



COVID-19 and Human Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

COVID-19 came as a whirlwind with disrupting the socio-economic activities of the Nigerians culminating into varying degrees of hardship. The paper examined the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on human security in Nigeria. The risk theory was employed as the explanatory framework. The paper is qualitative in nature relying on secondary data obtained from texts, journal materials and other internet sources. The paper asserts that government responses to the effects of the pandemic through cash transfer, economic stimulus and provision of food palliative had limited impact on the well being of the citizens, particularly the vulnerable. This was due to corrupt practices, disorganisation, diversion of materials, the politicisation of the process, absence of a framework for welfare administration, contradictions spawned by some of the policies, lack of database that captures citizens in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy, among others. The study recommended that the government should put in place a social security/protection programme that provides a sound welfare system to the citizens. Furthermore, the government needs to enhance its capacity and put in place economic support programmes that will empower Nigerians in the informal sector as a coping mechanism in cases of emergencies like a pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Human Security, Socio-economic Security, Social Protection, Pandemic

Introduction

In the history of humans, different pandemics have been experienced with devastating effects on health, peace and security. Diseases have been caused by more than 20 infectious agents over the past decades (Balkhair, 2020). In 2019, the world experienced the outbreak of Corona virus-associated diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) constituting a challenge to the public health care system globally. COVID-19 was declared a pandemic World Health Organisation (WHO) due to its high rate of spread and devastation on humanity. The pandemic emerged from Wuhan, China, and it had to alert the WHO about how the disease affected the sick and aged with weak immune systems. From the medical perspective, every human being irrespective of age, sex, creed, race and religion, is prone to contact the disease. The pandemic exposed humanity to suffering coupled with the fact that no immediate medicine was available to address it. It generated socio-economic insecurity which exposed governance incapacitation globally. As of 5th April, 2021, the confirmed cases globally are 4,314,455 (Statista, 2021), the death rate was nearly 2.6 million across the world (Statista, 2021); in Africa, 3,089,961 were the confirmed cases (World Health Organization, 2021), while the death rate was 78,369 (World Health Organization, 2021) while over 3.5 million people got recovered from the pandemic in Africa (Statista, 2021).

Nigeria was not spared from the pandemic as the first case was confirmed on 27th February, 2020. In order to contain its spread, the federal government announced the partial closure of the country's borders and social activities while a stay at home order in line with the Quarantine Act of 2004 was imposed. In order to prevent the speedy transmission of the disease, states such as Lagos, Ogun and Federal Capital Territory were



immediately shut down, leading to restriction of public gatherings, people's movements and closure of business operations except the ones rendering essential services. In the mid-March, the federal government imposed a nationwide curfew and restrictions on non-essential travels into the country and between states. In May 2020, the lockdown was relaxed due to hardship experienced by the people. Consequently, a spike was experienced in the number of reported cases of people who tested positive to the disease. In Kano State, there were reported cases of deaths caused by COVID-19. Economic hardship, insecurity, gender-based violence, armed robbery and other social vices became widespread. The paper interrogated the contradictions spawned by COVID-19 and how they affected human security in Nigeria. Also, it examined the responses adopted by the government in addressing the human security challenges occasioned by the pandemic.

Concept of Pandemic

The term pandemic was first used in 1666 but interchangeably with epidemic. A pandemic is a disease that spreads over a large area, country, continent and globe, and can be transmitted from human to human (Samal, 2014; Qiu, Rutherford, Mao, & Chu, 2017). It is a large scale outbreak of infectious disease which causes great mortality over a wide geographical area such as the black death, cholera, influenza, ebolavirus, among others. Pandemics spread fast due to global travel, urbanisation and integration (Morse et al., 2012). A pandemic is characterised by a high rate of attack causing social and economic disruptions. It is a disease associated with novel variants of existing organisms like antigens in influenza, viruses, HIV/AIDs and plague (Morens, Folkers, & Fauci, 2009). Before a disease is declared a pandemic, it must exhibit the main features of geographic movement, severity, novelty, high rate of attack, explosiveness, minimum population immunity, infectiousness and contagiousness.

Human Security

Human security came into political discourse in 1994 when the United Nations Development Programme noted that human security should be an overarching responsibility of every national government instead of state security. The UNDP (1994) views human security as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the pattern of daily lives. In any state, the onus lies on the government to ensure that citizens are not subjected to any form of threat. Every citizen is expected to maximise their potentials in life, therefore, the main focus of security should be citizens rather than the political entities. It includes personal, environmental, economic, food, health and social security. Provisioning of human security in all its ramifications eliminates threats to survival, daily life and dignity of human beings. It is also fundamental part of the development process connect to securing human capabilities (Gomez & Gasper, 2013).

