

Government Policy Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria



Obinna Nwodim, PhD¹, Edmund Felix Obomanu, PhD²

^{1,2}Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT: The principal responsibility of any government is to provide for the security and welfare of the citizenry. A major feature of the well-being of the citizenry is quality healthcare service delivery. There is no doubt that the novel COVID-19 pandemic that ravaged the world exposed the vulnerability of citizens to social and economic challenges, thus imposing tremendous stress on governments, globally. In other words, governments were taken to task on their responsibilities. Both developed and developing countries were not spared as casualties cut across the divide. In response to the health challenges and subsequent socio-economic impacts, governments, the world over, adopted various policy measures to address the pandemic. In this paper, the author examined the policy response of the Nigerian government to the pandemic in order to mitigate the harsh negative impacts on the citizenry. The theoretical underpinning of this study is the systems theory as developed by David Easton. The paper is descriptive and therefore adopted secondary data from books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers, as well as other periodicals, both online and offline for discussion and analysis. The study observed that although, the Nigerian government adopted measures and strategies in the fight against the pandemic, the policy strategies and mechanisms were weak and reactionary, even as there were no feedback mechanisms to ascertain policy outcome. The paper, amongst others, therefore recommended that a state of emergency be declared in the economic sector of the country to help revive the economy and improve the well-being of the citizenry, while a robust and workable National Health Insurance Policy be established to address the health needs of the citizens.

KEYWORDS: Policy Response; COVID-19 Pandemic; Economic Impact; Health Sector.

INTRODUCTION

The protection of lives and property of the citizens, as well as the enhancement of their welfare is a fundamental objective of the state. Such goals promote patriotism, loyalty and obedience of citizens to the state. The extent of involvement of the state in promoting the welfare of the citizenry is reflective on the stability and progress the state enjoys. To achieve this, public activities encompass various spheres of human endeavours such as agriculture, education, health, etc. Governments strive to ensure that the welfare of the citizenry is promoted in these sectors. These are achieved through programmes and policies. A major and critical sector in the promotion and enhancement of the living standard of the citizenry is the health sector. A healthy population results to a healthy nation. This implies that there is a critical need for policies and programmes that would improve both the health and the social and economic sectors of the state. It also impacts on the economy of the society. The year 2020, no doubt, exposed the vulnerabilities of the socio-economic sector of most countries of the world. Both developed and developing countries faced the challenges posed by the novel COVID-19 pandemic that ravaged the world. The world economy was temporarily put to a halt as a result of various nations locking down their borders- air, land and sea, to stem the spread of the contagious virus. It resulted in economic difficulties that the world had not witnessed in over a century. A lot of health facilities in countries of the world were overrun, as the increased number of patients infected with the virus overstretched the facilities. Governments were forced to make contingent plans and arrangements to address the challenges. Lives were lost, livelihoods affected, psychological trauma were experienced, resulting to severe socio-economic challenges. As the Pandemic raged on, governments adopted varied strategies and policies to address the problem. Policies which included social and economic were adopted by both developed and developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. Most countries adopted some palliative measures, some applied bail out strategies to mitigate the harsh economic and social realities necessitated by the pandemic. In order words, governments responded in various ways. This paper attempts to examine the policy response of the Nigerian government to ameliorate and mitigate the negative and harsh effects of the corona virus pandemic on the citizens. This will be achieved by setting out an introduction to the study

Government Policy Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

and then take a conceptual clarification of the major concepts relevant to the study. We shall examine the theoretical framework and how they apply in this paper and further lay out the methodology of the study. The paper will also consider review of relevant literature on the subject matter and proceed to discuss and analyze information obtained and will finally summarize and make recommendations based on the findings of the study.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Policy Response: Dye (1972) provided a commonly used definition of what a public policy is. According to him, a public policy is what government chose to do or not to do. This definition makes it trite to state that the activities of government are very important in the sustenance of the state. To this end, it would be safe to state that part of what government does is to engage in decision making. It is this very important function that creates room for the implementation of policies of government. The citizens are engaged in a number of activities from social, to economic and political and governments participate in these activities by way of regulation and control. This is in a bid to evolve a stable and conducive society for the good of all. In order to discharge its responsibilities, governments make decisions by way of policy response. Such response could be in form of proactive measures to prevent something, which is usually, negative from occurring, or reactive, which implies responding to an issue that has already occurred. Whether it is proactive or reactive, government's response goes a long way in addressing the challenges faced by the citizens through decision making.

