

Volume 1 No.1
ISSN: 2814 0516

Maiden
Edition
2021



WAUU JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

A Bi-annual; Multi-disciplinary Journal Publication
of The West African Union University
Institute Press, Cotonou, Republic of Benin

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Abstract

The efforts made by the federal and state governments to curtail the spread of coronavirus in Nigeria such as lockdown, indoor policy and the ban on inter-state movement created a lot of hardship to businesses and households. These challenges necessitated the distribution of palliatives to businesses and households that were most affected by the pandemic. The dissatisfaction and lamentations that followed the distribution of palliatives by government agencies and ministry made the study of palliative distribution in the country very imperative. The study was designed to examine the template used by government agencies to distribute Covid-19 palliatives and the politics of deciding the beneficiaries. The study used qualitative descriptive approach and relied on secondary data to draw findings. The study observed that distribution of palliatives was politicised and done with a view to maintaining the strength of the party in power. The study concludes that the palliative distribution was poorly handled in the country. It therefore recommends that actions and policies made by those in power should be regulated by means of institutionalised code of conduct to ensure that all sections of the country experience a sense of inclusiveness.

Keywords: Covid-19, Pandemic, Politics, Palliatives and Distribution.

Introduction

Globalization has removed the barriers threatening the free flow of trade, capital and people from one part of the world to another. In the same manner, it has also increase the chances of diseases moving across national boundaries as it is the case with Covid-19. The novel Corona virus disease (Covid-19) has become an important health threat ravaging the entire globe with numerous health and economic implications.

The year 2020 was welcomed by a deadly viral outbreak called Corona virus disease 2019 (Covid-19), previously known as 2019-novel corona virus (2019-nCoV). Covid-19 was first reported in Wuhan, the capital and major business city of Hubei Province in China (Ohia, Bakarey & Ahmad, 2020). The global transmission of the disease is one of the dysfunctions of globalization, which offers both opportunities and catastrophes (Amzat, Aminu, Kolo, Akinyele, Ogundairo & Danjibo, 2020). Within a short space of time, the virus spread so fast that it met the epidemiological criteria

of a pandemic such as infecting more than 100,000 people in at least 100 countries (Callaway (2020) as cited in Ohia, Bakarey & Ahmad (2020)).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) on March 11, 2020 declared Covid-19 a public health pandemic. Symptoms exhibited by Covid-19 disease range from fever, cough, respiratory symptoms, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2020). Fatal outcomes can include lower respiratory tract illnesses such as Pneumonia and Bronchitis, or acute respiratory distress syndrome (SARS) in severe disease (Ohia, Bakarey & Ahmad, 2020). These complications are more pronounced in patients with underlying health conditions such as Cardiopulmonary disease, Immuno-compromised individuals, infants and the elderly (Centre for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) 2020).

In Nigeria, the first outbreak of Covid-19 occurred on 27th February, 2020 through an Italian business man who visited the country

(Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), 2020). The declaration of this index case spurred the Nigeria government, with the support of relevant health agencies to embark on measures targeted at curtailing the spread of the disease (Omaka-Amari *et al*, 2020). These measures include self-isolation and lock down of entire cities and States, awareness creation on improve personal hygiene practices such as frequent washing of hands with soap and water or use of alcohol based hand sanitizer, wearing of face mask, maintaining social and physical distance at least one (1) metre away in public gathering etc.

Lockdown of cities, states as well as the entire country as advocated by World Health Organization (WHO) as the best approach to controlling or curtailing the spread of Covid-19 brought untold hardship to government, businesses and individual household especially in countries with low level of technology and infrastructural facilities to support electronic commerce. The depletion in the prices of crude oil in the international market due to global lockdown negatively impacted the country's gross domestic product (GDP) thereby increasing our economic woes. With the stay indoor policy introduced in the country, many businesses were shut down and workers laid off in the formal sectors of the economy. While in the informal sectors where large percentage of the people are engaged in, was in serious distress owing to the lock down policy implemented.

