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IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: ADVOCATING FOR E-GOVANANCE

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic had caused huge strain on the burden of governance globally, even the developed countries are cringing under the heavy load. This work is aimed at x-raying the impact of the pandemic on governance and explore how the fragile economy of Nigeria fared under its weight. The paper adopted a discourse approach based on content analysis. The finding is that there's glaring deficits of proactive leadership in the pandemic management in Nigeria. The pandemic and faltering leadership plunged the country into untold hardship and heavy debt. Consequently, the paper recommends that government address the fragile health facilities in the country and embrace e-governance to enhance accountability, transparency and pure democracy based on citizen's participation as a means to cushion the effect of the pandemic on the nation.

Keywords: Governance, Covid-19 Pandemic, E- Governance, Information Communication and Technology (ICT), citizen's participation.

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Introduction

The essence of government, is to provide goods and services for the welfare of the people, maintain peace and security against internal insurrections and external aggression, maintain law and order through the law enforcement agencies, solving unemployment problems by creating jobs for the eligible job seekers, regulating economic activities in order to protect the economy from economic desperadoes as well as ensure economic growth and development, protect and preserve the rights of the citizenry, maintaining interrelationship with other nations of the world. Unarguably the advent of covid-19 had added another dimensions to these conventional duties of government. It's obvious that the pandemic has caused a huge strain on the burden of government, even the developed countries are cringing under the heavy load, one wonder how the fragile economy of the underdeveloped is faring under this weight.

Ogidi, Alum and Udo-Orji (2020) opined that beyond the tragic health hazards and human consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic talking about loss of many lives, the economic uncertainties, and disruptions that have resulted came at a cost to the global economy. To this end, the United Nations Trade and Development Agency (UNCTAD) put the cost of the outbreak at about US\$2 trillion in 2020". Understanding the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the Nigerian economy is very important here. According to Onyekwena and Ekereuche (2020, April 8), before the pandemic, the Nigerian government had been grappling with weak recovery from the 2014 oil price shock, with GDP growth tapering around 2.3 percent in 2019. In February, the IMF revised the 2020 GDP growth rate from 2.5 percent to 2 percent, as a result of relatively low oil prices and limited fiscal space. Relatedly, the country's debt profile has been a source of concern for policymakers and development practitioners as the recent estimate puts the debt service-to-revenue ratio at 60 percent, which is likely to worsen amid the steep decline in revenue associated with falling oil prices. These constraining factors will aggravate the economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and make it more difficult for the government to weather the crisis (Okoro, Anukaenyi&Ndema (2020). Okibe (2021) alluded that "amid the spread, countries began to discover that the challenges posed by the virus were beyond the limits of any nation. The attendant dearth of medical equipment and facilities, lack of adequate spaces for isolation and treatment of confirmed cases, and humongous death toll warranted interdependence,

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collaboration and assistance among nations of the world, either from the developed or from the developing countries. Hence, both developed and developing nations found itself in almost the same disorganized and bizarre situation. Nonetheless, it was more palpable in developing nations and Nigeria in particular, which prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, depended so much on foreign medical trips with visible decay in her medical infrastructure (Okibe, 2021). Extant cases include poor funding, institutional fragility, bad maintenance culture and management crisis that reflects in bad leadership and corruption in the system. The faltering in political leadership, more so towards the health sector, laid a sordid foundation and erected big stumbling bumps on the path to COVID-19 management in the country”

The crux of this work therefore is to investigate how Nigeria has fared in the face of these global challenge coupled with the hitherto ailing economy. The research also attempted to strategies a way forward to grappling with the governance in the face of these difficulties.

Conceptual and Literature Review

Yagboyaju and Akinola (2019) looked into the Nigerian State and the Crisis of Governance and discovered that over the decades, there has been a recurrent and sustained argument that the Nigerian state, like its counterparts in Africa and other countries of the developing world, underperforms due to lack of state capacity to deal with the contemporary complexities of governance. The article examines the state of governance in Nigeria and assesses the factors militating against the promotion of public good and effective service delivery in the country. The article draws data from secondary and primary sources, which include the authors’ close observations of events in Nigeria. Governance and political leadership in Nigeria have been driven by self-interest and other primordial considerations, which take priority over that of the public. The state has failed in three major areas: security of lives and properties, promotion of the rule of law, and provision of visionary leadership. In conclusion, the nature and characters of the political leadership explains the Nigerian state incapacity for effective governance.

