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Covid-19 pandemic: its impacts and lessons for Nigeria

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted one of the most significant global public health crises of the twenty-first century, which generated far-reaching impacts on health systems, economies, education, social relations, religious practices, and governance. In Nigeria, the pandemic exposed existing structural vulnerabilities and created additional challenges for individuals, institutions, and government. This paper examines the multidimensional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian society and explores lessons that can inform strategies for mitigating the effects of future pandemics and public health emergencies. The study adopts a qualitative, conceptual approach based on a critical review of relevant scholarly literature, official reports, and documented evidence concerning the Nigerian experience of COVID-19. The analysis indicates that the pandemic disrupted economic activities and livelihoods, interrupted educational processes, constrained religious and social interactions, exposed weaknesses in healthcare infrastructure, and intensified vulnerabilities associated with poverty, unemployment, and inadequate social protection. The study further identifies economic dependence on crude oil, inadequate healthcare preparedness, weak digital infrastructure, limited institutional capacity, insufficient transparency in the distribution of palliatives, misinformation, and vaccine hesitancy as important challenges that affected Nigeria's pandemic response. Drawing on these experiences, the paper argues that effective pandemic mitigation requires a multidimensional and formidable approach encompassing economic diversification, strengthened healthcare systems, improved welfare for frontline health workers, transparent social protection mechanisms, digital transformation of education and commerce, adaptive religious practices, effective risk communication, and public confidence in vaccination. The paper concludes that the COVID-19 experience provides important lessons for strengthening Nigeria's institutional preparedness, social resilience, and capacity to respond effectively to future public health emergencies.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, Coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2

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Introduction

Covid-19 pandemic is a reality that has shocked the world; it is an invisible enemy that has taken the world by surprise; what humanity never imagine could happen in the world in this era of advanced scientific and technological health care system has happened as a result of the emergence of the pandemic. It is important to note that before the emergence of corona virus virtually everything was normal in the world: people were free to move from one place to the other; people were free to relate and socialize; economic sectors were carrying out their businesses freely with little or no barrier; the health sectors were able to proffer solutions to most of the health challenges battling humanity; sport and entertainment industries were carrying out their sporting and entertainment activities with little or no hitches; religious activities were being carried out by various religious adherents without much challenges; education sectors were carrying out various education exercises for the development of humanity; social workers were carrying out their social work in different places and among people of various needs; government activities were going on smoothly in most of the countries of the world; bilateral trades and diplomatic relationships among nations were going on with little challenges where the case may be.

Nevertheless, with the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic everything was turned upside down; with different governments imposing total lockdown, the world was put to a state of stoppage; the world experienced partial or total restriction of movement and social interaction; economic sectors cease to function as it used to be; institutions of learning were short down; entertainment and sporting activities banned indefinitely, religious and other social activities that could attract large number of people were also banned with little relaxation in some places; different countries began to evacuate its citizens from the affected countries; diplomatic relationships have ceased to function as they used to be; even health personnel who were front liners in fight against this dreaded virus carryout their work with fear and suspicions.

It is quite obvious that Covid-19 has affected every aspect of human existence, and both young and elderly, poor and the rich were affected by this virus in one way or the other. Although there is no doubt to assert that Covid-19 has affected human existence, however, it will be helpful to look for ways in which the impact of the virus on humanity could be mitigated. Despite the negative impact of Covid-19 on human beings, it is important to note that there are ways in which it could be mitigated. This is what prompted the researcher to carry out this research. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to find out how the negative impact of Covid-19 pandemic could be mitigated in Nigeria. The researcher has achieved the above aim by examining how the pandemic has affected the physical, social, psychological, mental, political, economic and religious/moral aspects of human existence, and by finding out how to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 in Nigeria. The above areas of concern formed the objectives that will help the research to achieve the aim of the research as stated earlier. Since corona virus has virtually affected every aspects of human existence, the researcher is of the view that tailoring the objectives of the research around physical, psychological, socio-economic, mental, political, religious aspects of human existence will help in finding out that impact of Covid-19 pandemic on humanity.

The following are the major questions which this research seeks to answer:

- What are the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on human existence?
- What are the ways in which the various impact of corona virus could be mitigated?
- What are the things that individual, government, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies, and the global community could do to help cushion the impact of Covid-19?

