

Management of COVID-19 Pandemic and the Deepening Socio-Economic Crises in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Nigerian government was battling with the lingering economic crisis due to high inflation and the drop in revenue from crude oil before the advent of COVID 19 that is ravaging both the social and economic lives of people across the world. This paper examined the efforts of the government at managing the effects of COVID-19 on the deepening socio-economic crisis in Nigeria. This paper relied on secondary sources of data from government briefs and the National Statistics Bureau. It was revealed that the efforts of the government are commendable, but the paucity of funds and the lack of transparency in both finance and administration caused the distrust between the government and the people. The paper concludes that government economic and social palliatives in addressing the socio-economic crisis in the country should be given more media coverage to enable the public to have more access to the information.

Keywords: Crisis management, Socio-economic crisis, Emergency, Development, and Media

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1. Introduction

Nigerian government for years has battled with emergencies that affected not only the livelihood of her people but also security and the corporate existence of the country. These emergencies are usually sudden thus creating crises that require a level of preparation, prompt response, reviewing, and assessing the consequences of these emergencies. For instance, each the geopolitical zones in the country has witnessed the various categories of emergencies resulting from disaster namely, terrorist attacks in the northern parts of the nation which have left many people displaced; the attacks and counter-attacks among herdsmen and farmers in several places across the geopolitical zones; the communal crisis that has resulted in the loss of lives and properties. Also, natural disasters such as floods killed 155 people; displaced 25,000 people, and affected properties and farms of over 129,000 residents (www.aa.com.tr) in various communities in the country in 2020. Also various incidences of famine in the north and its rippling effect on the food security in the country; Ebola virus outbreak in 2014 which recorded a death rate of 41% and currently COVID-19 pandemic that is witnessed in several countries in the world.

COVID 19 pandemic took the world by surprise, paralyzing not only the economic activities of the nations but also the social existence of mankind. According to World Bank forecasts, the global economy will shrink by 5.2% this year which would represent the deepest recession since the Second World War. In Nigeria, the first news of a recorded COVID 19 patient was met with mixed fillings by the citizens. Many believed that COVID 19 did not exist while some felt that recording COVID 19 case was another avenue for the government to siphon and loot money from the national treasury. While those in opposition parties initially preferred to play the power politics with the management of the pandemic, thus creating more distrust among the people against the government.

Pandemics either COVID 19 or not are managed by the government and when there is a distrust crisis inform economic, political, or social ensues. Thus, transparency either fiscal or political and access to information is critical to the successful management of a pandemic. To this end, a highly bureaucratic emergency system; characterized by clearly defined objectives, a formal structure, a division of labor, a set of guiding policies (Schneider, 1992) whose activities are transparent on government procedures and spending is required. Furthermore, this emergency system must include centralized decision-making, effective risk/crisis communication, and adhere to strict implementation of pre-planned operating protocol and procedures of the system (Britton, 1986). Iterating Britton's submission, these government emergency systems handling COVID-19 require effective and efficient strategies in handling emergencies.

The paper focused on the benchmarks used in the management of the COVID 19 pandemic and the relief packages by the Nigerian government and their effect on the economic activities of the nation.

2. Crisis Management: A discourse

In understanding crisis management there is a need for a clarification of the concept of crisis. The definition of crisis can be viewed from two perspectives in a public setting; the causes and time approach. The causes approach focuses on the reasons or causative of crisis; this includes the political, economic, natural disaster, public diseases, and terrorist attacks. Heath, (2004) shares this view when he defined crisis as an emergency under which national security, societal stability, public order, and human lives and property are seriously jeopardized or harmed, leading to major consequences that need to be handled urgently by public decision-makers. Fearn-Banks, (2007) opined

that crisis is “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, industry or country, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name”; while The time approach by Link identified four types of crises the first type is an exploding crisis, the second is an immediate crisis, the third is a building crisis, and the fourth is a continuing crisis (Link, 1989). Patel (2017) stressed that crisis hurts social structure, infrastructure, communication system, transport services & other essential sources, and the affected community is the need for food, shelter, clothing, medical assistance, and social care.

Though the crisis is a relative and subjective term, the magnitude and gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic certainly differ from case to case from one country to another, just as individuals in their own lives face different types of crises (Mukhopadhyay, 2005). In reality, Coppola,(2015) hinted that....

the capacity to carry out this mission of crisis management is by no means uniform.

The unfortunate reality is that some countries and some regions are more capable than others at addressing the problem. But no nation, regardless of its wealth or influence, is advanced enough to be fully immune the negative effects and the crisis it can pose to mankind and her environment Furthermore, the emergence of a global economy makes it more and more difficult to contain the consequences of any crisis within one country's borders.

