

COVID-19 RESPONSE STRATEGIES AND INCREASED POVERTY RATES IN THE SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA: A REVIEW

Udoikah, Joseph Michael

Department of Public Administration, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

Abstract

The study title “covid-19 response strategies and increased poverty rate in Nigeria: A review” was undertaken to determine the effect of strategies adopted by the government to cushion the spread of covid-19 pandemic on the people. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain the effect of the federal government covid 19 intervention measures such as lock down, social distancing on poverty rate occasioned by the outbreak of covid-19 in Nigeria and to investigate the contribution of the federal government intervention funds on the economic revival of the needy following the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Social contract theory propounded by Hobbes (1651) in Nnoli (2003) was used as the theoretical framework for the study. Secondary sources of data were used to collect relevant data for the study. The outcome of the study amongst other things revealed that covid-19 response strategies adopted by the federal government such as the distribution of government palliative, social distancing, lock down etc amongst others did not achieve much because most of the target beneficiaries were not reached due to politicization and corrupt practices that characterized the distribution. Again, some of the response strategies of the federal government like lock down added to the already existing sufferings of the masses and as well increased the already existing poverty rates. It was recommended that further response to pandemic or other health challenges in the country should be well planned to prevent further exposure of Nigerians to sufferings in the midst of National emergency. To achieve this, there should be in place a data bank to give accurate records of the number of people that a given attention is targeted.

Key words: Covid-19, response strategies, poverty, South east, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019 created another threat to the already existing poverty status of the country. COVID-19 is an abbreviation of Coronavirus disease that was discovered in year 2019 in Wuhan province, China. It began spreading rapidly in China and to other parts of the world through the movement of people in early 2020. Covid-19 affected greatly the economy of China and the world economy at large.

In Nigeria, the emergence of covid-19 in the country could be traced to the return of an Italian citizen who returned to Nigeria from Milan, Italy through Murtala Muhammed International Airport on 25th February, 2020. The Italian returnee fell sick on the 26th of February and was transferred to Lagos state Bio security facility for isolation, thus became the first recorded case of covid 19 in Nigeria. He was confirmed positive to covid-19 on 27th February, 2020. From there, corona virus spread to other parts of the country including the south eastern region of the country. Nigeria had recorded a total of 39539 covid 19 confirmed cases, and 845 deaths (NCDC, 2020).

In view of the above covid-19 spread, the federal government came up with some measures to control the spread of the virus and cushion the effect of hardship occasioned by the pandemic through provision of policy strategies and some palliative measures. These include closure of schools at all levels across the federation, closure of worship centres, market and business premises, sit at home order and interstate

movement ban except for those on essential duties. Government also introduced covid-19 protocols which were observed and they include washing of hands with soap and running water, use of hand sterilizer, wearing of face masks and social distancing. Government also set up a presidential task force on covid-19 on march, 2020 to coordinate and oversee the Nigerian multi-sectoral inter-governmental efforts to contain the spread of covid-19 and mitigate the impact in the country.

In the light of this intervention, government also provides cash donations and relief materials to individuals at both national and states levels. One would expect to see significant improvement on the socio-economic wellbeing of the people. However, this appears not to be the case, the unfortunate socio-economic woes and poor standard of living experienced in Nigeria due to the outbreak of covid-19 seemed to have been escalated by the effect of the pandemic on the economy.

To further cushion the effect of covid 19 on the poor population, the government deployed palliatives measures which include food items, clothing materials, healthcare consumables, and cash donations, covid- 19 survival loan facilities for household and small scale businesses and farmers to boost agriculture and food production to ameliorate the sufferings of the people. However, despite these laudable measures to address the socioeconomic hardship occasioned by covid-19, the present socio-economic well being of the citizen, poverty rate, employment rate and the general economic condition of the people seems to be poorer that it used to be before the advent of covid-19.

The presidential intervention as earlier stated is no doubt commendable, but administration of the palliatives which were targeted at the poor seems to have been hampered by politicization. The distribution of the available palliatives, especially in the south eastern region appears to have been determined by party affiliations. Political office holders and those in top government positions adopted a divisive approach to distribute and share the palliatives based on functional connection thereby depriving the targeted poor from having access to the palliatives that was meant to cushion the effect of the pandemic on them. This ugly and sharp practice seemingly skipped the needy and vulnerable who were the real targets of the intervention programme, and exposed them to more hardship and poverty.

Maku, Amaghionyeodiwe, Adesoye and Alimi (2015) observed that despite the large government spending, theseveral fiscal measures and a variety of economic programmes that the Nigerian government had introduced and implemented over the years, it is a dismay that growth has not accelerated and poverty remains widespread and pervasive. Unfortunately, the relief materials such as food, clothing, healthcare, consumables set aside for welfare of the people were hoarded by key stakeholders in government thereby increasing the sufferings of the people. This action resulted to crisis, death and destruction of public and private properties in most part of the country including the south eastern states of Nigeria.

