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## STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA IN THE ERA OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### ABSTRACT

Building a resilient community is very pertinent since no community is immune from disaster both natural and man-made. The novel Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) pandemic is one of such disaster that has affected most countries of the world, including Nigeria. This study highlighted the significant impact of this pandemic on the economic, health and educational systems of the country. The study further discussed several strategies which could be applied to build resilient communities in Nigeria even in the face of Covid-19. These strategies will empower the citizens of the country to recover from the harsh effects of the pandemic and continue contributing to sustainable development in the country. This study also proposed that to recover from the negative effects of Covid-19, small and medium scale business development should be encouraged through tax incentives, favourable loans and grants among others; furthermore, capacity building and skill development of youths should be prioritized to strengthen communities during and beyond the pandemic.

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### INTRODUCTION

Globally, Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) has posed unprecedented challenges to various communities in the health, economic, education, social and many other sectors. COVID-19 is a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (WHO, 2020a). It has brought about severe setback in public health and led to heavy socio-economic crises in the affected countries (Ajisegiri, Odusanya & Joshi, 2020). As at October 20, 2020, over 215 countries have reported a covid-19 case with a total of forty million, nine hundred and twenty-one thousand, six hundred and sixty (40,921, 660) confirmed cases and one million, one hundred and twenty-six thousand, nine hundred and thirty (1,126,930) deaths globally (Worldometer, 2020). The initial confusion on how to treat the virus and lack of clinical vaccine for combating it led various countries especially Nigeria to adopt non-pharmaceutical measures for curbing the spread of the virus such as the total or partial lockdown of social, educational, political and economic activities.

This is in line with World Health Organization (WHO, 200 & NCDC, 2020) guidelines put in place to check the spread of the virus that causes coronavirus in various parts of the world. The guidelines include:

- Use of face- masks: Use of non-medical face masks/people covering their face with transparent face masks/covering their nose and mouth when leaving their houses.
- Physical distancing by maintaining at least 2 metres distance from one other.
- Regular hand washing with soap under running water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use of alcohol-based sanitizer if water is not readily available
- Frequent cleaning of surface with water and soap or disinfectants
- Use of temperature scanner or check for screening or checking of people's temperature at entry points of public places
- Adequate provision of waste management facilities

- People are advised to cover mouth and nose properly with a tissue paper when coughing or sneezing, and the used tissue paper to be disposed of properly immediately after use.
- People are advised to cough or sneeze into their elbow if a tissue paper is not readily available.
- Use of a large hall or an open space for proper ventilation and adequate circulation of air
- Avoid close contact with any person showing symptoms of respiratory illness.
- People to stay at home when they feel unwell until they recover.
- If the illness persists and the symptoms of observed, the concerned person is advised to contact Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) through given hotlines for prompt attention.
- Avoid large gathering of more than 20 people and gatherings where physical distancing protocol is not put in place.
- Health personnel to be available where possible to detect fever on entry and to respond to emergency.
- Disinfect the place of large gatherings after use.
- People who are returning from outside the country are advised to go into self-quarantine for 14 days in case they are carrying the virus that causes coronavirus (COVID - 19).
- Avoid mingling with people as much as possible.
- Avoid congregating with people as much as possible

Even with the clear evidence that the lockdown can slow down the spread of COVID-19, the measure also had some short and long-term negative impacts on the society. For instance, the lockdown of markets, shops, schools, business premises and event centres prevented many daily income earners from making income to take care of their responsibilities. The inter-state lockdown made it extremely difficult for farmers to get seedlings for their farm or to take out farm produce for sale in the market especially as the lockdown happened during the farming season. More so, teachers in private schools could not work and was not paid while commercial transporters also endured long period of no work or income (Teachout & Zipfel, 2020). The lockdown can also have serious negative mental health impact on people with poor socio-economic background and the homeless citizens (Aragona, Barbato, Cavani, Costanzo, Mirisola, 2020). Many households found it difficult to feed and procure other basic needs.

These negative effects of COVID-19 lockdown and other emergency measures put in place to curb the spread of the virus also posed some challenges to community development in the economic, educational and political sectors. The lockdown on sports affected people's health as many people's healthy living depended on daily exercise they do to keep fit. Some government workers like university lecturers were not paid salaries and no palliatives were given by the government. All these challenges prompted this study which examined the effects of COVID-19 on Nigeria communities and proposed strategies that can be used to strengthen community resilience in the era of COVID-19.

