



Covid-19 and poverty in Kwara State - Nigeria

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Abstract

Corona virus disease properly tagged COVID-19 pandemic is a global problem which broke out in Wuhan, China in the late 2019. It is widely spreading globally since its inception in China. Today most of the countries of the world are infected with this so-called COVID-19 pandemic. In Nigeria, most of the states have been infected with this plague. This study aims to examine the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economic condition of people in Kwara State. The data and information employed in this paper are majorly sourced and collected from secondary ones such as journal articles, reports, internet, newspapers supported with target-group discussion and interview. The findings reveal that COVID-19 pandemic has significant negative impact on the poor people in Kwara State. Finding also exposes lapses on the side of government / system in the State. The paper comprises of introduction, definitions of concepts, situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and poverty in Kwara State, impacts of covid-19 pandemic on poverty in Kwara State and major challenges of the plague in the State. The paper finally presents remarking conclusion and policy implication.

Keywords: Covid-19, Kwara State, Nigeria; Pandemic, Poverty.

1. Introduction

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic infects millions of people globally. Today, millions of people are on sick-bed suffering from this virus and several thousand lives have been claimed by this virus. The COVID-19 was emerged in Wuhan in China in the last quarters of 2019 and since then it has been spreading all over the world. Most of the countries of the world have been infected and only the magnitude of infection is differed. The countries that are seriously infected with mass destruction are China, U.S.A., Italy and Spain.

The cause(s) of this plague is not yet explicitly clear to the whole world because there is mixed-reactions from different quarters particularly from the developed world. One side believed that the cause(s)

of this pandemic is natural while the other side strongly associated the cause(s) with man-made one. The latter group attributed the cause of the pandemic to the test of nuclear/chemical weapon (Weapon of Mass Destruction, WMD) by the super powers internationally or trade-war between two strong countries: U.S.A. and China. The two are accusing each other as the cause of the pandemic in the world through their action and reaction. It is believed that this is out of showcasing their strength and might to become new world leading power.

As Nigeria struggles with the outbreak in the early 2020, the government has been expending and receiving both financial contribution and technical support from various levels both locally and internationally. The donors include individuals, corporations, institutions and

individual countries with financial and technical assistance. Several billions of Naira have been realized and expended by Nigeria's government since the emergence of the pandemic in the country. The Fund raised have been using to tackle the problem on curbing the widespread with the country. Despite all the efforts Nigeria's government is adopting to ensure that the virus is not spreading have been proven abortive as most of the states including Kwara State have recorded cases of COVID-19 in the country.

Generally, poverty has been lingering economic problem in Nigeria. Kwara State is one of the poorest states in the country struggling with high level of poverty. This involves lack of access to public utilities and other services, poor and dilapidated infrastructure, illiteracy and ignorance, poor health care, social and economic insecurity as well as political exclusion and oppression. Poverty in Kwara state has been in rising trend. The state relative poverty in 1992, 1996, 2004, 2010, 2012 and 2016 were 60.8%, 75.5%, 85.22%, 80.54%, 74.3% and 71.1%, respectively (Mustapha, Akande & Jimoh, 2017; Abdussalam, 2016:11). In 2019, the poverty headcount rate percentage of population in Kwara state is between 21 and 40 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Though, majority of the poor in the state felt the effect of covid-19 seriously between year 2020 and 2021 (Target-group discussion). As the government has not fully understood the needs of the poor in the state it causes the former's ineffective

strategies to alleviate poverty in the economy (Abdussalam, 2016; Akindola, 2006). Although, state government continues her commitment to alleviate the suffering of the less privileged in the state despite the fact that she relies almost exclusively on allocations from the federal level and internal generated revenue (IGR) (Kwara State Governor, AbdulFatah Ahmed, 2013). Many poverty programmes and empowerment were introduced in the state with little impact on the people particularly the core-poor.

