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The Impact of Corona Virus on the Socio-Economic Life of Nigerians

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Note of Editor-in-Chief

This is the first Special issue of the journal *Culture e Studi del Sociale-CuSSoc*. The idea behind the special issue comes from this consideration: around the world, individuals are facing a critical moment, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences require some reflections on many topics, often forgotten by scholars. This is the reason why many Italian and foreign scholars have been invited to give their contribution. Furthermore, now more than ever, it is crucial to share knowledge coming from multiple disciplines and that's why it was decided to write an entire issue in English.

For scientific and intellectual correctness, the contents of single articles refer to the situation as in mid-May 2020. It is necessary to clarify that because this Special issue was published when many countries were starting to reduce their emergency measures to cope with the pandemic.

The Impact of Corona Virus on the Socio-Economic Life of Nigerians

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Abstract

Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered corona virus that can be transmitted through droplets from cough and sneeze. People who are infected can experience mild to moderate symptoms and can recover without requiring special treatment. However, aged patients and those with respiratory disease can develop serious illness. Maintenance of high standard of hygiene through frequent washing of hand, use of hand sanitizer and social distancing has been recommended as ways of slowing down the transmission of this disease that has been declared a global health emergency. This study examines how the coronavirus pandemic which is sweeping around the globe affects the socio-economic life of Nigerians. The study reveals that the effect of the pandemic on the socio-economic life of Nigerians is enormous due to the peculiarity of the Nigerian system and economy which depends on close social contact that hinges on the theory of communitarianism, a theory that supports the fact that a person's personality or identity is molded by the society. Hence, a total lock down in Nigeria is not sustainable over a long period of time.

Keywords: COVID-19, Socio-economic life, Nigerians.

1. The economic effects of covid-19 on the masses

History has recorded the outbreak of several plagues such as the circa in 3000 BC that wiped out a whole village in China, Plague of Athens in 430 BC, Antonine plague of AD 165-180, plague of Cyprian AD 250-271, Black Death 1346-1353, Russian Plague 1770-1772, Spanish flu 1918-1920, AIDS 1981, the West Africa Ebola epidemic 2014-2016 and the Zika virus epidemic of 2015 (Jarus, 2020).

Ebola Virus Disease which is a recent epidemic broke out in West Africa with 15,261 confirmed cases and 11,325 deaths was first reported in December 2014 as an 18 month old boy from a small village in Guinea is believed to have been infected by bat. The disease then spread to Conakry Guinea's capital and further to border countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. Other countries affected by the epidemic are Italy, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The first case of Ebola Virus was recorded in Nigeria on 20 July 2014 when an infected Liberian passenger arrived Lagos by plane. The man, who died in hospital five days later, through a chain of transmission infected a total of 19 people, of whom seven died of the disease (WHO, 2014).

The Coronavirus pandemic which the globe is grappling with was first discovered in Nigeria on 27th February, 2020 when an Italian who works in Nigeria just returned from Milan (NCDC, 2020). As at 3rd April, 2020, there were 184 cases recorded in Nigeria with about 20 recoveries and two deaths.

The index cases of corona virus across the country stem from people who visited parts of Europe that were worst hit with the virus and the spread to other affected person is as a result of direct and indirect contacts with affected persons.

As at 22nd of April, Nigeria has recorded 873 confirmed cases of Corona virus, 28 deaths and 197 recoveries and efforts to contain the further spread of the disease has taken a toll on the economic and social lives of Nigerians.

Nigeria is a country in which many people struggle everyday to earn a living and its private sector, including its informal sector, employs more than 80% of the country's workforce (AfDB, 2012, p.10). The lockdown is affecting the masses because there is no absolute structured social welfare package for citizens even before the out break of Corona virus. Solomon Chikan a Life Coach in an interview on Silverbird 93.7 radio (2020) said that citizens need to be alive to achieve their dreams and that government is helpless in this current situation. He emphasized that:

Neighbours should help one another, those who are well off should help one another, people should save for the rainy days and learn from the situation. Our systems are not working, people who need the palliatives the most cannot be reached because most don't have bank accounts and those who may be entrusted to reach the people will not reach them.

Since Nigeria got her independence from the British in 1960, corruption, nepotism and mismanagement have been the bane of governance and the masses are at the receiving end of these vices despite the fact that Nigeria is a country rich in crude oil (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019).

