

Governance and Covid-19 Pandemic- A Critical Assessment of Infrastructural Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is indisputably faced with the vagaries of unbearable consequences occasioned by COVID-19 pandemic. All measures put in place by government to combat the pandemic could not yield much fruits due to lack of infrastructural development evidenced in bad roads, poor healthcare facilities, poor power supply, poor educational facilities and inadequate employment. Many citizens have died and many subjected to ongoing untold hardship due to inadequacies in the functioning of the various sectors of the country. The discourse anchored on structural functional tool of analysis popularized by Spencer Herbert, Talcott Parsons, among others; stressed on the relationship between the various structures that made up the society. The theory is of the assumptions that a system has parts that are interdependent and must function together for the stability of the whole. Therefore, proper functioning of health sector, education sector, transportation, housing sector, road infrastructure and good economy for job opportunities would have created sufficient buffers and resilience against COVID-19 and even future exogenous shocks. Infrastructural decay should be urgently addressed for stability and good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Governance, Development, COVID-19, Road network, Health Sector, Housing facilities, power supply, Education Sector, Transportation System, Employment

Introduction

Nigeria since independence in 1960 has her affairs in the hands of both military and civilian leaders. The various regimes of both military and civilians have initiated several programmes aimed at instituting development in the country. This is reflected in the introduction of the first national development plan in 1962 down to vision 2020. Irrespective of all these laudable programmes, Nigeria has remained very under developed in all spheres of societal existence.

The executive arm of government presents to the national assembly budgets on yearly basis for approval in trillions of naira, including foreign borrowing to address welfare issues in the country. Surprisingly, the key areas of concern like education, health, housing, roads, employment etc. are still in a pitiable state. This unwholesome state of affairs is precipitated by endemic corruption at all levels of government and the society at large (Odo, 2017). This is reflected in the fact that many Nigerians continue to live in penury and hopelessness, insecurity of lives and properties, increasing unemployment and youth restiveness, kidnapping and armed robbery, power failure, ineffective health services, poor education, poor housing and bad roads etc. Allens and Ololo reiterated.

Lamentably, the outbreak of the global pandemic coronavirus, code named *COVID-19* and its penetration into Nigeria on the 27th of February, 2020 exposed the governance failure and infrastructural decay in the country in a magnitude that was not imagined. It was optimally despicable

that when the virus was first recorded, ventilators, testing centres, access roads for contact tracing and isolation centres were grossly inadequate in the country. During lockdown, we saw hunger as a result of high rate of Nigerian depending on daily hustling for survival, discomfort at homes due to power failure and palliatives given where hoarded by those in positions of authority. Poor road networks, poor housing, poor transportation and poor educational facilities made our country most vulnerable/unable to combat the spread of the *COVID-19* virus.

Conceptual Issues

Good Governance

Governance is seen as a process or an act of overseeing the affairs of people in a given domain through provision of social amenities/services. It is a means of controlling activities driven towards achieving desirable outcomes (Hirst and Thompson, 1996). This definition stressed the fact that governance deals with any activity that is purpose oriented and the outcome of such activity must be desirable.

Nonetheless, World Bank (1998) sees governance from the perspective of exercising powers in managing the economic and social endowments towards attaining development. This captures principally, the manner of exercising power in the handling of resources for development. More so, (United Nation Development Programme-UNDP, 1997) expands the notion of governance to embrace private sectors, and civil societies; culminating in the existence of corporate governance. But within the scope of the study, governance is directed on the provision of public services by public officers. The system of politics of a nation and its functionality in relation to public administration and law, defines governance (Odu, 2017).

Notably, the concept of good governance is even more contentious than governance because, the term 'good' is relative. Meaning that what a given society describes as a good governance may not be what another society considers as 'good'. This depends on the level of attained development of the society in question among other factors. Good governance defines a given polity that describes a government, a state or a people. It entails a desired leadership and stands for government that is acceptable (Eborieme and Egbefo in Ezoni, Wuan and Jonahed, 2017).

More so, Onyeka (2006) sees good governance as using elaborately the available human and material resources for the satisfaction of the needs of the society. This simply points to the fact; there is good governance when the resources of the people are channeled to meet the needs and yearnings of the people. Using what we have to give us what we need in itself is good governance, he asserted. Those in positions of authority should therefore, talk always with the masses to identify and satisfy their needs, this is the only way of ensuring responsive government.

