

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA

By

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Abstract

The study investigated the implication of Covid-19 on sustainable development of rural communities in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population comprised of residents in three Area Councils (Gwagwalada, Bwari and Kuje) of the six Area Councils in the FCT. The target population was characterized by variability on the attributes of age, educational qualifications, religion, and marital status. A total of 320 respondents were used as the sample size. Multistage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. A combination of stratified sampling and proportionate random sampling techniques were used. Eight (8) items structured questionnaire titled "Covid-19 and Sustainable Development of Rural Communities Questionnaire" (CSDRCQ) was used as the instrument for data collection. Content validity was used. Test-retest method of reliability was used to obtain the internal consistency. The reliability index was obtained through Cornbrash's alpha (0.89). Data collected were analyzed using the frequency counts and the mean score. The study revealed among others that: corona virus disease has negative implication on sustainable development of rural communities. Covid-19 pandemic reduces income generation of rural community dwellers, causes food insecurity and health challenge in the family. Government presence was not felt among rural communities in the FCT during Covid-19 pandemic. The study recommended among others that there should be sustained public awareness campaign about the corona virus pandemic through mass media and Federal government should provide financial grant for every household to start up business to generate sustainable income.

Keywords: Covid-19, sustainable development, rural communities, Implication, FCT

Introduction

Corona virus disease otherwise referred to as Covid-19 is a novel virus that has brought myriads of challenges to the global community and its devastating negative impact to countries with weak health and economic systems. Research by the World Health Organization (2020), shows that older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular

diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease and cancer were more likely to develop serious illnesses from covid-19. Some of the symptoms of covid-19 include; sore throat, runny nose, constant coughing/sneezing, breathing difficulty and fatigue.

The index case of corona virus in Nigeria started when an Italian national working in Lagos flew into the commercial city of Lagos from Milan, Italy, on February, 25, 2020 (Nigeria Center for Disease Control, 2020a). At the onset of the outbreak of covid-19, the Nigerian government made a great effort to stop the further spread of disease within the country. Such efforts include a ban on social gatherings (there were mechanisms to arrest and punish those who defy this); a shutdown of Lagos, Abuja, and Ogun states, which were regarded as the epicenter for the covid-19 pandemic; and other preventive measures such as an increase in screening at border entry points, self-isolation, social distancing of not less than 2 meters, use of hand sanitizer, and washing of hands frequently (Adnan, 2020; Obiezu, 2020).

No doubt that Covid-19 pandemic brought serious challenges to Nigeria's quest for sustainable development. Symbiotic relationship between covid-19 and sustainable development cannot be undermined. Sustainable development is defined by The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), as cited by Onyeike and Adieme (2014), as the development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. According to Nwogu and Adieme (2018), sustainable development is characterized by a continuous, guided process of economic, environmental and social change aimed at promoting wellbeing of citizens now and bearing in mind of the future. Sustainable development means attaining a balance between environmental protection and human economic development and between the present and future needs.

Sustainable development requires an integration of economic, social and environmental approaches towards development. Covid-19 however has implication for sustainable development particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. One of the basic principles of sustainable development is the harmony between man and nature. It depicts that development of humanity should not be on cost of environmental health. Covid-19 is a threat to environmental health and a threat to survival of human beings.

Sustainable development principle also include development within socio-cultural and traditional – knowledge base. In the era of scientific revolution, the world of social value, norms and traditional knowledge cannot be denied (Singh, 2014). However, covid-19 brought a halt to esteem social gathering. Maintenance of social distancing became order of the day in the era of covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, people in rural areas hardly maintain Covid-19 protocols in the aspect of maintaining social distance in the public. The communal lifestyle makes them to glue together in gathering like church activities, age grades, rite performances etc. These occasions were handed down to them by their ancestors and can never be jettisoned in this era of pandemic. This is the reason why more attention should be given to the rural areas. When people disobey Covid-19 protocols, they get infected with the virus, and by implication, reduce their capacity to contribute to sustainable development in the country.

Sustainable development focuses on enhancement of quality of life. Covid-19 reduces the quality of life. The Nigerian Centre for Disease and Control (2020b) revealed that after the first Covid-19 case was announced on 27 February in Lagos, as of September 20, 2020, there were cumulatively 57, 242 Covid-19 confirmed cases in Nigeria, with 48,569 cases discharged

and 1,098 recorded deaths in 36 states and the FCT. By April, 2022, the World Health Organization reported 3,142 corona virus deaths in Nigeria and 255,663 corona virus cases (WHO, 2022). The high rate of deaths and covid-19 infection is a threat to quality of life which is one of the principles of sustainable development.

