

Covid-19 Pandemic- Challenges and Opportunities in the Development of Rural Areas in Nigeria

Omini Ubi Ubi

Department of Public Administration
University of Calabar, Nigeria
ubiomini55@gmail.com

Ofre, Robert Akie

Department of Public Administration
University of Calabar, Nigeria
robert27ofre@gmail.com

Abstract

Covid-19 is a novel virus that has brought myriads of challenges to the global community and its devastating negative impact to countries with weak health and economic systems. One of the countries that the pandemic has brought serious challenges is Nigeria whose major food supply and raw materials for industrial development come from rural areas. In the wake of the pandemic, the government of Nigeria embarked in appropriate measures to curtail the spread of the virus. Those measures are closures of international borders, closure of interstate boundaries to prevent vehicular movement, closure of churches, embargo on community activities such as burials, marriages, traditional gathering etc. These measures created negative impact in the rural communities as the government ensure enforcement in all the nooks and crannies. Though covid-19 posed challenges, it also created vast opportunities in the areas of the health sector, basic hygiene improvement, technological innovation, increase in the Gross Domestic Product and the modernization of the agricultural industry to boost food sufficiency. These opportunities are capable of developing the rural areas and make it more strategic and reliable to the national and global economies. The article analyzed the opportunities which covid-19 has brought. The modernization theory is used to explain the article.

Key Words: Covid-19, Challenges, Opportunities, Rural Areas and Nigeria

Introduction

Covid-19 is a novel virus that has caused serious health issues globally; the virus was first discovered in Wuhan, Province in China in 2019. According to Zhou et al (2020), posits that in December, 2019, a new coronavirus (SARS Cov-2) emerged sparking an epidemic of acute respiratory syndrome (Covid-19) in humans, centered in Wuhan, China. The rapid spread of the virus across the world is a source of worry considering to high number of deaths recorded. Jay et al (2020), within three months when the virus was discovered, it had spread to more than 118,000 cases and caused 4291 deaths in 114 countries which caused the World Health Organization to declare a global pandemic. With the rapid spread of the virus, the death toll is on the increase in developed and developing countries. Though Europe, Asia and South American continents are badly hit, the death rate in Africa that is the major concern of the paper is slow and steady, with weak medical facilities and inadequate health personnel to contend with the pandemic. The pandemic dealt a deadly blow to the economy of the entire world as the various governments used lockdown and restriction of movement to curtail the spread of the virus. According to

Jiatong (2020), the covid-19 caused tremendous negative effect to the Chinese economy, that since the breakdown of Covid-19, the tourism and hospitality industry have been decreasing. He further emphasized that all group tours by travel agencies across the country have been suspended, for instance in Beijing, there are 13525 tour packages involving 242,000 tourists have been cancelled. This wreckage in the hospitality and tourism industry of China has a global impact. This is the reason government across the globe must put effort in mitigating the impact of covid-19 in order to avert a global economic depression that is capable of sinking the whole world.

To further explained the challenges of covid-19, Anan (2020), talked about the devastating impact of covid-19 to the Jordan economy, that some of the short term negative impact of the pandemic as a result of the lockdown measures and suspension of economic activities includes average loss of around USD 116 million per day, a drop of around USD 532.48 million per month in tax revenue, shrinkage in exports by around USD 1.1 billion and loss of around USD 353 million in the tourism sector over the months of April and May, based on the Department of Statistic and Ministry of Finance. The challenges posed by covid-19 are quite enormous, that the problem, can be seen in all the sector of the economy. The exposed and valuable sectors such, as Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs) are often characterized with limited financial and non-financial resources (Welsh and White, 1981). In Nigeria, the economic misfortunes are quite visible, some banks and private organizations embarked on massive sack of workers thereby increasing to the number of unemployed people in the labor market. The massive unemployment in Nigeria which is responsible for social problems like cultism, armed robbery, prostitution, kidnapping etc. These social problems have caused serious instability and making governance difficult. This is the reason why the government of Nigeria must put every effort to mitigate the virus and take advantages of its attendant opportunities.

