

**THE EFFICACY OF THE NIGERIAN RESPONSE TO COVID-19: CHALLENGES,
LESSONS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

By

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Overview of Nigeria's response to the Coronavirus Pandemic

In December 2019, China reported an outbreak of a disease that swept through Wuhan in the Hubei Province. Since then, globally, 4, 629, 575 cases have been confirmed as at 17th May, 2020, with 311, 363 deaths (Johns Hopkins, 2020). In Nigeria, the first case was recorded on the 27th of February, and since then, a total of 5, 671 cases have been confirmed from 32, 942 tests, 1, 472 persons discharged and 176 deaths at the time of writing, (NCDC, 2020). In responding to the threat posed by the pandemic, the President, Muhammadu Buhari inaugurated the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 to coordinate the emergency national response. Consequently, several strategies such as lock-downs to strengthen social distancing, and the national strategy to scale up access to Coronavirus disease testing in Nigeria amongst others have been instituted and implemented under the leadership of the PTF headed by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation. Also, post COVID-19 economic recovery strategies are being developed by the Economic Sustainability Committee headed by the Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo.

It is important to note at this juncture that the Coronavirus disease poses a great threat to Nigeria. Already, the global Oil and Gas industry is suffering so much from it. With about 3 billion people under one form of restriction or the other, this has led to an acute drop in demand for petroleum products the world over. Consequently, energy intensive industries such as Aviation, Shipping, and local transportation have been severely hit, leading to thousands of job losses the world over. This in turn has drastically affected the price of oil due to the glut caused by a combination of increased production and a greatly reduced demand, (IMF, 2020). This has crashed Oil price to an 18-year all time low, with grave consequences for Oil-dependent countries such as Nigeria.

1.2 Problem Statement

The paucity of funds coupled with Nigeria's weak healthcare system severely handicaps the country in its fight against COVID-19. These coupled with the recent spike in daily confirmed cases further puts the country between the proverbial "devil and the deep blue sea". This necessitates the need to ramp up the response through the deployment of effective and efficient strategies that will provide value for money, and reverse the trend of the pandemic within the quickest possible time. Unfortunately, all indicators point to the fact that the country is yet to have a coordinated response to not only mitigate the pandemic, but to aid socio-economic recovery post COVID-19.

1.3 Objectives

Objectives of the study are as follows;

- i. To assess Nigeria's emergency response preparedness.
- ii. To assess the efficacy of Nigeria's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. To proffer alternative and/or supplementary strategies to responding to the pandemic.

- iv. To identify opportunities for strengthening systems and institutions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Disasters and Emergencies

According to the International Red Cross, natural disasters have a wide spectrum ranging from earthquakes and volcanoes, to floods, drought, wildfires, and outbreak of diseases amongst others. They are noted for causing loss of lives on a massive scale with the 2010 Haiti earthquake estimated to have killed about 316,000 people and rendering about 3 million homeless. In March 2011, another devastating earthquake in Tohoku, eastern Japan, triggered an extremely destructive tsunami that led to loss of lives and destruction of infrastructure. Furthermore, the tsunami caused a number of nuclear accidents at three nuclear reactors in Fukushima, releasing and exposing the inhabitants to dangerous levels of radiation, leading to the evacuation of thousands.

The World Health Organisation defines an emergency as a state that demands decision and follow-up in terms of extra-ordinary measures. Consequently, it is necessary for certain threshold values to be met/recognised in order for it to be called into existence. From the foregoing, it is evident that while emergencies are expected, they are mostly not foreseen. Essentially, what this means is that whilst countries plan for emergencies, which can be brought about by any disaster, natural or anthropogenic, such as earthquakes or conflicts, the magnitude/scale of disasters are usually unpredictable until they are set in motion. Furthermore, in order for an emergency to exist, a "state of emergency" needs to "be declared" or imposed by somebody in authority, who, at a later stage, will also lift it (Oxford Pocket Dictionary, 1992). Consequently, emergencies are situations defined within a spatio-temporal framework, that is, within the context of time and space.

