

GOVERNANCE, TRIPLE-HELIX AND COVID-19 MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *The study investigates how governance has impacted on “triple-helix model” for managing the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The study relied on the researcher's observation of the issues and matters arisen in the continuing Covid-19 pandemic, and secondary data on the subject matter. The study revealed that Covid-19 has led to the death of many Nigerians, while those who are still living are in fear, and that as at the time Nigeria recorded its first case of Covid-19, there was virtually no facility on the ground to combat the infectious disease. The study further showed that the triple-helix model of cooperation among the University-Industry-Government that could have helped in curtailing the pandemic is not well harnessed. The study also revealed that the lockdown that follows the outbreak of Covid-19 shattered the means of livelihood of many Nigerians, while many sectors of the economy are badly affected; the lockdown imposed was not successful as many Nigerians have no home to stay, while others who lived on the income they earn daily defied the orders for fear of being killed by hunger; the palliative offered by the government was marred with irregularities, as there is no reliable or accurate statistics and demography data that could have aided the judicious distribution of the palliative. The study concluded, that the continued rise in the number of Covid-19 cases, with limited health capacity to mitigate it is not only a threat to the lives of the citizenry but also has the tendency of escalating beyond control. The study, therefore, recommended, that the country's leadership should go back to the drawing board to re-assess the pandemic in order to strategize a formidable approach to halt the noxious disease, while attempt should also be made to provide quality governance in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Governance, Triple-Helix, Covid-19, University, and Industry*

INTRODUCTION

The eruption of an unfamiliar respiratory disease known as "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2" (SARS-CoV-2) toward the end of the year 2019 in Wuhan China, caused unprecedented pandemonium in the health sectors across the world. The disease whose symptoms included fever, tiredness, dry cough, aches, pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, and sore throat or diarrhea aptly fitted to a family of viruses known as - 'coronaviruses'. The case of coronavirus was officially reported to the World Health Organisation on December 31, 2019; and by January 30, 2020, the disease was declared a global health emergency. The coronavirus disease was termed COVID-19 by the World Health Organisation on February 11, 2020, who also on March 11, 2020, declared the

disease a global pandemic (WHO, 2020 cited in Cennimo, 2020; Paudel, 2020). COVID-19 did not only triggered an unparalleled disruption to the world economy but also damaged the means of sustenance and livelihood of many people across the world. The first patient infected with the 2019 novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) was detected on December 1, 2019, and as of June 1, 2020, the figure of infected people have risen to six million, three hundred and three thousand, nine hundred and twenty, while three hundred and seventy-four thousand, five hundred and sixty-four fatalities have been recorded (Worldometers, 2020).

The World leaders in conjunction with the World Health Organisation are striving to curtail the pandemic. Similarly, governments of the affected countries are also making every effort to nip in the bud the Covid-19 pandemics from causing a further global health and economic damages. The capability and ability of any government to curtail the pandemic, however, depend largely on the quality of governance put in place, specifically in the area of accident and disaster management prior to the pandemic, as well as overall governance processes of the country. Governance in this context means, a system or process through which 'power is exercised in the management of a country's political, economic, and social resources for development' (World Bank, 1993). Put differently, governance is all about managing and harnessing the state resources for the state's development. The question is how well are the country's resources being managed by those in public offices? To what extent has the nation's resources being used for development? What aspect of development has the country focused on before the Covid-19 outbreak?

Since the government cannot handle all its activities by itself, there is a need to use institutions. In essence, the level of the effectiveness of institutions determines the quality of governance. Suffice to ask again, how are the institutions within the country (especially those institutions that have roles to play in curtailing Covid-19), faring before the pandemic? Some of the basic institutions that are necessary at this period of the Covid-19 pandemic can be categorized into two. They are educational institutions (Universities) and economic institutions (Industries), while the government remains a core actor in the tripartite relations. The tripartite relation among the university, the industry, and the government is referred to as "Triple-Helix". Triple-Helix simply implies the model of the university-industry-government relation "for understanding entrepreneurship, the changing dynamics of universities, innovation, and socio-economic development" (Etzkowitz, 2008). The trio relation is recognized across the globe in view of the fact that it has to do with the socio-economic development of countries that made judicious use of the tripartite relations.

