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Assessment of Government Response to Socioeconomic Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

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Abstract

Since the Nigerian economy is largely dominated by informal workers, the preventive measures (lockdown, movement restriction, social distancing and interstate travel ban) occasioned by Covid-19 pandemic will affect socioeconomic livelihood in Nigeria. Relying on secondary sources, this study examines socioeconomic challenges of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, analyses and evaluates government response to curbing its effect on livelihood in Nigeria. Results from the study find bearings between Covid-19 pandemic and low socioeconomic livelihood in Nigeria. Palliative measures introduced by the government to minimize the effect of Covid-19 pandemic are largely ineffective owing to poor coordination, human right violations as well as inadequate fiscal policy. Recommendations from the study draws on the need for the government to diversify the economy by promoting the informal and agricultural sectors, facilitate infrastructural development and improve health facilities, to avoid economic recession of post Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigeria, Socioeconomic, Informal Economy, Covid-19 Pandemic, Lockdown

1. Point of Departure

Government exists for the preservation of human lives and properties. Locke (1689) proposes a social contract through the establishment of a legitimate authority to protect life, property and liberty of those who lived within the state. The role of the government in this regard is to provide enabling environment for economic efficiency and growth through protection of private property. These functions of the government become imperative for citizens to invest their resources and energies in productive process for the overall development of the country (Ismail and Imoughele, 2015; Meyer and Meyer, 2016).

Although, socioeconomic problems such as poverty, unemployment, low income, inequality, poor housing, ineffective health facilities, epileptic power supply etc. are present in developing countries (Adeniran and Sidiq, 2018; Kyambalesa, 2009), the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic may further confound socioeconomic livelihood in Nigeria where more than half of the population lives below international poverty line of US \$1.25 a day

(Central Bank of Nigeria, 2015; World Bank, 2014). To this end, this study examines government response to socioeconomic impact of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The study has five sections. Added to this introductory note, the second section provides conceptual meaning to the concept of socioeconomic, informal economy as well as Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. While the third section discusses the methodology used in carrying out the study, the fourth section discusses socioeconomic challenges of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, analyses and evaluates effectiveness of government response to Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, before conclusion.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

2.1. Socioeconomic and Informal Economy

Socioeconomic is a combination of two words 'socio and economic'. Socio means society or social issues, while economic relates to means of income. Therefore, socioeconomic refers to societal and economic factors. It is a broad term used to describe the social and economic standing of individual in the society (Hellmich, 2015; Mark 2009). Socioeconomic covers a variety of ways that explains individual work experience, household, as well as access to basic needs and resources (Davis and Dolfsma, 2008; Heath, Martin and Beerten, 2003). While various indices may be applied in determining socioeconomic condition of the individual, major indicator includes occupation, income and education (Darin-Mattsson, Fors and Kåreholt, 2017; Hellmich, 2015). Darin-Mattsson, et al (2017) further maintains that these major indicators (occupation, income and education) affect the other, in the sense that, individual's type of occupation largely corresponds to their income which in turns determines their level of education.

Studies (Baizidi, 2019; Brown, 2009; Heath, Martin and Beerten, 2003) agreed on a typical model of socioeconomic classification such as the upper, middle, working and lower classes. Individual in the upper class are rich and wealthy, but few in number and controls larger part of the society's wealth (Akhbar-Williams, 2010; Brown, 2009). Two types of group exist in the upper class viz: the upper upper class e.g aristocrat who has been rich from generations and the lower upper class such as the capitalist (Brown, 2009; Heath, Martin and Beerten, 2003). The middle class, also known as the sandwich class, are largely white collar or professional workers characterized by moderate incomes and affordable basic needs (Baizidi, 2019; Liu, 2010). Based on their level of education, individual in the middle class are further divided into two groups. This includes the upper middle class, categorized as skilled workers or highly educated professional with high incomes and, the lower middle class typically comprises of less educated people with lower incomes such as secretaries, retailers, teachers etc. (Akhbar-Williams, 2010; Stephen, 2016).

Otherwise known as blue collar class, the working class are made up of unskilled workers who are engaged in manual or strenuous labour (Akhbar-Williams, 2010; Heath, Martin and Beerten, 2003). This category of people includes electricians, plumbers, carpenters etc. The last classification on the social rung is the lower or the underclass, characterized by poverty, unemployment and homelessness (Brown, 2009; Darin-Mattsson, et al, 2017). Individual in the lower class are excluded from mainstream society, lack medical care, education, housing, food, clothing and vocational training.

