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COVID-19 AND THE EFFECTS OF THE LOCKDOWN ON NIGERIANS

Since the beginning of the year, the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated the lives of people around the world, changing the way we live and interact with each other. It has led to a lot of changes in the economic and social landscape of the world.

The corona virus disease is a respiratory disorder caused by the novel SARS-CoV-2 virus. The virus originated in animals, probably bats, and was transmitted to other animals before crossing into humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) on 31st December 2019, was formally notified about a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City in China. This was later identified as the corona virus and discovered to have originated at the Huanan wet market in Wuhan which was known for their array of exotic animals. These exotic animals were the carriers of the virus which was then transmitted to humans. The virus which is spread through droplets from infected individuals took little time to spread around China and eventually the rest of the world. By 11th March 2020, the WHO officially declared the corona virus disease a pandemic as it had spread significantly to a very large number of countries.

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was reported on 27th February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus. On 9th March 2020, a second case was reported in Ogun state, a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen on the 30th March 2020, a lockdown was enforced in Lagos, Ogun and Abuja. Soon after other states began enforcing lockdowns, curfews and bans on inter-state travels to curb the spread. This meant a halt on businesses, education, religious gatherings and essentially every socio-economic facet of the nation. The lockdown enforced a kind of self-quarantine where most Nigerians were asked to remain at home to avoid contracting the virus. This affected people in many ways.

The first was of course financially as it put a strain on the country’s already failing economy. The sudden outbreak which left many governments of the world startled resulted in an unexpected recession for a lot of countries. Nigeria was not exempted as the economy suffered due to the closure of businesses. This bleed into the lives of low-income families who relied on daily wages to fend for every day needs like food. Many were left in want forcing the government to provide relief materials adding to government expenditure. The closure of borders made things worse as there was no import or export of products.

Another way the lockdown impacted Nigerians was in the transport sector. Not only was there loss of income for many, others were stranded due to the ban on inter-state travel. This also affected the markets as goods have to transported from farms to consumers leading to hiked prices due to limited supply and shortage of certain goods all together.

The educational sector was equally affected as schools were suddenly closed. This led to a disruption of the academic calendar particularly for JSS3 and SS3 students whose external exams had been slated for May. Online classes were introduced but was met with challenges as parents complained of data charges and bad cellular network. The disruption of the academic year hit private school owners and teachers the hardest as this was their means of income.

The health sector was also affected by the pandemic. Many hospitals in Nigeria are under equipped and under staffed making them unable to handle the increased number of infections and the high demand for testing. Even affluent Nigerians were effectively stuck with the inadequate health care facilities as they couldn’t travel for treatment.

The mental health of Nigerians has been affected as well, the forced solitude resulting in a rise in cases of rape, police brutality, domestic violence and armed robbery. Reports of insurgency and kidnappings too have been on the rise during the lockdown increasing the crime rate and level of insecurity in the nation.

With no cure in sight at the moment, the unfortunate truth remains that the corona virus maybe here to stay and its presence has already spelt doom in many aspects of human endeavor unless something is done urgently.