Crisis management simply means a planned and systematic approach towards understanding and solving problems in the wake of an emergency. It is regaining control over the social chaos (crisis) and to reestablish social order (Dynes, 1989). Sinha (2014), opined that crisis management is a body of policy and administrative decision and operational activities which pertain to the various stages of an emergency at all levels. This operational activity involves the participation of people in the management of the occurrence through creating awareness of the emergency.

Managing a crisis involves “a set of factors designed to combat disaster and to lessen the actual damage inflicted by the disaster” (Coombs 2004). This set of factors includes the processes used in disaster management namely; preparation for a disaster before it occurs by developing early warning devices; development of disaster response (e.g., emergency evacuation, and quarantine, mass decontamination); and support and rebuilding plans after natural or human-made disasters have occurred recovery (Ireni 2008). The initial process includes preparing for the emergency and assessing the crisis when it occurs. The second process focuses on how the government and the people respond to the crisis, hence there is a need for a proper communication channel that the people can trust, and lastly, recovery and risk reduction phase; this phase repairs, support and rebuilds the communities. It involves the provision of incentives and public awareness programs to empower those affected by the pandemic.

These processes are essential to the development for effective and efficient crisis management and the multi-disciplinary forms of crisis (Coombs, 1999), and its direct intent to both divert a crisis in advance and to manage crisis once it has erupted as a result of an emergency(Pearson & Clair, 1998). However, one of the lifelines of these processes depends on access to information to the people in the community on the disaster. Information, therefore, plays a major role in the management of disaster primarily because the success of planning and executing operations to a great extent depend on the exact information released to the people.

3. COVID 19 and Socio Economic Crisis

Before the outbreak of COVID 19, the Nigerian government had been experiencing a dwindling in revenue due to the drop in oil prices. A press statement released by World Bank predicted a low 8% of GDP in 2019 to a projected 5% in 2020. It is worrying that COVID 19 is coming at a time when the country is struggling to meet with fiscal challenges of governance.

The cost of upgrading health care facilities and the cost of treating COVID 19 patients is on the rise daily due to higher cases recorded daily. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) released a statement confirming that between February and August 2020, the federal government had spent over 44.9 billion naira in treating and managing COVID 19 patients. The state governor of Lagos state also stated that the state government spends 1 million naira per day to treat patients in the state. This will surely affect other sectors in the country. For instance, taking a ride on the road across many states in the western states of the nation shows the deplorable state of the highways.

To curb the spread of the pandemic the government decided to lock down the entire nation, forcing people to stay at home thus affect their income and businesses. Many private organisations initially paid half salaries to workers, but later stop paying salaries. Some banks and aviation companies in Nigeria embarked on sacking workers to reduce the staff strength and expenditure of the organisation. It took the intervention of the government through reaching an agreement with those organisations before their initial decision was withdrawn.

The lockdown due to COVID 19also affected the supply of food; resulting in a hike in the price of food According to the NBS Data on inflation, food prices rose to the highest level in more than 12 years during the lockdown. Also, the [consumer price index](#) for food has increased all through the pandemic period. It rose from 14.9% in February 2020 to 15.18% in June 2020, showing an increase of about 0.28% within only four months. It

is forecast to increase to 17% by September 2020. This is a considerable rise from 13.39% in July 2019 and 14.09% in October 2019(<https://theconversation.com/food-prices>).

The economic cost of education during the lockdown was tremendous for parents struggling to survive on stumpy salaries that they barely live on to survive. School closures in this pandemic broadened the in-depth issues affecting education. This issue includes the cost of digital learning, inadequate access to the internet. The impact was more severe for disadvantaged children and their families, causing interrupted learning, compromised nutrition, childcare problems, and consequent economic cost to families who could not work

In this pandemic, the rate of crime is now increased. The Nigerian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency reports the lockdown encouraged the activities of drug dealers and traffickers in Nigeria. In April 2020, the Head of the Nigeria Police had to place the [INTERPOL unit](#) in the country on red alert due to the rise in organised crime. This comes on top of an already dangerous situation (<https://www.transparency.org>)

In terms of revenue generation in the country, the country witnessed a reduction of 11%. The IGR collected by the 36 states including the FCT in the first half of the year, dipped by 11.7% compared to N693.9 billion recorded in the corresponding period of 2019 (NBS Report). The lockdown affected economic activities in all the states of the federation. The transportation business is not left out the prices of transportation fares after the lockdown doubled up due to the hike in the price of fuel.