The above action by state actors resulted in poverty and hunger which undermined the goal of the lockdown and sit at home order of the federal and states government. The fight to control the spread of the pandemic did not yield any result as people were seen going about their normal business in the midst of the lock down and sit at home order, as they preferred to die of corona virus instead of dying from hunger since the expected palliative did not gets to them. The masses appears not to have felt the impact of the huge amount of funds government claimed to have disbursed to reduced the economic hardship occasioned by the pandemic . Those with pressing health challenges hardly go to the hospital; rather they resorted to self medication as they poorly believe any slight increase in their body temperature would be attributed to covid-19. Based on the above, very many in Nigeria are now without job and sustainable means of livelihood.

Theoretical Framework

Among the social theories that exist social contract theory stands out as one of the best theories that explain the justification behind government's provision of social welfare packages to the citizens. The researcher therefore adopted social contract theory propounded by Hobbes (1651) and later elaborated by scholars such as Nnoli (2003) as the theoretical framework of analysis. Hobbes theory is based on the fact that there exists a contract between man and the state (the government). According to Hobbes man's life in the state of nature was one of fear and selfishness. Man lived in more or less chaotic condition of constant fear. Hobbes assumed that life in the state of nature was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. He argued that in the bid to ensure personal security and self protection and to avoid wretchedness and pain man went into contract with the state. Out of their freedom they relinquished their rights to constituted authorities. Consequent to this contract, the most powerful authority (the state) is to guard, ensure safety including social security, and preserve all lives and property. The subjects were to pay taxes, give up all their rights, privileges and rest all freedom in the sovereign for perception of peace.

Scholars have elaborated social contract theory in the face of increasing yearnings for government's intervention to salvage the sufferings of the people. For instance, Nnoli, (2003) opined that Hobbes postulation that life in the state of nature was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short means that in such conditions, there could neither be wrong nor right, justice nor injustice. He further submitted that in order to improve the existed condition, a form of contract was instituted between the individuals and the government on the other hand.

Abah, et al (2016) argued that when individuals relinquished their rights to state in fulfillment of their own part of the contract, the state then assumed the position of a father who must provide for the children. Government provision of social welfare services they argued is .therefore a logical consequence of state's effort at fulfilling its own part of the contract with the people. In the words of Hassan & Ahmed (2015) the universal consensus on the need for good governance is essentially linked to the growing thirst for an improved and qualitative living standard and a secured environment.

Although welfare is widely seen to be non-profit motivated services but that which is aimed at satisfying basic needs of the less privileged provided by individuals, group or government (Dolgoft, 2012), it is social when the services are articulated for group and community interests for the sole purpose of improving the living conditions of the citizenry. This correlates with the opinion of Richard (2012), who saw social welfare to involve those nonprofit functions of the society, public or voluntary, that are clearly aimed at alleviating distress and poverty or ameliorate the conditions of causalities of the society.

Social contract theory provides the basis upon which we can really understand and evaluate government's social welfare response programmes and various interventions to improve the quality of life of the people. Since independence till date, successive governments in Nigeria have introduced one programme or the other in the quest to better the living conditions of the. The most recent effort was the creation of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development in 2019. Since the outbreak of corona virus globally and in Nigeria in particular, government has made effort to fulfill its social security function through the provision of funds, food items and other relief materials. These provisions were expended from the taxes paid by the citizens as part of their obligations to the state. It is based on the above discourse that social contract theory is considered suitable to explain the effects of social welfare administration on socio-economic well-being of the people with a particular focus on the COVID-19 response strategies in Nigeria.

The concept of poverty

Poverty as an important social concept has been examined from different perspectives by several researchers, as well as many reputable international organisations, such as: World Bank, United Nations, and International Monetary Fund (IMF). More so, in attempt to provide holistic description of poverty, Danaan (2018) defines poverty as complex, multidimensional and multifaceted with manifestations in the economic, social, political, environmental and other aspects of human life. In the same vein, poverty has been defined as a “status of humiliation, a sense of being dependent on the others, a condition of being forced to accept rudeness, insults, and even indifference when one seeks help” (Latvia, 1998). Furthermore, the United Nations equally described poverty as a state of denial of choices and opportunities and a violation of human dignity that directly leads to low consumption of food or inability to afford balance diets, or low health conditions, low educational level and lack of access to education, as well as poor housing condition (UN, 2020). In general, poverty simply means “the state of being poor”. Buheji et al., (2020) further explained that, being poor in this context does not restrict to lack of financial resources alone. It certainly includes: lack of educational opportunities, inability to afford or access good health care services, lack of decent employment to make good living, difficulty in meeting minimum standard of living or inability to provide collateral for securing credit facilities. Using social and health perspectives, Buheji, (2019) categorizes poverty into two different types. First, the financial poverty, which he described as a situation where people living in poverty might have the asset, but not the cash flow and the second one is physical poverty, which is described as a condition where people in poverty would look poor, or have a health condition that carries the symptoms of indigence like malnutrition. Broadly speaking, poverty can mean high degree of insecurity, economic powerlessness and social exclusion of individuals, households and even communities. Furthermore, Karimu, & Muhammad (2017) stated that being poor may compel people to be living in fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. Therefore, poverty is certainly capable of denying people the right to enjoy basic necessities of life.

