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UNDERSTANDING THE VALUES OF RESEARCH IN ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISSUES: THE CASE OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This paper entitled 'Understanding the Values of Research in Addressing Social Issues: The Case of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria' examined the values of research in human development with focus on epidemics. The paper adopted historical and descriptive method of research, and relied on secondary sources of data. Therefore, the study reviewed extensively existing literature on the subject under study and used descriptive analytical tool in its analysis. The study employed Develonic theoretical framework to analyzed the study data from the analysis, the study revealed that outbreak of pandemic in human Society is not new, however, what is new, is the changing character and variations of the pandemics, which among others include; Malaria, Small pox, Tuberculosis, Influenza, HIV/AIDs, SARs, Ebola and COVID 19 among others. The study also discovered that the potency and risks of these diseases were reduced and, in some cases, eradicated following the research discovery of drugs. The outbreak of pandemics and its associated risk have been suffered by Nigerians like other affected Nations, Yet the government of Nigeria never prioritize research as a measure to address the health crisis. The study therefore concludes that, research is the only means of providing lasting solution to pandemic crisis and indeed development in the country. Based on these findings, the study recommends among others that the government should prioritize research by encouraging research institutes and universities, both private and public, through adequate funding and provision of laboratory equipment for collaborative research to tackle existing epidemics, and to sustain research that would help the country's health sector addressing health crisis in future.
Keywords: COVID 19, Institutes, Nigeria, Pandemic Research, University.

Introduction

> *Throughout history, nothing has killed more human beings than deadly infectious diseases. Today, COVID-19 has shown how vulnerable we remain. However, research has also shown how we can always overcome and defeat pandemics from wiping the entire human race (Vince, 2020)*

Vince's position introduced us to two major themes. First, is that, outbreak of infectious or pandemic is common to human society and that such outbreak is always accompanied with

many deaths. The second theme of the quotation suggests to us that to reduce the potency of any outbreak of pandemic lies in the efficacy of research findings. In other words, the reduction of mortality and morbidity associated with pandemic infectious diseases is the value of social research. By this, without research, the scale, duration and magnitude of human suffering in the event of outbreak of epidemic can be imagined. Mankind has experienced and would continue to witness pandemics with considerable impact on their lives as we continue to battle with nature for our survival. COVID-19 outbreak is one of such situations in the history of epidemic and pandemic in human society. However, scientists and other professional researchers have refused to allow the world or human society to be boxed by the deadly infectious diseases outbreak.

This work therefore, is divided into four sections. Section one is the introduction. This is followed by Section two that deals with the history of outbreak of infectious diseases in human society while the third Section handles Nigerian COVID-19 experience. The final Section of the work takes on corroborative team research approach towards addressing the emergency situation.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed develonic approach. This approach involves holistic scientific study of wealth-creation (Jonathan 2010). It provides a framework, which integrates technology, development and productivity (Jonathan 2010). It applies to any type of economy without bias because the method of its derivation does not depend on economy type. Pandemic compels every nation to research in order to utilize most of the existing scientists and researchers knowledge towrd addressing health and other related development crisis. Develonics offers a theoretical and practical method of researching into the production of drugs. Variations of quantities of all inputs due to any change in pandemic process are handled simultaneously. The objective is to determine for a given resource, the technology which generates the best benefits. Nigeria's ability to acquire develop drugs within the existing global pandemic is constraints by inadequate research. A major impediment to technological development in Nigeria is the non-collaboration between research institutions and the industries.

The Outbreak of Pandemic Diseases in Historical Context.

The outbreak of deadly pandemic diseases in the society is not new, and this was the reason informed why people were advised not to panic. Nevertheless, what is new perhaps, is the changing character of pandemic and variations in their manifestations and their effects on human beings. Let us keep in view the mosquito borne disease called Malaria that broke out many years ago. Malaria has affected humanity for thousands of years and is still with us today. Initially, the deadly malaria disease was not only fearful but also killed many people. However, it is interesting to note that today through the help of research and the discovery of anti-malaria drugs like the Chloroquine and many others, there is significant reduction in the dead tolls associated with malaria pandemics. History has it that the African continent was once described "as the Whiteman's grave'' in the days of Euro-African relations to show how deadly was malaria disease. But today the story is no longer the same following the inputs of research. Today, we have a lot of Europeans in Africa courtesy of the discovery of the treatment of malaria pandemic through research.