Nigeria has a fair share of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Apart from the fact that the pandemic has been having adverse effects on the country's economy, its citizens have fallen under an excruciating economy. The poor masses, most of them who live by the income they earn daily were hard hit by the country's economic situation. Besides, the country as of June 1, 2020, became the third African country to record more than 10,000 cases of Covid-19, as the current number of people infected by Covid-19 has risen to ten thousand, one hundred and sixty-two, while two hundred and eighty-seven death have been recorded.

To effectively combat a pandemic disease like Covid-19, there is a dire need for triangular cooperation among the University-Industry-Government. The universities through their Teaching Hospitals across the country are needed to direct all their actions

and activities toward curbing the pandemic. The Colleges of Medical Sciences of the Nigerian universities are needed to conduct researches to curtail the diseases, while the services of health personnel of the Universities' Teaching Hospital are needed in the area of caring for those that are infected by Covid-19. In a similar vein, the services of Scientists in the related disciplines across the Departments and Faculties of the universities are needed to reinforce the researches of those in Medical Sciences. The economic institutions (the industries) within the country are to provide synergy in terms of financing the universities in effectively carrying out researches, as well as to support the government in the area of funding to acquire necessary equipment into the hospitals and isolation centres across the country.

There is a need to state here that, a government that will serve as a unifying force for the University-Industry-Government Relations for combating Covid-19 management must be a government that offers quality governance. The quality of governance should have reflected in the area of making quality policy-decisions. For instance, industries, need a friendly economic policy, and a secure environment to thrive. To what extent is the government offering this to industries in Nigeria? Are the industries in Nigeria secured? Is Nigeria's environment friendly for investments? Are the necessary facilities (especially stable electricity) available? With regards to the educational institution, proper funding or financing would have gone a long way to boost quality research, stabilize the university, and make Nigerian universities to be able to compete favourably with their counterparts across the world. Conversely, Nigerian universities have continued to suffer from inadequate financing. It is no longer surprising that the Nigerian universities whose services are essential as a core partner in triple-helix relations are on strike even as Covid-19 ravages on. The academia under the auspices of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was on strike for about three months now on the issue that bothers mainly on the funding of the universities in Nigeria. The strike notwithstanding, some of the staff of universities, especially those in the Medical Sciences still put their lives on the line to assist in treating those infected by the Covid-19, however the efforts that supposed to assist greatly in combating the Covid-19 pandemic are not well-harnessed, it is to this extent that the study investigates, how governance has impacted on triple-helix for managing Covid-19 in Nigeria.

UNIVERSITIES, INDUSTRIES AND COVID-19 MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

Like any other institution, the coronavirus outbreak has caused a major disruption to educational institutions including universities across the world. The pandemic has thus caused an alteration to many aspects of the university's life. The universities since, the outbreak of Covid-19 have been striving to contribute their quotas toward curtailing the pandemic from further damaging the university activities.

Universities can be seen as complex institutions, with the capacity of rendering various services to various people, organizations, associations, and countries across the world. Universities from the time immemorial have been disseminating new knowledge and innovative thinking, producing skilled personnel and credible credentials, attracting international talent and business investment into countries, serving as agents of social justice, as well as contributing to social and cultural vitality (Lucas cited in Peterson, 2020). Given these various services that universities render, "there is no doubt that universities,

