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The Covid-19 and the Nigerian pandemic: A review on Covid-19 in the inequitable world of Nigerians

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country of more than 200 million citizens. Amongst these, 40% live below the poverty line and earn less than \$400 dollars annually. The laws in the country does not also affect all f her citizens equally. The large gap in equity in the nation has been seen to have a direct impact on the recent public health emergency, the covid-19 pandemic that occurred. With a lot of policies put in place to cub the spread and enhance control of the virus, the country had a lot of gaps and windows for her elite citizens. This did not just cause an introduction of the virus into the country; it also played a pivotal role in the pattern of spread in the country. The paper also went further to reflect the need for government office holders to have strong unbiased knowledge of medical emergencies (Epidemics and pandemics) and their implications. The public health implications of a fall in civilization and what impacts it can have in the prognosis of public health affairs in a nation. It creates a direct linkage between the impact of government policies, civil violence and most importantly Inequity.

Keywords: inequity, covid-19, Nigeria, pandemic, government

Introduction

How inequitable is my world?

The Macmillan English dictionary defined the word “*inequitable*” as unfair, because people are not being treated equally ^[1]. It may however, be more practically defined as a nation where the government officials are paid a little less than \$65,000 monthly and \$1 million dollar annually while more than 40% (83 million people) of the population in that same nation live below the poverty line, earning less than \$400 annually ^[2-3]. As you can see, things do not get more inequitable than the everyday life of the most populated black nation in the most populated black continent in the world (figure 1) ^[4].

The aim of this article is to tell the inequitable story of the covid-19 in Nigeria.

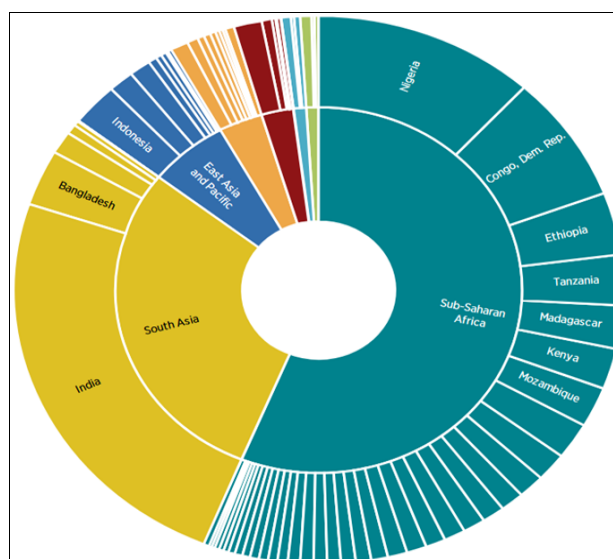


Fig 1: Shows the 10 countries with the poorest people in the world. While sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest, Nigeria has the largest poverty burden within it ^[5]

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Prologue

As the rumors of an epidemic in china was later confirmed by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission on the 31st of December, 2019 and later by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the 4th of January, 2020; the fear of a possible pandemic steadily became a reality [6]. To Africans, the pandemic became more of a home felt reality when the first African case was confirmed on 14th of February in Egypt [7]. To Nigerians, the air went still when the first case was reported on the 27th of February, 2020 (figure 2) [8]. All these posed three major questions to the nation with the 5th lowest life expectancy and 16th highest mortality in the world [9-10];

- a) How ready were we for a pandemic?
- b) What impact was this about to have on our livelihood?
- c) How merciful were the “politicians” willing to be on the average citizens?

NB: the third question was the most important of them all.



Fig 2: The first confirmed case by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) was on the 27th of February and published on the 28th of February by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). *From the NCDC twitter page.*

By end of February, we had a confirmed case and no death.

But, was Nigeria really prepared?

Looking back now at the famous declaration made on the 9th of February by the Minister of Health of Nigeria that, “we were ready to contain the corona virus, if it broke out in Nigeria”; or even the almost laughable declaration by a Pastor of the Church of Possibility in Lagos state, “that he could heal coronavirus patients and will go to china to destroy it!” [11-12] one will be forced to have reinforced confidence in the Nigerian government and gods. Although, these two statements suggested we were ready to handle and not ready to prevent the entry of the virus. The silver lining though was that; we were at least ready for something. However, Fingers became crossed when the virus finally strolled into our borders and the Minister of health began to use big terminologies such as “multi-sectoral preparedness group; activated national emergency operations; strengthened rapid measures and firm control implementations” [13]. Yet, Nigerians saw nothing being done nor a decline in the rising case prevalence.