The untold hardship brought upon the people as a result of the lock down policy of government aimed at curtailing the spread of the virus led to mass outcry for measures to cushion the effects of the hardship. At this point the government announced series of palliatives as a way of cushioning the effect of the lockdown, the Federal Government of Nigeria rolled out the following palliative measures for targeted groups. Three months interest holidays for those holding Tradermoni, market-moni, and farmers-moni loans issued by the Bank of Industry, Bank of Agriculture, and the Nigeria Export and Import Bank. President Muhammadu Buhari also announced an expansion of the initial number of households that would benefit from the direct distribution of food and cash from 2.6

million household to 3.6 million household, whom he described as most vulnerable in the society (Eranga, 2020).

The dissatisfaction exhibited by Nigerians on the distribution of government palliatives as captured by Business Day (Newspaper) of 19th April, 2020 which reported thus: "It is lamentation and bitter wailing in Lagos and other parts of the country as Nigerians complain that the stimulus packages announced by the Federal government to cushion the effects of the lockdown imposed on some states and the Federal Capital Territory to contain the further spread of the Corona virus (Covid-19) Pandemic have not been sincerely deployed". From this background the paper aimed at identifying the various palliatives measures of the Federal Government, criteria of distribution, actual beneficiaries of the palliatives, and finally to make recommendations based on the findings of the paper.

2.0 Clarification of Concepts

Key concepts that constitute the topic of the paper such as Covid-19, pandemic, politics and palliative will be clarified.

2.1 Covid-19

Covid-19 is a new genre of Corona viruses that causes illness such as common cold, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) (WHO, 2020 as cited in Awofeso and Irabor, 2020). It is an infectious disease that spread mainly through droplet of spittle or release from the nose when infected person coughs or sneezes (Nigeria centre for Disease Control (NCDC) 2020). Empirical investigations reveal that Corona virus diseases such as SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV was contracted from animal in China, 2002 and Saudi Arabia, 2012 respectively (Awofeso and Irabor, 2020). However, Covid-19 is a novel virus because it has not been previously identified in human system. The common symptoms of Covid-19 include fever, cough, dyspnea and tiredness (NCDC, 2020). The suffix '19' as used after Covid-19 correlates to the year of discovery of the virus in 2019 (Ohia, Bakarey and Tauseef, 2020).

2.2 Pandemic

The term pandemic is a generic adjective that describes a wide spread epidemic that affects people in many countries and continents. It is a term used to substantiate the rapid rate of contagious disease ranging from endemic and epidemic (Muthu 2005; Qiu, Rutherford & Mao, 2017 as cited in Awofeso and Irabor, 2020). An endemic disease is an infectious disease in

a community at a particular time (Qiu, Rutherford, & Mao, 2017 as cited in Awofeso & Irabor 2020). The contagious effect and rate of spread of Covid-19 globally justify the pandemic nature of the virus. See (Table 1) below for number of countries, confirmed cases and number of death as at October 6th, 2020). The WHO confirms Covid-19 as a pandemic on 11th March, 2020.

Table 1: Statistics on Covid-19 by World Health Organization (WHO)

No of Countries	No of confirms cases	No of deaths
235	35,274,993	1,038,534

Source: WHO website Corona virus update on the (6th October, 2020 01:00 GMT + 1)

2.3 Politics

The word politics' is gotten from a Greek word 'politika' meaning the affairs of the cities. Politics is the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations between individuals such as the distribution of resources or status. It may be used positively in the context of a political solution which is compromising and non-violent, or descriptively as the art or science of government" but also often carries as negative connotation (Hague and Harrop, 2013). In the view of Harold Lasswell, Politics is who gets what, when and how (Lasswell, 1963). On the other hand, David Easton sees politics as the authoritative allocation of values for a society (Easton, 1981).