COVID-19 Pandemic: This refers to the corona virus which was said to have originated from Wuhan, China in 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared corona virus a pandemic in February 2020. The virus is characterized by flu –like symptoms such as cold, high body temperature, cough, sneezing and difficulty in breathing. The symptoms are said to attack the immune system of the body, thereby causing severe fatalities to the body system. COVID 19 was described as a novel disease and so it was difficult to find drugs that would cure it. However, the World Health Organization and medical experts advised that the basic remedies were to avoid body contacts and movements of persons from one place to the other, the use of face masks, regular washing of hands and the use of hand sanitizers. The aim was to help curb the spread, while efforts were made to find the cure and vaccine for its remedy.

Economic Impact: The resultant effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was the huge negative impact on the world economy it created. As a result of the restriction of movement occasioned by the lockdown of many countries, all economic activities were put to a halt. Industries and businesses were closed; there were no flights, both local and international. Businesses suffered as there was no body to patronize a lot of them. Jobs were lost, which affected a lot of livelihoods. Countries that depended on crude oil suffered huge deficits as the price of oil went an all-time low due to the lockdown of most economies. Also, countries that depended on tourism suffered the same fate as the restriction on travels both locally and internationally affected the tourism sector. These social and economic impacts, no doubt, affected the quality of life of the citizens in both developed and developing countries. The world energy market was heavily affected as the price of crude oil nose-dived in the international market. As a matter of fact, the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic necessitated the call from the various sectors of the economy for various forms of bail out from respective governments. Sectors such as the agriculture, education, transportation, sports, etc had made several calls to respective governments for bail out in other to mitigate the huge economic impact suffered as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Health Sector: Health is a very important aspect of the human life, as a healthy body is makes room for improved productivity in all ramifications. The health sector here refers to the capacity and infrastructure provided for medical purposes to address the well-being and health needs of citizens. The health sector implies both the medical and health practitioners and infrastructure such as hospital facilities which include laboratory facilities and equipment to address the health-care needs of citizens. The health-care practitioners include all those professionals in the health care sector that are involved in the provision of healthcare services to the population, such as doctors, nurses, laboratory technologists, as well as other Para medical staff who in one way or the other are engaged in health-care service delivery. The quality of service-delivery is also a major component of health care and so must be considered very important in the sector.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In other to properly explain this study in line with scientific principles, a theoretical framework was adopted to guide the research. The theoretical underpinning of this study is anchored on the Systems Theory. The Theory is derived from David Easton's conceptualization and analysis of political systems Allen and Gilbert (2011). Easton's behavioural approach to politics proposed that a political system could be seen as a delimited and fluid system of steps in decision making and that change in the social or physical environment surrounding a political system produces "demands" and "supports" for actions or the *status quo* directed

Government Policy Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

as inputs towards the political system through political behavior. These demands and supporting groups stimulate competition in a political system leading to decisions or outputs directed at some aspects of the surrounding social or physical environment. A key assumption of this theory with regard to public policy making is that the process is characterized by interaction of the environment, political system and output Allen and Gilbert (2011). As it applies to this study, the demand here is the incident of the COVID-19 pandemic which necessitates the response of the state by way of decision making or policy response which is the support. This theory has been used to explain how humans respond to hazards in the environment (Burton, Kate and White, 1978, Mmom, 2013, Nwodim, 2017).

Research Questions:

The study is premised on the following research questions:

- What are the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Did the government respond appropriately to the incidence of the COVID -19 pandemic?
- What is the nature of the response by government to the COVID-19 Pandemic?

