

## **Governance During and after Covid-19 in Nigeria- A Critical Exposition on Governance**

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### ***Abstract***

*Governance in the era of COVID-19 in Nigeria was characterized by several changes in the social, economic and cultural disposition of individuals and groups, thus propelling the need to examine certain parameters like healthcare delivery, education advancement and e-commerce development in a state of normality, during a pandemic and after a pandemic. The methodology adopted was a documentary review of concepts based on existing literature for critical and contextual analysis. Social change theory was used to explain the phenomenon of study. The findings revealed that the health sector has suffered neglect over the years resulting in the inability of governments to swiftly prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the number of deaths recorded. It further revealed that the education section, especially tertiary education is in a state of decay as students could not continue with their academic activities during the pandemic due to lack of provision and sustainability of e-learning in our ivory towers. It also revealed that e-commerce is yet to be embraced by government which could have ameliorated the suffering of the citizens during the pandemic in relation to accessing goods and services especially food and other consumables. The study recommended constant upgrade and equipping of existing healthcare facilities and building new ones nationwide with improved wages for health workers by governments, also that government should commence the provision, installation and sustenance of e-learning facilities in the Education sector, especially in all tertiary institutions in the country; and that government should engage in e-commerce development for fast, safe and efficient delivery of goods and services to citizens.*

**Keywords:** *Governance, COVID-19, Healthcare delivery, Education advancement, e-commerce development*

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### **Introduction**

The past decades have been characterized with recurrent and sustained debate on the Nigerian state of governance. Like other developing countries in Africa and globally, the Nigerian case seems to attract much discourse due to its oil producing status which has been a major source of revenue generation to the country over the years.

Governance can be defined as the action or manner of governing a state or organization. The state capacity to deal with the contemporary complexities of governance is deemed responsive especially in a democratic administration. According to (Smith, 2003, p.108) Cited in Yagboyaju, 2000, the nature of the state, the public institutions through which legitimate power is exercised and enforced is inevitable to the study of politics and administration. Bayart (2009) examines the African socio-political and economic realities and attributes state's failure to certain variables like historical heritage, weak political leadership, corruption, ethnic conflicts and wars.

According to Akinola (2008), the “Petroleum rich” Nigerian state, confronted by socio-political instability, high degree of corruption, mass hostility to the “Public” and poor macroeconomic management, continue to display the attributes of state in crisis. World Bank (1997) posits that successive governments in Nigeria, like in many African states, lack the political will to initiate, nurture and sustain policy or structured transformation or to formulate and implement sound economic reform to reposition the state for greatness.

There has been a transformation process in governance in the third world countries and Africa and Nigerian specifically witnessed a successful transformation from military regimes to a democratized administration. The democratic process as expected is embroidered with various social change including health, education, infrastructures, commerce and security. These changes therefore are translated to changes in institutions of governances and their ability to deliver on the dividends of democracy.

The strengthening of democratic institutions should be specifically for capacity building so that leaders and public office holders can promote democratic good governance and sustainable development; but these seem not to be the case in Nigeria after twenty-one (21) years of democratic system. It is indeed pathetic to still witness the decay in the health, education, infrastructure, power, housing, security, water sectors in the country and general development and its sustenance. This is as a result of failed leadership which leads to failed governance which also results in a failed state.

A state that experience inadequacies in its institutions of governance can hardly be responsive in an atmosphere of new societal challenges that requires government action to tackle such challenges effectively and timely. The novel coronavirus (*COVID-19*) is one of such challenges that have ravaged the socio-economic status of the world’s best economies and deaths of individuals globally. The *COVID-19* pandemic has not only exposed the inadequacies in the Nigerian healthcare sector but also in education, commerce and social welfare.

