

**TO EXPLORE AND HARNESS THE OPPORTUNITIES AMIDST OF COVID-19  
PANDEMIC AS PREREQUISITE FOR NIGERIAN ECONOMIC SECTORS  
ENHANCEMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the economic growth opportunities exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and its control measures in Nigeria. The study employed qualitative method using long essay style; Data were sourced from secondary sources. Some of the opportunities of the Covid-19 lockdown considered are economic diversification through funding of agricultural sector, encouraging of competitive environment for various sources of revenue against the oil sector monopoly source of income. Funding and upgrading of the Nigerian hospital and putting a perfect halt to medical tourism, encouraging of digital economy and cashless policy, attitude of the politicians and governance to the people during this period, attitude of the peoples and various religious relationships within the period total lockdown in Nigeria. The study concludes that there are positive and significant relationship found between the Covid-19 pandemic/ lockdown and variable studied. The researcher therefore recommends that the government and its various sectors, business enterprises and their owners ranging from household firms to cooperate companies, religions groups and individuals should ensure they explore and harness the various opportunities amidst of covid-19 pandemic to enhance the Nigeria economy.

**KEYWORDS:** Covid-19, Pandemic, lockdown, Nigerian economy, economic growth opportunities

**INTRODUCTION**

The Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria is part of the worldwide pandemic of corona virus disease 2019 (covid-19) cause by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS- cov- 2). The virus was first discovered in Wuhan, the Hubei region of China and subsequently, it spread to almost all parts of the world. It was first confirmed in Nigeria on 27th February 2020, when an Italian citizen of Lagos was tested positive for the virus. After noticing the first case, the virus spread so fast in Nigeria that it is overwhelming the health system and causing serious social and economic unrest Economic around the world are fighting the effects of the covid-19 pandemic, not least in Nigeria, which was already tackling its own fiscal challenges. Though, most of the countries failed to appreciate the fact that there are opportunities amidst of the corona virus pandemic era if well harnessed.

Prior to Covid-19 pandemic era, Nigerian economy had being on serious economic crises which may be traced to centralization of the government sources of revenue on oil and gas sector. The oil that was

first found in Nigeria in 1956 and boomed in the 1970s has been responsible for the emergence of disorderliness in Nigeria economic system.

Whereas, the Nigeria source of revenue is strongly and solely on oil sector, any factor that affects the sector is a determinant and control variable in Nigeria economic behavior. Hence, the Nigerian economy almost crashed during the first experienced oil sector crises in 1973 when the member of the organization of Arab petroleum exporting countries proclaimed an oil embargo.

Thus, Nigeria government after trying to diversify the sources of revenue using various policies and measures, the government is still depending on oil sector. The current crash in oil prices, which is traceable to Covid-19, is also indirectly adding to the Covid-19 and lockdown impacts on people and the economy. It affects peoples' attitude to spending. It is affecting the income of the people and the nation, hence one persons spending is another person's income and the peoples' income is the nation's income. Currently, Nigerian government is projecting revenue flow from oil to decline from 5.5 trillion naira in 2020 to 1.1 trillion naira, and this leads the country to sudden fiscal crisis and economic challenges amidst of covid-19 pandemic era. Hence, Nigeria is practicing mono-economy based on oil sector; the impact will be felt across all sectors coupled with the national lockdown Policy initiated on March 30th, 2020. There are concerns around overall economic activities starting from household to the Gross National Product (GNP) as the covid-19 pandemic impacts negatively on the sectors and oil and gas sector in particular.

Despite the challenges ahead, there still exists some traceable opportunities amidst of the Covid-19 pandemic era. What the pandemic crisis have done is to accelerate decisions on a number of structural issues that have impeded Nigeria over the last few years. The fuel subsidy policy which has cost a lot of money and has not been very economic effective in helping people "those with lower incomes" has been reversed. Market based tariffs for electricity in Nigeria is also coming to fruition. The government is starting to make decisions which have the potential to lead to much more investment and much rapid, inclusive economic growth in Nigeria. The government is also increasing policies focusing on stimulating local businesses. The CBN as the apex financial institution has been at the forefront of driving credit to sectors with capacity for local production and those that can source raw materials locally and meet local demands. In trying to recover the economy after the Covid-19 pandemic, the government equally needs to focus on social infrastructure. For Nigeria in particular there will be need to plan beyond the pandemic crisis, hence, there will be increase awareness of sectors like agriculture and increasing sensitization around food security and also allocating more fund to healthcare sectors to reduce medical tourism and more importantly, to diversify sources of revenue in Nigeria.