**Coronavirus (COVID-19):** COVID-19 is an acute respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019. COVID-19 is an acronym for

Corona Virus Disease of 2019 which is a highly infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (WHO, 2020). Findings reveal that COVID-19 is transmitted through close person-to-person contact involving respiratory droplets from talking, coughing or sneezing (WHO, 2020 and NCDC, 2020). It could also be contracted by touching infected surfaces and then touching the nose, mouth, or eyes with the same hands unwashed (NCDC, 2020). COVID-19 challenge started on 12th December 2019 when an unknown acute pneumonia caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) struck Wuhan, China. On January, 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) described Covid-19 disease as Public Health Emergency of International Concern, while the disease was finally declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Balkhair, 2020).

Though COVID-19 attacks both young and old people, evidences reveal that the risk is higher among the older ones and people with underlying health challenges like diabetes, hypertension, asthma and other bronchial or respiratory infections. COVID-19 mostly attacks the respiratory system of its victims and causes them to experience, mild, moderate or severe respiratory illness especially among older ones or people with underlying health challenges or conditions (WHO, 2020). This implies that some victims of COVID-19 experience clear symptoms such as cough, sneezing, loss of the sense of taste, loss of the sense of smell, fever and shortness of breath; however, some other victims are mere carriers of the virus, displaying none of those identified symptoms throughout the incubation period of 1 to 14 days (Sauer, 2020). More so, when COVID-19 attacks older people or people with underlying health conditions, their health condition break down to the extent that they experience septic shock, acute kidney injury which may eventually lead to death due to multiple organ failure (Ren *et al.*, 2020). COVID-19 is a highly contagious or infectious disease which attacks respiratory system and could be contracted through contact with droplets of an infected person or contact with infected surfaces. COVID-19 is diagnosed through a laboratory test.

**Resilient Communities:** A community refers to a group of people living together within a geographical area and share some common attributes and goals which bring them closer to each other. A community is a geographic unit; that is, a group of people living in the same area, such as a village, a town or an urban neighborhood and sharing a particular interest and conditions of life (Farida & Okaka, 2014). This implies that for individual members to be grouped as a community, there should be interaction among them; a sense of belonging; a subjective feeling of value and respect which based on mutual relationships as a result of shared experiences, beliefs, or characteristics (Mahar, Cobigo, & Stuart, 2013). The definitions above show that a community thrives more on healthy relationship of its members. However, in the situation of disaster or pandemic such as COVID-19, the resilience of the community becomes an important factor for sustaining development in the community. When a community is resilient, they recover quickly from damages caused by disaster and continue marching towards sustainable development. Community resilience is the sustained ability of community members to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations (Abir, Cunningham & Zimmerman, 2016).

Building a resilient community is very essential since it will be difficult to build a community which is totally free from disaster or disruption. Resilience will enable the community to build back their economic, social, political and educational structure in case of any disruption by disaster. Resilient community fights against vulnerability of the community as it emphasizes what the community members could do for themselves to enhance their capability to respond or recover from every form of social, economic, political and educational disruption (Twigg, 2009). Therefore, a community is resilient if the members of the community could effectively utilize their material and human resources in such a way that they are able to prepare, respond and recover from disruptive challenges. It then follows that communities should be prepared always to face challenges when they arise. This is because no community has control over disaster especially natural ones. A resilient community is a strong and sustainable community that can stand any form of disaster.

**Theoretical Framework:** The theoretical significance of the study was built around Recovery theory. The early development of recovery theory could be credited to John Perceval, son of one of Britain's prime ministers in 1840. He described in writing, his recovery from the psychosis which plagued him between the years 1830 to 1832 (Bateson, 1961). The recovery theory is an approach to mental health care which states that people can recover from mental illness to lead full, satisfying lives (Malla, Joobar & Garcia, 2015). This serves to counter the previous belief that an individual who suffers from mental illness would live with the poor mental condition for the rest of their lives with no further contribution to their societies. Recovery theory does not limit its focus on merely treating or managing symptoms of mental patient, rather it emphasize on helping the individuals with mental illness to recover his mental health fully and contribute to the development of himself and his community (Jacob, 2015). Therefore, the process of recovery involves having the hope that recovery is possible, then having a secure base for recovery and empowerment to live a meaningful life after recovery.

The recovery theory is related to the process of building resilient community because just as the recovery theory emphasizes the gradual process of enabling a mental patient to recover fully from mental illness and contribute meaningfully to the society, building a resilient community empower the community members to recover from any form of disruption and contribute meaningfully to community development. Due to the scarce nature of resources and the severity of many geophysical events, it becomes very difficult for a society to be totally free from human or man-made disaster. Hence, the recovery model could enable the community members to focus on utilizing their human and material resources in a way that will empower them to recover quickly and holistically from every form of disruption that could result from disaster. More so, just like the recovery from mental illness, building a resilient community involves having hope that a resilient community is possible and then working collectively towards achieving it.

**Impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian Systems:** Nigerian communities had and are still having their fair share of challenges posed by COVID-19 ranging from death, sickness, coping with loss of loved ones, taking care of loved ones and other responsibilities to other life challenges.

The impacts are discussed under educational, economic, and health systems thus:

**Impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian Educational System:** Covid-19 pandemic has really affected the educational system of many countries in the world, including Nigeria. Though, Nigerian educational system has not always been regarded to have reached the desired standard (Oyelola, 2015), the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant effects have brought about more damages to the system. COVID-19 affected the calendar of the various levels of Nigerian educational system, comprising of nine years basic education (primary and junior secondary education); three years post-basic/senior secondary education and three to six years tertiary education (National policy on education, 2013; Adedokun, 2020). It was observed that at the peak of COVID-19 school lockdown, many private universities were effectively engaging in virtual teaching and learning while those in the government universities remained static thereby creating a huge gap between the calendar of many universities in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the long time away from school due to COVID-19 lockdown might have caused some form of relapse in knowledge and ability of both students and some teachers especially those in the basic education level. Though the extent of this relapse would be determined only after the students' assessment but based on the experiences gained from students' performance immediately after 1 month or 3 weeks holiday, it is largely expected that the students and pupil would face some form of relapse after 5 months of non-school activities (Simon & Hans, 2020). More so, due to the long time away from school, many youths in Nigerian secondary schools and tertiary institutions have shifted their interest and focus from education to business, vocation and online businesses (Simon & Hans, 2020). This would most likely make these youths see formal education as a less serious issue and could increase the rate of school drop outs among Nigerian youths.

In addition, the COVID-19 lockdown has reduced the rate of new discovery or findings in Nigerian institutions. This is due to the fact that many institutions canceled their conferences which were originally scheduled between February to August because as at then, they were not fully prepared to carry out virtual conferences (Ogunode, Abigeal & Lydia, 2020). This will likely slow down the efficiency of some stakeholders in Nigerian educational system as they largely depend on these conferences for knowledge and skills update. More so, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged Nigeria's revenue generation and subsequently led to the downward review of the country's initial proposed budget for education (Ogunode et al., 2020). This will further lead to the cancelation of several educational development programmes necessary for effective teaching and learning in Nigerian schools.

**Impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian Economic System:** The Nigerian economy has been affected significantly by COVID-19 and its resultant lockdown. Before the COVID-19 era, Nigeria had over 13 million employed youths, accounting for over 23% of her youth labor force (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018); however, it is estimated that the rate of unemployed youths in Nigeria will rise to over 33% by the end of December 2020 because of the effects of the pandemic (Obiezu, 2020). Furthermore, the Covid-19 control measures such as lockdown have really challenged the sustained livelihood of daily wage income earners who form about 60%

of the country's labour force and forced many into debts, hunger and poverty (International Labour Organization, 2020). It is evident that many small and medium scale businesses have also been adversely affected by the pandemic as they experienced reduction in sales and profit making due to the poor circulation of money in the country as a result of increased unemployment rate. In addition, the reduction on the demand and price of crude oil due to COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected Nigerian economic system. The world witnesses a high drop in the price of crude oil and this cut down Nigeria's revenue since Nigeria is a country highly dependent on crude oil sales for revenue generation (Ozili, 2020). This has made the economic situation of Nigeria to become unpredictable as it challenges the ability of the government to generate enough revenue to fund the budget. Therefore, the negative impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian economic system include: the increment in the percentage of unemployed youths, challenging the daily wage earners' source of livelihood, increment in the price of goods and commodities, fall in the price of crude oil among others.

**Impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian Health System:** COVID-19 has caused severe strain on the health system of many countries including Nigeria. A recent survey carried out proved that the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic has affected the efficiency of other health services such as routine immunizations, family planning, cancer diagnosis and treatment and most emergency medical services (Gavi, 2020). The survey further revealed that routine immunization services in Nigeria has significantly reduced since the onset of the pandemic in Nigeria especially when it concerns vaccines such as pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) and pentavalent vaccine which are made available through chartered flight. More so, as noted by (Ajisegiri, Odusanya & Josh, 2020), the fear of being infected with the virus has kept some community health workers away from rendering routine health services such as HIV or TB management, disease surveillance and health management information system which has resulted to increase in mortality and morbidity of infectious diseases.