2. The African system/Nigerian approach of handling corona virus challenge

Nigeria like most African societies operate in a close knitted setting in which people are their neighbours' keeper and there is a close social relationship with one another. This close relationship is a common feature in most African cultures which can be compared with a living network of relations almost like that between the various parts of an organism (Etta, Esowe & Asukwo, 2016). This feature of the African cultures and societies is further supported by the theory of communitarianism that attach importance to the social realm and "maintains that society should articulate what is good - such articulations are both needed and legitimate (Etzioni, 2003).

Nigeria the most populous black country in the world is barely left out in most global event. According to WHO, Nigeria (2020), "any disease outbreak in Africa's most populous country is never taken lightly and with the gravity of the global situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nigerian Government had to move fast and mobilize all resources for the outbreak response".

At the wake of the the out break of the Corona virus in the Chinese city of Wuhan, Nigeria took some steps to ensure that the virus does not encroach the coast of the the country by putting in place checks on passengers from countries that were epicentres of the virus. However, with the discovery of the index case of the virus in Lagos, Nigeria and the rapid spread to other parts of the country, a stringent measure of partial lock down to total lock down were being imposed in some states of the federation. The Federal government of Nigeria imposed a total lock down on the Federal Capital Territory Abuja and in Lagos and Ogun States which were the worst hit in Nigeria. Some State where governors imposed a lock down include Kaduna, Plateau, Rivers and Delta.

Many arguments have however ensued from many quarters as to the justification of the Federal Government of Nigeria imposing a lockdown on some

states considering the communal social setting of Nigeria which is a determinant factor in the economy of the informal sector of the nation.

Some people are of the opinion that the lockdown is necessary to contain the virus while many in the informal sector are opposed to the lockdown as it is a set back to their businesses. According to an article in the guardian news paper (Ebiri, *et al.*, 2020) states that:

While the majority of the respondents agree that the extension is a child of necessity and sacrifice that must be paid, they also appeal to the Federal Government and the 36 governors to earnestly put measures in place that would see the country out of the economic and social quagmire the lockdown will engender while also providing palliatives.

2.1. Measures put in place by Nigeria's Government as palliative

In a bid to curb the spread of the Corona virus in Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari in his address to the nation on March 29th 2020, imposed a lock down in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Lagos and Ogun States. This implies that many Nigerians who depend on daily income for their livelihood cannot meet up with their financial obligations.

The lock down decision imposed by the Federal government was however greeted by many criticism as many people involved in the informal sector are faced with reality of being unable to fend for themselves amid the lock down and no concrete palliatives have been rolled out by the government to cushion the effect of the economy crisis facing the masses.

President Buhari in his address to the nation on extension of the lock down for another two weeks stated that:

No country can afford the full impact of a sustained restriction of movement on its economy. I am fully aware of the great difficulties experienced especially by those who earn a daily wage such as traders, dayworkers, artisans and manual workers. For this group, their sustenance depends on their ability to go out. Their livelihoods depend on them mingling with others and about seeking work. But despite these realities we must not change the restrictions. In the past two weeks, we announced palliative measures such as food distribution, cash transfers and loans repayment waivers to ease the pains of our restrictive policies during this difficult time. These palliatives will be sustained. I have also directed that the current social register be expanded from 2.6 million households to 3.6 million households in the next two weeks (CNBC Africa, 2020).

Many Nigerians are however dissatisfied with the criteria set for the beneficiaries of the palliatives of \$52 conditional cash transfer per household as the Minister for humanitarian affairs Sadiya Farouq stated Nigerians who recharge airtime of 24 cents and those who have \$13 and below in their bank accounts are entitled to the palliative. Whereas there is a popular opinion that the cash transfer should be done based on the 38.5 Million bank accounts linked to Biometric Verification Number- BVN (Market Watch, 2020).

2.2. Government's oil based economy

Nigeria in 2018 was estimated at 195,874,740 in population¹. Nigeria despite being the Largest economy in Africa is heavily indebted and mainly dependent on crude oil as a major revenue source(Terwase, Abdul-Talib & Zengeni, 2014).

¹ The datas on Nigerian population are available on website of World Bank: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=NG> (Accessed, 21st April, 2020).