This paper adopts a qualitative and conceptual research approach based on a critical review and synthesis of existing literature and documentary evidence on the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The study relies primarily on secondary sources, including scholarly journal articles, institutional reports, official COVID-19 situation reports, and relevant documented materials relating to the social, economic, educational, healthcare, and religious consequences of the pandemic. Relevant literatures were examined thematically in accordance with the major objectives of the study. Particular attention was given to evidence concerning the effects of COVID-19 on the Nigerian economy, education, healthcare system, religious activities, social relations, livelihoods, and government interventions. The analysis also considered measures adopted during the pandemic and the challenges associated with their implementation. The study is essentially analytical rather than statistical. It synthesises findings from existing studies to identify recurring patterns, structural weaknesses, and lessons that can contribute to improved pandemic preparedness in Nigeria. The mitigation strategies proposed in the paper are consequently derived from the documented challenges associated with the Nigerian experience and from the need to strengthen institutional and societal resilience.

Research of this nature is timely and its significance cannot be overemphasized. The research is significant because of the following: knowing the impact of Covid-19 on human existence will help us to look for ways out; it will help us to channel the available resources toward cushioning the negative impact of Covid-19 on the populace. Furthermore, the research is significant because it will help us to know ways in which the impact of Covid-19 pandemic could be mitigated.

History of Covid-19

The world experienced the outbreak of the novel coronavirus that is ravaging human race in December 2019 in Wuhan City of China. According to WHO (2019) Early investigations by Chinese authorities has revealed that the early symptoms of the disease in human was in early December 2019 (The virus is said to belong to beta (b) group of coronaviruses. Shereen *et al* further reveal that the Chinese researchers named coronavirus as “Wuhan coronavirus or 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV)”. However, the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) named the novel coronavirus as “SARS-CoV-2 and the disease it causes as COVID-19”. Although there are allegations that Covid-19 was a laboratory construct, yet quite a number of facts suggest that Covid-19 was first transmitted from animals to humans in Wuhan because the city is linked to seafood and live animals market (Ozili and Arun 2020). World Health report argues that “The full genetic sequence of SARS-CoV-2 from the early human cases and sequences of many other viruses isolated from human cases in China and all over the since then show that SAR-CoV-2 has an ecological origin in bat populations.”

It was further argued that another coronavirus, SAR-CoV-1, which caused the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 was also closely related to SAR-CoV-2 in genetic relations which suggest that they have the same ecological origin in bat population (WHO, 2019). The transmission of Covid-19 is very high when compared to viruses of similar family group. That is why within few months of its emergence the virus has infected about 4.64 million people across the globe as of the time this paper was written. The transmission rate of SARS-CoV-2 is said to be higher possibility because of “the genetic recombination event at S protein in the RBD region of SARS-CoV-2 may have enhanced its transmission ability”.

Multidimensional Impacts of Covid-19 on Nigerian Society

Although Nigeria has experienced other outbreaks like Lassa fever, bird flu, monkey pox, Ebola disease, yet those outbreaks did not affect the nation like Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 has weighed down the socio-economic, educational system, political and religious life of Nigerians. Abulude and Abulude in their paper “Impact of Covid-19 pandemic: Lesson from Nigeria”, gave general impacts of the pandemic in Nigeria. They showed that the total lockdown enforced by FG on some states which was followed by similar action by various state governors affected markets, schools, religious and social gatherings, international and national movements in the country. They argued that the pandemic had affected the economy of the nation because of the imposed total lockdown has all business activities in the nation. Speaking on the effects of the pandemic on education in Nigeria, they said the effect on education was devastating because “students at all levels have lost almost 4 months of learning activities” (Abulude and Abulude, 2020).

Adelakun in his paper title “Coronavirus (Covid-19) and Nigerian Education System: Impacts, Management, Response, and Way Forward,” talked about the impact of Covid-19 on the education system in Nigeria. In the paper Samuel pointed out four impacts of Covid-19 on Nigeria education system which includes: impact on school closure, a measure that has interrupted learning process at all levels of education (Adelakun, 2020). Another impact is on education finance, where the pandemic led government, parents, individuals, ministries of education at all levels, and other concerned personnel were forced to develop new strategies on how to finance the education of their children and the system at large. Furthermore, the pandemic according to the paper has affected graduates and school leavers, the welfare which students used to enjoy while in school, and finally, he pointed out how the pandemic affected children whose parents are not literate to assist them while at home. This he said has made some students to loss interest in schooling.