Development

The word development in the intellectual circle is viewed from two perspectives (Ekpe and Adokereke, 2010). This is precipitated by the argument in the domain on what development entails. Some Scholars use the word 'growth and change' interchangeably with development. Both words have different meanings from development. While growth can be an element in development, growth on its own cannot be development. However, the first perspective of development is explicitly tied to economic domain. Here, development is seen from the angle of maximization of growth in the Gross National product (GNP) through capital accumulation and industrialization (Meyer, 1989). It is measured in economic parameters for a growth in Gross National product (GNP). In the other hand, the Marxist/radical perspective considers development from realities on ground and sees the

liberalists as too abstract. The Marxist perspective sees development from the aspect of man and his wellbeing and not micro-economic variables (Okereke and Ekpe, 2010). This gears to the fact that development by this school of thought depends on the general improvement in the wellbeing and living conditions of the people in a given area or society.

Development entails therefore, that greater majority of people have access to quality education, good houses, health services, electricity and reliable means of incomes.

Coronavirus

The disease (*COVID-19*) is said to be from the family of ribonucleic (RNA) viruses. The name “Corona virus” came from the fact that its particle exhibits a characteristic of ‘corona’ (crown) of spike protein around its lipids environment. (See http://www.oje.int/scientific_expertise/specific_information_and_recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019_novel-corona_virus. Akani & Gabriel (2020). Sources have pointed scientifically that the virus commonly exists in both human and animals. It is known to be highly contagious and can be transmitted between animals and humans. This pandemic is said to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as acute respiratory syndrome. It is referred to as pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO) because of its capacity to spread widely and prevalent nature across the world.

In December 2019, there were reports of human cases of pneumonia of unknown source exiting in Wuham city, Hubai province in China. The causative agent of this deathly respiratory disease of highly contagious nature was identified by Chinese Authority to be “Corona virus” (Source as found above). It is recorded that over 8,306,956 (eight million, three hundred and sixty thousand, nine hundred and fifty-six) cases of this virus are confirmed world over, with Nigeria having 17, 526. Many have died out of the figure presented above, some have recovered and many are still undergoing treatments. The transmission is still ongoing and no cure has been scientifically discovered and proven, making the recovery from it miraculous.

Theoretical framework

This work anchored on the theoretical assumptions of structural-functional theory. This is a sociological theory which explains why the society functions the way it does by stressing the relationship between the various social institutions and structures that makes up the society. The theory posits that the society is a system with interdependent parts that work together for the stability of the whole. It assumes that all parts must work together for the proper functioning of the whole.

Structural functionalism was theorized by Herbert Spencer, August Comte, Talcott Persons, Robert Marton and Almon Powell. This theory further argues that in order to understand a political system, it is important to understand not just the structures therein, but also the respective roles of such structures in the functioning process. The interacting role of voter, legislators and administrators are key in the stability of a political system, just as father, mother, children need to play their roles to keep the family working (Osi, 2013).

It is deduced from the foregoing that, the political system like Nigeria has structures and sectors that must be effective and efficient for the nation to progress. For Nigeria as a nation to be seen working, it entails that the Roads, Health, Education, Housing, Transportation and Economy sectors are functional. The functionality of these sectors will also demand the proper functioning of the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary as institutions of governance for the betterment of all citizens. The society is said to be progressive/developed only when all the sectors are equipped to function well for the benefit of the masses or citizens. It means therefore, that there is good governance only

when government organs play their respective roles to achieve better living standard for citizens through good healthcare services, housing, power supply, transportation, education, roads and employment opportunities.