Well, we said we still had God. However, this faith was soon forced to dwindle when the case prevalence and mortality burden by 31st of March in Nigeria was most prevalent in Lagos state, where that Pastor and Church of Possibility were located (figure 3). They never healed even a single case.



Fig 3: The Nigerian Centre for Disease control case prevalence as at 31st of March, 2020. With 59% (82) of these cases being from Lagos. *From the NCDC twitter page.*

By the time the Nigerian President finally decided it appropriate to bless the nation with his Presidential address, he said, “Za Covik-1-9 Birus-” There we knew, he was reading a written script on a topic he had no idea about. We knew, the Nigerian government was not ready. Nigeria was not ready.

By end of March, we had 139 confirmed cases and 2 deaths.

The poems of the law vs. the chorus of the elite

There was so much abandon in the visible response by the Nigerian government in tackling the pandemic. Three major steps taken were;

1. Lock down and social distancing: In fact, there was a task-force that went around churches arresting pastors who violated it, with even some church leaders having to jump over concrete fences to escape arrest and sanction [14-16]. This effort would have been commendable if similar efforts were made on fellow Muslims at the time, or even the Burial of Muslim Government dignitaries. Such reckless abandon resulted in the public dumping of a hazmat suit by one of the undertakers at the over-crowded burial of a government official who had died from the covid-19 infection. [17-19] Need I add, until this time, all diseased corpses were cremated.

It did not stop at the obviously one-sided religious card commonly played but, also extended to the social bias. One of the biggest paradoxes was the arrest and sanction of the famous Nigerian actress Funke Akindele for holding a house party with about 20 guest for her husband’s birthday, while several recurrent political rallies, campaigns and elections for the Edo state governorship elections went on with hundreds to thousands of participants in attendance. In fact, one of the rallies was attended by a governor of another state who had just recently then ordered the demolition of 2 hotels for supposedly disobeying the Covid-19 safety orders in his state [20-22]. This, right here, was Irony not paradox.

Notwithstanding, maybe we all wished some leniency was accorded the taxi driver in Abuja who stripped butt naked, weeping and pleading for mercy as he was apprehended for carrying more than three passengers in his car. “Hunger virus”, he said, “would kill me and my family before the corona virus did”. He was sentenced [23].

By the end of April, we had 1,932 confirmed cases and 58 deaths.

2. Compulsory face masks: The armed forces were tasked with the duty of ensuring people were always on face masks. To this end, there were even establishments of mobile courts to persecute those who disobeyed this rule and that of the social distancing. The thought of becoming an ex-convict was so frightening that so many obeyed. Of course, apart from the president, who never wore a face mask? So that when he once did, it made national news. Although it was ashore another country^[24].

By the end of May, we had 10, 162 confirmed cases and 287 deaths.

1. Border closure and flight ban: This was without doubt one of the first initiatives many nations took. Although we should not be fast to judge a nation's preparedness by the speed with which it closed its international borders; we should however note that weeks after Nigeria had confirmed her first case and even a Covid related death, the borders were not yet closed. At the time, rumored reasons were that some influential politicians and their relatives were still outside the country. This was however confirmed when the President's daughter and the (late-due to Covid) Chief of staff –among others- returned to the country just before the borders were closed^[13, 19, 25]. Right there and then, in that delay, we missed a critical window to have controlled the spread.

A window that caused us five more states in addition to Lagos, by the time the borders were finally closed on the 23rd of March, 2020^[26].

Many countries enforced laws to make sure that those coming in were quarantined for a 14 days' period before being let in. Nigeria had such a law, but it was optional to the elite and high government class. This was how the son of the former Vice-President of Nigeria brought in the virus and infected others. He even graciously went to a crowded night club while being symptomatic, until he was arrested and forced into isolation and treatment. This was also how the then (now late) chief of staff to the president returned from a compound Germany-Egypt trip with the virus and generously shared it to his aides and some fellow governors he had met with before his breakdown, hospital admission and death^[19, 27].

The ban on flying obviously did not include the elite of the society, as it did not include the Governor of the central bank of Nigeria and his family on their Honey-Covid-moon trip to London^[28]. Neither did it include the First Lady, when she and her daughter went on her wedding shopping trip to Dubai. Although, they hilariously said it was a medical trip^[29].

By the end of June, we had 25, 133 confirmed cases and 573 deaths.