Ozili on the other hands, in his paper “Covid-19 pandemic and economic crisis: The Nigerian experience and structural causes”, pointed out the economic impact of the pandemic in Nigeria. The paper showed five major ways in which Covid-19 had impact on Nigeria economic which includes the following: he said one, the Covid-19 pandemic affected borrowers’ capacity to service loans, which gave rise to NPLs that depressed banks’ earnings and eventually impaired bank soundness and stability. Two, the pandemic led to sharp decline in oil price. The most visible and immediate impact of the pandemic on Nigerian economic, according to the paper, was the drop in the price of crude oil, which dropped from nearly US\$60 per barrel to as low as US\$30 per barrel in March. During the pandemic, people were no longer travelling and this led to a sustained fall in the demand for aviation fuel and automobile fuel which affected Nigeria’s net oil revenue, and eventually affected Nigeria’s foreign reserve. Three, there were supply shocks in the global supply chain as many importers shut down their factories and closed their borders particularly China. He said Nigeria was severely affected because Nigeria is an import-dependent country. Four, the national budget was also affected. The budget was initially planned with an oil price of US\$57 per barrel. However, the fall in oil price to US\$30 per barrel meant that the budget became obsolete and a new budget had to be formed that was repriced with the low oil price. Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic affected the Nigerian stock market. Major market indices in the stock market plunged when investors pulled out their investments into so-called safe havens like US Treasury bonds (Ozili, 2020).

Religion is another area in which Covid-19 pandemic had major impact in Nigeria. Abulude and Abulude said that the pandemic has affected religious activities throughout the nation. He gave instances in which Sunday and Friday prayers were banned in many states in the country. And some pastors and imams were arrested in Lagos, and Borno among others for violating the order (Abulude and Abulude, 2020). Afolaranmi made an extensive research on the effects of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown on churches in Nigeria. His focus was on the impact of the pandemic lockdown on pastoral ministry. In the paper he pointed out in an attempt to curtail the spread of the pandemic governments across the world restricted large gathering of people and movement from one place to the other. They achieved this imposing total or relaxed

lockdown. This has affected pastoral ministry as it deals mainly with gathering of large number of people. The lockdown he said stopped the pastors from performing their pastoral ministry in the traditional ways of physical contacts. He says “With the advent of a COVID-19 case in Nigeria on February 27, 2020, the Nigerian governments at the federal and state levels started imposing series of lockdown measures (Afolaranmi 2020). Undoubtedly, this lockdown affected churches and the ways pastors are performing their pastoral ministry among the church members.”

Quadri in his paper “Covid-19 and religious congregations: implications for the spread of novel pathogens”, showed that although most religions prescribed congregations of its adherents at local, national, and international as part of their faith, yet it could serve as a potential focal point for the disperse of the novel pathogens (Quadri, 2020). The paper was written to show how religious congregation could increase the rate of infection of Covid-19. He argued that religious congregation is one of the factors that led to the high rate of Covid-19 in countries like Iran, South Korea, Israel, and India. He therefore suggests that prompt response such suspension of communal gathering must be promulgated to ensure social distancing because it has serious implications in a time of pandemic. Many countries have adopted this measure and it has affected them in one way or the other.

Lessons for mitigating the impacts of future pandemics in Nigeria

The Nigerian experience of COVID-19 provides important lessons for strengthening national resilience. Mitigation should not be understood simply as the introduction of measures after a pandemic has already emerged. Rather, it should encompass preparedness, prevention, early response, adaptation, recovery, and institutional learning.

Pandemic should not be taken for granted

Although Covid-19 was real and deadly, yet many Nigerians took it for granted. Though the daily records in the country is on the increase, yet many people are not following the NCDC rules for the prevention of the spread of the pandemic. The Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Covid-19 said on Monday 1 February as twitted by *The Nation* newspaper that Nigeria lost 405 people to the dreaded virus in the last two months. The Chairman of the Task Force says “The global infections have exceeded 100 million, while fatalities have also crossed the two million mark. Unfortunately, Nigeria, like the rest of the world, is now experiencing a more virulent second wave, which has increased the number of Covid-19 related deaths from 1,173 on November 29, 2020, to 1,578 on January 31, 2021, an increase of 34 percent” (PTF, 2021). Though President Buhari signed into law Covid-19 Regulations, however the Presidency on 31 January, through its media aid Garba Shehu through his twitter handle, expressed worries over reported non-compliance by Nigeria.