4. Governments Effort at Managing COVID 19 Socio-Economic Crises

When a pandemic happens it challenges societies and governments; challenge social, economic, climatic and environmental change; undermines the legitimacy of government by creating apparent chaos and disruption and finally, highlight the weaknesses and limits of government Handmer & Dovers (2013). Pandemics must be well managed so that it doesn't lead to great damage and loss of life and property that far exceeds our capabilities to recover (Ireni 2014).

In managing COVID-19, the federal government of Nigeria in partnership with the state governments embarked on benchmarks such as state-level coordination, planning and monitoring, surveillance, rapid response teams and case investigation, points of entry, laboratory capacity, infection prevention and control, risk communication and case management. The state-level coordination, planning, and monitoring involved

- Activation of public health emergency management mechanisms with the engagement of relevant ministries such as health, education, environment, social protection, and agriculture, to provide coordinated management of COVID-19 preparedness and response.
- Review of regulatory requirements and legal basis of potential health measures.
- Measures for prevention and aggressive containment of COVID-19 through lockdown, stay at home restrictions
- Enforcement of restrictions and guidelines for personal hygiene and community sanitation, as well as social distancing.
- Incentives and palliative measures to encourage compliance with directives and orders.
- Coordination with Federal Government.
- Coordination with other States.
- Engagement with critical stakeholders-traditional rulers, community leaders, religious leaders, leaders of thought, health workers, traditional healers, community volunteers, CSOs, trade unions, women groups, youth groups, professionals, the business community, development partners, etc.
- Monitoring and regular operational reviews to assess implementation success and epidemiological situation and adjusting measures as necessary.
- Resource mobilization-budgetary allocation, donations, corporate social responsibility, development partners. (PGF Brief)

Risk Communication and Community Engagement entailed communicating with the citizens through the media on prevention and what COVID 19 is. This is to ensure that the public gets all relevant information directly from the government. Surveillance, Rapid Response Teams, and Case Investigation involved rapid detection of cases, through contact tracing and case identification. Training and equipping rapid-response teams to investigate cases and clusters early in the outbreak, and conduct contact tracing within 24 hours (PGF Brief). Points of Entry ensured that points of entry into the country are well secured so that those coming into the country can be accounted for. Laboratory Capacity means upgrading and construction of laboratories by the state government to manage testing. Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) entailed Enhancement of infection prevention and control (IPC) practices in communities and health facilities to prepare for treatment of patients with COVID-19, and prevent transmission to staff, all patients/visitors, and in the community. An assessment of IPC capacity at all levels of the healthcare system, including public, private, traditional practices, and pharmacies. Minimum requirements include functional triage system and isolation rooms, trained staff (for early detection and standard principles for IPC); and enough IPC materials, including personal protective equipment (PPE) and WASH services/hand hygiene

stations. (PGF Brief). Lastly, Case Management required upgrading healthcare facilities to cater for a larger number of cases;

- Preparation of healthcare facilities for large increases in the number of suspected cases of COVID-19.
- Training of medical staff and volunteers to be familiar with the suspected COVID-19 case definition, and able to deliver the appropriate care pathway.
- Implementation of special considerations and programmes for vulnerable populations (elderly, patients with chronic diseases, pregnant and lactating women, and children) (PGF Brief)

Although, the Federal Government of Nigeria was commended by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the management and curtailment of COVID-19, in the last few weeks there has been an upsurge in reported cases. For instance, as of October 4, 2020, the number of cases skyrocketed to 59,345 in comparison to 11,166 cases recorded on June 03, 2020 (www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/nigeria/). This implies that within five months Nigeria experienced an increase of 48,179 cases. It is interesting to note that despite the increase in the number of cases, the number of reported death was 590 as of 30th June 2020 while the number of reported deaths in October was 1,144 (www.ncdc.gov.ng). This is indicative of the fact that despite the efforts of the government Covid-19 pandemic remains a major concern to both Governments.

5. Conclusion

The benchmarks identified by the governments are applauding and it will go a long way in managing the pandemic if the public cooperates with the government. But the benchmark is silent on the recovery and risk reduction phase of crisis management. There is a need to repair, support, and rebuild the communities by providing incentives and public awareness programs to empower those affected by the Pandemic. The recovery and risk reduction phase will definitively break the Carmel back, judging from Nigeria's population of 206 million (www.statistia.com), the unemployment rate of 7.96% (www.statistia.com), the inflation rate of 12.88% (www.statistia.com), and decline in revenue from crude oil; it will take a miracle for the government to sustain the giving of palliatives.

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