

## **THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON NIGERIA: A SUBSTANTIAL THREAT TO THE ATTAINMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the nexus between COVID-19 pandemic and social problems in Nigeria, with focus on its perceived threat to the attainment of Sustainable development Goals, SDGs. Specifically, the paper examined the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on crime, poverty, and unemployment in Nigeria. Methodologically, the study made use of secondary source of data and content analysis. The study findings on crime show an increase in organized crime, rising level of cyber crime, violent crime, gender-based domestic violence, extra-judicial killings as well as palliative fraud while fall in real Gross Domestic Product, agrifood system GDP, and spread of poverty to urban areas, hunger and starvation, among others, were found to be the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on poverty. Similarly, the study findings on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on unemployment show that, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise was badly affected, people lost their jobs, underemployment and youth unemployment worsened during the pandemic. Recommendations were made in the areas of poverty alleviation, employment generation, skill acquisition programmes, apprenticeship scheme and other forms of technical and vocational training in order to reduce the levels of crime, poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. On the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical measures on the pandemic's protocol should be strictly adhered to. Temporally, palliative measures can be given **in order** to cushion the effects of the pandemic which will go a long way **in** reducing the levels of crime, poverty, and unemployment in Nigeria.

**Keywords: Covid-19, Crime, Pandemic, Poverty, Unemployment.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cross-continently, COVID-19 pandemic has left no part of the world untouched. The virus emerged from Wuhan, China, and spread to other parts of the world. According to United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC, 2020), over the course of just a few weeks during the first few months of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic radically changed the nature of social interaction and economic activity in all regions across the world. By the first week of April 2020, 3.9 billion people – more than half the global population – were under some forms of lockdown. According to Aleruchiegbuchu and Obinachiwori (2020), corona virus COVID-19 pandemic is a general world health predicament of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and one of the most severe challenges humanity have ever bumped into since the second world war.

Similarly, Gerell, Kardell and Kindgren (2020) averred that, with the virus spreading rapidly around the world during 2020, it has a tremendous impact on many countries, both directly through the disease it causes, COVID-19, and indirectly through the measures governments and other actors take to combat its spread. This is in tandem with the position of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (2020) which shows that the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic is having profound impacts on society and the economy.

As of 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2020, the World Health Organisation reported more than 2.1 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 142,229 deaths in 213 countries, areas or territories. It is one of the pandemics that have raised awareness and level of consciousness to the extent that, even some negligible number of states in Nigeria that claimed to be COVID-19 proof or free, were very mindful of what they do with little or no confidence.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2020, Nigeria recorded its first index case. From that period onwards, the number of confirmed cases has continued to rise uncontrollably in the country (Brisibe and Udeme, 2020). The government of Nigeria has taken a variety of measures to control the spread of the novel corona virus, including restrictions on movement that are being enforced by law enforcement agencies and the military (Transparency International, 2020).

## **SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Every country is bedeviled with one form of social problem or the other which makes it a universal and normal phenomenon. There are some social problems that exist in some countries and are non-existent in other countries while some countries have common social problems like the issue of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. This is best explained by Imhonopi and Urim (2012:123)

Every country has its own social problems that force its leadership, citizens and state institutions to hobnob together for solutions. What may be a social problem in Nigeria may not be a social problem in other countries. Even when such problems exist, they may actually exist in varying degrees. For instance, Ghana is one of Nigeria's West African neighbours but has not experienced religious fundamentalism or terrorism like we see in Nigeria. Even the issue of tribalism which is byzantine in Nigeria is not well pronounced in Ghana's social structure. While this does not mean that Ghanians do not have their own fair share of social complications, it does show that what aches Nigeria as social problems may not be the same for Ghanians.