Informal economy is a shadow, gray, black or underground business enterprise, not fully regulated by the government. It can also be defined as the type of economic enterprise that is not taxed nor included in a country's GDP or economy projection (Ogbuabor and Malaolu, 2013). Informal economy covers a wide range of labour market activities including street trading, carpentry, motorcycle services photography, catering, hairdressing, fashion designing, painting, media personality etc. Informal economy is said to be widespread in developing countries due to scarcity of earnings opportunities and economic hardship (Awojobi, Ayakpat and Adisa, 2014; Nastav and Bojnec, 2008).

In Nigeria, the informal economy is significant because it provides employment opportunities for the teeming unemployed citizens and the medium to meet the needs of poor consumers through cheaper and accessible goods and services (Ogbuabor and Malaolu, 2013; Yusuf, 2014). Also, due to the ease and flexibility attached to the operations of informal enterprises, the sector is devoid of bureaucratic regulatory framework with little or no

formal educational requirements (Awojobi, Ayakpat and Adisa, 2014; Fapohunda, 2013). Information in table 1 shows percentage contribution of the formal and informal sectors to Nigeria's economy in 2019. Analysis from the table indicates that informal sector contributed 58% to GDP and 80% to employment generation in 2019. Despite rebasing its GDP to incorporate informal enterprises in the economy, Nigeria's informal sector has largely been underestimated by the government. The lack of accurate data on the growing rate of informal enterprises in Nigeria poses challenges for effective targeting of economic policy and control measures (Kwanga, 2015; Awojobi, Ayakpat and Adisa, 2014). Yet, informal business is seen as a source of employment and livelihood in Nigeria (Fapohunda, 2013; Amasi, 2016).

Table 1: Percentage Contribution of the Formal and Informal Sectors to Nigeria's Economy in the Year 2019

	Formal Sector	Informal Sector
GDP	42%	58%
Employment	20%	80%

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2019.

Due to its vast population and abundance natural resources, Nigeria is arguably one of the largest economies in Africa. However, the paradox of these potential factors continues to manifest in low socioeconomic livelihood among its citizens. Socioeconomic problems in Nigeria are compounded by increasing unemployment, inadequate social welfare, ineffective health care facilities etc., which continues to widen inequalities and disparities between the rich and the poor, thus weakening social cohesion and citizen's trust in government (Adeniran and Sidiq, 2018).

2.3. Covid-19 Pandemic and the Nigerian Experience

Covid-19 is a new genre of Coronaviruses that causes illnesses such as common cold, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; WHO, 2020). It is an infectious disease that spreads mainly through dribble of spittle or release from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (Nigeria Center for Disease Control, 2020; WHO, 2020). The novel coronavirus is said to originate from Wuhan City in China (WHO, 2020; Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, 2019). Empirical investigations (Peiris, Lai and Poon, 2003; Shrikrushna, Quazi, Shubham, Suraj, Shreya, Rohit, Suraj and Biyani, 2020; WHO, 2020) reveal that coronavirus diseases such as SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV was contracted from animal in China, 2002 and Saudi Arabia, 2012 respectively. However, Covid-19 is a novel virus because it has not been previously identified in human system. Common symptoms of Covid-19 include fever, cough, Dyspnea and tiredness (NCDC, 2020; Shrikrushna, et al, 2020; WHO, 2020). The suffix '19' as used after Covid correlates to the year of discovery of the virus in 2019 (Ohia, Bakarey and Tauseef, 2020; WHO, 2020).

A pandemic is a widespread epidemic that affects people in many countries and continent. It is a term used to substantiate the rapid rate of contagious disease raging from endemic and epidemic (Muthu, 2005; Qiu, Rutherford, and Mao, 2017). An endemic disease is an infectious disease that is common in a particular region or community, while epidemic is an outbreak of infectious disease in a community at a particular time (Chakraborty, 2017; Qiu, Rutherford, and Mao, 2017). A pandemic occur when an epidemic becomes widespread and affects people in many countries. The contagious effect and rate of spread of Covid-19 globally justify the pandemic nature of the virus (see table 2 for the number of countries, confirmed cases and death rate of Covid-19 as at June, 22 2020). The WHO confirms Covid-19 as a pandemic on 11 March, 2020 (CDC, 2020; WHO, 2020). Historical accounts of similar cases of Covid-19 pandemic includes: Spanish Flu, 1918-1919; Asian Flu, 1957-1958; Swine Flu, 2009-2010; SARS, 2002-2003; Ebola, 2014-2016; MERS, 2015-present (Patrick and Daniel Krewski, 2016; WHO, 2020).

