

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES ON THE SOUTH-EAST ZONE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to determine the socio-economic consequences of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the South-East of Nigeria. It conclusively looked at the technological palliatives on the situation on ground.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This is an opinion paper based on the social media expositions, practical experiences and public opinion of the inhabitants in the researcher's area of study.

Findings: Findings from the study reveal that the fear of COVID-19 and the effects of the steps taken by the government to curb the spread is causing serious socio- economic consequences on the regions and the inhabitants of South-East in Nigeria.

Practical Implications: The need to prepare the minds of the government and people on unexpected socio-economic effect of COVID-19 which are likely to cause panic among regions and their inhabitants.

Originality/Value: The value of this paper is to appreciate the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 and the steps taken by the government aim at bringing solution to unexpected socio-economic development.

Keywords: Socio-economic, Consequences, COVID-19, South-East of Nigeria.

Paper Type: Conceptual

Introduction

In the past few months, the whole world has experienced numerous crisis regarding a disease outbreak known as Coronavirus (Covid-19). The Covid-19 outbreak was first reported to World Health Organization (WHO) on the 31st December, 2019 in Wuhan, China's Hubei Province, as a localized disease. Coronaviruses are said to be a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

According to QIU, 2018 Coronavirus is thought to be an animal virus arising from an as-yet-unknown animal reservoir (perhaps bats and snakes) that spread to other animals (Civet Cats) and then to the first infected human in Southern China in 2002. COVID-19 initial transmission appeared to be from an animal source, but there are also strong evidences now that it can be transmitted from (person-to-person) who are just mildly ill or not even showing symptoms yet. WHO has just described the new Coronavirus outbreak as

pandemic and a global health emergency as its spread within a short continues to rapidly increase unimaginably across countries and continents affecting not just lives but also livelihoods. it is now also threatening national and international security.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the virus has infected thousands of people causing widespread serious illness across a large population and many deaths across many countries. According to Chikwe Ihekweazu, the Director, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), at a press conference of the Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 held at Abuja on Wednesday 9th April, 2020, the number of cases from over the world has risen to over two million with over 100,000 deaths. The viral outbreak has posed a major destabilizing threat to the global economy.

John Hopkin's University report has shown that the virus which originated in China's Wuhan city has affected 98 countries and territories around the world and has claimed at least 331,650 lives globally, while more than 107,732

cases are still suspected worldwide and tens of millions of people are in quarantine as at 8th March, 2020. Based on these, experts across the world expressed worry and panic over the rapid spread of the epidemic which could cause huge negative impacts on population, health and bring the global economy to a recess. The recent outbreaks compared side-by-side with the devastating effect has become international problems and speedy calls for urgent international actions.

Part of the actions to contain the widespread of the virus was adoption of more stringent precautions such as: Mandatory Movement Restrictions within countries and nation, restrictions on international travelling and airlines as well as intense screening at airports and otherland and sea boundaries of countries worldwide. Tourism (International and Local) has also been lockdown. Closing of business sectors, factories, schools, churches etc. is known a common feature in countries all over the world.

It is an indisputable fact that these decisions taken by most countries would have a devastating socio-economic effect but the whole world has to abide considering the fact that there is no clear solution to the pandemic yet. Nigeria as a member of International Community is experiencing her unpleasant share in this ugly unfortunate devastating development.

Following this development, Nigeria in like manner recorded her first infection index case of coronavirus in Lagos on 27th February, 2020. It is no longer a myth that Nigeria has joined the list of nations where the virus epidemic has become threatening.

Nigeria like most other countries of the world has taken to the necessary restrictive decisions discussed above. A lockdown was imposed on Lagos State, the nations sprawling commercial hub, as well as neighboring Ogun State and the capital territory of Abuja to curb the speedy spread of the virus in Nigeria. These areas having identified as high-risk for the spread of the virus. Other vital steps taken by the Federal Government of Nigeria according to Punch newspaper of 11th March, 2020 includes: Ban for public gatherings, ban on churches and mosque activities, SIT-AT-HOME directive etc;

even in other states across the country where total restrictions have not been pronounced. This Federal Government actions affects the South-East zones under considerations in numerous ways.

Based on this, the study aims to expose the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19, its present state on the South-East region. These zones include: Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, Imo and Abia State precisely. Information to this research work has been greatly limited by the restrictions imposed by the Government and fear of interaction created by the deadly nature of the virus. Therefore, the researcher is relying strictly on social media such as:

- Telephone
- Radio Nigeria
- Ray Power FM
- WAZOBIA FM
- Alpha FM
- Omega FM
- Blaze FM
- Other Stations
- Google
- WhatsApp
- Electronic Newspapers
- Online Journals

This is the available access of information. The researcher is partially depending on public opinion based on rumors which are not too dependable source of information.