### **Covid-19 pandemic/lockdown mixed results and impacts in Nigeria**

In trying to curtail the adverse impact of the deadly corona virus, the Nigeria president ordered for a lockdown over a two weeks period (first phase), effective from 30th March, 2020. Though the policy is introduced to serve as a control measure of the deadly disease but on its own, it impacted negatively

on the economy with some traceable opportunities for economic growth in Nigeria. As a result of the lockdown, most private businesses laid off their staff just to retain very few that had their salaries slashed. The prices of food skyrocketed as a result of the lockdown, the cost of transportation increased while small business owners that survive on daily income earning could not boost of daily feeding. Thus, these households business and small and medium scale firms accounts for 96% of businesses in Nigeria and 84% of employment, posing a severe risk to small business and the economy at large.

Covid-19 and its follow up lockdown policy did not only impact adversely on private business, rather it hugely affected on the activities of both local, state and federal government, this is mostly caused as a result of a downturn in the sale of crude oil. The Nigerian government could no longer fund the 2020 budget because the targeted demand of crude oil benchmark of 57 USD per barrel could not be met as a result of fall in crude oil price. As a result, the benchmark was reduced to 30 USD, a gap of 27 naira, which is a deficit, aside from slashing 1.5 trillion naira in order to make the budget realistic.

The recent concentration of every economy, mostly the developing nations is looking for relief funds for survival and to cushion the effect of the pandemic rather than planning of investment. Global financial crisis is rising and stock market is falling daily as the world's economy is crashing. Most economy, like the United States are already in recession, which automatically will affect investment in stock markets of every other national economy. In efforts to tackle the adverse effects of both Covid-19 and lockdown policy in Nigeria, some opportunities for economic enhancement were exposed. Within this period of total lockdown in Nigeria, people were placed in a condition that they have no option than to keep to government rules, regulations and policies. Other previously initiated measures for economic growth like E-economy, cashless policy, E-learning that have not been successfully implemented do to people's attitude towards them became useful and successfully applied within the period of Covid-19 pandemic/ lockdown in Nigeria. There is also serious attempt by the government to disintegrate interest attached to oil sector and to diversify the economy to become independent of oil sector. Efforts were put in place to revive the agricultural sector and household businesses, small and medium scale industry owners were empowered. During this period of Covid-19 pandemic/lockdown, the Nigerian government was re-activated and became closer to the people to the extent that they felt the needs of the people for the first time. The government also tried to react to these needs of the people as they unfolds during this period by providing digital services, security, health care, information/ communication, food, protection, future plans and various kinds of cushions to reduce people's fears and risks. This period equally experienced show of brotherhood, unity and charity among the citizens not minding the tribe, region or religion one is from.

## **Policies of economy diversification amidst of Covid-19 pandemic/lockdown and the needs to advance on it**

The importance and role of agriculture in Nigeria before the oil boom of 1970s can never be over emphasized. Before this period of oil boom in Nigeria, agricultural sector was able to grow at a sufficient rate to provide adequate food for an increase population, raw materials for a budding industrial sector, increasing public revenue and exchange for government and employment

opportunities for an expanding labour force. When the government noticed the natural growth in the agricultural sector, they were able to provide little support which concentrated on export crops like cocoa, groundnut, palm produce, rubber and cotton as self sufficiency in food production seemed not to pose any problem worthy of public attention. Indications of problems in Nigeria agricultural sector, however started to unfold between 1960-1969 due to increase in food supply short falls, rising food price and declining foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports. The period of 1970-79 witnessed a rapid deterioration in the country's agricultural situation which was caused by the Nigeria civil war and this condition was later compounded by the oil boom of 1970s.

According to Prabuddha and Babu (2010), agricultural policies in Nigeria have undergone four main phases: first from 1960-1970, the second from 1970-1979 (ie the period of oil boom), the third from 1980 to 1990s (ie during the structure adjustment program (SAP); and the forth from 1991 (ie post SAP era).

In exploring the opportunity to revive agricultural sector amidst of covid-19 pandemic, there is need to note, the fifth phase of agricultural sector enhancement policy from 2020. This is a new agricultural opportunity framework policy that continues to inform us on the need for steady concentration on agricultural sector as a major means of decentralizing monopoly interest on oil sector and to ensure economic diversification.