Theoretical Framework: The Risk Society Theory

The theory anchoring the paper is the risk society theory propounded by the German sociologist, Ulrich Beck in 1986. It was advanced to explain risks caused by technological advancement and globalisation. To Beck, industrialisation has generated side effects that produce risks in society. Risks range from degradation to global ecology, health pandemics and international terrorism faced by humans due to exposure to different technologies, Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), electromagnetic radiation, chemicals, industrial toxins and pollutants.



The spread of COVID-19 aptly shows that the world is prone to risks due to social interconnection. In Nigeria, COVID-19 has generated socio-political impairments crippling the political system. The theory is applicable as it illuminates the risk the COVID-19 pandemic constituted to human security in Nigeria.

The Contradictions Spawned by COVID-19 for Human Security in Nigeria

COVID-19 constituted risk to human security in Nigeria. One aspect of human security is to ensure that lives are protected. With the pandemic, lives were lost, including the prominent politicians. As of 21st November 2020, 66, 228 Nigerians were confirmed positive out of 739,215 tested while 1,167 people were recorded to have died from the complications of the virus (Varrella, 2021). The pandemic disrupted small and large scale businesses, manufacturing and subsistence agricultural activities. As a result of the lockdown imposed by the federal government, business activities were completely paralysed, and losses were incurred in public and private organisations. There was an increased loss of jobs in the private sector while those who were lucky not to be sacked had their salaries slashed. The informal economy was not spared was also grossly affected during the lockdown. As reported by the West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP, 2020), Nigerians were exposed to economic hardship with galloping inflation and incessant job cuts with a lack of adequate social security measures. The pandemic further weakened the fragile mono-product Nigerian economy, which depends heavily on the sale of crude oil to meet its budget expenses. The aviation sectors not exempted as it lost N17 billion monthly due to shut down (Anagun & Oni, 2020). The banking sector was also affected as economic activities were shutdown. Also, it affected borrowers' capacities to service their loans giving rise to non-performing loans which depressed banks' earnings (Ozili, 2020). Even before the eruption of COVID-19, Nigerian health sector has been in a state of comatose as there was poor infrastructure, inadequate ambulance services, ineffective national health insurance systems and dysfunctional primary health care system, all rooted in inadequate funding of the sector (Ozili, 2020). That is the more reason why there is proliferation of private hospitals in the country. COVID-19 revealed the state of infrastructural decay in all the government established hospitals in Nigeria as most of them lack modern equipment to address the challenges the pandemic unraveled.

In another way, the pandemic affected the economic well being of the low-income earners. A lot of Nigerians who rely on daily income were at the economic risk as they could not go to farms and markets. The vulnerable people who rely on their family members to meet their economic needs suffered a great deal. There was a shortage of imported good due to shut down of many nations' economies leading to increased prices of imported goods and materials. A lot of Nigerian youths operating in the informal sector were also affected as they have to stay at home without being paid.

Most of the informal workers had their daily incomes affected because of their inability to work from home like those in the formal sector. There was an increase in the rate of armed robbery and gender-based violence during the lockdown of the economy. Insecurity was aggravated across the nation as only very few governors were able to provide palliatives that were not effectively distributed. Videos went viral about the quantity and quality of the food items distributed. It was later revealed that the food items which should be distributed to the Nigerian masses were hoarded. Not until during the End SARs Protests that the citizens discovered that the palliative items were hoarded in different warehouses in states like Lagos, Ogun, Oyo and Kaduna. The inability of the government to provide social security during the pandemic generated security issues which prompted the communities to resort to self-help. Women were trapped under lockdown in their homes with



abusive partners, while under-aged girls were exposed to unwanted sex. Women also engaged in harmful coping mechanisms such as transaction sex. A video of an elderly woman went viral who said she was ready to sleep with a man for N500.00 in order to feed her children. In Lagos state, a criminal gangs referred to as One Million Boys, looted shops locked up. The security agents did not help matters as they engaged in extortion of money from the people. There was food scarcity as a result of the movement restriction which prevented farmers from going to the farms. This suggests that the post-COVID-19 period can fall into an era of food insecurity.