### **Conceptual Discourse**

The classical and contemporary assertions of government identify the existence of a social, economic and political structures and processes where societies values are authoritatively determined and allocated “political system” (Easton 1953). For effectiveness and efficiency in governance, there must be a synergy between the organs of government and checks and balances to avoid abuse of power and office by political and public office holders in the course of discharging their duties.

Governance in a democratic system involves the executive, legislature and judiciary discharging their responsibilities of formulating policies, implementing and evaluating such policies and also rendering interpretations for reconciliation in cases of conflicts among the organs of governments.

United National Development Programme (UNDP (2007) posits that governance is a formal and informed arrangements that determine how public decisions are made and how public actions are executed to maintain the constitutional values of the state. Nzongola-Ntalaja (2003) dissects governance into three major types; first, political or public governance where the authority is the state, government or public sector involving the process by which a society organizes and manages its affairs through constituted authority. Second, economic governance where the authority is mostly driven by the private sector and relates to the policies, processes and institutional functionality that are vital to service delivery. Third, Social governance where authority resides with the civil society, citizens and non-profit organizations upholding a system of values and beliefs that are cogent for social behaviors and public decisions to be taken. Though there is need for a synergy between the three sectors of governance, the public sector in which

the state or government exercises authority over the affairs of its citizens is undoubtedly the most important as it determines the level of development in the country.

The world has witnessed series of pandemics over the past decades and the coronavirus (*COVID-19*) pandemic ravaged world economies and its negative impact on the social, economic, political, cultural and religious lives of individuals and groups still lingers. The novel *COVID-19* virus is yet to have a cure, and as such, the world is at risk of a second wave of the virus.

Coronavirus belongs to the coronaviridae family in the Nidovirales order. Corona represents crown-like spikes on the outer surface of the virus; thus the name coronavirus (Shereen et al, 2020). The virus was first diagnosed in Wuhan, China where it was believed to have originated. The virus comes with symptoms such as high fever, cough, catarrh and difficulty in breathing. These symptoms are closely related to the SARS-COV virus symptoms. From the inception of the outbreak in 2019 till date, the total cases reported are 59.1 million, total recovered is 40.8 million while total deaths are 1.3 million worldwide, out of this, reported cases in Nigeria is 66.383, recovered is 62.076 and deaths 1,167.

Africa and Nigeria have not been spared by the virus and these are the times where governance is truly measured in terms of fulfilling the natural laws of social contract to its citizens. For the sake of this paper, governance during and after *COVID-19* in Nigeria will be assessed using three major public sectors in Nigeria; these are healthcare delivery, education advancement and e-commerce development.

### **Healthcare Delivery and *COVID-19***

There has been an increased discourse on healthcare services and quality by the public, government and healthcare professionals in the country. Health is usually perceived to be wealth and thus the need for government to be proactive in the provision of healthcare services to the citizenry. Since 1999 when Nigeria witnessed democratic transition, successive administrations have been struggling with policy formulation and implementation in the health sector with little or no impact in terms of improved quality healthcare services. Till date, there are still issues of strike action by health workers, either Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) members or Joint Health Staff Union (JOHESU) members over poor funding of health institutions and poor wages of staff. These inadequacies constantly plague the effectiveness and efficiency of healthcare service delivery across the country.

The case has not been different during the period of *COVID-19* in the country. The government was caught in a state of unpreparedness since most healthcare facilities were ill-equipped and there were no plans for new ones. These and the lack of manpower in the healthcare profession to tackle the pandemic became limitations towards containing the virus. Those that volunteered to render services to the infected persons were owed hazard allowances by the government which further worsen the situation during the pandemic.

The Nigerian health sector has not experienced any major change after the *COVID-19* pandemic, for instance, there are no plans by the Federal Government or States to convert the emergency testing and isolation centres to permanent facilities with adequate equipment and personnel for future occurrences. There are still lingering issues of unresolved agreements between the government and the National Medical Association (NMA) and Joint Health Staff Union (JOHESU). One would have expected that the pandemic should cause government to be more responsive and sensitive to the provisions of quality healthcare services to the masses; it is hoped that the pandemic serves as a catalyst for quality and accessible healthcare system in Nigeria.