Though there are myriads of problems linked to covid-19, amidst these problems there are opportunities that the government and the people in rural areas can utilize to bring massive development in the area. Rural areas in Nigeria is strategically important considering the fact that raw materials for industrial growth and food consumed in urban centers come from rural areas, thus, the development of the rural areas by capitalizing on the opportunities which covid-19 has brought all over the world. The bulk of the population in Nigeria reside in the rural areas, the position of World Bank (2010), the rural population in Nigeria was 79,528,440 in 2010 representing 50.2 Percent of the nation's population. For Mabogunje (1981, 1997), clearly stated that, rural societies harbor over 80 percent of the country's population in Nigeria, hence the occupational activities that constitute the majority in the rural areas are tied to farming, animal husbandry, fishing, poultry, cattle rearing, forestry, food processing and small-scale farming, and cottage industrial ventures. There is need for the rural areas in Nigeria to be developed through the opportunities displayed by covid-19 with all alacrity. The direction of this paper is Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities in the Development of Rural Areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges of Covid-19 to the world

The recent scientific revelation by Professor Graeme Ackland of Edinburgh University, warned that Covid-19 could be with us forever. He further confirmed that horrific situation, that if survivors can get-reinfected even though experts believe immunity will make the disease milder in future. He stated that, the government had previously warned that Covid-19 would be around forever, the virus can act like other seasonal viruses. Since the vaccines and drugs for Covid-19 is yet to be discovered, the world would continue to face challenges posed by Covid-19. Anan (2020), mentioned the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in Jordan, that the lockdown in Jordan, saw an average loss of around USD 116 million per day a drop of around USD 532.48 million per month, in revenue. The pandemic also reduced export by around USD 1.1 billion and loss of around USD 3.53 Million in the tourism sector over in the months of April and May,

based on the Department of Statistic and Ministry of Finance. While Deginen (2020), conducted a research on the challenges and opportunities of covid-19 in Agricultural Economy; The case of Ethiopia, concluded that, the challenges occasioned by Covid-19 are food shortages, slowdown of service sectors, input delay, decline in foreign currency and increase unemployment in many economies. Generally, the overwhelming result of the covid-19 induced economic depression and job cuts among the investment projects may exacerbate extreme poverty and food insecurity (Mesay, 2020). Since the pandemic is a global issue, exportation, was affected. For Alemayehu (2020), export of various agricultural products such as coffee, oil seeds and pulses declined in the next two quarters of the year by 11,15 and 13% respectively.

Global currencies in terms of depreciation is a challenged caused by Covid-19. For instance, the local currency of Ethiopia was devalued by 2% against the United State Dollar in March before this time, it was already on a fallen spree by approximately 0.5% each month following a 5.6% fall against the United State Dollar in November, 2019 (Ad et al, 2020). It is economic fact that depreciation of the value of any currency is liable to lead to lower purchasing power parity of the country. Nigeria too was not left out in these economic crises as the naira experience depreciations which that portends danger to the economy and triggered inflation. Covid-19 brought about job losses globally and worst hit is in Africa where unemployment is high. DRC (2020), maintained that low skilled workers lost their jobs which raised concern that Small and Medium Scale Enterprises are not spared by the myriads of problems posed by covid-19. Nomita (2020) in his article, Covid-19 Challenges and Opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) posits that the biggest challenges faced SMEs is to maintain continuity of business, that the lockdown has affected business progress, thereby adversely impacted on small-scale businesses.

Nigeria being the largest country in Africa is not spared by the virus, the pandemic greatly affected the economy of the country. Gavi (2020) analyze the economic impact of the pandemic that negatively affected the sale of crude oil since the entire world was locked down. The reduction of the prices of crude oil affected the implementation of the 2020 budget. According to IMF (2020), in Nigeria more than 3.8 million people monthly working in the informal sector, risk losing their jobs and this could rise to 13 million, if movement restrictions continues. Similarly, Gavi (2020) explain the impact of covid-19 on routine immunization, in Nigeria, observed that the uptake of immunization services has been greatly affected since the commencement of the pandemic. A comparison of pentavalent performance between 2019 and 2020 shows a decrease in performance in the months since the Covid-19 outbreak begins. The enormous challenges posed by Covid-19 is quite glaring, most of the people who survive on daily hustling were affected by restriction of movement thereby exposing how weak the economy is. Prior to covid-19, an estimated eight million people required food assistance in Ethiopia. The figures include people who were displaced from their original houses due to unrest and natural shocks (OCHA, 2020). According to Forsido et al (2020), movement restriction due to Covid-19, adversely affected agricultural inputs distribution that determined food supply. In Nigeria, in the wake of the Covid-19, there was massive sack in the banking industry. For instance, banks like Access Bank, First Bank and Guarantee Trust Bank retrenched staff due to negative impact of covid-19. The lockdown imposed in the thirty-six states in Nigeria was strange to majority of Nigerian who rely on daily hustling to survive. People result to stealing and looting in order to survive.