In ensuring that the citizens obeyed the lockdown rules, the security agents were deployed resulting into gross human rights violations. Cases of degrading abusive treatments abound. There were extortions of money from people who violated the lockdown rules (Sunday, 2020). There were instances of soldiers who did not wear face mask harassing those who failed to do so in one of the markets in Ogun state (BBC News, 2020). The security agents wielded extreme power in order to contain and enforce the spread of the pandemic, physical injuries/assault and outright killings were perpetrated by the officers of the Nigeria Police Force (BBC News, 2020). For instance, Rinji Bala was killed in Jos, Plateau state on May 12, 2020 by one of the security agents who remains at large (WANEP, 2020). It was reported that law enforcement agencies killed about 18 people in a bid to enforce the lockdown regulations (see BBC News, 2020). Coronavirus: Security forces kill more Nigerians than COVID-19. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52317196>)

The pandemic rolled back the little gain made by the female labour force participation which further limits women's ability to support themselves and their households particularly as the breadwinners. The socio-economic impact of the pandemic affected women emotionally and economically (Partners West Africa Nigeria, 2020). The women informal workers experienced stresses in managing to fend for their families despite the risk the pandemic constituted to their lives. The burden of caring for household sky-rocketed, particularly the care for the sick and extended family members with limited resources, coupled with the fact that women did not have access to government palliatives. COVID-19 compounded the economic hardship on women in the informal sector as they earned less particularly in the rural economy.

There was an increased cases of gender-based violence and women and children abuse in Nigeria. There was a surge in gender-based violence as family members were locked down and there was no way to meet their financial needs, frustration resulted on the part of the men thereby resulting into violence on their partners. In Lagos, Ogun and Abuja, gender-based violence skyrocketed from 60 to 238 between March and April 2020 (Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), 2020). Also, 23 out of 36 states in Nigeria experienced reported cases of gender-based violence, a monthly increase of 149% (Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), 2020). To worsen the situation, the survivors did not have access to treatment as resources were diverted in addressing the pandemic by the government. In an attempt to curtail the spread of the virus, religious centres were also put under lock. After some time, there were divisions as to whether the religious houses should not be opened as market places were not locked down. This became politicised as some Christian leaders saw the lockdown as an attempt to silence Christian activities in Nigeria. It was seen as a ploy by the Muslim political leaders to repress the church. Religious centres, particularly churches, adopted online worship and home cell units where few people could gather and observe the pandemic regulations.

The education sector was also negatively impacted by COVID-19 pandemic. As the federal government ordered all schools to be shut down in Nigeria, a high percentage of school-age children were locked out of



school, particularly public schools. Private schools engaged their students in teaching and learning processes via online which are not available to the public schools. Most of the public schools found it difficult to migrate online due to lack of resources like electricity and internet services. The education implication of COVID-19 has become worrisome in Nigeria because of the inability of the government to provide an average digital educational economy at the secondary and university levels. The pandemic also affected peacebuilding activities in the crisis-ridden areas in Nigeria. Due to restriction of movement and social distancing rules, peacebuilding efforts were hampered as the actors could not be physically present in resolving matters causing conflicts particularly in the North Central Nigeria where there is killing by pastoralist-farmer conflict. COVID-19 has exacerbated the conflict dynamics, and the existing pattern of inequality interrupted peace processes. The peacebuilding actors could not engage with the conflicting actors online like other social activities that were carried out virtually as local communities lack access to online activities and lack of knowledge of information technology.

Measures Adopted by the Government to Cushion the Effects of COVID-19 in Nigeria

One major step taken by the federal and state governments was the creation of more awareness about the pandemic. Advocacy on how to prevent person-to-person transmission was put in place through different mass media. Also, sensitisation was carried out by the National Orientation Agency (NOA), National Centre for Disease Control and other civil society organisations. In order to speed up the response of NCDC to prevent the transmission of the disease, N5billion was released by the federal government as special intervention fund and N10 billion to Lagos state government (Amzat et al., 2020). The federal government also made a pronouncement through the minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Management that N20,000 would be transferred to the poor and vulnerable people who registered in the National Social Register (NSR). Also, in order to alleviate the adverse effects of COVID-19 on the Nigerian populace, the federal government through the Central Bank provided an economic stimulus package to support some households and small scale businesses. However, the stimulus package was a loan that required collateral security attached before it could be given to the respective business owners. Apart from that, an interest of between 5% and 9% was to be paid on the loan if granted (Isaac, 2020). According to the federal government, every household considered low was to benefit to the sum of three million while a small scale business owner was to get N25 million (Partners West Africa Nigeria, 2020). Also introduced was a one-year moratorium on loans and the reduced interest rate on intervention loans from 9% to 5% (Partners West Africa Nigeria, 2020).

