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## COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS A GLOBAL TURBULENCE: HISTORY, RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Right from the pre-historic period to the present, the issue of pandemic as a form of global turbulence had always occurred and reoccurred in diverse forms and in different places just like a recurring decimal and had taken its toll on humans by claiming unimaginable number of lives across the world. Most of these incidences, had really threatened human existence and had shaken, even the most technologically advanced nations of the world to its very foundation. It is therefore against this background that this paper carries out a historical analysis of COVID-19 and its socio-economic effects on Africa, though with particular reference to the Nigerian people. The paper went further to interrogate the place of alternative medicine as a way of building resilience and recovery from the menace. The research methodology employed in the analysis of data obtained is historical and descriptive. The research work obtained its data mostly from secondary sources made up of books, journal articles, newspaper reports, government publications personal observations, and relevant materials from the internet. The paper finds out that COVID-19 did impacted negatively on the socio-economic life of the Africans, and that if we must fully recover, we must re-visit and embrace alternative medicine and give it a pride of place in our health policy formulation.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Turbulence, Recovery, Alternative medicine, Nigeria.

### Introduction

COVID-19 is one of such pandemics which had been so turbulent and has taken a heavy toll of human life in unprecedented magnitude across the globe. Although, the spread of the virus in Africa was rather slow and reported cases comparatively small, the socio-cultural impacts have been equally as devastating as in any other continent of the world. In this paper, attempt shall be made at historicising the impact of the COVID – 19 on Africa with particular emphasis on the socio-cultural life of the Nigerian

People. The paper also seeks to interrogate the place of Alternative Medicine,<sup>1</sup> an aspect of indigenous knowledge as one of the ways to building resilience and total recovery from the menace of the pandemic both now and in the nearest future. The research

<sup>1</sup> Alternative Medicine as a subset of indigenous Knowledge System is defined as the use and application of the product of natural plants for medication and health related purposes.

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## Conceptualisation

### COVID- 19

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19, a Public Health Emergency of International concern on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020. It was declared a pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 by WHO when the sickness was considered to be very turbulent and that it was spreading very fast across the world (Oluwadare, 2021). It has since impacted the entire world in diverse ways. The sudden emergence of COVID-19 disease could best be described as a period of global turbulence in view of the diverse ways it did impacted on the whole world. It has led to many deaths, economy of nations has been negatively affected, jobs have been lost, small and medium scale enterprises have been brought down. It also led to the restriction of people's movement, and redefined the culture and people's ways of life. The nature of tragedy it has brought to families, the downturn it imposed on the economy of nations and the ills it has inflicted on the socio-cultural lives of the people just like turbulence had been highly devastating and catastrophic.

## Turbulence

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines turbulence as a situation of sudden change, confusion, disagreement and sometimes violence. It can also refer to atmospheric instability and unpredictable movement of air resulting from a storm. A situation that is characterised by unrest and disorder. Right from the pre-historic to the modern times, there has also been a lot of situations and circumstances that could be likened to turbulence due to the way it came and its effects that has really impacted either positively or negatively on the course of history all over the world, the issue of COVID- 19 as pointed out earlier is one of such cases.

## Pandemics

Pandemic has been described as the global spread of a new disease which affects a wide range of individuals and claims a greater number of lives. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCS) described a pandemic as an epidemic of infectious disease that spreads through human populations across a large region, multiple continents or globally (IFRCS, 2018). It is the outbreak of epidemics that spread across boundaries with devastating effects which has the capacity to alter and change the course of human history, generate tension and disrupt settlement patterns (Ikalewumi, 2021).