METHODOLOGY

The paper is qualitative and as such the method of data collection adopted for this study is mainly secondary. That is from sources such as historical and archival records, internet materials, academic journals, newspaper reports, news magazines, special reports and documents from relevant government agencies. Useful information were elicited from these sources from which discussion and analysis were based.

REVIEW ON LITERATURE

The art of governance implies adequate response by the state authorities to the yearnings and aspirations of the citizenry. This is what governments, all over the world, strive to achieve. Governance and policy response are two concepts that influence both development and underdevelopment of the state. To explain further, good governance attracts development and improved wellbeing of the citizens, while bad government or maladministration reflects on the quality of life of individuals in the state, which is characteristically poor and low. Development scholars and analysts have bared their minds on efforts at providing responsible service to the citizens through governance. However, reality shows that many states, particularly those of the developing countries lack proper or good governance and so impacts negatively on the lives of the citizenry. We may consider how some scholars and relevant bodies consider and view governance. The World Bank (1988) defines governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources. In other words, the management of resources is an essential feature of governance and influences policy outcome. On their own part, Daramola and Olowopolu (2017, p.15) define governance as "the process of decision making and implementation with focus on effectiveness of the government in providing the process and structure for mobilizing the state resources for the interest of the people". Contributing in this regard Yaqub and Abubakar (2005) aver that governance is the totality of the process of constituting a government, as well as administering a political community. Wariboko (2019) on his part refers to governance as the practices of command (co-ordination or control) in an organization or polity. It is the set of institutional forms of control for maintaining and destabilizing order necessary for human flourishing in an organized polity. For Serageldin and Landell-Mills (1991) governance incorporates not only integrity, efficiency and economy of government, but its effectiveness is measured by the ends to which governance organization and activity are directed. In the opinion of Hufty (2011), it is the process of interaction and decision making among the actors involved in a collective problem that leads to creation, reinforcement or reproduction of social norms and institutions. Governance relates specifically to the use of political authority and their exercise of control to manage resources for social and economic development of society (Ugoanni, 2019). Definitely, common features run across the various opinions and definitions on the concept of governance. They include the reality that it is an activity which involves some level of management and that the management is geared towards achieving certain goals in the society. However, the reality shows that governance is far from achieving this objective, hence there are various results on the act of governance. Some governance objectives produce good results and others poor or bad results and hence the concept of good governance becomes imperative here.

Like that of governance, some scholars and analysts have given various opinions on the concept of good governance. For instance Ibodje (2012) asserts that good governance is one that is characterized by accountability to the management of public resources, rule of law in the conduct of public affairs, predictability of institutional performance and behaviour, justice, equity and effectiveness in the management of the economy. For Ekpu (2009, p. 11), "good governance means respect for the rule of law, accountability, transparency, delivery on election promises and creation of an atmosphere for the flowering of freedom and for the achievement of the greatest good for the greatest number of our people". On their own part, Akomodele and Akomodele

Government Policy Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

(2012, p. 62) aver that “good governance is that which meets the needs of the people as it relates to development and better life”. Staphenurst and Kpundeh (1999) assert that good governance entails efficient and effective reciprocity between leaders and the led, with responsibilities incumbent upon the government. It is obvious that the concept of governance, like governance has features that run across the various definitions. There are definitely features of accountability, transparency, integrity and responsible leadership which ultimately translate to policies that bring about result-oriented decision-making.

Further to the foregoing assertion, the concept of governance as explained by various scholars identify key characteristics such as responsiveness, transparency, equity, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, participation, rule of law and inclusiveness as elements of good governance (Ewin, Nnamani and Eberinwa, 2014, p.4; UNESCO n.d., p 2-3; Aloba, 2014, p.22; Okoro, 2016, p.2; Downer, 2000; Izah, 2013, P. 3; Nwanegbo, 2016, p. 53).