2.4 Palliatives

The word palliative according to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary 7th Edition is an action, a decision that is designed to make a difficult situation seem better without actually solving the cause of the problems. In this paper, it refers to the sum of government activities, actions and decisions taken to reduce the harsh conditions caused by the outbreak of Covid-19 disease.

3.0 Methodology

The study made use of secondary data, utilizing relevant literature on Covid-19 pandemic, palliatives distribution in Nigeria were purposefully selected for content analysis. Official documents and statistics from key ministries and agencies handling palliatives distribution such as Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development; National Social Safety-Nets

Coordinating Office (NASSCO), National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). Data collected from these secondary sources are presented using tables and charts. Although, data on certain aspects of palliatives like loans and their beneficiaries is still not made public at the time of writing this paper. Richard C. Snyder (1962) theory of decision making is used for discussion of findings. and also to drive the study's point home.

4.0 Theoretical Framework

The researcher adopted the decision-making theory. Decision-making theory in political science was championed by scholars like Herbert Simon, James G. March, Richard C. Snyder and a host others. Decision-making is usually defined as a process or sequence of activities involving stages of problem recognition, search for information, definition of alternatives, and the selection by an actor(s) of one from two or more alternatives consistent with the ranked preferences identified in the first three stages that will maximize or satisfy the actor's goal. This paper adopts Richard C. Snyder's (1962) contribution or position on decision-making theory because it perfectly explain the attitude of Nigerian leaders when making public policy decisions. He see decision-making as a process analysis that is capable of dealing with dynamic situations. To him a process analysis may be of two kinds dealing with interaction and decision making. Snyder begins with this simple notion that all political action is undertaken by concrete human beings and that if we want to comprehend the dynamics of this action, we should be prepared to view the world not from our point of view but from the perspective of

the person(s) responsible for taking the decision. His main concern is with two things: who made the key decisions that gave rise to a particular action and how to assess the intellectual and interactive processes by following which the decision-makers reached their decision. Thus, he offered a model showing three main variables: internal setting, external setting and decision-making process.

The theory advocates that the background and perspective of the actor with the power to make the final key political decision should be the basis on which policies, programmes and key decisions of the government will be interpreted. In this case, President Muhammadu Buhari who constitutionally has the final say on government policies and programme will be the one whose previous antecedents and perspectives will serve as basis for interpreting current government policies and programmes in respect of Covid-19 palliative measures. Given President Muhammadu Buhari's pronouncement to give 95% to where his votes came from and 5% to areas where he was not voted. In addition to his consistent pattern of appointments and resource allocation throughout his five years of administration will help us to interpret the politics involved in Covid-19 palliative distribution.

Richard C. Snyder (1962:72) theory of decision-making also picked interest in assessing the interactive processes taken by decision makers in arriving at a particular decision. In this case, the decision making process was not open to the masses, experts or views of opposition party members but it was only restricted to appointees of the president. This scenario prevented alternative lines of thought that would have given room for rational decision making process. From the above, the decision making process is geared to maintain the hold of power and consolidate areas of stronghold.

5.0 Impact of Covid-19 on Businesses and Households

The stay at home directive by the government to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 brought untold hardship on businesses and households. Nigeria has a very high percentage of total labour force in informal sector of the economy that depend on daily interaction to carryout their business, the lock down meant reduction in household income, loss of business income and drop in quality of life of those who work in the informal sector. In Nigeria, the informal economy is significant because it provides employment opportunities for the teeming unemployed citizens and the medium to meet the needs of poor consumers through cheaper and accessible goods and services (Ogbuabor & Malaolu 2013 as cited in Awofeso & Irabor, 2020). Many businesses were shut down as a result of the lockdown and the stay at home policy. Even businesses providing essential services were compelled to operate below their average operation capacity thereby leading to massive retrenchment of workers, non payment of workers salaries and the need for government support for the survival of both businesses and households.