All these lackadaisical attitude and attribute of the Nigerian government and its elite citizens lead to rapid imported and community transmission as we went from recording a case or two a day, to recording hundreds a day^[30]. Ignorant of the fact that her impulse to look away from the misconduct of her top officials, but compelled by the need to put the rampaging virus under control; the Nigerian government was forced to make rules and impose drastic measures that made life unbearable for majority of her citizens^[31]. Realizing how unrealistic some of the measures were, the untrained and untamed armed forces were given extra mandates and authority to make sure citizens complied. There was thus a pathologic increase in Police brutality and

extra Judiciary killings^[32]. This, in time, had a bitter price to pay.

Notwithstanding, by the end of July, we had 43,151 confirmed cases and 879 deaths.

The men, the gods and those who walk on water.

The most respected entities in Nigeria are our leaders, our Gods and our Prophets. There were governors who refused the NCDC operating within their states, like Kogi state and Kano, amongst others. Hence, endangering the lives of (majorly already ignorant) citizens in their states^[33-35].

Some of our Muslim brethren clearly saw it as an unsuccessful ploy against their religion and prayer. In fact, citizens of Kano state believed that the Covid was a big joke, they organized covid-19 football leagues and the "Drink corona challenge"; where they would shake different people, wash their hands and drink the water. It all ended in tears^[34-36].

The hilarious governor of Kano state who initially waved away the Covid claims and went further to relax the safety measures in his state, came on national news crying and asking for 15 Billion Naira from the President. "That way", he said, "you will show us that you loved us"^[35, 37].

As though the Christian God had been silent until the advent of the covid-19 pandemic, there were now visions and revelations everywhere. God was speaking so much. The Pastors and Prophets were having a swell time, and their congregations, swayed minds. One prominent one preached that it was a ploy by the pope, another that he could cure the Virus and another that there was no virus, as it was a 5G network induced pathology^[38].

The ignorance and ineptitude of our political and religious leaders cost Nigerian's thousands of lives. There was even a week Kano state alone buried more than 600 bodies. There were mass burials in other northern Muslim predominant states too. Although, the Presidential Covid task force confirmed these deaths were as a result of the virus, the NCDC never added these deaths to their official records^[39].

"Nobody knows precisely how many Nigerians COVID-19 has killed- "

- John Campbell.

At the end of August, we had 59, 008 confirmed cases and 1, 013 deaths.

The straws that broke the camels back

In the health sector, the fear of cough became the beginning of wisdom. Everyone was scared. The hospitals were in no improved conditions. Health workers repeated safety gears. When asked for hazard allowance for front line workers, the very passionate Federal Minister of health said that "they did not need it, all they did was check temperatures". This caused a national event and some health workers went on strike, costing even more critical (non-Covid) lives^[40].

When they finally agreed to return, some crucial workers were paid \$10 as their monthly risk allowance. Let us ignore the fact that there was even still delay in these payments and focus on the fact that the government officials got risk allowances in millions per week!^[41]

Doctors and other health workers died for our nation, yet were never celebrated. Instead, some politicians who disobeyed the Covid directives were given nationally recognized and befitting burial salutes.

At the end of September, we had 58, 848 confirmed cases and 1, 112 deaths.

Standing the ugly test of time

Unlike the Chicken and the egg, we know that in our case the hunger came before the anger. Just like the predictions made by the Bill and Melinda Gates team, the Nigeria socioeconomic structure had almost completely crumbled under the weight of the pandemic. Or did it?

- The country went into more international debts of hundreds of millions of dollars, in the name of Covid 19. While sharing less than 10\$ or its equivalent to the lucky ordinary citizens.
- While citizens died from poor health and hunger, the country dedicated its resources to adding hazard allowance to the already fattened senators and law makers.
- While armed robbery, kidnapping and rape took a pathologic toll for the roof; the armed forces focused their brutality on the civilians in the name of keeping the covid-19 directives.
- Soon, videos and reports of the armed forces killing, stealing and kidnapping civilians for money emerged. These resulted in a national and international outcry and protest; the end SARS protest
- In-situ, ware houses of states and homes of politicians were invaded by protesters, and tons of covid-19 palliatives were discovered. This was in October.
- One of such law makers who hid away the palliatives meant for his constituents later compassionately

appealed his apology saying that, “he intended to share them on his birthday”. Another, a lady, had already gone ahead to print her face, name and Happy birthday posters on her constituent’s palliatives. They held them since March and watched as common men died of hunger. All while waiting for their birthdays. Even the birthday of Christ was not this spectacular.

