

Human Rights Violations during Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown in Nigeria: Some Theoretical Insights

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Abstract: *Many countries across the world are currently facing unprecedented challenges as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. On March 29th, 2020 the Federal Government of Nigeria initial declared four-week reconsider lockdown including closure of international airports, shutting down of institutions and halting all essential activities in three major states, Lagos, Abuja and Ogun. Although the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic Nigeria clearly provided for certain rights that cannot be easily undermined such as the right to freedom of movement, right to freedom from discrimination, etc. However, the COVID-19 policy measures have fuelled the infringement on fundamental human rights of the citizens especially during this turbulent times occasioned by COVID-19 infections. Against this backdrop, the research focuses on some human rights violations during COVID-19 induced lockdown in Nigeria. Data for the study were drawn from participant observation and authentic secondary sources. The study identified that the enforcement of COVID-19 lockdown by security agencies contravened some peoples' fundamental human rights in Nigeria. It further recommended that the human rights of the people must be promoted and safeguarded with the view to ensuring that the people live neither with disease nor hunger.*

Keywords: COVID-19; Human Right; Lockdown; Violation; Nigeria

Introduction

The year 2020 globally was welcomed by a deadly viral outbreak called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The COVID-19 was first reported from Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province of China in December, 2019 (World Health Organization, 2020). Initially, the perception was that the COVID-19 pandemic would be restricted in Wuhan only. But the infections later spread across the world through international travel. The economic implications became severe as people were asked to stay at home, living under lockdown and the severity was felt in various sectors of the economy with travel bans affecting the aviation industry, cancellations of social functions, etc (Elliot, 2020). On March 11, 2020 the WHO declared the disease as pandemic (WHO, 2020). As of March 29, 2022 when this study was being revised, global COVID-19 reported cases have exceeded 482,462,032 million with nearly 6,128,712 deaths and more than 2.4 million recoveries (Johns Hopkins University, 2022).

On February 27, 2020, the first official case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was reported by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (2020). Since the first reported case in Nigeria, the situation has rapidly deteriorated with more cases occurring, despite restriction measures initiated by both the state and federal government of Nigeria to control the spread of the virus. Besides, movement restriction policy to reduce the spread of COVID-19 should not be used to violate the right to life, as guaranteed under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, the reverse is the case as the enforcement of the lockdown has unfortunately been marked by deadly repression and other violations of human rights. According to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) (2020), the security forces (the Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Army, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps) used "excessive or disproportionate" force resulting in incidents of indiscriminate killing of innocent and law abiding citizens of Nigeria. According to Azu (2020,p.1) the Nigeria security agencies implemented the restrictions in public places by arresting, detaining, shootings, etc, have been identified as major incidents of gross human rights violations. Against this backdrop, the authors will attempt to briefly discuss the concept of human rights and its violation. Thereafter, the article examines specific rights that were violated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, effort were equally be made to examine the socio-economic impact of the lockdown in Nigeria.

Materials and Methods

The study used a qualitative and descriptive approach. Due to safety protocols established by health experts on COVID-19 pandemic, the study adopted direct observation of events, media commentaries through official channels on televisions and official documents from relevant agencies. The key agencies in this regard are: the Central Bank of Nigeria, National Bureau of Statistics and NCDC. The NCDC data represents authentic national figures on total confirmed cases, total discharged, total fatalities and total number of laboratory tests carried out since the first case of the virus was recorded. Data for global cases were sourced from the Johns Hopkins University database which provides authentic daily updates on global cases of COVID-19. Each document was skimmed for relevance and then studied in detail after being deemed to be of potential significance.

COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

The pandemic has significantly impacted on Nigeria economy. This study observed that currently, the case fatality ratio of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is 3% of total confirmed cases. This value is less than that calculated from the global figures (CFR = 0.06) (Ohia, Bakary and Ahmad, 2020). Although the recorded cases and estimated mortality rate may seem low, it is important to note that Nigeria is the largest black nation in Africa with a population of 214,993,342 million people as of Tuesday, March 29, 2022 based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data (Worldometer, 2022). According to Ajayi (2020), the Federal Government of Nigeria fourth phase extended the lockdown by four weeks as a result of the growing wave of community transmission of COVID-19 infections. This extension of lockdown was also affected business activities in 536 Local Government Areas representing 69 per cent out of the Nigeria's 774 LGAs. Table 1 below shows the summary of reported coronavirus cases in Nigeria as at 29th March, 2022.