6.0 Government Responses on Covid-19 Impact

The growing number of confirmed cases across the country as can be seen in Table 2 below compelled many states of the federation to adopt, different measures of curtailing the spread of the virus in their domain. There was ban on inter-state movement as many of the states announced lock down or curfew at certain hours of the day to restrict movement. The federal government announced a lockdown on 30th March, 2020 in Lagos and Ogun States as well as Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) and later Kano State, which were considered epic centre of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020). This was followed by similar directive by some state governments culminating into closure of schools, religious houses, social and sport gathering (Awofeso and Irabor, 2020).

Table 2: State Distribution of Covid-19 Cases

States	Number of Cases Laboratory Confirmed	Number of Cases on Admission	Number of Cases Discharged	Number of Deaths
Lagos	19,651	4,196	15,250	205
FCT	5,746	684	4,984	78
Plateau	3,497	749	2,715	33
Oyo	3,268	798	2,430	40
Edo	2,631	29	2,495	107
Rivers	2,517	125	2,334	59
Kaduna	2,444	57	2,347	40
Ogun	1,883	122	1,733	28
Delta	1,802	16	1,737	49
Kano	1,738	14	1,670	54
Ondo	1,635	54	1,545	36
Enugu	1,289	102	1,166	21
Kwara	1,044	37	982	25
Ebonyi	1,042	4	1,008	30
Abia	898	18	872	8
Katsina	884	19	841	24
Gombe	883	111	747	25
Osun	847	25	805	17
Borno	745	4	705	36
Bauchi	699	8	677	14
Imo	576	29	535	12
Benue	481	58	413	10
Nasarawa	452	114	325	13
Bayelsa	401	7	373	21
Jigawa	325	6	308	11
Ekiti	322	11	305	6
Akwa Ibom	293	7	278	8
Niger	259	15	232	12
Adamawa	248	23	208	17
Anambra	238	0	219	19
Sokoto	162	1	144	17
Taraba	105	10	89	6
Kebbi	93	1	84	8
Cross River	87	4	74	9
Zamfara	79	1	73	5
Yobe	76	6	62	8
Kogi	5	0	3	2
	59,345	7,464	50,768	1,113

Source: NCDC Website Situation Update 5th October, 2020 at 11:20am

Distribution of food items and conditional cash transfer to the poor and vulnerable citizens to cushion the effect of void-19 was carried out in some states of the federation. The number of household that benefited from the conditional cash transfer was estimated to cover 3.6 million citizens as can be seen in table 3 below. These are citizens who depend on daily wage and persons with disabilities, whose

means of livelihood has been negatively affected by covid-19 lockdown and movement restriction (NJoku, Ebiri, Ohimide, Musa, & Agbohiaje, 2020 as cited by Awofeso & Irabor, 2020). The government also continue the Home Grown school feeding programme aimed at addressing malnutrition and ensuring provision of food ration to school children

(Onwuzoo, 2020 as cited by Awofeso and Irabor, 2020).

Fiscal stimulus packages like loans and reduction of interest rate, tax cut and tax holidays are implemented to mitigate the effect of covid-19 pandemic on household, small and medium scale enterprises. Soft loans were given to individuals and household through the platform provided by Central Bank of Nigeria in Partnership with some micro finance banks. The government implemented tax holidays for small businesses against company income tax. While tax rate for medium businesses were revised downward from 30% to 20% (Nnanna, 2020). The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) also approved uniform exchange rate system for inter-bank market to ease pressure of foreign exchange rate (Onyekwena and Ekeruche, 2020 as cited by Awofeso and Irabor, 2020). Other stimulus package are pronounced by the Federal Government such as assisting private organization to pay three (3) months of their staff salaries and also the establishment of 50 billion naira intervention fund to improve health facilities in the country.