Rate of Poverty in Nigeria before the Outbreak of COVID-19

Over the years, there is lack of uniform criteria in measuring poverty globally, but socioeconomic status has been very prominent in determining poverty level of a country, as individual's “income” remains the most consistent, most popular and most preferred parameter for measuring poverty in most countries of the world. Recent study showed that the international poverty line stood at US\$1.9 per day (Sumner et al., 2020). Based on the official report of a government agency in Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria poverty line stands at N137,430 per year, which is equivalent of \$381.75 (NBS, 2020). This means that, those in Nigeria who earn below N137,430 per year, are clearly living in poverty. According to Buheji et al., (2020) about 35% of Nigerian population - that is, 62 million Nigerians have been in this category since year 2015 when the country entered into economic recession that lasted almost two years. In the same vein, previous NBS reports showed an increase in Nigeria's poverty rate from 54.7% to 60.9% between year 2004 and year 2010 respectively. The agency explained that absolute poverty was measured in those reports by the number of people who could afford only the bare essentials of shelter, food and clothing. Meanwhile, some earlier NBS reports had shown a decrease in the country's poverty rate between the period of 1985 and 1992 as well as between 1996 and 2004.

Major Causes of Poverty in Nigeria since Independence

Besides ineffective leadership and poor governance: bribery, corruption, lack of vision and foresight had also contributed significantly to the current alarming rate of poverty in Nigeria. Khalid (2008) suggested that the leading causes of poverty in Nigeria are unemployment, ignorance, bad leadership, corruption, high inflation, environmental degradation and high population growth. Though, several factors have been earlier identified by many researchers as causes of persistent poverty in Nigeria. However, this present study considered the following three salient causes of poverty in Nigeria which include: bad leadership, corruption and illiteracy.

Bad Leadership: Leadership is defined “as a body of people who lead and direct the activities of a group towards a shared goal” (Ogbeidi, 2012). Generally, leadership has to do with ability to lead, direct and organize a group towards achieving a mutually shared goal. Development in any nation is a function of effective leadership disposition, because true leaders are selfless and they think more of their people as well as next generation. But in the last 60 years of Nigeria existence as an independent nation, the country has experienced several leadership challenges in terms of bad governance. According to Ijewereme and Dunmade (2014), since attainment of political independence in 1960, Nigeria has never been governed by truly transformational and selfless leaders. Transition from one weak and ineffective leader to another has remained a constant leadership experience in Nigeria. Ebegbulem, (2012) earlier stated that poor leadership and corruption had adversely affected Nigeria's democratic stability and her economic development. Leadership crisis in Nigeria has been characterized with: greediness, parochial interest, visionless, mission-less, mediocrity, high-handedness, unwilling to relinquish power, lopsided appointments, ethnic discrimination, corruption among others. Throughout the world, good governance is the hallmark of a responsible leader. Good governance always ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in the decision-making over the allocation of resources (Waziri, 2009). The United Nations Development Programme – UNDP defines governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country affairs at all levels. Lack of access to basic services such as: education, primary health care, electricity, pipe borne water, motorable roads, employment opportunities and security of live and property, which are prerequisites for effective human development with a whole lot of wide reaching effects on the citizenry had lend credence to poor leadership performances in the Nigeria. Additionally, lack of leadership transparency and accountability in managing the country's affairs are responsible for enormous pressures constantly mount on public office holders by several non-state actors, such as: civil society organization, media among others with a call to enhance peoples driven priority in managing the nation's affair and its resources. Good leadership cannot be achieved without proper attention to social inclusion. A good leader encourages social inclusion in all aspects and bridges the gap between the leaders and the led to avoid a feeling of social discrimination among the citizens. For effective leadership performance, citizens are to be carried along in the various stages of policy planning, decision-making and implementation processes. This is because people, especially the downtrodden of society (the poor and the youth) are more likely to identify with policies they are part of, than those that are imposed on them by their leaders.

Corruption: Corruption has been part and parcel of most Nigerian leaders since the country got her independence in 1960. Though, there is no universal consensus on the definition of corruption. But the UN Global Programme against Corruption (GPAC) has defined it as “abuse of power or position for personal gain”. Continuous abuse of power for personal gain has become a major characteristics of Nigerian leaders right from independence in 1960. The first military incursion into the business of

governance in Nigeria in 1966 was blamed on several allegations of corrupt practices by the then civilian government of Tafawa Balewa. Ejimabo, (2013) stated that the young military officers who staged the first coup in 1966, maintained that the military was compelled to oust the civilian regime in order to end corruption and maladministration. Since the time of first Nigeria civilian regime till today, the rate of corruption has remained worrisome and unabated. According to Aluko (2002) corruption has a long history in Nigeria but its gradual popularity is due to the unimaginable records of consistent corrupt practices that mostly common among the country's political class, government officials as well as civil servants. In Nigeria, people perpetrate corruption in different forms and through different channels such as: financial misappropriation, financial mismanagement, looting of common treasury, money laundering, over-inflation of contracts, ghost workers, bribery among others (Ijewereme and Dunmade, 2014). Corruption is not only rampant among government officials but it also exists in every other sector of the nation's economy, in which the private sector and religious bodies are not exempted. In view of high rate of corruption in Nigeria, Danaan (2018) stated that, "there tends to be no accountability in public and community service. Greed and selfishness seem to be embedded in the psyche of an average Nigerian in leadership position and funds meant for development are mismanaged and embezzled by corrupt government officials." In the same vein, Adebayo (2013) earlier asserted that corruption strongly aggravates poverty, by eating up funds that would have otherwise been used to rescue a lot of vulnerable people from the pain of starvation and economic powerlessness, as it excessively pulls scarce resources from the national treasuries (money meant for economic development) into the bank accounts of a few politically powerful individuals. Similarly,

