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Corona virus has invaded the lives of many Nigerians and made their lives miserable most because of the lockdown issues and restrictive measures taken to countries the spread of the virus

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in 52 countries in Africa, as of 9 April 2020, is put at 12,368; a very small fraction (0.8%) of the world's total. Africa's confirmed COVID-19 death toll is put at 632 (0.7%) of the world's coronavirus related deaths for the same date. South Africa accounts for the highest number of confirmed cases at 1,934 with 11 related deaths. On the other hand, African countries closest to Europe and the Middle East account for half of the COVID-19 cases on the continent. Most of the cases and deaths, however, occurred in four North African countries, Algeria (1666), Egypt (1699), Morocco (1374) and Tunisia (643) with 80% (4 out of 5) of the total COVID-19 related deaths in Africa.

On the other hand, Nigeria which is the most populous country on the continent with an estimated population of 200 million (15% of Africa's 1.3 billion people) has 323 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (2.5% of Africa's) and 10 deaths as of 12 April 2020. These numbers are, however, far from the true reflection of the situation in Nigeria, based on the fact that 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 200 million.

It is pertinent to note that Nigeria's prevailing situation is a case of an infectious pandemic overriding existing recurring and ongoing epidemics, especially of cholera, Lassa fever and yellow fever; these jointly kill thousands of people yearly. This is of course outside malaria-related deaths. Malaria fever is an endemic disease that kills tens of thousands of Nigerians (especially children) yearly. Nigeria accounts for up to 25 percent of the global cases of malaria and up to 110,000 deaths yearly especially among children under five (WHO, 2015). Although malaria is a preventable and potentially eradicable disease, the complacency of the capitalist order in protecting the interest of multinational drug companies, over and above that of the populace, has seen the persistence of the disease in Nigeria and some other parts of the world. The ongoing outbreak of Lassa Fever and Yellow Fever, terrible hemorrhagic diseases with symptoms of fever, body aches, vomiting, diarrhea and sometimes bleeding through body orifices – mouth, nose, anus etc., is a case of great concern being overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hundreds of lives have been lost to these epidemics, including recent cases of doctors and nurses who got infected and died in the process of treating infected patients. An estimated 300,000 to 500,000 cases of Lassa Fever and 5,000 related deaths occur annually in West Africa alone (source: NCDC), and Nigeria accounts for 50% of the region's estimated population of 401 million and a significant number of these cases.

It is now very evident that there was really no preparation to arrest the earliest cases of importation of COVID-19 into the country which could have been done at the points of entry into the country, especially at the international airports. Effective quarantine of travelers coming into the country, since the Chinese outbreak became news in January could have been done. It was not until much later, by 18 March 2020, that Nigeria eventually placed a travel ban on 13 countries with high incidence of the disease namely the United States, United Kingdom, South Korea, Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, China, Spain, Netherlands, Norway, Japan and Iran. The regime later banned all international flights into and out of Nigeria effective 23 March 2020. This knee jerk, uncoordinated approach came rather late. By then, many returnees had already melted into the communities.

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Lastly locking down people at home has adverse effect Of 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.

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.

The necessity for the labour movement to be visible on issues that concern the workers and poor masses cannot be over-emphasized at this moment. Labour must organize and harness these pockets of protests and demand adequate food distribution to all households in need. In the same vein, labour must also expose the hypocrisy of the politicians in government and their deceitful billionaire cronies. Their donations of billions to the COVID-19 containment fund should be noted as deceitful; it is borne not so much out of altruism but as a way of paying back little from the multibillion milked off government in the past by way of inflated contracts, heavy tax holidays and other huge concessions that they have received in the past.