Though, despite the challenges that emanated from the novel Covid-19, there are great opportunities that can be envisage and utilized to drive development in the entire sectors. This is the essence of this paper whose interest is on covid-19 Pandemic. Challenges and opportunities in the Development of Rural Communities in Nigeria.

Modernization Theory

The modernization theory is a description and explanation of the process and explanation of transformation from a traditional and underdeveloped societies to more improved and better developed societies. Historically, the theory hinges on the process of change towards social, economic and political system that are developed in Western and Northern America from 17th century to the 19th and then spread to other European countries to South America, Asia and African continents, (Eisenstadt, 1966).

Modernization theory has been one measures which triggers development through the sociology of national development. The theory explained the past and present pre-modern societies became modern (Westernized) through the processes of economic growth and change in social, political and cultural structures. Above all, modernization theorists are concern with economic growth within societies as indicated instance, the measures of Gross National Product (GNP). The mechanization or industrialization are ingredients in the process of economic growth. The theorists study the social, political and cultural consequences of economic growth and the conditions that are important for massive industrialization and economic growth and the realities that are sensitive for industrialization and development. The development cancome when traditional and underdeveloped societies jettisoned cultural practices that are inherently inimical to development. The developed societies designed appropriate mechanism for the massive development of the society.

Covid-19 brought about devastating challenges to the development of rural areas. Rural areas are strategically, and economically important to the development of Nigeria and the world at large. In rural areas lie raw materials and agricultural products that are used for industrial development and consumption in urban centers. Covid-19 has really reshaped the communal lifestyle of the rural people, thus making them not to relate properly. Covid-19 protocols include wearing of facemask, social distancing which inhibits cultural gathering, use of hand sanitizer etc. These protocols are strange to the rural people considering the neglect, which the area has faced from the government. Despite the challenges embedded in covid-19, there are evidenced based opportunities that can be utilized as pedestals for rural development and snowball more development in urban centers. The modernization theory's position is on development across political, economic, social and other segment of the society. Therefore, covid-19 has brought about improvement in basic hygiene, planned communities in rural areas, the introduction of zoom in community interaction and the use of social media to reach out and get useful information both local and internationally. Basic hygiene is paramount in sustaining the health of human being and prolong life span, it also help to avert epidemic. Basic Covid-19 protocols would alert the awareness of the people to jettison dirty environment knowing the adverse consequences of living in a dirty society. The use of social media and zoom for interaction would boost their information and communication technology knowledge and increase their social capital. This is the essence of this paper whose direction is to venture more on the opportunities created by covid-19 and its application for the development of rural communities.

Covid-19 and Transmission in Rural Areas in Nigeria

Covid-19 is a novel virus whose spread rate is high, the virus is mainly transmitted through contacts and respiratory droplets. Some medical personnel have indicated that the virus can also be contacted through airborne transmission. From the position of WHO (2020), the mode of transmission of SARS – Cov-2 includes, contacts, droplet, airborne, fomite, focal-oral, blood born, mother to child and animal to human transmission. The virus usually cause respiratory illness ranging from mild disease to severe death and some person infected with the virus could be asymptomatic.

The virus can be contacted through airborne; this could be done when people live in a crowded environment without defective ventilation. This is the case of rural areas in Nigeria that

have suffered neglect from the Nigerian government in the past, thereby the people suffer and do not have access to basic amenities. In an environment where basic amenities are lacking it can trigger the spread of covid-19. The bulk of the population reside in rural areas in Nigeria. Many do not have access to quality education, which is hindrance to comprehending the advanced English Language used for enlightenment and campaign against covid-19 in the media. Some areas cannot access radio and television signal; it makes the people bereft of vital information. These are all the issues that can limit its awareness to curtail the spread of the virus.

