

**THE IMPLICATIONS AND IMPACT OF COVID -19 PREVENTIVE  
MEASURES IN NIGERIA: A CASE OF PORT-HARCOURT CITY AND  
OBIO/AKPOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN RIVERS STATE (MARCH 2020  
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**Abstract**

*The paper x-rayed the historic origin of COVID -19 and the circumstances that surrounded its spread to almost all nations in the world. The devastating effect of the virus cannot be overemphasized; it has grounded global economy to the extent that it will take some nations centuries to recover from the effect, with an unimaginable number of deaths. The corona virus was first noticed and recorded on 31st December, 2019 in Wuhu, a city in China. On 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2020. As a result of its speedy spread and devastating effect to humanity, World Health Organization (WHO) declared the corona virus a global pandemic. The world Health Organization quickly swung into action on how the deadly disease can be controlled with precautionary measures that was adopted worldwide to combat the spread of the virus. Nigeria followed WHO's preventive measures with total adherence and added other stringent measures without recourse to the Nigerian peculiarities and uniqueness thereby leading to excruciating, pathetic condition of the masses that are not only vulnerable to hunger and insecurity but also susceptible to death by installment and other adverse impact on the economy. The federal government declared lockdown in Lagos, Ogun states and Abuja. State governments through their governors declared other precautionary measures in their respective states. The paper made use of structural functionalist theory and collected data through primary and secondary sources. The implication of the preventive measures to the people of Rivers state in Port Harcourt*

*and its environs formed the thesis of this paper. The perception of the people about the pandemic and the impact of the COVID-19 to the people were analyzed. It discovered that government lacked good policy formulation and implementation to fight and control the pandemic, it showed that Nigerian health sector is fragile and plagued with inadequacies. Government palliative measures were not commensurate to cushion the effect of pandemic to the people. Stakeholders and actors used corona virus as a conduit to appropriate wealth for themselves. There was no uniformity of actions and data from agencies and ministries. Conclusively the paper made recommendations on way forward, which includes the use of our natural and medical clinical research and personnel in finding a cure for it just as Madagascar did. Furthermore, there is need to upgrade our health sector, policy experts and technocrats on policy formulation be consulted to come up with good policies among others.*

**Keyword:** Preventive Measures, Coronavirus, COVID-19

## **Introduction**

COVID-19 is a global pandemic plaguing the world, its effect unquantifiable in all areas of human endeavors. This deadly pandemic originated from Wuhan, Hubei, Province in China in December 31st, 2019, and from there got to almost all parts of the world. In African it was first noticed in Egypt on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2020. In Nigeria the first case was reported and recorded, and announced on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 through an Italian citizen who tested positive in Lagos on March 9<sup>th</sup>, while another case was reported in Ewekoro, a city in Ogun state. (NCDC 2020)

The disease spreading like wild fire in dry hammartan season, found its way to other parts of the county. Federal Government in accordance with World Health Organization's directives set in motion federal and state ministries of health, National Center for Disease Control and other agencies to come up with policies and preventive measures to curb the pandemic. The first was federal government's declaration of lockdown in Lagos, Ogun states and Abuja. There were other preventive precautionary measures adopted by the federal government, like the closure of land, sea borders while intra and international flights were restricted. Governors of the various states in Nigeria adopted preventive measures and palliatives to cushion the adverse effect of the COVID-19 on the people. The people of Port Harcourt and its environs inclusive and that is where this study is centered on. This paper will find out how the people of Port Harcourt city and Obio/ Akpor were able to cope and manage themselves during the total and partial lock down in the city. The implication of the preventive measures to the

people of Port Harcourt and proffer solution to the negative impact of the preventive measures.

This study will find out the perception of the people of Port Harcourt city and Obio/Akpor about COVID -19 and government policies in ameliorating their plights and proffer probable solution on how to stay with the virus without been infected and do their normal business.

### **Statement of Problem**

Covid-19 has quarantined all sectors of human endeavor globally, its adverse effect to humanity is unimaginable. The number of deaths is alarming as recorded across the globe. There is no known approved cure for the pandemic and people are dying and getting infected on daily bases despite the preventive and palliative measures. The preventive measures as advocated by WHO and other agencies to combat the scourge is working but has so many disadvantages to developing and poor nations like Nigeria. Rationales behind these are problems this study addressed. The preventive measures, which include lockdown, brought untold hardship and hunger to the people leading to another virus, "hunger virus". Why have people refused to stay at home during the lockdown period? Were people consulted before decision was taken? What are the implications of the lockdown to the people of Port Harcourt metropolitan city? Are there solutions to the adverse effect of preventive and palliative measures to the people? Did Government palliatives help to cushion people suffering are research questions for the survey.