2.2 Disaster Management

Due to the widespread loss of lives, destruction of property, and disruption of systems emergencies can cause, emergency management has gained traction, especially over the past couple of decades. Emergency management has made so much advancement such that the level of comprehensiveness has become one of the hallmarks of societal development. Blanchard (2007) proposed eight principles stating that it must be:

- i. Comprehensive – able to take into cognizance all phases, all hazards, all stakeholders, and all impacts relevant to disasters.
- ii. Proactive – anticipating future disasters and taking preventive and preparatory measures to build disaster – resistant and disaster resilient communities.
- iii. Risk driven – emergency management must use sound risk management principles (hazard identification, risk analysis and impact analysis) in assigning priorities and resources.
- iv. Sustained – emergency management must ensure well-coordinated effort among all agencies of government and stakeholders in a community.
- v. Collaborative – emergency management is not a “one man squad,” but must involve a broad-based relationship among individuals, agencies, and other stakeholders for consensus building.
- vi. Coordinated – there must be synergy in the activities of all relevant stakeholders to achieve a common purpose of mitigating disaster.
- vii. Flexible – emergency management must use creative and innovative approaches in dealing with disaster situations.

- viii. Professional – emergency management must put emphasis on science and knowledge-based techniques in its approaches. Its operational guidelines should be based on education, training, experience, ethical practice, public stewardship and continuous improvement.

The aforementioned principles guide disaster management, which involves the following steps:

- i. Prevention and mitigation.
- ii. Preparedness.
- iii. Disaster.
- iv. Response.
- v. Rehabilitation and recovery.

By and large, the principles must be incorporated into every step in order to ensure a robust disaster management plan. In other words, each step must be comprehensive, taking into cognizance every aspect; proactive, envisioning probable challenges and proffering solutions to them; risk-driven, ensuring potential and identified risks remain the focus of the response; sustainable, collaborative, leaving no stakeholder behind; coordinated; flexible, being able to be adapted to different scenarios; and professional.

2.3 The COVID-19 Pandemic

Infectious diseases are the world's leading cause of death, contributing a quarter to a third of all mortality. In most developed countries, infectious diseases rank as the leading cause of mortality after cancer and heart disease (Verikios, 2011). Infectious disease outbreaks can easily cross boundaries to threaten economic and regional stability, as is the case with Corona Virus. COVID-19 virus infection was first reported in Wuhan in December 2019. Research suggests that the

outbreak started at a wholesale market in Wuhan from workers and customers slaughtering animals such as pigs, dogs, bats, civet cats, rats, and snakes etc., (Chen et. al., 2020). The virus can cause fever, cough, trouble breathing, severe pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, heart failure and death, (Sandbu, 2020). This new virus spreads extremely rapidly among humans, and whilst it was initially seen to be an epidemic in China, the virus spread worldwide within a couple of weeks. In March 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic and by the end of the month, the world had seen more than half a million people infected and nearly 30,000 deaths.

A pandemic occurs when an epidemic spreads beyond a country's borders into other countries, and in the realm of infectious diseases, this is the worst case scenario that can happen. Communicable diseases have existed since humankind's hunter-gatherer days, however, the transition to agrarian life 10,000 years ago created communities that increased the probability of epidemics, (History.com). Over the course of history, several pandemics have been recorded. These include amongst others, the pandemic of 450 B.C., the Antonine plague of 165 A.D., the Cyprian plague of 250 A.D., the black death of 1350, the great plague of London in 1665, the Spanish Flu of 1918, and of course the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019.

3.0 Discussion

Nigeria is vulnerable to an extended period of low oil prices, while its path to rapid production increases is constrained by operational, regulatory and infrastructural challenges. The decline in international prices of crude oil adversely affects the inflow of foreign exchange into the country. The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics reports that in the first quarter of 2019 sectors such as Agriculture, Manufacturing, Mining and Quarrying, Transportation and Storage contributed to non-oil GDP, while close to 90% of Nigeria's FX revenues still came from oil exports). Thus, the global Oil market meltdown threatens Nigeria's execution of the budget, especially financing of

capital projects. The fall in rates, which is far below the expected \$57 per barrel target for the 2020 budget, has ignited a fresh wave of concern about the effect on the 2020 economic forecasts of the federal government. This is because Oil price volatility can have tremendous impact on strategic investment decisions, as well as worsen capital flow and foreign reserves. The Federal Government has therefore put forward some policies in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, such as the downward review of the 2020 budget amongst others.