Socio-Economic Consequences of Covid-19 on the South-East Zones

Present State of COVID-19 in the Region

Though the presence of coronavirus (COVID-19) have not been reported to have taken a dreadful dimension in these zones, the fear of this and the consequences of the steps taken by the government to curb the spread is causing serious socio-economic consequences on the regions and the inhabitants.

As reported by WAZOBIA FM on 15th April 2020, based on feedback from the public responses on the discussions concerning COVID-19. The Federal Government is expressing serious concern on the states of these Regions not taken the lockdown order seriously. The situation update in Nigeria on the cases of COVID-19 by states as at 16th

April, 2020, has shown that 20 states in Nigeria have been affected by this disease.

The latest update gotten from Google confirmed that the states in this region are now confirmed areas of the virus presence. The present fear of the spread of the disease and

not too sure of medical solutions available is confirming the need to understand the federal government concern about the states in the region not taking the lockdown seriously.

The table below shows the virus statistics revealed by internet source mentioned.

GENERAL FACT SHEET (April 16th, 2020)

STATES	TOTAL CONFIRMED CASES	NEW CONFIRMED CASES	TOTAL DISCHARGED CASES	NEW DISCHARGED CASES	TOTAL DEATHS	NEW DEATHS	TOTAL ACTIVE CASES	DAYS SINCE LAST REPORTED CASE
Lagos	251	19	90	5	7	0	154	0
FCT	67	9	23	0	2	0	42	0
Kano	21	5	0	0	1	1	20	0
Osun	20	0	17	6	0	0	3	13
Edo	15	0	5	5	1	0	9	2
Oyo	13	2	5	1	0	0	8	0
Ogun	9	0	5	3	0	0	4	3
Katsina	7	0	0	0	1	0	6	1
Kaduna	6	0	0	0	0	0	6	6
Bauchi	6	0	0	0	0	0	6	8
Akwa Ibom	6	0	3	3	0	0	3	2
Kwara	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Delta	4	0	0	0	1	0	3	1
Ondo	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Rivers	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	10
Niger	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Enugu	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	20
Ekiti	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	15
Benue	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	19
Anambra	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	6
TOTAL	442	35	152	24	13	1	277	

SELECTED CHARTS

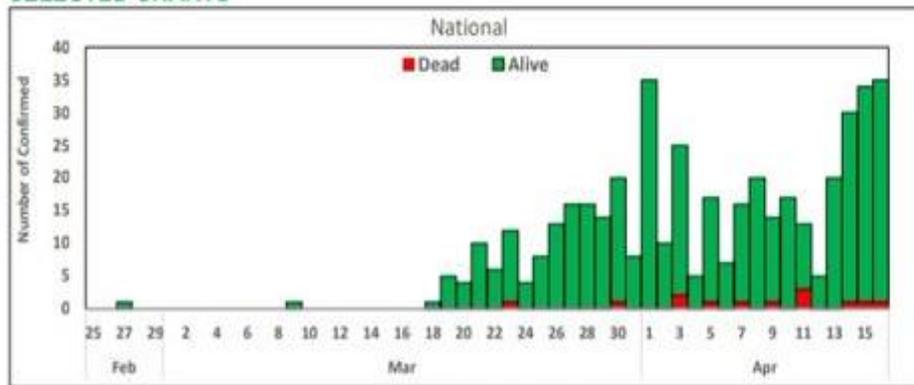


Fig. 3: Daily Epi-Curve of Confirmed Cases (wk9 - wk 16)

The chart shows that Imo, Abia, and Ebonyi States has not show any presence of the virus but the fear of the spread through possible interactions of people from other states without an effective adherence to the federal government lockdown instructions is understandable. A medical practitioner looking at the patterns of the virus revealed that it will eventually get to all the states.

Immediate Social Effect on the Region.

Reduction of Social Interactions; since the implementation of the lockdown in these areas, social restrictions has reduced social interactions generally. With the current lockdown and ban on public gatherings, people can no longer go their normal activities such as; work, business, church, mosque, markets, schools, entertainment centres, etc. families and friends find it extremely difficult to visit one another because of social distancing order. Children are even having the feel of the social restrictions as they are missing their friends in school. Ceremonies such as burials, marriages, weddings, birthdays etc. are put on hold. Hospital mortuaries are no longer accepting corpses. Bereaved families are also finding it difficult to bury their deceased ones since burials can no longer hold.