With the current COVID-19 pandemic in the state, people in the state are being impoverished due to the lockdown as part of the measure to control the spread of the pandemic. Therefore, this paper examines the impact of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) on poverty in Kwara State. The research objective raised in this study has explored the concept and theory of poverty and COVID-19 pandemic in the state. Other issues discuss in this chapter include definition of the concepts, situation of COVID-19 pandemic and poverty in Kwara State, impact of COVID-19 pandemic on poverty level in Kwara State, major challenges of the COVID-19 as well as conclusion and policy implication. The figure 1 shows the analysis of the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the poverty/impoverishment in Kwara state. COVID-19 pandemic creates lockdown, curfew, and insufficient foodstuff and cash in which leads to poverty and impoverishment in the economy.

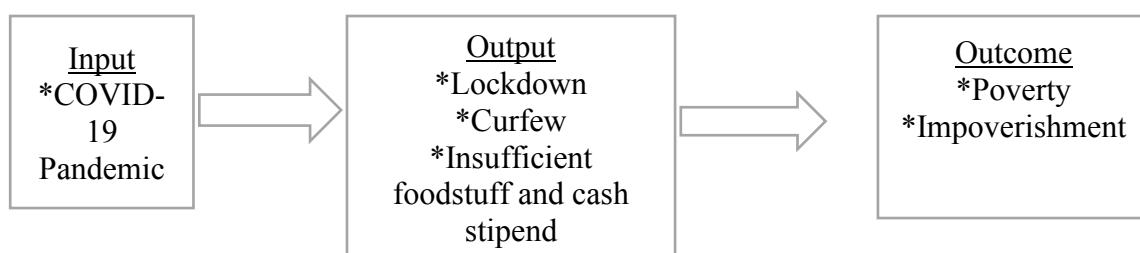


Figure 1: Impact Model of COVID-19
Source: Researcher's proposed model

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of COVID-19

According to medical definition, coronavirus is a type of common virus that infects humans, typically leading to an upper respiratory infection (URI). COVID-19 pandemic can be spreading through many ways such as coughing, sneezing, close personal contact, by touching an object or surface contaminated with the virus (Stoppler, 2018). World Health Organization, WHO (2020) sees Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Those who were infected with this virus experience mild to moderate respiratory difficulty, and categories of people as old people, those with health challenge such as cancer and cardiovascular disease are more likely to developed serious infection. This virus can be prevented from spreading by protecting oneself through hand-washing with sanitizer or liquid soap and wearing face-mask. This is necessary no specific and approved vaccines/ treatments for this so-called COVID-19. Though, research efforts have been underway to develop vaccines to cure the virus in order to reduce its attacking. The virus is also meant illness caused by a novel coronavirus presently called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus

(<https://emedicine.medscape.com>). See also Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), 2020 and National Bureau of Statistics, (2010).

2.2 Concept of Poverty

Poverty has no specific definition or meaning. It means different thing and situation to different people, community, society and even state/country of the world. Different authors and writers present poverty based on their views and understanding of their areas or units under study. According to Idowu and Oyeleye (2012), they view poverty as a peculiar situation or condition where people are

exempted from participating in activities in a given country or society as well as prevention of income necessary to satisfy their basic requirements such as food, accommodation, training skill and working tools for life survival. Aigbokhan (2000) defines poverty “as the inability to achieve a minimal standard of living”. This connotes that a person is considered poor if his/her disposable income or consumption spending is below his/her level of minimum living standard.

Poverty can be caused by various factors, these include low economic growth performance, human resource development, debt burden, governance, environmental degradation, crime and violence are among others (Olowa, 2012). Alters (2009) argues that the causes and contributing factors of poverty are many such as unemployment, low educational attainment and literacy, hunger and malnutrition. Many people are poor because they are unemployed or underemployed and reside in area with harsh economic opportunities. Those with low educational attainment and literacy have the high tendencies to be poor or to be part of the working poor, that is, there is direct relationship between the two variables. The relationship between hunger and poverty is reciprocal, because poverty always results in hunger, but the latter is a factor that keeps people in the former.

Therefore, poverty in the context of Kwara state in question exists because individual finds himself or herself to being incapacitated (being discriminated in the society), illiterate, lacking relatively sophisticated farm tools or being local farmer, being unable to send his/her children to standard or private school (because public school has turned to low-standard one), being a polygamous family with large family members size, living in dilapidated houses, lacking social support, lacking able-bodied family members who can feed and fix members on better job, being single parents, dependency on large

family property resources, having limited food security, turning to part-time beggar, unable to have three square meals per day, involving in political thuggery activities, deprivation from participation in government as well as political representation (Abdussalam, 2016). Parts of those considered poor and impacted by COVID-19 include the elderly or old people, widows, sick people, unemployed youth and physically-challenged ones.