What is a social problem? Before we attempt definitional reflections on the concept, 'social problem', it is worth-mentioning here that social problem is not synonymous with personal problem. A problem is social if it affects a large member of the society. For instance, crime, poverty, and unemployment are examples of problems that affect a reasonable number of Nigerians, as they are cross-sectional social problems in Nigeria. Personal problem, on the other hand, affects the individual alone and in some cases, his relations psychologically. Social problems, according to Fasoranti (2004:274), "are unpleasant socio-cultural circumstances, which have unpleasant results for mankind". For Igbo and Anugwom (2002:78), a social problem "is a social condition that is hazardous, unjust and unjustifiable, with far reaching consequences for the health, welfare, and happiness of many people within the immediate environment.

From the foregoing, we can define a social problem as a state of discomfort and difficulty in any sphere of human existence which has a devastating effect on the society. In social work, social problem means that the problem has a social origin instead of psychological origin. It means that a client's problem has relationship with his social environment (Ekpe and Mamah, 1997).

### **COVID-19 AND CRIME IN NIGERIA**

Crime is one of the major social problems in every society. The consequences of crime are felt by crime victims all over the world. Victims of crime here could be individuals, groups, organizations, government and other entities in society. Broom and Selznick (1963) observed that in any society there is always a consensus about what behavior will be reacted to favourably, neutrally, and unfavourably. Some behaviours are rewarded, others ignored, and some attract official punishment. For Brantingham and Brantingham (1984), crime is a complex social phenomenon. Crime has a legal component (a rule that prohibits specific conduct on pains of punishment) and behavioural component (conduct in violation of that rule). Crime is distinguished from other deviant behaviours only because they are legally forbidden.

This is in harmony with the definition of crime given by Hughes et al (1999:154) which viewed crime as an act of deviance that is prohibited by law. Similarly, Imhonopi and Urim (2012) defined crime as an action prohibited by law or failure (omission) to act as required by law. As well as other spheres of human existence, COVID-19 has impacted immensely on crime in Nigeria. United Nations Organisation (UNO, 2020) suggests that, the impact of COVID-19 on crime, security and the rule of law will be enormous. Reaffirming the above assertion, Transparency International (2020) has discovered that, amidst the pandemic, organized crime has actually been on the rise. The Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) is still arresting drug traffickers who have continued operations despite lock down. Security agents who have turned checkpoints into cash cows provide some clue as to how this happened. Cybercrime has also increased through the sale of fake medical products online. This is corroborated by United Nations Office on Drug and Crime World Wildlife Report (2020) which observes that falsified medicines in the wake of COVID-19 is an emerging threat for security and public health in Nigeria. As an intervention, UNODC continues its support to Nigerian Correctional Service with protective kits for COVID-19 prevention in Custodial Centres in Nigeria. Similarly, Tade (2020) has opined that one of the emerging and unintended consequences of lock-down, aimed at curtailing the spread of Corona virus in most African countries, is violent criminality, murder, kidnapping, domestic violence (gender-based violence), and growing cyber-crime among other criminal

activities. This is in tandem with the findings of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (2020) which depict that cyber scams, fraud, disinformation and other cyber-enabled crimes will become a growth industry, as people on lockdown kill time online. In Nigeria, there are reports of human rights violations while enforcing lockdowns as over twenty-persons have been killed by the police. According to Okokie-Osemene (2021), there was looting of shops, robbery, and killing by security forces, in Lagos Warri, Aba, Umuahia and other cities during lockdown. While there was remarkable decrease in crimes compared with the preCOVID-19 period, the lockdown did not deter trouble makers from engaging in violent acts, such as armed robbery, police violence, and kidnapping. The State is also being accused of leveraging on the pandemic to commit what can be termed ‘palliative fraud’ and COVID-fund fraud (Tade, 2020). In another development, Automated Credit Application Processing System (2020) found these trending during the lockdown in Nigeria:

Between 30 March and mid-April, following the beginning of lockdowns, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recorded extrajudicial killings and abuse of power by the Nigerian security forces. Some people were killed by law enforcement agents for allegedly not complying with containment measures. In the same period, the NHRC recorded 33 incidents of inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as 27 incidents of unlawful arrest and detention recorded in areas under lockdown or movement restrictions, as well as intimidation and arrest of journalists.

## **COVID-19 AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

Poverty is the deprivation from the basic necessities of life and is the condition of having insufficient resources or income. In most extreme form, poverty is a lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water, and health services (Imhonopi and Urim, 2012).