Economic Impacts:

Scholars and researchers have taken diverse perspectives of the economic impact of the Corona virus pandemic. Ozili (2020) argues that the economic down-turns in Nigeria was triggered by a combination of declining oil price and spill over from the COVID-19 outbreak which not only led to a fall in the demand for oil products, but also stopped economic activities from taking place when social distancing policies were enforced. Also in their study of the impacts of COVID-19 on food system and poverty in Nigeria, Andam, Edeh, Oboh, Pauw and Thurlow, (2020) found out that Nigeria’s total GDP fell 23% during the lockdown. Agri-food system fell 11%, primarily due to restrictions on food services. Household income also fell by a quarter, leading a 95 points increase in the national poverty rate. This implies that the already bad poverty situation of the country worsened as a result of the pandemic. Just in 2019, Nigeria was declared the poverty capital of the world, surpassing India (Barikor and Nwodim, 2020) as she continued to grapple with economic difficulties over the years. Their study further indicated that given the scale of these economic losses, the recovery scenario indicated that even with a rapid easing of restrictions and global recovery, Nigeria was unlikely to escape deep economic recession. Of course, the prediction was made manifest when the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) declared late November 2020 that Nigeria had slipped into recession.

Elsewhere, while estimating the economic costs of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, Andam, Edeh, Oboh, Pauw and Thurlow, (2020) highlighted the reality that during the lockdown period, Nigeria suffered a 34.1% loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic, amounting to USD 16 billion with 2/3 of the losses coming from the services sector. The agriculture sector which serves as the primary means of livelihood for most Nigerians suffered 13.1% loss in output (USD 1.2 billion). Although primary agricultural activities were excluded from the direct restriction on economic activities imposed in the lockdown zones, the broader agri-food system was affected indirectly because of its linkage with the rest of the economy. There were obvious impacts on the socio-economic lives of the citizens as a major characteristic of the livelihood of the people is that a major segment of the population lives from hand to mouth. In other words, they live on their daily earnings. This implies that for them to feed in a day, they must have to go out to fend for themselves. It is that which they earn for the day that they use as upkeep for that day. So then, policies like lockdown and restriction of movements became problematic to the sustenance of this category of people. Examining the impact of the pandemic in the service sector of the economy, Mogaji (2020) in his study recognizes the impact of COVID-19 on transportation in Lagos State, Nigeria, highlighting its effects on transportation in emerging economies where lockdown restrictions on movements may be ineffective and presents practical implication for public and private sector policymakers as they navigate the precarious time and chart a new path for individuals and Nigeria. In all, there is an obvious reality of the negative effects of the pandemic on the socio economy of the country hampering the wellbeing of the citizenry.

Policy Response:

Soon after the corona virus (COVID-19) disease was first reported in an Italian citizen that arrived Nigeria on February 28, 2020 by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the National Emergency Operation Centres were immediately activated to Level 3 to trace and detect all his contacts and the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 was inaugurated 3 weeks later (Ebenso and Otu, 2020). Nigeria was among the first countries to recognize the risk and start planning ahead of the epidemic curve one week after China first reported the first case of COVID -19. So far, the country has recorded strides in in the fight against COVID-19 by drawing on successes and lessons learnt from controlling previous epidemics such as Ebola and Polio and ongoing epidemics such as Lasser Fever, followed by significant financial investments into preparedness and surveillance from the Federal Government and the newly formed Nigeria Private Sector Coalition Against COVID-19, (NTA, 2020). Evidences can be seen in the increase in the number of testing centre prior to the dilacerations of COVID-19 as a pandemic and today. The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19, the Federal Ministry of Health and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control have been working closely in collaboration with relevant ministries, departments, agencies, partners and other stakeholders to coordinate and review the national response strategies and implementation activities on daily basis in order to effectively contain the spread of COVID -19. Till date, several non-pharmaceutical measures have been employed to limit the importation of new

Government Policy Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

cases and control local transmission. These measures include: staying at home, travel ban to and from high risk countries with community transmission of COVID-19, border controls; deployment of rapid response teams to all affected states; state level training and capacity building of all health personnel on infectious disease prevention and control; case management, intensified risk communication, community engagement, heightened surveillance, field epidemiological investigation, rapid identification of suspected cases, isolation, diagnosis, contact tracing, monitoring and follow-up of persons of interest. Furthermore, social and religious gatherings were banned temporarily, schools and businesses were closed, restriction of movements and partial lockdown were instituted in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Lagos and Ogun States.