Sustainable development encourages people to participate and also make them capable to manage their resources. But covid-19 reduces the capacity of people to neither participate nor manage their resource. The Federal and State Governments instituted several restrictions to slow down the spread of COVID-19, including State Border Closures and Curfews, total lockdowns, closure of schools, workplaces, and markets, etc. In rural communities, food demand and food supplies were hugely affected by movement constraints, low purchasing power, with huge negative impact on the vulnerable population groups (Siche, 2020).

The rationale for sustainable development is to meet the needs of the teeming population as well as maintain an eco-friendly environment both for the present and the future. Since man is the custodian of the environment, his actions and inactions determines the state of the environment. The human development is dependent upon the resources of the environment. A prosperous society relies on a healthy environment to provide food and resources, safe drinking water and clean air for its citizens. Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to the problem of food insecurity in every part of Nigeria. The resources of the environment cannot be tapped to sustain livelihood during the pandemic lockdown.

According to World Bank (2015), Nigeria is the second of five countries that constitute 60% of the world's 1 billion extremely poor people. In Nigeria, small farmers in rural communities make up 88% of the farming population, with over 72% of these smallholders living below the poverty line (FAO 2018). The rural famers cannot transport their harvested crops to market, no thanks to corona virus pandemic that brought seat at home. No meaningful development can take place where the large proportion of farming population in rural areas are denied opportunities of tilling the land, accessing health care services as well as education.

Ogisi and Begho (2021) added that Covid-19 is a potential driver of household hunger, poverty, and food insecurity. The authors noted that hunger, poverty, and food insecurity are limitation for sustainable development. Covid-19 affected various constituents of household food security in Nigeria. Prior to lockdown, households that could afford to stock up food staples purchased more than usual. This stockpiling in addition to disruptions in food supply chain drove prices up in regions where supply was limited. For instance, the price of a 50 kg bag of rice rose to NGN21,000 from NGN18000, and the price of yam rose from NGN500 to NGN1200 (Akinfenwa 2020). Such increases in the price of staple food pushed them beyond the reach of many farm households, increasing food insecurity, particularly for the 26 million undernourished Nigerians. Sustainable development cannot be achieved when teeming populace are malnourished and poor.

According to Singh (2014), at the core of sustainable development is the need to consider "three pillars" together: Society, the Economy and the Environment. No matter the context, the basic idea remains the same – people, habitats and economic systems are inter-related. It is however sad to note that income losses associated with Covid-19 also drove poor rural dwellers to seek alternative income-earning activities – involving migration which increased the risk of spreading the virus. For many rural communities, there was the conundrum of whether to follow lockdown rules at the risk of losing their livelihoods or continue farming and risk exposure to Covid-19 (Ubi & Akie, 2021).

Many rural community dwellers do not believe the existence of Covid-19, they rather believe that the virus was artificially created by government officials in order to loot public funds (Ubi and Akie, 2021). Though there are myriads of developmental challenges linked to Covid-19, amidst these problems, there are opportunities that the government and the people in rural areas can utilized to bring massive development in the area. Rural areas in Nigeria is strategically important considering the fact that raw materials for industrial growth and food consumed in urban centers come from rural areas. The bulk of the population in Nigeria reside in the rural areas, it is against this backdrop that this paper investigated the implication of Covid-19 on sustainable development of rural communities in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Objective of the Study

The specific objectives the study sought to achieve is to:

1. Determine the implication of Covid-19 on sustainable development of rural communities in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Research Question

- a. What are the implications of Covid-19 on sustainable development of rural communities in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Research Methods

The research design adopted for the study was descriptive survey. The population comprised of residents in three Area Councils (Gwagwalada, Bwari and Kuje) of the six Area Councils in the FCT. The target population was characterized by variability on the attributes of age, educational qualifications, religion, and marital status. A total of 320 respondents were used as the sample size. Multistage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. A combination of stratified sampling and proportionate random sampling techniques were used. Eight (8) items structured questionnaire titled “Covid-19 and Sustainable Development of Rural Communities Questionnaire” (CSDRCQ) was used as the instrument for data collection, using Likert-type rating scale in which scores were assigned to each response as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) carries 4 point; Agree (A) carries 3 point; Disagree (D) carries 2 point and Strongly Disagree (SD) carries 1 point. Content validity was used. Test-retest method of reliability was used to obtain the internal consistency. The reliability index was obtained through Cornbrash’s alpha (0.89). Out of the 320 questionnaires administered, 276 were returned valid, representing 86% success rate. Data collected were statistically analyzed using the frequency counts and the mean score to answer the research questions. 2.50 was taken as the bench mark for decision making. A mean score from 2.50 above was accepted, while a mean score less than 2.50 was rejected. Discussions of findings were done immediately after data analysis.