## Historical Trajectory of Pandemics and COVID-19

Prior to the emergence of COVID-19, the world had witnessed quite a number of Pandemics that had claimed unimaginable number of lives across the world. The first recorded case of pandemic referred to as Athenian Plague occurred in 430-26BC. The information regarding this plague was recovered from the writings of Thucydides, who himself was a survivor in his book titled, the History of the Peloponnesian war (Alao, 2016). The plague was said to have originated in Ethiopia, and which later spread to Egypt and Greece. The symptom of the pandemic

included headaches, conjunctivitis, rashes covering the body and fever. (Huremovic, 2019). This resulted to the victim coughing out blood and extremely painful stomach pain. The victim dies within seven or eight days. The cause of this disease was not known until recently when a theory by Olson and some team of epidemiologists suggested or considered the cause to be Ebola virus (Huremovic, 2019).

Another plague that occurred was the Antonine plague otherwise called the plague of Galen which broke out in the Roman Empire during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in 161-180AD (Huremovic, 2019). The disease manifest in form of small pox. It spread across Asia Minor, Egypt, Greece and Italy. The plague led to the death of about one third of the population of the infected area of the world.

In 1334, the world witnessed another pandemic called the Black Death. It originated in China and spread through Central Asia to Northern India and finally got to Europe claiming the lives of as many as 150 million. The disease was considered to be caused by oriental rat fleas and through the release of bacteria into the host while feeding. The disease was contracted through contact with droplets from an infected person (Huremovic, 2019).

In 1817, there was the first recorded case of the outbreak of Cholera in India which was later considered as pandemic because of its global spread across many countries of the world (Rogers 1919), in (Bakare & Ajayi, 2021).

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the world started witnessing cases of flu such as Russian flu in 1889-1893, Spanish flu, 1918-1919; Asian flu, 1957-1959; Hong Kong flu, 1968-1970; Swine flu, 2009-2010 (Piret & Boivin, 2021). The Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-1919 which was regarded as one of the worst that had ever been recorded in human history which claimed around 40 million lives within a year across the world. (Johnson & Mueller, 2002, in Bakare & Ajayi, 2021). The Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-1919 was regarded as the first global pandemic to pose as a challenge to the efficacy of modern medicine (Huremovic, 2019). It was caused by the H1N1 strain of the influenza virus. The actual place where the virus originated from remained unknown. The epidemic took place in the middle of the First World War. In a space of a few months, the deadly virus had spread all over U.S.A, Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands. The number of death recorded were well over 50million (Huremovic, 2019).

Others were Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome HIV/AIDS; jungle fever; smallpox and the pig influenza of 1976. (Bakare & Ajayi, 2021).

The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome SARS-CoV. started to emerge in the world scene in 2002-2003. In about a decade later, 2015 to be precise, the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) broke out. All the respiratory associated diseases were traced to human interaction with animals such as bats, dromedary, camels and pangolin (Piret & Bovin, 2021). The terms such as endemic, epidemic and pandemic relate to the occurrence of a health condition compared to its predicted rate as well as to its spread in geographic areas. It is regarded as an epidemic when it spread to a larger geographic area and pandemic when it takes a global dimension. The spread was however, heightened and worsened by globalisation consequent upon technological progress in the area of transportation both in the land, sea and air as the case may be ( Piret & Bovin, 2021)

In December 2019, The first case of COVID-19 disease was discovered in Wuhan City, the capital of Hubei Province in China. The coronavirus disease was caused by a virus that spreads through droplets released when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes (Arowolo, Ogunbote, Edun, & Akinola, 2022). As of May, 2020, the infection figures reveal 3,759,967 confirmed cases of people who have contracted the disease and 259,474 confirmed deaths in 215 countries. In Africa, 53,609 cases have been reported. (Jaja, Anyanwu, & Iwu-Jaja, 2020) As at August 5, 2020, no fewer than 18.6 million cases were confirmed to have contracted the disease out of which 11.2 million recovered and 704 thousand died. (New York Times, 2020). As at the time of collating this data, October 15, 2022, available data from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) reveals that a total number of 5,593,537 samples have been tested out of which 265,741 cases were confirmed to have contracted the virus, 258,933 cases were discharged, 3,155 deaths were recorded while 3,593 case were still active. (NCDC, October, 2022).