### **Conceptualisation**

#### **COVID-19**

World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) posited that COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by corona virus. It can be transmitted through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes or exhales. It is a large number of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). On 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2020, WHO posited that corona virus constituted a Public Health Emergency of International concern; In March 11, 2020 World Health Organization declared Corona virus a pandemic. President of America Trump (2020) describe corona virus as a national disaster.

Medicine.com (2020) defined COVID -19 as illness caused by a novel corona virus. NCDC (2020) averred that corona viruses are zoonotic, that they are normally

transmitted between animals and people. That corona viruses disease is caused by a new stain of corona viruses SARS-Cov-2 that has not been previously identified until reported and identified in Wuhan, China. The name COVID-19 was given to the disease by World Health Organization, which etymologically was coined as an acronym from the following words. CO stand for corona, VI represent virus, D for disease and 19 for 2019 when it was discovered.

Corona virus comes with the following symptoms, fever, dry cough, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, chills and repeated shaking, muscle pains, headache, sore throat, and loss of senses of taste or smell , fatigue, diarrhea, runny nose (catarrh) dyspnea and that symptoms appear within 14 days. There is no facial appearance that shows a person is infected with the virus. Corona virus can be transmitted by infected person through droplets from their nose and throats to objects and surfaces when they sneeze, cough on or touch surfaces such as table, doorknobs and hand rails, any person that touches those things and thereafter touches his eyes, mouth or nose without proper washing of hands get infected (WHO 2020). World Health Organization (2020) came up with the following precautionary measures on how to stay safe from COVID 19 considering its rapid spread and devastating impact globally.

### **Preventive Measures**

Yourdictionary.com (2019) defined preventive measures as intended or used to prevent or hinder, acting as obstacle, carried out to deter expected aggression by hostile forces, preventing or showing the cause of an illness or disease. In this context, preventive measures are measures mapped out by WHO, Ministries, agencies and other organization to prevent the astronomical spread of corona virus and its deadly effect to humanity. Different organization adopted different strategies under direct guidance of World Health Organization (WHO) to curb the pandemic as there is no vaccine for treatment ascertained by WHO. Federal government of Nigeria in collaboration with other federal and state agencies adopted many strategies in line with WHO guidelines to fight the pandemic scourge and to reduce its devastating effect to humanity. These measures will be listed subsequently in this paper as advocated by WHO and other agencies, all to ensure that the scourge is curtailed and contained.

### **Palliatives:**

WHO (2019) define palliative care as an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life- threatening

illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pains and other problems, physically, psychological and spiritual. Lexico.com (2019) view palliative as relieving pain without dealing with the cure of the condition, intended to alleviate a problem without addressing the underlying cause. This study adopted this definition as the meaning of palliative in this paper.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Structural Functionalism Theory**

This study adopted structural functionalism theory. Wikipedia (2017) “structural functionalism or simple functionalism is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability”. This theory views society through a macro-level adjustment based on social structure and social functions that work in harmony to shape the whole society. Structural functionalism centered on explaining and maintaining order, stability and cohesion based on interdependency, socialization and systemic change.

Modern political philosophers use the structural functionalist theory of ancient anthropologist, psychologist and sociologist like, Spencer, H (1899), Durkheim (1916), Radcliff-Brown (1935), Malinowski (1922), Parson, T (1939) Merton (1949). Political Scientist introduced structural functionalist theory in political science and public administration by comparing and analyzing political system. From their respective studies it was discovered that social function and organic life must work together through a network of connection into an integrated whole. Offiong (1997) postulated that “structural functionalism has been generally agreed on to be an offshoot from the general system theory. It is simply a means of explaining what political structures perform, what basic functions the political system and under what conditions in any given system”.