In addition, the Federal Government expanded the social safety nets and welfare programmes in its efforts to reduce poverty and mitigate the impact of the unintentional partial lockdown on the livelihood of the poor and vulnerable households in affected states. Food rations, food vouchers, conditional cash transfers and other forms of palliatives targeted vulnerable and socially disadvantaged members of the affected countries (Tijanim, 2020).

Specifically, the Nigerian government undertook a number of fiscal measures to mitigate its effects on the citizenry as follows:

Economic Stimulus Measures (loans, moratorium, debt repayments) Monetary policy:

On March 16, 2020 the Central Bank of Nigeria announced new measures as follows:

- A one year extension of moratorium on principal payments for CBN intervention facilities;
- The reduction of the interest rate on intervention loans from 9 percent to 5 percent;
- Strengthening of the loan to deposit policy (i.e. stepping up enforcement directives to extend more credit to the private sector);
- Creation of NGN 50 billion target credit facility for affected households and small and medium enterprises;
- Granting regulatory forbearance to for banks to restructure terms of facilities in affected sectors;
- Improving FX supply to the CBN by directing oil companies and oil servicing companies to sell FX to the CBN. rather than the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation;
- Additional NGN100 billion intervention fund in healthcare loans to pharmaceutical companies and health care practitioners intending to expand, build capacity;
- Identification of few key local pharmaceutical companies that will be granted funding facilities to support the procurement of raw materials and equipment required to boost local drug production;
- N 1 trillion loans to boost local manufacturing and production across the critical sectors;
- The CBN has adopted a unified exchange rate system for inter-Banks and parallel market rates to ease to ease pressure on FOREX earnings as oil prices continued to plummet;
- CBN adopted the official rate of N360 to a dollar for International Money Transfer Operators rate to banks;
- For on lending facilities, financial institutions have been directed to engage international development partners and negotiate concessions to ease the pains of the borrowers;
- Provision of credit assistance for the health industry to meet the potential increase in demand for health services and products by facilitating borrowing conditions for pharmaceutical companies, hospitals and practitioners.

Fiscal Policy:

- The crude oil price benchmark was also reduced from USD 57 to USD 30;
- The CBN pledged to pump N1.1 trillion (USD 3Billion) into critical sectors of the economy;
- Commencement of three month repayment moratorium for all TraderMoni, Market Moni and FarmerMoni loans;
- Similar moratorium to be given to all Federal Government funded loans issued by the Bank of Industry; Bank of Agriculture and the Nigeria Export-Import Bank.

CUSTOMS MEASURES

Export of Mask: Some restrictions on exportation of masks were implemented;

Other measures:

- Authorities are considering a wide range of COVID-19 support measures including reduction of customs duty and customs audits but such measures are not officially announced;
- No changes in customs requirements as at March 31, 2020.

Payment facilities:

- Extension of filling due date for Value Added Tax (VAT) from the 21st day to the last working day of the month, following the month of deduction.

Other Measures and Sources:

Government Policy Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Fiscal Policy:

- The Federal Government revises planned spending in the 2020 budget with an increase of about N 023 trillion in expenditure and a 315 decrease in revenue.

Suspension of New Electricity Tariffs:

- On April 1st, the Nigeria Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) suspended the payment of new electricity tariffs scheduled to commence on April 2, citing poor electricity supply, wide metering gap and the impact of the COVID -19 pandemic. The National Assembly recently postponed the effective date of the new tariff to the first quarter of 2021;
- On October 11, NERC suspended the Multi Year Tariff Order (MYTO) 2020 for the Electricity Distribution Licenses for 2 weeks.