### **Education Advancement and COVID-19**

Education is an indispensable tool for human and societal growth and this awareness has created a state of consciousness in leaders that engage in responsive governance to the educational needs of their citizens. In developed countries, education occupies first to third position on list of priorities of governments on yearly budget. Some developing countries in Asia and even Africa invest extensively in education especially science and technology, humanities and infrastructural development of tertiary institutions, research institutes and general funding of the educational sector.

Sadly, in Nigeria the reverse is the case with the existing wroth in governance. The educational sector in Nigeria, especially tertiary education has witnessed a wholesome neglect in the past twenty-one (21) years of democracy in the country. Infrastructural decay, poor funding and strikes are recurrent maladies in tertiary institutions in Nigeria due to governance.

The establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1932 marked the beginning of higher education in Nigeria. Few years later was the emergence of University College Ibadan, now University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and the University of Lagos all being the first generation Universities in Nigeria, strategically located regionally across the country. One would expect that sixty (60) years after independence and twenty-one (21) years of successive democratic administrations in Nigeria, the education sector would have experienced total transformation that is competitive with their global counterparts in the areas of infrastructures, funding, information communication technology and sustainability. Presently social, economic, political, cultural and religious practices of individuals and groups are driven by Information Communication Technology for effectiveness and efficiency.

The continuous neglect of tertiary education by government and indeed Education sector was exposed during the *COVID-19* pandemic and the inadequacies that were supposed to be addressed before the pandemic. For instance, no First Generation University in Nigeria is equipped and efficient for e-learning in the country for students to have continued in their educational activities from any location in Nigeria or globally in an event of a pandemic which could lead to lockdown and curfew placed by the state.

Students had lost academic sessions due to the pandemic, only if the tertiary institution were ICT enabled for studies online; the negative impact of the pandemic would have been averted. Hedges and Hayward (2004), views e-learning as an innovative approach for delivering electronically mediated, well-designed, learner-centered and interactive learning environments to anyone at any time and location. Obviously, the trend of education advancement in references to e-learning in Nigeria after the *COVID-19* pandemic is yet to witness any significant change from its previous state.

### **E-Commerce Development and COVID-19**

Commerce involves the exchange of goods and services between producers and consumers in a given society. The government has the responsibility of providing an enabling environment for businesses to thrive but also to ensure the accessibility of goods and services to citizens at all times. It is therefore vital for e-commerce development to be given a boost by the government. E-commerce is the transacting of business activities using Information Communication Technology (ICT) facilities. In developed countries, e-commerce is a source of revenue generation to government while ensuring fast and efficient service delivery to citizens. Though individuals and groups have recently embrace e-commerce in Nigeria, the government through the Ministry of commerce and industry is yet to develop and harness the unlimited potentials of this innovation.

E-commerce enhances the delivery of goods and services to consumers at their door steps without the stress of going to the market physically, rather placing order for goods and making payments online for such goods. In a country of about two hundred million (200,000,000) people, less than half of this population engage in online shopping despite being an easy way to access goods and services. If the government had engaged in the development of e-commerce platforms for citizens to access goods and services at any given time to enhance their living due to the sense of insecurity that most citizens feel about online transactions especially with regards to their account details and ATM cards during such transactions.

The non-compliance of government to global best practices in e-commerce resulted in government inability to provide the least physiological need which is food to its citizens who became vulnerable due to the imposition of lockdowns/curfews by federal and state governments for several months during the *COVID-19* pandemic. This brought untold hardship to some families across the country and events of domestic violence were recorded as parents who depended on daily pay could no longer work for their family's daily meal.