Table 1: Statistics of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria as at 29th March, 2022

S/No	Population of Nigeria	Confirmed Cases	Discharged Cases	Deaths	Total Test Carried Out
1.	214,993,342	255,341	249,566	3,142	4,726,096

Source: Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (2022)

Understanding Human Rights

Human rights are body of rules ensuring that every human being lives a dignified life. According to Madunagu (2006, p. 539) a person is not born with human rights, although an individual can be born into human rights. He points out that one acquires human rights as a human being, and that human rights are rights acquired over time through the strivings and struggles of human beings: struggles against the exploitations of some segments of humanity by other segments. According to the Constitution of the FRN, 1999, as amended, (CFRN 1999) at Chapter 4 thereof, provide these rights to includes, right to life, right to dignity of person, right to personal liberty, right to fair hearing, right to private and family life, right to freedom of thought, etc.

Selected incidents of Human Rights Violations linked to COVID-19**Rights to Life and Health**

Onyemelukwe (2020) stated that initially, there was apparent public acceptance of COVID-19 lockdown signified by a high degree of compliance. But later, the inhuman strategy applied by the security agencies in the enforcement of the lockdown policy in many part of the country led to reports of human rights violation. Resident doctors in government-owned hospitals went on strike because of unfair remuneration, poor working conditions, unpaid salaries, etc. On 24 June, 2020, doctors in government-owned hospitals in Ondo state embarked on a three-month industrial action. Also, on 2nd August, 2020, resident doctors equally embarked on a nationwide industrial action which was suspended on 4th October of the same year.

Right to Dignity of Human Person

ActionAid (2020), highlight the enforcement measures taken by some security agencies ranging from severe torture, physical assault, illegal seizure, extortions etc. For example on 18th April, 2020, there was confusion at Ebem, headquarters of Ohafia council area of Abia State as youths of the community burnt a police station, residence of the Divisional Police Officer over the killing of their kinsman identified as Friday Arunsi by a policeman serving in the area (Alaribe and Ugbor, 2020). Also on Tuesday, the 14th of April 2020, the Police in Anambra State killed two persons at the New Tyre Market Area of Nkpor in the Idemili North Local Government Area while enforcing the lockdown order (Social Action, 2020).

Hence, the implementation of COVID-19 lockdown has left much to be desired as a total of 105 complaints were further received from twenty-four States (24) out of the 36 States in Nigeria. Out of 105 complaints/incidents of human rights violation received and documented, Lagos State has the highest recorded cases with 28 incidents. This is followed by the FCT, Abuja which has 10 recorded cases (National Human Right Commission, 2020). Enugu State recorded 9 incidents followed by Abia, Delta and Nasarawa States which recorded 7, 6 and 5 incidents respectively. Rivers State also recorded 5 incidents of human rights violation while Imo recorded 4 incidents. Out of this number, 12 deaths were recorded in Kaduna State, while Delta, Niger, Ebonyi and Katsina States recorded 1 death each (NHRC, 2020).

Right to Own Property

Forced evictions of residence citizens continued unabated despite the COVID-19 pandemic. On 10 and 13 July, more than 400 homes in Iddo Sarki community, Abuja, were demolished by staff of the Federal Capital Development Authority and personnel from the police, army, Security and Civil Defence Corps and other security agents. Residents were tear-gassed by security agents. University of Abuja students who were renting apartments in the community returned from lessons to find their accommodation and belongings in ruins. Their houses were demolished without genuine consultation with affected communities, adequate written notice, or

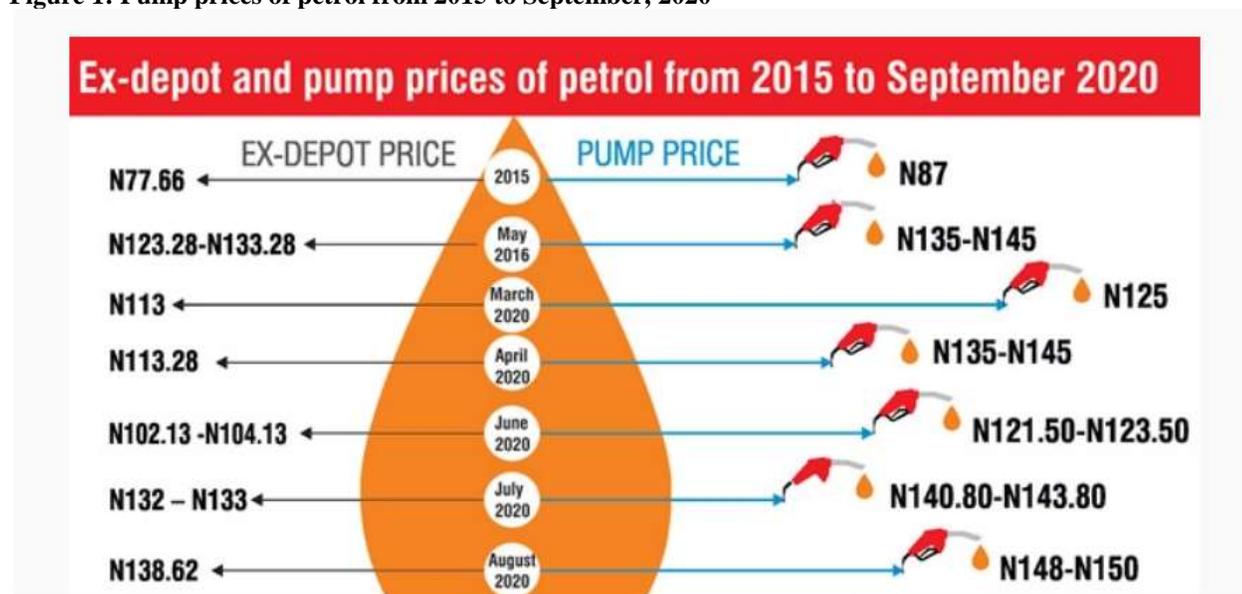
provision of alternative accommodation. The demolitions not only violated people’s right to adequate housing but also negatively impacted on the livelihoods of those affected.

Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown in Nigeria

The prolonged lockdown which entered tenth month has had severe economic consequence nationwide. The NBS (2020) reported that an estimated 41 % of 82.9 million individuals live below the poverty line in Nigeria. According to Oluwatosin (2020) the movement restrictions as well as uncertainty in the lockdown led to food supply chain problems with a lot of farmers finding it difficult to buy seedlings to cultivate.

Furthermore, the Nigerian government can no longer meet the targeted demand of crude oil benchmark of \$57 per barrel to fund the 2020 budget as the fall in crude price has made it difficult for the federal government to reduce the benchmark to \$30, a gap of 27 Naira, which is a deficit, aside from slashing 1.5 trillion Naira in order to make the budget realistic (Olatokewa,2020). Similarly, Naira depreciation persisted as external reserves drop to USD 33.49 bn. This was triggered by increased dollar. This downward trend was as a result of suspension of dollar sales since March 20th, 2020, coupled with skeletal services rendered by CBN which resulted in backlog of foreign exchange demand (Komolafe,2020). The pandemic has hit hard on the economy as the country is now facing U.S dollar shortages due to crash in oil prices. Besides, petrol prices have increased for three straight months due to COVID-19 induced lockdown, rising from N121.50–N123.50 per litre in June to N140.80–N143.80 in July, N148–N150 in August and N158–N162 in September (Olaekan, 2020). This is furthermore shown in the figure below:

Figure 1: Pump prices of petrol from 2015 to September, 2020



Source:

Olaetan et. al (2020).

The implication of the hike in fuel price means that, this will attract increase in transport fare, conveying of food stuff etc. The economic effect is that it the consumers who will bear all these additional cost when buying goods (Vanguard Editorial, 2020).

Conclusion

This study assessed human rights violations during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. This study documented a very painful period with a halt in business activities in the country which has rendered many people penniless and unable to provide for themselves the basic amenities needed for the duration of COVID-19 lockdown. Civil and socio-economic rights, like the right to freedom of movement, right to own property , etc have also been affected by the pandemic. The study recommended that the three tiers of government must ensure that the human rights of the people must be promoted and safeguarded with the view to ensuring that the people live neither with disease nor hunger.

Authors’ Bibliographical Sketch

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