In the 16th Century, mankind experienced the outbreak of Justinian disease, that killed as many as 50 million people, perhaps, half of the global population at that time(Abdel-Basset, 2021). It is interesting to note that research findings equally help in the prevention and control of this disease. In the 14th century, mankind suffered from Black Death disease. According to

Bryam cited in Venice (2020), about 200 million people died of the deadly disease. Smallpox was another deadly disease in the human society. Smallpox killed as many as 300 million people (Vince, 2020). Again, this disease was also curtailed through the development of vaccines that made mankind to overcome the impact of the Small pox disease.

By 1918, mankind suffered from the outbreak of influenza pandemic, which killed more human beings than previous epidemics. Bryam cited in Venice(2020) regretted the killings of human beings when he noted in a lamentation tone that:

> *Some 50 to 100 million people is said to have died from the influenza pandemic. But I must tell you regrettably that the number killed by influenza surpassed the Death tone of World War I, which was fought at the same time mankind experienced the outbreak of the pandemic. The 1918 Flu-Virus infected one in every three persons on the planet.*

But today, research findings have reduced the potency of the influenza disease. HIV is another pandemic in the history of infectious disease in human society. Though, it lacks vaccines and has killed an estimated 22 million people, it is still with us and has infected over 75 million people and with more added every day (Charles, 2018). However, the fact is that through research, retroviral drugs that reduced the potency of AIDS, have been discovered and applied, making mankind to control and reduce the mortality rate of HIV/AIDS. As if these were not enough for mankind to bear, the 2014/2016 Ebola outbreak took the centre stage as it killed many people in the history of our time, with about 28,700 cases reported and over 11,300 deaths recorded (Charles, 2018). This disease also has been brought under control through research result.

Today, COVID-19 pandemic has also delivered the world into uncharted waters of infectious human suffering. The constant threats of diseases kept the ruins on human development, but the happiness is that, researchers are always doing their best to keep these diseases in check through the implementation of research social values. Scientists have continued to explore how to mitigate the impact of any disease that troubled mankind. In the event of disease outbreak, researchers scramble to develop candidate drugs or vaccines in order to treat, prevent and in most cases, eradicate the sickness from the human society. To be precise, researchers try to establish through research efforts evident based results on how to reduce the risk of morbidity and mortality of any human sickness. This approach takes real time over the production of generalized knowledge. Thus, research is used as compass to foster understanding of how disease transmission, prevention, control and treatment could be achieved. This perhaps, explains why, Venice (2020) posited that, "through research man has defeated and would continue to overcome some of the infectious diseases and their barriers." In total agreement, Charles Kenny, a senior fellow at the Centre for Global Development reminded us in his book, titled winning the War on Death, Humanity, Infections and the Fight for the Modern World "that the decline of infectious disease is the best evidence that life on this planet truly is getting better" (Charcles, 2018).

The above observation is correct giving the fact that without research, man could not have overcome pandemics that ravaged the society in the years past. The emerging lethal diseases like Ebola, HIV, Tuberculosis, Sars, and COVID-19 do not respect political boundaries indicating that, it is a collective responsibility of States in the global society to deploy their resources towards getting solution to these pandemics. As it is known, they all started from a particular place, and with high rate of acceleration spread to other parts of the world. This explains why all countries in the world, have a particular responsibility to direct

adequate attention to research and the studying of pandemics with the aim of tackling associated challenges.

History of COVID-19

COVID-19 is small in size, about 65-to-128-inch diameter (ACD, 2019). It has single stranded RNA nucleic material ranging from 26 to 32 KVS in length. Earlier research studies revealed that, COVID-19 belongs to the zoonotic class of infection with high level transmissibility. COVID-19 risks is high than SARS COV following its infective reproduction number (R) of 1.77. At first, the World Health Organization referred to it as 2019 Novel Corona Virus Disease, and later announced the current reference name as "Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus" (WHO, 2020). The result from research carried out by team of scientists led by Prof. Young-Zhen Zhary, published on 10th Janaury 2020, named Wuhan, China as the origination city (Venice, 2020). This revelation was further supported by 89.2% findings of the research conducted by Chinese scholars that also attributed the outbreak of COVID-19 in connection to a sea food market in Wuban, China(Venice,2020).