Sadly, the pandemic has been completely globalized, spreading across all regions to 210 countries and territories, (Johns Hopkins, 2020). Globally, the number of infected cases and deaths is increasing at an alarming rate, and astonishingly high compared with other comparable outbreaks in the past (Woodward, 2020). Initially, China was the epicentre with a very large number of cases and deaths, but this soon spread to Europe, making Italy the next epicentre, and now, USA records the highest cases in the world. Scientists have warned that if appropriate caution is not taken, Africa will be COVID-19's next epicentre, which would be the worst, taking into cognizance the weak healthcare system of African countries. This further necessitates the need for strong preventive strategies to ensure our weak healthcare systems are not overstretched beyond their elastic limit. The pandemic has impacted all major economies including the G7 nations, which share about 50% of world supply and demand (GDP), 65% of world production, and 41% of world manufacturing exports (Baldwin and di Munro, 2020).

3.1 Nigeria and the Pandemic

In responding to the pandemic, President Muhammadu Buhari established the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (PTF) chaired by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation and drawing membership from the Ministries of Health, Interior, Aviation, Humanitarian Affairs, Education, Environment, Information, Department of State Services, Nigeria Centre for Disease

Control, UNAIDS, and World Health Organisation Nigeria Country Office. The PTF is the coordinating entity of the country's COVID-19 response, working in consonance with several Ministries, Departments and Agencies of the Federal Government such as the Ministries of Agriculture, Finance, as well as the Central Bank of Nigeria in developing sectoral strategies for dealing with the pandemic, and its attendant effect on every sphere of socio-economic life.

3.2 Response Strategies and Policies

For ease of analysis and discussion, the strategies and policies developed for the COVID-19 response are classified under the following headings:

- i. Sectoral strategies and policies; Health, Economic, and Humanitarian.
- ii. National strategies and policies.
- iii. State strategies and policies.

3.2.1 Sectoral Strategies and Policies

These are strategies and/or policies premised on principles from a particular sector designed to mitigate the effects of the pandemic either in that sector, and/or in the wider society. Sectoral strategies and policies are the most pre-dominant because they are the most specific, deploying targeted solutions to ending the pandemic.

3.2.1.1 Health Strategies and Policies

The following are health strategies and policies deployed in the response:

Expansion of National Testing Capacity

This is one of the health strategies being implemented to combat the pandemic. This basically entails expansion of the country's capabilities to test many samples on a daily basis. This strategy

seeks to expand existing NCDC laboratory network for molecular Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR), leverage capacity within high-throughput HIV molecular testing laboratories, as well as utilise point of care tuberculosis testing GeneXpert machines for COVID-19 testing. These with the ultimate aim of increasing national testing capacity to 7,000 tests per day.

Establishment of Sample Collection Centres

The strategy seeks to encourage establishment of more sample collection centres in each state in order to be able to reach more people per time. This is one of the drivers behind the detection success of Lagos state.

Establishment of Treatment and Isolation Centres

The treatment and isolation centres are established to nurse confirmed cases of Coronavirus infection to recovery. Identified cases with low to mild symptoms are nursed at the isolation centres while those with severe symptoms are subjected to further treatment in order to aid recovery from infection.

Development/adoption of Guidelines

Various guidelines for clinical and community interventions have been developed and/or adopted by the Ministry of Health and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. These guidelines range from prevention, testing, quarantine, and treatment, providing guidance to not just the general public on how to deal with the infection as well as protect themselves, but to health practitioners as well.

Enforcement of lockdown

This is a public health strategy aimed at enforcing the principle of social distancing through restriction of movement of people and non-essential goods. Due to the nature of the virus; its high

infectious and reproductive rate, as well as mode of transmission, one of the most effective means of preventing the spread is social distancing. This involves staying at least 6 feet away from every person to reduce contact, and reduce chances of getting infected. It is however common knowledge that social distancing will be difficult to implement in many settings such as markets, especially in a country like Nigeria. Consequently, lockdowns are the most effective means of enforcing social distancing.