Aleyomi, (2013) suggested that "corruption has taught many Nigerians wrong lessons, that it does not pay to be honest, hardworking, dependable and law abiding because the culture has legalized illegality in the society". In fact, it is worrisome to note that the situation has degenerated to the extent that getting a corrupt-free Nigerian is almost impossible (Dike, 2003).

As a result of persistent corrupt practices in Nigeria, several funds meant for developmental programmes and projects targeted at ameliorating the challenges of vulnerable people are usually squandered. High rate of corruption has equally hindered the effective provision of basic amenities such as: construction of roads, schools, hospitals and others. It is obvious that where fund meant for provision of public projects cannot be completely looted by government officials in charge, the common practice is to embark on the use of substandard and inferior materials in executing the projects, with aim of making huge profit. Meanwhile, many public projects with such structural deficit do not last long before becoming dilapidated and the painful aspect of such experience is that, the vulnerable people are usually the one who bear the brunt of such failed projects. Few among these corruption-based failed projects include several poorly constructed township roads by many Local Government elected office holders. Recently in Nigeria, these types of projects are not limited to a particular local government area but it rather spread across the entire length and breadth of the country. A common feature of such poorly constructed roads is that they hardly last up to two years before becoming death traps with several failed portion and dangerous potholes that commonly constitute maximum inconveniences for every road users. Another easily found failed projects handled by these greedy Nigerian politicians include poorly constructed borehole water supplies in both rural and urban areas. These types of boreholes usually become the only source of portable water supply for a large percentage of the citizens, as pipe borne water is nowhere to be found in many part of the country. It is however worrisome that majority of these borehole water supplies, despite their importance to the living condition of the residents, usually stop working in less than a year after their initial installations that commonly come with an elaborate political commissioning ceremony.

Whereas, it is highly understandable that if these public projects are properly handled with standard materials that meet the contract specifications, there is no doubt that they would significantly reduce the suffering of most vulnerable Nigerians who are living in poverty. Ejimabo, (2013) claimed that, regardless of where corruption occurs, the individual or group involved and what causes it or the form it takes, the facts still remain that in Nigeria, corruption has contributed immensely to greed, mistrust, insecurity and injustice, as well as to the poverty and the misery of a large segment of the nation's population.

Illiteracy: Despite several efforts made by the Nigerian government since independence to tackle high rate of illiteracy in the country, through provision of access to formal education by establishing more primary, secondary and tertiary schools across the nation, coupled with the provision of free education, scholarship, as well as provision of free learning materials, it is unexpected to discover that illiteracy level still remains high in the country. One of the most disturbing channels through which illiteracy has been contributing to the high rate of poverty, is the fact that many Nigerians are committed to raising large number of children through multiple wives. This idea of raising many children in the family usually brings about high financial demand that constantly go beyond the capacity of such family to properly care for the children. These forms of family structures have direct implication on the country's population growth. Ordinarily, population growth supposed to be a blessing for the country's socio-economic development. Because a healthy population is an economic asset since the assured supply of a strong and healthy labour force is an essential factor of social change and development, (Olowa, 2012). But in the case of Nigeria, this unregulated population growth has adversely affected the few available infrastructural facilities, because of poor national planning and lack of adequate developmental projects on the part of government to meet the country's continuous population demands. Even where some amenities are provided, especially in the urban areas, such public facilities are constantly overstretched by sudden population explosion usually springing out of the vulnerable population zone.

Consequently, high rate of illiteracy in the country has undoubtedly made large percentage of Nigerian youth unemployable. This is because employment opportunities can only be secured by suitably qualified individuals. By implication, every youth without a required academic qualification or vocational training will not be able to secure any profitable job that can improve their living condition and enhance their standard of living. Therefore, high rate of illiteracy had equally encouraged the development of bad leadership, because many greedy leaders easily manipulated their ways for personal financial enrichment at the expense of the general population, by taking undue advantage of this illiterate bloc of the population, who lack basic knowledge about their fundamental rights, let alone being able to defend them.

Covid-19 Response Strategies at reducing poverty insouth eastern states and Nigeria at large

Nigeria like other countries globally adopted some strategies to curtail and contain the spread of the novel corona virus. These strategic interventions according to Onwuka (2021) largely followed the standard World health organization (WHO)-suggested approach namely: testing, contact tracing, isolation and treatment, as well as containment measures such as strict enforcement of hygiene practices like hand washing, observation of social distancing, and travel restrictions (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020).

