
NIGERIA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS AND COVID-19 ONSLAUGHT

by

Nuhu Shehu Nuhu
Kaduna Polytechnic
Email: nuhushehu@gmail.com
Phone: +23424458102

Abstract

This study analyzed Nigeria's foreign relations in the period of the outbreak of Corona virus. The study adopts the qualitative method of data gathering where secondary sources of data were analyzed. It revealed that due to the low demand of Crude oil prices in the world, Nigeria's oil revenue dwindled which posed serious threat to development. The study brought to the fore that Nigeria must look inwards to diversify its sources of revenue due to the effect of dwindling revenue when ever a pandemic sets in. However, assistance in form of loans was received from multilateral partners, and the United States of America. The study recommends that the government should strengthened its boarder security to timely respond to outbreak of global pandemic. It went further to recommend that Nigeria should encourage the use of digital trade as viable option for the elimination of problems encountered in the economy as a result of lockdown down effects in case of the outbreak of any pandemic in future.

KeyWords: Foreign policy, development partners, Covid-19, development assistance.

Introduction

Foreign policy has been defined as the general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states (Brittanica, 2020). According to Bojang (2018), he described foreign policy as the discrete purposeful action that results from the political level decision of an individual or group of individuals in dealing with the external environment.

Diplomacy as instrument of foreign policy has been affected much due to the tensions around trade and transport of medicines, diagnostic tests and hospital equipment for treating the corona virus disease (wikipedia, 2020). Godwin Emebele, the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria said that *"around the world, countries have moved away from multilateralism and responded by fighting for themselves with several measures to protect their own people and economies, regardless of the spillover effects on the rest of the world"*.

He further observed that "According to the World Customs Organization, a total of 32 countries and territories, adopted stringent and immediate export restrictions on critical medical supplies and drugs that were specifically meant to respond to COVID-19" (Godswil U., 2020).

Nigeria's foreign relations which predates its independence, can be traced back to thousands of years even before the coming of the Europeans, where the various emirates, Kingdoms and empires were believed to have interacted with the outside world. Subsequently the coming of Europeans, precisely the United Kingdom through the Royal Niger Company became the Country's monumental pioneer relationship that ensued with one of the super powers of the world up till the present times.

The colonization of Nigeria inadvertently directed Nigeria's foreign relations towards the Western countries especially the United Kingdom and its allies. However, after independence in 1960 the country drafted and codified its foreign policy to rest heavily on concern and focus on Africa. It continued to play this role until the change of events in the international system

and the global economy, where its foreign policy thrusts inclined more on achieving economic diplomacy for its economic advancement and growth from around 1985 to the present (Ese, U., 2020).

Nigeria's position in International community has not surpassed its status as developing country, despite its being one of the largest producers of crude oil and having an active millions of youth population that can be deployed into various sectors for gainful economic activities, abundant natural resources and other raw materials (World Bank, 2019).

Nigeria relies heavily on development assistance and foreign loans from advanced countries like China, United Kingdom, United States of America, European commission and other multilateral financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for execution of its developmental projects like road networks, electricity, healthcare, education (Ugwube S., 2016). The total net official development assistance and official aid received in Nigeria in 2018 was reported at USD 3301520020 (Trading Economics, 2020).

In March 2020, Nigeria like other countries of the world, was hit by a pandemic which the World Health Organization (W.H.O) identified as Corona Virus or Covid-19. The virus was first discovered in the Seafood market in Wuhan (Chinenyinwa, 2020) the Communist Republic of China (CRC). This disease brought about thousands of deaths around the world, and declined economic activities were so many vulnerable countries were at the brink of recession, among which include Nigeria (World Bank, 2020).

Problem Statement

The concern of this study stems from the need to solve the problem of dependency on foreign partners in the event of onslaught of a pandemic like the novel corona virus. It seeks to address how Nigeria will thrive in a pandemic without relying on development partners for survival.