Richard and Eme (2015) studied the Electronic Governance and Administration in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges: the paper highlights key-points in Electronic governance and administration. The

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paper goes on to explore and highlight the benefits and challenges facing the new payment system and concludes by positing that the new platforms have so far streamlined the operations of both users and government in Nigeria. The objective of the paper was to examine the roles, prospects and challenges of technology inspired government will help solve administration problems in Nigeria. The Nigerian government liberation of the telecommunication sector and proliferation of smart-phones have deepened internet penetration in the polity. Added to the new impetus is the proliferation of social media sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Plus, Tumblr, Instagram and Twitter among others. These platforms have their pros and cons such as using information shared on these sites to launch phishing attacks for access to people's online banking details with a view to fleecing them. Like every new policy, there are skepticisms about its workability. Banks have therefore taken the responsibility to enlighten their customers about the policy to achieve a seamless result.

In a similar study, Adeyemo (2011) assessed Nigeria's E-government implementation and the global e-gov ranking. Nigeria is a country that has always posed a paradox to the international community in terms of its level of development vis-a-vis its economic potential. This is also reflected in the low ranking index it gets in international surveys despite the effort to develop its infrastructure and human capital. Nigeria has the fastest growing and most lucrative telecommunications, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) market in Africa, yet in spite of this obvious and significant progress is still being ranked low in e-government provision to its citizen. This paper reviews the aim and methodology used by the ranking agencies, takes a survey of Nigeria's performance in global e-government surveys, identifies areas of deficiencies which have contributed to the low e-service delivery in the country despite the success recorded in the country's ICT and telecommunications sector and suggests how this situation may be improved.

Jaison & Aakash Monthero (2017) investigated if E-Government has helped the common people. Their work uncovered that government is a working body selected by the people, for the people. It helps the people in smooth working of their day today routine work with the bureaucracy. Every time it is not possible for the government to reach to the people within a short period of time. So it delays work. E-Government is regarded as the usage of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in order to enhance the activities of public sector organisations. A few definitions limit e-government to

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Internetempowered applications just, or just to communications amongst government and outside gatherings. Here e-governance helps the government. With the use of Information Technology, it can reach immediately to the people and get their work done. But has e-governance actually helped and improved the life of middle class people? The paper looks into the overview of e-governance and its impact on the life of common people. This research is an act to improve the administration and advancement of electronic Government administrations and procedures and suggesting measures that require using Internetbased information technology to enhance the day to day activities of the citizens.

Okibe (2021) studied the challenges of coronavirus (covid-19) management and leadership questions: a case study of Nigeria. He aver that the new strain of the coronavirus referred to as COVID-19, was either new to the scientists or to the medical practitioners. It explains the lapses in its management that stunned the world. Although no one anticipated the outbreak of such virus, however, the debates about its origin admixed with conspiracy theories preoccupied many countries and distracted attention on how to contain the virus from further spread with the accompanying fatality. Focusing on Nigeria, the study examined the management of COVID-19 in the country, especially, how political leadership braced up with the challenges. As analytical research, it relied on secondary data and applied content analysis for inference. It adopted “bounded rationality model” of decision-making theory to explain the challenges posed to decision-making under crisis or emergencies, and discuss how it affected the management of coronavirus in Nigeria. The findings show that there are glaring deficits of proactive leadership in the COVID-19 management in Nigeria. It resulted in most of the management guidelines introduced by government being copy and paste (imitation of what other countries adopted without comparing the differences in climate). The consequences were dissensions and remarkable poor public compliance behaviours. It requires that Nigerian leaderships begin to develop health infrastructure, human and industrial capacities that countries tap during emergency that confines nations to its territorial borders.