It is important to note that pandemic should not be taken for granted; Nigerians should ignore any conspiracy theory that seeks to undermine the outbreak of pandemic as it was the case during Covid-19 pandemic. Instead, we should be ready to comply with NCDC regulations and the order given by the Federal Government. Nigerians need to change their attitudes because the new variant of the virus has high rate of transmission and is adapting all the time; we need to take responsibility by wearing face masks in public, regular washing of hands, using of hand sanitizer, avoiding crowded areas and any other measure that will prevent us from the virus. As we await the availability of vaccines, we must apply the non-pharmaceutical interventions to help lower our chances of contracting the virus and preventing its spreading to others. It is hoped that following the regulations will go a long way in mitigating the deadly impact of the virus in the country.

Diversification of economy

Haven seen the impact of the pandemic on the economy of the country, it is high time for Nigeria to look for viable ways to diversify its economy. It is important to note that overdependence on crude oil is not healthy to the stability of Nigerian economy, especially during pandemic period where the price of crude oil dropped drastically in international market. The fall in the price of crude oil has affected Nigeria foreign reserve because it is the main source of income of the country.

Therefore, Nigeria needs professional advice on how to diversify its economy in order to mitigate the economic impact of any disaster that might affect us just it were during Covid-19 pandemic. Nigeria as a country need to boost its agriculture sectors, invest in developing functional industries, and encourage vocational and entrepreneurship skills in order to help reduce unemployment and over-dependence on the government to provide employment opportunities for its populace. It is hoped that when there is increase in number of people who are self-employed it will help in mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on the masses.

Strengthening Public Health Preparedness and Compliance

The health system has a major role to play whenever there is pandemic. As it were during Covid-19 pandemic, Nigeria is still battling with the challenge of poor health system. Most of health sectors in the country were not equipped to handle cases that were related to Covid-19. Consequently, it is very difficult to ascertain the true impact of the pandemic in the country. Though the sector needs to be commended for its effort in the fight against the pandemic, nevertheless, more needs to be done in strengthening and equipping the health sector in order to do more in the global fight against any Covid-19 and any form of pandemic. The country needs to develop a strong health care system at all levels in order to combat the spread of pandemic.

Besides, the frontline health workers need to have good insurance and welfare packages to boost their morale and encourage them to put in their best in the global fight against dreaded health-related issues like coronavirus. Although the government made provision to improve the welfare of the frontline workers, however, there are instances in which the health workers went on strike during the pandemic because the government did not fulfill the promises it made to them. Consequently, this has affected the fight against the dreaded coronavirus. However, if the government can implement good welfare package and provide health insurance to health workers it will encourage them in their fight against any form of disease outbreak and pandemic.

Transparency in the distribution of palliatives

Distribution of palliative has played a major role in cushioning the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the masses. The total lockdown that was imposed as a result of the pandemic brought untold hardship on people because greater numbers of Nigerians are living on daily earnings. The lockdown has crippled their business and denied them the opportunity to provide for their families. The government through The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development of Nigeria distributed palliatives to cushion the impact of the pandemic. However, many Nigerians have complained about lack of transparency in the distribution of the palliatives. Although the ministry said they have fed school children and distributed cash to many Nigerians but many Nigerians criticized the whole processes as lacking transparent.

Besides, the looting of palliatives during the ENDSARS protest have exposed many state governors who have refused to share palliatives for people who suffered hunger during the pandemic. It is unfortunate to say that this lack of transparency made many Nigerians not believe in the reality of the pandemic; instead they see Nigerian Covid-19 as a corrupt means to enrich few individuals at the detriment of greater number of the masses. Therefore, transparency in the distribution of palliatives during pandemic will help in cushioning its impacts. This will also help Nigerians who doubt the reality of the virus to know that it really exists and people should learn to take responsibility and never take things for granted.

Upgrading the Education System

The traditional way of learning through physical meeting appeared to be dangerous during Covid-19 pandemic because it hardly follows the safety protocols that will stop the spread of the virus. Consequently, Nigeria need to upgrade its learning process to fit with challenges which coronavirus and related pandemic brings on education. The Ministry of Education needs to introduce online or blended forms of learning at all levels of education. Although this is challenging because of its cost, poor internet connectivity/facilities, and poor power supply, however, this is the best method that can reduce the spread of contagious diseases and mitigate its impact on education.

Adaptation of Religious and Community Activities

Religious congregation is an important thing for most religious adherents. In facts, congregating is part and parcel of many religions. Nevertheless, religious congregation appeared to have high potential of spreading pandemic like coronavirus. Therefore, religious leaders should find alternative means of meeting that will reduce the spread of pandemic. They could employ the use of virtual meeting, except where necessary, to help reduce the high numbers of worshippers. Besides, in a situation where physical meeting is necessary, they can split the time of meeting so that the protocols for social distance could be strictly followed as it was the case during Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, in all the meetings, hand washing facilities or alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be provided. And religious leaders should encourage their members to regularly wash their hands, use hand sanitizer, and put on their nose mask in public places. Following such Covid-19 protocols will help in mitigating the impacts of any contagious pandemic.

