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DE

19/eng04/062

GST 122

ASSIGNMENT

Write a report of not more than 2 pages, on the corona virus pandemic and the effects of the lockdown and restriction of movement on Nigerians.

REPORT ON CORONA VIRUS.

The recent pandemic on the corona virus (also known as COVID-19) is a major threat to the world as well as Nigeria. The virus was first discovered in 2019 but had an outrageous wild spread in the year 2020. As of March, 2020, “only” a thousand cases of corona virus had been confirmed in over 40 African countries. Obviously, this figure seems rather low. Still, regardless of whether there is simply a delay in the spread of the virus or short comings in how cases are reported, we cannot assume that Africa will long remain immune.

Alarmingly, most African countries, as well as Nigeria seem ill-equipped to face the pandemic. On Wednesday, the WHO has warned that Africa must now “prepare for the worst”.

The present ongoing pandemic has put Nigeria as well as her citizens in an unfavorable condition. The lockdown being held state wide has reduced the economic and social productivity of the country as well as income rate.

According to the Nigerian Center for Disease Control, (NCDC), it has been estimated that in Nigeria, there have been 493 cases, with 17 deaths and 159 people recovering from the virus. It was also said that the few people who suffered from the corona virus, who were discharged from hospitals have been admitted again, because the symptoms which they thought had left were being recognized again,

The president of Nigeria, president Muhammadu Buhari has also warned that restrictions could be in place in some states indefinitely as Lagos, Abuja and Ogun receive longer quarantines (2 weeks). The Nigerian government also insisted a warning to health workers to be on the look out for Lassa fever when treating patients during the corona virus pandemic. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 infections of Lassa fever occur annually, with approximately 5,000 deaths.

It is in this vein that the leadership of labor must come out in defense of the workers on the issue of lockdown. As parts of the efforts to curtail the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government ordered a lockdown on Lagos, Ogun and the FCT Abuja, for an initial period of two weeks starting 11:59pm, 30 March 2020, now extended by another 2 weeks from 13 April 2020. Many other states are already applying one stay-at-home rule or the other up to state boundaries closure.

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. Labor 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 labor movement to be visible on issues that concern the workers and poor masses cannot be over-emphasized at this moment. Labor must organize and harness these pockets of protests and demand adequate food distribution to all households in need. In the same vein, labor 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 naira 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.