Initially, it was speculated that the disease was transmitted from animal named Civet Cats to human (Venice, 2020). Before now, the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MCRS-COV) of 2012, and the 2002 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-COV) were found to have been transmitted from animal to human and therefore, speculated in like manner, that COVID-19 is animal associated. Though this speculation is yet confirmed, but the obvious is that COVID-19 infection is transmitted from one person to another through droplets from infected person, usually at the time of coughing or sneezing (WHO,2020).

According to research findings, exposure to onset of symptoms span between two and ½ days with an average of five days (Korsten, 2020). As stated earlier, COVID-19 has a high rate of transmissibility. Thus, within a month, COVID-19 pandemic spread throughout China. The spread was so wide because the disease occurred during the celebration of Chinese New Year, a time when there is always high level of human movement among the Chinese people. As at the time of the study, more than 8.34 million people have been affected in about 187 countries with death tolls of more than 238 recorded (Okon, 2022).

Nigeria Experience of COVID 19

The first confirmed COVID-19 case in Nigeria was on the 27th February, 2020. The case was an Italian citizen who resided and worked in Nigeria. He travelled to Milan, Italy and returned to Lagos, Nigeria on the 25thFebruary, 2020. He was confirmed as COVID-19 infected patient by the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital on Friday, February 28, 2020 (NCDC Report, 2020). Since then, the disease has been reported in many States, including the Federal Capital Territory.

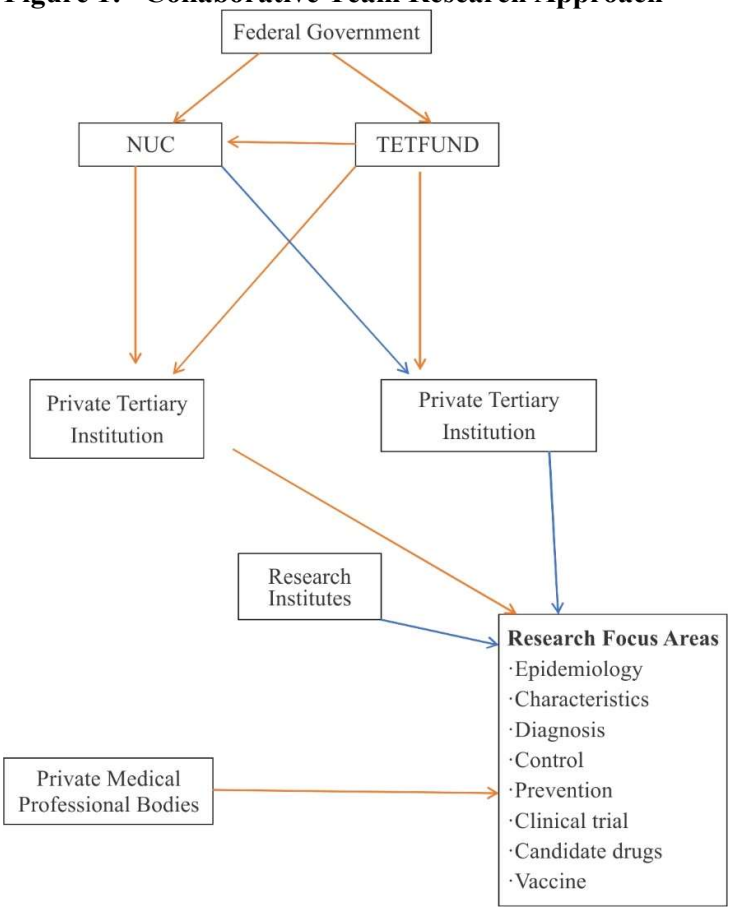
The fatality rate was presumed to be high then, since few persons were tested. Again, those with mild symptoms were most likely not tested since the testing kits were insufficient and, in most cases, for stigmatization, including religious belief many suspected persons refuse to be tested. Since the vaccine for treatment is yet discovered, treatment measures such as masks, hand hygiene, case detection, contact tracing and quarantine have been discussed as ways to reduce transmission. While these experience and measures cannot totally be disregarded, the obvious is that lasting solutions rest on research findings

Research Collaboration Approach

In order to address COVID-19 pandemic threat to lives, many nations such as the United States, China, Britain, Germany including African countries scrambled towards understanding the

dynamic and character of COVID-19 health crisis. Many nations across the world both developed and developing nations, mobilized their various resources, including developing framework programmes for research and innovation in an unprecedented manner to support procedure and activities directed towards providing solution to the pandemic. Nigeria, like many others, also swing into action through research.