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Explanations of variables

Governance

In a more general term, governance comprises all of the processes of governing – whether undertaken by the government of a state, by a market, or by a network – over a social system (family, tribe, formal or informal organization, a territory or across territories) and whether through the laws, norms, power or language of an organized society. It relates to "the processes of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement, or reproduction of social norms and institutions". In lay terms, it could be described as the political processes that exist in and between formal institutions (Wikipedia). Governance is associated with politics and the art of state craft at varying level of analysis-the Nation state, sub-national units, local government etc (Onyisi, 2010 cited in Ibekwe, 2015). Specifically, According to the International Bureau for Education (IBE) Governance refer to structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation. Governance also represents the norms, values and rules of the game through which public affairs are managed in a manner that is transparent, participatory, inclusive and responsive. Governance therefore, can be subtle and may not be easily observable. In a broad sense, governance is about the culture and institutional environment in which citizens and stakeholders interact among themselves and participate in public affairs. It is more than the organs of the government. Olufemi (2012) opined that governance involves exercise of political, economic and administration authority to manage the affairs in and the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Governance can be seen as the means or mechanism whereby the affairs of the citizens are catered for (Ibekwe, 2015)

COVID: 19

The coronavirus disease (covid-19) is caused by a new strain of coronavirus (SARS-CoV2) that has not been found in man. The World Health Organisation (WHO) had the report of the new strain on the 31st of December 2019 in Wuhan china. The implication is that coronavirus (not Covid-19) is not

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entirely new as they have other type of coronavirus earlier reported. Coronavirus, nonetheless, is a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)effect.

E-governance

Ayo (2014) sees e-governance as “the application of ICT to transform the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of exchange of information and transaction; with the objective of providing a SMARRT Government. The acronym SMARRT refers to Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive, Responsible and Transparent government”

It is instructive to note that e- governance is basically the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the public delivery of service or operations of government. Stretching further, Ojo (2014 cited Abasilim&Edet, 2015) state that e-governance is “the application of information communication technology (ICT) by the government to enhance accountability, create awareness and ensures transparency in the management of governmental business.” He also states that e-governance can be seen as a political strategy of government through which their activities can be showcased to the public. From the above definition, it is worthy of note that e-governance is not all about carrying out government activities through the use modern communication technology, rather it emphasizes the need for accountability, public awareness and enlightenment, transparency in governance, and participatory democracy. This is succinctly captured by the World Bank report definition. They described e-government as that which involve the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) by governments to enhance the range and quality of information and services provided to citizens, businesses, civil society organizations, and other government agencies in an efficient, cost-effective and convenient manner, making government processes more transparent and accountable and strengthening democracy (Olugbile, 2012).

UNESCO (2013 cited in Okwueze, 2012; Palivia&sharma, 2007) stated that e-governance involves:

the Public sector use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizens participation in the decision making process and making

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government more accountable, transparent and effective. E-governance involves new styles of leadership, new ways of debating and deciding policy and investment, new ways of accessing education, new ways of listening to citizens and new ways of organizing and delivering information and services. E-governance is generally considered as a wider concept than e-government, since it can bring about a change in the way citizens relate to governments and to each other. E-government can bring forth new concept of citizenship, both in terms of citizen's needs and responsibilities. Its objective is to engage, enable and empower the citizen (Ibekwe (2015).

More than ever, the Nigerian populace, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, are requesting for accountability, inclusiveness and transparency in governance. We have established earlier, that the pandemic have caused serious economic crunch, thereby depleting the already meagre resources of government. The imperativeness of sound e-government is not an option but a sine qua none to stir the rudder of governance if the country will not capsize.

Mode of e-Governance delivery & their Limitations

According to Olugbile (2012) there are four modes for e-governance delivery which he described thus:

1. Government to Citizens (G2C) Uses CRM principles, where citizen is seen as customers or consumer. E.g Nigerian Immigration Portal. This focuses primarily on developing user-friendly one-stop centers of service for easy access to high quality government services and information (Richard & Eme, 2015).
2. Government to Business (G2B) Government transaction dealing with contractors/organize private sectors. E.g Nigeria Stock Exchange Portal, CBN portals, e-payment system. The aims according to Richard & Eme (2015) is to facilitate and enhance the capability of business transactions between the government and the private sector by Improving communications and connectivity between the two parties
3. Government to Employees (G2E) E.g. Nigeria Pension Scheme System. Also known as Intra-governmental, aimed at the leverage of ICT to reduce costs and improve the quality of administration and management within government organization (Islam and Ahmed, 2007).