In addition, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) imposed full lockdowns in areas that are considered epicenters of the pandemic. To this end, on 30 March, 2020, the FGN imposed full lockdown of Lagos, and Ogun States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) for 14 days in the first instance. The

lockdown was further extended following the expiration of the initial lockdown and the increasing number of cases across many states. The state governments have also followed suit (Presidential Taskforce on COvid-19, 2020). Some state governors have implemented partial lockdown involving banning of, public gatherings, closure of open markets, and restriction of inter-state movements. Thus, businesses are being forced to shut down without alternative plans, rendering vulnerable information sector workers who work daily to earn a living and are now stranded at home, unable to sustain themselves and their families.

Across the world also, governments are employing two fundamental non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. These include Suppression and Mitigation. In the case of suppression, the objective is to reduce the transmission rate to less than 1 whereas in the case of mitigation, the objective is to get the numbers to decline or slow its spread. Population wide social distancing combined with home isolation of cases and closure of schools and universities are minimum policy requirements for effective suppression. A part from the above, the Nigerian governments at both national and state levels have responded with the provision of palliatives. During the announcement of the lockdown:

...President Buhari said the government would put in place measures to preserve the livelihoods of workers and business owners to ensure their families get through this very difficult time in dignity". The most vulnerable in our society" would receive conditional cash transfers for the next two months.

This was followed with the implementation of social welfare packages which include 20,000 Naira (US \$2) to families that registered in the National Social Register of poor and vulnerable households set up by the Buhari's administration in 2016 to combat poverty; distribution of 77,000 metric tons of grain, 50 billion naira (US \$28.5 million) earmarked as credit facility to support households and micro, small and medium enterprises affected by the COVID-19 pandemic etc.

Other major important moves made by the government to control the spread of the virus include the following: (i) The setting up of the presidential task force on COVID-19 by president Muhammadu Buhari on March 9, 2020, to coordinate and oversee Nigeria's multi-sectoral intergovernmental efforts to contain the spread and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The PTF provides overall policy direction, guidance and continuous support to the National Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) of the NCDC, and other Ministries and Government Agencies involved in response activities and ensure their coordination towards a single set of national strategic objectives, (ii) Economic Sustainability committee inaugurated by the President on 30th of March, 2020 chaired by the Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, to develop a comprehensive economic plan to respond to the disruption and dislocations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, (iii) The President also set up a committee made up of the Minister and Minister of State of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Minister of State Petroleum Resources, Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria and Group managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the 2020 budget and to recommend appropriate and immediate response strategies, (iv) The development of the Nigeria Economic Plan by the Economic sustainability committee (ESC).

The NESP has been developed as a 12-month, 2.3 trillion Naira "transit" plan, (v) The 500 billion Naira component of the NESP COVID-19 crisis intervention Fund, for the upgrading of health facilities nationwide, and also to finance a National Special Public works programmes as well as any other interventions that may appear in the future, (vi) Release of 70,000 metric Tonnes of grain for

distribution to poor and vulnerable households across the country, (vii) Commencement of a three-month repayment moratorium for all trader moni, Market moni and farmer moni Loans, with immediate effect, (viii) Commencement of a three-month moratorium for all Federal Government funded loans issued by Bank of Industry, bank of Agriculture and Nigeria export import bank, (ix) Establishment of a joint Technical Task Team to facilitate the movement of food and agricultural inputs across Nigeria, during the corona virus lockdown, etc (PTF, 2020). Other interventions came in form of palliatives - unemployment benefits, cash grants, waivers and host of other incentives (Department for International Development, 2020).

In Nigeria, government interventions could be grouped into three broad categories namely: fiscal interventions, macroeconomic intervention and monetary intervention, especially palliatives for the poor and most vulnerable groups (IMF, 2019).

COVID-19 Response Strategies and its Challenges in south east Nigeria

Since COVID-19 is still an on-going pandemic, an expansive body of literature is yet to be developed on its implications on socio-economic well-being of the people, especially in Nigeria. That notwithstanding, the increasing demand made by the public on governments social welfare function is the context upon which the economic hardship brought about by the unfortunate outbreak of the corona virus disease may be understood. Available record reveals that Corona virus or the diseases it causes "COVID-19", originated from the Wuhan Province of China in December, 2019. It began spreading rapidly in China and to other parts of the world in early 2020. Africa recorded its first COVID-19 case in Egypt on the 14th February, 2020. Since then, more than 52 countries have reported cases initially confined to capital cities, cases are now reported in a significant number of countries, and in multiple provinces (Peterson, 2020; OECD, 2020). Ogunode, et al, (2020) document that on the 27th of February 2020, Nigeria confirmed its first case in Lagos State, an Italian who works in Nigeria had returned from Milan, Italy through the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, fell ill on the 26th February and was transferred to Lagos State Biosecurity Facilities for isolation and testing. Since then the virus has spread across the states in the federation. The spread of COVID-19 affected economic activities in China and other parts of the world, and in February, the Chinese economy came to a halt. China is a major exporter of commodities to African countries, and the contraction in China has a consequence for African countries through the negative impact on African businesses that rely heavily on China for the supply of primary and intermediate raw materials. This is also the case in Nigeria.