The House of Representatives passed emergency Economic Stimulus Bill of 2020 in order to grant a tax rebate of 50% to the Nigerian companies that would retain their workers. The bill was to cater for the general well being of the Nigerians and also provide temporary relief to companies and individuals to cushion the harsh effects of lockdown (Isaac, 2020). The condition attached was that the companies must be registered under the Companies and Allied Matters. The package was introduced to discourage retrenchment of people at their various workplaces. Import duties to be paid on medical equipment including medicines and personal protection for the management of the pandemic for six months starting on March 1, 2020, were provided. The bill as being non-inclusive as there are many unregistered businesses which will not meet the requirements for registration, most especially businesses in the informal sector populated by women (Partners West Africa Nigeria, 2020).



As argued by Dixit, Ogundeji, & Onwujekwe (2020), 90% of the workforce is from the informal sector and needs support to survive.

Another way through which the government responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic was by providing food palliatives. They did so in collaboration with government officials, chiefs, youths, elders in the communities as the case of Rivers State showed. Though it was conceived in good intention, its distribution and administration were marred by mismanagement and lack of transparency. Many of the palliative items were hoarded while the citizens went about hungry, unlike in the USA, UK and Canada where food items were distributed according to the needs of the people. The response measures taken by both the federal and state governments were characterised by low coverage of people, politicisation of the process, poor delivery and implementation.

The Limited Impacts of Government Intervention

The responses of government in ensuring human security provisioning were not impactful due to inherent contradictions in the political system such nepotism, mismanagement, absence of a framework for welfare administration, lack of correct database of population, distrust of political leaders, weak state capacity, among others. To start with, the distribution of the economic relief package was marred by undue politicisation of the process by the political class. Many people did not know about the relief package as it was shrouded in secrecy. Those who benefited from the stimulus package did based on political connection. A lot of Nigerian masses could not benefit from the cash transfer because it was restricted to a particular group of people of Northern extraction.

The cash transfer of N20,000.00 proposed by the federal government was also affected by many irregularities due to lack of adequate database to provide information about all Nigerians. This raised a lot of questions as regards cash transfer which include: what is the category of people who constitute the vulnerable? How many are registered in the National Social Register? How will the money get to the vulnerable? How will the funds be distributed equitably in the six geopolitical zones, given ethnic groups of diverse political affiliations? How will the vulnerable be identified? What is the total number of people that the cash transfer will cover? The means of transferring the funds constituted a challenge as most of the poor people do not have bank accounts.

Mismanagement of COVID-19 money affected the responses of government in providing socio-economic security. Nigeria received monetary assistance from the international community. For instance, the German government donated £26 million, the United States of America through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) donated \$21.4 million, and the European Union contributed 50 million Euros to the Nigerian government in combating the pandemic (Awofeso & Irabor, 2020). In addition, the private sector raised an estimated N27 billion in Nigeria to combat COVID-19 (Awofeso & Irabor, 2020). In spite of the donations to the Nigerian government to cushion the hardship on the masses, their plights could not be alleviated because the funds were not effectively utilised by the political class. Corruption later turned the COVID-19 money to another avenue for stealing. The ruling party used the COVID-19 funds and palliatives to fester their political interest while members of other political parties were excluded. The party chieftains diverted many palliative items in order to sustain their cronies. Weak institutions and lack of social welfare system



compounded the suffering of the Nigerian people during and after the pandemic crisis. Also, there was lack of coordinated and comprehensive synergy to alleviate the suffering unleashed on the masses.

Conclusion

COVID-19 constituted a human security problem in Nigeria. Not only did it affect the health sector but also had adverse effects on the socio-economic well being of the masses. Measures deployed by the government could not ensure human security as a result of nepotism, mismanagement, weak state capacity, lack of correct database of the population, among others, hence, suffering lingered. The corrupt government officials saw the measures taken as avenues for diversion of public funds and palliative materials. Security agents who abused human rights should be investigated and prosecuted to serve as deterrents. Government officials involved in diverting money and palliatives should be prosecuted to prevent recurrence. There is need for the government to develop a social security programme to address the socio-economic insecurity facing the Nigerians. However, it will require adequate budgeting and funding of social security programmes by the government. All human rights violations during the pandemic should be investigated and perpetrators brought to justice in order to serve a deterrence.

It is important to state that further studies can be conducted in order to investigate other issues that affected human security during COVID-19 in Nigeria. Areas for further studies can include politicisation of palliative distribution in Nigeria during COVID-19, corruption and palliative administration in Nigeria, COVID-19 and socio-economic challenges in Nigeria, among others.

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