Economies worldwide are struggling to recover from unpredicted shrinking of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Nigeria is not an exception, thus the status quo that existed before and during the pandemic in e-commerce remains. The government is yet to realize the relevance of this innovation in an event of any future occurrence of pandemic and the need to fast track the development of e-commerce in the country.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Change Theory**

This theory postulated by Sociologist Auguste Comte (1820) means the existing differences in anything observed over a period of time. It can be described as observable differences in social patterns and social interactions. Anderson and Parker (1964) posits that social change involves the alteration in the structure or functioning of social forms or processes. The *COVID-19* pandemic is one variable that has brought significant social change globally. The pandemic has not only claim lives of millions of individuals across the world but has also ravaged economies of both developed and developing countries, and people have to observe social distancing, use of hand sanitizers, hand washing and wearing of face masks and no more handshakes, causing changes in existing social patterns. The best economies are struggling to recover from the *COVID-19* experience even when they have practiced ideal governance with functional and rewarding social, economic, political, cultural and religious systems.

In Nigeria, the inadequacies in our governance processes were exposed in the areas of healthcare delivery, education advancement, e-commerce and other vital areas that enhance the livelihood of citizens and democratic dividends. Therefore, this paper calls for a change in the traditional sectors to a standard healthcare delivery, digitalized education sector and technology based commerce industry in Nigeria. If only we had responsive governance in Nigeria, the scourge of the pandemic would have been curtailed significantly.

### **Discussion of findings**

In the course of carrying out this study, it was revealed that healthcare delivery which is a key variable that can be used to measure good governance has suffered neglect over the years, thus the inability of the federal and state governments to successfully prevent the spread of the *COVID-19* virus and the resultant deaths. If the existing healthcare facilities were properly equipped and new ones established with standard testing centres across the country, the spread and deaths toll would have reduced reasonably. The emolument of health workers is not encouraging to motivate them to risk their lives and that of their family members while in the

line of duty. There were people who felt they were infected by the virus but could not access testing centres to know their status, thereby leading to unavoidable deaths.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the education sector became static due to the lockdowns and curfew imposed by the government. This static mood of academic activities would have been avoided if there were provisions for e-learning in schools especially the tertiary institutions. This has resulted in the loss of academic session for the students. The none engagement of students in academic activities during the pandemic period led most of them to engage in social vices, while some students started part time jobs and small businesses after the ease of lockdown.

Finally, it was revealed that access to goods and services by citizens were difficult due to the lockdowns and curfews imposed, these projects the need for e-commerce development and promotion by the government to avert future occurrences to ensure availability and accessibility of goods and services to citizens on time. The non-development and promotion of e-commerce by the government brought limitations in the accessibility of goods and services by citizens especially during the *COVID-19* pandemic.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is concluded that in Nigeria, the true essence of governance is yet to be released by successive governments and the present one. Government is about the people and not a pocket of few individuals who find themselves in the corridors of power, who rather than serve the people, engage in accumulation of wealth for themselves and their family with continuous oppression and subjugation of the people. The deprivation of the citizens of ideal or good governance has resulted in the consistent neglect of life enhancement infrastructures, programmes and basic physiological needs. The healthcare system has suffered neglect over time, the education sector is in a state of total decay and e-commerce development is yet to be considered as a source of revenue generation for the country and its convenience for the delivery of goods and services to the citizens.

It is therefore imperative for political leaders and public office holders to know that governance is about service delivery to the citizens and democratic dividends, so that the experiences of the *COVID-19* pandemic should serve as lessons learnt for good governance.

### **Recommendations**

1. Government should engage in constant upgrade and equipping of existing healthcare facilities across the country and building of new ones at intervals for efficiency, also improving the wages of health workers.
2. Government needs to invest massively in e-learning in the education sector especially in tertiary institutions so that academic activities can still be in progress even in an event of a pandemic.
3. Government should engage in e-commerce development for fast and safe delivery of goods and services to the citizens to avert the unpleasant experiences witnessed during the *COVID-19* pandemic.

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