through their intellectual knowledge base, can add (and they do) enormously to the science of Covid-19” (Peterson, 2020). From the knowledge, universities have been developing new vaccines to treat the disease, they have as well been engaging and researching to understand the nature and pattern of spreading of the disease across the country. Universities apart from rendering academic services of teaching-learning, researching, and community servicing, are as well motivate and bring together various external educational stakeholders together. In other words, the universities have been championing and uniting such stakeholders such as alumni, industry, donor agencies, philanthropists, the private sector, and government together to fight the Covid-19. Apart from this, universities trained medical doctors, and other healthcare personnel in various university’s teaching hospitals are leading the war against the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, the captain of industries, as well as industries in Nigeria are well involved in the combat against Covid-19. The industries and other corporate organizations that came under the auspices of Nigerian Private Sector Coalition Against COVID-19 (CACOVID) donated funds to support the efforts of the government at combating the Covid-19 diseases. To this extent, the fund donated was about N15.325 billion (Nnanna, 2020). Apart from this are the industrialists who rose to the challenges through their monetary contributions toward finding a solution to the Covid-19 pandemic. The industrialists and businessmen in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria mobilized private-sector leadership to support the government in providing funds as well as medical facilities for the hospitals and centres for caring for the victims of coronavirus. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria's Director, Corporate Communications, the total sum of N19.48 billion was contributed to the account of the Private Sector Coalition Against COVID-19 as of April 3, 2020, to support the government effort against Covid-19. The donors include captain of industries, banks, and other corporate organizations, have redeemed their pledges, while the apex Bank awaits an outstanding N3.4 billion from four others, as of April 3, 2020 (Odotola, 2020).

In the same vein, in April 2020, the Private sector-led Coalition Against COVID-19 is believed to have ordered for about 250,000 supplies for tests kits, and 150,000 extraction kits for testing people for the coronavirus infection. The coalition is also believed to have given food relief package to about 1.7 million households across the nation to alleviate the effects of the restrictions order given by the government to curtail the spreading of the Covid-19 pandemic. The coalition has equally set up isolation centers in some states in Nigeria which include Lagos, Kano, Rivers, Borno and Enugu, and Abuja, in addition to the renovations of some hospitals as well as supplied medical equipment to some of these hospitals (Dangote Group, 2020).

It must be noted that apart from separate involvement of the universities and industries in the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has being a measure of joints efforts of the duo at halting the spread of the diseases. For instance, there was some collaboration of the Olabisi Onabanjo University with industries such as – Anjola Herbal Company Limited who partnered with the university in producing Anti-COVID-19 herbal syrup, the samples of which had been submitted to the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) for approval. The Olabisi Onabanjo University also teamed up with Ebelola Bioenergetic Solutions and StarkHouse Nigeria – Lifecenta to produce face mask and face shield to combat the spread of the coronavirus. However, the core partner in the triple-helix relations is found wanting to complement the effort of

the university and industry in the spirit of the triple-helix, the development which was as a result of the poor governance system is a major setback to effort at exterminating Covid-19 from the country in particular and contribution to the global effort toward halting Covid-19 pandemic.

GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS AT MANAGING COVID-19 IN NIGERIA

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to constitute a great challenge to people's health and with destructive effects on world economies, the government of many countries has accordingly instigated varying degrees of lockdown to restrain the disease from being spreading on. The Nigerian government to this extent enacted the Covid-19 Regulation 2020, which was signed and dated 30th of March 2020. The President through the regulations directed that movements in Lagos, Ogun, and Federal Capital Territory for an initial period of 14 days with effect from 11 pm on Monday 30 March 2020 should cease. People are to stay in their various homes, businesses and offices are to be closed, while inter-states travel is put on hold. However, the restriction does not apply to:

- hospitals and related medical establishments;
- health care related manufacturers and distributors; food processing,
- distribution and retails companies;
- petroleum distribution and retail entities;
- power generation, transmission and distributions companies;
- private security companies;
- urgent court matters as may be directed by the Chief Justice of Nigeria;
- financial system and money markets; and
- workers in telecom companies, broadcasters, print, and electronic media staff who can prove they are unable to work from home (The Federal Government of Nigeria, 2020).