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4. Government to Government (G2G) e.g. Unified Communication via a structure dedicated Virtual Private Network. Usually among heads of state. This is an inter-governmental effort that aims to improve communication and effectiveness of services between federal, state and local governments in the running of day-to-day administration. It generally aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of overall government operations. (Richard & Eme, 2015).

However, Jeong (2007) in his book *Fundamental of Development Administration* opined that e-governance demonstrate applications of ICT to facilitate the operation and the disbursement of government information and service delivery. It therefore, rely heavily on the internetwork of ICT infrastructures, internet and non-internet applications to aid the operations of government (Olugbile (2012). Jeong (2007) further indicate that the term comprises of the computerized associations between a citizen and his or her administration (C2G), amongst governments and other government organizations (G2G), amongst government and residents (G2C), amongst government and workers (G2E), and amongst government and organizations/business' (G2B).

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

According to UNESCO (2021), ICT refers to diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information. These technological tools and resources include computers, the internet (Websites, blogs, emails), live broadcast technologies (radio, television and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcast, audio, and video players, storage devices) and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, Visio/video-conferencing).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is on good governance theory as enunciated by Ekundayo (2017). The most relevant of the governance theories to the Nigerian governance situation is the good governance theory. Its tenets can be used as searchlight for good governance and its principles can be adopted as indices for assessment of governance in Nigeria. The good governance theory is associated with governing methods and structures in developing countries and it is particularly relevant to governance in Nigeria because Nigeria is a developing country. Good governance theory develops from a set of principles or policies first introduced by the World Bank in relating with and in assisting developing or

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third world countries. The World Bank usually requires good governance practice, among others, as a condition from the developing countries. Good governance is about how the public sector in third world countries can be developed. It has been realized that a modern form of government is not just only about efficiency, that governing is also about accountability between the state and its citizens (Bjork and Johansson, 2001) Good governance is about how people are treated not merely as customers or consumers (as in the new public management approach) but as citizens, who have the right to hold their governments to account for the actions they take or fail to take. The demand for efficiency in the public sector should not be allowed to lead to bad service. When there is bad service, citizens have the right to protest and hold politicians accountable. Good governance theory, therefore, is a governance theory that sets some basic principles according to which a Good governance theory, therefore, is a governance theory that sets some basic principles according to which a good government, whatever its form, must be run. Such principles include accountability, control, responsiveness, transparency, public participation, economy, efficiency etc. In sum, the theory of good governance is created to reflect all the principles enunciated above and many more (Minogue, Polidano and Hulme, 1998). In view of the foregoing and in line with the World Bank principles and policy interventions in third world countries, good governance involves an efficient public service, an independent judicial system and legal framework to enforce contracts and responsible administration of public funds. Other requirements for good governance include an independent public auditor responsible to a representative legislature, respect for the law and human rights at all levels of government and a pluralistic institutional structure. Apart from the above, good governance is predicated on three segments of the society which have direct effect on governance as highlighted. The type of political regime, the process by which authority is exercised in the management of the economic and social resources with a view to development, and the capacity of governments to formulate policies and have them effectively implemented (WorldBank, 1992:3)

Discussion

Covid-19 started as a public health crisis and quickly evolved into a financial and economic crisis of epic proportions (Paine, 2020).The pandemic has impacted people's livelihoods, as resources are diverted to address the spread of the virus. Tremendous economic downturn and job losses have