Theory of Causes of Poverty

Tussing (1975) with respect to the causes of poverty in any given society through his theories. While the generic theories of poverty view those factors that cause poverty in an aggregate or totality. The theories are much concerned on the problems generated from the macro economy rather than the micro economy, that is, national economic problems as opposed to the individual socio-economic traits. Poverty is hardly attributed to the individual defects in this situation. In a situation where there are inadequate job opportunities in the economy and some people cannot find work to do or other can get but underemployed, the reason for be unemployed and impoverished cannot be blamed on individuals in such society (Rajah, 2011).

Analogous to this poverty theory is Ryan (1971) cited in Ropers & Hinton (1991) and Kerbo (2006)'s "blaming the system" in which the explanation posits that continuous suffering of the individuals is as a result of various social factors and forces which include the structures of social and economic systems, specific institutions and/or institutional regulations and demands, political programs and policies, various cultural...social interaction such as racism, sexism, and ageism, which deny peculiar individuals and groups equal right to enjoy social and economic opportunities and resources. It is generally described that being poor can be a personal or public issue as in the model of the social production of

poverty. COVID-19 and other issues surrounding it have caused certain section of the society to be poor and poorer, and this can be classified under the generic theory or blaming the system.

3. Methodology

This study was carried out in Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria. It covers the impacts of COVID-19 on poverty level in Kwara state. The population of the study consist all the poor in Kwara state and they are in different categories. The poor in the study include the low-income earners (who are receiving minimum wage of N30,000:00 and less), the unemployed, youth, petty-market women, elderly persons and disabled. Secondary data and information were majorly used and sourced from journal articles, reports, internets, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2010, 2015 and 2018, and Nigerian Centre for Diseases Control (NCDC). These sources were supported with primary source as target-group discussion and interview in order to obtain in-depth information about the poor in the state. The interviewees and those use for discussion are drawn from these set of poor groups.

Twelve respondents were randomly selected and 6 each for discussion and interview. This was limited to this number in order to avoid large group and maintain social distancing. More so, the nature of the research is timely-one. The study employed content analysis for the data and information collected. The personal interview in this study would be carried out in order to obtain additional information that is relevant for the study. Similarly, target-group discussion employed to garner information through group interaction on a topic or issue predetermined by the researcher.

4. Results and Discussion

COVID-19 Pandemic and Poverty Situation in Kwara State

According to NCDC the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Nigeria on the

27th February, 2020. This was imported to Nigeria through Lagos by an Italian citizen. As a result, the country has begun discovery of more cases in the country. It was later in the April the Kwara state has the first confirmed case. The spread of the COVID-19 in Nigeria continued to rise since the

discovery of the first case in February. Similarly, Kwara state has also had more cases as the statistics of the confirmed cases shown by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC. Below is the statistics for Nigeria and Kwara state:

Table 1: Statistics for Nigeria and Kwara state

	Confirmed	Recovered/Discharged	Death
Nigeria	206,076	194,097	2,723
Kwara state	3,867	155	57

Source: Nairametrics: COVID-19 update in Nigeria; <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng>, as at 04th October, 2021.

To date 206, 076 cases have been confirmed, 194,097 cases have been discharged and 2,723 deaths have been recorded in Nigeria. Nigeria recorded the highest figure of COVID-19 cases of 681 on the 12th of June since the deadly contagious disease was first reported in March. While, in Kwara state, 3,867 cases have been confirmed tested positive, 155 cases have been discharged and 57 death recorded. In a move to curb the spread of the pandemic disease, Kwara state in line with the Federal government of Nigeria preventive measures have introduced lockdown of all movements in the state with exception of essential goods and services, including personnel. Those people who move or supply food stuff and medical facilities, drugs, medical and security personnel are allowed to be moving due to their services provision (NCDC, 2020; Nairametrics, 2020).