3.2.1.2 *Economic Strategies and Policies*

This can be further sub-divided into monetary, fiscal, and income strategies and policies:

3.2.1.2.1 *Monetary Strategies and Policies*

- i. Extension of moratorium on all principal repayments of its intervention facilities for one year, effective from 1 March 2020 (for those whose contractual moratorium is still effective as of date, the additional one-year moratorium will take effect for them from the end of the contractual moratorium);
- ii. Reduction of interest rates for all CBN investment facilities from 9% to 5% per annum for one year with effect from 1 March 2020;
- iii. Creation of a ₦50 billion targeted credit scheme for households, small and medium-sized enterprises that have been particularly hard hit, enterprises such as hoteliers, airline service providers, healthcare dealers, etc.;
- iv. Provision of ₦100 billion credit support for the healthcare industry particularly pharmaceutical companies, hospitals and health practitioners, that want to start new or expand current prescription or health-care services;

- v. Regulatory forbearance in form of leave granted to Deposit Money Banks (“DMBs”) to consider temporary and time-bound restructuring of the tenor and loan terms for households and business enterprises adversely impacted;
- vi. Strengthening of the CBN Loan to Deposit Ratio (LDR) policy by supporting industry funding levels to maintain DMBs’ capacity to direct credit to individuals, households and businesses and by indicating readiness to consider additional incentives to stimulate extension of longer tenured credit facilities; and
- vii. ₦1 trillion loans to improve local development and manufacturing across critical sectors.

3.2.1.2.2 *Fiscal Strategies and Policies*

- i. Extension of time limits for filing value added tax and withholding tax from the 21st day of the month to the last working day of the month after the deduction month;
- ii. Extension of the due date for submission of income tax returns for businesses by one month ("revised submission period");
- iii. Filing of tax returns by taxpayers without audited financial statements (provided that the financial statements would be submitted within 2 months of the revised due date of filing);
- iv. Usage of electronic platforms to pay taxes and manage tax clearance certificates;
- v. Proposed development of a portal where taxpayers upload documents needed for desk reviews and tax audits to access the tax authority online; and

- vi. Facility for taxpayers to file tax returns electronically through e-filing via.firs.gov.ng or through approved e-mail accounts provided by FIRS.
- vii. 2020 Budget rightsizing – retaining only the critical welfare enhancing expenditure; As steps to curb the impact of coronavirus outbreak and oil price collapse on the nation's economy, the Nigerian government has made several major adjustments to the 2020 budget. A 50 per cent cut in proposed revenue from privatization proceeds, 20 per cent cut in capital expenditures, and 25 per cent cut in recurrent expenditures was initiated.

3.2.1.2.3 *Other Economic Strategies*

Reduction of revenue leakages

As the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent oil crash crippled the Nigerian economic system, there is the need for total compliance and aggressive revenue drive to mitigate against the looming economic meltdown.

Stronger anti–corruption measures

Stronger measures to combat corruption, which has perennially dogged the country, especially public financial transactions are in place to shore up revenue theft and wastage at this point in time.

Elimination of energy subsidies

Faced with increasing fiscal constraints, the Federal Government of Nigeria was under increasing pressure to remove subsidy. Subsidy simply is paying the difference between production cost and the cost charged to customers in order to make them more affordable. A provision of ₦450bn had been made in the 2020 budget for under-recovery of cost in respect of the importation of the

Premium Motor Spirit (PMS). This has been scrapped and the funds will be channelled to other urgent and more important needs.

3.2.1.3 *Humanitarian Strategies and Policies*

The humanitarian strategies being deployed by the Government is comprised of distribution of food items, as well as conditional cash transfers to the “most vulnerable” as palliatives.

3.2.2 *National Strategies and Policies*

Most of the sectoral strategies and policies put in place are national. Most states only adopt these strategies and apply within their jurisdiction with the exception of Lagos state, which had implemented some strategies and policies to curtail the spread of the disease.

3.2.3 *State Strategies and Policies*

Majority of the strategies and policies implemented by states are adapted from the sectoral strategies and policies developed and implemented at the national level. Listed below are strategies implemented across the 36 states and the FCT:

- i. Restriction of movement.
- ii. Border closure.
- iii. Lockdown.
- iv. Emergency response.
- v. Test Centre.
- vi. Isolation Centre (300 bed).
- vii. Added ventilators.
- viii. SME grants.

Figure 3: Policy response to the Coronavirus disease disaggregated by State.