People in rural areas hardly maintain covid-19 protocols in the aspect of maintaining social distance in the public. The communal lifestyle make them to glue together in gathering like church activities, age grades, rite performances etc. These occasions were handed down to them by their ancestors and can never be jettisoned in this era of pandemic. This is the reason why more attention should be given to the rural areas. Most of the rural communities in Nigeria do not have testing centers to ascertain peoples' Covid-19 status. Asymptomatic people can live with the virus without displaying any symptoms. These categories of people who carry the virus without showing symptom, spread the virus fast through to regular handshake and other contacts. In Nigeria, community infection is high occasioned with the fact that the people lack access to testing facilities. It is only through testing that one can deduce if he has the virus and then conduct appropriate measures to protect others. Just like the early stage of HIV/AIDS, the people in rural communities did not believe that HIV/AIDS exist, until it became a social problem in Nigeria which made the virus an epidemic in rural areas. A reasonable number of person in rural areas in Nigeria do not believe the existence of Covid-19, they rather believe that the virus was artificially created by government officials in order to loot public funds. There is no doubt that corruption is endemic in Nigeria which is one of the reasons for the neglect to develop the area, therefore, whatever the government is trying to tell them, the people tend to disbelieve and rather behave the way they like which make them vulnerable.

In rural communities in Nigeria, community infection tends to be on the rise due to the communal living of the people. This is worrisome because it would affect the productive capacity in the area as most of them are predominantly farmers and also negatively impact in urban towns and other big cities. At present, there is serious and persistent rise in the prices of food stuff all over Nigeria, this could be the result in the reduction of agricultural production occasioned by Covid-19 among farmers. In Ugep (largest village in West Africa), Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria is experiencing spike in malaria with increasing number of persons visiting local patent chemist (pharmacy) and local hospitals for medical attention. The death rate among adults have been high. Malaria and Covid-19 have similar symptoms and could be misunderstood on treatments basis. The National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) that is responsible for control, testing and giving situation report on daily basis over Covid-19 infections only limit testing to urban centers like state headquarters. At the local government level there are no testing centers. The result is the high rate of Covid-19 among the rural population. The strategic importance of rural area cannot be overemphasized; the government of Nigeria and the Non-Governmental Organization must rise up and put appropriate machineries in motion to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 in rural areas in Nigeria.

Opportunities Emanating from Covid-19 and the Development of Rural Area in Nigeria

The introductory and literature review sections of this paper, the authors stated the challenges created by Covid-19 to the global economy and the rural areas. These challenges have indeed affected the world and brought new world order. The new order is the Covid-19 protocols which include non-shaking of hands, the use of hand sanitizer, maintaining basic hygiene, wearing of face mask, social distance etc. Hitherto, no recommended vaccines from World Health Organization to prevent the virus. Vetted scientists from Ivy League Universities have said that covid-19 has come to stay with us. The clear fact that Covid-19 has created numerous challenges;

there are great opportunities that can be utilized for the development of rural area in Nigeria and the development of the global environment. This is the concern of the paper.

The following are the opportunities created by covid-19.

1. **Preparedness to build better medical facilities in rural areas:** Covid-19 reminded us of the Bubonic Plague of the 14th century killed many persons across Europe and the Spanish Flu of 1919 that led to the death of 50 million persons globally. Therefore, it is pertinent for the government, non-governmental organizations, charity organizations and philanthropists to build modern hospitals and reinforce the existing medical system with advanced facilities and manpower in rural areas in Nigeria. It is clear that Covid-19 is not the only pandemic that has hit the world, but the rural areas have always been unprepared, the result is always high fatalities. This is an opportunity for the government to build good hospitals in rural areas to avert unforeseen epidemic and pandemic which will definitely come as man continues to exist. It is better to prepare for war when there is peace, than to prepare for war when there is war.
2. **Improvement on basic hygiene:** One of the ways of preventing covid-19 is through the maintenance of basic hygiene, which emphasized on hand washing, the use of hand sanitizer and living in clean environment. The campaign against covid-19 has awakened and enlightens the people in rural Nigeria in maintaining basic hygiene which is key to healthy living. Before now, people in rural areas hardly maintain basic hygiene due to unplanned environment where people reside, but with covid-19 being around and for the people to stay alive the people need to live in a clean environment.
3. **Technological innovation:** Covid-19 brought about lockdown which means restriction of movement, social distance etc. These measures are to ensure that people do not move with the virus, thus businesses and gatherings are put on hold which brought negatives impacts. Businesses can now be conducted through the social media, meetings can be held through zoom, thereby, making expensive traveling unnecessary, marriage committees meeting can be held on WhatsApp and other social media platforms. This technological advancement will increase the literacy level of the number of persons who use mobile phones. The increase number of persons that use mobile phones will create positive impact and boost the telecommunication market and create job opportunities.
4. **Modernization of the agricultural industry:** Covid-19 really affects food sufficiency in Nigeria. The government of Nigeria has to rise up to the occasion by modernizing agriculture and given the rural people financial assistance to enable them cultivate large farmland. Covid-19 strengthened the effort of Government provide series of varieties of rice which can be harvested within as pace of three months and replanted, instead of planting and staying for one year. Also, the government provides facilities for massive irrigation farming in order to boost food sufficiency not only in rural areas, the country and the world at large. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) recently established a program to support farmers and Small Scale Enterprises financially. The Central Bank made funds available for these categories of people to cushion the impact of covid-19 and further strengthen the local economy.
5. **Increase in Gross Domestic Products (GDP):** Since Covid-19 restricted movements, and closure of borders, it affected the movement of goods and services. It has helped the local people to concentrate more on what they produce than rely on importation of goods abroad. For example, rice production in Nigeria has increased and more people are going into rice production occasioned by the financial assistance given to rice farmers. Also, cassava production has increased in rural areas.