Apart from the restriction order by the Federal Government, the state governments equally imposed different restrictions orders on the movement of people within their various states, gathering of a large number of people was discouraged, while people are asked to maintain social distancing and to wear a face mask in public places among other restrictions. The restriction order by the government has unprecedented effects on businesses and the economy. To cushion these effects the government introduced fiscal and economic stimulatory measures to salvage businesses and economy from total collapse.

The government through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) announced a credit relief of \$136.6M to various businesses that were affected by the restriction to curtail coronavirus pandemic. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria's Governor, households, small and medium-scaled businesses, hotels, health care merchants, and airline service providers, among other businesses are expected to benefit from the funds. The apex bank also announced a reduction in the interest rates on loans from 9% to 5% and backdated to March 1, 2020 (Olawaju, 2020). There are other fiscal stimuli and other interventions planned in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning:

The government has planned to inject the N500 billion Covid-19 Crisis Intervention Fund for the upgrading of healthcare facilities and funding of the Special Public Works Programme for the purpose of generating employment.

The government of Nigeria has further requested for US\$100 million to meet the Covid-19 emergency, as well as to expand HealthCare capacity across the country in addition to the current US\$90 million Regional Disease Surveillance Systems ('REDISSE') facility from the World Bank. The Federal Government also takes steps to augment the States' Allocations & Moratorium on States' Debts and Withdraw US\$150 million from the Nigeria Sovereign Investment Authority ('NSIA') Stabilization Fund to support Federal Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) disbursements. The 2020 Appropriation Act is to be amended to accommodate the downward review of initial revenue estimates (See Deloitte Nigeria, 2020).

From the above discussion, it appears that government efforts are geared mainly at nation's economy and giving palliatives to the states and few individuals with little effort at promoting researches that can further save the lives of the people infected with coronavirus, at the same time help in the growth of the country's economy.

COVID-19: ISSUES AND MATTERS ARISING

There is no disputing the fact that a lot of issues and matters arose in the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, the disease has continued to take tolls on all sectors of the economy in Nigeria which include – education, health, aviation, transportation, banking, oil and gas, agriculture, artisans, and religion. The disease and the lockdown have made many people lose their means of livelihood, especially those who deal in perishable products. The poor masses who live on daily earning, people working in the informal sector of the economy, the artisans, hawkers, and local traders, were deeply affected by the coronavirus induced lockdown. The fact that the prices of common commodities include food rises during the lockdown compounded their problem. The government reacted by lockdown most of the economic activities in the country, as well as restricted the movement of the people. The government has equally announced economic assistance to lessen the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. These steps by the government have exposed a lot of inadequacies in Nigeria.

In the course of lockdown, for instance, several millions of Nigerians did not have access to the basic necessity of life such as food, water, and housing, while many did not have the income to survive with their families. The fundamental question is how can people without the basic necessity of life be told to stay at home? For those people that have no home, and live on the street, (for instance, the *Almajiris*) where will they stay? The *Almajiris* are children or minors that are not well taken care of, and left to fend for themselves. Most of these children live on the street and survive through begging for alms. Apart from the fact that these children have no permanent place to call their home, the lockdown period compounded their problem, as they were further exposed to starvation, and being infected with the coronavirus. While the *Almajiri* needed to be assisted, the state governments, especially in the northern parts of the country embarked on their mass deportation from their state of residence, to that of origin. The northern state governments under the auspices of the Northern Governors' Forum (NGF) later stated that the deportation of the *Almajiris* was necessary because they are susceptible to contracting coronavirus, as

a result, they were deported to be able to receive care from their parents (The Guardian, 2020).