COVID-19 and the State of Infrastructures and Employment in Nigeria

Though *COVID-19* pandemic ravaged the entire world, including the developed countries, it is lack of infrastructural development and unemployment that placed Nigerians in a more helpless situation as discussed below:

COVID-19 and the State of Roads in Nigeria

Coronavirus entrance into Nigeria placed a lot of demands on government in the area of infrastructural development. This is because the capacity of countries to curb the frequency spread as it were is to have a system that is enabling for treatment and preventive measures to be effective. Accessible roads however, has prominent role in combating *COVID-19* pandemic (Punch, 2020). This is because contact-tracing is designed as a measure to discover and quarantine the infected persons. It was a difficult task for health personnel and other officials who are saddled with the responsibility because the virus was already in various parts of the country before the lockdown policy. Lamentably, it was discovered that tracing suspected persons is not constrained by distance to interior villages, but hugely by the bad state of our roads. "Most of our roads are nothing but death traps", some of the health personnel reported (Punch, 2020). It is reported that many officials could not take their assignment of contact-tracing to the end because of breakdown of official vehicles as a result of bad roads. Many assigned *COVID-19* response cars had series of accidents for same reasons and therefore, recorded minimal success in this regard (Okereke & Ekpe, 2010). The huge amount budgeted yearly for constructing and repairing of roads in this country is very deceitful. Roads are evidently seen not to be motorable everywhere, there is neglect of by those in both of Residual and concurrent constitutional role to fix roads in Nigeria. The Federal, State and Local Governments have failed in the provision of accessible roads for the citizens of Nigeria. Lack of accessible roads for successful contact-tracing accounts for hike in the spread and subsequent high mysterious death rate recorded in many interior parts of the country.

Unarguably, bad road is a major challenge in combating *COVID-19* in Nigeria by making contact-tracing unsuccessful in most cases. The disappointment is that roads could not be constructed urgently to meet the *COVID-19* demands of the time. Roads are not to be provided in emergency circumstances but something to be done in good season that is favorable for construction. The state of our roads is still pitiable; even as little efforts are now made after the terrible experience during the corona virus pandemic.

COVID-19 and the State of Health Sector in Nigeria

Health is the first sector that comes to mind when a pandemic of this kind threatens anywhere and at any level. Health sector no doubt, has been given attention globally. For instance, Africa Union countries pledged their support to improving this sector and encouraged donor countries to step up their support in this respect in April, 2001. Regrettably, only one African country met this target of 15 percent of their annual budget to improve health sector (WEF, 2020). Irrespective of the huge sum of money allocated to health sector in Nigeria, our health sector remains one of the poorest globally. For instance, ₦257, 543 billion representing 5.8 percent of 2015 budget was allocated to health, 340:456 billion representing 3.39 percent of 2018 budget and 365.77 billion representing 4.1 percent of 2019 budget was allocated to health sector (Budget Office, 2020). Surprisingly, the huge

amount of money as seen above has not still improve on our health sector as medical tourism continues with the country losing 81 billion yearly (Punch, 2020). Our politicians patronize the health sectors abroad other than that of Nigeria. The health sector of Nigeria is so poor that even the State Housing Clinic in presidential villa is not equipped. This was at some point in 2017 confirmed when Aisha Buhari (The first lady of this country) could not have x-ray services at the clinic as a result of lack of machines and other required equipment. This is the situation in many Health care centres in Nigeria where some even lack paracetamol (Premium times, 2017).

More so, the entrance of *COVID-19* into Nigeria exposed further the devastating nature of our health sector. Evidently speaking, ventilators, testing centres, isolation centres and testing kits were grossly inadequate. It is even more embarrassing that no ventilator was found in Aso Rock Clinic which made the clinic incapacitated to handle the complications of late Chief of staff to President Buhari, Mallam Aba Kyari who later died of the *COVID-19* pandemic. Healthcare facilities across the country were found unequipped and unfit to manage victims of *COVID-19*. The poor state of healthcare services accounts for the increasing number of confirmed death cases in Nigeria by the day. Worryingly, less than 100,000 Nigerians are tested due to lack of testing kits, thereby making the pandemic to keep ravaging the country.

COVID-19 and the State of Housing Facilities in Nigeria

Housing is one the basic necessities of life everywhere in the world. Governments of other nations gives serious attention to housing policies to ensure the comfort of their citizens. This is near zero in Nigeria, as citizens' salaries are even deducted through National Housing Fund (NHF) but are rarely provided with accommodations required to be occupied by them as public servants. Again, Nigeria is among the countries with poor housing policies.

Consequently, *COVID-19* pandemic requires sound housing framework as applied in other infrastructures. Unfortunately, Nigeria has poor housing culture where more than the expected number of people sleep in a room depending on their economic strength. Many Nigerians live in slums where a small room carries over 12 people. This is very visible in place like Ajegunle in Lagos and others (Punch, 2020). This made the transmission of the virus very alarming as one infected person risks the lives of the other large number of people in the same room (FAD.FM. 93:1 CAL, 2020).