Score (10)	State	Cases	Movement restriction	Closed borders	Lockdown	Emergency law	Security personnel	Test Labs	Isolation centre (300 beds)	Added ventilators	SME grants	Handouts
9	Lagos	2278	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
8	Ogun	145	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Ebonyi	9	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
7	Osun	42	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Kwara	58	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Ekiti	19	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Abuja	386	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
6	Plateau	21	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Kaduna	134	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Delta	25	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Adamawa	21	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
5	Taraba	17	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Sokoto	112	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Oyo	76	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Ondo	19	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Niger	14	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Kogi	0	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Edo	93	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Borno	204	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Anambra	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
4	Zamfara	73	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Rivers	33	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Nassarawa	29	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Katsina	239	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Kano	761	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Jigawa	191	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Gombe	124	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Enugu	12	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Cross River	0	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Bauchi	210	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
3	Akwa Ibom	16	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Yobe	32	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Benue	4	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Bayelsa	6	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
2	Abia	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Kebbi	31	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Imo	7	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	

Source: Stears Business.

3.3 Analysis of Strategies and Policies

Implementing traditional policy initiatives such as lowering interest rates and borrowing costs, tax cuts and tax holidays are very potent when market shocks occur. However, when demand shocks are coupled with supply shocks, those steps are reduced (CSEA, 2020). It was clear from the start of the current crisis that shocks on both the demand and the supply sides have consequences for the economy. The supply side has subsequently been impacted by factors such as social distancing imposed by lockdowns with consumers remaining at home, leading to spending restrictions and declining demand, thus leading to the closure of plants, as well as cutting off production and sales. In addition, the decision to close educational institutions and schools in an effort to control the pandemic has also led to a growing increase of non-school children, youth and adults. This educational disruption is most felt by the most vulnerable members of the society because, unlike the middle to upper class that are able to provide alternate means of engaging their children through the internet and digital satellite television, this class of the population have no such means.

For most developing economies, Nigeria inclusive, the eventuality of sliding into a recession is expected as the global coronavirus outbreak puts severe pressure on the economy. At the moment, the country is still sluggishly grappling with recovery from the 2016 economic recession which was a fall out of global oil price crash and insufficient foreign exchange earnings to meet imports. In the spirit of economic recovery and growth sustainability, the Nigerian federal budget for the 2020 fiscal year was prepared with significant revenue expectations but with contestable realizations (CSEA, 2020; BudgiT, 2020). The approved budget estimated revenue collections at N8.24 trillion, an increase of approximately 20 percent from 2019 figures, while revenue assumptions was based on increased global oil demand and stable market with oil price benchmark and oil output respectively at \$57 per barrel and 2.18 million barrels per day (BudgiT, 2020). The

emergence of COVID-19 and its increasing incidence in Nigeria however necessitated drastic review and changes in the earlier revenue expectations and fiscal projections. Consequently, when compared with events that led to recession in 2016, the current state of the global economy poses more difficulties ahead as the oil price is currently below US\$30, and plummeting at a rate never before seen. Given the impending economic downturn, it is quite unfortunate that the nation has massively underperformed in setting aside adequate reserves for rainy days as it faces in the coming months.

In tackling these global economic challenges, the downward revision of the budget was expected, although not necessarily needed. The reason for this being that the pandemic should have triggered the activation of an emergency mode (if the country had such plans). Also, it is evident from the trend of the pandemic, that this year, and even a part of the next would be focused on halting the spread, as well as mitigating the economic impacts of the pandemic. In other words, the pandemic has brought about a reality entirely different from that which was prevalent during the development of the 2020 budget. Thus, a budget focusing on strengthening the health care system, supporting rapid roll-out of the national response to the pandemic, as well as mitigating economic impacts of the pandemic should have been developed. This could have been done with little fuss bearing the brilliant planning focal persons littered around our Ministries, Departments and Agencies charged with developing the budget could be called upon to develop such. This would have channelled the country's effort at dealing with the pandemic in a coherent multi-sectoral manner, rather than the haphazard manner we are currently implementing.

The decision to cut the retail price of gasoline under a price modulation arrangement is a welcome development. The cut is expected to curb rising inflation, especially food price inflation which will mainly benefit the poor. However, rather than the price capping regime introduced, by which it is

expected of the Petroleum Products Price Regulation Agency (PPPRA) to constantly issue monthly guide on appropriate pricing regime, it is expected that the government will use this opportunity to completely deregulate the petroleum industry in line with existing suggestions and reports (CSEA, 2020).

