

NAME: ZOAKA SARAPHINA DAUDA

COLLEGE: SMS

MATRIC NO: 19/SMS09/081

DEPARTMENT: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

COURSE CODE: GST 122

CORONAVIRUS (CONVID-19) PANDEMIC

The coronavirus outbreak has been labelled a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). The corona virus pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War II. Since its emergence in Asia late last year, the virus has spread to every continent except Antarctica. Cases are rising daily in Asia, Americas, Europe and Africa. Countries are racing to slow the spread of the virus by testing and treating patients, carrying out contact tracing, limiting travel, quarantining citizens, and cancelling large gatherings such as sporting events, concerts, and schools.

What is a pandemic?

A pandemic describes a widespread of infectious disease where there is a significant and ongoing person-to-person spread in multiple countries around the world at the same time. Pandemic moves like a wave and can crash on those least able to cope. The last time a pandemic occurred was in 2009 with swine flu, which experts think killed hundreds of thousands of people. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with corona virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. With no vaccine or treatment that can prevent it yet, containing its spread is vital. The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is to be well informed about the corona virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads. Protect yourself and others from infection by washing your hands or using an alcohol based rub frequently and not touching your face. The corona virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, so it's important that you also practice respiratory etiquette (for example, by coughing into a flexed elbow). But corona virus is much more than a health crisis. By stressing every one of the countries it touches, it has the potential to create devastating social, economic and political crises that will leave deep scars. At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19. However, there are many ongoing clinical trials evaluating potential treatments.

Effects of Lockdown and Restriction of Movement on Nigerians

Lagos is the country's major economic centre as well as its financial capital, Ogun state borders Lagos state to the south and is notable for having a high concentration of industrial estates and being a major manufacturing hub. Abuja is the seat of government.

With these three places in a lockdown state, the effect on Nigerians and the economy is disastrous. Those that will be affected the hardest will be households that rely on the day to day activities of self-employed individuals for consumption. Nigeria has a very high self-employment rate, a research showed that 41.4% of household members reported being self-employed, 26.5% are employed, 2.8% reported they were employers of labour, 15.7% indicated that they were unemployed, while 13.6% reported being non-active in the labour force.

At least, however, these individuals were engaged in some sort of economic activity to meet their daily needs. But, with the lockdown and restriction of movement on the individuals and the closure of some businesses loss of income will be the immediate concern for individuals who have been contributing to household consumption through their entrepreneurial activities and engagement in hand-to-mouth self-employment. It will be hard for such individuals to participate in the lockdown when their households depend on them for consumption.

However, locking people down at home in the Nigerian context is like asking people to go hungry for the duration of the lockdown. As more than 60 per cent of Nigerians survive on daily pay from menial jobs and petty trading, a lockdown means their means of daily livelihood have been locked down. The plight of private sector employees is no better. Many private employers have maintained a 'no salary during lockdown' stance, or at best a 50 per cent pay cut. Some have even completely laid the workers off. Pangs of hunger will lead to widespread anger. Protests in different forms are already being seen within the communities. People are

protesting against a lockdown without palliatives, against the high-handedness of law enforcement agents, and even rejecting all manner of palliatives that smack of insult to their intelligence, such as packs of food that are not enough to feed a family of six in 2 weeks being distributed to be shared among 60-80 families in a cluster. This protest mood that is brewing has the potential to transform into a movement that would pose a serious challenge to the lockdown if the hunger question is not resolved. It could also get a lot worse, as we are beginning to see in some places in Lagos and Ogun States where a layer of lumpen youth, pushed to extreme hunger by the lockdown, go on mass looting of shops and houses, carting away ordinary people's food and belongings.

Meanwhile, police report on Monday 13th – April, 2020 said that “they were bolstering forces in Lagos and Ogun after almost 200 suspects were arrested amid fears of a spike in crime during the lockdown”. This shows that there is increase in crime rate as burglars snick to shops and attacking homes to snatch the little money people are surviving on during the lockdown and without any means of individuals travelling to the banks to deposit their finances.

The extension of the lockdown is expected to add to the hardship to millions of Nigerians living hand-to-mouth, often on less than one dollar a day.

In Nigeria the pain of the COVID-19 lockdown imposed by both the federal and state governments is excruciating in both economic and social terms with casualties mounting with specific reference to women and girls who have suffered various degrees of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). But the sad reality is that if no action is taken to stem this tide more Nigerian women and girls may die from the pangs of hunger and SGBV than from the Coronavirus itself. Because, vulnerable women and girls live with perpetrators of gender-based violence.

Research shows the increased use of generators likely means an uptick in air and noise pollution. Researchers at the department of engineering and public policy at Carnegie Mellon University found backup power generation in Nigeria produces carbon dioxide emissions equivalent to 60% of its annual electricity sector emissions. There are also thousands of wealthier households with much larger diesel-based generators which are even worse for the environment.

Amid the lockdown, with vehicular movement, including public transport, virtually grounded, attendants at several fuel stations in Lagos, confirm to Quartz Africa that a majority of purchases are coming from individuals buying in jericans to fuel generators. With increased usage of generators during the lockdown it is also a cyclical effect of attempts to keep the economy afloat as, in a major shift in Nigerian work culture, businesses are asking employees to work from home.

Encouragingly, the Nigerian government has expanded value-added tax exemptions for basic food items as well as medical and pharmaceutical items.

However, other services are still subject to VAT which was recently increased from 5% to 7.5% in February 2020 and could benefit from a reduction during the lockdown period.

An example of an important service affected by the increase in VAT is telecom services such as voice calls, SMS, data, or banking services such as electronic transfers. Given the restriction of movement, it could be safe to assume that calls, texts, and online transactions have increased, and Nigerians could benefit from a VAT reduction during this lockdown period.

While these measures may not replace the value of relief for the hungry and the provision of efficient power supply or quality network services, they could go a long way in helping citizens support themselves during the lockdown.

In conclusion, this virus has infected 2,416,135 people around the world and 165,939 are dead, as of 20th April 2020. This current pandemic known as COVID-19 has really brought the whole world to a halt. Plans have been cancelled, lives have been lost, emerging controversial ideas about the pandemic being a weapon for the third

world war and so many others factors triggered by the pandemic. This leaves the whole world hoping it all comes to an end.

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