THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE OF FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

Olaoye, Olutunji Adetunji
Department of General Studies
olutunjiolaoye@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng
+2348032474432

Abstract

This paper examines the Covid-19 pandemic and socio-economic life of Francophone countries. The Covid-19 pandemic is an unprecedented international health crisis that ravage the whole world. Statistically, there were more than 4.3 million confirmed cases and death rate rose to 290, 000 globally. The pandemic for the first time in world history, resulted to social distancing, travel restrictions, self isolation, loss of jobs, closure of schools and work places. The objectives of the study is to examine the effects of the pandemic on the socio-economic life of some Francophone West African countries: Benin, Mali, Senegal, Niger. The researcher concludes on the challenges fostering the spread of Covid-19 pandemic and the way forward.

Keywords: Covid-19, Socio-economic, Francophone countries, Challenges, Way Forward.

Introduction

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) was detected in Mainland China in December 2019, and which affected every continent. Through this highly contagious disease, statistically over a million cases were diagnosed in over 200 countries globally. The cause of the outbreak of this virus is a new virus known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARSCOV-2). On February 2, 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) officially named the disease caused by the novel coronavirus as Coronavirus Disease 2019 (covid-19).

In early March 2020, the covid-19 pandemic hit the West African, especially Francophone West African Countries: Benin, Mali, Guinea, Niger and a host of others. Different but stringent measures were taken initially on the arrival of the covid-19 pandemic West African sub-regions. Each country effects the closure of its border, this resulted to a serious setback of cross border trading and human trafficking, some stranded travelers could not return to their country as a result of the closure of the borders. These closure were effected to curtail fast spreading of Coronavirus on one hand, and recognition of World Health Organization (WHO) guide lines on the pandemic on the other.

In some countries, it was generally believed that new cases of coronavirus and the figures attached to them were politically motivated. For instance, in Niger republic, some believed that the pandemic is being used for financial reasons. IFRC, (2020) politicians are manipulating data to present more positive cases in the hope of winning funding from donors.

Suffice it to say that new cases and mortality rates of the pandemic were a bit astronomical during the month of April in Benin, Mali, Niger and some other Francophone countries. By the end of June2020, these countries witness a kind of decline both in new cases and mortality rates. This new development resulted to ease of lockdown in countries aforementioned and drastic reduction in the practice of social distance.

Methodology

The research analyses quantitative and qualitative empirical data from certain sources on Covid-19 data platform.

Study Area

The study area involves certain Francophone West African countries namely: Benin, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Burkina Faso.

Quantitative analyses

The data analyses here comprises of cumulative number of daily cases of covid-19, the death rate and tests conducted. The period of study is from 28 of February the date of the first case to 30 June.

Qualitative Analyses

The data analyses here involves reports on situations of covid-19 in different countries, ministries, scientific articles, reports from health organizations such as World Health Organizations (WHO) press release and other social media.

Results

The first case of covid-19 was 28 of February in West Africa sub-region, in place like Burkina-Fasse, Niger and Mali. The number of cases registered in countries like Senegal, guinea and Cote D'ivoire rose to 5000.

In the month of April, some of these francophone countries were registering many cases, but there was a decline in number of cases, the month of June recorded zero cases in Burkina-Fasso and Niger, while Guinea and Senegal still recorded some cases.

Discussion

Following the discovery of the first official case of coronavirus (Covid-19) in Benin Republic which was dated as far back as 14 march, 2020, Niger 22 march, some drastic measures were taken by the government. In Senegal for the national epidemic management committee was effected on the 6th of January, 2020. Similar measures were taken in some of the Francophone countries, a fourteen day confinement for travelers who were coming from countries where the virus was already detected. A serious ban was placed on gatherings of more than 1000 people and suspensions of official missions to countries where the pandemic was affected. In country like Burkina Faso, there were bans on gatherings and cancellation of national events and National Culture Week, a biennial event.

In each of these countries, a rapid implementation of measures was taken in order to have control over travelers. Temperature checks was made available at the airports. It is very important to note that the first case of coronavirus in each of these countries was imported by nationals or foreigners from Europe. There was quick response to the first case discovered in these territories through rapid measures. In Benin republic for instance, about three days after discovery of the first case, there was mandatory implementation of quarantine of people who entered into the country by air, restrictions was placed on issuance of entry visas and closure of land borders was immediately effected. Stringent measures were also taken by Guinea and Senegal, where curfew was introduced, followed by declaration of a state of emergency. Lockdown strategy was not fully implemented in these countries, but border closure was strictly adhere to. These measures were extended to April and May 2020, when and where more drastic measures were reinforced. The use of face mask became absolutely necessary, reduction of people on public transport and close of markets, and business centres were living examples of the extended measures. There were serious tensions between the governments and religious representatives in West Africa Francophone countries to effect closure by the former on places of worship in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. In Senegal the ban on religious activities was lifted as a result of subtle protests from Islamic clerics who believed in efficacy of prayers to put an end to any challenge or obstacles that stood in the way of man. Contrastively, while some catholic representatives effect the closure of churches, mosques were open to have collective prayer in order to eradicate the disease. In Guinea, government effected the temporary closure of the mosque, while markets remained opened.