Study Area

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja is located in the centre of the country. It replaced Lagos as the capital of Nigeria on 12 December, 1991. Abuja's geography is defined by Aso Rock, a 400-metre (1,300 ft) monolith. The Presidential Complex, National Assembly, Supreme Court and much of the city extend to the south of the rock. Zuma Rock, a 792-metre (2,598 ft) monolith, lies just north of the city on the expressway to Kaduna. At the 2006 census, the city of Abuja had a population of 776,298. As of 2016, the metropolitan area of Abuja is

estimated at six million persons, placing it behind only Lagos, as the most populous metro area in Nigeria (Jaiyeola, 2016). The indigenous inhabitants of Abuja are Gbagyi, Bassa, Gwandara, Gade, Dibo, Nupe and Koro.

Results

Research Question: What are the implications of Covid-19 on sustainable development of rural communities in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Table 1: Mean response on implications of Covid-19 on sustainable development of rural communities

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	x	Decision
1	I am aware of corona virus disease	216	48	5	7	3.71	Accepted
2	Covid-19 pandemic reduced my income generation	201	66	6	3	3.68	Accepted
3	My family could not get food to eat because of covid-19 pandemic	206	63	5	2	3.71	Accepted
4	There was no government presence in my community during Covid-19 pandemic	139	98	20	19	3.29	Accepted
5	Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the high cost of food stuff in my community	206	63	5	2	3.71	Accepted
6	Covid-19 contributed to the slow pace of development in my community	221	53	2	0	3.79	Accepted
7	Corona virus is a source of worry for my family health.	105	81	52	38	3.11	Accepted
8	I believe that corona virus is real	98	71	60	47	2.79	Accepted
	Average mean score					3.47	Accepted

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 1 presents data with respect to the implications of Covid-19 on sustainable development of rural communities in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The analysis shows agreement with all items. The average mean score of 3.47, creates basis for the conclusion that Covid-19 pandemic has negative implication for sustainable development.

Major Findings

The following were major findings:

- Rural community dwellers in the FCT are aware of the existence of corona virus disease
- Covid-19 pandemic reduces income generation of rural community dwellers in the FCT
- Rural community dwellers in the FCT could not get food to eat because of covid-19 pandemic
- There was no government presence in rural communities in the FCT during Covid-19 pandemic

- Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the high cost of food stuff in rural communities in the FCT
- Covid-19 contributed to the slow pace of development in rural communities in the FCT
- Corona virus is a source of worry for the health of rural community dwellers in the FCT

Discussion of Findings

The findings in Table 1 revealed that rural community dwellers in the FCT are aware of the existence of corona virus disease. Covid-19 pandemic reduces income generation of rural community dwellers as many rural community dwellers in the FCT could not get food to eat. The Table revealed also that there was no government presence in rural communities in the FCT during Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the high cost of food stuff in rural communities in the FCT and Covid-19 contributed to the slow pace of development in rural communities in the FCT as well as source of worry for the health. These findings corroborated the report of WHO (2022) concerning health implication of corona virus on sustainable development. WHO found that in Nigeria, by April, 2022, about 3,142 corona virus deaths were recorded. This should be a source of worry for every Nigerian. High rate of deaths and covid-19 infection is a threat to quality of life of rural dwellers. It also in line with the study by Siche (2020) that in rural communities, food demand and food supplies were hugely affected by movement constraints, low purchasing power, with huge negative impact on the vulnerable population groups. Sustainable development encourages people to participate and also make them capable to manage their resources. But covid-19 reduces the capacity of people to neither participate nor manage their resource.

Conclusion

Covid-19 is a novel virus that has brought myriads of challenges to the global community and its devastating negative impact on development. Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore concluded that corona virus disease has negative implication on sustainable development of rural communities. Covid-19 pandemic reduces income generation of rural community dwellers, causes food insecurity in the family. Government presence was not felt among rural communities in the FCT during Covid-19 pandemic and Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the high cost of food stuff in rural communities in the FCT.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of the study, the following are the recommendations:

- There should be sustained public awareness campaign about the corona virus pandemic through mass media to reach out to rural communities in particular.
- The Federal government should provide financial grant for every household through its social welfare scheme for families to start up business to generate sustainable income
- The Federal government and FCT administration should direct its economic policies towards ensuring adequate supplies of affordable food for the benefits of teeming population.
- The FCT administration in particular should bring development to every community in the FCT
- Government at all level should provide well equipped hospitals at every geo-political ward particularly in the FCT.

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