The federal government also came up with the idea of giving palliatives to the poor which they referred to as the “poorest of the poor”. However, one issue that came up with this idea was how to determine the poorest of the poor. The reason is not far-fetched from the fact that the country lacks reliable or accurate statistics and data on the demographical pattern of the country. This is not only seen as an inhibiting factor to effective planning but also an impediment for the judicious distribution of the palliative materials. Beyond this is the lack of accurate population figures of Nigeria, as the country continues to rely on an estimated figure. On different occasions, Nigeria's population is put at between 180 and 200 million, depending on who is quoting the figure and for what purpose. Another pertinent question to ask is, if an accurate figure of Nigeria's population is not known, how then would the country determine the number of children, adults, and aged population? How will the country know the number of the unemployed population and the population of those with a special need? All these data and information are needed for purposes of planning and budgeting, apart from the issue of giving out palliative materials. Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic further exposes the politics attached to the population census in Nigeria, as a tool for manipulating elections, and for accruing more revenue from the federation account among other parochial political attachments.

Another issue that arose during the Covid-19 is that it revealed the unpreparedness of the country with respect to the adequate provision of the health care facilities. Even though the infectious disease which started from China has given them a bit opportunity to prepare, and put in place necessary facilities to tackle the pandemic in case it will reach Nigeria, the country leadership, as usual, continue to play politics with the issue, claiming that all necessary facilities have been put in place. It was after the disease has reached the country that the so-called leaders were running helter-skelter; and put in place some makeshift facilities. Even the makeshift or improvised facilities put in place was because the Nigerian political leaders, highly placed technocrats and other who is who in the country who used to travel out of the country especially to Europe for medical attention cannot do so because of ravaging pandemic, and the lockdown of the international entry ports. Had it been possible for these categories of people to travel out, they would have left the poor masses in Nigeria to face the coronavirus scourge, while they stay away with their family in Europe and America. The government thus put in place some health care facilities in some of Nigeria's hospitals, because they no longer have the option and opportunity to travel out for medical attention as usual. Therefore, the setting up of emergency test centres, isolation centres and refurbishment of the hospitals by both the States and Federal government is a matter and issues arose from the Covid-19 pandemic. It is not surprising that during the ongoing pandemic, the Medical Doctors under the auspices of the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) have embarked on an indefinite nationwide strike. While all resident doctors, medical officers below the rank of Principal Medical Officer (PMO), and House Officers across all the Federal and State Hospitals in Nigeria have already joined the strike action as of Monday, June 15, 2020, others members working in Covid-19 isolation centres across the country are exempted from the strike for the first 2 weeks, after which they will join if the government fail to accede to their demands.

At this junction, it is pertinent to ask again why would the government delay taking care of its health sector till a time like this? The answer to this is simply a leadership

problem, which has been identified as a major governance challenge in developing countries. Thus, the inability of the government to develop the health sector is a direct result or consequence of poor governance system that has been offered by successive political leaders to Nigerians. There is no doubt that political leaders of many developing countries are well exposed to the way things are being done in the developed countries where they always travel to for shopping and medical trips, they have, however, failed to replicate this good development into their respective countries. Thus, these set of leaders are poor when it comes to practicing good governance, in terms of caring for the citizens by providing essential social and welfare services to the citizenry. It is surprising to note, that since most of the political class, the highly placed technocrats and "who is who" were prevented from seeking medical attention abroad due to the international border closure many of them are still surviving. Therefore, it can be inferred that there is more to their traveling abroad than seeking medical attention. Besides, some of these categories of people who were abroad when Covid-19 broke out were even returning to Nigeria. Many of them perhaps must have returned home because the hospitals in Europe and America must have been filled up by victims of coronavirus pandemic, and as such, they cannot be given "special treatment again".

Another issue and matter of interesting is the distribution of exotic cars to the member of the National Assembly amidst Covid-19 pandemic. It would be recalled that, as of March 26, 2020, three hundred and sixty (360) members of the House of Representatives started taking delivery of Toyota Camry 2020 model cars, which was said to have been purchased for and by them as their official cars. Although it has been planned to get official cars for the lawmakers prior to coronavirus pandemic, the cars were, however, delivered at a wrong time when people they are representing are being tormented by the infectious coronavirus, while the country economy is going down.