Crude oil market has however been adversely affected crude oil price as the crude oil price in the international market drastically dropped. According to OPEC, “the price of OPEC basket of thirteen crudes stood at \$21.19 a barrel on Wednesday, compared with \$22.67 the previous day” (OPEC, 2020).

Adegbite and Abu (2020) examining the situation noted that:

Nigeria, like many countries, has been adversely affected by the pandemic— from the slump in the crude oil price to disruption of supply chain as a result of the lockdown in China, which is a major trading partner with Nigeria. The Nigerian economy is now heading for the second recession in less than four years.

Business AM, one of Nigeria’s economy newspapers on 23rd of April, 2020 reported that:

Nigeria has not stopped producing crude oil but a persistent crash in oil prices may lead to a halt in production, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation has declared. On Tuesday, global oil price benchmark, amid the demand collapse caused by reduced economic activities, Brent, against which Nigeria’s crude oil is priced, fell by \$6.34 to \$19.23 per barrel. Nigeria recently slashed the oil price benchmark for its budget to \$30 per barrel from \$57 per barrel, but oil prices kept crashing since the outbreak of coronavirus as demand plunged.

2.3. Funds and resolutions towards curbing covid 19

There have been many contributions geared towards fighting COVID-19 in Nigeria from international organizations and private individuals in Nigeria.

The UN in Nigeria, through the Basket Fund, mobilized and deployed over USD \$2 million from the UN system for the procurement of essential medical supplies that will boost the efforts of the Nigerian Government in containing COVID-19 and caring for those confirmed cases in need of serious medical attention (United Nations, Nigeria, 2020).

Under the Coalition Against COVID-19 (CACOVID) led by Aliko Dangote, according to *Africabusiness* (2020), a total donation to the CACOVID relief fund totaled over \$55.7m as of April 6, with Dangote and the Central bank donating \$5.1m each was realized. Other private contributors include Segun Agbaje (Guaranty Trust Bank), Jim Ovia (Zenith Bank), Herbert Wigwe (Access Bank), Tony Elumelu (United Bank for Africa), Abdulsamad Rabiou of BUA Group, Folorunsho Alakija of Famfa Oil Limited, Oba Otudeko (First Bank), Femi Otedola of Amperion Power, billionaire businessman Mike Adenuga of Globacom and the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation have provided \$2.59m each.

The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) alongside some oil companies has pledged \$30m to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control to improve patient care, medical supplies and equipment.

President Buhari in one of his addresses to the nation said the number of testing laboratories in the country have been increased and testing capacity has been raised to 1,500 tests per day, while over 7,000 Healthcare workers on infection prevention and control have been trained and many State Governments have also made provisions for isolation wards and treatment centres. .

Other resolution on containing COVID-19 revealed by the president in his address to the nation on 27th of April, 2020 after consultation with the Nigeria Governor's Forum (NGF) include providing hazard fee and procuring insurance for health workers in the front line, gradually relaxing the lockdown from May 4th to

resuscitate economic activities, imposing the compulsory use of face mask, imposing curfew from 8pm to 6am, banning of non-essential inter-state travels and social gatherings.

There was however an imposition of a two-week total lockdown in Kano State, Northern Nigeria where only 77 confirmed cases of COVID-19 was recorded amidst several mysterious deaths which is not unconnected to COVID-19 (Guardian Newspaper, 2020).

2.4. Findings

At the end of the research on the effect of coronavirus disease on the socio-economic lives of Nigerians, the study found out that

I. A total lock down to contain COVID-19 cannot be sustained in Nigeria over a long period of time

II. Nigeria's economy depend majorly on the informal sector that heavily relies on social setting to thrive

III. Lack of social security structure reveals the weakness of the system especially in times of dire need like the situation posed by COVID-19

IV. Nigeria have to move away from overdependence on crude oil and diversify to other sector to boost the economy.

Conclusion

Nigeria like many African societies is a close knit of social entities that affects its economy, enforcing a total lock down for even a short while has devastating effect on the economy. Considering the fact that Nigeria has no concrete social structure that supports the poor in the land and the prevalent hardship that average Nigerians go through to fend for their families, Nigeria should avoid the bait of extensive lock down practised by buoyant economies of the world that can conveniently cater for its citizens.

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