Table 2: Number of Countries with Confirmed Cases and Death of Covid-19, as at June, 22 2020

No of Countries	No of Confirmed Cases	No of Death
188	8,860,331	465,740

Source: WHO, 2020

Across polities, governments have continued to introduce a number of precautionary measures such as self-isolation and lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19. Further still, personal hygiene practices such as frequent washing of hands with soap and water or use of alcohol based hand sanitizer, wearing of face mask, maintaining social and physical distancing at least 1 meter away in public gathering etc., has been suggested as means to minimize the spread of Covid-19 (WHO, 2020; NCDC). While global effort to develop vaccine to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus is ongoing, the movement restriction, lockdowns and social distancing occasioned by the pandemic has continued to cause structural changes in economy and social system globally. Based on the high rate of contagious effect of Covid-19, the WHO (2020) observes that developing countries may face inadequate testing capacity due to weak and ineffective health system.

The index case of Covid-19 in Nigeria was recorded on 27 February, 2020 when an Italian citizen tested positive for the virus in Lagos (NCDC, 2020). However, the number of confirmed cases and death of Covid-19 in Nigeria has continued to increase. Analysis in table 3 shows that 20,244 confirmed cases, 6,879 recovery and 518 deaths of Covid-19 were recorded across states in Nigeria as at 22 June, 2020. The effect of Covid-19 pandemic on socioeconomic livelihood in Nigeria implies negative consequences for larger part of its citizens who are engaged in the informal sector of the economy and lives below international poverty line of US \$1.25 a day (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2015).

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria is hinge on conspiracy theories. One of such belief is that Covid-19 is nonexistence but a means for the government to divert public fund to private pocket. This position pervades public domain since public's trust in government is low (Odima, 2020). Another belief is that Covid-19 is a disease for the elites and wealthy individuals. This position seem catchy resulting from news from government officials, business leaders, celebrity, social and media personality who tested positive for the virus or died from Coronavirus related illness (Campbell, 2020). Thus, despite public awareness on preventive measures of Covid-19, the lower class in the society perceived government regulations as a sham, thus increasing the rate of community transmission of the virus in Nigeria (Campbell and McCaslin, 2020).

Table 3: Number of Confirmed Cases, Deaths and Recovery rate of Covid-19 across States in Nigeria as at 22 June 2020.

State Affected	No. of Confirmed Cases	No. of Recovery	No of Death
Lagos	126	8,576	1,444
FCT	1,567	486	30
Kano	1,190	712	50
Oyo	912	282	9
Rivers	874	391	31
Edo	784	197	31
Ogun	646	361	15
Kaduna	580	302	10
Delta	501	124	17
Borno	468	362	31
Bauchi	464	324	11
Gombe	451	246	14
Katsina	426	233	22
Jigawa	317	191	6
Plateau	251	125	6

Ebonyi	234	137	0
Imo	234	21	3
Abia	222	93	3
Nasarawa	184	88	6
Kwara	180	122	6
Bayelsa	169	29	10
Enugu	144	29	5
Sokoto	135	115	14
Ondo	134	75	17
Zamfara	76	71	5
Kebbi	67	40	6
Anambra	66	51	9
Niger	66	37	3
Akwa Ibom	65	43	2
Osun	60	46	5
Yobe	56	45	8
Adamawa	45	37	5
Benue	44	15	0
Ekiti	35	28	2
Taraba	18	10	0
Kogi	3	0	0
	20,244	6,879	518

Source: NCDC, 2020.

3. Research Method

The study made use of secondary data. Therefore, relevant literatures on socioeconomic challenges and Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria were purposefully selected for content analysis. Covid-19 pandemic is ongoing as at the period of conducting this research. Thus, the enforcement of social and physical distancing, movement restrictions as well as lockdown by the government could not allow for a field study.

4.1. Socioeconomic Challenges of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

(a) Monolithic Nature of Nigeria Economy: Nigeria is a monolithic economy that relies on crude oil as major a source of government revenue and foreign exchange inflow (Al-Ghwell, 2020; Bjørnland, 2000; Oladipo and Fabayo, 2012). The depletion in the prices of crude oil amid Covid-19 pandemic portends negative growth in Nigeria GDP. Analysis in table 4 shows Nigeria's GDP growth rate in Nigeria from 2010 to the First Quarter of 2020. While economic recovery has been relatively slow since the 2016 recession, the depletion in the prices of crude oil and its attendant decline in the GDP by the First Quarter (FQ) of 2020 will worsen socioeconomic problems in Nigeria. More so, since government relies on external borrowing to finance public expenditure, the implication of crude oil depletion is further manifested on debt serving which is a major bane of economic development in Nigeria (Aluko and Arowolo, 2010). Amid Covid-19 pandemic, the House of Representative approved the President request to borrow \$5.513 billion to finance 2020 deficit budget (Nlebem, 2020).