Hospital personnel who were suspected to be infected in Calabar and other areas had large family members living with them, since most of them were bread-winners, there family members never abandoned them in isolation but rather gave them the required care, even in close touch against *COVID-19* preventive measures (*COVID-19* report, 2020). Both government and private workers are in the same situation.

The state of Power Supply and *COVID-19* Pandemic in Nigeria

Power supply has been a very serious challenge in Nigeria and was most needed during the pandemic. Following the lockdown policy by the Federal and State Governments, there came emerging challenges occasioned by increased need for electricity. People at home needed their electronics and devices on for comfort, and necessarily to follow trending events. This was not possible as power failure was seen to be consistent to the detriment of all. Many schools introduced online and television education delivery services, but was largely hampered by power failure, because technological devices are not efficient and effective without power supply (Osi, 2020). More so, movement of goods and services from one place to another became limited during lockdown, and

many went into e-marketing (Online marketing), but success was impeded by lack of availability of power when mostly needed.

Few Nigerians have functional generators to run their houses/businesses and few who have are always confronted with cost of fueling them. Power was, and remains a major setback in the course of combating *COVID-19* as health sector is also affected by constant power failure culminating in epileptic healthcare services (The Cable, 2020).

The State of Education and *COVID-19* Pandemic in Nigeria

Education is very key in the pursuit of development in every economy. It is no news that skills and potentials are better developed in schools. Schools are known to be veritable tools in increasing children abilities to become useful (United Nations International Children Emergency Fund-UNICEF, 2020). Even a relatively short time in school has a longer impact in the life of the children; a short point of missed school may have consequences for skills growth in future (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization-UNESCO, 2020).

Consequently, the interruption by *COVID-19* in school activities cannot be estimated in terms of effect, especially psychologically. Closure of schools have precipitated a gradual decay of inbuilt abilities in school children and may not likely be noticed precisely (UNESCO, 2020). Notably, there were no technological infrastructures in our schools for e-learning, and as such, the attempt to introduce learning online without physical contact became a failed venture. Many countries have long introduced e-learning even before the outbreak of *COVID-19* and such countries witnessed low negative impact of *COVID-19* on education.

The outbreak of *COVID-19* therefore, exposed the level of educational backwardness of our country; reflected in the low technological advancement through e-learning which is the order in many countries of the world. Moreso, classrooms, studying desks, running water and other amenities were considered very inadequate in both nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria (The Cable, 2020).

***COVID-19* and State of Transportation in Nigeria**

It is very worrisome in Nigeria, as our transportation system has not seen the light of international practices. Most Civil servants and private workers do not have buses to take them to work from designated areas. Many rely on public buses owned by private individuals who do it for profit maximization. As such, people became more vulnerable to coronavirus as private taxi drivers were not ready to reduce the number of persons to be carried in adherence to social distancing as part of the preventive measures (Punch, 2020). It was revealed that more than 60 percent of both public and staff of private organizations do not have personal cars to use to work, but rely on public buses. Four adults are seen squeezed in one taxi with their children and two persons in the front seat originally designed for one person and the driver. Regulations from government have failed to ensure adequate spacing of passengers and as such pointing to high risks of *COVID-19* spread.

***COVID-19* and State of Employment in Nigeria**

During *COVID-19*, it was discovered that many people became jobless and more than 67 percent of Nigerians depend on private sectors as source of survival. The season of lockdown brought untold hardship evidenced in hunger, frustration, stealing etc. Many people could not feed as their sources of livelihood were folded, many fell sick and some even died. Few who were able to withstand this situation are few politicians who have embezzled from government coffers and Civil Servants who

were still paid even while at home (Sheng, 2020). This discloses that there is high level of unemployment in Nigeria and many depend on daily hustles for survival, as such are greatly affected by *COVID-19* (The Guardian, 2020).