The Social consequences of COVID-19 lockdown are telling on families in these areas. People are hungry, sick and defenseless. Some families are going through undeniable endemic acute hunger, yet have reduced their demand for food due to poverty. This is worsened by inter-state lockdown as people could not travel to their states/villages where they could be supported with some farm products. As a result some feel displaced as they could not re-unite with their family members before the lockdown.

With the ugly experiences in these areas and coupled with the lockdown of churches and mosques where people can get spiritual admonitions and consolations, crime has been on the increase. Some desperate inhabitants who do not believe in folding hands to “watch and pray” have gone into devastating criminal acts and social vices like robbery, kidnapping, rapping, domestic violence, killings, harassments, internet fraud. Even the starving inhabitants of these areas painfully sleep with

one eye open and one eye closed at night under fear of the men of under world.

The police are having a hand full of problems to handle and inviting the military to help resulting to judicial killings. They are even becoming over ambitious and unnecessary killings of even the innocent inhabitants. This confirms the report from headline news on the social media that “the security agents killed more Nigerians in two weeks than the virus”.

Even the availability of mask for usage as a vital instrument for protection has been confirmed by the NCDC Director General, Chikwe Ihekweazu at a press conference of the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, to be in short supply and a controversial issue.

The scale of the disease out-breaks and response has radically increase and the aspect of mask availability and usage is one of them. He further explained that there is a chronic global shortage of personal protective equipment including masks around the world as the world was not prepared for a pandemic of this scale. So, we have to prioritize certain part of the population (health workers at isolation centres and laboratories as well as senior citizens) on the use of face masks. According to him, fifty percent of the world masks are produced by China that has been on lockdown for months. Other countries that produced medical equipments including masks had banned their exportation because they also needed them. Hence, wearing of a mask is not a protection against COVID-19 unless it is combined with other measures such as physical distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene.

The above statement confirms the fact that the supply of mask is limited even to the rich and mighty in the society. This statement further explains the fact that people within the region under consideration do not have easy access to mask. Hence many of them are not even wearing it. The pressure of their peculiar socio-economic deprivation at this point is making the inhabitants of the region under consideration not to appreciate or even consider the use of mask. They now even expose themselves to the risk of contacting the dreaded virus without adhering worldwide

easy acknowledged method of preventing contact with the virus.

Immediate Health Consequences on the Region

Though COVID-19 is not yet taken many lives in the area but fear of the disease and shortage of drugs created by the lockdown is beginning to affect the lives of the inhabitants. Many inhabitants cannot get common drugs to buy at normal prices with their economic source of their income affected by the lockdown.

The health effect of the COVID-19 outbreak is unimaginable with the inhabitants who have other underlying terminal diseases like:

- Ulcer
- Cancer
- Cardiac problems
- High Blood Pressure (HBP)
- Diabetes
- Liver problems
- Kidney problems
- Mental ill health etc.

These categories of people who live daily on drugs are in more distressed situation because of shortage or total absence of these drugs. As a result, their lives are now at risk at the attack of the mildest illness or disease. COVID-19 epidemic has brought great harm not only to the inhabitant's physical and mental health, but also the psychological aspect which has fostered negative impacts. There seem to be extreme emotional sadness in the lives of the helpless sick persons. Information from the social media also weakens their mental state and its negative thought has shown to even depress immune system and weakens it against viruses. There are fears and panicking in the areas. Some of the helpless sick are having daily sleepless night on how to ameliorate the acidity of their plights. Their major worry is based on the information that there are no medical cure for COVID-19 yet, and that those with underlying illness may not easily recover from the disease when being infected. Never wanted to fall victims and to boost their immune systems and avoid any loss of life they resorted to rumors and all sorts of information on how to keep fit in their struggle.

Due to lack of trustworthy official information, folktales about the epidemic situation spread

through word of mouth, the mobile phone text messages, social media transmission and other ways. The spread of all kinds of rumors exacerbated the spread of social panic and buying of drugs (Chloroquine) as rumor has it could prevent and control COVID-19 as mentioned by an officer of International Organization. The inhabitants who text run this landed themselves in hospital confirming a popular saying that "Cowards die Twenty Times before their time". Some others dwelled on mixture Therapy of garlic, lemon juice and warm water etc; but whether these were effective for COVID-19 was not scientifically established at this time.

Following this development Dr. Chinwe Ihekweazu, the Director, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) during the press conference at Abuja, warned that the use of chloroquine and its derivatives for the management of COVID-19 disease has not been validated and approved by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Immediate Economic Effect on the Region

There has also been much devastating effect on the economic lives of people in the areas. People are not finding the debilitating situation (Social Distancing Cum Lockdown) very easy.

