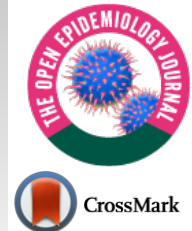




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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Factors that Hindered Effective Containment of Coronavirus: A Nigerian Perspective

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Dear Editor,

Pandemic refers to an epidemic that spread over several countries, normally affecting a large number of people [1]. Coronavirus has recently been detected in the Wuhan region of China in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) used the term 2019 novel coronavirus to refer to the new coronavirus that affected the lower respiratory tract. This virus causes various symptoms, such as pneumonia, fever, breathing difficulty and lung infection, etc. This respiratory infection can be transmitted through droplets of various sizes. According to current evidence, the COVID-19 virus is primarily transmitted between people through respiratory droplets and contact routes. These viruses gradually spread across the globe. Considering the rate of spread, it became alarming and called for urgent attention by world leaders to combat the menace. In the war against COVID-19, health system resilience, accountability and integrity are more important than ever. The health systems of some high-income-countries have become overwhelmed as a result of the rising number of morbidity and mortality due to COVID-19. The less resilient health systems of many low and middle-income countries (Nigeria is included), are even more vulnerable. With the high population as well as high population density in most part of the country, the risk of transmission and spread of the virus can never be overemphasized. If urgent and deliberate steps in the right direction are not taken by various stakeholders, the health system is at edge of complete collapse [2].

Nigeria announces the first index case of COVID-19 on February 27, 2020. Meanwhile, the index was an Italian national who imported the case of COVID-19 to the country; it is in view of this development that the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) swung into action to control the spread of this deadly virus. Among the actions taken by the

Federal government of Nigeria through the ministry of health to limit the spread of coronavirus, was announced at the early stage the restriction of movement, then total lockdown in three cities, namely; Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja, this is in line with global best practice in the containment of the spread of an infectious disease. The action was taken by the Federal Government of Nigeria via NCDC rather came when it was a bit late, as the virus had been spread and detected in various locations within the country. Despite the effort by the Federal Government of Nigeria to protect her citizen against the menace of COVID-19, certain factors hindered the effective management or containment of coronavirus in Nigeria. It is evident that Nigeria took this pandemic lightly through their initial actions/inactions. These include but are not limited to the inability of the Federal Government to ban international flight travelling in and out of the country, as at the time when the index case was identified. On the other hand, corruption, indiscipline, poverty, insufficient testing laboratories and personnel are some of the factors that hindered the effective containment of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Nigeria.

Corruption: is one of the most fundamental factors hindering the effective containment of the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria; however evidence from the latest report by CNN indicates that Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) gave false information on figures of coronavirus cases in Nigeria. In addition to this, some State Governments see this development as an avenue to embezzle public funds. In recent times, some patients with coronavirus in a state within the country threatened to leave the isolation centers, accusing the state government of not giving them the needed attention and treatment, including inadequate feeding. According to World Health Organization (WHO), Nigeria is said to have one of the largest stocks of Human Resources for Health (HRH) in Africa. However, this country has densities of nurses, midwives as well as doctors that are still too low to successfully deliver essential health services (1.95 per 1,000). In the last few years, migration to foreign countries has reduced, and now the

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primary challenge for Nigeria is insufficient production and inequitable distribution of healthcare providers. The health manpower is concentrated in urban tertiary health care service delivery centers [3].

The security personnel saddled with the responsibility of enforcing the order of restriction, which includes stay at home order, ban of inter and intra state travelling, given by the Federal Government and the various state governments to prevent the spread or transmission of the virus; however, they allow people to flout the order by collecting bribe from commuters who convey passengers from one location to another, this resulted in increasing number of incidence cases of coronavirus across the country; currently, more than 5000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 has been reported by NCDC [4].

Indiscipline: this is another factor that hindered the effective containment of coronavirus in Nigeria. Furthermore, indiscipline has been bedeviling Nigeria since time immemorial and preventing the country from moving forward. It is no longer news that in this part of the world people took the issues of coronavirus for granted, and a lot of people refuse to adhere to instructions given by NCDC on social distancing, hand washing, use of facemask and stay at home order without cogent reasons. However, all the above are rooted as a result of indiscipline and failure to adhere to the rule of law. Research has shown that some people in some part of the country still do not believe that coronavirus exists meanwhile, indiscipline has created a huge problem in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

Poverty: this remains a developmental challenge for Nigeria and a factor that is seriously affecting the fight against effective containment of the spread of coronavirus in Nigeria. Many Nigerians, however a large percentage of the Nigerian population live below the poverty line, many people survived by going out on a daily basis to look for what to sustain them for a day; therefore subjecting these categories of people to total lockdown will only translate to a potential death sentence by hunger. However, in an effort to ameliorate the impact of COVID-19 on the less privileged, the Federal Government of Nigeria come up with palliative measures by the disbursement of money and distribution of food items to various household identified as vulnerable in the society, this effort made by the government is a very welcome development. However, it is on record that palliatives given by the federal government did not get into the hand of most of the needy, as those saddled with the responsibility of distribution of palliative see it as means to enrich themselves. With the onslaught of the COVID-19 crisis,

concerns are growing that the scale and scope of IFFs could be increasing as authorities are distracted and overwhelmed by the unprecedented economic fallout. Such concerns are especially acute in developing countries, many of which are already characterized by poor governance, weak regulatory oversight, and corruption [5].

Insufficient laboratory and personnel: lack of adequate test labs for COVID-19 hindered the effective containment of coronavirus in the country. At the early stage of the pandemic, test laboratories for coronavirus in Nigeria were just three; two Lagos and one in Abuja; this seriously affected testing capacity to test the populace, however many wanted to be tested for coronavirus to know their status but as the result of insufficient test capacity of NCDC lab, as such they only resort to testing the privileged people in the society such as the public figures or politicians while ordinary Nigerian citizen with the virus continues to go about their normal business, thereby spreading the virus, this is more so as a lot of coronavirus patients are asymptomatic. Although in recent time, the NCDC has increased its lab test capacity in Nigeria, it can test up to 5000 people per day. In conclusion, for Nigeria to effectively contain the spread of coronavirus as other African countries have achieved, like Mauritius a few days ago, it has announced that for the last 15 days, it has not recorded any new case of COVID-19. The rapid spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria calls for sincerity on the parts of the authorities, the health workers, and citizens. It also demands vigilance from civil society organizations and the mass media to foster accountability. It is high time for Nigeria to explore all available means to ensure they contain the spread of coronavirus. However, all factors highlighted in the report should be reviewed strictly, and the grey areas addressed efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that the set objectives are achieved.

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