Most African governments including Nigeria, have implemented measures to encourage social distancing, focusing on border and travel restrictions, school closures and bans on large gatherings. However, these measures were not only targeted at controlling the spread of the virus but also resulted to closure of productive sectors of the economy with its challenges. One major effect was the falling of oil prices. UNDP (2020) revealed that:

The decline in oil prices by 55 percent between the end of 2019 to March 2020, is one of the most serious economic shocks that Nigeria has faced in its memory, especially as the oil sector contributes 65 percent and 90 percent to government and total export revenues, respectively. As at 18th March, 2020, the price of crude oil dropped to US\$29.621 barrel. Given that Federal budget estimates for 2020 have pegged oil prices at US\$57/barrel and production at 2.18 million barrels per day, if prices continue to remain at this level, it would translate to a decline in 48 percent of expected revenue by close to \$10B and export earnings by \$19B. The

decline in export revenue is projected to have a combined effect of 0.55 percentage points drop in GDP.

The above definitely has some ripple effects on other sectors since oil is the main stay of the Nigeria's economy. The increase in hunger and poverty justifies the clamour for social welfare packages in the face of ravaging effects of COVID-19. The UN estimates that nearly 30 million more people could fall into poverty and the number of acutely food- insecure people could significantly increased. World Bank (2020) revealed that about 40-60 million people will be moved into extreme poverty as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. World population living in less than \$1.90 per day is projected to increase from 8.2% in 2019 to 8.6% in 2020, or from 632 million people to 665 million people. At the country level, the three countries with the largest change in the number of poor are estimated to be India (12 million), Nigeria (5 million) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (2 million). Onehi (2020) citing Olubiyi (2020) observed that Nigeria currently have deficits in housing, water, sanitation, food, healthcare and education, among others and that COVID-19 outbreak will more than likely increase these shortfalls. Adesoji (2020) added that out of 1, 9540 households surveyed on a nationally representative sample, between 35-59% of households could not afford to buy staple foods like yam, rice and bean during the 7 days prior to the interview when they needed them. It is also important to note that as of 2019 before the outbreak of COVID-19, 40.1% of Nigerians representing over 82.9 million Nigerians live in poverty and inequality. The report defines national poverty as annual expenditure below N137, 430 (N376.5 per day or roughly \$1 on 360/\$). This no doubt has increased following the outbreak of corona virus.

Job loses seems to have been added to the economic hardship facing the people. In 2019, the National Bureau of Statistics documented that unemployment rate in Nigeria was 23.1% while underemployment stood at 16%. In May 2019 however, the Minister of Labour and Employment Chris Ngige, revealed that the Federal Government forecast an unemployment rate of 33.5% by 2020. This may have increased going by a number of job losses. This is further buttressed by the fact that out of 1,950 households surveyed on 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 (Adesoji, 2020). A further breakdown according to him showed that the poorest households (from the lowest consumption quintile) reported the highest share of Nigeria who stopped working (45%) while 35% of the wealthiest household also affected. Also, the study reported a high rate of households income loss since mid-march 2020, as 79% of households reported that their total income decreased. Basically, while the income from all sectors were affected, the rate was highest for income from non-farm family business (85%) compared to household farming, livestock or fishing (73%) and wage employment (58%). Despite the fact that the pandemic affects virtually all the sectors, the informal sector appears to be worst hit in terms of unemployment. The artisans and petty traders who must go out on daily basis before they could eat seem to be the worst hit as their means of livelihood has been hampered by the covid-19 restrictions. Lending support to the foregoing, Morka (2020), the Executive Director of the Social Economic Rights Action Centre, a Lagos-based non-governmental organization, reported that the vast majority of people outside the formal system are hit devastatingly by the lockdown, any disruption to their daily livelihood has a huge and significant impact on their ability to meet their most basic needs". The informal sector, in which more than 80 percent of Nigerians work he submitted, includes a wide range of occupations, from street traders, taxi drivers, tradesmen, and artisans to food vendors and hair dressers. In Lagos alone, 65 percent of the estimated 25 million people work in the informal sector.

The health sector is not left out. Currently, in Africa, including Nigeria, 65% of healthcare expenses are made from out-of pocket expenditures compared to Europe where the national and regional authorities

are responsible for the health policies and expenditure of citizens, (Peterson, 2020). The on-going pandemic has health implications in Nigeria. According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report, Nigeria is placed 187th among 200 countries on global healthcare delivery system ranking (Ephraim-Emmanuel, Adigwe, Oyeghe&Ogaji, 2018). Nigeria runs a National Health Insurance Scheme that cater for only federal public servants. This category of workers constitutes less than 1% of the total population and resides mostly in urban centers. The scheme does not provide cover for people employed in the informal sector despite the fact that it is from the sector that the bulk of the population makes a living, especially the rural population (Urama, Adewoyin, Ezebuilo, Ukimueze&Ene, 2019). The situation in the rural areas is regrettable. Not only do these areas house about two thirds of the country's poor who engage in informal employments, they also lack most basic social amenities, including quality healthcare facilities. OECD (2020) in their study revealed that informal workers are most exposed to the consequences of the health and economic crises. It added that the growing number of COVID-19 patients' risks overcrowding health facilities, and patients with high burden diseases like AIDs, tuberculosis and malaria could lack access and/or adequate care. Patients with other active diseases such as Lassa fever in Nigeria and Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo may also be affected. COVID-19 pandemic will still remain a major challenge to healthcare service delivery in Nigeria due to its impact on the healthcare budgetary allocations.