Palliative measure was initiated by the government from the federal level down to the state level. In Kwara state, the palliative measure is in various forms. The mode of palliative includes food stuff and cash stipend. Aside from the state government, private organizations, foundations and associations as well as well-to-do individuals are also involved in giving out palliative to the less privileged people and those who are seriously affected by the outbreak. One of the renowned unions that organized the palliative in the state is Ilorin

Emirate Descendant Progressive Union (IEDPU).

The essence of this gesture is to mitigate the economic hardship created as a result of lockdown in the COVID-19 outbreak. Part of the objective of the palliative gesture is to alleviate the food poverty among the poor and mostly the poorest of the poor in the state. Albeit, the distribution of palliative was not effective and successful as expected by the public even by the government itself. The fallout attributed to many reasons such as organization and distributive method opted for in the distribution of the palliative. More so, the materials released for the distribution are equally insufficient provision among others. In the target-group discussion, discussants were not satisfied with the distribution method of the palliative as it was not reached the target-poor in the state. More so, people are not contented with the quantity of the palliative released by the committee in charged to solve the poverty problem on ground.

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Poverty in Kwara State

National Bureau of statistics (NBS) reveals that Nigeria's inflation rate increased by 12.34% (year-on-year) in the month of April, 2020 compared to 12.26% recorded in the previous month (March) 2020. This inflation rate of April is the highest since last two years. This is as a result of

economic downturn causes by COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a month-on-month, the index increased by 1.02% in April compared to 0.84% recorded for March, 2020. The composite food index increased by 15.03% in April compared to 14.98% recorded in March, 2020. Based on a month-on-month, food inflation increased by 1.18% in April, compared to 0.94% recorded in March, 2020. According to the report, the rise in the food index was caused by increases in the prices of basket of food commodity (Oyekanmi, 2020).

The high inflation rate also attributed to the highest increases to the prices of other non-food items like transports, paramedical services and major household appliances. Although, Kwara state is one of the states in Nigeria hits with the lowest rise in inflation with 8.98 percent. Generally, the connotation is that rapid increase in the prices of goods and services in the economy caused by the lockdown procedure in response to COVID-19 pandemic and the persistent global oil crisis. It implies that the purchasing power of buyers or consumers to buy goods and services deteriorated.

According to the interviewees, they expressed hike in the prices of staple food stuff like Garri (cassava flower), was selling at the rate of 120 naira and during the lockdown period till now it is selling at the rate between 180 naira and 210 naira. The same thing applied to the prices of other food stuff like rice, yam, and the ingredients (tomato, onion, pepper, vegetables e.t.c.) using for cooking. Some workers or salary-earners are also affected by the lockdown during the COVID-19 in the state. Particularly, the low-income earners both at the public and private sectors. The worse part of it hits those who are working in the private schools as teachers and other staff who are non-teaching. Most of them are not being paid salaries since the schools had been closed down for COVID-19. Few of them are working with the private enterprises and

corporate sectors are witnessed slashing of their salaries/wages or get half-payment.

One interviewee said, their salaries/wages are not even sufficient to take care of their up-keeping and their family members before the COVID-19 pandemic talk less of half-payment or when there is no salary/wage at all. Majority of the interviewees lamented that they are seriously affected by the lockdown measure placed on them by the government as they cannot go out for their business activities which are the means of livelihood to take care of their wives and children. For those who are public workers but low-income earners are receiving salary but their purchasing power is lower due to the increases in the prices of most consumable goods and services.

Major Challenges of COVID-19

Some challenges mentioned in this section expected to be deepened if the COVID-19 outbreak is not controlled and there is no total relaxation of lockdown by end of third quarter of 2020.

Expectation of Recession

Recession starts when there is a downward descend from the peak which is of a short duration. It means the turning period during which the forces that make for contraction or depression finally win over the forces of expansion (Jhingan, 2009). According to Todaro (1997), recession is a period of slack general economic activity as reflected in rising unemployment and excess productive capacity in a broad spectrum of industries and firms. Nigeria economy is already facing recession with the lockdown and closure of inter-state boundaries in the country. With these, international and domestic economies are being affected in which the reflection of it have impact on the state. Although, what is currently observing as challenge in the state economy is new term tagged as 'Coronamic' situation. This is an economic situation witnesses by a country/state during the coronavirus

(COVID-19) outbreak. This more or less fear of recession in an economy. During this time, there are decline in bank deposits (saving, current and fixed deposit accounts) and increase in withdrawal in banking system. The pandemic is capable enough to weaken the economy in the state although this may be mild and not severe. It is also associated with sudden demand for liquidity as many people have expend their cash and reduced account deposits to lower during and anticipated in the post-COVID-19.

