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## Coronavirus Pandemic and the Effects of the Lockdown and Restriction of Movement on Nigerians.

It would be hell if the Covid-19 breaks out in Nigeria on the scale presently being witnessed in Europe and the US. Clearly the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) that started out as an epidemic in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and ended up as a pandemic (affecting the whole world) has thrown the whole world into a war-like situation. Scores of thousands of deaths have been recorded cumulatively for all countries across the world. Health systems in most countries are overwhelmed by the seriously sick patients in hospitals, many of whom are on ventilators and nursed in intensive care units (ICU). Global and local economies stand at their worst in decades; the world economy is now declared to be in recession by the World Bank/IMF and could eventually lead to the deepest depression since 1929.

The price of crude oil (the mainstay of the Nigerian economy) tumbled like never in the last 20 years. It went to as low as below \$20 per barrel from above \$60 just before the pandemic. It has never been this bad in the last two decades and this has made a mess of the Nigerian federal government's budget estimates for 2020; making salaries payment, debt obligations and other projections uncertain. This is clearly so because the price of crude oil, which contributes over 90% of Nigeria's externally generated revenue, now hovers around \$30 per barrel, which is far less than the budget's benchmark of \$57 per barrel, and this signifies tough times ahead. By the early hours of 12 April 2020, the overall statistics of COVID-19 (Coronavirus infections) and associated deaths remain alarming and fearful. The statistics are alarming because the rise to the 1.8 million confirmed cases took less than 4 months. Nigeria since testing is not being carried out on a large scale.

The Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) stated earlier in the month that the present testing volume is 500 tests per day and hoped to increase this capacity to 1000 or more tests per day in the coming weeks. Thus far, less than 5000 tests have been carried out in a population of 200million. The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on the 27 February 2020 in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital with a population of 21 million. The index case arrived from Milan, Italy, then the fourth country with high incidence (371 cases), and came into the country via Lagos Airport on 25 February 2020 where nothing serious was on ground to check or track new entrants into the country from suspected places with acute infections.

In 2018 Nigeria climbed out of the recession which had been triggered by the sharp drop in crude oil earnings in 2015-2017, but low economic growth rates were recorded subsequently, 1.9% in 2018 and 2.3% in 2019, and was projected to rise to 2.9% in 2020 and 3.3% in 2021. The estimated growth rate for 2020 has, however, now been shattered by the ongoing meltdown in the world economy, which is presently in recession, a development accelerated by the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic.

Even long before the announcement of lockdowns across countries, immediate job and income loss was on the order of the day for Nigerian small business owners occasioned by the pandemic in the earliest days, showing the inter-dependence of the world economy at all levels even in backwater town and villages. A typical example here is the effect of the pandemic on the

sporting world and the spiralling effect on the owners of the ubiquitous soccer leagues viewing centres across Nigerian cities, towns and even villages where sport fans pay to watch these matches. With the suspension of the various leagues, it has been zero income for this sector.

Another example is the aviation industry which has witnessed an unprecedented suspension of its activities and led to loss of millions of jobs around the world. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) on 3 April stated that 91,380 jobs were at risk in Nigeria's aviation industry due to the travel restrictions imposed by several countries to control the spread of the coronavirus which led to a revenue loss of \$760 million. The body further projected that airlines across Africa and the Middle East have lost about \$23 billion to the pandemic. Many airlines have announced various measures, from outright lay-offs to stoppage of workers' salaries to cuts in wages.

The post-COVID-19 era is going to be tough on the Nigerian economy. The world economy, and by extension the Nigerian economy, is already in recession while the pandemic lasts, and would likely enter a full-blown depression thereafter. The capitalists and their hangers-on want us to believe that the recession was caused by the pandemic. This is untrue. In Nigeria and internationally, the capitalist system was already on the edge of a cliff; the pandemic only served as a catalyst that hastened the rate of collapse. The price of crude oil will not get significantly improve even after the pandemic. The impact of this drastic reduction of crude oil prices on the Nigerian economy will be far-reaching. For starters, Nigeria has carried out a downward review of the budget benchmark of crude oil per barrel from \$57 to \$30. Budgeted revenue from the Nigeria Customs Service, has been reviewed downward to 40 per cent of the initial expectations from import duties, from N1.5trn to N943bn in anticipation of a reduction in trade volumes.

However, locking people down at home in the Nigerian context is like asking people to go hungry for the duration of the lockdown. 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. Labour must agitate for full pay for workers, whether private or government employed, for as long as the lockdown lasts. Government must also distribute foodstuff and domestic essentials to the poor masses to cushion the effect of the lockdown.

Furthermore, it should be stressed that what confronts us is not either lockdown for health security as a prime feature of social distancing to prevent deadly spread of coronavirus or end lockdown for people to get food and end hunger with the potential to spread the virus. Our concrete demand is there should be adequate food, appropriate housings and other essentials for all while we keep safe at home to keep the virus at bay. The concrete reality is that the resources available in society are enough to cater for food and the essential needs of everybody if equitably distributed.

(Coronavirus Pandemic and the Effects of the Lockdown and Restriction of Movement on Nigerians has been adapted from The Impact on Nigeria of the Coronavirus pandemic: socioeconomic pandemonium by In Defence of Marxist)