**Strategies for Strengthening Community Resilience in COVID-19 Era in Nigeria:** In order to ensure a resilient community in this Covid-19 era, it is important that the youths and adults are empowered to fight the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. This could be done by encouraging small and medium scale business development, creating job opportunities,

**Encouraging Small and Medium Scale Business Development:** Small and medium scale businesses are regarded as major drivers in the world economy, especially in the developing countries like Nigeria because of the huge role they play in employment creation and poverty alleviation. However, with the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic coupled with the long period of lockdown, many of the small and medium scale businesses in Nigeria has been adversely affected (Imanche, Ze, Tasinda & Dalibi, 2020). This has made it difficult for some of the businesses to function effectively while some have folded already due to the inability to meet up with the financial demands for running the business. This has in turn affected the economy of the country negatively as the reduction of effective small and medium scale businesses also lead to increase in the number of financially dependent and unemployed youths and adults.

Therefore, there is need to revive these small and medium scale businesses and also encourage the formation of new ones. This can be done through the following ways:

- **Tax Incentives:** Tax incentive is a tool employed by the government to bring down the tax burden of investors so as to encourage them to invest in a business. Tax incentives refer to the special tax policy arrangement which is designed to attract, retain or increase investment in a particular sector (Raphael, Mfon & Ofonime, 2019). Tax incentives could take the shape of reduction in tax rates on profits, application of accounting policy which allows accelerated depreciation and loss carry forwards for tax purposes, tax holidays and reduction of tariffs on imported equipment, components, and raw materials (Twesige & Gasheja, 2019). Implementation of these tax policies in Nigeria will encourage various small and medium scale businesses to expand; it will also encourage new investors to invest in a particular business because of the business-friendly tax policy. This is because tax incentives often offset the tax, transportation, labour or other cost differences in a business and this acts as a catalyst for improved performance of the business (Philips, 2010). Therefore, tax incentives have become even more necessary to revive, retain and attract more investors in the small and medium scale businesses as many are still battling with the financial burden caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.
- **Low interest and long duration loans:** Fund is an essential element for the development of Small and Medium Scale business. However, due to the financial burden created by Covid-19 pandemic, many small and medium scale investments and investors in Nigeria lack the adequate amount of money needed to sustain a business. Hence, the government should collaborate with cooperate financial institutions and banks to help give out loans to investors on a low interest rate and also with a repayment period that would be convenient for the investors. Allowing the investors enough time to repay the loan especially in the case of new investors will help to avoid a fatal mismatch between project gestation and loan maturity (Okonkwo & Obidike, 2016).
- Adjusting the view of Nigerians towards patronizing made in Nigerian goods so as to encourage the producers of those small and medium scale products.

**Job Creation for Youths:** Nigeria has been battling with high unemployment rate among its youths even before the emergence Covid-19. However, reports prove that the youth unemployment rate in Nigeria significantly increased from 29.7% in 2018 to 34.9% in second quarter of 2020; this is an indication that about 13.9 million Nigerians youths aged between 15-34 years remain unemployed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). This higher youth unemployment rate is highly connected to the Covid-19 pandemic and its damaging effects. National Bureau of statistic conducted a Covid-19 impact monitoring and found out that 42% of the respondents who were working before the Covid-19 outbreak stopped work due to Covid-19 effects (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Hence, increasing the rate of poverty, crime and violence in the country during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. This therefore, makes it very necessary for the government to create more jobs for the youths to enable them to contribute in sustaining the development of the country even after the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Capacity building and skill development of youths:**

Capacity building is vital for development of employment potentials in Nigerian youths. This is because the possession of certificates is not usually enough to make an individual gainfully employed in the Nigerian society. Capacity building in this context refer to the process through which the youths of Nigeria are enabled to acquire or upgrade their knowledge and skills required to effectively handle tools and equipment and other resources necessary to complete a task (Usman, Kabiru & Bikisu, 2017). Capacity building and skill development would enable the youths to support themselves financially through self-employment; it could also serve as a mean of added income even if the youth is employed in a government or private establishment. Hence, building the capacity of the youths through skill development with help to reduce the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic on the economy.

### **Extensive Health Education Programme to Improve Citizen's Attitude towards Covid-19 Pandemic:**

Before Covid-19 was announced as a global pandemic, many citizens believed that Covid-19 only thrives in Europe, America, Asia and other planets apart from Africa. Even when the index case was announced in Nigeria and some other persons tested positive, large number of the people especially in Northern Nigeria still saw this virus as one which can only attack the rich ones who travel out of the country. This poor attitude and belief about Covid-19 made it difficult for a large part of Nigerian citizens to adhere to the Covid-19 safety precautionary measures clearly stated by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) such as social distancing, use of hand sanitizers and putting on face masks (NCDC, 2020). Also, Nigerians continued to parade false information about COVID-19 and also promoted non-certified traditional concoctions for the treatment of Covid-19; this further made it difficult for the people to adhere to Covid-19 safety precautions (Vigdor, 2020). This poor attitude and belief of citizens towards Covid-19 which is as a result of low level of awareness clearly contributed to the high rate of infections in Nigeria.