Some of the measures introduced to contain the spread of the Pandemic were imposition of ban on public gatherings, indefinite closure of public institutions such as educational institutions at all levels, from primary to the universities, suspension of all air travels, restriction of movement which led to the closure of villages, towns and cities across countries, and the introduction testing mechanisms to identify, isolate and treat infected people. (UNESCO,2020)

## The Socio-Cultural Impact of Covid-19 on Yoruba Family System in South-western Nigeria

This section considers the socio-cultural effects of corona virus on Africa Continent with particular reference to the Yoruba of South western Nigeria as the chosen area of study. The Yoruba family system in South western Nigeria known as *Ebi* is the basic unit of the society and indigenous to Yoruba culture and tradition. *Ebi* is made up of the man, his wife or wives, their children, relatives and dependants. (Osemobo,2020) It comprises not just generations of particular genealogy but also families from different genealogies whose link can be through marriage, adoption or other linkages arising from human or natural factors. (Abdul, 2014). The implication of the above is that every individual in indigenous Yoruba setting belongs to an *Ebi* and cannot exist in isolation.

Culture, on the other hand is that complex whole which includes shared ideas, knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society Taylor (1871) cited in Familugba, (2021). Arowolo et. al, (2022) defined culture as the summation of the belief system, norms and values to gauge people's disposition. It aggregates folklores, nuances and mores which dictates people's way of life from cradle to the grave. It spells out in details socialisation process; anticipates occurrence of disease and death. Decision making to seek for health intervention on every case is based on culture and social facts which influences individuals' illness behaviour and how people decide to seek for solution to their health challenges. Culture, therefore, as the totality of ways of life spells out the norms and values of society as fundamentally designed to protect individuals against vagaries of life including Corona virus.

The Covid-19 pandemic was highly turbulent and constituted a very serious threat to the very fabric of the African socio- cultural values. For instance, the restrictions imposed on large gatherings of people in a particular place at a time was a very serious blow against the 'Ebi' concept of belief among the Yoruba of South western Nigeria. It did really affect the belief in *Ebi* and communal livelihood which is a highly cherished value among the Africans. For instance, the handshake, the hugging, the greeting style by male folk which involves prostrating for an elder by the younger ones which is a mark of respect are fast being eroded, and if care is not taken, would fade into oblivion.

Arts, cultural events, festivals and expos were also badly affected in many parts of Africa just as many of the ceremonies and fun fare that are associated with these events were cancelled out rightly or restricted to a very limited number of participants. For example, there was the total cancellation of the *Idi-Iroko* Festival at *Ado-Ekiti* in 2020. This was done to avoid large gathering of people in the same place at the same time. A lot of Businesses that were associated with the art and culture sector of the economy also suffered serious setback due to restrictions placed on socio-cultural activities. Entrepreneurs who engages in the sale of artistic or art related materials such as drums, gangan, sekere, guitar etc. witnessed a downward trend in their commercial engagements.

Due to protracted lockdown which was associated with measures adopted to contain the coronavirus disease, sports and creative industries were also affected. This was characterised by the suspension of soccer, athletics among others. The implication of this was that the professionals who were mainly youths who engages in these sporting activities were exposed to idleness and other anti-social vices. (COMESA, 2020) The ban on festivals and cultural activities also had a ripples effect tourism and hospitality industry in many African countries including Nigeria. The internally generated revenue which would have accrued to the purse of the government and corporate organisations were not forthcoming due to border closure and restriction placed on movement of people from one place to the other.

Transportation industry was also badly affected as a result of restrictions on movements both on local and international levels. The closure of national borders, educational institutions, restaurants, markets and the prohibition of public gatherings brought about income losses to small-scale businesses that are the source of income for many Africans and particularly in Nigeria. (Atuire & Rivtazibwa, 2021).

## African Approach for Building Resilience and Recovery Through Alternative Medicine

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines resilience as the mental ability to recover quickly from depression, illness or misfortune. The term "Alternative medicine" describes any form of medicine or healing that does not fall into conventional medical practice. (Huizen, 2021). Alternative Medicine, which is a branch of indigenous knowledge system is the application of the natural herbs in form of plants and roots to cure one form of diseases or the other in the African society.