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exacerbated inequalities. Education and much needed skills training have been deferred in most countries. The resulting skills gaps, capacities deficit and loss of jobs and economic opportunities will require that states be creative in governance in the future. Importantly, states will have to rely on technology, innovation and digital governance to render public services and goods. To do so, states in collaboration with the private sector and international development partners, should put in place measure to ensure that the digital divide is addressed (Jayarem et al, 2020).Adeyamo (2011) affirm that “the Nigerian government has in the last couple of years taken steps at the federal government level to give the country a sense of direction and harmonize the efforts of the disparate organizations and stakeholders in the development of, and utilization of ICT in Nigerian.”The perceived benefits of e-governance in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized especially bearing in mind the fact that government need to restrain or reduce face to face contact in view of the covid-19 with its various phases and strains. Beyond the issues of the pandemic, scholars have given their voice to the benefits of e-government.Ibekwe (2015) discussed extensively the benefits of e-governance to include: Reduction in administrative cost, promoting faster operations (in businesses, organizations and government), Reduction of corruption, promotion of transparency and accountability. Facilitation of good governance and service delivery, bringing the government closer to the people, strengthening of democratic processes, reduction of travelling hazards, reduction in bureaucratic redtapism.

Advocating for the full implementation of e-governance in Nigeria

According to Olugbile (n.d) to achieve a trusted e-service built and driven on the core principles of Confidentiality, Integrity and Availability (CIA),the development of basic infrastructure is crucial for implementing e-government (InfoDev 2002; Greenhill 2010b cited in Richard, &Eme, 2015). Again, governments have to maintain partnerships with other organizations, either private sectors or non-profit organizations, as well as relationships within departments (infoDev 2002). Also, a good coordination between central, regional and local agencies is paramount to effectiveness e-government. To mitigate the high risk involved in e-governance, there is the need for both internet and information technology (IT) governance or regulation.

Internet governance, therefore was defined by the World Summit on the Information Society as "the development and application by Governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective

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roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet. Internet governance deals with how much influence each sector of society should have on the development of the Internet, such as to what extent the state should be able to censor it, and how issues on the Internet, such as cyber-bullying, should be approached.(Wikipedia).

Information technology governance: IT governance primarily deals with connections between business focus and IT management. The goal of clear governance is to assure that investment in IT generates business value and mitigates the risks that are associated with IT projects (Wikipedia)

To curb the excesses and promote accountability and transparency in governance, e-governance is sine qua none. Ayo (2014) sees e-governance as “the application of ICT to transform the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of exchange of information and transaction; with the objective of providing a SMARRT Government. The acronym SMARRT refers to Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive, and Responsible and Transparent government” e-governance, if well applied has the potential of handling the issues of broad-based participation, transparency through the free flow of information. ”e- governance demonstrate applications of ICT to facilitate the process and the distribution of government information and service delivery.The outcome basically will be a free flow of information between departments, agencies and layers within government, more professional administrators, supported by standardized, electronically-embedded decision-making systems; cheaper and more effective management and processing of information; the routine provision of services according to impersonal rules, as opposed to clientelist arrangements; transparency, particularly in relation to the procurement of government services; opportunities to work in partnership with the private sector in modernizing governmental processes; a free flow of information between government and citizens; the strengthening of intermediary democratic institutions, such as parliaments, local government, civil-society organizations (CSOs) (Richard &Eme, 2015).

The e-governance will lead to prudent use of resources as well as curtail waste and diversion of fund. Sustainable economic opportunity for the entire citizenry has been pointed out as one of the indices for assessing good governance globally. This seems to be guaranteed through prudent economic management, well organized private sector and adequate provision of infrastructural facilities as well as sound agricultural and rural development. Good governance has its economic dimensions which

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cover decision-making processes on economic issues in a country as well as their interactions with world economies (Ekundayo, 2017). A good example is the economic policy adopted by the governor of Anambra state-prof Soludo, where tax payment is linked to service delivery. For one to get a driver's license for instance, the portal will request evidence of tax clearance. This will reduce tax avoidance and evasion and the regime of touts will be over. This is because good governance runs on good economy, all things being equal.

Conclusion

Nigeria as a country have depended so much on importing foreign strategies and policies in tackling the challenges facing the country. The major issue may not necessarily be on the importation but not tailoring it to the local content. Having adopted foreign strategies to manage the COVID-19, the inability of government to domesticate the policies actually hampers on the public obedience. The consequences were dissensions and remarkable poor public compliance behaviors.

Recommendations

Going forward, apart from making concerted effort in addressing the fragile health facilities in Nigeria as a directly occasioned by the pandemic, the government must embrace e-governance to enhance accountability, transparency and pure democracy based on citizen's participation in governance.

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