In each of these Francophone countries, sites or structures were purposely dedicated to treatment of cases of corona virus at no cost. In most cases, tests and treatments were mainly carried out in state capitals in Burkina Fasso, in Mali, about three public hospitals in Bouake (Abidjan), the state Capital in Burkina Fasso, in Mali, about three public hospitals were set aside for case management. In Senegal, hostels were used for management of cases. Theis and Mbour were reserved for management of mild cases. On the 10th of April 2020, a programme called "**One Malian**, **one mask"** was launched with 20 million washable masks imported into the country. At the beginning of April 2020 in Guinea, government included the services of trainees to work in the health centres. Wearing of face-masks in public and para-public services was made compulsory in the capital city of Niger, Niamey especially in urban transport, super markets, shops, market places and public squares, similar measures were taken in Burkina Fasso which include serious bans on travels from regions to regions except for conveyance of food items.

There were protest due to the strict measures taken by government in certain quarters. There were violent demonstrations in Niamey, Niger republic to lift banks on closure of places of worship. In Cote'd'Iviore , there was destruction of the screening centre which was under construction in early April, 2020. In Guinea, there was sporadic shooting by gendarmes at hoodlums who capitalized on the opportunity to collect bribes from people who were not wearing mask, which resulted to deaths of ten people. These demonstrations in some cases resulted to relaxation of some measures such as cancellation of the closure of markets. The months of May and June witnessed ease of lockdowns through reopening of cultural centres in Senegal 11 May, 2020 and reopening of school in Senegal from examination classes that was due to open on June 2nd 2020. On the 29th of June, the Senegalese president who was on isolation announced the lifting of state of emergency and curfew, places for leisure activities remained closed. Apart from religious remained closed. Apart from religions reasons, political and socio economic also accounted for protest in each of these countries.

In these Francophone countries, suffice it to say that the socio-economic consequences were responsible for easing of measure put in place. Economic measures were taken by governments of each countries to support some individuals and families. There was postponement in the payment of electricity bills, reduction of fuel price in Guinea exemption of electricity and water bills from value added tax in Mali, removal of subsidy in tourist industry in Senegal, distribution of food items to the poor and needy which cuts across Senegal, Mali and Coted'Ivoire.

Review of Literature

Covid-19 and Socio-economic Impacts

The Covid-19 pandemic has significant effects on the socio-economic life of man. These effects cut across the whole world with varying length of degree.

With Coronavirus diseases, many developing countries and especially in the African continent are going to face long-term consequences, World Bank (2020). No doubt, the effects of the pandemic are much more pronounced in areas of economic, social, health of people of the developing countries than those of the developed ones. The World Bank (2020) describe poverty as hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to see a doctor, not having access to school and not knowing how to read, not having a job, fearing the future, and living one day at a time. These effects symbolize a state of hopelessness, where and when the immediate future cannot be determined. According to Anyanwu and Anyanwu (2017), about 82% of the poor population live in rural areas earning mainly from agriculture, rural poverty is notably greater in areas with high agricultural opportunities. The level of poverty expressed here is no doubt attached to lack of manpower and skill to tap available resources, the presence of a disease like the Covid-19 will impoverish the people further. Loss of jobs across the world has serious devastating effects on the lives of human. As part of the measures to curb spreading of the disease, all governments across the continents introduce lockdown measures and social distance which place limitation on the movement of the people. Dingel and Neiman (2020) analyze the feasibility of jobs that can be done from home. They find that 37 percent of jobs can be feasibly performed from home which is related to the extent that the jobs involve face-to-face interaction.

Globally, border closures are on the rise. In the US, all foreign nationals from China, Iran and certain EU countries are barred from entering, coronavirus travel bans (2020). These banks place embargo on international trade bearing serious economic effects on the people.

Most countries of the world are confronted with inflation as a result of food shortage. The beginning of the pandemic sent fear, panic and anxiety to people's mind, there was mad rush of people who stockpile food items so as to survive at the pronouncement of the lockdown. This stockpiling of food items and essential commodities resulted to scarcity, since productions by the various industries were completely grounded.

Apart from loss of jobs during the complete and partial lockdowns, quite a large number of people suffered adverse financial threat. Those who work in private sector did not receive their salaries any longer. In this category are people in teaching profession, people who work in hotels and small scale industries, artisans and people who work on a daily basis to earn their living.

Socially, the Covid-19 pandemic bared serious effects on all levels of the education system, which cuts across pre-school to tertiary institutions. Government of different countries introduced various policies to acquire some knowledge of education. In some cases, e-learning type of education was introduced to prevent total loss of academic activities and boredom in various homes.

UNESCO (2020) estimates that close to 900 million learners have been affected by the closure of educational institutions. This closure was effected to prevent the fast spreading of the virus within institutions and prevent carriage to vulnerable individuals, suffice it to say that these closures had serious socio-economic implications on the government, private sectors and the people.