Another related issue to the National Assembly is the huge sum of N37 billion budgeted for the renovation of the National Assembly Complex. This can be seen as an ill-timed exercise given the state of the economy of the country. To this extent, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has appealed to the National Assembly to set aside the money meant for the renovation of the National Assembly Complex to alleviate the problems faced by the States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) at combating the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the vulnerable persons and poor masses in these respective domains. Thus, SERAP in its letter dated April 11, 2020, to both the Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives appealed to them on the need to use the N37 billion to help the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory.

The distribution of palliatives through the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management is also an issue that generates a lot of controversies. The Federal Government of Nigeria in its bid to cushion the effect of the lockdown on the poor and the vulnerable made provision for the disbursement of N20, 000 Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) to each person. According to the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, over 2.6 million households have benefited from the palliative, while over 11 million vulnerable been identified in 35 states are yet to benefit from the palliative measure. However, the yardsticks used for the distribution of palliative materials have been questioned since. There were allegations that the sharing of the palliatives were discriminatory and highly politicized. The leadership of the National Assembly also faulted the pattern used by the Federal Government in the implementation of the Social Investment

Programme. The leadership of the National Assembly is not only questioning the lack of backing the programme with relevant legislation, but they are also not satisfied with the method of handling the programme, and thereby doubted the ability of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management to handle the proper sharing of the palliative. The NASS leadership equally wondered why the effect of palliatives has not been felt in many parts of the country despite the claim that over N700 billion have been shared with people (see Business Hallmark (2020)).

Another matter of concern is that of non-trial, or non-testing of some of the Covid-19 medicines that have been developed locally in Nigeria. To date, researchers across the universities in Nigeria came out with different medicine which they believed can cure the coronavirus disease. The list of the universities involved includes – the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Ibadan, Olabisi Onabanjo University among other universities, none of these medicines have been approved by the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC).

It is hoped that issues and matters that arose during the Covid-19 pandemic and lesson learned will reshape the governance system and propel quality governance in Nigeria. The government will be expected to take steps to once and for all fix the health and education sectors by appropriating the large percentage of its yearly budget to the sectors. Besides, the government will be expected to institute a social scheme for the purpose of ameliorating the predicaments of the masses, especially those that have to do with their basic needs.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The eruption of Covid-19 is no doubt a topical issue among countries across the globe in the last few months. Therefore, the affected countries, including Nigeria have continued to look for ways of halting the disease that has snuffed out lives out of many people and smothered the global economy. Nigeria has taken many steps toward combating the plague. However, the poor governance system in Nigeria, where state resources have not been judiciously managed for the state's development made the country's leadership be running helter-skelter when the first case of Covid-19 was recorded. The medical facilities that ordinarily should have been put in place if good governance had been practiced were not on the ground. This resulted in putting in place a makeshift medical facilities and isolation centres for accommodating people who are infected by the coronavirus. The governance system has equally impeded the university-industry-government mutual relations for combating the disease, instead each of these groups thus engaged in individual effort. The pattern adopted in the distribution of palliate materials to the poor and vulnerable was also faulty, resulting from the lack of accurate records, information, and statistics of the country's population. That the legislative arms of the government continue to take delivery of exotic cars during pandemic testifies to ineptitude in the governance system of Nigeria. Thus Covid-19 exposes the quality of governance in Nigeria and served as a litmus test about poor governance systems being operated in Nigeria. The study concluded that the continued rise in the number of Covid-19 cases, with limited health capacity to mitigate it is not only a threat to the lives of the citizenry but also has a tendency of escalating the disease beyond control. The study, therefore, recommended, that the country's leadership should go back to the drawing board to re-assess the pandemic in other

to strategize a formidable approach to halt the noxious disease, while attempt should also be made to provide quality governance in Nigeria.

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