Remarkably, poor governance is felt in all ramifications, especially in the area of unemployment for the youths. This dissatisfaction with governance behavior built up to grievances and degenerated to the #ENDSARS protest. The insensitivity of government made this to metamorphose into social malady where government and private properties were vandalized and looted. Disappointedly, food was hoarded by heartless politicians in warehouses in different parts of the country, while the jobless youths were dying in hunger and penury. The forceful removal of food items by youths and subsequent setting of such warehouses ablaze was burned out of hardship from unemployment. This has put the leadership and image of Nigeria in a negative thought by the entire world.

Conclusion

Indisputably, Nigeria is endowed with rich human and material resources to move up in the director of development, but crippled by the lack of transformational leadership and strong institutions to harness and channel these resources for the benefit of majority of Nigerians. It is very ignominious of our leaders, that after 60 years of independent, we are still far from what characterizes good governance and development. No excuse should be given for the worrisome infrastructural deficit as exposed by the *COVID-19* pandemic in Nigeria. The conclusion is that our leaders have failed and something needs to be done urgently to save the nation from total collapse, hence justification for the #ENDSARS protest by the youths after *COVID-19*.

Notably, availability of good roads, hospitals, schools, power supply, housing, transportation system and employment opportunities will not only benefit the masses but also the politicians (leaders) as *COVID-19* has revealed. We have no other country than Nigeria, reflected in the fact that no elite was given opportunity for medical tourism during the global lockdown and most of them died as a result, since there were no well-equipped hospitals in the country to manage their health challenges. This is the time our leaders should learn their lessons and take development of critical infrastructures to be of benefit to all and not just to the masses as wrongly perceived in the past. The challenges experienced during the global lockdown precipitated by *COVID-19* affected all Nigerians irrespective of class, hence a call for development of Nigeria as it is for the benefit of all and should be taken seriously by the leaders henceforth.

Recommendations

It is very excruciating and transcendental that trillions of naira budgeted yearly to equip the various sectors of the Nigerian economy has been revealed fruitless by *COVID-19* pandemic. The lamentable infrastructural decay reflected in poor health services, poor housing, poor road networks, poor education and lack of employment has caused some Nigerians at the helm of affairs to pay with their lives, while some recently faced wanton destruction of properties by the dissatisfied youths. Therefore, government should assume responsibility of constructing good roads that will enhance efficient movement of goods and services in all parts of the country. Contact-tracing would have been very effective and efficient if there were good road network in the country so as to curb the spread of *COVID-19* virus.

Health sector should be given adequate attention and improved on appropriately to meet international best health practices. Some prominent Nigerians who died as victims of *COVID-19* was due to the inability of our health sector to manage their conditions appropriately as a result of lack of needed

standard facilities. Many other Nigerians are facing the same situation as the pandemic is yet to come to an end. Good healthcare facilities will help us in future health challenges that may arise.

More so, our educational sector should be upgraded to embrace electronic learning (E-learning). Many schools in the country suffered setbacks because of the lockdown policy. Students were not able to have their sessions completed because there were no existing facilities to make the e-learning effective. Many communities in Nigeria have no access to internet services and many without televisions and laptops. If government ensures that service providers avail internet services across the country, then the negative impact we had during the *COVID-19* will be averted in the future.

Again, our housing policy should improve to reduce the number of people in a household. The wide spread of the *COVID-19* was enabled by our poor housing conditions where one infected person is capable of risking more than 10 people who live in the same roof with the victim. Efforts of government in this direction will curb the excesses of vulnerability in future.

Very noticeable is the lack of power supply that pose challenges in many respects of life. Electronic learning failed during *COVID-19* largely because of lack of electricity. Laptops, televisions, iPads and other electronic devices cannot function without adequate power supply. Many parts of the country are yet to see electric poles not to mention cables. Efforts should be made in this direction to give Nigerians the needed comfort when the need arises.

Our transportation system should be improved as government has refused to provide town service buses for Civil servants and private individuals. Spread was high because *COVID-19* infected persons were still squeezed among 4-5 persons in one row of public cabs. Buses can be provided by government with appropriate space-regulations.

Finally, lack of employment opportunities built from grievances to violence where youths could not bear the blow of hardship and went into protest. In the course of this, food items were discovered in government warehouses pointing to bad governance. The situation aggregated to looting and wanton destruction of public and private properties. Jobs should be dimensionally provided for youths, so as to avoid hardship that would build to destructive tensions and social maladies trying moments like *COVID-19* pandemic.

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