NIS waiver for Visitor Affected by Travel Ban:

- On 16th April, Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) announced the grant of payment waiver to visitors/ migrants affected by the travel ban and the closure of international airports. Affected persons are expected to reschedule their flights and travel within a week of the suspension of the restrictions
- Lagos state Government reverts annual land use charges to pre 2018 rates.

Source: [https://: www.home.kpmg/govrnance](https://www.home.kpmg/govrnance)

A number of monetary policies were introduced by the Federal Government to help boost the harsh effects of the pandemic on the economy. This was based on the reality that the effects of the lockdown affected the circulation of money as a result of the restriction of movements and the closure of business and industries. There was indeed serious economic lull and the bailout measures and relaxation of some monetary policies by the Federal Government through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) was to play a major role to boost the country's economy thereby mitigating the harsh negative effects on the citizenry. The Federal Government went a step further to introduce cushioning policies in customs and excise in order to boost commercial activities which would help improve the livelihood of the citizenry. In other words, the economic burden placed on individuals and households required financial measures such as was put in place by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to mitigate such negative impacts. The fact remains, to what extent were these measures applied and how successful were they to mitigate the harsh effects on the citizenry.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the Nigerian government responded to the challenges brought about by the novel coronavirus pandemic by activating the relevant ministries, agencies, parastatals and departments to be alive to their responsibilities. Apart from medical response against the spread of the virus through contact tracing of infected and suspected infected persons, setting up of laboratories as well as isolation centres in various states of the Federation, there were also non pharmaceutical responses they were initiated to curb the spread of the virus. Such included the massive enlightenment, education and re-orientation of the citizenry on the novel virus through various mass media and communication channels. The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, as well as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) played significant roles in this regard. It was evident that the measures taken to curb the spread of the virus infringed on the economic activities of the citizens, particularly those whose livelihood depended on their daily income. For several weeks there was the closure of inter and intra state boundaries. These had tremendous negative impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of the citizens. To a large extent, economic activities were at a lull. It was difficult to transport food produce from the northern part of the country to the south. Such food produce that were usually moved from the north to the south became scarce and expensive. A lot of people could not afford them. On the other hand, farmers in the north could not sell their produce to earn revenue from their farms. Worse still, due to the non-availability of storage system to preserve the farm produce, particularly the perishable one, there were so much losses incurred by the farmers due to their inability to timely dispose their produce as a result of the restrictions in interstate boundaries. This situation, in no small measure worsened the poverty rate in the country, with deeper economic crisis. To cushion the effects of the restrictions on the citizens, governments, both federal and states levels, individually rolled out food "palliatives" to address the challenges of hunger for the teeming masses who could not go out to fend for themselves as a result of the restrictions on movements occasioned by the lockdown. The government was also able to mobilize the private sector towards supporting the public initiatives by making diverse donations to help cushion the effects of the pandemic on the citizens. In response, the private sector under the auspices of Coalition against COVID-19 (CACOVID) made several donations in cash and in materials to assist the efforts of government at both the federal and states levels. However, there were several reports of dissatisfaction over the distribution of the palliatives and many had claimed that they were not reached. Apart from the impact

Government Policy Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

on the very poor citizens, there were also those who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. Hundreds of thousands were laid off their jobs as a result of the down turn occasioned by the corona virus. A lot of employees in the service sector such as transportation- both air and land, banking sector, amongst others were relieved of their jobs due to the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no doubt that the scenarios worsened the already battered economy of the country, even as it sits comfortably as the poverty capital of the world. The government responded promptly through fiscal and non-fiscal measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the citizenry. The major organs used as response mechanisms was the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to roll out various measures and strategies aimed at cushioning the financial impact on businesses in Nigeria. Government announced various forms of bail out in a number of sectors in the country, as well as moratorium on loans collected from the Federal Government by private business concerns. It announced a stimulus package and bailout for the health sector, the small and medium scale enterprises, the airline, the transport, the education, as well as the agriculture sectors. All these were in a bid to stimulate the already battered economy and help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the citizens. However, the level of implementation of these policies is yet another issue that has not been effectively considered. Government is yet to roll out a mechanism of feedback to ascertain the level of implementation of its response and subsequent impact on the economy.

