed for consumption.

On the other hand, despite the lockdown measure and its implementation, road transportation system was informally in operation. Thus, the cost of transportation was high and many citizens were left stranded. In addition, many private companies have to close down and stop production, some cut-down salaries of their workers while others retrenched many of their workers to be able to stand the chance of keeping their companies and businesses running. More so, the fundamental human rights of the citizens are being infringed by the control measure adopted to contain the spread of the virus.

Challenges associated with the control measures adopted in Nigeria

Getting it right has always been a problem in Nigeria. The control measures adopted in Nigeria were adopted in other countries with higher numbers of confirmed cases. In the case of Nigeria for instance, confirmed cases were very few as at the time the lockdown policy was enforced and citizens had to remain indoors in spite of the fact that governments at all levels had not fully prepared for the pandemic.

However, there was no strategic plan by the Nigeria government to kick coronavirus out of the country, instead; the control measures were used as first aid to fight coronavirus which has not been effective, because first aid is only but a temporary nursing and not total cure. In fact, the Nigerian government still do not have a viable solution against the spread of coronavirus yet, the figures of confirmed cases keep increasing day by day. That is to say, the control measures have not been effective since they fail to curtail the spread of the virus while it lasted.

Conclusion

The Coronavirus pandemic has caused a lot of havoc on Nigerian economy especially the control measures adopted by the government and taking into cognizance the level of poverty and retrenchment of workers in different organizations. Nigeria has what it takes to be a great nation but that can only come to fruition when the right policies and decisions are made and implemented effectively. Thus, the federal government must focus on industrialization of the country and much more fundamentally, the development of education and research institutes.

The Way Forward

The Federal government of Nigeria in collaboration with the Central Bank developed strategies to help in cushioning the effect of the virus and lockdown by injecting huge amounts of resources to stabilize the economy thereby empowering the people which is an indication that the government is concerned about the welfare of the citizens.

However, in spite of the efforts made by the Federal Government as stated above, it is expected that at this point the government should give attention to a particular sector capable of helping the country and the world at large from the effect of the Coronavirus pandemic. This aspect is education and research institutions. Government is currently working to revamp the economy without due attention to the covid-19 itself. As it stands now, the battle is to revive the nation's economy amidst and post COVID19 while conscious effort to find a cure for the disease is neglected.

Some of the ways for the revitalization of Nigerian economy include:

- Investment in the education and research sector
- Investment in research institutes
- Effectiveness of price legislation
- Industrialization

Measures that can mitigate the spread of the virus such as regular washing of hands, proper hygiene and other health related etiquettes can still be maintained.

A common scriptural adage has it that "My people perish for lack of knowledge". Without knowledge the people are doomed for destruction. The federal government should inject more resources into the education sector so as to give room for more knowledge production through further research into the COVID-19 dilemma. This will also enable the country's research institutes to compete in the world for search the cure of COVID-19.

The efforts of the government to take Nigerians out of poverty is really commendable. But this effort will amount to nothing without focusing on building industries. The Nigerian government should focus also on building industries and factories that will process essentially the agricultural raw material to reduce the rate of unemployment and poverty caused by COVID-19. For instance, building a government owned sugar

factory, automobile and other food processed industries will go a long way to revive the Nigerian economy and improve the living standard of the people. These industries will create huge employment opportunities and improve the productive capacity of the country which will have positive bearing on the sustainability of the country's economy.

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