The Nigeria economy has been seriously affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and this simply means that it affected the oil sector severely; hence, it is sole revenue source of the country. Oil prices have fallen amidst of the covid-19 pandemic and many nations, especially those that based only on oil like Nigeria are facing recession or even depression.

According to Ekott, (2020), as the government is searching for alternative sources of revenue, experts say the agricultural sector remains a promising area. Whereas, the lockdown impacted adversely on people and economy at large, it also remind the people and Nigeria government on the need to enhance the agricultural sector, diversify the economy and make proactive policies that will remedy the current economic situation in the country. How the country can quickly take advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic period and agricultural sector position to ensure food sufficiency in the country and improve the entire economy is paramount.

From every indication, it is obvious that economic activities have been negatively affected in the whole world and in Nigeria particular by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The oil sector being the only major source of income in Nigeria has disappointed again, oil price has fallen, the financial market is on the downside, aviation industry and even sport has suffered and the only remedy noticed is concentration of investment on agriculture. Thus, the government monetary and fiscal intervention currently adopted measures to cushion the effect of Covid-19 menace on household firms, micro, small and medium scale industries and mostly on the framers

The CBN reduced interest rate on all existing intervention facilities from 9% to 5% for one year. It extend moratorium period on existing intervention facilities for household firms and farmers that are affected by Covid-19

During Covid-19 pandemic period that was followed up by national lockdown, it became optimistic that the only option left for Nigeria is to diversify the economy or go back to agriculture which had long been the mainstream of Nigeria economy before the oil boom as a way out of economic woes and to boost our almost falling economy.

### **Digitalized economy amidst of Covid-19 pandemic/lockdown and the needs to advance on it**

The digital economy is the worldwide network of economic activities, commercial transactions and professional interactions that are enabled by information, communication and technology (ICT). It can be succinctly summed up as the economy based on digital technology. The digital economy reflects the move from the third industrial revolution (Isiadinso & Omogu, 2019). According to them, the digital economy is fast becoming the most innovative and widest reaching economy in the world. In 2018, the Nigeria Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) explained that the Nigerian digital economy is expected to generate 88billion USD and create three (3) million new jobs by the end of 2020.

Considering the recent need of digital globalization, the Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC) was empowered by the Nigeria Communication Act (NCA 2003) and is responsible for amongst other things creating an enabling environment for competition among operators in the industry and ensure the provision of qualitative and efficient telecommunications throughout the country. Without doubt, the telecommunication sector has grown since 2001 and has witnessed and unprecedented positive impact on other socio-economy sector in the country. The entry of mobile telecommunication technology has initiated transformation to sectors such as, banking, insurance, e-agriculture etc, with various other services riding on the mobile telecommunications technology in Nigeria.

The National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS) have been developed to reposition the Nigeria economy in order to take advantage of many other opportunities that digital technology provides. This is in line with the vision of the government to diversify the economy of Nigeria away from dependency on oil and gas sector. Knowing the relevance of digital economy and in line with the digital economy vision, the president of Nigeria approves the merging of the Federal Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy (FMOCDE) on the 17th of October 2019. This has clearly positioned Nigeria as early adopters of digital technology and it gives us a good opportunity to become major participant in the growing global digital economy

One of the major policies establishing the digital economy is cashless policy which is a policy established in 2012 by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). Some of the tools for cashless policy are

Automated Teller Machine (ATM), Web-Based Transactions (WEB), Mobile Banking Transactions (MBT), Point-of-Sales (POS) (Muhibudeen & Haladu, 2017). Though cashless policy and its various implementing tools have been in place in the country since 2012, yet they have not been popular and also not regularly put in use by the people until the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and its follow up lockdown. The lockdown period exposed the people and the nation at large to series of difficulties and the partial lockdown of the financial institutions made people to embrace the digital financial transactions, hence physical transactions were not possible. Thus customers of banks were encouraged to avoid physical contact and cash as much as possible. People were advised to stay at home and make use digital channels, such as ATM services, mobile App, online Banking, cards and USSD platforms.

However, well grounded businesses that are leveraging digital presence to offer their services and delivery have a huge advantage within this period, with online market place being the only succor for delivery of essential items during this pandemic, there has been an astronomical increase in demand. Expectedly, people started turning to online shopping on e-commerce platforms due to the lockdown and isolation measures.