Safety Net

Social safety net is a set of government programs such as food staples, welfare payments, free health clinics, and unemployment insurance designed to provide the absolute poor with a minimal level of living below which they should not fall. Safety nets incorporate provisions for maintaining adequate consumption for individuals affected by certain economic misfortunes, especially involuntary unemployment, industrial injuries, and work disabilities (Todaro, 1997). Safety net is also a set of programs that guaranteed individuals a minimum standard of living (Colander, 1995). There is a tendency of increase in the poverty level in the state as the hunger still remains the problem of the poor and the poorest of the poor. Without urgent action or solution to address this problem by the government the latter would still be lingering. Before the COVID-19 pandemic there was no sound social and economic safety net that guarantee the quality life for the poor in the state.

Fall in Revenue

This is another possible challenge the government would face during and in the post-COVID-19 lockdown are the shortfall in the internal generated revenue (IGR) and postponement in the repayment of loans and servicing-debt. During the period of lockdown, the state is unable to have effective and efficient collection of IGRs.

Although, it is part of support to the state during the COVID-19 pandemic by the federal government to postpone the deduction of loan repayment from the state monthly allocation. There is future consequence of this on the economic plan and development in the state. First, it would expand or lengthen the period of loan repayment and second, delay in borrowing other money/taking other loan to be used for developmental projects.

Projects and Governance

The challenge of COVID-19 would not spare postponement of some projects and slow governance in the state. Though applause for the state government for its tireless efforts in ensuring continuation in the execution of some projects on ground in the state that are still incomplete and some others would be postponed till the post-COVID-19 pandemic or by the year 2021 when the state economy improves. The same challenge the government would face in carrying out its governmental services and day-to-day administration.

Poor Record/Data

There is no or insufficient record/data of those that are poor in the state. Lack of record/data of the poor was one of the factors that failed the government in the distribution of palliative during the COVID-19 lockdown, as the the distribution didn't really reflect the target-groups. Poor data of those that are core poor and less privileged like old people, disabled, unemployed and widows, contribute to shortage of palliative and poor distribution.

5. Conclusion and Policy Implication

This chapter has examined the issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic currently witnesses by Nigeria and Kwara state in particular. Mostly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on the lives of the poor and less privileged in Kwara state. Findings revealed that the

COVID-19 outbreak has caused more economic damage to the people in Kwara state, specifically, the poor and the small business entrepreneurs. Various challenges were identified in which they need urgent action to be taken on them by the government. There are policy implications suggested to the government/policy-makers relevant to reshape the economy in the state in the aftermath of COVID-19 outbreak and to take care of the future:

i- Need for Policy Reform – there is a growing awareness that improper implementation of anti-poverty programmes have been taken to reduce poverty level through empowerment and trader money, training and provision of working tools. Therefore, government should double outlay on these programmes and related ones to ensure meaningful reduction in the poverty level.

ii- Small and Medium Enterprise – Government should give more support to the small and medium enterprise (SME) in the state. Government should extend more financial support and conducive environment to those people in SMEs and encourage more people to participate in the enterprises.

iii- Social Security/Safety Net - government should initiate effective and efficient social security programme to support the poor and less privilege ones in the state. This is to capture the old people, disable individuals and unemployed youth. Under this social security, government should ensure affordable and accessible healthcare services and facilities, albeit, in the long-run to reduce health-related sufferings and diseases among the poor.

iv- Necessity of Record/Data – Government and policy makers in the state should equally find way to collect proper record/data on the poor in different categories in the state, as this would assist in policy-making and forecast in the economy.

v- Government should also fashion out the yardstick to incorporate those who are

working in private sector as they are part of the electorates in the state. Special cash stipend and other palliative are suggested for them within the government financial strength, particularly, during this pandemic period in order to alleviate their hardship.

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