In addition, the fight against the damaging effects of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria is challenged by the high rate of urban slums in the country; high level of social mixing and unhygienic practices such as non-washing of hands, sharing of sanitation facilities (Ioannidis, 2020). Hence, there is need to change the knowledge, belief and attitude of the citizens towards Covid-19 and its preventive measures so as to reduce the spread and help the people recover from the damaging effects of Covid-19. This could be done through extensive health education programmes in Nigerian communities. Extensive health education programmes would provide the community members with the required knowledge, belief, and attitude which will help them to make healthier choices in this fight against the effects of Covid-19 (Abedel-Azim, 2015). Improving the level of knowledge, belief and attitude of the community members will raise their level of understanding of Covid-19 pandemic, its effects and its preventive measures; this will in turn increase their level of adherence to the Covid-19 safety precaution. The use of community health workers for health education programmes targeted towards COVID-19 awareness creation would have significant effect on the community members as they would be more eager to accept information from people they consider being part of them. Community health workers are members of a particular community who are neither professional doctors or nurses but have little training on health management; these community

health workers might be offering health services on volunteer basis or on little remuneration (Kerry et al., 2018). Hence, these community health workers can easily locate community members in the most interior parts of the community and deliver health education to them since they are part of the community. Therefore, community health workers could be used for extensive health education programmes to improve the knowledge, belief and attitude of the people towards Covid-19 and enable them actively join the fight against the disease by adhering to all the Covid-19 safety precautions.

**Closing the Digital Divide in Nigerian Schools:** Digital divide explains the differences and similarities in usage of Information and communication technologies. Digital divide refers to the difference between developed and developing society, rich and poor family or individuals, literate and illiterate individuals in terms of access to information and communication technology tools and the ability to utilize them (Tayo, Thompson & Thompson, 2015). In Nigeria, it has become so difficult for a lot of schools to afford broad access to necessary ICT tools which will enable e-learning to be widely used in its institutions of higher learning (Adeyemi & Esere, 2013). Also, many of the teachers and lecturers in Nigerian schools do not have the adequate knowledge and skills to organize e-learning even if the technological tools are available (Aworanti, 2016). Finally, due to the unstable power supply system and network connection in most communities in Nigeria, it becomes difficult to effectively embark on e-learning since most of the technological tools for e-learning are electricity based and work with network connection (Saheed et al., 2019). These factors discussed above makes it difficult to build a resilient education sector in Nigeria through e-learning.

Therefore, to effectively build a resilient education community in Nigeria, the factors responsible for poor usage of e-learning in Nigeria must be tackled. This is because e-learning has been identified as the best form of learning during this Covid-19 period since it enables the students to learn effectively without mixing with the public (Raheem & Khan, 2020). Thus, there is need for the Nigerian government to make adequate provision for ICT facilities in all Nigerian schools, especially the tertiary institutions where there are usually high number of students in a class (Onwe & Ezekwe, 2014). Furthermore, every opportunity available should be utilized to train teachers and lecturers on the effective use of ICT tools; community centers or public school's spaces in the various communities could be used for the purpose of this training (Ugboma, 2012). More so, efforts should be made to ensure that communities have stable power supply which will enable them to operate the available ICT tools. Finally, there is an urgent need to create a scheme which will help students from various communities to have access to ICT tools at a very much subsidized cost (Onwe & Ezekwe, 2014). When these steps are taken to improve the e-learning situation in Nigerian schools, the students would be able to enjoy faster and broader learning experience which will support the building of resilient Nigerian communities.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

Covid-19 pandemic brought serious hardship to many people, claimed lots of life, led to loss of jobs and closed down various businesses in Nigeria. These negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic have threatened the achievement of sustainable development in the country especially in the economic, health

and education sector. Hence, there is need to look at ways through which the country could adjust and build back the system affected by Covid-19 so as to maintain the movements towards sustainable development. This study proposed that to recover from the negative effects of Covid-19, small and medium scale business development should be encouraged through tax incentives, favourable loans and grants among others; jobs should be created for the youths; capacity building and skill development of youths should be prioritized, extensive health education programme to improve citizen's attitude towards Covid-19 pandemic should be organized and the digital divide in Nigerian Schools should be bridged.

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