Chilcott (1998) posited that structural functionalism conceptualizes society as a system of interacting parts that promote stability or transformation through their interactions”. It is important to look at the structures of the system to substantiate particular activities and their interrelations. The basic concept of structural functionalism theory includes,

- (i) Society consists of both structures and functions that are interconnected and interdependent, and ultimately focused on maintaining or

- mediating society equilibrium (Radcliffe- Brown, (1935) and or necessary transformation (Dale, Vella& Potts (2013)
- (ii) Social systems consist of both structures and functions that are necessary for the ongoing health or survival of that system Chilcott (1998).
  - (iii) Structures exist to meet the functional needs of a system Merton (1949)
  - (iv) Systemic functionality (that is how parts of the system work) across and within structures serves to reinforce and maintain the stability of the system's structures in the context of an ever-changing complex and unpredictable system.

From the above analysis on structural functionalism it is evident that this study can effectively be anchored on structural functionalist theory. There are structures and functions to be performed in any given social system or in a nation. For a nation to function effectively and efficiently all the structures must perform their respective statutory functions harmoniously to achieve optimally. There must be cordial interaction, interconnection and interdependence of all the structures and functions for optimal benefit of the entire society or nation. (Chinnah 2019)

All the parts concerned in achieving optimally in the fight against Covid-19, WHO, government agencies, private and public, which are partners in the short or long run must work together for the success to be achieved. The structural functional theory postulates that when public administrators plan, they have no choice but to take consideration of environmental factors, (political, social, economic, technological and ethical) interrelated elements with interaction between the environment external and internal (Ezeani, 2006). The relationship and interrelation among the various structures is very important as it is used to evaluate and analyze the success or otherwise of any phenomenon using the best methodology before recommendation and suggestions is made. The central theme in structural functionalism theory is that, it views a society as a complex system made up of parts with functions clearly stated to be executed by the various structures to work in unity and to promote solidarity and stability. Coherence and harmony are needed for optimal maximization and achievement of set goals to fight Covid-19. Government at all levels with her agencies, ministries, departments and private organizations must work concertedly to achieve the fight against this pandemic.

## **Methodology**

This study made use of secondary data, as relevant documented literatures like newspapers, journals. Government gazettes, textbooks and few people interviewed.

## **Data analysis**

### **Preventive measures on COVID -19**

World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) as the highest health body worldwide came up with the following preventive measures on how covid-19 can be combated and reduce the chances of being spread .

1. Regular and thorough washing of the hands with an alcoholic –based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. This kills the virus that might be on your hands.
2. Maintain at least 1 meter (3 feet) distance between yourself and others.
3. Avoid going to crowded places.
4. Government should encourage the general public to wear a fabric mask if there is widespread community transmission.
5. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
6. Make sure you and the people around you follow good respiratory hygiene.
7. Stay home and self-isolate even with minor symptoms such as cough, headache, mild fever, until you recover.
8. If you have fever, cough and difficulty in breathing, seek medical attention, but call by telephone in advance if possible and follow the directions of your local health authority.
9. Keep up to date on the latest information from trusted sources, such as WHO, or your local health authorities

### **Organizations and Agencies in the Fight Against COVID-19.**

1. World Health Organization, Federal and state Governments.
2. Federal and state Ministry of Health,
3. Presidential Task Force, called PTF-COVID-19.
4. Nigeria Center for Disease and Control (NCDC)
5. National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR)

6. National Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD)
7. National Agency for Food, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC)
8. National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA)
9. National Association of Resident Medical Doctors.
- 10 Nigeria Private Sector Coalitions.
11. National / State Emergency Management Agency.
12. International Coordinating Group on Vaccine.

Amanda (2020) opined that one of the measures recommended to curb the pandemic following its seeming success in China and other foreign countries is for people to remain at home and avoid person to person contact to reduce the spread. No wonder, Federal government under the leadership of president Buhari announced lockdown in two states and the Federal capital territory on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, namely, Lagos, Ogun and Abuja. The lockdown of non-essential services, and activities, closure of schools, a ban on international flight, imposition of curfew, restrictions on mass gathering outside workplace for not more than 50 persons in close spaces, (wedding, funerals etc) provided physical distancing measures ,mandatory use of facemasks.

The fight against Covid 19 need a concerted unified effort, so state government had their own share of preventive measures as adopted by the governors of the respective states to curb the pandemic. The federal government lockdown Lagos, Ogun and Federal Capital territory Abuja on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020 for an initial period of two weeks as announced by the president.