Also, the impact of COVID-19 on the education, especially the Higher Institution Development is quite enormous. Ogunode, et al, (2020) found that the outbreak of COVID-19 has resulted to reduction in international education. They argued that many students studying abroad will be discouraged to continue their studies and many planning to study abroad cannot achieve their plans because many countries have placed ban on travels. This was followed by disruption in Academic calendar of Higher Institutions and other levels of education. They observed that the closure of all educational institutions from primary schools to the higher institutions would affect the student's academic plans and programme. Others include cancellation of local and international conferences. According to Wikipedia (2020) the 2019-2020 corona virus pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the widespread closures of schools and universities. This also was the case in Nigeria. As at 3rd April 2020, over 421 million learners were out of school due to the fact that hundred Countries have implemented national closures, impacting about 98% of the world's student's population. There is also the problem of loss of workforce in the education institutions. World meters (2020) also reported that COVID-19 is responsible for the death of over 74,431 persons across the world including Nigeria and still counting. These people are from different professions including the teaching profession. In addition to the foregoing, is the issue of cut in budget of higher education (Seaafrica, 2020) observed that the Nigeria Federal budget for the 2020 fiscal year was prepared with significant revenue expectations but with contestable realizations. The approved budget had projected revenue collections at N8.24 Trillion, an increase of about 20% from 2019 figure. The revenue assumptions were premised on increasing global oil demand and stable market with oil price bench mark and oil output respectively at 57 per barrel and 2.18 million Barrels per day. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 and its increasing incidence in Nigeria has called for adrastric review and the changes in the earlier revenue expectations and fiscal projections to the extent that it resulted to Nigeria going for a budget that is over 1410 Trillion. This has a far reaching effect in all sectors of the economy including education. Contributing to the discourse, Simon & Hans (2020) note that the closure of schools, colleges and universities not only interrupted the teaching for students around the world, the closure also coincides with a key assessment period and many exams have been postponed or cancelled. Internal assessments are perhaps thought to be less important and many have been cancelled. But their point is to give information about the child's progress for families and teachers.

Uduak (2020) in his contribution argued that COVID-19 pandemic has led to major disruptions in social and economic activities in virtually all the sectors in the world. To him, the impact has been in terms of increased level of mortality and morbidity, as well as in terms of different types of social and economic problems such as increase in mental health, loss of jobs and income. He was particularly concerned and worried over gender dimension of COVID-19 impact in Nigeria. This is why he submitted that women are usually responsible for childcare within families in Nigeria. With the closing of schools due to COVID-19 pandemic, he argued, children of school age are at home and have to be looked after mainly by mothers. The opportunity cost here is that while men may be able to resume work whenever restrictions are lifted, women will only be able to resume work when schools can resume. This will certainly lead to loss of income and entrench gender inequality. Similarly, the amount of domestic work done by women in terms of cooking and general housekeeping will remarkably increase thereby putting additional mental and physical stress on women.

As a corollary of the above, the increased risks of unplanned pregnancies due to COVID-19 lockdown measures have been highlighted in reports. This scenario is also applicable to Nigeria. The implication of being trapped by an unplanned pregnancy could be more debilitating for women from poorer households considering the fact that they may be forced to bear the burden of child bearing and nurturing alone. Children who have the ambition of returning back to school may be consumed by fear of being stigmatized by their peers. Early pregnancies in younger females also has severe consequences aside from being psychologically affected, they also face risk of exposure to birth and health related complications such as maternal or mortality, premature births, vesico-viginal fistulas (VVF) etc., which may have long term devastating effects on their lives. Furthermore, the restrictions due to COVID-19 will widely increase the incidence of child marriage and poverty in the northern part of the country and by extension the whole Nigeria (Uduak, 2020).

It has also been argued by scholars and international organizations that health related pandemics have implications on peace and social cohesion. For instance, UNDP (2020) documents that evidence suggest that health related pandemics have potential to increase the risk of: domestic violence - with police reports in China showing that domestic violence tripled during the epidemic, violence against health workers due to serious stress levels that the pandemic placed on patients, and abuse and exploitation of women and girls - especially care givers. Furthermore, frustrations resulting from economic loss could also play into existing regional fact lines within Nigeria. Furthermore, implementing isolation measures without regard to the local context can further exacerbate the situation leading to stress disorders, mental health and in some cases protracted violence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Poverty is not only rampant but is also operating at a very high rate in Nigeria. This study further reveals that the current economic hardship experienced by vulnerable people in the country has taken a new dimension, largely due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the inability of our political leaders to ensure equitable distribution of the provided covid-19 response strategies to the targeted poor in the country. Though, COVID-19 pandemic is regarded as a serious global health challenge, but its attendant socioeconomic impact has higher adverse effect on the living conditions of the entire vulnerable population in Nigeria. This is specifically caused by the negative effect of the outbreak on their day-to-day social and economic activities which characterized their means of livelihood. The recent increase in the poverty status among vulnerable Nigerians actually affirmed the earlier claim by Buheji et al., (2020) that