Globally, travel bans have led to a drop in demand for jet and other fuels, exacerbating fears on the oil market and negatively impacting the aviation industry. The twin danger of a growing coronavirus outbreak and a dropping oil price forced the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to call for a deliberate emergency summit on supply cuts to lift falling oil prices and the expanding impact of the epidemic on global demand for energy. Russia, however, refused to take part in the debate about reducing demand. Saudi, in response to Russia's disagreement over cutbacks in production, announced it would increase its oil production, giving customers in Europe, Asia and the United States unprecedented price cuts of \$6 to \$8 per tank. The announcement triggered a crash in oil prices which resulted in a further fall in crude oil prices per barrel. The escalating price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia to flood world markets with cheap oil and ignite energy and financial markets with panic and shock waves.

Consequently, as global demand for oil drops drastically in the wake of the COVID-19, the Nigerian naira becomes unstable. A dollar crunch typically affects a wide range of businesses that require hard currency to fund importation of materials needed for production activities. The US dollar exchange rate on the parallel market went as high as 430 naira due to “excessive demand”, resulting from hoarding of the naira by BDC operators and activities of speculators. This came with damaging effects as businesses are unable to access dollars needed to import raw materials and households unable to afford the hike in price of household items. The recent ‘adjustment of price’ by the central bank to peg the naira at 380 against the dollar came after the impact of the oil

price plunge spread across asset classes in Nigeria. This led investors to widen spreads on the bond market, selling stocks and putting much pressure on the country's foreign reserves.

A combination of strategies such as reduction of revenue leakages, and stronger anti-corruption measures will identify areas of revenue leakages, block all loopholes to enhance revenue generation into the federation account, promote equity especially with regards to the distribution of resources, as well as encourage transparency and accountability. Also, rightsizing of the 2020 budget by a 50 per cent cut in proposed revenue from privatization proceeds, 20 per cent cut in capital expenditures, and 25 percent cut in recurrent expenditures was initiated. This is expected to reflect the present economic reality of the country.

The decision to lift the lockdown by the Federal Government, although to be phased, is not the best for the country at this point in time. Evidence from countries that had been locked down weeks before Nigeria's showed a steep increase in confirmed cases within the first couple of days of relaxing the cessation of movement. It is important to note that these countries had been locked down weeks before Nigeria commenced hers, and it was a total lockdown. On the other hand, several states in Nigeria were open to movement during the initial lockdown of Lagos, FCT and Ogun, which aided movement of people, and ultimately, diffusion of the disease across the length and breadth of the country. Whilst it is understandable that the Government is considerate of the plight of Nigerians, it must be mentioned here that the inability of the country to muster a multi-sectoral response is the reason why we are forced to make the decision between the economy and our health. Unfortunately, the Government has decided to choose the economy. It is understandable that this is a very tough decision to make, however, we must understand that prevention is better and cheaper than treatment. It is noted that Nigerians will be infected, however, taking into cognizance the poor state of the Nation's healthcare system, and finances, prevention

would be the safer, more economic option to choose. To this end, the initial lockdown should have witnessed aggressive expansion of laboratory capabilities beyond what we have, coordinated strategies for community mobilisation and testing across the 36+1 states, development and expansion of a comprehensive palliative for Nigerians most in need, strengthening of the healthcare system, as well as comprehensive recovery strategies for life post COVID-19.

At this juncture, it should be noted that Nigeria is yet to develop a comprehensive COVID-19 response plan that details both the response strategies as well as the recovery strategies. Rather, the country is running a disjointed plan, with the various Agencies involved in the response implementing their strategies in silos. At this point, what is needed is a multi-sectoral plan, with various Agencies implementing a single plan in a synchronised order. Furthermore, the sluggishness to set in motion preventive mechanisms, the hurried announcement and implementation of the lock-down, which in itself would have facilitated further spread of the virus, the haphazard manner in which “palliatives” are distributed, the failure to come up with a robust economic stimulus plan even after almost two months of recording the country’s index case all points to the weak political will that pervades this nation. Nigeria at this point in time is presented with a host of opportunities to strengthen not only our healthcare system, but to strengthen our institutions and processes. At the moment, we are not making the most of the opportunity, thus, a ringing message the country needs to heed at this moment in time is the need to overhaul our system. Consequently, the strategies put in place by the Government at all levels although commendable and appropriate, are not comprehensive enough to effectively and efficiently deal with the situation. Challenges militating against the success of these range from poor implementation, to a lack of legislative frameworks, poor funding mechanism, and an absence of complimentary strategies. This pandemic has further brought to the fore, the weaknesses inherent

in the system we run as a country, which is in need of an overhaul. From our planning, to the budgeting and implementation, we need to drastically adjust our priorities as a nation in order to build more resilient systems.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

