



HOW READY ARE NIGERIANS FOR COVID -19 CHALLENGES?

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ABSTRACT

Background: Coronavirus Disease started in Wuhan China at the tail end of 2019. Since then it has spread to all continents of the world like wildfire, resulting in declaration of COVID-19 as pandemic by World Health Organisation on 11th March 2020. Nigeria recorded its first confirmed case in February 2020.

The Presidential Task Force was set up by Federal Government immediately with responsibility of coordinating the national response, and mitigating against the spread.

However, the challenges faced by the state governments were enormous, viz-a-viz setting up isolation centers, provision of test kits, Personal Protective Equipment, and training of manpower.

Conclusion: There is need for all levels of governments and citizens to work together in creating more awareness on COVID-19 in order to mitigate the spread of this deadly virus.

Keywords: COVID-19, Nigeria, Presidential Task Force, PPE, Health workers.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic is the health challenge facing the entire world populace in this century. The devastating effect on the developed countries like Italy, Spain, UK and USA have shown that no country is prepared for the destructive nature of this virus. This disease puts enormous pressure on health systems and Health Care Workers (HCW). The hospitals were overwhelmed by the number of infected patients in need of care. Global economy is not spared too as a number of countries are going into recession. It was projected that developing countries will bear the brunt of this pandemic because of poor health facilities, poor planning, poor

economy, ongoing wars, and corruption. As of 5th May 2020 the pandemic has affected 213 countries around the world.¹

Nigeria, the most populous black nation with the estimated population of over 200 million is not save from this pandemic. Nigeria recorded the first case of COVID-19 on 27 February 2020 in Lagos.^{2,3} However, as of May 5th 2020 the disease has spread all over the country, with 2950 confirmed cases, 98 deaths and 481 discharged from isolation centre.¹

The Federal government responded to this pandemic just like any other country by





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setting up COVID 19 Presidential Task Force (PTF) on 9 March 2020 to coordinate and oversee the multi-sectorial inter-governmental efforts to contain the spread and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. This task force is headed by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Mr. Boss Mustapha.

The task force came out with action plan to curb the spread of this disease with policy statements which include: prevention, social distancing, testing, contact tracing, closing of all the borders (land, sea and air), provision of PPE, setting up testing centers, training of HCW, awareness programs/campaigns on all medias (television, radio, telecommunication networks), closing down all schools in Nigeria, initial lockdown of 3 most affected states in the country (Lagos, Federal Capital Territory and Ogun) and provision of palliative measures to reduce the effects of lockdown on the citizenry. The state government also passed bills into law to support the stay at home order.

The Presidential task force is tasked with the following mandates:

1. Provide overall policy direction, guidance and National Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) at the NCDC and other Ministries and Government Agencies.
2. Enable the delivery of national and state level outbreak control.
3. Review and make approval recommendations for implementing country wide or regional non-pharmaceutical intervention.
4. Provide recommendations for the direct funding and technical support to states and local government.
5. Define targets and monitor the progress in the delivery of these targets to meet the minimum requirements for a satisfactory performance.
6. Coordinates Nigeria's engagement with other countries bilateral and multilateral bodies, and international organization.
7. Keep the public abreast of strategic progress with Nigeria's response and emerging development regarding preparedness and response.

The challenges of Covid-19 in Nigeria include:

- a. Inadequate number of testing centers; Nigeria with 36 states including FCT had less than 30 testing centers (as at 5th May 2020).
- b. Lack of test materials (reagents, PCR machines and swab sticks).
- c. Inadequate provision of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for frontline health workers. 135 HCW had contracted the disease and 5 death recorded as of 5/5/20.⁴ This has created fear among the HCWs and many private hospitals have closed down across the country leading to increase in non-COVID-19 related deaths.
- d. Lack of adequate number of trained HCWs to handle the testing.
- e. Lack of awareness/ health promotion about the diseases among the population.
- f. Lack of funding by the state government in setting up of an ideal isolation center with the necessary equipment.



- g. Poorly motivated HCWs (non-payment of hazard allowance to the HCW, no available concrete insurance plan).
- h. Poor surveillance and contact tracing.
- i. Increased poverty due to lockdown as our economy thrives on informal sector.
- j. Politicization of the response against COVID-19.
- k. Ignorance and denial of the pandemic by the populace.

Recommendations

1. Provision of PPE in all health facilities in Nigeria.
2. Retraining of HCWs on how to handle infected persons and on self-protection.
3. Establishment of test centers in all the local governments of the country.
4. Provision of adequate test kits in all the testing centers.
5. Enforcing face mask and social distance in working place, markets and all public gatherings.
6. Provision of more funding to the state governments to help in setting up isolation center.
7. Provision of health insurance and hazard allowance to the HCWs and other frontlines workers.
8. Provision of palliatives to people in a state where there is total lockdown in other to prevent breakdown of law and order.
9. Increase community health awareness and sensitization about COVID-19.
10. Encourage research on COVID-9 in the country.
11. Government should partner with private sectors, community leaders, religious leaders and NGOs on COVID-19 health promotion and provision of palliatives to the needy.
12. Procure operational vehicles and ambulances for easy tracing and transportation of suspected and confirmed cases to the isolation centres.

Conclusion: COVID-19 is the worst public health emergency and pandemic of this century. All hands must be on deck to mitigate its spread and reduce its socio-economic impact.

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