7.0 Pattern of Covid-19 Palliative Distribution

There was no proper template designed to facilitate the proper distribution of palliative

measures to those who were hit hard by covid-19 lockdown. The Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 adopted a social register that was questionable for distributing palliative items. The Social Register prepared by the National Social Safety-Net Coordinating Office (NASSCO) which existed years before the advent of Covid-19 became the sacred document used for determining those who will benefit from covid-19 packages particularly the conditional cash transfer. The National Social Register was initially prepared to cover poor and vulnerable people in 34 States and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as can be seen in table three below but Ogun and Ebonyi States were not captured (Onah, Ugwuibe & Onah, 2020).

The National Social Register was prepared in President Muhammadu Buhari first tenure when the administration introduced the policy of conditional cash transfer to the poor and vulnerable citizens of the country. The criteria of selecting beneficiaries were questionable especially when some states were not captured, while the distribution of beneficiaries was skewed in favour of states where President Muhammadu Buhari was massively voted and where the All Progressive Congress (APC) was in control of the state government.

Table 3:Beneficiaries of Conditional Cash Transfer in States on Party Lines

S/No	APC States in 2015	Number of Household	Number of Beneficiaries
1	Adamawa	52,471	196,401
2	Bauchi	47,712	275,007
3	Benue	141,983	628,463
4	Borno	7,130	33,728
5	Edo (Buhari lost in Edo but it was an APC state in 2015)	43,260	144,676
6	FCT	41,485	156,260
7	Gombe (Buhari won massively though PDP)	31,982	156,553
8	Jigawa	168,542	656,757
9	Kaduna	90,794	358,486
10	Kano	151,315	763,919
11	Katsina	176,724	807,200
12	Kebbi	219,102	932,460
13	Kogi	96,646	447,40
14	Kwara	96,335	417,358
15	Lagos	14,434	52,319
16	Nasarawa	149,693	542,774

17	Niger	63,957	329,593
18	Osun	64,931	218,872
19	Oyo	28,382	99,569
20	Plateau	156,058	585,289
21	Sokoto	3,347	18,435
22	Yobe	31,665	163,711
23	Zamfara	291,629	1,341,153
24	Imo (Though Buhari lost in Imo but it is an APC State in 2015)	24,426	82,216
			9,408,669
	Non-APC states in 2015	Number of Households	Number of Beneficiaries
1	Abia	14,246	152,605
2	Akwa Ibom	52,471	405,822
3	Anambra	43,146	121,539
4	Bayelsa	51,727	184,876
5	Cross River	27,604	148,486
6	Delta	30,338	80,644
7	Ekiti	15,119	51,865
8	Enugu	6,886	27,013
9	Ondo	25,312	89,519
10	Rivers	73,601	267,812
11	Taraba	39,646	106,691
			1,636,868

Source: The National Social Safety-Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO), 2020. Modified by the Author

It is expected that, the criteria for the distribution of Covid-19 palliative should have been based on the need and where the Corona virus pandemic hit hardest. Using these parameters, states with the highest numbers of confirmed cases and where lockdown was introduced should benefit more than states where the numbers of confirmed cases are low. In addition, people living in urban areas and engaged in informal sectors of the economy should have been given priority because they were the one who were hit hardest by the lock down. Many in formal sector were not paid salaries and some were out rightly disengaged by their employers. But unfortunately the Presidential Tax Force setup by President Muhammadu Buhari and comprised only his appointees and members of All Progressive Congress (APC) decided to adopt a social register prepared to favour sympathizers of the party (APC) prepared some years before the advent of Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to this insensitivity to

the plight of Nigerians by adopting a National Social Register that was not updated to cover those working both in formal and informal sectors whose means of livelihood was badly affected in urban centres and States hit hardest by the Covid-19.

The Federal Government rather introduced a dangerous dimension to Covid-19 distribution by using it as a means of political party consolidation. The Guardian newspaper vividly captured this scenario in some states like Lagos, Ekiti, and Plateau where palliatives were handed over to political chieftains to share to party members (*The Guardian*, 2020). The distribution of Covid-19 Palliatives was even faulted by notable groups in the country. Onah, Uguibe & Onah (2020) captured the reaction of notable groups on the distribution of palliative package in a tabular form as can be seen below. The common concern raised by the groups is the politicization, lopsided nature, and lack of transparency in the distribution of palliatives in the country.