It is an established fact that crises can be arrested only by attacking their source, consequently, the Government's focus must be on virus containment. Thus, the priority must be on strengthening the healthcare system especially infrastructure, and the science of COVID-19 containment and mitigation. In order to get back to our normal lives and resume the pursuit of nation-building, we must flatten the COVID-19 infection curve. This must take precedence over any other subject matter, including the need to re-open the economy. The monetary and fiscal policies will help, but they will be utterly useless if the pandemic is not contained.

5.2 Strategy and Policy Recommendations

Below listed are some recommendations that could be pursued by the Government in addition to existing strategies:

Restructure the Civil Service

The need to overhaul Nigeria's civil service is critical to the overall re-engineering process. Truth is, this situation gives us an opportunity to reset the country, placing it on a trajectory that guarantees equality and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities to all irrespective of your ethnicity, religion or social standing. The civil service by virtue of the important role it plays should be overhauled for improved service delivery and efficiency. It should be weeded of rent-

seekers who have no contribution to make to the development of our nation, it should be rid of incompetence, nepotism, tribalism and every other phenomenon that has plagued it for the past couple of decades. The Nigerian civil service should enjoy first pick of the best Nigerian tertiary institutions have to offer. In order to be able to do so, the civil service must be restructured in such a way that it harnesses the talent and creativity of civil servants, the remuneration must be competitive, selection must be devoid of ethnic and religious bias, and career progression must be devoid of tribalism, nepotism, or any form of favouritism. Again, as explained below, the development of a National Development Plan (NDP) will greatly help in shaping the civil service into a lean and mean machinery that will propel the nation to greater heights.

Overhaul the Country's Budgeting System

What a nation, seeks to achieve with their lives or within a given period, should be the key driver of the budget. A purpose-driven budget therefore allows the country to double down on what matters most, whilst cutting waste. So for Nigeria, such our budget should cause us to determine down to the minutest detail, how many Nigerians we need to provide for, how many work in our public service, the size of public service we need and how they should add value, the roads we need and what value they will add, the transportation links between our cities and at what cost, the hospitals that need to be built, how we would develop our education sector etc. It should itemize our "objectives to be achieved for the fiscal year", which in turn should be guided by our long-term goals as outlined in our national development plan.