This resulted on lockdown of markets. Hence with increase in demand, there is a perception and fear from the traders on the possibility to replacing stocks. Following this development, prices of food items exorbitantly increased and there is still possibility of further increase in price. An average inhabitant can no longer afford to buy the necessary food items.

The distress is more prominent among people living in poverty, the vulnerable with dependants. They lament on compulsory SIT-AT-HOME without any palliatives from the government. All these problems resulted into grievances and breaking of social distance/lockdown order. Good proportions are on the street. They accused their state government/local government of politicizing the palliatives and giving it to faceless individuals without reaching the vulnerable and the poor who truly need them. In fact, an untold hardship, anger and frustration could be read from people's voices and comments. One

Mr. Chidi from Nnewi called WAZOBIA FM platform expressing his views as follows:

“I am an artisan and a daily income earner who survives only on daily contracts, how do the government want people like us to survive sitting at home? In fact once I get any job now, I am going wherever it is. All we need is effective intensive testing-home-to-home to discover the carriers if at all they are telling us the truth about COVID-19. It is better to die of the so called virus than to die of hunger”.

As revealed by the Nigeria’s Finance Minister, Zainab Ahmed, the impact of the pandemic has driven down the global demand.

The emerging health and economic risks resulting from the COVID-19 and decline in international oil prices pose existential threats to Nigeria’s economy, health care system, national security as well as the lives of citizens. Fitch ratings pushed Nigeria’s debt rating deeper into “junk” territory and the virus pandemic is expected to drive the economy back into recession.

Long Term Socio-Economic Effect of COVID-19 on the Region

If the state of affairs continues, fear among the people concerning their socio-economic life is likely to create more problems than can be imagined. Many traders are likely to stop selling their goods so as to use it to sustain their families. The people in the region in an attempt to maintain the desired safety precautions are likely to avoid one another and cannot assist each other like before.

The inhabitants (Igbos) cultural emphasis on love for one another and brotherly attachment are likely to reduce with the increase in social vices like stealing, kidnapping, rapping, murder etc. Suspicion and effort to protect oneself and family can create social mistrust.

Technology palliative to the unexpected socio-economic devastation of the COVID-19: The help of technology social media at this point in time is unimaginable. Technology through the various social media (telephone, radio, television, e-newspaper etc) proved to be very handy on reducing the effect of social restriction. It also helps to reduce the economics limitations that were associated with the socio-economic restriction. People

within the region had during this period. They are relying completely on the use of the telephone and other internet facilities to reach one another for necessary socio-economic contact. Family and other relationship were not completely cut off. People were also able to discuss economic issues using the media.

Technology was unfortunately also restricted from some rural areas of the region by lack of adequate supply of electricity and related network problem. With restricted electricity supply in some area and none at all in most rural areas people had to rely on generator and solar facilities for charging their phones and other technological restriction affecting filling stations in some areas the problem of availability of fuel for generators was also added. But all the same, the effect of technology in the reduction of the socio-economic problem associated with the COVID-19 epidemic cannot be underestimated.

The radio and telephone are playing their fair roles in ensuring adequate dissemination of vital information concerning COVID-19 without these information sources the people of the region would have been in the dark about the development on this devastating virus. They would have been lost as to the role played by government and the role they should pay to ensure a collective fight against this common enemy.

Conclusion

In conclusion COVID-19 has come as a global problem. As many before it (Aids, Ebola, Lassa fever) came we only hope by the special grace of God that it will melt down as medical science and Technology continues to prefer solution. But the world must learn some lesson for future caution. We must also agree with the fact that these devastating occurrences are inevitable in the face of human development.

So, the nation should begin to think of making and more independent in socio-economic capacities. Regions and peoples should be encouraged to grow their own food, learn to be more socio-economically independent and ready to face difficult time as the word according to religious explanations “Is just facing the beginning of the end time trouble.

It is also important to announce to the government of the most developing countries

to rise up to their social responsibilities. They should learn from the developed countries how to make socio-economic palliative available and accessible to rural areas in difficult time of the unexpected as we are experiencing with COVID-19.

We should all as inhabitants of this world be tough and ready for tougher and difficult times but understand that tough times don't last but tough people do by the grace of God.

The Way Forward

- Though government has established its surveillance system to control and prevent disease. There is need to create a coronavirus fund to strengthen the health care infrastructure.
- Government should increase the orientation given to citizens especially those in the South-East regions as so many do not believe that COVID-19 is real.
- The government should as a matter of urgency give strategic communication and proper sensitization on the COVID-19 in the south-East Zone, particularly those in the

remote area so that the inhabitants will know what to do and not to do. This should be in all major languages - English, Pidgin and country's indigenous languages.

- Government should ensure that palliatives get to those living in poverty and vulnerable who truly need them.

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