In this work, analysis has been done on how the Corona Virus affected Nigeria, its ability to address the issue of Corona Virus (Covid-19), Nigeria's relations with development partners, and how to tackle it during this period. Moreover, the study has been laid on system analysis and critical geography as theoretical framework for analysis. The recommendations in this study, will serve as a new wake up call for Nigeria in its relations with other nations which brings out the importance of guarding national interest as a priority in its relations with the outside world. As the study shows how developed nations jealously stopped essential export in preference for their own nationals.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts two theories in order to explain the pattern of relationship that occurred among nations especially Nigeria and the outside world. The theories are: system analysis, propounded by David Easton and the Critical geography theory, which emanated from the ideas of Jargen Habermas in the 1970s, and the Frankfurt School. Though, this theory is also rooted in the neo-maxism school of thought. (Gauga, 2007, and Stephen, 2020).

As provided in the Eastonian system analysis (Gauga, 2007), the relationship of causes of Covid-19, as input to the international political system, and the policies and decisions made, regarded as outputs are explained and analysed.

The critical geography here, is based on the notion that, humanity has the potential to transform the environment, and it offers a means of examining international political behaviors including the relationship between Government and people; states at regional and global levels and lastly between international organizations and states (Stephen, 2017).

Looking at the importance of environment in its ability to generate inputs and feedbacks, the Covid-19, as a virus is a clear expedient factor of natural causative agent that can bring about a change in the environment, whose effect can lead to changing pattern of behaviours among nations in terms of decisions and policies.

These two theories are used inter-changeably throughout the analysis in this study in order to determine the impact and effects of Nigeria's foreign relations with the international community as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19.

Methodology

The paper adopts the qualitative method in analyzing the data generated in the study. Secondary sources of data ranging from books, journals, news articles, government documents, and internet materials were used to form the literature review and content information provided in the research in order to analyse foreign relations of Nigeria in the wake of COVID-19, especially as it relates to economic growth before and after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Scope of the Study

This paper examines Nigeria's foreign relations in succeeding months to the outbreak of Corona Virus (Covid-19), precisely when the Nigeria government imposed a curfew (lockdown) on 27th March, 2020, that saw to the shutdown of almost all political, social, economic and cultural activities in the country. It analyzed how Nigeria has been interacting with countries in the world in furtherance of its national interest or foreign policy goals and objectives particularly in the area of financial development assistance and security assistance during the outbreak of Corona Virus (Covid-19).

Literature review

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy has been defined as the strategy that is properly articulated and designed in a coordinated manner by institutionally designated decision makers in a bid to manipulate the international environment to achieve identified national objectives (Ese&Jide, 2018). This implies that foreign policy is the instrument in which states advance to achieve their national fundamental objectives.

Foreign policy is also described as a type of action, states embarks upon in its interaction with other member states in the global environment to attain its goals and objectives (Stephen&Kafilat,2017).

Foreign policy is also defined as the actions of national or central governments taken towards other actors external to the legal sovereignty of the initiating governments. As prescribed in the theories used in this study, the systems theory and critical geography, which stipulates inputs on foreign policy decisions and policies from the environment, will reflect rather an isolated phenomenon in which the environment and nature had caused nations to act in a way that is non-traditional as far as sources of foreign policy making and decision are concerned(Nuhu S., 2015).

The Corona Virus, unlike wars that have a history of ravaging the social and economic fabrics of nations, the Corona Virus offered an unprecedented phenomenon that has influenced foreign policy decisions and actions of various nations which calls for another Marshall plan in order to assist nations whose economies were ravaged by the pandemic(Sean F.,2020). Corona Virus, unlike wars that are decided by policy makers, the Corona virus came about as a result of the influence of the environment even through, traces of human causes abound in its existence(Hadi E., &Mahrokh, J, 2020).

Global Pandemic and Foreign Policy

Global pandemic has in recent times become a very important phenomenon in global affairs that attracted concern of scholars in international relations that found it worthy of being studied alongside the foreign policy of nations. Foreign policy is now being gradually driven substantially by health in order to protect national security, free trades, and economic advancements(ibid:2015). To this end, in November 2001, the countries of Canada, France, European Commission, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, with technical support from the World Health Organization, came together to

establish the Global Health Security Initiative (GHSI) in order to strengthen health preparedness and respond to biological, chemical, radio-nuclear and other global influencing threats (Nuhu S., 2015).