Table 4: Reactions of Groups over the Distribution of Conditional Cash Transfer

S/No	Groups	Comments over the distribution of CCT as a palliatives (Summary)	Recommendation and stand
1	Governor's Forum	The distribution of the palliatives is selective	Involve the Governors fully in the process and reform the System
2	House of Representative caucus	The Distribution of the palliatives is selective and partial. It does not cover enough grounds	Ensure even and wide-spread distribution.
3	Senate President	The distribution is unfair. Distributing N20,000 to the poor is not the best at this time	Reform and change the strategy for more poor Nigerians to benefit. It should be based on legislation
4	Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)	The distribution lacks transparency. It lacks coverage	Government should make the process more transparent and extend the palliatives to all the needy
5	Centre for Transparency Advocacy (CTA)	The palliative distribution appear to be politicized	Federal and State governments should not politicize the distribution of palliatives meant for all
6	Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability project (SERAP)	The data base upon which the palliatives are predicated are unreliable. The distribution lacks transparency	Provide more details for Nigerians to see.
7	Ohaneze Ndigbo Youth (Igbo Socio cultural association)	It is a skewed program that gives the impression that Igbos are second class citizens or not wanted in Nigeria.	President should ensure that no part of Nigeria is left out of the CCT palliative
8	The indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB)	There is lopsidedness in government on-going disbursement of the palliative to the exclusion of the South East geopolitical zone.	The distribution of the palliative is a humiliation of the Igbo and this is capable of creating more crisis.

Source: Onah, Uguibe & Onah (2020) modified by the author

8.0 Conclusion

The handling of palliatives distribution in Nigeria has further exposed a weak system of crisis management in terms of policy making as well as the dearth of comprehensive data for effective planning and proper management of resources. Public policies in Nigeria in most cases are designed to score a political point rather than promote development. The theory of decision making as propounded by Richard C. Snyder stresses that policies, decisions and actions of the government are best explained and understood when you look at it using the lens and perspective of the decision makers or those who have the final say on government policies and programmes (Snyder, 1962 as cited in Johari, 2011). In the context of this paper, the decision makers are politicians and their major concern or interest is to consolidate their hold on power. This best explains the politicization of Covid-19 palliatives distribution which is consciously done to favour states where APC All Progressive Congress (APC) is in control and to maintain the political stronghold of the President in view of future elections. The implication of such actions include: the increasing divisiveness in the country along various fault lines, violent partisanship before and during elections, and finally, slow the pace of development in every area of life as a people.

9.0 Recommendations

Public policies aimed at distributing scarce resources should be done based on accurate data devoid of politicization. Data used for distribution of palliatives in Nigeria was not

timely and were collected long before the incidence of Covid-19 came up. In view of this obvious shortcoming of this National Social Register which was used for distributing palliatives, it became imperative for Federal Government to come up with a template designed deliberately to capture those are mostly hit by the lockdown and other measures taken by the government to curtail the spread of Covid-19. The absence of comprehensive and periodic update of data in Nigeria is a bane to effective planning and programming which is necessary for sustainable development. All government agencies must be structured and empowered to maintain an up-to-date data concerning their areas of jurisdiction. This will enhance smooth coordination of government activities aimed at improving the condition of the disadvantaged people through intervention. This will also reduce wastage and poor implementation of government interventions.

Politicization of policies and programmes of government should be discouraged through the institutionalization of certain code of conducts for public officials that they must uphold at all times. Sanctions should be imposed on public officials that go against these codes when they are found wanting. The Code of Conduct Bureau should be empowered by law to examine regularly government policies and programmes with a view to ensuring that they are designed and implemented in such a manner that the inclusiveness of all sections is guaranteed.

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