Marshall (1998) refers to poverty, in absolute terms, as a state in which the individual lacks the resource necessary for subsistence. According to Ake (1981), economic need is man’s most fundamental need. Unless man is able to meet this need, he cannot exist in the first place.

Poverty could constitute a major problem. When meeting the barest essentials of life is impaired by poverty and want, there is that tendency for some individuals to take to illegitimate means to fulfill basic needs. As Ewubare (2020) rightly pointed out, the incidence of poverty in Nigeria has worsened since the 1980s and became pervasive in the 1990s. Poverty in Nigeria is found among four identifiable economic groups namely the rural landless, the small farmers, the urban under-employed and the unemployed. In 2018, about half the population (87 million people) lived on less than \$1.90 a day. Most of the nation’s poor live in rural areas and have markedly less access to clean water than those in urban areas (Borgen Project, 2021). In 2019, 40.1 percent of the total population was classified as poor-those living below the national poverty line of 137,430 per person per year (National Bureau of Statistics, in Odili 2020:209). COVID-19 pandemics and its corresponding and necessary measures to curtail the spread namely lockdown and restriction of movement, has affected almost all spheres of human existence with poverty not being an exception in Nigeria.

While it is true that the poverty level in Nigeria was relatively high even before COVID-19, it is a fundamental truth that, the level of poverty in Nigeria became relatively higher with the advent of COVID-19. This is particularly due to the measures put in place to prevent the spread of the virus causing the disease to other parts of the country where there was none hitherto. According to the World Bank (2021), before COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, approximately 4 in 10 Nigerians were living below the national poverty line, and millions more were living just above the poverty line, making them vulnerable to falling back into poverty when shocks occur.

As observed by Andam, Edeh and Thurlow (2020), total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell 23% during the lockdown. Agri-food system GDP fell 11%, primarily due to restriction on food services. Household incomes fell by a quarter, leading a 9% increase in the national poverty rate. This is in tandem with the findings of the Borgen Project (2021) which show that, the impact of COVID-19 on poverty in Nigeria has been especially disastrous. The downturn in Nigeria's economy due to COVID-19 affected a large number of people and worsened the impact of COVID-19 on poverty in Nigeria. For instance, Kwam (2020) found that household incomes fell by a quarter, leading a 9% point increase in the national poverty rate. Similarly, many families in Lagos were bedeviled by hunger and starvation during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria (Relief web, 2021). In another submission, Kharas and Dooley (2021) observed that the number of people living in extreme poverty rose to 92 million in 2020 from 84 million in 2019 due to the pandemic. From another dimension, Geddes (2021) found that the hike in menstrual product price has led some girls to engage in sexual violence or trade sex with men in order to afford menstrual products.

## **COVID-19 AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA**

Unemployment has been the bane of national development and security in Nigeria. In the second quarter of 2020, unemployment rate increased to 27 percent (Zhema and Adihikon, 2020). This claims which is not at variance with statistics presented by Statista (2021) shows that, the unemployment rate in Nigeria was approximately 7.96 percent in 2020. This is relatively high when compared with the rate of unemployment in 2015 when it was 4.31 percent. COVID-19 pandemics and its corresponding and necessary measures to curtail the spread namely lockdown and restriction of movement, has affected almost all spheres of human existence with unemployment not being an exception in Nigeria. Many people especially in the private sector either lost their jobs or not being paid their salaries as long as the first phase of lockdown lasted. Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) where most of our youths are engaged was badly hit by the pandemic, the resultant effect of which is unimaginable as we shall see later in this piece. This is in tandem with the findings of a survey of 3,000 businesses (formal and informal sectors conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics and the United Nations Development Programme which showed that a third of Nigeria's workers were out of job in the fourth quarter of 2020 due to the pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 on life generally is not hidden; it is a global pandemic that has left no race unaffected. It is enormous to the extent that the world system, at a point, was completely locked down. The devastating nature of this global health challenge, has led to a blame game. While the United States of America pointed an accusing finger at China, China on the other hand, blamed the United States of not doing the right thing at the right time. Before COVID-19, Nigeria's unemployment rate was already sky high at 23% while underemployment stood at 16%, according to a 2018 report by National Bureau of statistics (NBS). This has worsened with the pandemic. The implication is that more Nigerians, especially