vulnerable people are usually at the receiving end of any natural or artificially induced disasters, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Across the world, introduction of social investment programmes is among the most popular approaches to poverty alleviation programmes toward vulnerable people. But the complete failure of several previous social investment programmes in Nigeria calls for a more drastic and aggressive actions on the part of Nigerian government, in order to significantly tackle the high rate of poverty in the country. Furthermore, there is a need to establish additional pro-poor people programmes, which should be handled by professionals that possess unquestionable characters, together with necessary legal backings for its effectiveness and that will be targeted at the vulnerable people with the aim of gradually graduating them out of the poverty zone, and thereby reducing the high rate of poverty in the country as well as facilitating the expected national growth and development that would benefit the rich and the poor in the country. Again, further response to pandemic or other health challenges in the country should be well planned to prevent further exposure of Nigerians to sufferings in the midst of National emergency. To achieve this, there should be in place a data bank to give accurate records of the number of people that a given attention is targeted.

REFERENCES

- Abah, E. O., Edeh, J. N. & Nwakamma, M. C. (2016). "Accessing Factors that Affect Implementation of Social Welfare Services in Nigeria". *European Journal of Social Services*, 52(1): 45-56.
- Badru, F. A. (2015). Social Welfare Administration in Nigeria. Course Manual for PAD 402: Social Welfare Administration in Nigeria. National Open University of Nigeria.
- Dolgoft, R. (2012). Understanding Social Welfare: A search for social justice (9th edition). Maryland: Pearson Publishers.
- Ephraim-Emmanuel, B. C., Adigwe, A., Oyeghe, R. & OGaji, D. S. (2018). "Quality of Healthcare in Nigeria: Myth or Reality". *International Journal of Research in Medical Services*, 6(9): 2875-2881.
- Hassan, J. E. (2017). What is Social Welfare History? Social Welfare History Reject. Retrieved from <http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/recollections/social-welfare-history>, 7th July, 2020.
- Hobbes, T. (1651) 1950 *Leviathan* with an introduction by A.D Lindary. New York: Dutton.
- Ekitan, I., Babatope, O., Meliz, Y. & Savas, I. (2019). "Effects of Socio-economic Factors on Nigeria's Life Expectancy at Birth". *Annals of Biostatistics & Biometric Applications*, 1(5): 1-6.
- Nwachukwu, L. and Onwubiko, O. (2008). Poverty Alleviation as a Policy Problem in Nigeria: Lessons of Experience and Prospective for Solution". *African Journal of Political and Administrative Studies (AJPAS)*, 4(1): 251-270.
- Olu, A. & Irabor, P. A. (2020). "Assessment of Government Response to Socio-economic Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria". *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 3(1): 677-686.
- OECD (2013). Economic Well-being. OECD Framework for Statistics on the Distribution of Household income, consumption and wealth.
- OECD (2020). "COVID-19 in Africa: Regional Socio-economic implications and policy priorities". Tracking Corona virus (COVID-19) Contributing to a Global

- Ogbonna, B. O. (2017). "Social Welfare Scheme a Neglected Component of Public Healthcare Services in Nigeria". *Moj Public Health*, 5(3): 101-104.
- Ogunode, N. 1, Abigeal, I. & Lydia, A. E. (2020). "Impact of COVID-19 on the Higher Institutions Development in Nigeria". *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2(2): 126-135.
- Olukayode, M. E., Amaghionyeodigwe, L., Bolaji, A. A., & Olorunfemi, A. (2015). "Components of Government Spending, Social Welfare and Economic Performance in Nigeria". *International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences*, 5(3): 417-432.
- Onah, V. O. (2017). "Genesis of third world underdevelopment". In Okolie, A.S. & Onah, V. C. (eds), "Politics of Development and Underdevelopment" Abakaliki: WillyRose&Appleseed Publishing Coy.
- Onwuka, I.O. (2021). "Tracking Poverty in era of Covid-19 Pandemic: The Contributory Pension Scheme Option". *African Journal of Business Management*, 5(4): 122-132
- Ozili, P. K. (2020). "Covid-19 Pandemic and Economic Crisis: The Nigerian Experience and Structural Causes". www.researchgate.net/publication/1340499471. Retrieved 20 July, 2021.
- Peterson, O. (2020). "COVID-19 in Africa: Socio-economic impact, policy response and opportunities". Available on Emerald Insight of: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/0144-333x.htm>. Retrieved 15th July, 2020.
- Presidential Task Force-Covid-19 (2020). Implementation Guidance for Lockdown Policy. Available at: <https://nipc.gov.ng/2020/05/02/implementation-guidance-for-lockdown-policy/>
- Sisira, K. N. G., Ravindra, H. K. & AlexandruMirarea, N. (2016). "Socio-Economic Determinants of Well-Being of Urban Households: A study of Sri Lanka". *The USV Annals of Economics & Public Administration*, 2 (24): 26-35.
- Ubi, P. & Ndem, B. (2019). "Poverty and Health Outcomes in Nigeria". *International Journal of Economics & Financial Issues*, 9(6): 132-141.
- UNDP (2020). "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria: A Socio-economic Analysis".