Apart from the Federal Government, the various state governments adopted different policy response mechanisms in the fight against the pandemic in line similar to those of the Federal Government. These policies, though implemented in the states were greeted with mixed reactions from the citizens owing to poor, effective and efficient implementation.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Despite the economic challenges and financial down turn faced by the government, there was significant and early response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria. Although, the casualties record in Nigeria, as in other African countries were not as fatal as those in Europe, Asia and other parts of the world, it is obvious that there were inadequate infrastructure to contain the spread and treatment of the pandemic. For instance, as at the time when the virus was imported into the country, there were only about five testing centres for the virus in Nigeria. However, with the response by the Federal and State governments as well as other public spirited individuals and organizations, the number of testing centres rapidly increased. Furthermore, in the face of the pandemic and response mechanisms, the government is yet to initiate a feedback mechanism to ascertain the level of response and output of its policies. For instance, it was difficult to ascertain how and to what extent the distribution of food palliatives went to the targeted households. While it was reported that the Federal and state governments spent billions of naira to purchase palliatives that were distributed to poor households, it was observed that a lot of households complained that they did not receive such palliatives. Even those that received said what was received were short of what could be called palliatives. For instance, some families claimed they received three packets of indomie nodules. In some states some claimed they received a few cups of rice and others tubers of yams as palliatives. The reported cases of hoarding of these food items also showed lack of transparency, accountability and integrity in public policy implementation in Nigeria. There is also a high element of corruption in the process of public policy implementation. The conditional cash transfer by the Federal Government to the rural poor could not be tracked as cash payments were said to be made directly to the beneficiaries. This falls short of the process of accountability and transparency. We observed in this study a significant gap between policy initiation and policy implementation in the Nigerian public service delivery mechanism. This also affects policy outcomes of government activities. The same goes at the State level. Most State governments set up Committees made up of their political friends and associates. This developments cast doubt on the transparency of the relief and palliative distribution.

It is based on these findings that the study recommends as follows:

- Government should evolve a more accountable and transparent process in public policy implementation. This would enhance and ensure positive outcome of government intentions;
- There should be reward and punishment system for public officials that deliberately hinder government objectives by going against government directives in public policy implementation;
- A specialized agency should be charged with ensuring support and response to cushion the effects at the Federal level, rather than saddle the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs with relief distribution. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is already saddled with the responsibility by law to do that, while the Ministry should have played the supervisory role;
- When such an agency is established it should have levels of operation such that it would operate at the levels of Federal, State and Local Government levels in order to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in service-delivery;