in the lower middle class, could potentially be forced to live below poverty line (Global Citizen, 2020). Similarly, according to the report of COVID-19 survey by National Bureau of Statistics (2020), out of the 1,950 households surveyed on a nationally representative sample, 42% of the respondents who were working before the outbreak were no longer working the week preceding the interview for reasons related to COVID-19 (Agbeyo, 2020). In another submission, findings from the National Longitudinal Phone Survey (NLPS) since March 2020 indicate that unemployment contracted sharply and job turnover increased significantly in April, but have stabilized by the end of August (Nigeria Development Update, 2020). At another level, Statista (2020) found that unemployment rate rose from 8.53% in 2019 to 9.01% in 2020. This is in tandem with the submission of the United Nations Development Program as presented by the National Bureau of Statistics (2021), the vast majority of business operating in Nigeria suffered business closure, change in hours of operation and change in operational costs, among other unemployment-driven circumstances.

The aforementioned is in tandem with the findings of Proshare Intelligent Investing (2021) with reference to data released by National Bureau of Statistics on unemployment and labour statistics on Q4'20, the number spiked 6.2% to 33.3% from 27% in Q2'20. The COVID-19 pandemic has fuelled youth unemployment in Africa's largest economy, which has risen for 5 consecutive years to about 14% (Reuters, 2021)

To worsen the situation, most of the approximately 40 million Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the country, where young people find employment, have also been badly hit by the pandemic and necessary restrictions on business activity (The Africa Report, 2020).

This is not far from the findings of Adebimpe, Adetunji, Nwachukwu and Hieu (2021) that, unemployment rate among young people, ages 15-34 years is 30.1% in the fourth quarter of 2020, up from 26.7% in the preceding quarter due to the COVID-19 shutdown measures. This corroborates Aleruchiegbulu and Obinachiwori (2020) who found that, as the virus continues to ravage the world, businesses are shutting down and people are losing their jobs or put on "Stand by" without salaries, which has affected negatively on the employers, employees, their families and others that depend on them.

Similarly, Effiong, *et al* (2020 in Enyinda, 2020:174) argued that the pandemic has taken the world unaware, unprepared and left a number of people dead and businesses shut down leading to severe economic consequences. These consequences had not spared rising unemployment rate in Nigeria.

## **COVID-19 AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS: A POTENTIAL THREAT TO THE ATTAINMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)**

The [17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) which were developed and adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015 according to [Geddes](#) (2021), is a call to action for the eradication of poverty, protection of the planet, and ensuring that all peoples enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. According to Chinedu and Ozden (2018), poverty reduction is an indispensable precondition for sustainable development, which entails meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability for the future. This idea is closely related to the idea of sustainability which implies meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The implication is that any human development goal that will jeopardize future environmental, economic and social well beings of future generations

will elicit un-sustainability. Developing countries have been criticized for their inability to reduce poverty and contribute to sustainable development, as observed by Asadi, Akbari, Hossein, Hoshang, Rostami and Saudati (2008), they are facing dilemmas such as un-sustainability and poverty as poor people are often seen as compelled to exploit their surrounding for short-term survival. This is one of the many reasons why 189 countries unanimously adopted the Millennium Declarations pledging to make effort to free humanity from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty across race and ethnicity. Contributory to inability of many developing countries to reduce poverty and contribute to sustainable development is their attitudes to the environment. Owens (2013) attributed this menace to deforestation, air pollution, water pollution, lack of birth control and waste disposition in developing countries.