Figure 1: Collaborative Team Research Approach



Source: Author's compilation, 2023

The above diagram introduces us to the collaborative team research approach. The first and most important stakeholder is the Federal government. This is because it is the Federal government that provides the regulatory framework for other agencies. Again, Federal government also fund other related agencies. In 2019, the Federal government approved the sum of ₦5 billion for research purposes and increased it to ₦7.5 billion in the 2020 budget(FGN Budget,2020). Let us keep in view, that the budget for education visa-vis research over the years was nothing to write home about. This explains why there has been decay in the educational sector, especially in the areas of quality research, including quality of libraries, laboratories and lecturers.

Nigerian Universities do not have conducive learning environment, the caliber of lecturers in most of the universities cannot be compared to those offered in foreign universities.

However, during the Covid period, scholars, in Nigeria's universities proved beyond doubt that they are in better position to perform optimally. It is sad to read in pages of our national dailies of scholars and researchers begging for encouragement in their quest to proffer solution to COVID-19 pandemic.

As observed by Bugoro (2020) TETFUND in close collaboration with the National University Commission and other related research institutes, could empower university research professionals to carry out research activities in the area of COVID-19 epidemiology, candidate drugs/vaccines, diagnosis, control and prevention. The network of coordinating research represented in the diagram revealed the encouraging partnership between the body and others in the fight against COVID-19(Bugoro, 2020).

The possibility of achieving positive results especially finding solution to the outbreak of corona virus, and indeed other related diseases in the Country is well defined. In all the states of the federation, there are fundamental laboratory and professional researchers. It is interesting to note that some universities in the Country, in rapid response to COVID-19 produce equipment such as personal protective equipment (PPE), ventilator and many others to assist in the fight against COVID-19. Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, produced hand sanitizers and donated to the State government. Many other institutions also produced same. This suggests that, actually, Nigerian institutions are in better position to address the challenges confronting us, especially emerging and re-emerging deadly diseases.

It is common knowledge that the outbreak of infectious diseases has always generated corresponding research, and subsequent production of preventive vaccine. For instance, the outbreak of transmissible diseases like smallpox, influenza and bulbaric plague in Brazil in the mid-1980s, led to the creation of Butanta Institute that generated research knowledge, which resulted in the production of vaccines for public health (Tersin, 2020). This vaccine had contributed to the control and eradication of not only the transmissible diseases, but also helped to reduce the country's dependence on imported vaccines.

Regarding more specific information of the research area with private bodies. Through this, relationship among university professional virologists, medical laboratory scientists and research institutes across the Country for more balance approach could enhanced COVID Evidence based research directed to achieving results in this respect. Taking this into account, the desire should be to develop vaccine through research that can be used as therapeutic intervention for COVID-19 infection treatment. This is important especially in the light of the epidemic episode in several countries in Africa, representing a worldwide threat.

Concluding Remark

From the analysis, the study discovers that, it is only scientists and other professional researchers that would continue to find lasting solution to current deadly diseases, and also to avoid similar pandemic outbreak in the future through research. This finding is in line with established reality that outbreak of pandemic never remains active the way it started, as scientists usually battle to reduce their potency.

COVID-19 is a global pandemic that poses threat to security and economic wellbeing of people across borders. In the event of outbreak of global pandemic, research as a compass should be directed towards identifying ways of controlling and preventing risks associated with the pandemic. Thus, the government, research institutes and the private sectors must collaborate to addressing pandemic problems. In Nigeria, research approach should be an exercise in collaboration between research institutes, universities community, professional medical experts, Nigeria University Commission, Health related institutions (private and public) and spirited individual researchers. The high level of collaboration in an emergency

situation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic should be a proactive strategy. However, without adequate financial support from the government and building of more confidence in our own, research for solutions to COVID-19 and other related diseases, including development will be mere paper work.

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