Conclusion

Pandemic is not new to the world. In 1919, there was the Spanish Flu that led to the death of 50 million lives. There was also the bubonic plague of the 14th century that swept Asia, Europe and Africa, millions of persons lost their lives at that time. In our contemporary world, Covid-19 is the real pandemic we are facing. The essence of this paper is Covid-19 Pandemic Challenges and Opportunities of in the Development Rural Areas in Nigeria. The paper clearly showed that, though covid-19 has challenges, the opportunities are quite enormous, that if the government can tap more into these opportunities, the rural areas in Nigeria will experience development.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations:

1. The federal government of Nigeria should be prepared to contend with epidemic and pandemic by building world class medical facilities to match with medical personnel in rural areas. This will serve as preparation against any epidemic or pandemic.
2. Campaign on basic hygiene should be on regular basis through the supervision of sanitary officials in rural areas. Also, government should extend its town planning policy to rural areas to avoid the building of houses without proper sanitary lane and ventilation
3. The financial assistance initiated by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to farmers and small scale business owners should be on a consistent basis. This will encourage more people be self-employed instead of relying on government while collar jobs which are limited to specified number of persons
4. The government of Nigeria and the information and communication technology sector should ensure that telecommunication reached to remotest areas in Nigeria.

References

- Anan, Z (2020) Covid-19 Pandemic Challenges and Opportunities: The Case of Jordan. Euromessco Research Dialogue Advocacy.
- Anlewmayehu, G (2020), The Macroeconomics and Social Impact of Covid-19 in Ethiopia and Suggested Direction for Policy Response.
- Danish Refugee Council (DRC), (2020), The Ripple Effect of Covid-19 on Economic Activities, Livelihood and Food Security in East Africa and the Great Lakes.
- Degineh, L (2020), Challenges and opportunities of Covid-19 in agricultural economy: The Case of Ethiopia. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. Vol (65) 32-41.
- Eisenstadt, S. N (1966) Modernization: Protest and Change. Englewood Cliffs, N. J. Prentice Hall.
- Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, 2020
- International Monetary Fund Report, 2020.
- Jay, J. V.B , Katherine, B. and Robb, W (2020) Using social and behavioral Science to support Covid-19 pandemic response. *Nature of Human Behavioral* (4) 460 – 471.
- Jiatong, N(2020),Under Covid 19,challenges and opportunities for hospitality and tourism industry of China. *Journal of Tourism & Hospitality*. vol 9,40-44
- Mobogunje, A. (1981),The Development Process: A Spatial Perspective, Hutchinson. University Press.
- Mobogunje, A. L (1987) Urbanization in Nigeria, University of London Press, 3rd Edition, London.
- Mesay, M (2020), the Impact of Covid-19 on Food Security in Ethiopia, Ministry of Health (MOH), 2020, www.epirgov.etephieoc@gmail.com, www.facebook.com/ephiapge.
- Nomita, S (2020), Covid-19: Challenges and Opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMES).University of Delhi, India.
- OCHA (2020), Humanitarian Needs Overview Snapshot, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

- Welsh, J. A. and White, J. F. (1981), A small business is not a little big business. Harvard Business Review, vol 59. 18
- World Health Organization (2020) Transmission Prevention, Precaution Scientific Brief.
- World Bank (2010) Rural Population in Nigeria. Retrieved from www.tradingeconomics.com/nig/rural-population.
- WHO (2020), Transmission of SARS – Cov-2: Implication for Infection Prevention, Precaution. Scientific Brief
- Zhou, F. et al (2020), Clinical course risk factors for mortality of adult in patients with Covid-19 in Wuhan, China: A retrospective cohort study, *Lancet*(395) 1054 – 1062.