Table 4: Nigeria GDP Growth, 2010-FQ 2020.

Year	GDP Growth	Performance Indicator
2020 (FQ)	1.87%	decrease
2019	2.3%	increase
2018	1.9%	increase
2017	0.81%	decrease
2016	-1.62%	decrease (recession)
2015	2.65%	decrease

2014	6.31%	decrease
2013	6.67%	increase
2012	4.23%	decrease
2011	4.9%	decrease
2010	11.3%	increase
2009	8.4%	-

Source: National Bureau of Statistic (NBS), 2020.

(b) Difficulties in Maintaining Social Distancing: Another major socioeconomic challenge of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria relates to the problem of maintaining social and physical distancing as well as good hygiene practices in high density and poor houses typical of rural and urban residence in Nigeria. Adesoji (2014) found that most residential houses in Nigeria are without good toilets, sewage, and drainage systems, as well as inadequate waste disposal facilities, space and setback. Several other studies (Babanyara, Usman and Saleh, 2010; Olotuah and Taiwo, and 2013) reveals that increased rural urban migration and urban housing deficit accounts for the proliferation of slums in many towns and cities across states in Nigeria. Since individual's position on the socioeconomic rung correlates to their health status (Michael, 2004; Olotuah, 2015), inadequate access to sanitation will further aid the spread of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

(c) Effect on Informal Workers: The 'stay at home' directive by the government to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 affects socioeconomic livelihood of the informal workers. Analysis in table 1 shows that 80% of the Nigeria labour force are employed in the informal sector. To this extent, Covid-19 pandemic and its attendant coping measures (lockdown, restriction on movement etc.) portends grave consequences for citizens who based their income on daily access such as face-to-face interactions and customer flow to meet basic needs. These challenges are not without negative consequences on low income, savings and consumption expenditure. In the same vein, Covid-19 pandemic creates uncertainty in global markets and interrupts supply chain. As a result, some industries and companies resort to layoff or salary modification to cope with economy downturn of Covid-19 pandemic (Arinze, Ogwu and Aliyu, 2020; Olorunbi, 2020). According to the NBS (2020), out of the over 200 million Nigeria's population, 23 million persons, aged between 15 and 35 years old are either unemployed or underemployed in the year 2019. Moreover, given the economy downturn of Covid-19 pandemic, it is not in doubt to postulate a steady increase in Nigeria's unemployment rate.

(d) General Belief that Covid-19 is Nonexistence: The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria is hinge on conspiracy theories. One of such belief is that Covid-19 is nonexistence but a means for the government to divert public fund to private pocket. This position pervades public domain since public's trust in government is low (Odima, 2020). Another belief is that Covid-19 is a disease for the elites and wealthy individuals. This position seem appealing due to news from government officials, business leaders, celebrity, social and media personality who tested positive for the virus or died from Covid-19 related illness (Campbell, 2020). Consequently, despite public awareness on preventive measures of Covid-19, the lower class in the society perceived government regulations as a sham, thus increasing the rate of the virus in Nigeria (Campbell and McCaslin, 2020).

4.2. Government Response to Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

(a) Lockdown and Movement Restrictions: The federal government announced a lockdown on 30 March, 2020 in Lagos and Ogun states, as well as Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) and later Kano state, which are considered as the epicenter of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020). This was followed by similar directive by some state governments culminating into closure of school, religion, social and sport gathering as well as movement restriction and interstate travel ban. The federal government also institutes the Presidential Task Force (PTF) to keep update with the management of Covid-19 in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020). This is coupled with the establishment of Emergency Operations Centers as a rapid response strategy to flattening the curve of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020).

(b) Distribution of Palliative: Another major response by the government to cushion the effect of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria was the distribution of palliatives such as food items and 'conditional cash transfer' to the

poor and vulnerable citizens. The beneficiaries of the 'conditional cash transfer' were estimated to cover 3.6 million citizens who depend on daily wage and persons with disabilities, whose means of livelihood has been negatively affected by Covid-19 lockdown and movement restrictions (Njoku, Ebiri, Olumide, Musa, and Agboluaje, 2020). Private individual and Civil Society Organizations also supported the government through cash donations and distributions of parcels of food items to the needy (Abara, 2020). Similarly, the government also continued the Home Grown School Feeding Programme aimed at addressing malnutrition and ensuring provision of food ration to schoolchildren amid Covid-19 pandemic (Onwuzoo, 2020).