### **Rivers State Preventive Measures to Combat COVID 19.**

The dynamic and proactive Governor of Rivers state, Barrister Ezebunwo Nyesom Wike was among the first governors that took the fight against Covid 19 seriously as he adopted and deployed many strategies on how to achieve result and better the lives of his people. In March 2020 the governor set up a Task Force on Covid - 19, on 4<sup>th</sup> May the Governor of Rivers state and that of Kaduna state announced their own lockdown in compliance of all the state preventive measures as advocated by WHO and other collaborating agencies in the fight against the spread of the virus. Governor, Wike announced total lockdown in two local government areas namely Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt city local government,



which include compulsory wearing of facemask in public places and vehicles. Closure of all land, sea and air borders and entry routes into the state. Closure of all open markets, slaughters, hotels, guesthouses, cinema, bars, and restaurant, maintenance of social distancing, washing of hands with alcoholic based sanitizer, practice of social distancing.

Public and private vehicles to limit their passengers based on social distancing.

Avoid contact with infected person. Avoid touching of eyes, mouth and nose frequently.

Washing of hands and the use of alcoholic sanitizer.

No public gathering like wedding, funerals or social events.

No religious gathering must be more than 50 persons in attendance.

Closure of all educational institutions.

Sensitization campaign about the pandemic, advertisement, jingles on television, radio, billboard, town criers at village setting.

Provision and donation of isolation centers and treatment centers for those infected.

No operation of public and private motor parks in the two local government areas.

Donation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by government and other items.

### **Rivers State Government Palliative Measure On COVID-19**

To cushion the effect of the Covid -19 in the state, state government set up a task force and budgeted 2 billion for the purchase of food items that will be given to the most vulnerable across the 23 local government areas in the state.

Distribution of food items to the vulnerable in the 23 local government areas.

Provision of free buses along major routes in Port Harcourt metropolis.

Donation of equipment and facilities for covid-19.

Despite all the adverts and sensitization about corona virus the people of the state are not taking the preventive measures seriously. They viewed the pandemic as a sickness for the elites that travelled abroad or sickness for those who had siphoned the nation's wealth, while some are of the opinion that it was punishment from

God on those in government. Ebola experience was still fresh in the memory of Rivers people, its politicization that goes with financial benefit turned the whole thing like a child's play despite the sensitization by government agencies on the social media.

The people are not ready to comply because government has failed severally in terms of welfare and social security. People were forced to stay at home because of threat from the government, not that they are afraid of the pandemic. The direct monitoring and patrol team led by the Governor in the streets and routes to the state including the demolition of a hotel in Eleme Local Government area of the state helped to aid compliance not that the people were ready to comply neither do they believe that the pandemic is real.

### **Impact of Preventive Measures of Covid-19 to the People of Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas.**

UNDP (2020) stated that covid-19 might threaten developing countries like Nigeria. The pandemic may not only be a health crises in the short term but there seems to be a looming and devastating economic crises that may affect social and private lives for months and years to come.....the pandemic will leave deep scars . The scars the pandemic brought to the people will take decades if not century before it can be corrected.

The preventive measures of lockdown that took place in the two local government areas led to increase in prices of goods and services. All the entry routes to the state were closed except for essential services. There was no free vehicular movement of goods and services to and from other states. The few goods available were scrambled for by many persons leading to astronomical increase in prices of goods and services. The inflation during the period was quite astronomical for the masses to deal with.

The closure of markets, companies and factories, motor parks, hotels and cinemas affected so many people and mostly the private sector. It led to unemployment, increase in the level of hunger, poverty, low religious activities, rise in sexual abuses at homes. Specifically those that have their businesses in Ikokwu, Oil mill Market, Oginigba, mile 1 \$ 3 markets among others.

Oparinde (2020) averred that covid-19 affected the income of most churches significantly because of low giving capacity of some members; he advised churches to go investment and human capacity development. According to him

evangelism were reduced, house fellowship stopped. Religious organization suffered both physical and spiritual, churches went online for fellowship and other activities.

The citizens of the area suffered from emotional, psychological trauma as a result of the shortfall to their expectation on the area of government palliatives to ameliorate the excruciating condition of the masses. The state government came up with good palliative measures to cushion the effect of the covid -19 but the distribution of the palliatives met with difficulties Evang (2020). Federal government of Nigeria rolled out palliative measures for targeted group, however lamentation have trailed the distribution of the palliative measures.

The definition of vulnerable as a construct was not captured as the distribution of palliatives were politicized. There were cases where people waited and waited only to get two packets of indomie only for a family of 7 and three cups of gari. ThisDAY (2020) reported that it is lamentation and bitter wailing in Lagos and part of the country as Nigerians complained that stimulus packages by federal government and Lagos state government to cushion the effect of the lockdown imposed on some states have not been sincerely deployed, the same complain was raised in the local governments as investigated.