According to Nwadike (2020) many customers who previously avoided e-payment services are being converted following the Covid-19 induced lockdown. In those weeks of lockdown, many Nigerians relied on ATMs, Point of Sale (POS) machines and other e-payment channels to pay for essential commodities as bank branches were closed (Nwadike, 2020). In reaction to rush of cashless policy tools during the period of Covid-19 pandemic, various financial institutions re-activated and improve on their cashless policy technology and digital services.

For instance, Access Bank Management in 2020 has redefined how people live and do business amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Fortunately, with the improvements on our mobile, internet banking, most of your everyday financial transactions can safely be completed from the comfort of your homes using your computer or phone (Access Bank 2020).

According to Aneke Samson, Group Head, Digital Banking at UBA says his bank has upgraded its mobile app to do more for customers from their various homes during the lockdown, he said the bank is also considering banking across various channel.

Obetta Callistus, who is the Group Executive, Technology and Service at First Bank, gives an insight on how his bank is using technology to connect with its customers and work force. He said that organizations needed to build resilient business operations beyond the lockdown period, and that technology would continue to play a dominant role in achieving this.

According to Abubaker Suleiman, Managing Director at Sterling Bank, there is a need for banks to keep innovating through the crisis of Covid-19 pandemic, including planning ahead and staying connected to the customers. According to him, the bank introduced new products and services that



support online learning, omini-channel mobile banking platforms and applications that enable people to invest in treasury bills from any location of their convenience.

Dividends of Governance amidst of Covid-19 pandemic/lockdown and the needs to advance on it Before the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, the activities of the government and its dividends are only felt on mere paper or rarely at the Federal capital and few state government capitals. Most of the ministries of government created are yet unknown to the citizens because they are dormant, not functioning and inactive.

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and in the course of planning to reduce or eradicate its impact made most of the dormant government ministries to become active and functional and in turn the Nigerian government system becomes more vibrant.

The Nigeria federal and state government ensured the rights to food, shelter and other basic necessities for people losing jobs or income during the Covid-19 pandemic. The economic assistance that the government has announced in response to the corona virus has expose inadequacies in Nigerian's social protection system and risks excluding the country's poorest and most vulnerable people. The president in his announcement on April 13th, 2020 stated that the most vulnerable in Nigeria could receive conditional cash transfer.

In the process of implementing the promises of the president on cushioning the families of vulnerable, the ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development became known and active. The ministry took up the responsibility of distributing the items and food meant for the vulnerable, on April 1st, the minister began paying 20,000 naira (52USD) to families registered in the nation social register of the poor and vulnerable households set up by the present administration in 2016 to combat poverty,

Nigeria Central Bank has announced a 50 billion naira targeted credit facilities to support household and micro, small and medium enterprises affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The credit facility through which households can potentially get up to 3 million naira loan was launched.

The House of Representative on March 24th, 2020 passed the Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill (EESB), 2020 to provide a 50 percent tax rebate for employers and business owners who agree to not make staff cuts in 2020. The bill if goes into effect may prevent job losses in its formal sectors. These have been the obligation of the Nigeria Government hence under international human rights law; Nigeria's Government has an obligation to protect people's right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food and nutrition, the highest attainable standard of health and the right to good security.

According to Ibrahim and Kwaja (2020), Covid-19 pandemic is more than a public health emergency, it is a test of the whole architecture of governance, we must govern ourselves out of the crisis as it is leading us to build a more inclusive society in which the interests of all are what determines public policy choice.

## **Attitudes of top politicians and the rich to healthcare sector amidst of Covid-19 pandemic/lockdown and the needs to advance on it**

Nigerians' politicians and government have not in the past shown any interest to the health sector which may be attributed to the fact that they do not patronize the hospital and health workers at home.

The trend of embarking on expensive office projects for governance agencies at the cost of the sector is a phenomenon that has plagued Nigeria for many years. The heads of states of African Union countries on April 2001 met in Nigeria and pledged to set a target of allocating at least 15 percent of the annual budget to improve the health sector. The resolution is known as the Abuja Declaration.