- As though it were the best solution, the so sensitive Nigerian government ordered the armed forces, Counter terrorism Unit (CTU) and soldiers to forcefully arrest, torture and shoot at these protesters. One of international note is the massacre at the Lekki toll-gate, Lagos state.

At the end October, we had 62, 964 confirmed cases and 1, 325 deaths.

Conclusion

There is a gossiped paradox as to how the case prevalence are rapidly reducing now that the lock down is all over (Figure 4). This is giving more fuel to the initial suspicions that the figures were inflated. However, this can simply be explained by the fact that less people present for tests anymore. They now try home remedies and self-medications.

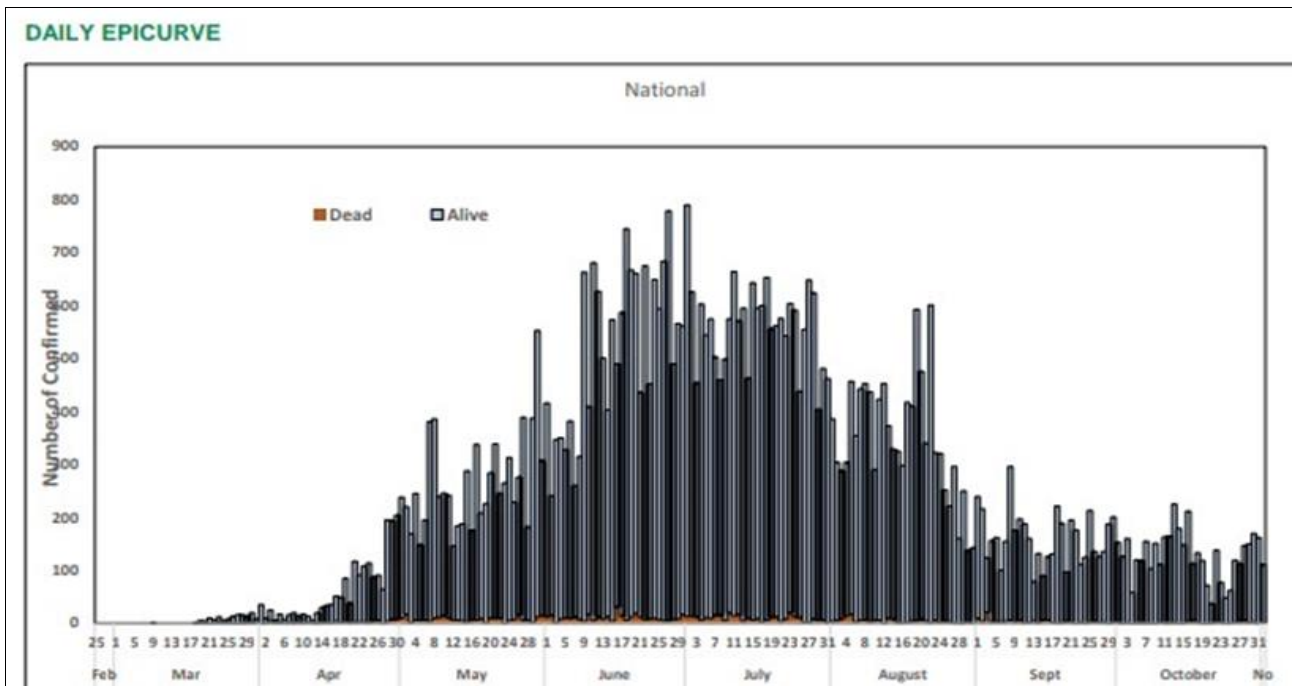


Fig 4: daily epidemic curve of confirmed cases (Wks9-Wks44) as reported per day.

One fact will forever remain, the covid-19 epidemic in Nigeria only succeeded because the Nigerian Pandemic did. It is so sad that no one will ever hold these men or parasites responsible. For fear of being called an antichrist or an apostate, our religious leaders will never be held responsible for their misguidance. We prefer to chase first the parasites we cannot see; before those we have been seeing. Spreading their viruses of Inequality and Corruption.
 “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing”
 -Edmund Burke (1729-97)

We are where we are today because, too many good men have looked away too many times while too many acts of inequity have been swept under too many rugs. Alas the year 2020 ended with 87,510 confirmed cases and 1,289 deaths. Amidst the Nigerian pandemic; It could have been worse.

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Conflict of Interest.

Authors declare no conflict of Interest

Authors Contribution

Daniel Otobo: Draft of Original Script

Ngozi Okoro: Proof reading and editing

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