The concluded Millennium Development Goals and the provisions of the New Partnership for Africa's development (NEPAD), also sought to address global pandemic issues. And the activities of these organizations are felt in these countries over the years, especially in the developing and less developed countries in Africa. However, so many challenges stood on the way to total eradication of diseases (Ibid: 2015).

Global pandemics like the HIV and Aids, Poliomyelitis and even malaria, were some of the diseases at the table of most countries and international organizations like the W.H.O in terms of concerted efforts of eradication and healthcare administration even before the outbreak of the Corona Virus in December, 2019 (WHO, 2019).

Poliomyelitis, an acute viral infectious disease which spread from person to person via the fecal-oral route, leading to muscle weakness and acute flaccid paralysis, had ravaged countries of the developing world, where it was recorded in 2008 that Nigeria had 90% of polio cases of all the countries in African continent (Ibid: 2015) (The author ought to have provide a reliable source) Per. Fortunately, the world health organization in July, 2020 declared that Nigeria is now free from the Poliomyelitis virus. However, HIV & AIDS, malaria are far from being over, looking at the number of patients and infections recorded annually in the country.

Corona Virus (COVID-19)

Corona Virus is a large family of viruses which may cause disease in animals or humans. About seven types of Corona Viruses can infect people around the world, but from study, it is believed that only four viruses of the Corona can infect humans which are 229E, NL63, OC43 and HKV (Abdulhafeez, 2020).

The Viruses when contracted cause a respiratory infection varying from the common cold to more severe diseases such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the present virus (Corona Virus). They are all referred to as zoonotic diseases caused by acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-COV"2). (Ibid: 2020).

Corona Virus was first discovered in the seafood market at Wuhan (Chinenyenw, 2020), Southern China which rapidly spread throughout the world. The spread has generated reactions from so many countries of the world, where China as the epicenter of the disease was accused of mishandling and conceiving the existence and outbreak of the disease to the rest of the world countries. This had created a diplomatic impasse especially with the United States of America, that its President made series of calls for the prosecution of China and calling for investigations as to how China and the World Health Organization failed to protect the people of the world from the onslaught of the disease.

Impact of Corona Virus in the Nigerian Economy

Corona Virus was first traced to an Italian expert working with the Lafarge company who entered the country, and had other contacts whom were infected by the disease. Efforts were made in tracing and isolating the victims, however, the virus could not be contained and eventually led the Nigerian Government into shutting down first, its international airports of Nnamdi Azikwe in Abuja and Murtala Muhammad airport in Lagos (Peter I., 2020).

The devastation of the virus in World's economy greatly affected Nigeria as a monoculture economic country that heavily depends on the exportation of crude oil as its major source of revenue that is used in infrastructural development and servicing almost all the sectors of the economy.

According to the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (Emefele, 2020), crude oil prices declined dramatically to as low as US \$ 17 per barrel by the end of March 2020. The over dependence on imports of finished products and other raw materials for industries production

inputs like the pharmaceutical industries, also were severely affected due to suppliers shut down of factories abroad especially in the people's republic of China (Opcit: 2020).

The household incomes, was catastrophic in Nigeria, due to the virus, whereas said by the Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria (CDC, 2020), "most Nigerian Families depend on daily income for their survival. The lockdown imposed on 27th March, 2020 for the whole country, revealed horrible scenes of destitute stricken citizens in Nigeria.

Moreover, the lost and ill conditions of breadwinners affected by the disease aggravated the poverty of households.

Nigeria's Intervention Program for Palliatives and Resuscitating the Economy

Nigeria like the rest of the world countries has put in place various measures, financial and monetary policies, in order to address the onslaught impact of the Corona Virus on the economy, the population, and also security as the stability and protection of lives and properties is the cardinal fundamental objectives of the existence of the country.

The following measures were adopted in Nigeria during the onslaught of Corona virus in order to revamp and resuscitate the economy and welfare of the citizens:

Fiscal and Monetary Policies:

1. Banks were granted regulatory forbearance to restructure terms of facilities in sectors hit by the pandemic.
2. In addition, moratorium were granted on all Central Bank of Nigeria's monetary interventions related to credit facilities expended to households, small and medium scale enterprises etc.
3. The CBN directed oil companies to sell foreign exchange to CBN and not to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).
4. The CBN created a ₦ 50 billion targeted credit facility for affected households and SMEs.
5. The CBN is to provide ₦ 1 trillion in loans to boost manufacturing and production across critical sectors (Emiefele, 2020).