Thus, the declaration never yields any positive results, hence, the country budgets for health sector after that has been below 10 percent. The Nigeria health budget for 2018 stood at N340.46 bn, which was 3.96 percent of its N8.6 trillion proposed national spending. A breakdown of the health budget showed that Nigeria is estimated to have a population of 186 million, allocated approximately N1,832.62 for each citizen of the total N 9.45 trillion budgeted for 2020 by the federal government, N 427.3 bn (4.5 percent) was allocated to health.

Amidst of Covid-19, the need to give top priority to health in terms of maximum attention and investment is noticed, not only the health infrastructure in terms of the equipment and facilities but also the health workforce which is important in driving any health system (Aworinde, 2020). Nigeria list of people who got or have died from Covid-19 includes top politicians and some members of the rich class and high occupiers of top government offices. These are kind of people who normally and frequently travel to UK, Germany, India, or USA at the slightest pains or fever because Nigerian hospitals are poorly equipped or funded. Unfortunately, Nigeria spent more than 800 m USD on treatment in overseas hospitals yearly. President Buhari promised to end medical tourism when he took power in 2018, but he himself after assuming office spent more than four (4) months in London in 2007 for treatment and subsequently go to abroad for additional care and so it was with all Nigerian top politicians and members of rich class.

But with borders closed and each country haunted by its own Covid-19 nightmare, Nigerians big men and women are now forced to use their country's hospitals. The government top officials started patronizing local hospital as they have no option due to flight restriction and this led to upgrading of most local and government hospitals. More hospitals are created in various states, universities and even some clinics in secondary and primary schools. There is also serious improvement on the facilities, technologies and remunerations and take homes of the health workforce.



## **Cordial relationship exhibited amidst of Covid-19 and the needs to advance on it**

The endless conflict among the various religious groups and tribes in Nigeria is no longer news nor strange. It was only during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic era that Nigerians for the first time co-exist in peace and exhibit some characteristics of brotherhood and oneness.

The Christian and Muslim communities in Nigeria have been collaborating to respond and combat the growing corona virus pandemic in the country in what has been described as a show of love and unity. According to Egwu (2020), the relationship between these two religious groups and their adherents in the country has been marred with tension and violence but the leaders are putting their differences aside to unite for a common cause. According to Ani (2020), in times of crisis, we need to put everything that divides us aside and come together to achieve a common goal and that is what is presently happening.

The world is on its own coming together to fight the Covid-19 pandemic bringing governments, organizations from across industries and sectors and individuals together to help respond to this global deadly outbreak. The outpouring of global solidarity and support sparked by this shared challenge has been phenomenal. According to CBN information, as at April 18th, 2020, the sum of 25.8 billion naira has so far been donated by 107 Nigerian companies and notable individuals, as relief fund to combat corona virus in the country. These companies and individual donated this money are well spread among various religions and tribes making up Nigeria.

According to Elumelu, T.O, UBA group charming, this is a time when we must all play our part, this global pandemic must bring citizens, governments and business leaders together And quickly.

## **CONCLUSION**

Reviewing the government policies and people's responses to these policies before and amidst of covid-19 pandemic indicates more quality governance amidst of Covid-19 pandemic and quality responses by the citizens. Proactive laws were made; more hospitals were built with improved facilities, hospital technology and healthcare workforce. Food and social securities were provided for the poor, needy and vulnerable. Medical tourism was 100% put to a halt amidst Covid-19 lockdown.

Nigerian government prior to Covid-19 pandemic had tried without success to lift various subsidies that do not benefit the lower class in the country like fuel subsidy but this became successful amidst of covid-19 pandemic. Also, the government made so many other decisions, rules and policies which have the potentials to lead to much more investment and much rapid, all-inclusive economic growth in Nigeria within this period.

There is also serous improvement on technologies of cashless policy and digital economy at large and there is also increase in people's readiness and compliance to digital economic policies during the

pandemic unlike before. All activities during the Covid-19 pandemic and national lockdown went online and huge success was experienced and recorded ranging from educational learning, training of different kinds, seminars, workshops, meetings, church activities, ceremonies like weddings, commercial dealings and banking activities were all successfully done online

Outside the sports period, the covid-19 pandemic era is the only period Nigerians come together to fight a common goal without being sectional. There is high increase of unity and show of brotherhood among the tribes and various religious groups. Though we do not wish the Covid-19 to continue but the research recommends that these opportunities amidst of covid-19 pandemic/ lockdown should be advanced on by the government, its various sectors, private enterprises, household firms, micro, small, medium industries and individual.

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