(c) Fiscal Stimulus Measure: Fiscal stimulus such as interest rate reductions, tax cuts and tax holidays were implemented to mitigate the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on Small and Medium Scale enterprises. For instance, the government implemented tax holidays for small businesses against company income tax, while tax rate for medium businesses were revised downwards from 30% to 20% (Nnanna, 2020). The CBN also approved uniform exchange rate system for Inter-Bank market to ease pressure on Foreign Exchange rates (Onyekwena and Ekeruche, 2020). Other stimulus measures include the establishment of #50 billion Intervention Fund to improve health facilities in the country (Nnanna, 2020; Onyekwena and Ekeruche, 2020).

4.3. Effectiveness of Government Response to Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Government response to Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria was not without challenges that further aggravates socioeconomic livelihood.

(a) Human Right Abuse: The enforcement of lockdown, movement restrictions and curfew by the security agents were met with human right violations, degrading treatment, illegal confiscation of properties, extortion and unlawful arrests. The National Human Rights Commission (2020) reveals that security forces used excessive or disproportionate force leading to deaths in Kaduna, Abia, Delta, Niger, Ebonyi and Katsina States. The NHRC (2020) also identifies the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Army and Nigeria Correctional Service to be responsible for the highest cases of human right violations during Covid-19 lockdown and movement restrictions. In the same vein, various cases of gender based violence including rape, and domestic violence such as spousal violence, and parent-child abuse were largely reported during Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2020; NHRC, 2020).

(b) Poor Coordination of Palliative: Palliative aid to the poor and vulnerable was characterized by coordination problems. The eligibility criteria for the Federal Government Covid-19 palliative aid includes inability to recharge mobile phone with N100, bank balance not more than N5000, and referral by community leader (Njoku, et al, 2020). These criteria fall short of standard indicators (disability status, income, employment and education) for measuring household poverty (World Bank, 2014). Therefore, palliative aid meant to cushion the effect of Covid-19 lockdown on the poor and vulnerable may not achieve its intended objectives. Moreover, in what could be seen as party politics affairs, palliative aid were given to party loyalists at the expense of the poor and vulnerable in the society (Njoku, et al, 2020).

(c) Inadequate Fiscal Policy: The conventional fiscal policy measures (interest rate reductions, tax cuts and tax holidays) introduced by the government to mitigate the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on Small and Medium Scale enterprises may be effective when a decrease in aggregate demand is met with an increase in supply and vice-verse (Al-Ghwell, 2020; Bjørnland, 2000; Oladipo and Fabayo, 2012). However, the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic causes a decrease in both demand and supply in the global economic chain (Al-Ghwell, 2020). The demand factors include limitations in spending and declining consumptions due to movement restrictions, curfew and social distancing occasioned by Covid-19 pandemic. The supply factors include low productions, layoff, and risk of factory shutdown due to economy downturn of Covid-19 pandemic. The combinations of these two factors will manifest in Nigeria's unemployment rate and low GDP as seen in table 4.

(d) Ineffective Coordination of Covid-19 Lockdown across the State: Although the federal government announced a lockdown in Lagos and Ogun states, as well as Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) and later Kano state, which are considered as the epicenter of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020), corresponding

response were not enforced by subnational government across the states. For instance, state such as Oyo either enforced partial lockdown or curfew (Feyisipo, 2020). Policy inconsistency on the implementation of lockdown creates a lacuna for movement of people and goods as well as nonobservance to the WHO Covid-19 protocol. Since the virus is highly contagious, ineffective coordination of Covid-19 lockdown and protocols in one part of the state will aggravate the spread of the virus in the country.

5. Conclusion

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic portend negative consequences for socioeconomic livelihood in Nigeria. Government response to mitigate the effect of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown on the poor and sustaining the economy are largely defective. The aforementioned observation is considered in relation to the informal workers which accounts for Nigeria's largest economy, but bear greater brunt of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. To guide against post Covid-19 pandemic recession, there is need for the government to expand the economy by promoting the informal and agricultural sectors which accounts for Nigeria's largest revenue. The government should also create an enabling socioeconomic environment through the provision of social amenities to facilitate economic growth and improve health facilities, thereby creating job opportunities and increasing GDP.

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