Government Policy Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

REFERENCES

- 1) Akomodele, I.T. & Akomodele, O. B. (2012). Legislation as a tool for Good Governance in Nigeria: Legal Matters Arising. In European Journal of Business and Social Science. Available on www.eajournals.org.
- 2) Alobu, E. E. (2014). Promoting the Culture of Democracy and Good Governance in Local Government Councils in Nigeria. The Role of the Legislature. In British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences. Vol. 18. No 1.
- 3) Andam, K.S.; Edeh, H., Oboh, V.; Pauw, K.; and Thurlow, J. (2020). Impacts of COVID-19 on food systems and poverty in Nigeria. In Advances in Food Security and Sustainability. Available at; www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. Accessed on 06-12-2020.
- 4) Andam, K.S., Edeh, H., Oboh, V.; Pauw, K.; & Thurlow, J. (2020). Estimating the Economic Cost of COVID 19 in Nigeria. NSSP Working Paper 2020. Available at: www.ifpri.org. Accessed on 06-12-2020.
- 5) Barikor, I. B & Nwodim, O. (2020). Democracy and development: Appraising Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In International Journal of Humanities Research. Vol 8 (4). Retrieved from <https://seahipaj.org/index.php/journals/education-social-sciences-and-arts/ijisshr/currentissue/>. Accessed on 30/12/2020.
- 6) Daramola, O. & Olowoporoki, O. (2017). Plurality of urban governance in Nigeria and its Importance in Deliver of Environmental Services. Advances in Environmental Research 6(1).27-33.
- 7) Ebenso, B. & Otu, A. (2020). Can Nigeria Contain the COVID -19 outbreak Using Lessons From Recent Epidemics? Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/52214-1098>. Cited on April 3. Accessed on 07-12-2020.
- 8) Ekpu, R. (2019, December 21). 'Ten Years of Faltering Steps' Newswatch Magazine.
- 9) Ewuin, N.C. , Nnamani, O.O. and Eberinwa (2014) Legislative Oversight and Good Governance in Nigeria National Assembly. An Analysis of Obasanjo and Jonathan's Administration. Available at www.arabianjbm.com.
- 10) Hufty, M. (2011). Investigating Policy Processes. The Governance Analytical Framework (GAF). In U. Weisemann and H. Hurni (eds). Research in Sustainable Development Foundations, Experience and Perspectives. Bern Geographical Bernensia, 403-424.
- 11) Ibodje, S.W.E. (2012) National Development in Nigeria: The Problem of Good Governance in Nigeria. Lead Paper Presented at the 3rd National Conference of the School of Business and Management Technology, Abia State Polytechnic, Aba.
- 12) Izah, P. P. (2013). Legislative Oversight and Democracy in Developing Countries. Paper for ECOWAS-P on Security Challenges on Political Instability in West Africa. Dakar Senegal, 29th -31st October. Available at www.a-dap.awepa.org.
- 13) Mogaji, E. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on Transportation in Lagos, Nigeria. Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives. Available at: www.mbi.nlm.nih.gov. Accessed on 07-12-2020.
- 14) Nigeria Television Authority. Breakdown of Contributions to fight COVID-19 in Nigeria. 2020. Available at: <https://www.nta.ng/news/finance202004402-reakdown-of-contributions-to-fight-COVID-19nigeria-cna-cited-2020>. April 3.
- 15) Nwanegbo, J.C. (2016). Democratic Leadership and Good Governance in Nigeria. In Aloysius- Michaels, O.; Shuaibu, I and Salisu, H. (eds). *Governance, Security and National Security in Nigeria*. Keffi; Nigeria Political Science Association.
- 16) Okoro, O. (2016). The Concept of Legislative Oversight. Available at: www.aronewsonline.com.
- 17) Ozili, P.K. (2020). COVID 19 Pandemic and Economic Crisis: The Nigerian Experience and Structural Causes. Available at: www.researchgate.net. Accessed on 06-12-2020.
- 18) Serageldin, I and Landell-Mill, P.(1991). Governance and the External Factor. In World Bank, Proceedings of the World Bank Annual Conference on Development Economics, Washington DC.
- 19) Stapenhurst, R. and Kpundeh, S. I. (1999). Curbing Corruption: Towards a Model for building National Integrity. The World Bank: Washington DC.
- 20) Tijanim S.J. (2020). Available at equityhealthy.biomedicentra.com
- 21) Ugonna, J.N.N. (2019). Management Perspectives in Governance and Leadership in Nigeria 1800-2018. In O. Nwodim; M.D. Ogali and E.C. Ndu (Eds). *The State, Politics and Development: Essays in Honour of Professor Eme Ekekwe*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press Limited.
- 22) United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (n.d). What is Good Governance/. United Nations.
- 23) Wariboko, N. (2019). Leadership and Governance. In O. Nwodim; M.D. Ogali and E. C. Ndu (Eds). *The State, Politics and Development: Essays in Honour of Professor Eme Ekekwe*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press Limited.
- 24) World Bank (1989). Sub Saharan Africa; From Crisis to Sustainable Growth. Washington DC; World Bank.
- 25) Yaqub, O. & Abubakar, S.O. (2005). Conceptualizing Good Governance, Corruption and Democracy. In L. Olorode and S. O. Akinboye (eds). *Democracy, Good Governance and Corruption in Nigeria*. Friedrich Ebert Shifting (FEP).