Social and Education Policies:

Some of the measures adopted by the Nigerian Government in the social and education sectors are as follows:

1. The World Health Organization and the Nigeria's Centre for Disease Control are putting efforts in building the nation's capacities for response to the disease in areas of identification, diagnosis of the disease (Chinenyenwa,2020.).
2. The government is increasing the health capacity of hospitals to address the disease, and building more isolation centers with provision for drugs to address the disease symptoms, ventilators for patients with difficulty in breathing and also good nutritious foods.
3. The security agencies were used in enforcing the social distancing measures and imposing curfew in worst hit areas.

International Support to Nigeria during the COVID-19

Before the pandemic, the government had been battling with poor recovery from the 2014 oil shocks, with GDP growth at around 2.3 percent in 2014. And in February, the IMG revised the 2020 GDP growth rate from 2.5 percent to downward relapse of just 2 percent as a result of the impact of covid-19 on the economy(Onyekwena&Ekeruche,2020).

The Corona virus pandemic has ushered in a new global readiness and empathy for the assistance of countries mostly developing nations whose economies were devastated by the pandemic (Sohaela, 2020). According to Tessa, (2020), the UN COVID-19 Basket Fund, made important donations in medical supplies to Nigeria. The United Nations is also supporting Nigeria in the areas of risk communications, community engagement, infection prevention and control, epidemiology/surveillance and management of the virus (UNICEF, 2020).

The United States assisted Nigeria with over \$ 21 million in order to address the problems of water scarcity and sanitation, humanitarian assistance to the internally displaced persons and Corona virus infection prevention. It has also supported the Nigeria's Centre for Disease Control in sending million SMS messages to Nigerians, educating them on safety measures to be taken during the pandemic (US Embassy, 2020).

Moreover, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), had approved \$ 3.4 million in emergency financial assistance to Nigeria, under the rapid financing instrument to support in addressing the severe economic impact of the virus (IMF: 2020).

The individual countries support to Nigeria has been gloomy due to the impact of the disease on their individual countries. The Countries moved away from multilateralism and are responding internally using several measures to protect their own people and economies, regardless of the spill over effect on the rest of the world (Emefiele, 2020)

The support rendered to Nigeria during the onslaught of Covid-19 as found in the study, was far away from addressing the devastation caused by the pandemic due to other countries growing economic conditions that made development assistance very difficult to expend especially to developing countries like Nigeria.

Conclusion

The Corona virus as shown in this study had wreaked havoc on the Nigerian economy due to the fall on crude oil prices and the ban imposed by countries on importation which local industries especially pharmaceutical industries relied heavily. Households income were affected due to lockdown or curfew on the daily wages of low income earners and they live at the mercy of paltry palliatives from the government, and other individual of community humanitarian support groups. It revealed that, the strained on the economies of Nigeria's global partners due to the virus has reduced the level of donations anticipated by the government and the Nigerian populace.

Recommendation:

The Corona virus pandemic in Nigeria has revealed the need for urgent policy change and institutional restructuring in order to prepare for such eventualities in the future. Based on the findings of this paper, I will recommend the following:

1. The Government should prioritize funding in the health sector, especially, emergency preparedness and response units, are to be well equipped, and ever ready in case of a pandemic outbreak.
2. Nigeria together with her global partners should improve boarder and airports facilities for detection, prevention and early response alert on persons, animals coming into or going out of their respective countries. This will save countries from redistributing deadly contagious diseases as they manifest in their countries.
3. Nigeria should invest heavily on digital trading technologies owing to the succour these technologies provided especially in other nations as a result of the pandemic. Nigeria should device ways of increasing its revenue base through these digital trade technologies.

This study examines the nature of COVID-19 and its impact on the Nigerian economy, and how it affects Nigeria's interactions with other nations, especially its ability to receive

development assistance from these foreign countries. The study is limited to focus on these relationship mentioned and did not seek to obtain individual country's contribution to Nigeria before the pandemic but during the pandemic. It is also limited by its inability to obtain data from the government on countries it tried to seek foreign assistance as a result of the pandemic as whether or not such requests were honored or not.

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