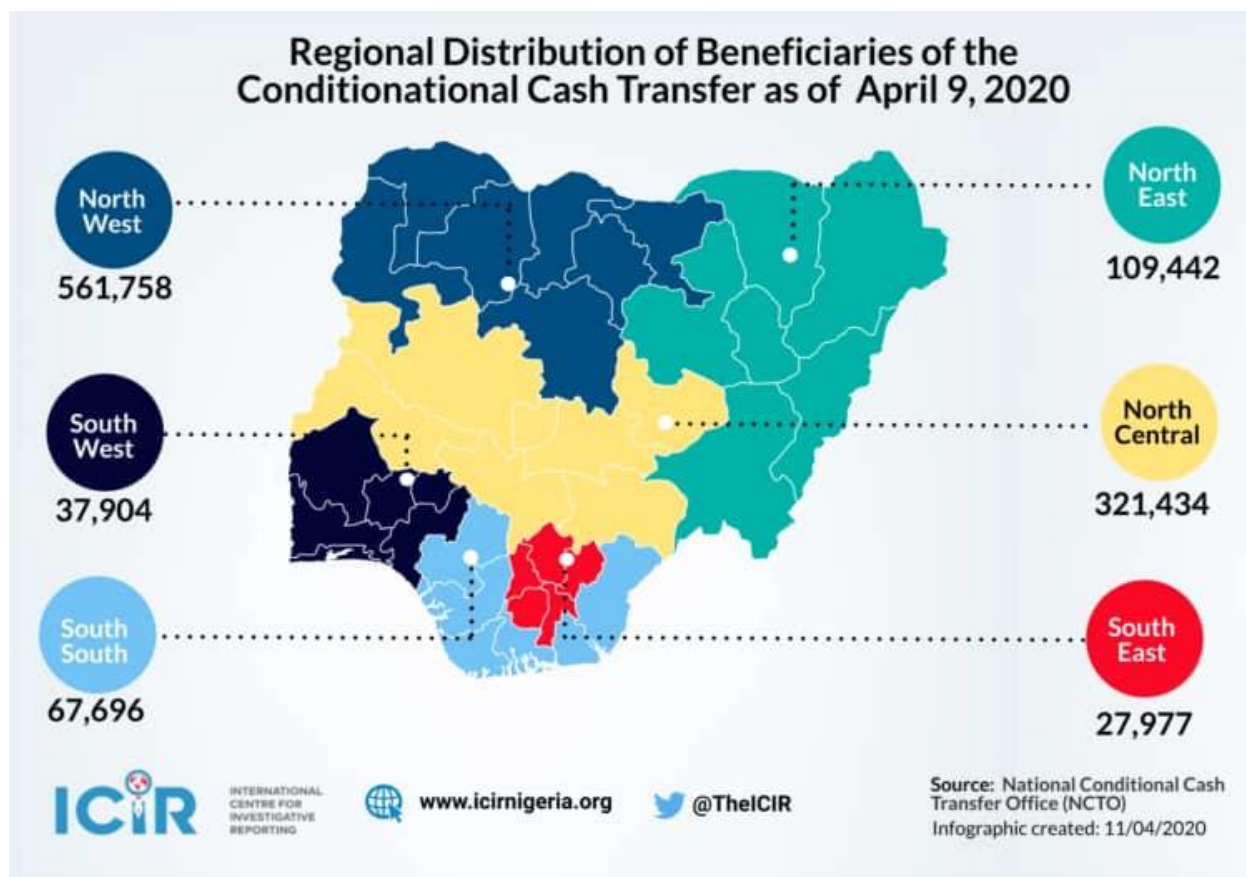
Implement a National Development Plan

Strategic planning is the art of formulating strategies, implementing them, and evaluating their impact based on organisational objectives. The concept focuses on integrating various departments

to achieve organisational goals (CFI, 2020). In this instance, the strategic plan is referred to as the National Development Plan, and the Ministries, Departments and Agencies will form the integrating departments. It is important to note that although the country developed a medium term expenditure framework called the Economic and Recovery Growth Plan (ERGP), the need for long-term strategic planning is of utmost importance. The National Development Plan (NDP) would provide strategic goals to each Ministry, Department and Agency of the Federal Government. In this wise, the NDP will determine the MDAs that will constitute the Federal Civil Service, which in turn will eliminate duplication of activities, ultimately reducing wastages. Furthermore, the NDP will outline the mandate of each MDA, which in turn will guide budgeting and implementation. These will all be geared towards achieving the strategic goals as set in the National Development Plan. Consequently, this will lead to the development of purpose-driven budgets where all MDAs are working in a concerted manner to bring about sustainable development to Nigeria.

Overhaul the Social Investment Programme

Since the outset of the Coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria, the Ministry had been engaged in providing palliatives to Nigerians. This palliative is comprised of cash transfers, distribution of relief materials such as food, etc., although laudable, is not reaching those most in need of it as when due. It is therefore necessary for the Federal Government to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the distributive mechanisms to reach households that are worst-hit by the pandemic. This will ensure the lock-down is strictly adhered to, giving the NCDC ample time to identify the infected, isolate, and treat them.

Figure 2: Regional distribution of beneficiaries of CCT as of 9th April, 2020.

Source: National Conditional Cash Transfer Office.

Develop a Realistic Fiscal Plan

As Dr. Akinwunmi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank posited, “*in the face of this pandemic, we must put lives above resources and health above debt. Why? Because developing economies are the most vulnerable at this time...*” At this moment in time, with the prevailing economic situation, the Federal Government should have developed a lean and mean fiscal plan aimed at targeting critical infrastructure such as health, education, rail transport, banking, agriculture, social investment and ICT amongst others. These should be focused on for the 2020 fiscal year whilst providing other MDAs with maintenance budgets, but no serious capital

outlay for the year. This will enable the Government channel scarce resources to the most critical needs required to eliminate the pandemic.

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