The preventive measures affected negatively as it led to increase in crime and other anti-social vices in the area. UNDP (2020) opined that the lockdown was critical for the disease containment; it undermined the economic and social foundations for survival and the resilient structures of Nigeria most vulnerable population. That millions of Nigerians will be pushed into temporary poverty, unemployment which will further expose them to the hunger -virus. Lockdown induced poverty and unemployment, might therefore trigger an increase in other social problem including general insecurity, kidnapping and gender -based violence. This exactly happened and is still happening. Most people did not go back to their businesses. There is increase in robbery and other anti-social vices in the area.

Social distancing sitting system in both private and commercial vehicles led to increase in cost of transportation fair. For example from Choba to mile 3 is now #200 instead of #150. The covid -19 buses were not available in all the routes and are few in number to meet the needs of the teaming population. Transporters had no customers to carry just as business people had no customer.

The closure of schools did not only affect children education it also affected their parents in so many negative ways. Parents spend more on watching and taken

care of their children. Many students and pupils spent more of their time in playing than studying. The online virtual teaching and learning had so many disadvantages ranging from poor network, lack of phones, cost of data, incompetency in handling phones, cost of phones etc. The preventive measure had serious negative impact on the educational system. As it stands now the academic calendar is distorted, there are two sets of year one student jostling for admission and registration in the university. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was not left out of the ugly side, those in camp were forced to leave camp not completing the orientation course; those yet to go are also worried. People with both minor and serious health challenges were at risk and died because of societal stigma and fear of been tagged covid-19 patient and the phobia of going to isolation center. Medical practitioners were over used and many lost their lives in the course of helping to treat others.

The pandemic coupled with its preventive measures led to gender generated violence as noted by (UN women, 2020) women and children suffer from domestic violence during the lockdown leading to increase in conflict. (Akpan 2020) observed that with the restriction of movements couples were compelled to stay at home together for longer period, creating additional tensions, which subsequently led to frustrations and aggression. Marriages and relationships were wrecked because of the lockdown. Miscreants and hoodlums within the area took advantage of the lockdown to perpetrate more crime knowing that people are within the confine of their houses.

In terms of social inequality it was ostensible to all and sundry (Makinde, 2020, Etang 2020) opined that the pandemic lockdown led to change in the educational system and exposed the high level of social inequality in Nigeria.

The preventive and palliative measures adopted had some positive impact, people were forced to look inward and thinker what better thing to do and eke a living. Families were united as people had time with their families instead of staying on hotels. There was improvement in the use of information communication technology for students, teachers and others. Learning and teaching were done on zoom some other businesses were also done online. Churches went into online worship and praises. People became more conscious of themselves health wise and high level of hygiene maintained by people. The health sector attracted attention of government for improvement and overhauling.

## **Summary**

The paper critically analyzed Covid-19 impact on the people of Nigeria focusing on the two local government areas that locked down in Rivers State. The study discovered that the nation health sector was not ready and prepared to combat any emergency, as there were no infrastructural facilities, equipment, staff and research center to handle cases as seen in the two local government studied. The study discovered that there was gap between policy formulation and implementation from the government and her citizens. People were not consulted before decisions were taken on covid-19 preventive measures. Government of Rivers state did not critically analyze its preventive measures before it adopted. What worked perfectly in USA cannot work here in Nigeria if not properly managed.

The study unveiled that palliative measures caused more harm than the covid-19 pandemic. That palliative measures were in no way tantamount to cushioning the adverse effect of the pandemic. The palliatives were not only politicized but also seen as conduit for appropriation of state resources by those concerned. It was discovered that the pandemic exists but was over blown to attract financial sympathy and empathy from other higher authorities.

### **Recommendations**

That state government should look inward in reorganizing her health sector to world standard, build and invest on research institutes and encourage the use of African traditional medicine.

People should be consulted before decisions about them are taken.

People are not fully sensitized about the pandemic, more sensitization need to be done.

There is need for policy monitoring and evaluation. There should be transparency and accountability in the use of public funds. People should stop playing politics with corona virus.

Palliatives should be meaningful enough to be called palliative and to cushion the effect.

Government at all level should come up with proactive measures on how to combat the pandemic looking inward in Africa.

Government at all levels should build more functional health centers with qualified professionals, building of research centers and institute.

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