The Covid-19 pandemic had serious socio-economic effects on sporting activities. Maria et al (2020) maintain covid-19 is having a substantial impact on sporting schedules as some of the world's largest sporting events come to view in 2020. Across the globe, most sporting activities especially football faced serious financial loss. As a result of the pandemic, stadia were completely closed, football players collected their wages from home in spite of great loss incurred by various football clubs across the globe.

Lockdown and social distancing measures to prevent spread of covid-19 have heightened fears of increasing levels of domestic violence, which includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse Maria et al (2020). Much time are spent as such, the scenario provides opportunity for people to establish and engage in inappropriate relationship.

Covid-19: France Aid to Her Territories

The role played by France during the covid-19 pandemic cannot be estimated. France mobilized resources of E1.2 billion to combat the spread of the pandemic in Africa. France increased its contribution and collaborated with multilateral bodies such as United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) in the fight against the pandemic. France was behind the international initiative to address the impact of Covid-19 in Africa launched on the 15th of April, 2020 which bared on African healthcare systems, African research, humanitarian and economic support.

In line with President Macron's appeal, French companies that were set up in Africa, also assisted in the fight against the pandemic through funding and cancellation of debts.

Covid-19 and Its Challenges.

The poor people have low capacity in applying social distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Acciari (2020) points out the difficulty for the poor in acquiring essential personal protection products such as gloves, masks and alcohol gel, let alone applying social distancing. The level of poverty in some Francophone West Africa Countries

such as Benin, Niger, Mali, Burkina Fasso, showcase the difficulty of the proper practice of the social distancing. The poor and the needy who reside in both rural and urban areas have difficulty in paying and settling house expenditures.

During the lockdown, demands in the markets is short of expectation, this measure prevent the farmers from going to their farm. Consequently, those who obtain agricultural loans are confronted with how to pay back.

The e-learning education program only benefit the children of the rich. Most of the poor people cannot afford android phones and data to access the internet.

Most jobs that are available on the internet are not feasible to the poor, except those that required face- to-face interaction which are not practicable during the lockdown

Daily wage earners are much more accepted by the pandemic, during the lockdown, they sometimes run out of food items and some other household needs, these pose serious challenges to them since nobody comes to their aid.

Covid-19: Way Forward

Till date, there has not been any curative measures to combat the great monster covid-19 that has ravaged the whole world. The pandemic resulted to socio-economic loss across the globe, so many lives were lost. The pandemic has not discriminated between the rich and the poor the white and the black so to say that all lives matter in spite of economic and social backgrounds of people across the globe.

The evil effects of the virus taught mankind a great lesson, it preaches the "espirit de corps" the spirit of togetherness, people should come together to fight common enemy.

Governments across the globe should embark on research in various fields of study towards discovering the vaccine and medication that can completely cure the virus.

Conclusions

The objective of this paper is to examine the covid-19 pandemic and socio-economic life of Francophone countries. The pandemic has had serious negative effects on the lives of the people both the rich and the poor incure loss vis-à-vis lives, jobs, materials wealth, psychological trauma, fear and anxiety. There are negatives effects on production networks, significant reduction on agricultural activities, tourism, trade and industry. The covid-19 pandemic results to closure of schools, business centres, restriction of movements, total and partial lockdowns which include physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

Recommendations

Though the covid-19 pandemic cuts across the globe in which the developed and the developing nations, the poor and the rich suffer the negative and adverse effects. Suffice it to state categorically that the poor nations and the poor people suffer most. In an international crisis of this magnitude, the governments of all developed and developing nations should design some measures to allay the fear of common people against future occurrences.

All lives matter, the under-privileged should be well catered for in terms of quality education, provision of jobs, health facilities. Immediate relief measures should be put in place for those who are seriously affected by the covid-19 pandemic and who may likely perceive the future as being bleak.

References

Anyanwu, J. & Anyanwu, J. (2018). Accounting for the Rising Value Added in Services Compared to that in Agriculture in African Economics, *Asian Journal of Economic Modelling*, Vol 6, No. 4.

Coronavirus Travel Bans (2020). Countries Impose Travel Restrictions, *usatoday*, (cited 2020, March 20).

Coronavirus, (2020). Sport-by-sport look at the Global Impact of Covid-19, the Independence, (Internet) cited march, 2020.

Dingel, J.I. & Neiman, B. (2010). How many Jobs can be done at Home? (Working Paper No. 2 Series). *National Bureau of Economic Research*.

IFRC, (2020) covid-19: Rapport Sur Les Retours d' information la Communaute #7. Dakar IFRC, 2020. Report No: 7,13 mar, 2020.

Maria, N., et al, (2020). The Socio-economic Implications of the Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid-19). *A Review of International Journal of Surgery 78*, 185 – 193, publisher Elsevier Ltd.

UNESCO, (2020). *Educational Disruption and Response*. (Internet, cited march 2020).

World Bank (2018). *Poverty and Shared Prosperity Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle*. https:www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity.