



COVID-19: IMPACT AND CHALLENGES IN THE NIGERIA CONTEXT

Jun 17, 2020

ARIZONA, USA -

Coronavirus or COVID-19 is a virus of the century which has been described as an enemy that unfortunately, is gradually eluding all known strategy and armament. This assertion is easily verifiable from the glaring NEGATIVE IMPACTS of this present global scourge. Medically, COVID-19 has been described as a virus which largely channels its damage well beyond the lungs and whose infection does not only lead to pneumonia but also to acute respiratory distress syndrome. Most worrisome, however, is not only the rocket-speed of its infection but also the mercurial nature of its mutation. In fact, dealing with this pandemic is like fighting a war, yet, according to General Terrence O' Shaughnessy, it is even more frustrating than fighting a war because in this case, the enemy of target remains largely invisible. Gen John Hyten says, "we had many assumptions of what a virus would do, what a pandemic would do, but when you actually see what coronavirus does, what COVID-19 does, it is completely different". And having assessed the potent, defeating nature of this global enemy, he concludes rather

despairingly that, “the definition of what it takes to be a superpower has changed forever”.

Conversely and notwithstanding the devastating effect of this virus, there are still some POSITIVE IMPACTS that COVID-19 has, strangely, brought in the global stage. This is best captured in the following words of the Cardinal Bo: “Covid-19, the invisible virus, has already taught existential lessons: the richest and more powerful nations that have arrogantly stockpiled nuclear arms and weapons are brought to knees by a virus. World powers that arrogantly negate all transcendent powers learn with humility that life is fragile and that we need one another. More than anything, all powers can learn to acknowledge the presence of a Power that is above all. With great pain, many countries realize that they have more soldiers in their counties in the business of killing than they have doctors who can save lives”. Suffice it to mention here also that Covid-19 has been able to unite many families once again under one roof for weeks and even for months! This scourge has also taught us the lesson of simple attitude towards social and religious celebrations where lavish and wasteful celebration of events has become the norm.

The above impacts (both negative and positive) are neither novel nor original. To be sure, there have been other plagues in the history of humanity like the Black Death of the 14th century and the Spanish Flu of the 1918 that killed over 50 million people. The

end of each of these plagues brought significant changes in the way things were done before the plagues. According to Sevkett Pamnk, “the Black plague pushed up the whole structure of wages and set the stage for the tumultuous labor war of the industrial revolution. The attitude towards the Church changed as the churches hold on society was damaged.” At the end of the Spanish flu, most countries of the world like Russia, Germany, France and United Kingdom put in place a centralized public health system which is funded through a state-run insurance scheme”. This Spanish flu even went ahead to bring about the need to coordinate public health at the international level since, clearly, contagious disease doesn’t respect borders.

In a similar manner, COVID-19 has brought a lot of changes in the way things are done. As Cardinal Bo rightly asserted, “nothing will be same again. The way we worship, the way we relate with one another, the way we work, will change. We are at the dawn of a new consciousness, a radically fresh approach to our life as the human family in a fragile world.” The above overall, synoptic appraisal of the negative and positive impacts of the COVID-19 in the global stage is very much applicable to Nigeria. But in addition to these and as other nations of the world adjust to the changes occasioned by this virus and, thus, get prepared for the future, one cannot ignore the multi-faceted CHALLENGES which COVID-19 has laid bare in varying sectors of the Nigerian society. Now the most important prayer for many is “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). Now, the

common concern is the care for each other through love and charity. Now we are beginning to know that whatsoever you do to the least of your neighbour is a direct service to God (Matthew 25:40).

Now is the time for government and people to look inwards to see what works for us as a people and use what we have to solve the problems we have. This is because indigenous solutions to even “foreign” problems have overtime proven to be as effective as “imported” solutions. This point simply poses the challenge of taking a critical look at our locally produced herbal medicines; that is, roots, plants or trees that are found in our indigenous environments, seeing how to harness them in an improved manner and using them to solve our health-related problems. In other words, this is the time where Africans and African nations must source for liberation from mental slavery and foreign categories. This is the time to know that we are rich in human and natural resources. Yes, COVID 19 is a clarion call to indigenization and African authenticity. According to Mazi Sam Ohubunwa, “Dependency mentality needs to change and now is the time. We must seize the opportunity to look inwards, build confidence on our abilities, competences and re-orient our national economic philosophy from import dependency to export driven. And Nigeria can beat India and China in the production and export of herbal products if anyone is willing to lead us through this part.” If a country like Madagascar was able to develop their own cure for Covid-19 using their local herbs and

what is found within their environment, then, Nigeria could do better given the enormous resources available to us.

COVID-19 challenges us to trust and have confidence in our own health professionals. This is the time to empower and motivate our own health professionals and get the best from them. Now we need to invest more resources in scientific research. This would entail supporting our research institutes to take on deeper level the question of research than they previously have done. Similarly, our universities should be made a place of research that take a contextual approach to our cultural environment. Our universities could develop a contextual research base using what we have. These and more are the challenges already posed by this pandemic which, if well confronted and addressed, would simply turn this monster into a booster!