In order to create an enabling environment for the implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria, the Economic Recovery Growth Plan (ERGP) (2017-2020) was initiated to focus on economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in tune with the aspirations of SDGs (Voluntary National Review, 2020). This move and its actualization are truncated by COVID-19 pandemic due to the hardship associated with the pandemic and its multiplier effects on economy and society. As a follow up in pursuit of the resolve to attain sustainable development in line with the United Nations' SDGs, Nigeria has unveiled another development plan, National Development Plan 2021-2025 with the mandate to lift 35, million people out of poverty and create 21 million new full time jobs by 2025, which will make unemployment rate drop to an average of 22.78% (Oyedemi, 2021). According to Ogisi and Begho (2020), COVID-19 posed a substantial threat to the attainment of SDGs 1, 2, 3, and 8 in Nigeria. These are no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, and decent work and economic growth respectively. Priority shifted to corona virus and how to regulate its spread left the above-mentioned global goals unattended to. It is on that note that Osmond *et al* (2021) observed that some SDGs are being neglected or sacrificed in order to achieve control of the pandemic.

In Nigeria, it was found that the preoccupation with COVID-19 cases have caused other critical socioeconomic issues to suffer neglect which could make Nigeria poorer due to distraction in economic activities (Fagbemi, 2021). This is detrimental to the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria.

Summarily, high rate of unemployment during the first wave of the pandemic as shown earlier, is a setback in actualising SDGs 8, which is decent work and economic growth. This is also a problem on the SDGs 1, which is no poverty as unemployment is capable of pushing people into poverty. This development is a stain on hunger, which is the SDGs 2 (No hunger). This has been captured before now in this piece which spotted hunger and starvation as some of the major impacts of the pandemic in Nigeria. In the same token, clean water and sanitation which is SDGs 6's hope of actualization has been jeopardized as poverty-related problems especially for people living in the slum areas of the city. As mentioned earlier, the high cost of menstrual products has made girls to have illicit sex with men in order to be able to buy pads and toilet tissues. This poverty-related behavior can be termed sexual violence in the study of crime. SDGs 4 which is quality education, was more negatively and unpleasantly affected, as schools as citadels of learning were shut down in order to regulate the spread of corona virus disease. Another worth-noting area is the SDGs 11, sustainable cities and communities. This was affected as indicated in the preceding section with the spread of poverty to urban areas due to COVID-19 related issues, which was hitherto not so.

The impact of the pandemic on crime is another serious bad signal to the implementation of SDGs 16, which is peace, justice and strong institutions. Extra-judicial killings and palliative frauds undertaken by organs of the criminal justice system and government agencies are glaring examples of absence of peace, justice and strong institutions. This development is a bad omen to the attainment of SDGs 5 which is gender equality. This is not farfetched, gender-based domestic violence mentioned earlier is at variance with the principle of gender equality. At another level, rising cyber and organized crimes are clear instances of absence of peace, justice and strong institutions, which SDGs 16 stand for.

Needless to mention the devastating effect of the pandemic as a substantial threat to the attainment of SDGs 3 which is good health and well-being, as the pandemic was purely a health issue that has led to loss of lives in Nigeria in particular, and the world at large.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

So far, the paper has succeeded in examining the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on crime, poverty and unemployment in Nigeria and its threat to the actualization of the sustainable development goals. Generally, the study found that crime, poverty, and unemployment surged during the pandemic. Specifically, the study findings on crime show an increase in organized crime, rising level of cyber crime, growing violent crime, extra-judicial killings as well as palliative fraud while fall in real Gross Domestic Product, agrifood system GDP, and spread of poverty to urban areas, were found to be the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on poverty. Similarly, the study findings on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on unemployment show that, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise was badly affected, people lost their jobs, underemployment and youth unemployment worsened during the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on crime, poverty and unemployment has multiplying effects on the attainment of sustainable development goals.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the aforementioned findings, recommendations were made in the areas of poverty alleviation, employment generation, skill acquisition programmes, apprenticeship scheme and other forms of technical and vocational training in order to reduce the levels of crime, poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. On the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical measures on the pandemic's protocol should be strictly adhered to. Temporally, palliative measures can be taken to cushion the effects of the pandemic on the aforementioned social problems. When these measures are taken with commitment and political will, it will reduce the aforementioned issues thereby ushering in sustainable development.

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