Developing Resilient Digital Business Systems

The lockdown during Covid-19 pandemic affected many businesses that were operating in the traditional ways of doing business. In view of this Nigeria need to provide alternative means of business transaction that can enable people to do business even when there is pandemic. The pandemic has brought challenges which require Nigeria to establish strong online system for doing business. Online business is a good alternative for doing business transaction during pandemics like Covid-19 pandemic. It is a fact that many people are not comfortable with online business because of the fear of fraudster/scammers. Besides, the epileptic nature of power and poor internet services are some of the challenges that are associated with online business.

However, those challenges should not deter us from establishing platforms for online business. Instead, Nigerian Communication Commission and other agencies that are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring cyber security should establish a strong system for online business transactions. The country needs to establish a system that can control and check internet fraudsters, thereby providing security for those who do online business.

Strengthening Risk Communication and Vaccine Confidence

Vaccine hesitancy during COVID-19 was influenced by misinformation, distrust, uncertainty, and conspiracy theories. This demonstrates that vaccine acceptance cannot be addressed solely through the availability of vaccines. Instead,

public confidence must be built through transparent communication and credible engagement with communities. Government and health institutions should provide accessible information explaining vaccine development, safety monitoring, effectiveness, and potential side effects. Similarly, healthcare professionals, religious leaders, community leaders, educators, and other trusted voices can play important roles in communicating evidence-based information. The increase numbers of conspiracy theories on Covid-19 pandemic made many people to be skeptical about the safety of the vaccines. In fact, with the increase of fake news on social media, some people did not know what to believe about the pandemic. The question which many people kept asking was how safe is the vaccine? Physicians had argued that before a vaccine could be administered on human it must undergo clinical trial to ascertain its safety. For instance, Dr Gertrude said that there are a lot of doctors who testified that the coronavirus vaccines do not have any effect on human DNA-Deoxyribonucleic acid is a complex molecule that contains all of the information necessary to build and maintain an organism, yet many people found it difficult to trust the vaccines (News Medical).

It was further argued that vaccines are basically produced in the lab having genetic code that is mimicking that of the virus, and when they mimic that in the lab it is then used to produce messenger RNA vaccine into our cells cytoplasm which will teach our cells how to produce spike protein that our immune systems will now recognize and form antibodies as a result. One of the key characteristics of SARS-CoV-2 – a virus before the worldwide outbreak of Covid-19 is the presence of spike proteins that allow the virus to penetrate host cells and cause infection. The messenger RNA stays in our cytoplasm using our ribosomes and enzymes to teach the cells to produce the spike protein, and it never gets into our nucleus. The nucleus is where our DNA is housed and since the spike protein never gets to our nucleus, it can never affect our DNA.

It is necessary to say people should be encouraged to take vaccines whenever there is pandemic because vaccines have done incredible good in the history of human beings. They are, says Steve Fouch of the Christian Medical Fellowship, “the biggest lifesaving medical technology.” Thanks to vaccines, smallpox and polio – not to mention flu – are no longer the deadly killers they once were.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic produced profound and multidimensional consequences for Nigerian society. Beyond its direct effects on public health, the pandemic disrupted economic activities, livelihoods, education, religious practices, social interaction, and institutional operations. It also exposed pre-existing weaknesses in healthcare infrastructure, economic diversification, digital capacity, social protection, and emergency governance. The Nigerian experience demonstrates that the consequences of a pandemic are shaped not only by the characteristics of the disease itself but also by the social and institutional conditions within which the disease occurs. Consequently, effective mitigation requires more than emergency restrictions or medical interventions. It requires sustained investment in the systems that enable individuals, communities, and institutions to withstand and recover from major disruptions.

Nigeria should therefore treat the lessons of COVID-19 as an opportunity to strengthen national resilience. Ultimately, the principal lesson of COVID-19 for Nigeria is that pandemic preparedness is inseparable from national development. A country with resilient healthcare institutions, diversified economic structures, inclusive digital infrastructure, effective social protection, credible public institutions, and informed communities is better positioned not only to manage pandemics but also to withstand other forms of national and global crises. Building these capacities before the emergence of another major outbreak will reduce dependence on emergency measures and improve the country's ability to protect lives and livelihoods.

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