Indigenous knowledge from where Alternative medicine emanates might be regarded as all forms of knowledge indigenous to a group of people and which they have possessed before contact with external people. In the case of Africa, African indigenous



knowledge refers to all forms of knowledge possessed by African people before they came in contact with the Europeans in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. It is the basis for all local level decision making in agriculture, food preparation, education, natural resource management and a host of other activities in rural communities (Familigba, 2017). It is the cumulative body of strategies, practices, techniques, tools, intellectual resources, explanations, beliefs and values accumulated over a period of time in a particular locality.

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans and the introduction of western education/orthodox medicine in Africa, The Yoruba of South western Nigeria had always believed that for every ailment or disease, God has created plants and roots as cure. In the Holy Bible, specifically the book of Genesis 1:29 "... God said, behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for meat". The Africans have had cases of viral diseases such as small pox (*Sopona*) and some other forms of epidemic outbreaks at one time or the other, and they have always responded to this outbreak of diseases in line with their cultural beliefs and natural therapies that are available in their environment. This is corroborated in this song which goes thus:

*Seleru agbo  
Agbara agbo  
Losun fi n wemo re  
Ki dokita o to de  
Abimo ma dana sile  
Osun la n powe' mo*

Meaning: the *osun* river which springs from the ground

The *osun* river which flows with vigour

Is what the *osun* goddess used to bathe her babies

Before we had the medical doctors.

*Excerpts from Sola Aluko et. Al,*

## World Health Organization Position in response to the Corona Virus and Alternative Medicine

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals of 'ensuring a healthy living and promoting the wellbeing for all.....', and in response to the health emergencies posed by Corona virus to the global community, the World Health Organisation had been taking the lead in terms of efforts geared towards combating the menace. The strategic preparedness and response plan produced by WHO outlines the public health measures that countries should take to prepare for and respond to the global health challenge. At the fiftieth session of the WHO regional committee for Africa held in 2000, African government, adopted a resolution in which member states were asked to produce evidence on the safety, efficacy and quality of traditional medicine.

In response to the WHO call for the production of Alternative medicine, and the medical proof of its efficacy and safety, a team of medical Doctors from the College of Medicine, University of Lagos (CMUL) called Bio resources Development Group (BDG) developed the IHP Detox Tea through natural blend of three major plant components, namely: King of bitters,(*Andrographis Paniculata*) ; bitter cola (*Garcinia kola*); and guava (*Psidium guajava*). (Muanya, 2022).

The presentation of the findings was made at the College of Medicine, University of Lagos on Monday April 11, 2022 during

the visit of the WHO Team to Nigeria to evaluate clinical trials conducted in the country for COVID-19 using traditional medicine. Following the subsequent approval by NAFDAC, the medicine (IHP Detox Tea) have been shown to alleviate symptoms of COVID-19. Positive patients who took IHP Detox Tea appeared to convert to negative status in relatively shorter time compared to those who did not. (Muanya, 2022).

## Conclusion

The fact that the effect of COVID-19 is less fatal in Africa as regards the number of lives lost during the process when compared with the western world should not be taken for granted. There is the need for adequate preparedness since no one is sure when, where and what the nature of the next pandemic would look like. It is therefore imperative for Africans, most importantly Nigeria to take advantage of the natural leaves, roots and herbs God had endowed us with to advance the course of alternative medicine that will be of required quality and standard. Consequent upon the WHO stance of welcoming innovations around the world in search for potential treatment for COVID-19, and in view of the recognition already accorded alternative medicine and its potential benefits, African countries should rise up to the challenge of conducting more vigorous researches into the development of Alternative Medicine and develop it to meet international standard that would be considered of required quality and acceptable standard to meet modern day best practices.

African government should have a drug development agenda from the vast array of medicinal plants resources, establish research institutions to develop herbal remedies for various diseases and fund innovative clinical trials on herbal remedies.

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